



Sermon Growth Guide

September 13, 2020

The Beautiful Story – Beautiful Promise

Genesis 15:1–6

Key Verse: Genesis 15:1

“After this, the word of the Lord came to Abram in a vision: “Do not be afraid, Abram. I am your shield, your very great reward.”

Big Idea: God is for you and brings you Himself to make a way; only believe.

Foundations

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Welcome to week five of *The Beautiful Story*.

Even after so great a fall, God does not give up on His people. God comes. God rescues. In our problems, God gives us Himself. We cry for help and for answers, and God gives us Himself.

Yet we still have a proper response. Verse 6 of our text this week reads, “Abram believed the Lord, and He credited it to him as righteousness.” Belief is our proper response to God giving us Himself.

The deepest promises, called covenants, have always had a highly relational component. The same is true of God’s covenant with His people. Yet, instead of “meeting in the middle,” God meets us on the far side of the cross and only asks that we lift up our heart in faith. Only believe.

May our response echo Peter’s: “You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God” (Matthew 16:16).

Open and close your time of further study and application in prayer. Ask the Spirit of God to guide and guard your time in His Word.

Understanding God’s Word

In verse 1, on what grounds does God charge Abram to not be afraid? Does every believer have the same promise?

What is Abram’s complaint in verses 2 and 3?

Compare verse 6 to all of Hebrews 11, as well as Romans 4:16. What do we learn this week regarding faith?

Applying God’s Word

This week we learn that we cannot meet God perfectly in the middle. Instead, we receive the free gift of God through faith. God is for you and brings you Himself to make a way; only believe.

In what ways do you eagerly desire to grow in your faith? In what ways might God be inviting you to believe in Him and walk by faith? What are you willing to risk in order to believe all that God has promised?

Witnessing God’s Word

Think of one person who struggles to believe in the free gift of God through the work of Jesus on the cross. Take a moment to close your time by praying for that person. Discern an action step you can take in moving toward this person with the love of Christ this week.

Down in my basement, in the storage area, is a cuckoo clock from Germany where I was born. I remember it going off in the kitchen when I was a kid. It's broken now. Pieces missing. Hands missing. Non-functioning cuckoo clock. Why is it in my basement? Well, I have plans to fix it obviously. I mean, I have had plans—well, intentions—to fix it for years. When will I fix it? Well, first I have to learn about clocks and where to get pieces and how to fix it ... when will I fix it? In the future. Got anything in your basement? Think it will ever get fixed?

We are telling **The Beautiful Story**, the great story of everything. God, creation, the fall, redemption, reconciliation—all of it. We have seen that a **Beautiful God** made a **Beautiful World** and put **Beautiful People** in it. But last week we saw how the beauty of it all has been threatened. Our own red-handed mutiny, our own disobedient selfishness, it ruptures the relationship we have with God, ourselves, our neighbors and our world. In fact, it throws everything on a track of destruction. Hellbent toward death. Careening toward chaos and darkness. What will happen next? This, by the way, is the world we are living in. Do you feel it? We know things are not as they are supposed to be. Lysa TerKeurst is a powerful Christian leader and author who experienced more than her share of difficulty from cancer and sickness to painfully public marriage struggles. She shared her story in a book she called *It's Not Supposed to Be This Way*. It's not supposed to be this way. Something's wrong. Can't you relate? Look at the world we live in. Lives ravaged by disease. Global disruption in pandemic. Racial injustice. Cities descending into riots. Our cures seem as damaging as our illnesses. Storms on top of storms. Something in us knows there is another "meant" way of life. Something in us knows there is another "right" way of life. Something has been lost or bent or broken. It's not supposed to be this way. Does God have plans to fix it?

Let me introduce you to a man named Abram and a **Beautiful Promise** from God. I am among those who understand **The Beautiful Story** by looking at a number of covenants. What's a covenant? It is a promise, but it's more than a promise. It's a relationship. It is binding, but it is also intimate. It is personal, but it is also universal. God's plan to fix it, God's plan of redemption, God's beautiful plan is seen in these particular beautiful moments of covenant. God never waivers in His love for what He has made. God never waivers in His intent to save and redeem us and the world. But you can't look at the whole story at once. You are always looking somewhere, right? Look at the mountains. Where? You have to focus in somewhere. Covenants are God's way of getting us focused in where we can really see the distilled truth. It is not the way it's supposed to be. God plans to fix it. Unlike my cuckoo clock, God's plans are guaranteed. It's not just a promise; it's a covenant.

"After this, the word of the Lord came to Abram in a vision: 'Do not be afraid, Abram. I am your shield, your very great reward'" (Genesis 15:1). Abram will be known as Abraham. "After this." After what? Let's catch up. After Creation. A beautiful God made a beautiful world with beautiful people in it. After the fall, when Adam and Eve turned their back on God and the whole thing spun out into pieces. After the disobedience of mankind spread like wildfire through the whole earth, corrupting every system to the point that God sent a flood. After Noah and his family were saved through the flood by the grace of God. After Abram was called by God to get up and go from his home country and follow God, and Abram did. After God announced that His plan to fix things was to create a nation of people descended from Abram, a blessed people to share blessings with all the



world. After Abram despaired of that promise in encroaching old age. “After this, the word of the Lord came to Abram in a vision: ‘Do not be afraid, Abram. I am your shield, your very great reward’” (Genesis 15:1).

Noah also experienced God’s covenant, by the way. “And God said, ‘This is the sign of the covenant I am making between me and you and every living creature with you, a covenant for all generations to come: I have set my rainbow in the clouds, and it will be the sign of the covenant between me and the earth’” (Genesis 9:12-13). Beautiful. When you despair of your future, lose hope or optimism, when you are drained of confidence in the promise of tomorrow—here’s a rainbow. Beauty in the sky will remind us of this promise. God actually says, if you look, God says He will see the rainbow and remember the covenant. The bow points toward heaven. Just keep that in mind for a few minutes.

After all this. “After this, the word of the Lord came to Abram in a vision: ‘Do not be afraid, Abram. I am your shield, your very great reward’” (Genesis 15:1). Why would Abram be afraid? Let’s walk it back again. A few chapters back, Abram was minding his own business when God tapped on his shoulder and said, “Get up and go.” “The Lord had said to Abram, ‘Go from your country, your people and your father’s household to the land I will show you. I will make you into a great nation, and I will bless you; I will make your name great, and you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and whoever curses you I will curse; and all peoples on earth will be blessed through you’” (Genesis 12:1-3). Abram has to leave his home, leave his comfort zone. He leaves his reputation, his security, his confident place to strike out after the voice of God. He does it. This is a key moment in

the beautiful story. God is not finished with us. God has not lost His love for us. God has a plan to intervene, get involved, redeem and restore, all that He has made including us—and it starts right here with this one man Abram.

It isn’t just his comfort zone he’s leaving. In the ancient world, as they say, the gods hung low. There was a god in every field, river, forest and mountain. Abram and his family would have a history with these imagined “gods.” That year the god of harvest really produced, or the god of the forest stopped that storm. Comfort. False. Wrong. A false sense of security, but that’s what they’ve got. Abram is stepping away from all that. Instead, Abram is going with this one God. This single God. “I’ll bet it all on you.” Based on this promise that he would have a long line of descendants. Does Abram really know who he’s dealing with? He might just see God as his personal divine sponsor. “So long as this new God performs, I’ll stick with him.” Now time has passed, and Abram is afraid. God says, it’s not what I’m doing for you or promising to you that matters; I’m giving you Myself. “After this, the word of the Lord came to Abram in a vision: ‘Do not be afraid, Abram. I am your shield, your very great reward’” (Genesis 15:1). In the beautiful story, it’s not about what God has for you, but that God is for you. “I am your shield. I am your very great reward.”

Abram is still unsure. “But Abram said, ‘Sovereign Lord, what can you give me since I remain childless and the one who will inherit my estate is Eliezer of Damascus?’ And Abram said, ‘You have given me no children; so a servant in my household will be my heir’”

(Genesis 15:2-3). Lord, I’m looking for you to fix a specific problem. If you can’t fix that, what else can I expect from you? Ever been there?



“Then the word of the Lord came to him: ‘This man will not be your heir, but a son who is your own flesh and blood will be your heir.’ He took him outside and said, ‘Look up at the sky and count the stars—if indeed you can count them.’ Then he said to him, ‘So shall your offspring be’” (Genesis 15:4-5). God is so merciful and patient with us. Now comes the critical turn, the famous verse quoted over and over in the New Testament, critical for understanding salvation by faith: “Abram believed the Lord, and he credited it to him as righteousness” (Genesis 15:6). God is looking for faith. God credited it to him as righteousness—upon this expression of faith and belief and trust, God says, “I count you righteous, I consider you in right relationship, I add to you the credit of rightly-related to God.” And not without cost. That promise will cost.

It doesn't end there. Abram still needs help believing. I want you to see what God does for him, what God does for us. Abram asks in verse 8, “How can I know?” God tells Abram to bring a set of animals to create a covenant ceremony. In the ancient world, to make a covenant, a binding oath stronger than a promise, this is what you did. The word covenant in Hebrew is from the root word “to cut.” You would take sacrificial animals and cut them in two, separating the pieces in two lines to make a sort of aisle through the middle, an aisle of blood. Then you walked through that aisle toward the person you were making a covenant with. I know, it's gross. Try this the next time you're closing on a house. It's gross, but it's also dramatic. In effect you are saying, look, if I don't keep my oath, let me become like these animals. Consider this a life oath, a blood oath, a covenant. Abram sets all that up.

Then God does something unexpected. Abram doesn't walk through the covenant aisle. Abram falls asleep. “As the sun was setting, Abram fell into a deep sleep, and a thick and

dreadful darkness came over him” (Genesis 15:12). Then he sees a vision: “When the sun had set and darkness had fallen, a smoking firepot with a blazing torch appeared and passed between the pieces. On that day the Lord made a covenant with Abram...” (Genesis 15:17-18). The Lord made the covenant with Abram. The pot and torch represent the presence of God moving down the aisle of covenantal blood, moving through the pieces of bodies broken in two, God moving toward Abram. “This is my covenant.” The Lord makes the covenant. Remember, when Noah looked into the sky, the bow was facing up to heaven, the rainbow faces up to heaven with an arrow between earth and heaven to pierce the heart of God. “I make this covenant,” says the Lord. “It's not on you. It's on me. I'm the one passing down the aisle of blood. I'm the one with the body broken and split.” God makes the covenant, friends, and not without cost. It is sealed on another day when darkness fell: “At noon, darkness came over the whole land until three in the afternoon. And at three in the afternoon Jesus cried out in a loud voice ... ‘My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?’” (Mark 15:33-34). The heart of God was ripped in two to make a covenant of blood with us through Jesus our Savior.

Don't be afraid. I am your shield. I am your very great reward. Me. Myself. Jesus. Only believe. Later Paul would teach the Romans, “Therefore, the promise comes by faith, so that it may be by grace and may be guaranteed to all Abraham's offspring—not only to those who are of the law but also to those who have the faith of Abraham. He is the father of us all” (Romans 4:16). Here is the beautiful story. The beautiful God. He makes covenant with us through his Son Jesus Christ. He walks toward you. He makes and keeps the beautiful promise. Only believe. Only believe. Only believe.

