

ASSURANCE IN TIMES OF DOUBT

Genesis 15:1-5

INTRODUCTION

Matt 17:20 – “Truly I say to you, if you have faith as a mustard seed, you shall say to this mountain, ‘Move from here to there,’ and it shall move; and nothing shall be impossible to you.”

Have you moved any mountains lately?
How about the mountains of troubles you feel crushing you?
Mountains of fear? Mountains of uncertainty? Mountains of doubt?

Doubt, uncertainty, and fear can come rushing in when troubles come our way. When what we expect to happen isn't happening. Or what we think shouldn't be happening is happening.

A Poem:

*Lord, I've never moved a mountain, and I guess I never will.
All the faith that I could muster, wouldn't move a small ant hill.
Yet I'll tell you Lord I'm grateful, for the joy of knowing Thee,
And for all the mountain-moving, down through life You've done
for me.*

*When I needed help you lifted, me from depths of great despair.
When burdens, pain and sorrow, have been more than I can
bear,
You've always been my courage, to restore life's troubled sea,
And to move these little mountains, that have looked so big to me.*

*Many times when I've had problems, and when bills I've had to
pay,
And the worries and the heartaches, just kept mounting every
day,
Lord, I don't know how you did it. I can't explain the wheres or
whys.
All I know is I've seen mountains turn to blessings in disguise.*

*No, I've never moved a mountain, for my faith is far too small.
Yet I thank you Lord of Heaven, you've always heard my call.
As long as mountains are in my life, I'll always have no fear,
For mountain-moving Jesus, is my strength and always near.*

God gives assurance to His children.

He says, in essence: *“Look up! Get up! And don't ever give up!”*

READ Gen 15:1-6

What we see in our text:

- God speaks
- Abram doubts
- God reassures

God addresses **two serious concerns** in Abram's heart:

1. his safety and his seed and
2. his protection and his posterity

He is concerned with his length of life and his legacy of life.

Proposition: For us → **3 Beautiful Timeless Truths:**

- I. God's Word encourages His troubled child
- II. The troubled child doubts the promise of God
- III. God graciously repeats and clarifies His promise to His troubled child.

So That: You will have assurance in your times of trouble.

1st Timeless Truth ...

I. God's Word Encourages His Troubled Child 15:1

Point – The Word of God comes to us when we need it.

Proof – Gen 15:1 – **“After these things the word of the LORD came to Abram in a vision, saying, ‘Do not fear, Abram, I am a shield to you; your reward shall be very great.’”**

“after these things” – after the occurrences of Chapter 14

The characteristic of mankind where often times after great victories and accomplishments, feats, and performances are then times of time of disappointment, letdown, and depression.

Illustration – Actuarial data (statistics related to insurance and life expectancy) I heard when I first started with my undergraduate degree in 1987 at Boeing Defense and Space Group:

- If you retire at age 55 – life expectancy of 20 years →75
- If you retire at age 60 – life expectancy of 10 years →70
- If you retire at age 65 – life expectancy of 13 months →66

Those were the numbers and it was shocking to me. Perhaps after working to 65 and being forced into retirement, there was a loss of purpose, a letdown.

Point – First, God’s **Word** and God’s **Will**

1) God’s Word

“**the word of the LORD**” →first appearance of this phrase

- only appears twice in Genesis, both in this passage (15:1,4)
- next appearance in Exod 9:20, 21

“**the word of the LORD came to ...**”

- next appearance in 1 Sam 15:10 – to Samuel

“**in a vision, saying,**” – only here and Num 24:4, 16; Ezek 13:7

All of these words are pointing to the fact that this is prophetic revelation →**20:7** – God speaking to king Abimelech, king of Gerar – “restore the man’s wife, for he is a prophet, and he will pray for you, and you will live.”

- Abram, even in his folly at this point (Gen 20), is described by God as a prophet

2) God’s Will

“**do not fear, Abram**” – word of encouragement →**command**

This is **the will of God**.

Do not fear what?

As good students of God's Word, we look at **the context**.

1) Do not fear → the revenge of man

- Abram is very likely afraid of retribution from the kingdom to the east
- the law of retaliation

But what is in even nearer **context**??

“the word of the LORD came to Abram in a vision”

2) Do not fear → the holiness of God!

- Abram, you will not be consumed.

Illustration – Remember when the angel appeared to the shepherds announcing the birth of Christ:

Luke 2:10 – “the angel said to them, ‘Do not be afraid; for behold, I bring you good news of a great joy which shall be for all the people.’”

Abram has the feeling of fear.

→ But God commands Abram not to fear.

The truth, the Word of God, always takes precedence over our feelings. We don't deny them, for we are created in the image of God, but we must take our feelings, when they are in conflict with the Word of God, and lay them at the foot of the cross.

This teaching is not “the opium of the masses.” (Karl Marx)

This is the will of God.

Application – Beloved, **our troubles** are just opportunities for God to display His providence, His power, and His sustaining grace.

Application – Summiting the mountain of our troubles give us the privilege to put the glory of God on display by our trust and confidence in our Lord!

Why should Abram not fear?

Point – Because God’s **Word** and God’s **will** are followed by:
→ God’s **protection** and God’s **promise**

3) God’s Protection

“**I am a shield to you**”

Point → This is the first “**I am (noun)**”!!!

Jesus said in the Gospel of John and the Revelation to John, Jesus said

“**I am ...**”

- the bread of life
- the light of the world
- the door
- the good Shepherd
- the resurrection and the life
- the way, the truth, and the life
- the true vine
- the root and offspring of David, the bright morning star
- the Alpha and Omega, the first and the last, the beginning and the end

→ Before any of these ... “**I am a shield to you**”

“**a shield**” - is a defensive weapon carried by a soldier to protect him against the offensive weapons of the enemy.

- same root word in the blessing of priest Melchizedek in 14:20 that is translated as ‘delivered’

- “delivered your enemies into your hand”
- this “**shield**” moves swiftly in any direction to stop any spear or arrow
- whatever thunderbolts flash towards you, this shield intervenes

A Bible believing pastor in Europe said it this way: *“In the night you are off guard and traveling alone in the twilight. The horrid assassin of our souls lies in ambush waiting for you. He never slumbers nor sleeps in his desire to destroy us. He is never weary. He never relents. He never abandons his quest for our destruction. He fires out of the darkness directly at us. He has tried to slay us a thousand times and failed. Christ is our shield and nothing gets through.”*

When we are little Christian children, he seeks to hurt us. He fires at us in the boldness of our teenage years. He fires at us during the strength of our manhood. He is merciless when he sees us in the tottering steps of old age. He seeks to tear us away from Christ on our death beds. But nothing reaches us. Nothing can tear us from Christ. If we are behind this shield of Jesus then we are safe for eternity.”

Illustration – Beloved, God is better than the strongest shepherd who drives away the bears and the lions and the thieves who would take away the weakest lamb from the flock.

Prov 18:10 – “The name of the LORD is a strong tower; The righteous runs into it and is safe.”

Between us and our enemies are all the armies of heaven. God is a mighty tower. The moment we run to him, we are completely safe from the worst our enemies can do. There are walls of salvation built around the soul He delights to defend.

Illustration – When General George Patton was in Sicily in WWII, he received high praise for his courage and bravery. General Patton replied, *“Sir, I am not a brave man. . . The truth is, I am an utter craven coward. I have never been within the sound of*

gunshot or in sight of battle in my whole life that I wasn't so scared that I had sweat in the palms of my hands."

Years later, when Patton's autobiography was published, it contained this statement: *"I learned very early in my life never to take counsel of my fears."*

Application - In the same way, your fears are real. They are part of your emotions. But do not take their counsel. Do not bend your ear towards the siren song of self preservation that would go against the counsel of God.

Eph 6:16 – “taking up the shield of faith with which you will be able to extinguish all the flaming missiles of the evil one.”

4) God's Promise

“your reward shall be very great”

14:21-24 – three weeks ago in our current study, but only one verse away in Scripture, we have the contrast between the King of Sodom's reward and God's reward

→ Both “**shield**” and “**reward**” point back to chapter 14.

Illustration – Imagine a fan who longs for some communication from his hero, and he finally gets an autographed letter or a photograph.

Beloved, you don't receive some sign or substitute for God. You receive God Himself.

God's **Protection** and God's **Promise** and even God's **Presence!**

Jesus promised the thief on the cross, “Today you shall be with me in paradise.” What a reward!

2nd Timeless Truth ...

II. The Troubled Child **Doubts** the Promise of God **15:2-3**

Point – Abram, the faithful, is wrestling with doubt.

Proof – “²And Abram said, ‘O Lord God, what wilt Thou give me, since I am childless, and the heir of my house is Eliezer of Damascus?’ ³And Abram said, ‘Since Thou hast given no offspring to me, one born in my house is my heir.’”

First recorded time Abram spoke to God – becomes a dialogue.

- previous had been only monologue (12:1, 7; 13:14ff)

We can see why James cites Abraham as a case study in:

- the faith possessed versus a faith professed (James 2:14f)
- when Abram speaks, his words express doubt
- but when he is silent, his actions express trust

Abram questions - God has delivered his enemies into his hand.
Will God be able to deliver a son into his household?

“**what wilt Thou give me, since I am childless**” – Abram and Sarai are well past childbearing age. The author of Hebrews says “as good as dead” (Heb 4:19)

We should not view this as unbelief.

Abram refers to God as *Adonai YHWH* (*El Elyon* before)

“**LORD GOD**” – this is the first appearance of *Adonai YHWH*

- previous English occasions of “LORD God” was *YHWH Elohim*

YHWH Elohim → *Elohim* the Creator is none other than *YHWH*.

Adonai YHWH → *YHWH* is my Lord and Master (*Adonai*).

BUT

All around him children are being born.

His servants are having babies and raising them.

They crawl at his feet. He hears them crying in a nearby tent.

It almost seems they are mocking his impotence and Sarai’s barrenness. He can’t produce the Seed through whom all the

nations of the earth will be blessed, the one who will be the ancestor of Messiah, the one who will crush Satan's head.

“do not fear”

- looking back - the war
- looking now - God
- looking forward - no child

When God appears to Abram, he is afraid. Abram is sinful. He sees God's holiness and maybe he is wondering if God's promise no longer stands because he is a sinful man? Maybe he has lost the promise???

Illustration – The story was told of a problem faced by executives of a large company. The company had moved into a new skyscraper and discovered that the builder apparently had not put in enough elevators. Employees were disgruntled because there were over long waits for the elevators, especially at both ends of the working day. The company put together a task force to solve this.

The task force came up with possible solutions:

1. Install a new elevator shaft through the building.
2. Speed up the elevators.
3. Arrange for them to stop at certain floors during rush periods.
4. Stagger working hours to reduce elevator demand during “rush hour.”
5. Install mirrors around entrances to all elevators.

Which solution would you choose? After some consideration, the company chose the last solution. And it worked. People became so preoccupied with looking at themselves (or at others), they no longer noticed the wait for the elevator.

→The problem was not the lack of elevators. The problem was the impatience of the employees.

Illustration – Remember – 2000 years later, there is another childless man past the age of having children with his wife, Zacharias, who will be father to John the Baptist

Luke 1:11-13 – “Do not be afraid, Zacharias.”

Application – Beloved, God is not slow about His promise, as some count slowness, but is patient toward you. (2Pe 3:9) It is not about us being patient with God. Let us redeem our thinking and our hearts and remember that God is patient towards us.

3rd Timeless Truth ...

III. God Graciously **Repeats and Clarifies His Promise** to His Troubled Child **15:4-5**

Point – God answers Abram.

God answers all who go to him rightly in their helplessness and need.

There are different ways, you see, in which we ask God questions.

- You can ask defiantly.
- You can ask from the blasphemous “*I’m disappointed in God*” vantage point.
- You can shake your fist in God’s face and question why God would let something like this happen.

God has no interest whatsoever in answering this approach.

Illustration – Try speaking to your boss this way.
Try speaking to your husband or your wife this way.
It won’t get you very far ... except into more trouble.

Or you can say, “*Here I am God. I’m your child and I have a great problem. I don’t understand. Help me Lord. Show me the way.*”

In the first case, you're saying to God – *“I'm going to judge You and measure You by my standard.”*

In the second case, you are saying, *“Help me. I want to understand. I want to learn. I want to obey.”*

In this latter way of coming to God, He is ready and willing, able and eager to answer you.

→ God **Repeats** His Promise to Abram

Proof – Gen 15:4 – **“Then behold, the word of the LORD came to him, saying, ‘This man will not be your heir; but one who shall come forth from your own body, he shall be your heir.’”**

“the word of YHWH came” again

“This man will not be your heir” – [r;Z" – “seed” again

- deliberate point to not use the servant's name (**Eliezer**) because God wants to take Abram's mind the man who is coming

“one who shall come forth from your own body”

2 Sam 7:12 – “When your days are complete and you lie down with your fathers, I will raise up your descendant after you, who will come forth from you, and I will establish his kingdom.”

Up to this point in Genesis, the narrative has been focused on God's promise of land to Abram and the threats to that promise -- famine (12), strife (13), invasion (14).

With chapter 15, the focus shifts from God's promise of land to God's promise of seed, and, specifically, the seed in the land

→ God **Clarifies** His Promise

Proof – Gen 15:5 – **“And He took him outside and said, ‘Now look toward the heavens, and count the stars, if you are able to**

count them.’ And He said to him, ‘So shall your descendants be.’”

God makes a point. He contrasts Himself with Abram.
The “**stars**” parallel and complementary to the “dust” (13:16)
But also elevates from the common (dust) to the noble (stars).
→Perhaps captures something of the physical and the spiritual.

By the way – man can’t count the number of stars.

Illustration – Historically regarding the number of stars:

- Ancient astronomer Hipparchus compiled a star catalog (the first of its kind) containing 850 stars
- the great scientist Ptolemy expanded the number in his own catalog to 1,022 stars →this remained a commonly held belief in the scientific community until the time of Blaise Pascal
- Pascal understood the number of stars are innumerable and countless just as the Word of God tells us

Application – Never allow your confidence in the inspired, inerrant, and wholly sufficient Word of God to be shaken by the ignorant musings and speculations of foolish men ... even when they drape them in the pompous garb of scientific revelation.

But God can count the number of stars and He names them all.

Isa 40:26 – “Lift up your eyes on high And see who has created these stars, The One who leads forth their host by number, He calls them all by name; Because of the greatness of His might and the strength of His power Not one of them is missing.”

Application – Now, God doesn’t say, I told you once and that’s good enough. Go look it up. No. He repeats the promise. It is still in effect.

→I haven’t changed. My promise hasn’t changed.

→I am the same yesterday, today, and tomorrow.

→I am the God who made these stars.

→I am the God who keeps My promises.

3 Beautiful Timeless Truths for us:

- 1) God's Word always **encourages** His troubled child
- 2) The troubled child may be occasional **doubts** about the promises of God, but if we approach God correctly
- 3) God graciously **repeats and clarifies His promise** to His troubled child (through His Word).

CONCLUSION

Application – Part of our problem is that we are always looking down. We are always looking at ourselves. And looking at ourselves leads to doubt, fear, and uncertainty. We need to look up. We need to remember what we deserve rather than what we desire and expect.

Have your mind stretched by the greatness of God.

Beloved, the question isn't whether or not you believe in God. Only a fool doesn't believe in God according to the Bible.

→The question is whether or not you believe God who makes these promises and whether or not you live by them.

Wise is the man or woman who learns to live by these promises and goes with the blessings and promises He has pointed out.