Covenant Communion — Delivery Transcript

Genesis 15 (CSB) · Wes Terry · Sunday, November 26, 2023 · *Faith & Its Reward*

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Thanks to the team for leading us in worship this morning. They always do a wonderful job leading us to the throne of grace. And when we enter into the time of preaching and teaching, I hope you'll consider it just as much a part of worship as we do our singing. If you're new to Broadview, we typically go through books of the Bible in our church, and right now we're in the book of Genesis. And so if you have a Bible, you can turn to Genesis chapter 15. And if you don't have a Bible, there'll be one up on the screen; you can follow along in that way.

We've been journeying through one of the great heroes of the faith. I call him the founding father of the faith, one of the true OGs of Old Testament faith heroes and his name is Abraham. We first meet him as Abram in Genesis chapter twelve. God calls him out of a life of pagan idolatry and other kinds of wickedness, and God tells him, if you will follow me, I'm going to bless you. I'm going to make your name great. And not only am I going to bless you, I'm going to bless the people who do bless you.

I'm going to curse the people who curse you. And through you and your family, all the nations of the earth are going to be blessed. And he said this to a man who had no children. He was married. They had tried and tried and tried to have children, but they could not have children. And so Abraham trusts the Lord and follows him. He does not know where he's going, but he's following him into this place that God was going to show him. And like many of the great heroes of faith, his early days were marked by incredible feats of obedience and worship to the Lord in the midst of difficult circumstances and even worshiping God in hostile circumstances, enemy territory.

He didn't care. He was sold out to the Lord until the Lord brought a test into his life through a famine and when the famine struck Abraham kind of stopped trusting in the Lord and started trusting in himself. I'm sure some of us can resonate with that. When God brings a

test to our life, it's very tempting to say, "Well, I'll just take care of this one, God. You know, you just stay there; I'll do this one on my own." And that's what Abraham did. He goes down to Egypt and makes a series of really bad decisions.

He loses his land that God had promised him. He loses his wife that God had given him. He loses the potential of having the child of promise through that union with his wife. And she is taken into Pharaoh's court, even as Abraham lives in Egypt off the back of his lie, telling Pharaoh his wife was really his sister. And so Pharaoh begins to bless him with all of these gifts and material prosperity. Until finally, God in his grace exposes Abram's sin, liberates Pharaoh—or liberates Abram's wife— from the hand of Pharaoh and sends them back to the promised land in Canaan.

Not just with what he lost—his wife and his own life—but also with all kinds of material prosperity that he had gained through that season of rebellion against God. It's an amazing display in Abraham's life of God's mercy and God's grace: even when we are faithless, God remains faithful. And I think Abraham really took that lesson to heart, and God renews his faith in Genesis chapter 14. And we see Abraham the next time his faith is tested, he passes the test. And then when God creates another crisis in his life, he, instead of trusting in himself, begins to trust in the Lord.

And in trusting the Lord, the Lord makes clear to Abraham, I need you to separate from your nephew Lot. Lot was taken with him on those early days in Genesis chapter 12, and it was never part of God's original plan. Lot ended up separating from Abraham and instead of going towards the Lord where God wanted him to go, Lot decided to go away from the Lord. He moves to a place called Sodom and Gomorrah. Maybe you've heard of it. The broken world that they were living in got a little worse.

And some kings from the east came and they invaded the area close to Sodom and Gomorrah. Sodom and Gomorrah was led by a coalition of five kings, and they decided they were tired of paying homage to these four kings, and so on the thirteenth year of their captivity of those kings or paying homage to those kings, they decided to rebel. And their talk was all talk, no action, because as soon as the four kings from the east came to confront the five kings of the south, the five kings of the south surrendered.

They fled for the mountains. They hid in the sand pits or the asphalt pits. And Lot, who had moved into Sodom at this point, was taken captive. And so Abraham had a decision to make. Even though my nephew doesn't want anything to do with me, and he's kind of chosen his path to run away from the Lord, should I rescue him from his bad decisions, or should I let him suffer the consequences? It was his bed, he made it, let him sleep in it—or should I go and get him? And just like the Lord in his grace went and rescued Abraham in his sin, Abraham goes and rescues Lot from his and not only does he rescue Lot, he defeats the four

kings of the east, who had basically triumphed over all the surrounding areas, going down to Sodom and going back up to Sodom.

Abraham pursues them all the way to the north, and when he gets there at the very northern tip, he splits his 318 men up at night. They go in. They destroy the four kings, take all the plunder that had been stolen, all of Lot's goods, and they take it all back to Sodom. And it's such a big deal that the king of Sodom says to Abraham, "I can't believe you were able to do this. God is obviously on your side." He didn't actually say that. The other king said that. "But because of your act of bravery, you can take all of the stuff.

Just leave me with the people. You take all the stuff." And Abraham says, "I'm not going to do that, lest you say you made Abraham rich. This victory wasn't because of you, and it wasn't because of me. It was because of the Lord." And so Abraham goes back home. He is blessed by another king, called the king of Salem.[1] His name was Melchizedek. And when we meet Abraham in our passage today, all of that stuff is in his rearview mirror. He's seen some amazing things from the Lord. I don't know about you, but if you triumphed over four kings from the east, basically if you were to win World War III, that would be on your top ten list of most important life events, would it not?

That's kind of what Abraham is going through when we meet him. And what we're going to see in our passage today is Abraham, with that in his rearview mirror, is going to enter into a conversation with God through which God confirms his covenant promise to Abraham that he first made in Genesis chapter 12. And there's a hundred different ways that we could go with this message. This is such an important, foundational chapter in the Old Testament. It is central to the life of Abraham. So many ways that we could handle it.

But what I want us to do this morning is to really unearth one truth, and that is that communion with God and our confidence in the Lord comes through his covenant with us. And I don't know—we don't even use the word covenant very much today. Maybe when you think of a marriage covenant, you think of the word covenant, but most often we don't talk about our promises in terms of a covenant, but the Lord makes covenants with his people. He's made more than one covenant. We're going to be looking at the Abrahamic covenant, but we are in a covenant as Christian people under the new covenant, and when you begin to truly understand the nature of the covenant that God has made with you, you will begin to experience deeper and deeper levels of communion and deeper and deeper levels of confidence in the Lord.

So that's what Genesis 15 is all about. It's a conversation between God and Abraham. One of many conversations that they have, but a very important conversation nonetheless, which leads me to the last thing I'll say before we dive into the text. Prayer—what Abraham's going to engage in with the Lord, conversing with God, is what I call prayer. And prayer is one of God's greatest gifts to us because we can experience communion with God. We experience

that communion through the covenant, but because of God's covenant, we're able to draw near to him in prayer and experience communion with him.

And so the things that we're about to see Abraham say I don't think he would have said had he not come to a place of close intimacy and fellowship with the Lord. And that's what we're able to receive through prayer. It's one of the things that the Lord really has pressed upon my heart for our church that we dive deeper and deeper into this discipline of prayer so that we can experience deeper and deeper levels of communion with God. Chapter 15, verse 1, it says, After these events, the word of the Lord came to Abraham in a vision.

And the Lord says, Do not be afraid, Abraham. I am your shield; your reward will be very great. Now if you—I don't know if you underline in your Bible—I underline the phrase "these events." What are these events he's talking about? It's talking about these events of chapter 14, where Abraham got his 318 men and they chased a coalition of four kings up to the north to rescue his nephew Lot. It's easy after you know the end of the story to think, well, that couldn't have been that big of a deal.

If you were in Abraham's shoes, it would have been the most life-changing event ever. So you can imagine why Abraham might be afraid. Because if you beat the biggest bully on the schoolyard block, but you didn't kill him, he's going to come back and get revenge, is he not? Or maybe you did take him out, but his friends and friends of friends know it was you who took him out, so maybe they're going to come and get revenge. I think that's probably what's going on in Abraham's life. He's taken on the big dog, he's embarrassed him, he's taken him down.

Maybe he's afraid of revenge and retaliation. Maybe Abraham's a little bit anxious because of the material prosperity problem. He denied all the material prosperity from the king of Sodom. We know Abraham has a problem with money because the whole reason he lied in Egypt was to get money. The whole reason he had the crisis of faith in Genesis chapter 13 was because of the money problem. The land couldn't sustain both him and Lot. I think money's always been a source of anxiety for Abraham and so the Lord is saying, or I think Abraham up to this point was maybe wondering how am I going to make ends meet since I didn't take all that money from the king of Sodom?

I've got to pay these 318 men, I've got to kind of rebuild and reestablish myself here. Maybe there was a little anxiety around that. Whatever the case may be, Abraham was anxious, Abraham was afraid, and the Lord says to Abraham in this conversation through prayer, you don't have to be afraid. Which is why we should pray, because when we pray, we receive comfort in our fears. How many of you have fears in your life? We all at one point or another have fears in our life. And what God does through the covenant is he invites us in prayer to come and receive comfort in our fears.

I had a friend back when I was growing up who said, "If you can worry about it, you can pray about it." And Abraham was worrying about it, and so he began to pray about it, and the Lord gave him comfort, as he often does when we pray. And he gives him comfort by reminding him of two things, which is important when it comes to prayer. It's not just that you're talking to God. In prayer, God will often speak to you. And God speaks to Abraham and reminds him of two key truths.

Number one, I am your protector. And number two, I am your prize. I'm your protector. He says, I am your shield. If you're worried about these kings coming and retaliating against you, you need to know I am your shield. You are not your shield. The 318 men that you trained are not your shield. Your ultimate shield is the Lord. And so you don't have to be afraid. But not only am I your shield, not only does he give him assurance of protection and to ease his anxiety, he also gives him the promise of a great reward.

And some translate it like the CSB: your reward will be very great. I think that's an okay way to translate it. And it could be that the Lord was saying to Abraham, don't worry about the money. Don't worry about not making it. Because I'm on your side and I will take care of your needs as they come along. I think instead, if you look at the King James translation or the New International Version, 1984 issue—or 1984 version—it says, I am your great reward. So Abraham, I am your protector, and I am your great reward, which is God's way of saying, I'm the prize, not the money.

It's never been about the money, Abraham. And you've seen this show up in your life over and over again. When you choose me over the money, you realize that I'm better than what the money is. I can do more than what the money can do. And so it's not the material prosperity that I give you that is the reward. I'm the reward. It's not just about what God can do for us, it's about God Himself promising to be with us. And so Abraham is praying to God. I think he's experiencing communion with God because he's receiving this comfort for his fears in his life.

He's being reminded that God is his provider. God is his protector, that God is the prize that he is after, but it doesn't stop there. The second reason Abraham experiences communion with God in prayer is because he's able to get some answers to his questions. Which is another reason we should pray. Because when you pray, you can ask God any question that is on your heart. And so what does Abraham ask? Look at verse 2. Abraham said, "Lord God, what can you give me?" You talk about this great reward, what are you going to give me?

"Because I am childless, and the heir of my house is Eliezer of Damascus." Abraham continued, "Look, you have given me no offspring, and so a slave born in my house will be my heir." Remember back all the way to Genesis chapter twelve, the Lord promised Abraham, I'm going to give your descendants these lands. And the implied descendant would be a biological child between Abraham and Sarai, but they didn't have a child when

God made the promise, and they still don't have a child, and so Abraham's saying, what gives, Lord? You said you were going to do this, you haven't done it.

So I've had to resolve myself to choose Eliezer, who's not my biological child. He's calling him a slave in his house. It just means a hired hand. It wasn't someone that was genetically related to him. And so I guess he's going to be my heir because you don't seem to be in a hurry to fulfill the promise you said you were going to fulfill. And I love that honesty about Abraham. And some people read that question as an angry question. I don't think it's an angry question. I think it's the kind of question that the guy in Mark chapter 9 asked Jesus when he had a son who was sick.

And he knew Jesus could heal people. He'd seen and heard the reports of Jesus healing people. And so he comes to Jesus in Mark 9, I think it's verse 23, and he says, Jesus, if you can heal my son, please heal him. And Jesus' response is, "If"—which I always like that—"if I can heal your son? All things are possible with those who believe." And then the man's response to that statement by Jesus is, okay, true enough. "I believe." Does anybody remember what he says after that? "Help my unbelief." I believe.

I mean I've seen it. I got no problem believing you can. But whatever I'm missing, however I'm not putting the pieces together, help me with my unbelief. I think that's what Abraham's saying: "Lord, I know you've delivered me out of Ur of the Chaldeans. You've got me through Egypt. You've got me through World War III. I have seen you do what you promised you would do, but I don't have a kid right now. You said I was going to have a kid, so I've just kind of resorted to this realistic second plan B.

Help my unbelief." And I think that's instructive because it's a reminder that your doubts don't have to destroy your faith. A lot of people feel guilty about doubting God or doubting their faith. Doubt—is the Bible really true? Can I really trust God? It's a part of being human. Everybody who follows the Lord will eventually experience doubt in their lives. But doubt can be a friend of your faith. It doesn't have to be an enemy. Just like doubt on a test can drive you to get the right answer, so also doubt in your faith can drive you to find God's truth.

It can drive you to a place of dependency and desperation so that at that place and in that posture God reveals to you and confirms to you his word, which is exactly what he does for Abraham in verse 4. The word of the Lord comes to Abraham after he asked the question: This one will not be your heir. Eliezer from Damascus is not the guy. Instead, one who comes from your own body or your own loins will be your heir. In other words, it's going to be a biological child between you and Sarai.

And not only does God reconfirm his promise and tell him, I am going to do what I promise I'm going to do, he then takes him outside and says, Look at the sky and count the stars, if

you're able to count them. And then he said to him, Your offspring will be that numerous. And so not only does the Lord reconfirm his promise to Abraham, he says, when I, not if I, but when I fulfill my promise to you. It will be so big and so undeniable. No one will wonder where it came from.

Everyone will know it's from the Lord. It will be—your descendants will be as numerous as the stars in the sky. So what I'm doing, Abraham, is bigger than what you think it is. And you need to be willing to wrap your mind around that and be reminded that my delay is not a cancellation. Just because I'm not fulfilling my promise on your timetable does not mean the promise will not be fulfilled. Which is another valuable thing we receive from the Lord when we pray. We get answers to our questions and we can be reminded my doubt doesn't have to destroy my faith.

And God's delays don't have to disturb his plans. Now they may disturb our plans. Amen? God's delays can disturb our plans, and have. There have been times in my life where I was like, you know, time's ticking, Lord. And it's disrupted my plans. But it doesn't disrupt his plans. In fact, usually God's delays are strategic. They're on purpose. God intentionally delays in fulfilling certain prayers because there's something he's doing in you through the delay. During that meantime waiting period, he's changing you and prepping you and strengthening you so that you can facilitate and receive the fullness of his promise when he brings it about in your life.

And so don't let God's delay disrupt his plan for your life. Don't let your doubts destroy your faith. But draw near to God, receive comfort for your anxieties and your fears, and receive these answers to your questions. The third thing Abraham receives in verse six is a reward for his faith. So when God says that, Abraham has a choice, right? I can believe what God has said or I can choose not to believe what God has said, and so Abraham chooses to trust the Lord. And it says in verse 6, Abraham believed God and God credited it to him as righteousness.

The word righteousness is just a word that means to meet the standard. And in this instance, you could substitute the word salvation because the standard that Abraham was trying to meet was the standard of being pleasing to God. And the only way to be pleasing to God as a sinful person is to not be a sinner, to have your sins removed, or to have righteousness given to you that you do not have of yourself. And that's what Abraham receives from the Lord by his faith. Now this dynamic of chapter 15, verse 6, where it says Abraham believed God and it was credited to him, or it was kind of given, it was a grace gift that he didn't deserve, this righteousness.

That verse is quoted by the New Testament authors four times. And it is absolutely central and fundamental to how they understand salvation and the gospel. So if you want to know how did the Old Testament saints get saved? How do we know Abraham's going to go to

heaven when Jesus wasn't around? What did Abraham believe? What was the gospel he believed? All the New Testament authors, the Apostle Paul in particular, looked at that verse, chapter 15, verse 6, as the explanatory statement for how the gospel was preached to Abraham in the Old Testament.

I don't have time to go through all of them, but I do want to show you one of them or two of them in the book of Romans, chapter 4, if you want to turn your Bible there. Romans chapter 4. In prayer, we receive righteousness for our faith. This righteousness is the righteousness we need to be reconciled to God. So in Romans chapter 4, the Apostle Paul is developing an argument. That we're all equally sinful before God. We're all equally condemned in our sin. The only way we can be justified is if God justifies us.

So the justifier has to justify us. He does that through Jesus. How do we receive what Jesus did on the cross into our life? We receive it by grace through faith. And then he uses the example of Abraham, chapter 4, verse 2. If Abraham was justified by works, then he had something to boast about—but he doesn't have anything to boast about before God. For what does the scripture say? Abraham believed God, and it was credited to him for righteousness. There's our verse. Now to the one who works, pay is not credited as a gift, but as something owed.

But to the one who does not work, but believes on him who declares the ungodly to be righteous, His faith is credited for righteousness. In other words, the just live by faith. The way to be reconciled to God, the way to be pleasing to God is not by the works that you do, it's not by the life that you live, it's by the life that Jesus lived for you on your behalf, and the way to receive his righteousness is by grace as a gift through your faith in what he did for you on the cross.

So it is in believing that Jesus died in your place for your sins that God sees your faith and says, I will make you righteous. You're not righteous, but I'm going to make you righteous, even though you're not. He keeps going at the end of chapter 4, verse 20, not just talking about salvation, but talking about Abraham's child, Isaac. Basically, Abraham did not waver in unbelief at God's promise, but was strengthened in his faith and gave glory to God because he was fully convinced that what God had promised, he was also able to do.

Therefore, again, it was credited to him for righteousness. One more example in Galatians chapter 3, if you'll turn there, Galatians chapter 3, verse 5. Paul is writing the letter to the Galatian church because they had started out their Christian life by grace through faith. But they had kind of slipped into a works-based righteousness so that the way that I keep God happy with me is by doing good things. So I know I can't save myself, so I need Jesus' grace to forgive me to get me started, but then after I'm started, I can keep God happy by what I do.

Paul says, no, that's not what the Christian life is. It is begun by faith. It is completed by faith. It is by faith from beginning to end. So he raises the question, so then does God give you the Spirit, the Holy Spirit, and work miracles among you by your doing? Is it by works of the law? No. It is by believing what you heard, just like Abraham who believed God, and it was credited to him for righteousness. You know then that those who have faith, these are Abraham's sons. Now the scripture saw in advance, look at this.

The scripture saw in advance that God would justify the Gentiles, that's non-Jewish people like you and me. He was going to justify people like us by faith. And so what did he do? He proclaimed the gospel ahead of time to Abraham, saying, all the nations of the earth will be blessed through you. Consequently, those who have faith are blessed with Abraham who had faith. This is so amazing. So in Genesis chapter 12, when the Lord says to Abraham, if you'll follow me, I'll bless you. And not only will I bless you, I'll bless all the nations through you.

Paul is saying that's the gospel. That's the gospel in the Old Testament where God was saying to Abraham, you don't see it right now, but through your lineage, through your line, I'm going to bring a child. And through that child is going to come a lineage, and through that lineage is going to come the Messiah. And through that Messiah, the nations of the earth are going to be blessed. And the way that they're going to receive salvation is the same way that you're going to receive salvation. It's not by what you do for me, good or bad or anything because you can't do enough good.

It's by what I do for you. And so if you'll believe my promise, I'll make you righteous. And he does. And he did. And that's what Abraham receives in prayer. He receives righteousness for his faith. But he doesn't stop there. He doesn't just experience communion with God through this conversation. In prayer, he then is given this amazing display of God's covenant. So we receive confidence in God through his promise. We receive communion through prayer. We receive confidence through the promise. If you look at chapter 15, verses 7 and 8: He said to Abraham, I am the Lord who brought you from Ur of the Chaldeans to give you this land to possess.

And then Abraham replies, but Lord God, how can I know? How can I know that I will possess it? Notice what he's asking. I need confidence. I believe you, I'm following you, but I need confidence. I need some external way to know for sure that this is for real. And on the one hand, God says, if you want confidence, just look in the rearview mirror. I'm the God who brought you out of Ur of the Chaldeans. I brought you out of your idolatry. I brought you out of the past. But he doesn't stop there.

He says, I'm also going to give you something else. So he says in verse 9, bring me a three-year-old cow, a three-year-old female goat, and a three-year-old ram, a turtledove, and a young pigeon. So that's five animals: a goat, a cow, and a ram, and a turtledove and a pigeon. We don't see this off the surface because we're not steeped in Old Testament Judaism, but

these were the five animals that were cleared by God for Old Testament sacrifices. So in the Old Testament they'd make a sacrifice to say, God, you're worthy of it all.

I'm a sinner. I need forgiveness. So would the blood of this animal pay the price for my sins? And God would say I'll be patient for one more year. Okay, we'll delay the judgment for one more year. So God is saying to Abraham, we're going to have some kind of a sacrificial ceremony here. Come and get the animals. But then he tells him to cut the animals in half. So look at verse 10. He brought all of these animals to the Lord. He cut them in half, and he laid the pieces opposite of each other, but he did not cut the birds in half.

Birds of prey came down on the carcasses, but Abraham drove them away. So if you're taking notes, what the Lord is doing through this is he's sealing the promise. He is ceremonially confirming his covenant or his promise with Abraham through what's called a covenant. A covenant, if you want a definition, is a relational promise that has defined stipulations for what's supposed to be done in the relationship, and then defined blessings or curses based on whether or not you fulfill the stipulations in the covenant. So like when you get married, you have a covenant for better or for worse, for richer or poorer, in sickness and in health.

You're saying I'm going to love you no matter what. Until death do us part, I'm all yours. That's essentially what is going on here, except it's a little bit different because this covenant is confirmed through the shedding of blood. Aren't you glad you don't have to shed your blood for your wedding day, right? He cuts the animals in half. Why is he cutting the animals in half? Well, if you know ancient Near Eastern culture, you'll know that when a covenant was signed, you would cut animals in half, you would put one half on this side and one half on this side, and you would make a little alleyway for you and the person that you were promising yourself to.

And what you would say is you would walk up and down the little alleyway, and you would basically say, if I don't keep my word, if I don't keep my promise, may it be done to me what's been done to these animals. It's kind of like today when we say I swear on my life I'm going to do this. That's what you were saying in a covenant. I swear on my life. If I don't do what I'm promising, then may I be cut asunder. May I be cut in half. And that's what God's covenant is with us.

His covenant with Abraham was confirmed through the shedding of blood. So Abraham sheds the blood, the covenant is confirmed. And then as Abraham goes to sleep—this is before the covenant is sealed—a deep sleep comes on him. And look at verse 12. As the sun was setting, a deep sleep came over Abraham, and suddenly great terror and darkness descended on him. And then the Lord said to Abraham, Know this for certain: Your offspring will be resident aliens for 400 years in a land that doesn't belong to them. They will be enslaved and oppressed.

However, I will judge the nation they serve. And afterward they will go out with many possessions. But you will go to your fathers in peace and be buried at a good old age. That's 125—175 years old, for those who are curious. I don't think we're going to get there. But you're going to go be buried at a good old age. In the fourth generation they will return here, for the iniquity of the Amorites has not yet reached its full measure. What's God saying? He's saying, I am promising you that I'm going to do what I'm going to do.

It is confirmed in blood, but you need to know something for certain. As I keep my promises to you, you're going to end up walking through some very challenging days. And essentially what God prophesies is the Exodus. He prophesies the events from Genesis chapter 49 all the way to Ex—no, Genesis 46, all the way to Exodus 13. What does he say? He says, Your people, the lineage that's going to come from your line. They are going to be enslaved and oppressed in a land that is not their own. What land is that?

Egypt. God says, it's going to be 400 years. The Israelites were in captivity for I think 430 years. God says, I'm going to judge that nation. How does God judge the Egyptians? With the ten plagues. Moses comes to Pharaoh, let my people go. Pharaoh says no. Moses releases the plagues. Then you're going to go out from them with great wealth. And what happens at the tenth plague? Pharaoh says, get out of here. It says that God gave the Israelites favor with the Egyptian people, so they got all this material prosperity and wealth as they exited Egypt.

And then God was with them as they journeyed through the wilderness until they eventually take the promised land and invade the Amorites. That's, I think, in Joshua chapter 10.[2] Everything happened exactly as God said it would happen to Abraham in this vision while he's asleep. I think the point of that is the Lord saying, my covenant is certain, irrespective of how you feel, irrespective of what your circumstances may suggest. Irrespective of how difficult things may be on the surface in the meantime, you can trust me. And that had to have been a difficult thing for Abraham to hear on the one hand, but what a wonderful thing to hear on the other hand.

Because sometimes you can endure incredible suffering if you know God is with you in it. And that it's temporary. It's temporary suffering. And that there's something better on the horizon. That's why every woman who's had a baby—as bad as it was, on the other end, there's the joy of receiving that child. And the Lord is saying here, know this for certain. It's going to get dark, it's going to be difficult. But what I start, I will finish. And so my covenant is confirmed through the shedding of blood. It is certain no matter the circumstances in every generation.

And then finally the covenant is completed by what God does, not what we do. Look at verse 17. I'm going to have to read this up here because I tore a hole in my Bible. My beautiful, wonderful sheepskin leather Bible. When the sun had set and it was dark, a smoking fire pot and a flaming torch appeared and passed between the divided animals. Who is this? This is

the Lord. Throughout the Old Testament, when God shows up, he often shows up through smoke and fire. You remember the Exodus, God led Israel through the wilderness through a pillar of cloud by day and a pillar of fire by night.

So smoke and fire. Same thing with Isaiah. Smoke fills the temple and then a burning coal from the altar touches his tongue. This is God passing through the alley. Notice who's not passing through the alley. Abram, where's Abram? So while Abraham is sleeping, God is walking up and down the alley, and what is God saying? He's saying, if I don't keep my promise, may it be done to me just like what's done to these animals. May I swear on my life, may my life be taken if I don't keep the promise.

Who's not saying that? Abram's not saying it. Because Abram's asleep. Which is a way of the passage suggesting God's covenants are completed not by what we do in participation and contribution. It's not about the contributions we make with the covenants of God. It's about the contribution He makes. It's not about our faithfulness because we're faithless. And if it was up to us, the covenant would be destroyed, but it is him being faithful that keeps the covenant to the end. Let's finish the rest of that sentence if you'll go back to verse—yeah, all the -ites.

I give this land to your offspring, from the Brook of Egypt to the great river, the Euphrates: the land of the Kenites, the Kenizzites, the Kadmonites, Hethites, Perizzites, Rephaim, Amorites, Canaanites, Girgashites, and Jebusites—and the Termites and all the rest. So the point is God completes the covenant. Now why do I point all that out? Because Abraham received communion with God and confidence in God through the Abrahamic covenant. But the Abrahamic covenant, as we just read in the New Testament, was paving the way for an even greater covenant. And that greater covenant is the new covenant that is available to you and to me.

By grace through faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. And the new covenant was also a covenant that was confirmed through the shedding of blood. But it wasn't the blood of bulls and goats, it was the blood of the sinless Son of God, Jesus Christ. And if you go to the book of Hebrews, the book of Hebrews talks about this that the blood of bulls and goats never took away sin. If the blood of bulls and goats could take away sin, then the Old Testament wouldn't have done what the Old Testament did.

Those who were sprinkled, those who were defiled, got sanctified for the purification of the flesh. But now in the new covenant, we have the blood of Christ, which will much more so cleanse us. How much more so with the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself without blemish to God, cleanse our consciences from dead works, so that we can serve the living God. What he's saying is those Old Testament sacrifices didn't deal with sin. They were paving the way for how God would deal with sin. God wouldn't deal with sin through animals.

He was going to deal with sin through his son. And it's the blood of Jesus that truly washes away our sins, truly purifies our conscience. We have communion with God because we're given the righteousness of Jesus Christ, not because of what we do, but because of what God has done for us through the death of Jesus on the cross. It was confirmed through blood. The covenant with Jesus is also certain no matter our circumstances. We go through difficult days. The book of 1 Peter was written to a group of suffering Christians, and he tells those suffering Christians, it will be difficult for you, but know this, you have an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, and it is kept in heaven for you.

So as difficult as your circumstances may be, as uncertain as you may be of whether God is with you or against you because of how painful it is, know this for certain, what he starts, he will finish. And there will come a day where the heavens will be split and Jesus will come back on the clouds and he will make all things new. His covenant was confirmed through blood, it was certain no matter what, and then finally it's completed by God's actions, not our own. He made him who knew no sin to be sin on our behalf, so that we might become the righteousness of God.

He did this so that he might be the just God and the justifier of those who believe. The only thing you need to contribute to your salvation is a willingness to believe that God has done everything for you. It is the willingness to have faith that Jesus has done for me what I cannot do for myself. And so if you really want communion with God, and if you really want confidence in God, it's found through his covenant with us. It's found through the covenant with us that God has made through the Lord Jesus Christ.

And that's why the life of Abraham is so relevant for us today because his little example of faith in the Old Testament is a model for us for how we can walk by faith in our day and age under our new covenant in the Lord Jesus Christ. And so as we respond to the Lord, for those of you who would say, "I'm not a Christian, you know, I've never made Jesus Lord of my life, I've kind of assumed that it was about what I do. And so the whole reason I'm at church today is so God will be happy with me"—wrong religion.

That's not Christianity. It's not about what we do, it's about what He has done. And if this morning the Holy Spirit is saying that—he's turned on that light for you—and he's saying you need to give your life to Jesus. You need to demonstrate your faith publicly through a confession of Jesus as Lord, you can do that now. You can come to the front during this time of response. I would also encourage those of you who already are Christians to ask God in these moments, "God, would you help me to more deeply understand who I am in Jesus?

Open my eyes so that I can see what you have done and how you are with me and how you will never leave me or forsake me—not because of what I've done, but because of who you are." Maybe you would ask for greater levels of communion with God, greater experiences of his love in your life. And you can receive that through a greater awareness of his love for you

in Jesus. Altar's open if you want to pray about anything, I'd be happy to pray with you, but let's respond to the Lord as he leads.

Father in heaven, we thank you for this story of Abraham. We thank you for your promise that it never fails, that it endures to the very end. And even when we are faithless and a shipwreck because of our doubts and our suffering, you are always there. You never leave us. Reconciliation, communion is as available to us today as running from you was yesterday. Thank you that you're a God that is abounding in steadfast love. So would you use this time to open our eyes to that to greater and greater degrees?

And that that would motivate our obedience and our generosity and lives of sacrificial obedience to what you call us to do individually and as a church and we pray it in Jesus' name. Amen.

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1. Transcript note: spoken as "He makes a treaty with another king called the king of Salem"; Genesis records that Melchizedek, king of Salem, brought out bread and wine and blessed Abram, and Abram gave him a tenth. The men "bound by a treaty with Abram" were Mamre, Eshcol, and Aner. Source: Genesis 14:13, 18–20 (CSB), BibleGateway. ↩
2. Transcript note: spoken as "Judges chapter 17" (which tells of Micah's idol). Israel's defeat of the Amorites is recorded in Numbers 21:21–35 (Sihon and Og, kings of the Amorites) and Joshua 10 (the five Amorite kings). Source: Numbers 21:21–25; Joshua 10:5–6 (CSB), BibleGateway. ↩