



12th Sunday after Pentecost^t
August 15, 2010
Genesis 15:1-6

What Can't God Give You?

"Grace, mercy and peace are yours from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen."

The Word of God for our consideration today is taken from Genesis 15:1-6.

"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." ² But Abram said, "O Sovereign LORD, what can you give me since I remain childless and the one who will inherit my estate is Eliezer of Damascus?" ³ And Abram said, "You have given me no children; so a servant in my household will be my heir." ⁴ Then the word of the LORD came to him: "This man will not be your heir, but a son coming from your own body will be your heir." ⁵ He took him outside and said, "Look up at the heavens and count the stars-- if indeed you can count them." Then he said to him, "So shall your offspring be." ⁶ Abram believed the LORD, and he credited it to him as righteousness."

Abraham was a man like any other man. Well, I suppose not. Abraham was a man of God's promise. When he was 75 years old, the LORD appeared to Abram and said, *"Leave your country, your people and your father's household and go 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 people on earth will be blessed through you."*

And what did Abram do? He went...because God had told him to. He went because God had promised him that he would bless him every step of the way. And the LORD kept his word. It was more than any nomad could have possibly imagined. Over the next ten years, Abram saw God's hand in his life as his wealth and standing increased. Over the next ten years, God protected Abram in everything he did. Just before our text, he protected Abram as he went to rescue his nephew Lot from men who had kidnapped him from his land. God was true to his Word.

Abram had more than he could have hoped for. He had a beautiful wife in Sarai. He had amassed great wealth. His name was well respected. But still. Something was missing. He didn't have an heir. It had been ten years since God had promised to give him a son and through that son, the Savior of the world. Abram had been waiting *ten years*.

Imagine trying and trying for years to have a child. Imagine wanting nothing in this world more than the gift of a child. Some of you perhaps don't have to imagine that hard. Now, when you are past the normal childbearing years, God appears to you and says that he will bless you and your spouse with the gift of a son. Your heart leaps for joy! You can't wait!

So you try. One year passes and no child. You assure one another, "It's in the Lord's hands." Two years pass and no child. You tell each other, "God will bless us when the time is right." Three years pass and no child. You say to each other, "Don't despair. God promised it. God will do it!" Four years pass and no child. Time is running out. Five, six, seven, eight, nine, ten years pass and no child. Humanly speaking, your time for having children is over. What would you be thinking? "Maybe God has forgotten me and his promise to me."

Abram and Sarai were understandably down. Not only did it seem that God wasn't blessing them with the promised son, but without a son, there would be no Savior. They were crushed. They were hopeless. They were depressed. Not only were their hopes for a child wrapped up in God's promise of a son, but also their very salvation!

We've been there, done that, haven't we? We'd like to believe that the life of the believer is nothing more than roses and sweet dreams. But anyone who has lived as a Christian in a sin-filled world knows that more often than not...it's not! Like Abram, we've "taken a risk" in living as a Christian. You know God's promises and so you step out on the ledge of trust and you live sure of what you hope for even though the goal can't be seen. What promises does God make to you in his Word that he seems to be slow in keeping?

God never promised you a child or a mansion or a Lamborghini. We're not talking about the things you hope to have. We're talking about God's promises to you. God promises to provide. And as Christians, we step out in faith and thank him with our offerings, trusting in that promise. Then why is it so hard to make ends meet sometimes? God promises to make whatever difficult situation you are facing in your life work out for your good. As Christians, we live our lives knowing that. Then why does it seem that things just get worse and worse with no hope in sight? God promises to walk with me even through the valley of the shadow of death. As Christians we cling to that promise. Then

why do we feel so lonely sometimes. God promises to forgive your every wrong doing. As Christians, we live with that confidence. Then why does guilt continue to bombard my heart? We are tempted to conclude, "Maybe God has forgotten me and his promises to me," just like Abram must have been tempted to think. Ten years is a long time to wait for a child!

So, what does God do for Abram? He comes to him with a word of encouragement. He doesn't need to, but he reminds Abram who is in control. "*Abram, I am your shield and your very great reward.*" You would think that would be enough. But Abram is so down it doesn't seem to sink in. "*Oh, Sovereign Lord, what can you do for me?*"

"What can I do for you, Abram? What can I do for you? Abram, do you want to step outside?" But God wanted to go outside, not to scold Abram, but to show him what he could do. "Abram, look up at the stars and count them. Go ahead, just try. That's the number of descendants you will have!"

Think about that. The One who put the stars in the sky is the one that made those promises to Abram...and he's the one that makes his promises to you. Sometimes our hearts lose hope in the midst of turmoil and say, "Lord, what can you do for me," as though God isn't strong enough to keep his promises. When you are tempted to doubt a single word of a single promise that God makes to you, just step outside and look up at the stars. When you are tempted to think that he doesn't remember insignificant you, remember that the One who promises to provide for you is the One who put the stars in the sky and knows each one by name! He knows you. He will provide – that's what he can do for you! The One who promises all things will work for your good was the same God who put a special star in the sky at Jesus' birth and moved it over Bethlehem. He can make your difficult situation work for your good – that's what he can do for you! The One that promises to forgive your every wrong doing is the One that darkened the star we call the sun on Good Friday to prove that your sin really is forgiven. You are forgiven in the sacrifice that Jesus' made on the cross – your guilt is removed forever. That's what God can do for you! The One who promises to be with you even through the valley of the shadow of death is the One that made the sun rise on Easter morning to reveal that his Son had risen from the grave! Death is not the end – that's what he can do for you! The next time you are tempted to ask God, "*Oh, Sovereign Lord, what can you do for me?*" Just step outside and look up at the stars...and you'll have your answer.

Notice, God did not immediately give Abram a son, though he could have. Abram would have to wait another fifteen years for God to make good on his Word. Do you think that he had his doubts during that time? Absolutely! Yet every time Abraham looked up at the stars, he was reminded that the God who put those stars in the sky was able to keep his promise to him. You know the rest of the story. When Abraham was 100 years old, God blessed Abraham and Sarah with a son, Isaac. From that son, God made good on his word to make Abraham into a great nation with descendants as numerous as the stars in the sky!

And here's the cool part. As Abraham looked up at the night sky 4000 years ago and he saw all those stars. God let him see you. What do I mean? Listen to what the apostle Paul says about this account: "**It is not the natural children who are God's children, but it is the children of the promise who are regarded as Abraham's offspring.**" (Romans 9:8) In other words, when God showed Abraham the night sky, he was showing him all the offspring he would one day have. As a Christian with the faith of Abraham, that's you! Abraham was a child of God's promise. So are you!

The Bible says that Abraham believed God and God credited it to him as righteousness. God convinced Abraham that his promises were true and he considered him righteous because of those promises. Yes, God even did that for the guy that asked him, "*Oh Sovereign Lord, what can you do for me?*"

When you find yourself asking what God can do for you. Just look at what he has done. In love, he created this world. In love, he promised to send a Savior. In love, he sent his only Son, Jesus, when no one else would do. In love, he created you and made you his own in baptism. In love, he comes to you still in the Lord's Supper and his Word. In love, he makes you promises in his Word. In love, he tells you to step outside and look up at the stars. Yeah, that's what God can do for you. Amen.

"Now to him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work within us, to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, forever and ever. Amen."

– Ephesians 3:20-21 –