

**Genesis 15: 7-21 “How shall I know?”, Sermon # 46 in the series –  
“Beginnings”, Delivered by Pastor Paul Rendall on July 15<sup>th</sup>,  
2012, in the Morning Worship Service.**

In the past several chapters we have seen that God called Abram out of Ur of the Chaldees, gave him great promises of what he would do for him personally and also for his descendants both physical and spiritual. We have seen that Abram was a man of faith to leave his country and his father's house and journey to Canaan, the promised land. We have seen already how his faith has been tried and tested; how he was weak in faith at certain times and strong in faith at other times.

He would almost lose Sarai to Pharaoh's embrace in Egypt because he would have her call him her brother, and yet later he could be a peacemaker with Lot over the issue of where they would pasture their flocks. He was also a man of war in going out to rescue him when he was taken captive. These were strong acts of faith in him. But we never hear of his faith being mentioned in the Scriptures until we get to Genesis 15: 6.

We can see that he was called by God, and what that meant, in Genesis 12 to 14. And we see him justified here in Genesis 15: 6. It was not that he wasn't justified before, but this declaration of God to him at this point was in order to his being assured of everything that God would do for him. In these verses we see him seeking God for the assurance that he would inherit the land that was promised to him. Since Abram is the father of all the faithful, the father of all who believe in both Old and New Testaments, I think that we can very safely use him as a type of the believer in every sense of that word.

This is the order of salvation as we find it in the Scriptures, spoken of in Romans 8: 30. “Moreover whom He predestined, these He also called; whom He called, these He also justified; and whom He justified, these He also glorified.” Assurance of your having eternal life is one of the greatest blessings that you can ever have in this life. The inheritance that Abram was promised is, to the New Testament believer, a type and picture of the eternal inheritance of heaven and the believer's being glorified through the work of Jesus Christ.

Assurance of your salvation does not always come at the moment of your being justified. It may, but it is not always the case. Abram had faith, but as I said last week, he was also afraid that God would not give him the child of promise, before he grew too old to have any children. Abram needed his faith to be strengthened and to have his doubts and fears taken away.

So too, you will need to have your doubts and fears taken away in regard to your salvation and all that God has promised that he will do for you. You will need to know that you will inherit all that God has promised you, and that God will do for you, in regard to salvation, those things which would be impossible for you to perform without Christ's help and grace.

So what I believe that this text is saying to us this morning, is this. You can

know that you will be an inheritor of salvation and eternal life if you find the same kind of assurance that Abram found on the night in which he was justified.

So the question that we want to answer this morning is this. How can I find assurance of my salvation and eternal life, even as Abram did, on that night so long ago? The answer which comes to us from these verses is, that you will find assurance if you will look to see if you have, by grace, the same kind of responses as Abram had, to the gospel sacrifice. Abram responded in 3 ways to the gospel sacrifice.

**1<sup>st</sup> – He responded by bringing to God in worship, what God commanded him to bring.** (verses 7-10)

I am calling this a gospel sacrifice that Abram responded to, because at the end of the chapter we see God making a covenant with Abram. And this covenant does not at all require Abram to do anything to fulfill it. It is all one-sided. This covenant is the outworking of what God sovereignly decided to do for Abram and his descendants. It has to do with what He would do for the physical descendants of Abram, as a nation, that is certain. And this is the Hebrew people to whom He would reveal himself, give them his Holy Word, and through whom He would bring forth the promised “seed” of Genesis 3: 15.

He would give them a land, and commandments on how He should be worshipped. In this passage also, we are given a prophetic history of what would happen to them and what God would do for them. They would be strangers in another land, that is Egypt, and be in bondage and affliction in that land for 400 years and then return. Abram wants to know whether he will inherit the land of Canaan. Acts 7: 5 says that he would not personally inherit a foot of it.

But the book of Hebrews says very plainly that he was “waiting for the city which has foundations, whose builder and maker is God.” (Hebrews 11: 10) And in verse 16 it says that he desired a better that is, a heavenly country. And, that God has prepared a city for him. That is the New Jerusalem where the church shall dwell forever, even heaven itself. That is the New Testament church built by Jesus Christ and composed of believers in every age, a heavenly city even here upon the earth, as well as in heaven.

But this sacrificial covenant that God and Abram were entering into did require a response of obedience to what God would ask him to bring. So I believe that when it talks about Abram bringing the 3 year old heifer, the 3 year old female goat, and a three year old ram, and of his cutting them in two, and also a turtledove, and a young pigeon, that this is a response to the gospel and the grace purchased by the sacrifice of Jesus Christ.

All the promises given to Abram and all true believers in both Old Testament and New, depend for their fulfillment in God and what He would do through Jesus Christ. He is the sacrifice through which God the Father would pass as a smoking oven and as a burning torch in His justice, and to show his mercy in making an everlasting covenant with sinful men. It would mean His afflicting His Son, the

Lord Jesus Christ, in the place of those who are afflicted with sin who would believe in Him. God would “cut a covenant with Abram and make over the blessings of that covenant to those who have faith in Jesus Christ. It would mean Christ’s suffering for sin in the smoking oven of God’s wrath and judgment, instead of the sinner suffering forever there.

It would mean God’s ordaining the burning torch of the dying love of Jesus Christ that would satisfy His own righteous judgment against sin. This would allow believers to come into covenant with Him, the Holy God. Abram was only sacrificing what God had commanded him to bring that day. God was saying to Abram, and to all of us, this is how I am to be approached. This is how I am to be known, and worshipped, through the sacrifice and death of my Son.

But the kind of animals that Abram brought show us what you and I must bring, at God’s command, when we come to worship Him. The 3 year old heifer, the 3 year old female goat, and the three year old ram are a picture for us of our response as believers in the church of Jesus Christ. The 3 year old heifer, the 3 year old female goat, and the 3 year old ram were at the height of their strength and beauty.

And whether you and I are male or female or a leader in Christ’s church, we are to bring to God all of our strength and whatever is good and lovely in us, and to offer it to God. We are to lay it before Him as slain, divided in two in relation to what we can do without Christ. Christ died at the height of His strength and beauty, and power as a sinless man. He was wise, and holy, true and good. All of His mind and soul and strength were devoted to God.

So our response must be the same in whatever sacrifice and offering we make of ourselves to God. We sacrifice our glory in order to have His grace at work in our hearts. He has died for sins and to sin, therefore we who believe also die to sin. Romans 6: 10, 11 says, “For the death that He died, He died to sin once for all; but the life that He lives, He lives to God. Likewise you also, reckon yourselves to be dead indeed to sin, but alive to God in Christ Jesus our Lord.” Christ died for men, women, leaders, and yes, also for children.

They are pictured here for us as the turtledove and the young pigeon. They are too young to think of making any sacrifice, or offering their strength to God, yet Christ has died for them as well. They are not cut in two, but Christ died for them. We bring them before the Lord in worship as an offering. We pray that the Lord will save them at a young age and use them mightily in His service as they grow up.

Let us ask ourselves this morning, if we would know that we are true Christians and inheritors of eternal life; whether we bring the sacrifices to God in worship which he has commanded? Are we coming to God through the sacrificial life and death of Jesus Christ, that sacrifice which alone God is pleased with? Do we lay our own strength and beauty and the merits of what we do, as dead in the dust before God? Do we present ourselves, our bodies, our minds, and our strength, as

a living sacrifice to God? Are we fully intending to be His servants in righteousness? Do we bring our strength, and beauty, and whatever level of intelligence He has given us, into this place of worship, to be given to Him to be taught and used as He sees fit?

All this is dependent upon what Christ has done, and what He will do, for us by his grace. This was not a legal sacrifice that Abram brought. It was a gospel sacrifice. It was what God had told him to bring. And this brought him assurance that he would inherit the land. It will bring you assurance of hope, of your being forgiven of your sins and your being on the way to heaven.

**2<sup>nd</sup> – Abram responded to the gospel sacrifice, and he found assurance, by driving away the vultures from the sacrifice.** (verse 11)

In verse 11 it says, “And when the vultures came down on the carcasses, Abram drove them away.” Since we now have hopefully perceived what the sacrifice represents in this passage, I believe that we can also hope to discern how “the vultures coming down on the sacrifice” would apply to us as well, and why those vultures need to be driven away. The vultures are those things or people who would prey on our sacrifice; either the doctrine of the Atonement, Christ’s substitutionary sacrifice, or else those who would try to prey on our response to that sacrifice. We must, as Abram, drive them away.

We must think of those thoughts and those people who would take away from us the sacrifice of Christ as essential to our salvation, as vultures. There are many people who would tell us that we really do not need Christ’s death to save us because we are basically good people. We need help, we need advice, but we do not need to be converted by the grace of Christ. This is a vulture that must be driven away! If we are not sinners, and sinners of such great magnitude as to be described in the Bible as ungodly, then why did our glorious Lord Jesus have to come to earth and die at all?

If we only need to be baptized into his name and take the sacraments to be right with God, then why did we need the perfect righteousness of our Lord to be worked out in His perfect keeping of God’s Holy Law? Why is it that the righteousness of Christ must be imputed to us based upon His sacrificial death? No, we are not only great sinners, but we are utterly impotent to save ourselves. Why does it say in Romans Chapter 5, verse 6 – “For when we were still without strength, in due time Christ died for the ungodly?” It is because we cannot change our own wicked hearts.

We keep trying to justify ourselves in God’s sight by works that we do. So religious people try to put ceremonies in the place of faith. They try to put baptism in the place of faith. They try to go to the sacrifice of the Mass and think that they have Christ by putting the wafer in their mouth. But has God ever said that this will bring them to salvation? No, Christ alone will bring us to God. Christ’s sacrifice alone will save us, keep us, and bring us to glory. We believe and we are saved.

Then too, we must think of those thoughts and those people who would take us away from being able to regularly attend the worship of God. They would tell us that there is something more important on Sunday than to dwell in His tabernacle and to give to Him the sacrifice of praise. They would say that there is something of more worldly importance than the holy and joyful duty of giving God the glory due His Name. Our text calls them vultures.

There are many people who would deter us from what is most important because they are selfish. They would take us away from offering to God everything we are and have to serve Him. They will come to you and try to convince you that you are a fanatic for going to a Bible-believing church, for giving so much of your money, your time, and your strength to sitting and listening intently to His Word. They will have many worldly-wise arguments against your making your commitment to serving God during the week, and worshipping Him on His day.

You have decided that you will follow Jesus. You have decided that you will live the rest of your life, having your focus on Him, and responding in your heart to what He has done for you at the cross. But these people who I am thinking of will do everything that they can to “pick at” and “drag away” whatever sacrifice you might make to God. You might even have these kind of thoughts go through your own mind.

You say – There are so many things that I could be doing besides worshipping God. There are so many things that would please me; things that could be done on the Lord’s Day. We must drive these thoughts away, lest God not be honored in our worship of Him. Let us bring all of our thoughts captive to the obedience of Christ at this point. My brethren, check your own heart and mind to see whether there are vultures lurking there to devour your pure devotion to God.

Are there pleasures or people who would drag you to worldly entertainments on the Lord’s Day? Are there thoughts of what you need to accomplish in worldly business that keep you from offering prayer to God in secret every day, from looking into His Word in order to hear His voice speaking to you? It is your best thoughts that you ought to give to God; it is these worshipful thoughts that you should offer Him every day, and this ought to be seen by you as a sacrifice.

Listen to Hebrews 13: 15, and 16; “Therefore by Him let us continually offer the sacrifice of praise to God, that the fruit of our lips, giving thanks to His name.” “But do not forget to do good and to share, for with such sacrifices God is well pleased.” The strength and power of Christianity is found in being able to offer these sacrifices every day.

How else do we abide in Christ unless we guard His sacrifice and ours? You will find great assurance of your salvation if you will come to the place where you willingly and deliberately are driving the vultures away from Christ’s sacrifice and from your own sacrifices of praise and the good works that you would do for Him in response to His sacrifice, which brought you salvation.

**3<sup>rd</sup> – You will find assurance of Eternal life and your salvation when**

**you rest your faith and hope entirely upon the Covenant promise of what God will do for you.** (verses 12-21)

You need to remember in closing, that when Abram had killed the animals that God had told him to kill, when He had cut them in two, down the middle, and had placed the pieces opposite each other, and the birds in twos close to each other, that it was not Abram and God both walking between the pieces. It was God alone who as a “smoking oven and a burning torch” passed between the pieces. This is what He was saying to Abram: I alone am the One who can satisfy my own perfect justice. I alone can show mercy in the sacrifice of Christ. I alone can make any sacrifice that you make acceptable and pleasing in my sight.

You may have many fears about whether or not I will perform everything that I have promised, and everything that I purpose, but it shall be so in due time, and My time is the right time.” “My way is the right way.” Abram had still much to learn about this, as we shall see. But so do we. And we will save the explanation of that until the next time. It is enough for you to know that God was the One who brought assurance to Abram concerning his inheriting the land. And God is the One who brings assurance to His believing people concerning their having eternal life.

We must rest our faith and hope entirely upon God’s promise and His Covenant sacrifice in the gift of Jesus Christ. As it says in Romans 8: 32 – “If He did not spare His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all, how shall He not with Him also freely give us all things?” And so He shall.