

Dear Friends,

Abram, later known as Abraham, is remembered as a man of faith. He is called the “father of all who believe” by St. Paul. (Romans 4:11) What did Abram believe?

The New Testament reading from Hebrews tells us that Abram believed that the Lord would provide the land he lived in as a nomad as a future home for his descendants. Based on that faith, Abram left what familiar, his old home and he went and lived in a place that was new and unfamiliar. In Genesis 14 the Lord has strengthened Abram’s faith in the promise of the land.

The author of the letter to the Hebrews tells us that Abram also believed in the promise of salvation, eternal life in heaven. In Genesis 15 the Lord want’s to strengthen Abram’s faith in this promise. The promise of heaven was linked to the Lord’s promise of a son for Abram. Through Abram’s descendants, the Lord had promised a Savior would come. Abram knew he needed a Savior. This was important to him. Abram’s faith was not perfect and it needed to be strengthened.

The Lord has promised you that as his son or daughter he will take care of us in the land in which we live. The Lord often uses those who rule us to play important role in how we receive our daily bread. In an election time, we worry about having less or doing without needed items if those who are elected are more of a hindrance than a help. We need to pray to him who is our real Provider.

We have to be careful that we get so concerned about the fulfillment of this promise that we do not focus on what is most important and this the Lord has promised to provide us with an eternal home and all the treasures that go with it.

In Genesis 15 Abram is very concerned about heavenly treasure that is his salvation and all the blessings that the Lord has promised. The Lord graciously comes to Abram and speaks to him about the fact that he need not be afraid. He, the Lord, will deliver heavenly treasure. This promise of the Lord is very important for you and me. We hear from the Lord’s word today that we are to...**Trust the Lord to Deliver Heavenly Treasure.**

1. Listen to the One speaking.

The Lord approaches Abram. He graciously approaches us in our time of need. He approached Abram in a vision. He comes to us in his word, the Bible. We need to listen to the One who is speaking.

A. He says to Abram, **“Do not be afraid, Abram. I am your shield, your very great reward.”**

1. Abram won the battle and routed the four Eastern Kings who had invaded. The Lord had been a shield and protected Abram. Abram turned his back on the spoils, plunder of war. The Lord would be his reward or source of blessing. Now the Lord promises that he will be his shield and reward, but the Lord is thinking spiritual and eternal treasure.

2. When we hear the word “reward” we usually think of something we have earned. However, in verse 6 we are told that righteousness, that is salvation, was credited to Abram. The Lord is the “reward” in the sense that he is the source of the gracious gift of salvation.

3. It is easy to see the Lord keeping his promise to take care of us in this life. However, spiritual gifts are much harder to see and we can't see the promised land of Heaven. Like Abram as we get older we may at times worry about our salvation. Therefore, the Lord comes to us and speaks to us in Scripture. He assures that he has done everything necessary for our salvation. There are places, like Ephesians 2:6 where it speaks of our salvation as an accomplished fact. The Lord can talk this way, because when he sets his mind to do something he always does it. So he is sure of our salvation and heavenly treasures and we can be too.

B. Never-the-less, we are told in verse one that Abram was afraid.

1. In verses 2 & 3 the Lord lets him vent his fears. He doesn't have a son. He has resigned himself to the fact that the Lord will not give him one and he has appointed his servant, Eliezer of Damascus to be his heir.

Later on we hear that Abram and Sara's age was a stumbling block, especially to Sara, his wife. That is not mentioned here so I am thinking that Abram simply believed that the Lord was not going to change the situation and would use his servant as his heir.

2. Abram's fear is not good. His mistake is that he doesn't bother to stop and

ask the Lord for an explanation, but simply seems to assume that things are going to be the way they are. He needed to repent of his fearful assumption.

We are guilty of assuming all kinds of things. That our country is going to continue on its anti-Christian path, that our church is never going to grow or have enough young people, that our marital challenges and family problems are never going to change. We don't know the mind of the Lord, but we do know he has invited us to pray about troubles and that all things are possible with him. Rather than a spirit of fear, the Lord is working that we have spirit of faith and a spirit seeking him as the solution to life's difficulties.

2. Listen to his words of promise.

I started by saying "listen to the One who is speaking." Now I would direct you to the Speaker's words. We want to listen to the Lord's words of promise.

A. After Abram is done venting the Lord says, **"This man will not be your heir, but a son who is your own flesh and blood will be your heir."**

1. He promises Abram a son. Through the lineage of that son a Savior would be born. We have the promise and the fulfillment of the Son of God who became flesh. Jesus born at Bethlehem. Jesus can promises us the Kingdom as he does in the gospel reading because he opened that Kingdom with his perfect life and his innocent suffering and death at the cross. Forgiveness of sins with God opens the Kingdom and so all the blessings promised become ours.

2. To assure Abram this is all real, the Lord expands his promise. **5 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."**

Not only will Abram have a son, but countless descendants. St. Paul informs that everyone who has the faith of Abraham, is counted as a descendant of him. (Romans 4:16)

When was the last time you stood outside on a starry night? When you get away from the city lights, you will see stars in the AZ sky that are beyond counting. So today Abraham has not only many Jewish descendants, but there are believers in Jesus all over the world who are descendents, because they have the faith of father Abraham.

B. We are informed (6) that when the Lord spoke, “**Abram believed the Lord, and he credited it to him as righteousness.**”

1. What the Lord promised Abram is Gospel. St. Paul tells us that, “[**The gospel] is the power of God that brings salvation to everyone who believes.**” (Romans 1:16) When Abram heard the promises of God, the Holy Spirit worked faith in his heart. He believed. He believed that the Lord would give him a son and that he had forgiveness and salvation in the coming Savior.

2. We are told that Abram was justified that is innocent before God because his faith was credited as righteous. So the Lord worked faith and then the Lord said because you have faith I am counting you as one who been made right in the work of the Savior. Abram had righteousness even though Jesus would not die for him for another 2000 years. This is possible because grace and salvation does not depend on us, it comes from God.

Conclusion: The verse of the day Hebrews 11:1 stated that “**Faith is being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we don’t see.**” We are not certain about the result of the presidential election in the fall. We hope that terrorism does not strike where we live, but we are not sure. Our young people pray for careers and marriage and we pray for them and their happiness, but the Lord does not guarantee that it will always turn out the way we want.

What is there that we can be sure of and certain of? The Scriptures tells us and show us that when the Lord promises something, it is as good as done. One of the things he wants us to certain of is our salvation in Jesus. Jesus fulfilled God’s promise to provide a sacrifice that would bring us the forgiveness of all sins with God. He has done this so all who believe certainly share in the treasures of salvation. He will deliver us to heaven someday. Based on his word **Trust the Lord to Deliver Heavenly Treasure.** Amen.

General Thought: Abraham did not trust in the treasures of this life which he could see, but he trusted the Lord’s promise and that was real, spiritual treasure for him.

Malady: Abraham trusted that the Lord would keep him safe against his enemies, but he did not

know how the Lord would give him a son who would carry the promise of the Savior.

Propositional Statement: The Lord speaks a word of promise concerning the Son of promise, and Abraham believed. He was counted as righteous in the Lord's eyes.

General Thought: Followers of Christ find true treasure in trusting God's promises. Faith is being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we don't see.

Malady: It is hard to set aside the fading treasures of this life and trust in God's promises as real treasure and wait for Christ's return.

Propositional Statement: We trust in God's promises because in them we have eternal treasure and we watch for the happy day of our Lord's return.

Introduction:

Do Not Be Afraid, Little Flock!

1. We know what we have been given.

A. Are you afraid?

1. Fear to let go of the things of this life and trust God and his promises. The followers of Christ seem few or little in power. (We can't use might and muscle to provide like the world seems to be able to.)
2. A command "**Do not be afraid, little flock.**" An invitation to look at things from God's perspective.

Trans: Why?

B. We have been given heavenly treasure.

1. Jesus has brought us into the Kingdom through his departure. We are the Lord Almighty's flock. We are his people.
2. We will never have to depart, we have it now.

for your Father has been pleased to give you the kingdom.

C. We should live confidently.

1. Willing to part with material things.

2. Focusing on the spiritual thus “providing purses” that is growing in our faith and confidence of what we have.
3. This is a treasure we will never lose.

Sell your possessions and give to the poor.

Provide purses for yourselves that will not wear out, a treasure in heaven that will not be exhausted, where no thief comes near and no moth destroys.

For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.

Trans: Having the Kingdom implies getting ready for its complete fulfillment.

2. We know what we have to do.

A. We are dressed. (We are appropriately dressed via word and sacrament.)

1. Picture of being ready to travel.
2. We are dressed in such a way that we are ready to go to meet the Lord, ready to go to heaven.

**35 "Be dressed ready for service and keep your lamps burning,
like men waiting for their master to return from a wedding banquet,
so that when he comes and knocks they can immediately open the door for him.**

B. We are watching.

1. We are watching the Scriptures.
2. We know what is coming. (Judgement, Eternal Blessings in Paradise)

It will be good for those servants whose master finds them watching when he comes.

**I tell you the truth, he will dress himself to serve,
will have them recline at the table and will come and wait on them.**

C. We are not caught by surprise. We are ready.

1. He could come at any time.
2. He comes unexpectedly like a thief.

It will be good for those servants whose master finds them ready, even if he comes in the second or third watch of the night.

But understand this: If the owner of the house had known at what hour the thief was

coming, he would not have let his house be broken into.

You also must be ready, because the Son of Man will come at an hour when you do not expect him."

Genesis 15:1-6

(NIV 2011)

1 After this, the word of the Lord came to Abram in a vision:

“Do not be afraid, Abram.

I am your shield,[a]

your very great reward.[b]”

2 But Abram said, “Sovereign Lord, what can you give me since I remain childless and the one who will inherit[c] 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 who is your own flesh and blood will be your heir.” 5 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[d] be.”

6 Abram believed the Lord, and he credited it to him as righteousness.

Footnotes:

a.Genesis 15:1 Or sovereign

b.Genesis 15:1 Or shield; / your reward will be very great

c.Genesis 15:2 The meaning of the Hebrew for this phrase is uncertain.

d.Genesis 15:5 Or seed

(NIV 1984)

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Haggai 1:2-14

(NIV 2011)

2 This is what the Lord Almighty says: “These people say, ‘The time has not yet come to rebuild the Lord’s house.’”

3 Then the word of the Lord came through the prophet Haggai: 4 “Is it a time for you yourselves to be living in your paneled houses, while this house remains a ruin?”

5 Now this is what the Lord Almighty says: “Give careful thought to your ways. 6 You have planted much, but harvested little. You eat, but never have enough. You drink, but never have your fill. You put on clothes, but are not warm. You earn wages, only to put them in a purse with holes in it.”

7 This is what the Lord Almighty says: “Give careful thought to your ways. 8 Go up into the mountains and bring down timber and build my house, so that I may take pleasure in it and be honored,” says the Lord. 9 “You expected much, but see, it turned out to be little. What you brought home, I blew away. Why?” declares the Lord Almighty. “Because of my house, which remains a ruin, while each of you is busy with your own house. 10 Therefore, because of you the heavens have withheld their dew and the earth its crops. 11 I called for a drought on the fields and the mountains, on the grain, the new wine, the olive oil and everything else the ground produces, on people and livestock, and on all the labor of your hands.”

12 Then Zerubbabel son of Shealtiel, Joshua son of Jozadak, the high priest, and the whole remnant of the people obeyed the voice of the Lord their God and the message of the prophet Haggai, because the Lord their God had sent him. And the people feared the Lord.

13 Then Haggai, the Lord’s messenger, gave this message of the Lord to the people: “I am with you,” declares the Lord. 14 So the Lord stirred up the spirit of Zerubbabel son of Shealtiel, governor of Judah, and the spirit of Joshua son of Jozadak, the high priest, and the spirit of the whole remnant of the people. They came and began to work on the house of the Lord Almighty, their God.

(NIV 1984)

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PSALM 33 (read responsively) (NIV 1984)

Sing joyfully to the Lord, you 'righteous;*

it is fitting for the upright to 'praise him.

For the Word of the Lord is 'right and true;*

he is faithful in 'all he does.

By the word of the Lord were the 'heavens made,*

their starry host by the breath 'of his mouth.

For he spoke, and it 'came to be;*

he commanded, and 'it stood firm.

The Lord foils the plans of the 'nations;*

he thwarts the purposes of the 'peoples.

But the plans of the Lord stand firm for'ever,*

the purposes of his heart through all gener'ations.

The Lord loves righteousness and 'justice;*

the earth is full of his un'failing love.

All: Glory be to the Father and to the Son

and to the Holy Spirit,

as it was in the beginning,

is now, and will be forever. Amen.

SECOND LESSON - Hebrews 11:1-3, 8-16

(NIV 2011)

Now faith is confidence in what we hope for and assurance about what we do not see. 2 This is what the ancients were commended for.

3 By faith we understand that the universe was formed at God's command, so that what is seen was not made out of what was visible.

8 By faith Abraham, when called to go to a place he would later receive as his inheritance, obeyed and went, even though he did not know where he was going. 9 By faith he made his home in the promised land like a stranger in a foreign country; he lived in tents, as did Isaac and Jacob, who were heirs with him of the same promise. 10 For he was looking forward to the city with foundations, whose architect and builder is God. 11 And by faith even Sarah, who was past childbearing age, was enabled to bear children because she[a] considered him faithful who had made the promise. 12 And so from this one man, and he as good as dead, came descendants as numerous as the stars in the sky and as countless as the sand on the seashore.

13 All these people were still living by faith when they died. They did not receive the things promised; they only saw them and welcomed them from a distance, admitting that they were foreigners and strangers on earth. 14 People who say such things show that they are looking for a country of their own. 15 If they had been thinking of the country they had left, they would have had opportunity to return. 16 Instead, they were longing for a better country—a heavenly one. Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God, for he has prepared a city for them.

Footnotes:

Hebrews 11:11 Or By faith Abraham, even though he was too old to have children—and Sarah herself was not able to conceive—was enabled to become a father because he

(NIV 1984)

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10 For he was looking forward to the city with foundations, whose architect and builder is God.

11 By faith Abraham, even though he was past age--and Sarah herself was barren--was enabled to become a father because he considered him faithful who had made the promise.

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Revelation 3:1-6 (NIV 1984)

"To the angel of the church in Sardis write:

These are the words of him who holds the seven spirits (or "the sevenfold Spirit") of God and the seven stars. I know your deeds; you have a reputation of being alive, but you are dead.

2Wake up! Strengthen what remains and is about to die, for I have not found your deeds complete in the sight of my God. 3Remember, therefore, what you have received and heard; obey it, and repent. But if you do not wake up, I will come like a thief, and you will not know at what time I will come to you. 4Yet you have a few people in Sardis who have not soiled their clothes. They will walk with me, dressed in white, for they are worthy. 5He who overcomes will, like them, be dressed in white. I will never blot out his name from the book of life, but will acknowledge his name before my Father and his angels. 6He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.

THE VERSE OF THE DAY

Alleluia. Now faith is being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see. Alleluia. (Hebrews 11:1 NIV)

THE GOSPEL READING - Luke 12:32-40

(NIV 2011)

32 "Do not be afraid, little flock, for your Father has been pleased to give you the kingdom. 33 Sell your possessions and give to the poor. Provide purses for yourselves that will not wear out, a treasure in heaven that will never fail, where no thief comes near and no moth destroys. 34 For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.

35 "Be dressed ready for service and keep your lamps burning, 36 like servants waiting for their master to return from a wedding banquet, so that when he comes and knocks they can immediately open the door for him. 37 It will be good for those servants whose master finds them watching when he comes. Truly I tell you, he will dress himself to serve, will have them recline at the table and will come and wait on them. 38 It will be good for those servants whose master finds them ready, even if he comes in the middle of the night or toward daybreak. 39 But understand this: If the owner of the house had known at what hour the thief was coming, he would not have let his house be broken into. 40 You also must be ready, because the Son of Man will come at an hour when you do not expect him."

(NIV 1984)

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