

## COMMENTS/QUESTIONS ON THE LESSONS FOR MARCH 16, 2025

### Genesis 15:1-12. 17-18

- Our passage provides an excellent example of how one verse can be understood in several different ways. Read again Genesis 15:6:

“And Abram believed the Lord; and the Lord reckoned it to him as righteousness.”

Abram trusts in the promise that God has made, that God will provide an heir for him. And God considers that act of trust and belief as an act of righteousness.

Paul and James take this verse in two very different ways:

“What then are we to say was gained by Abraham, our ancestor according to the flesh? For if Abraham was justified by works, he has something to boast about, but not before God. For what does the scripture say? ‘Abraham believed God, and it was reckoned to him as righteousness.’ Now to one who works, wages are not reckoned as a gift but as something due. But to one who without works trusts him who justifies the ungodly, such faith is reckoned as righteousness.” (Romans 4:1-5)

“Do you want to be shown, you senseless person, that faith without works is barren? Was not our ancestor Abraham justified by works when he offered his son Isaac on the altar? You see that faith was active along with his works, and faith was brought to completion by the works. Thus the scripture was fulfilled that says, ‘Abraham believed God, and it was reckoned to him as righteousness’, and he was called the friend of God. You see that a person is justified by works and not by faith alone.” (James 2:20-24)

Paul uses this verse to say that faith is apart from works. James uses this same verse to say that faith must be with works.

- How would our passage look if we read it from the perspective of Eliezer? We know nothing about Eliezer except his origin (Damascus) and his position in Abram’s house (slave/servant). What is threatening to Abram about the possibility that a slave could inherit his house? What does this reveal or say about Abram’s convictions or motivations? Though God does assure Abram of the fulfillment of the promise, God does address Abram’s issue with the slave in the section left out: “Know this for certain, that your offspring shall be aliens in a land that is not theirs, and shall be slaves there, and they shall be oppressed for four hundred years.” (Genesis 15:13) In other words, Abram may have issues with a slave being an heir, but Abram’s people ultimately will understand what being a slave is all about.
- As the covenant ceremony takes place, we read the haunting lines, “a deep and terrifying darkness descended upon him.” At times, our faith journey leads us not into places of light and joy but into places of “a deep and terrifying darkness.” The promise is not that God will make things easy. The promise is that God will be there.
- After this encounter, Sarai does ***not*** give birth to Isaac. This encounter is followed by Sarai giving her servant Hagar to Abram as another wife, who then gives birth to Ishmael. Abram tries to make the promise of God work. We are not told that this is right or wrong, though ultimately the promise will be fulfilled through Sarah. When have we tried to help the promises of God along with our solution?
- An odd covenant-making ceremony happens, in which a heifer, a goat, a ram, a turtledove, and a pigeon are ***cut in two, with each half lying on a different side***. God confirms this promise when a smoking fire pot and a flaming torch pass between the pieces. The meaning of this ceremony is no longer clear, but one suggestion is that dismemberment is being invoked if the covenant is broken.

### Psalm 27

- This is a beautiful psalm of trust in God, no matter what happens in life (“Though an army encamp against me ... though war rise up against me ... though my father and mother forsake me ....”). We can use the words of this psalm to remind ourselves to trust in God, that we “will see the goodness of the Lord in the land of the living.”

- Note the contrast with how the psalmist describes “the house of the Lord.” In verse 4, he declares that the one thing that he seeks is to “dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of my life.” And then in verse 5, he says that “God will give me shelter, hide me in the hidden places of the sanctuary, and raise me high upon a rock.” The house of the Lord is not simply a building, a temple, a church. The house of the Lord is where God dwells, and it includes the earth as a whole and ourselves as individuals. How would our outlook change if we saw the whole world as God’s dwelling? How about our community? How about our bodies?

### **Philippians 3:17 – 4:1**

- When we read about “enemies of the cross of Christ,” it is tempting to think that Paul speaks about other people. Our challenge is to reflect upon our own lives. Is our god our “belly,” our desires, our agendas? Or is our God the God of Jesus, the God of the cross of Christ? Are our minds set on earthly things? Or on heavenly things?
- The promise that God “will transform the body of our humiliation that it may be conformed to the body of his glory” is not meant to simply be a future fulfillment after our death. Rather, we are called to claim this promise now and begin the process that will continue once our earthly life is over

### **Luke 13:31-35**

- When we become overwhelmed by the tyrannical behavior of countries and leaders, this gospel gives us a response. “Herod” may be out to kill us, but we are still called to do the work of bringing wholeness and grace to the world. As we witness again the work of another “Herod” in the figure of Putin, we may see a similar call upon us.
- With one small turn of phrase, Jesus changes how we might understand his work:
  - Listen, I am casting out demons and performing cures today and tomorrow*
    - so far so good, we understand Jesus’ ministry on earth.
  - And on the third day I finish my work.*
    - By invoking “the third day,” we the hearers of this gospel understand a reference to the resurrection.

But what does Jesus mean by saying this? Is he saying that his work on earth is a work in the grave, so that new life is then promised by the resurrection? Are we living in the completion of the work of Jesus?

- Jesus invokes a beautiful image of himself or God as a mother hen seeking to gather up her chicks. Yet, Jerusalem refuses that nurturing that can come through Jesus and God. When have we pushed aside God’s love and care for us? What has helped bring us back?