

Date: March 3, 2024

Scripture: Genesis 15:1-6

Sermon Title: The Old Testament Gospel

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Thank you for the privilege of being here today to share the Word of God. On behalf of all the staff of the BCMD, and the 400+ partners churches that make up our convention, I bring you greetings. I'm grateful for the friendship I've developed the last few years with your Associate Pastor, Kevin Freeman. And I first met Bill Archer years ago when he was serving at the BCMD and I was serving as the President of our General Mission Board, while pastoring Leonardtown Baptist. What a blessing you all experience, Redland Baptist, to have Pastors like these two men! I've not been fortunate enough to meet the rest of your staff personally, but I'm confident they are equally a blessing to you as well.

We are so grateful for the partnership we enjoy with Redland Baptist through the CP. Through that, the gospel is able to spread to all the world. Over 3500 international missionaries are supported. Six seminaries train over 10,000 God-called men and women of God to serve in various capacities. Over 9000 churches have been planted throughout North America in the past decade. And, of course, the work of the BCMD is supported. So, thank you Redland for your support of the CP.

As Southern Baptists, the Cooperative Program is what fuels gospel proclamation. And it's the gospel that is central to all we do as churches. Many people mistakenly say that the gospel is a New Testament concept. I've even heard some pastors say things like they rarely preach from the OT because they believe we should always share the gospel when we preach. Well, I certainly agree that we should share the gospel every time we proclaim God's Word. But I believe we can see Jesus and His gospel in every part of God's Word, including the Old Testament. That's why today we're going to be looking at a passage in the Old Testament that you actually have to work hard NOT to see the gospel. I've titled this message "The Old Testament Gospel," but don't let that confuse you. The OT gospel is the same as the NT gospel. That's because there is ONE gospel, and that is Jesus Christ crucified, buried, and resurrected. It is through faith in His finished that we're made right with God. And that's the truth we see today by looking at this account of Abraham in Genesis 15. Would you turn with me today to Genesis 15:1-6 ... READ

Let's jump right in today by considering first, **The provider of justification (v. 1)**. It's God who's the provider of justification. In verse 1, the word of the Lord comes to Abram about this. Earlier in Genesis, Abram won the battle against the four kings. But now the battle is over and it seems that Abram is afraid. Why? Often, emotions fall apart after a time of danger or difficulty. Perhaps you remember the story of Elijah in 1 Kings after his victory over the prophets of Baal on Mt. Carmel. The wicked king Ahab, and his even more evil wife, Jezebel, had led Israel astray in following the false god, Baal. How in the world could followers of God buy into falsehood like Baal? But didn't we see many believers doing just that a few years back with all the untruths surrounding the QAnon conspiracy? Folks, many of those buying into that claimed to be followers of God. It was

really comparable to this where the people of Elijah's day were believing untruths about Baal. As a result, in Elijah's day, God brought drought upon the land. For 3 ½ years there was no rain. This led to conflict between Elijah and Ahab, each accusing the other of being the source of difficulty.

So, Elijah announced that rain was coming. The prophet of God also challenged the people to determine who they would follow; Baal or the true God. He proposed a contest on Mount Carmel between the prophets of Baal and himself. A sacrifice was prepared, and the prophets of Baal, obviously, couldn't get their false god to set it on fire. However, when Elijah asked the true God to consume the offering, He did. It became clear to the people who the true God was. Immediately after this event, the heavens opened and "*the sky grew dark with clouds and wind, and there was a downpour*" (1 Kings 18:45). You would think that this victory of Elijah would be cause for celebration, but instead we read in 1 Kings 19 that Elijah went into a dark depression after all of these events. Perhaps that's what we also see going on here with Abram.

Or, perhaps Abram thought of his impending fate. Maybe he thought the king of Sodom saw him as ignorant for taking no spoil so he'd return to take advantage of him. Maybe he thought the kings of the east wouldn't take defeat lightly and perhaps they'd return for retaliation. Whatever the reason was, we see that God came to Abram. This is the first time the Bible uses the phrase "*the word of Lord came,*" a phrase which is used over 100 other times in the Old Testament. This is also the first time we see the reassuring words "*do not be afraid.*"

So, God comes to Abram to reassure him. Notice he gives Abram two "I am" statements; "*I am your shield,*" and "*I am your very great reward.*" Now, this comes immediately after the encounter with Melchizedek, the king and priest, who pictures for us Jesus, our great High Priest and the King of kings. So, God essentially said, 'Abram, you have a king to protect you and a priest to pray for you.' And it's all couched in this language of "I am." And, of course, we know that God's name is "I am" - when Moses asked God what His name was, He replied, "I am that I am." Friends, God's "I AM" is perfectly adequate for your "I am not." Your life is only as big as your faith, and your faith is only as big as your God. You might spend time looking at yourself and become discouraged. But look to God by faith and be encouraged.

Understand that even when things all around you look bleak, God is the provider of justification. The promise of His justification is an amazing promise. Justification isn't just a theological concept, but it's also a technical term that describes our legal standing before God. To be justified means that God declares us to be righteous before Him. We are declared to have been accepted by God and made part of His family. I liken this to the creation account we read about in Genesis. God spoke, and it was so. The Hebrew of Genesis 1 literally says, "God said, 'Light be.' And light was." This is what theologians call creation by divine fiat. God simply spoke, and it was so. And likewise, this is how justification works. God speaks and it becomes so. When we speak and say something, maybe it comes to pass; but maybe it doesn't. However, when God speaks, things become reality. God has declared that all who are in Christ are justified. They aren't made right because of any inherent or intrinsic merit, but simply because God declares it to be so. And He can declare it to be reality because He is the provider of justification.

Probably all of us are familiar with Presidential pardons. Typically, outgoing presidents offer a number of pardons to convicted individuals just before they leave office, although the President has the authority to issue a pardon at any time. On August 9, 1974, Gerald Ford was sworn in as our 38<sup>th</sup> President. Less than one month later, September 8, 1974, he granted a full and unconditional pardon to former President Richard Nixon immunizing him from prosecution for any federal crimes he had committed or may have committed or taken part in as president.

This is a common practice for presidents. Our most recent outgoing president, President Trump, issued 143 pardons, 116 during his final weeks in office. Actually, this was relatively few compared to many of our presidents. Only the first President Bush issued fewer than this. Others issued MANY more, including FDR, who issued an astounding 2,819 pardons during his time in office. Granted he was in a lot longer than most presidents, but still, 2,819!! President Truman issued 1,913 pardons, and both Eisenhower and Wilson were also north of 1,000 presidential pardons!

Wikipedia describes a pardon as “a government decision to allow a person who has been convicted of a crime to be free and absolved of that conviction, as if they were never convicted.” It’s been well said that the word justification means “just as if I’d never sinned.” We’ve been pardoned by God not just for one single sin, but for every sin we ever have or ever will commit. We’ve been pardoned because the debt for that sin was paid for us by Jesus on the cross. Through faith in Him, we’re declared innocent because of His sacrifice.

Galatians chapter 3 sheds much light on this promise. We read in **verse 9**, “*Consequently those who have faith are blessed with Abraham, who had faith.*” This faith is rooted in believing in the person and work of Jesus Christ. Paul, who wrote Galatians 3, quotes from Genesis 15:6 in our passage when he says that *Abraham “believed God, and it was credited to him for righteousness” (Galatians 3:6).* We’ll look at this verse in more detail in just a bit, but what we need to understand here is that the promise of justification is focused upon the person of Jesus. Without Jesus, there is no promise. But in Him the promise is amazing. As **2 Corinthians 1:20** says, “*For every one of God’s promises is ‘Yes’ in him.*”

But like we so often do, Abram chose to focus on the negative rather than the positive. So, let’s consider **The problem of justification (vv. 2-3)**. Even though this glorious promise is given by God, Abram can’t seem to help but focus on his circumstances. As if God didn’t already know it, Abram informs God that he has no son. He tells God that all his inheritance will go to one named Eliezer of Damascus, who’s thought to be the same one referred to in Genesis 24:2: “*Abraham said to his servant, the elder of his household who managed all he owned.*” Abram, like many of us, was too quick to focus on the problem rather than the promise. He wondered how this could happen because he had no son, no heir, and therefore the promise sounded almost too good to be true.

This is now the fourth time God had spoken to Abram, and each time the promise of descendants was involved. In Genesis 12:2 (the original call in Ur), God had said, “*I will make you into a great nation.*” Although not specifically stated, clearly this implies that Abram would have descendants.

Genesis 12:7 tells us that while he was passing through Canaan, God said, *"To your offspring I will give this land."* This is the second time that God spoke directly to Abram, and again we see that it includes this promise of descendants.

The third time is recorded in Genesis 13:15-16, after Abram had returned from Egypt. God said, *"I will give you and your offspring forever all the land that you see. I will make your offspring like the dust of the earth, so that if anyone could count the dust of the earth, then your offspring could be counted."*

'But I don't have a son, God! I'm childless,' Abram says. 'The heir of my house is Eliezar of Damascus.' Then, in an almost condemnatory tone, Abram says, *"Look, you have given me no offspring, so a slave born in my house will be my heir"* (verse 3). It's really almost a daring statement on the part of Abram to make this accusation and put the responsibility on God. But isn't that what we so often do? A strong hurricane hits and brings destruction and we say, 'Why did God allow that to happen?' A loved one gets cancer and dies and we dare to accuse God and say, 'You could have brought healing, but you didn't.' We struggle with the concept of hell and say, 'Why would a God who's supposed to be love send people to hell?' Like we see with Abram here, we sit in judgment over God at times and insist He justify His actions to us! That didn't work out too well for Job did it? At one point in the story of Job, he's demanding that God come down and face him. Eventually, God does. And after God finishes Job basically says, "I'll just keep my mouth shut now - I'm pretty much an idiot who has NO IDEA what he's talking about." Folks, it is never our place to question God or demand that He justify Himself to us!

At this point, there seems to be a lack of trust on Abram's part. "I HAVE NO CHILD," even though he'd been told multiple times he'd have an heir. And that, pure and simple, is the problem of justification – a lack of trust. When we can't trust God, we can't be justified. Do you trust Him today? Abram was about to learn he could trust God even when he had no comprehension of how things could possibly work out. So what was he about to learn?

Let's notice next **The picture of justification (vv. 4-5)**. God could have easily been short and sarcastic here. He could have said, "You're really dense and untrusting aren't you, Abram. How many times am I going to have to say this to you?" But God doesn't respond that way. He doesn't retaliate, but instead, out of grace, He clarifies with an amazing picture. God says, "Abram, you'll have a descendant, and in fact, you'll have more descendants than you can number. They'll share 23 of your chromosomes. They'll come from you, not someone in your house. Look at the sky, Abram. Those stars up there will clue you in about your offspring."

One of my favorite Christian singers was Rich Mullins. I say "was" because he passed away tragically in an automobile accident in 1997. One of my favorite songs that he sang was "Sometimes by Step." When I read these verses here, I think of the words to the second verse of that song. They say: "Sometimes I think of Abraham, how one star he saw had been lit for me. He was a stranger in

this land, and I am that, no less than he. And on this road to righteousness, sometimes the climb can be so steep. I may falter in my steps, but never beyond Your reach.”

Abram was coming to learn that he wasn't beyond the reach of God. Perhaps, prior to this, Abram had begun to believe he'd failed God, and that there was something he hadn't done. But in reality, God was steadily at work. It may have seemed like He was doing nothing, but really one of the basic lessons of faith is that God's will is fulfilled in His way and His time. God didn't expect Abram and Sarai to figure out how to have a child. He simply asked them to be available so He could accomplish His purposes through them. Friends, in the same way, God doesn't ask you to always figure things out. He simply asks you to be obedient and available. Perhaps in your life, things look bleak, dark, or there's a sense of failure. Someone has well said, "when the outlook is bleak, try the uplook." We need to learn to look to God and trust Him. And that's exactly what Abram begins to do.

So, finally, today, I want us to consider **The peace of justification (v. 6)**. It seems that Abram makes a mental transition here. Once again, God told him "I will give you an heir." While it may not have clicked the first three times, it seems to have clicked this time. As verse 6 says, "*Abram believed the LORD, and he credited it to him as righteousness.*" When Abram believed, he experienced peace. What changed for him? At this point, NOTHING changed materially. Abram was still without an heir, but he wasn't without hope. Through faith, he believed, and the result was that God counted him as righteous. This means Abram became justified before God.

Again, let's consider what it means to be justified? We spoke earlier in terms of pardon. But it's not just pardon in that our sin is forgiven, but justified in that God looks at us through the merit of His Son's perfection. I think we see this justifying merit clearly here in verse 6. This verse is often called the John 3:16 of the Old Testament. It's the first reference in the Bible to Abram's faith. The verse is quoted three times in the New Testament; Galatians 3:6, which we saw earlier, but also Romans 4:3, and James 2:23. There are three key words used here: believed, credited, and righteousness. Let's look at each.

First is **BELIEVED**. This translates a Hebrew word meaning "to lean your whole weight upon." Abram leaned completely on the promises of God. That's exactly what we need to do as well. Remember, we aren't saved by making promises to God, but by believing God's promises to us. We must lean on Him!

The next word is **CREDITED**. This is what theologians call imputation. It means "to put to one's account." You see, Abram wasn't saved by obeying God or by promising to obey Him. He was saved by believing God, and it was his belief that was credited as righteousness. God put righteousness to his account. But it's critically important to note what he believed. He had believed God before. But Abram wasn't considered righteous when he believed God about leaving Ur. Neither was he counted righteous when he believed God about possessing the land. Rather, righteousness was credited to him when he believed God about this promise regarding the heir. Who is that heir? Well, initially it was his son, Isaac, but ultimately, down the line, it was Jesus Christ. Jesus came from the line of Abraham, through Isaac, then Jacob, all the way down through the ages, through King David, until eventually, a

young virgin by the name of Mary, gave birth to the very Son of God. You see, in all ages, salvation ultimately rests in Christ. He's the promised heir who would be the Messiah. It's not mere faith that saves, but specifically faith in Jesus Christ.

The final word is **RIGHTEOUSNESS**. This is still our greatest need today. It's not enough to be religious. God demands perfect righteousness. As Jesus said in Matthew 5:48, we are to be perfect. How do we achieve that standard? By ourselves, we can't. But Jesus not only can; He did. Righteousness is not something earned, but it is something received. Through faith in Jesus, we are given HIS righteousness. It is made our very own.

Talk about something that will provide peace! Knowing that we're right with God because we trust Christ is the only thing that will ultimately bring peace. People today are looking for peace in all kinds of ways. Many people seek peace through relationships; but even the strongest of relationships will falter eventually. Others seek peace through material goods. I remember a bumper sticker that I used to see on cars years ago. It said, **'He who dies with the most toys wins.'** Really? Will 'things' really bring us peace? They won't. That's why the bumper sticker that came out not long after that one was so much truer. It said, **'He who dies with the most toys ... still dies.'** Things don't bring us peace.

We could go on and on detailing the plethora of ways that people seek peace. But the only thing that brings true peace, peace with God, is Jesus. Will you receive the peace of justification that comes through trusting Christ? Will you, like Abram, believe the Lord? If so, I tell you confidently today, that He will credit that to you as righteousness, just like He did for Abram, and, as a result, you will be justified.

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I heard about a man in England who, years ago, put his Rolls-Royce on a boat and went across to the continent to go on a vacation (or as they call it in England, a holiday). While he was driving around Europe, something happened to the motor of his car. He cabled the Rolls-Royce people back in England and said, "I'm having trouble with my car; what do you suggest I do?" Well, the Rolls-Royce people didn't just tell him what to do; they flew a mechanic over to repair the car! The mechanic repaired it and then flew back to England leaving the man to continue his vacation. As you can imagine, the fellow was wondering, "How much is this going to cost me?" So, when he got back to England, he wrote the company a letter and asked how much he owed them. He received a letter back from the office that read: "Dear Sir: There is no record anywhere in our files that anything ever went wrong with your Rolls-Royce."

When you stand before God in judgment and remember all your sin, you may well begin to wonder, 'what's this going to cost me?' Well, I can tell you the answer to that because the Scripture has already answered it in **Romans 6:23: "The wages of sin is death."** But if, like Abram, you've believed the Word of the Lord, specifically the word about the Messiah, when you inquire of God about the cost of your sin, He'll look at you and say, "There is no record anywhere that you owe anything – well done good and faithful servant. Enter into the joy of your Lord." That's justification.

Are you looking to Jesus for your justification today? Only He can justify. The gospel leads to justification when we look to Him, so today, if you've never trusted Christ, I invite you to do just that.

INVITATION