

Genesis

Chapter 15 - God's Unseen Guarantees

Seeing the Unforeseen (vs. 12-21)

Genesis 15:12-21: Now when the sun was going down, a deep sleep fell upon Abram; and behold, terror and great darkness fell upon him. God said to Abram, “Know for certain that your descendants will be strangers in a land that is not theirs, where they will be enslaved and oppressed four hundred years. But I will also judge the nation whom they will serve, and afterward they will come out with many possessions. As for you, you shall go to your fathers in peace; you will be buried at a good old age. Then in the fourth generation they will return here, for the iniquity of the Amorite is not yet complete.” It came about when the sun had set, that it was very dark, and behold, there appeared a smoking oven and a flaming torch which passed between these pieces. On that day the LORD made a covenant with Abram, saying, “To your descendants I have given this land, From the river of Egypt as far as the great river, the river

Euphrates: the Kenite and the Kenizzite and the Kadmonite and the Hittite and the Perizzite and the Rephaim and the Amorite and the Canaanite and the Girgashite and the Jebusite.”

One of the lessons we've been looking at in the Gospel of Luke is to be careful how you listen. And when I open up Scripture, one of the marvelous things about studying Scripture is that it is “Living Word.” And you realize that it's not only truth, but these are real events in the lives of real people. They lived and struggled with the same things that we struggle with. I remember the first time I read James 5:17. It was really kind of an epiphany to me. Elijah was a man with a nature just like yours. Now, that's the guy that went up in the chariot of fire to heaven! And he had a nature just like yours. It's hard for us to imagine these paragons as we look in Scripture that they thought and felt some of the same things that we think and feel about. Nevertheless, they did. And you understand as Scripture begins to unfold that in their struggles, you

begin to identify with them. You go, "I felt that way." I remember the first time that my father-in-law came to church, and we were talking in the group before church, and I said, "One thing that we thought never would happen is my father-in-law would ever darken the door of the church." He was a big old guy, usually got in a lot of fights at the shipyards, was a foreman of the shipyards, and didn't necessarily like people on the whole. And I was convinced he didn't like me. In fact, he told me so. He waved his shotgun at me a couple of times, wanting me to leave his daughter alone. But he finally accepted me. But beyond that, he received the Lord. And it was a magnificent thing to see him come to church. And I remember that he wouldn't miss a Sunday. In fact, he would come to church, and he was this big old guy, probably as powerful as he was mean, that would come in with candy for the kids. He'd always give them candy as he comes into church. And I remember the one Sunday in particular, I had gone over to the house to have lunch with him, and he said, "Come here." And when he usually said, "Come here," you probably went ahead and did it. So, I went over, and the first time I actually saw him open

up his Bible, and he said, "You were preaching today." I said, "Yes, sir." He said, "That's me." And I knew exactly what he was saying. And we didn't say anything else. But he, for the first time in his life, identified with Scripture.

You and I need to identify with Scripture. We need to identify with the individuals that are in Scripture. Abram was going through some things, working through this whole thing of faith, which to many of us is a very obscure and strange thing. Scripture tells us the "just will live by faith," but how you cross into that realm from the physical? It's quite a leap.

We come to this individual, and one of the things we know about Abram is that he was not only a person that felt responsible about things, but he felt very passionate about them. And in particular, the thing that he felt passionate about was his posterity. I'm not really sure why he felt so passionate about it, except for the fact that Scripture gives us little windows. And one of the windows that it gives us is the fact that his brother died and probably helped in some way to cause him to feel passionate about family. Then he marries a woman that

can't have children, and he begins to feel more passionate about family. Sometimes the very things that you're not able to attain are the very things that you begin to feel the most passionate about. And God is working in our lives in that way.

So, God turns to him and He says, "I'm calling you out and I'm going to give you a blessing." And we've read it a number of times, but there in Genesis 12, "I'm not only going to bless you, but I'm also going to make you a great nation." Wow. The whole thing of posterity starts coming in. That lineage, "How's that going to happen? How am I going to become a great nation?" "And not only am I going to bless you, but I'm going to make you a blessing and literally to all the families of the earth." You can imagine at that moment that his heart was starting to beat and race in the wonderful possibility that he might have something to do with having a great lineage somehow, in some way. But in some way, he began to take some of this upon himself. He was a hands-on person, and I suppose in some way he felt like their future was in his hands. It rested upon his shoulders. And so, he

begins to show concern in ways in which he begins to take upon himself the rescuing of Lot. He takes his 300 men as he hears that he's been kidnapped, and he goes after him and he rescues him. He will ultimately come to the point of trying to work through how God is going to give him kids. And as we will know and see as we go on in the Book of Genesis, he will actually have a relationship with his wife's maid in order to have a child, and maybe it is Ishmael. Maybe it was a servant, but maybe it's Ishmael, and now he's trying to work through how in the world is he going to make this possible, because there's a lot on his shoulders. I mean, the future of future generations is on his shoulders. God just laid it upon him, and he's the one that's got to make it happen, right? I mean, this is the thoughts that begin to happen and begin to go. And it's interesting, the sacrifices that he begins to bring. God tells him, "I know who you are. I know what you're thinking about." One of the ways that He demonstrates that to Abraham is He tells him to step outside and look at the stars. Of course, what do Chaldeans do? They're stargazers. Literally, a synonym for Chaldean is stargazer. And so, God begins to show him great things. And how

many times has he looked up to the heavens and imagined great and marvelous things, and God goes, “This is your lineage.” You can just imagine. I mean, I kind of think of that wonderful passage in Ephesians, beyond what you could ask or think. And that's one of the things that universe does for us, right? It takes us into realms that we go, “Whoa, I can't even see the end of that.” And God goes, “Right. That's what I have for you.”

Then He asked him to do something that they were very used to doing in Ur of the Chaldeans, and that is make a commitment. I suppose that at first, he thought that he was going to be the one making the commitment, but God just simply tells him to bring certain animals. And as we talked about last week, He's not telling him to do something with the animals. He just tells him to bring them. But Abram has been through this before. He knows what to do. Because in Ur of the Chaldeans, if in fact you're going to make a commitment, because you don't trust each other, you're going to take a sacrifice, you're going to cut them in half, and you're going to walk in between them, and you're going to say, “And so shall it be

to me if I don't fulfill this commitment to you.” God tells him to bring the animals- of all the things that man would desire in the realm and in the culture in which he grew up. And we talked about those things, specifically productivity, prosperity, and ultimately power. And so, he brings these animals. But there's also that which means the most to Abram, and that is that sense of devotion and loyalty and care. Those turtle doves, those pigeons. As he places them on the altar, what probably goes upon his mind is, “I need to make a commitment. I need to make this happen.” And in some ways, this is Abram's “Achilles’ heel,” when you think about it. This is his weak spot. His weak spot is basically that he has a great desire to preserve and to protect his lineage. You go, “Well, that doesn't seem like a weak spot to me. That's a pretty good thing.” I mean, in and of itself, that's really a good desire. However, it's a bad thing in that it hinders his faith. If you and I think that we're the ones that are going to preserve and protect our lineage, though it's a good desire, it can be horrible to your faith because you begin to see yourself as the one that does it and the resource that does it.

The whole scenario in this picture and the setting is that which begins to stir in our hearts as well as at that time Abraham's heart, what God is getting across to him at this moment. If you remember, he brings the animal, he cuts them in half, and of course I believe that his intent was, "I'm going to be the one walking through it. I'm going to be the one making the commitment to God." But at the moment that begins to happen, the birds of the sky begin to come at the animals that have been cut open.

And if you look at the passage, it says in verse 11, (Genesis 15:11) "The birds of prey came down upon the carcasses..."

In which he had these animals that really represented, as we talked about, productivity, prosperity, and power, and ultimately devotion and love. They started swooping down. Well, if you can imagine, if you've ever been in a place where you've seen these massive vultures, they can get pretty aggressive. Not by nature, but in packs, they can and will begin to take over. And if you've ever tried to chase them away, it's a futile thing. The more you try to chase them away, the more they come. One comes over

here; you chase one over here. Another one comes over here, they're coming around you, and it's an impossible thing to do.

Bad things happen. The floodgates of evil opened up in the Garden. We're in a world in which evil exists, and the reversal of that evil is humanly impossible. We can't reverse it. The heart of man is desperately sick. I mean, who can imagine what he's thinking? You look at the world, and you go, "Who would think of such a thing?" And God says, "Man would." And we've seen the history of this as we go, but how is it that you could combat all of the evil that would swoop down on your loved ones? Isn't that an interesting picture? Will you tire? Will you be able to do it? How long will you last? Will you outlast evil? Or is evil greater than you?

Well, the very next verse really kind of opens it up even further, and it uses the term, "the sun going down". Ecclesiastes will talk about that, especially in Ecclesiastes 12, and will actually use a phrase similar to that to describe dying. When the sun starts going down, the light begins to dim, the luminaries in the sky begin to be

meaningless. You can't hear anymore. You can't see well. You don't even feel good. Even on the best days that the sun starts coming out, it still feels like it's raining. And he begins to describe this interesting picture of the sun setting.

It says,

(Genesis 15:12) “Now when the sun was going down, a deep sleep fell upon Abram...”

I wonder what the birds were doing. Scripture in many ways is showing the frailty of man. It's showing his inability to maintain and endure. He is mortal. He's not going to last. He's not going to be able to control things forever. We would like to. We would like to be in control. In that control, we would like to have the satisfaction of our concerns met, and we would like to have the fulfillment of our plans met. We have those. Proverbs 16 reminds us of the fact that that's not in our hands. We can make the plans, but the outcome is not in our ability to make that happen.

“Now when the sun was going down, a deep sleep fell upon Abram; and behold, terror and great darkness fell upon him.”

You ever had those moments?

I was reading a passage in Job. Job has a way of really describing things, I mean, tremendously well. If you look with me in Job 4, in this particular text, Eliphaz begins to describe, you know those times in your night where you begin to think about things? And not only has the sun gone down, but darkness in your heart begins to come in? And I don't think we want to admit that we wrestle with things and our frailties and our concerns. I don't think we like to talk much about our fears and anxieties, which begin to surface during the times of great darkness. Nevertheless, that's usually the time they begin to surface. This passage, if you look with me in Job 4:12, begins to describe these times, and it reads this way, (Job 4:12) “Now a word was brought to me stealthily, And my ear received a whisper of it.

(Job 4:13) Amid disquieting thoughts from the visions of the night,

When deep sleep falls on men,

(Job 4:14) Dread came upon me, and trembling,
And made all my bones shake.

(Job 4:15) Then a spirit passed by my face;
The hair of my flesh bristled up.

(Job 4:16) It stood still, but I could not discern its appearance;

A form was before my eyes..."

I remember as a kid, I told my brother, "There's something under my bed."

"... There was silence, then I heard a voice:

(Job 4:17) 'Can mankind be just before God?
Can a man be pure before his Maker?

(Job 4:18) He puts no trust even in His servants;
And against His angels He charges error.

(Job 4:19) How much more those who dwell in houses of clay..."

You know that moment you begin to sense your own frailties and the pains and the hurts and the concerns that you have? And you realize, “Who am I to handle such a thing? How could I even call upon the name of God to help me in this?”

“How much more those who dwell in houses of clay,
Whose foundation is in the dust,
Who are crushed before the moth!

(Job 4:20) Between morning and evening they are broken
in pieces;
Unobserved, they perish forever.

(Job 4:21) Is not their tent-cord plucked up within them?
They die, yet without wisdom.’”

Interesting passage that begins to, in some way, help us feel what Abram was feeling. He comes in a darkness, terror. What do you think his greatest fear was? I can tell you what it was. His posterity. He was concerned about his lineage. He was concerned about what was going to happen after him. I don't believe that Abram, at this juncture, he had already been in war chasing to try to rescue Lot, I believe at this juncture he had dealt with his

own mortality. He was concerned for what was going to happen afterwards. And there was grave concern. How do you protect everybody? How do you keep evil from swooping down? How can you take care of every contingency?

We were sharing memories with the men, and one of my most difficult days in my life, was when I heard that my brother had passed. He had passed at work. Nobody was expecting him to die at that particular time, but he had just died at the workplace. As my brother had, around the age of 12, begun to have seizures. I was two years younger than him. From that time on, I became kind of the big brother, and when he would have a seizure, I was there. And then when he did get married, he would have seizures and his wife would call me, "Brandt's having another seizure. Can you come?" And I would go. If I could go at all, I'd go. And that night when I heard that he had passed, I remember thinking, "Why couldn't I have been there?" And I wrestled with that a number of years, "I should have been there. Maybe I could have done something."

There are things in your life that you're going to have happen, and God's going to reveal to you it's not in your control. You're going to see your limitations, and it's going to be a scary moment in your life. “You mean I can't control this? I can't take care of this? I can't make this happen?” And God says, “Right.”

He falls into a deep sleep, he realizes this, and then God begins to tell him, “I know what you're wanting to know, ‘What's going to happen to your people?’ This is what's going to happen. I'm going to tell you what's going to happen.”

So, He describes to him, if you look in verse 13,

(Genesis 15:13) “God said to Abram, “Know for certain that your descendants will be strangers in a land...”

The first words out of God's mouth are not encouraging. You know, if you were talking to a parent, “Know for certain your kids are going to have a rough time.” And what's interesting is that we will go through the history of his children, especially through the Book of Genesis, we will follow them all the way through Joseph and Jacob at the very end, and Jacob will die, and that will basically

end. But that whole scenario with Joseph and going into Egypt and the fact that his brothers wanted to kill him is telling us that things were not going well in the family as well as outside the family. And when Joseph finally goes into Egypt and He begins to talk with his brothers, and they finally come together at the end, there's an interesting statement at the end as the Egyptians are watching him, and they're watching these individuals that are supposed to be family. They're probably thinking that Joseph was Egyptian, but this is his family. These are the strangers. These are the vagabonds. And it says within the text, shepherds were loathsome to the Egyptians. "Your people are going to be strangers, and they're going to be repelled by the people around them." Not necessarily good news. And they're going to be in this land that's not theirs, and finally, ultimately, they're going to be enslaved by the very people that own this land.

(Genesis 15:14) "But I will also judge the nation whom they will serve, and afterward they will come out with many possessions."

And I'm starting to feel better.

(Genesis 15:15) “As for you...”

“It's not your job to oversee this. You're going to go to sleep.”

“...you shall go to your fathers in peace; you will be buried at a good old age.”

In other words, “As you're alive, everything will be okay. But you're not going to be in charge. I am. I'm the One that's going to make sure that they're okay, not you.”

(Genesis 15:16) “Then in the fourth generation they will return here, for the iniquity of the Amorite is not yet complete.”

Leviticus 18 talks about the fact that the Amorites will actually fill up a defilement of the land. We sometimes think, “Well, God's just sort of pushing out these people because He's making room for his family.” And God says, “No, I'm concerned for them too. I'm giving them their time. You'll have your time.” And God is working in the lives of all.

“Then in the fourth generation they will return here, for the iniquity of the Amorite is not yet complete.”

(Genesis 15:17) It came about when the sun had set...

The sun was setting, now it has set.

“... that it was very dark...”

That's the time when you need to hear from God. You need to feel His presence, and you need to sense that He's going to do something great.

When you realize that it's not in your control, you know what you need? You need a promise. You need something that is an anchor for your soul. You need something that you can grab onto and something that God says, “Look, I'm going to take care of this. It's going to happen.” And you go, “How can I be sure?” And he goes, “I'll show you how you can be sure.”

Now, the picture that He gives him is very interesting in the passage. The picture that He gives him, if you look in the text, is that it came when the sun set. Let me just say this about the sun setting, that Scripture tells us in Psalm 19 that the sun is like on a circuit. It's an interesting picture. And from the perspective of the earth, we see it rising and setting. The point of it being on a circuit is to

tell us that though it sets, it's going to rise again. And Scripture will actually give us passages like, “though you may have mourning in the night, you will have joy in the morning.” The difficulties of your life, they're on a circuit. But God is the “day star” that rises in your heart.

And so, as the passage goes on, it says,

“It came about when the sun had set, that it was very dark, and behold, there appeared a smoking oven...”

See that in verse 17? The smoking oven is something that was round, the one that's actually described within the text. It's round, and it's a place in which they would both bake bread, but also come together and meet together. People would come together, they'd gather together around this smoking furnace, around the furnace, for the specific purpose of fellowship and being warm. We would probably call it warm fellowship. So, it's an interesting picture that God has given that really describes that. Now, the one caveat in all of this is that it's smoking, which is telling us that there's obscurity. The very thing that we're concerned about clearly is the fellowship and the relationship that we have and the concern that we have

for one another. Will their needs be met? Will we have the fellowship? Will we be able to gather again? And God says, “This is not for you to see.” It's not for you to see how it's going to happen. It's not for you to see all the details of it. There are things in your relationships that you're not going to completely understand. It's going to be beyond your visual experience to understand. But rest assured, there is a light that follows it.

If you look in the text, there are two things that happen. An oven and then the light that follows it. See?

So, it says in the passage,

“... there appeared a smoking oven and a flaming torch which passed between these pieces.”

God is ultimately saying, “But light is going to shine out of this darkness.”

In fact, I like the way that it's put in 2 Peter 1:19. God's word, this prophetic utterance, is like a light shining out of a dark place. What it's basically telling us is that His word, His promises are the light that carry us through. And God is telling us that He's making the promise, not Abram.

He's going through. He's making the commitment. And His promise is it's going to happen. Good is going to happen, and here's the promise. And if you look in the text, He gives the covenant. So, you understand what's happening within the passage?

So, it says,

(Genesis 15:18) “On that day the LORD made a covenant with Abram, saying,

“To your descendants I have given this land,

From the river of Egypt as far as the great river, the river Euphrates.”

I can imagine Abram's going, “Wait a minute, that's further than I thought.” And the fact that He mentions all of the nations that are now residing there, God is telling them, “And there's not one nation that I'm not going to oust out of it.” You know, I think you'd have a tendency to think, “Yeah, He missed one.” You'd know, if He missed one, you would say it. You know, if God just basically said, “And the nations,” you'd go, “Which ones?” But He actually mentions them all. The ones that are residing there. And He says, “It's going to happen. This is a

promise that I'm making you.” We're relying on the promises of God. You're going to have things in your life that are just overwhelming. Your concerns for your loved ones are going to be overwhelming. But you need to believe that God is the only One that can make it happen for you.

There's a passage in Isaiah 45, if you just look at that with me. God is reminding His people that “For the sake of My servant Jacob, I'm going to save you.” And it is to be noted that it is not guaranteed, and there are a lot of smoky things within our households, aren't there? I mean, “What are my kids thinking? And what will my kids' kids be thinking? And will they love God the way that I love Him?” And the answer is, not always. But there's still the promise of God.

The passage reads this way in Isaiah 45,

(Isaiah 45:4) “For the sake of Jacob My servant,
And Israel My chosen one,
I have also called you by your name;
I have given you a title of honor
Though you have not known Me.

(Isaiah 45:5) I am the LORD, and there is no other;
Besides Me there is no God.

I will gird you, though you have not known Me;

(Isaiah 45:6) That men may know from the rising to the
setting of the sun

That there is no one besides Me...”

If you drop on down to verse 9, it speaks to me, because there have been many times I've quarreled with God, and I basically asked this question, “Why did You do it that way? Or why did You let that happen? Or why didn't You do something about this?”

(Isaiah 45:9) “Woe to the one who quarrels with his
Maker—

An earthenware vessel among the vessels of earth! ...”

I think we kind of forget our place. We really clearly think way too highly of ourselves as we think of our own ability, “I think I can take care of everything.” Everything? “Yeah, I'm the protector.” Really? Everything? You missed a bird.

“... Will the clay say to the potter, ‘What are you doing?’
Or the thing you are making say, ‘He has no hands’?”

“He has no design. God made an accident, right? I mean, I'm the accident that He made.”

(Isaiah 45:10) “Woe to him who says to a father, ‘What are you begetting?’

Or to a woman, ‘To what are you giving birth?’”

Mistakes? I think not.

Verse 11 reads this way,

(Isaiah 45:11) “Thus says the LORD, the Holy One of Israel, and his Maker:

“Ask Me about the things to come concerning My sons...”

Up to that point, Israel had been going to oracles of the heathen. They'd been going into logistical prognostications. They had gone into the trends and the opinions of man. And God says, “Stop asking them. Ask Me.” You know, even in our own minds, we start trying to work through, “How is this going to happen? How am I going to make this happen?” And God says, “Quit talking to yourself. **Ask Me.** Ask Me about things that happen.”

And within this passage, if you look, it says, “And if you really know Me, you're going to commit everything to

Me.” You say, “Well, how could I really trust Him? I like verse 12.

(Isaiah 45:12) “It is I who made the earth, and created man upon it.

I stretched out the heavens with My hands
And I ordained all their host.”

“So, you don't think I know what I'm doing? What do you think? I'm a novice at this?” Everything that God does, He has a proven track record.

I mean, if you look at Isaiah 43, he had already taken the people, passed them through the waters.

(Isaiah 43:2) “When you pass through the waters, I will be with you;

And through the rivers, they will not overflow you.

When you walk through the fire, you will not be scorched,
Nor will the flame burn you.”

“I'm the Holy One. I'm the Savior. I'm the one that walked you through the sea. I have a track record. You can trust Me.” And all the way through, we see the necessity of just literally trusting Him.

I am encouraged by the fact that when you open up the New Testament, you have an individual by the name of Paul that grows extremely attached to a people. In fact, he grows so attached to the people that he actually says, "I was like your father. I was even like your mother on certain days, and I cared for you better than a mother would. And I never took anything from you. All I did was give. I worked night and day so that I wouldn't be a bother, but wow, do I really care for you." But Paul had to leave them. And many of them had been saved just but a short time, and Paul had to leave them in a world that was very hostile and very hateful. People were being tortured. And these are new Christians. He writes in the letter, "I've been bereft. I can't take it anymore." Go into chapter 3, "I can't take it anymore. I've got to know how you're doing. I've got to come and see you. But Satan has kept me back. The adversary hasn't let me go." I remember when I first read that, I said, "God, why don't you take care of Satan? He's no problem for You." And you can hear the voice of God, "I'm using him to keep Paul back." Paul says, "I couldn't take it anymore; I sent Timothy. 'Timothy, you go encourage them. I can't go. My

hands are tied.” I wonder how his hands got tied? Wonder who did that? So, he sent Timothy, and he finally gets word back from Timothy. He goes, “Timothy told me you're okay, that everything was okay, that you're even growing in the Lord, that you're not afraid of what's happening. In fact, you've grown stronger.” You know how he ends the chapter? “I've got to turn you over to the Lord.” It gives me repose to know that Paul wrestled with the same thing we do. But it is believing. Connie was asking me, she says, “What's your favorite verse?” I'm like, you know, “Gee, how do I have a favorite verse?” But I think one of the most meaningful verses to me is in Romans 8. “If He spared not His own Son, freely gave Him up for us all, how would He not with Him freely give us all things?” Was He talking about material things? Well, maybe. But I think He's mostly talking about the things that matter to us most. What, do you think God's going to hold back? You think God doesn't love your kids as much as you do? You think God doesn't care for people more than you do? The concerns that you have, you think that God loves less than you do? Then you need to go back to the Cross, because there's no way that's true. And there

are a lot of things that I haven't understood. There's that smoking oven, and I don't see things clearly, but I know this, the light's right behind it, and God promised me that.

Closing Prayer:

Father, we come before You today, and we give You thanks for Your promises. They keep us strong in the night. Our thoughts overwhelm us, and darkness comes upon us, and terror, which goes to our bones. But You've promised. And though it's out of my hands, it's not out of Yours, and Your arm is not so short that it cannot save. So, we trust in You today. We cast all of our cares upon You because we know that You care for us, and we know that You'll never leave us. You'll never forsake us. The God of all the earth will never grow tired, nor will You ever sleep or slumber. We trust You. It's a simple prayer, but wow does it change everything.