

## Bank On It - Genesis 18:1-15

The past few chapters of Genesis have been focused on God's covenant with Abraham.

The recurring theme throughout God's interaction with Abraham is that the establishment of the covenant is purely a work of grace. In fact, the theme of all God's interactions with man thus far has been grace. God establishes his covenant with Abraham and subsequently mankind. And God enters into this relationship, not because of the merit or deeds of man, but because of his grace, because of his love, and because of his desire to redeem worshipers for himself. It is all a work of grace.

It's because of grace that God remained committed to Abraham and Sarah despite their weakness, despite their doubt, despite their struggle with faith in the word of God, which we saw in chapter 16. It was the same with the first-generation Israelites of the Exodus to whom Moses is writing Genesis, and it is the same with us; those of us who are believers. God remains committed to us and reminds us that His word is fully reliable and fully trustworthy. As we look at our passage this morning, may God give us the grace and strength to trust and rely ever more fully on his holy Word. May we be able to say about God's Word, "You can bank on it!"

Are you familiar with the term idiom? If you are like me, you may recognize an idiom if you hear it but may have trouble explaining what it is. Merriam-Webster defines an idiom as an expression that typically presents a figurative, non-literal meaning attached to the phrase. In other words, it is a phrase we use to describe something but doesn't literally mean what it sounds like. Here are some examples, "Under the weather", "The ball is in your court", "Spill the beans", "Pulling your leg", and "Through thick and thin". Now how about this one, "And you can take that to the bank!" Or another way to say it, "Bank on it!" Have you ever heard that expression? *Bank on it* and *take it to the bank* are both idioms that refer to something that one can depend on; they may describe an action, idea, statement, or promise that one can assume to be true and accurate. A person uses the expression *bank on it* to mean to have faith that something is true and dependable.

There is not anything in this life or in the span of human existence for that matter, that can be banked on more fully, more completely, more reliably, than the word of God. God's word is truthful. In fact, it is truth itself. Therefore, it is completely accurate and completely reliable.

We read in Psalm 19, "The law of the Lord is perfect, reviving the soul; the testimony of the Lord is sure, making wise the simple; the precepts of the Lord are right, rejoicing the heart; the commandment of the Lord is pure, enlightening the eyes; the fear of the Lord is clean, enduring forever; the rules of the Lord are true, and righteous all together." God's word is perfect and sure and pure and righteous all together.

If that is the case, if we can bank as it were, on the word of God more than anything else, why do we so often struggle to believe it? Why do we find ourselves confronted with doubt? Why do we fail to trust fully in the promises of God? Simply put, because of sin.

Because of sin, we often find it hard to believe in God's word and trust in His promises. Many times, God's Word seems too good to be true or too impossible for Him to accomplish, or too wonderful for mere sinners.

I think we all can admit that often we exhibit a lack of trust or a lack of belief when it comes to the things we read about in Scripture. I think what we may ultimately struggle with the most is that there is a holy God who has provided a way for sinners to be reconciled to Himself. And that way was through the sacrifice of His only son, the Lord Jesus Christ. And all that is "required" is faith in Christ.

But our faith is often weak, isn't? And our weakness is often manifested through a lack of trust in the word of God.

Yet, throughout the course of redemptive history, God has never failed to keep his word or promises to his people. In fact, all of God's promises and truths point to something. Those promises find their fulfillment in the life and death of Jesus Christ. 2 Corinthians 1:20 says, "For all the promises of God find their Yes in Him." We will live in eternity with God because of the sacrifice of Christ. That is the ultimate promise of God and God always fulfills His promises.

With that in mind, we should be able to declare whole heartedly, "You can bank on that!" to God's word and promises. Yet, we struggle to fully trust the promises of God. So, what can we do? How can we grow in our belief of God's word and grow in our trust of His promise? His promise to work all things out for our good and His glory.

I think our passage today helps us with this. You can see there in your worship guide on page six, two points that our verses this morning help us to understand:

1. We can serve the Lord joyfully as we remember God's faithfulness to his Word.
2. We can trust the Lord fully as we hear the promise of his Word.

Look with me at verse 1. In verse one of chapter 18, we read that Abraham was sitting at the door of his tent in the heat of the day.

In Middle Eastern society at that time, it was common to engage in the bulk of the day's labor in the early morning hours and the late afternoon hours. Because of the intense heat, the middle part of the day was usually spent resting, with little or no activity. You may imagine this was precious time for the people to rest and recuperate from the early morning activities to prepare for the evening activities. Quite likely, this is what Abraham was doing. And we read that the Lord appeared to him at this time.

It is difficult to determine if Abraham knew the identity of the visitors immediately. Regardless, it seems he indeed knew at some point these were heavenly visitors because in the second part of verse two we read he bowed himself before them.

Bowing is, of course, a sign of worship and/or submission. Back in Genesis 14, Abraham had an encounter with two kings. The king of Salem and the king of Sodom. Both of those encounters would have provided an opportunity for Abraham to bow to those kings. But he did not bow. However, here in Chapter 18, he bows before these guests.

He also addresses one of them as Lord. This is the Hebrew word *adonai*, which is used in the NT for God or Jesus. Therefore, we can deduce that Abraham bowed because he realized the Lord, the king of kings, was speaking with him. These two events help us understand why it is likely that Abraham, if not initially, then very soon after his guests' arrival, was aware of their identity.

Knowing the Lord is in his presence, he requests that the visitors rest and refresh themselves with him. He offers them a meal and water. It was customary during those times to show hospitality to any and all visitors and certainly hospitality was in order when the visitors were dignified guests.

Abraham's recognition of the Lord reminds him of the covenant that was just made and Lord's favor toward him. He remembers the Word of the Lord. And now God visits Abraham.

In the ancient near east, covenants and treaties were often arranged around meals. To dine together was a symbol of a peaceful agreement. Certainly, this experience was reassuring to Abraham.

Abraham knows the Lord is with him and the Lord is faithful to His word, so Abraham responds with gratitude. God also reassures Abraham by reiterating the promise of the covenant again. In verse 10 we read "The Lord said, I will surely return to you in about this time next year, and Sarah your wife will have a son."

God reminds Abraham of the promise, the covenant, that He has just made. God reminds him again, this time with a date, of the promise of a son, an heir. The son of the covenant will be born to them in a year's time.

God is reinforcing the trustworthiness of His Word. It causes Abraham to joyfully serve the Lord and his guests. He can serve the Lord joyfully as he remembers God's faithfulness to his Word and God's faithfulness to him.

We too can serve the Lord joyfully as we remember God's faithfulness to his Word. God's faithfulness helps to strengthen us. It strengthens our weakness and doubt and unbelief by reassuring us that Christ, whom we are united to by faith, is our Emmanuel – God with us.

Continuing in our passage, we next see *Sarah's* reaction to the promise of a son. In essence, we see Sarah's reaction to the word of God. We read in the second part of verse 10, that Sara was listening behind the door of the tent when the Lord spoke to Abraham and told them that in a year's time, they would have a son.

It is likely that Sarah was not present when the Lord established his covenant with Abraham back in chapter 15. It *is* likely however, that Abraham told Sarah about God's promise. But unlike Abraham, she had not received direct instruction from God. She did not have a conversation with God like Abraham did.

But that was not an excuse. Because what did she have? She had the word of God. The word of God had been communicated to her, through God's prophet Abraham, her husband, repeatedly.

The same is true of us. We have the word of God, the promises of God, in our possession. 2 Timothy 3:16 states, "All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work". Do we want God to speak to us? To tell us what to do? To tell us His will for our lives? If the answer is yes, all we have to do is *read the Bible*.

Sarah had the word of God as well. She had seen God's word affirmed repeatedly. She had experienced the faithfulness of God repeatedly. Surely, she should have trusted in the word of God by this point. She should have had confidence in the promise of God.

However, her reaction reveals that she doubted. She doubted God would provide a son. And Sarah gives the reason for her doubt in verse 11. "Now Abraham and Sarah were old, advanced in years. The way of women had ceased to be with Sara." She doubted because it would take a miracle for she and Abraham to conceive and bear a child. She even questions the Lord in her mind. This word of the Lord, this promise, is too wonderful to believe. It's too amazing to consider. There was no way she and Abraham could bank on this promise from God. So she laughs. A laugh that reveals her true feelings about the promise of God.

Have you ever heard or seen or read something that seemed too impossible or fantastic or wonderful to believe? Growing up in the 80s and 90s, we had much less sources of entertainment, particularly visual entertainment, than we do today. The fact that we had a limited source of visual entertainment, I think, caused those of us who grew up in that era to feel much more nostalgic about shows from that time.

One of my favorite shows from the early and mid-80s was *Ripleys Believe It or Not*. The show was about legends, tales, and accounts of the strange and mysterious. The show was hosted by Jack Palance, the perfect host and narrator for the series because of his deep and somewhat spooky voice. What I remember most about the show was at the end of every story, Palance would end with this statement, "Believe it or not." Many of the stories told on *Ripley's Believe It or Not* seemed to be impossible because they did not fit into what we naturally believe is

humanly possible. We certainly have a tendency toward pessimism about things that seem impossible or at least contrary to the laws of nature and science.

We also naturally are pessimistic or even doubt the word of God. Often, we find ourselves doubting what God clearly tells us in his word.

You see God's word and promises many times seem too good to be true. The promise of a child to a couple beyond childbearing age, and the preservation of the righteous from a flood, the deliverance of a people from slavery, the promise of an inheritance and a land flowing with milk and honey, the promise of a king; the list goes on and on. One of the greatest promises in God's word is the rescue of sinners and the defeat of sin and death. The defeat of sin and death seems impossible to us. However, things that often seem impossible to us are possible with God. And God reminds Abraham and Sarah of this in verse 14 as He asks, "Is anything too hard for the Lord?"

He then reaffirms His promise, His Word – Sarah will indeed bear a child, a son, in a year's time. That promise of a covenant son reminds us of another promise of God to provide a covenant son.

You see God has promised that sin and death have already been defeated through the life, death, and resurrection of Christ. And God has promised that one day all those who trust in Christ through faith will no longer experience sin and death. God simply desires for us to believe in his word and trust in his promises. To believe and trust in the One who is the fulfillment of all the covenant promises – the Lord Jesus Christ.

That is why the study of God's word is so important. Through our study of God's word, the Lord reminds us of his faithfulness to his people. He reminds us of his commitment to his promises, he reassures us that he is committed to us, despite our weaknesses. His word teaches us about the character of God. He is sovereign. He is gracious. He is committed to His purposes. We can trust the Lord fully as we hear the promise of his Word. In other words, we can bank on God's word.

Let us pray. God, we admit that so often our faith is weak when it comes to trusting in the truth and the power and the reliability of your Word. Our cry is, "We believe, help our unbelief!" We understand your Word is true but help us to believe your Word is true. Help us live with full assurance that all Scripture is breathed out by God and will not fail and will always endure. May we indeed believe your Word is true and we can bank on it. In your name we pray, amen.