

# God, What Will You Give Me?

Genesis 15: 1 – 8

June 6, 2010

## I. Introduction

- A. How many of you here this morning would say that you have
  - 1. Entered into a covenant relationship with God? Some – some not sure
    - a. That's okay, we don't use that kind of language in church very often
  - 2. In fact, we don't hear covenant language used very often
    - a. In any aspect of our culture today, even though we make them all the time
  - 3. Remember the last time you installed a new program on your computer
    - a. No doubt, at some time in the process, a screen popped up
      - (1) That said something about a "user agreement"
    - b. Did you check the little box that said "I have read and agree"
      - (1) You just made a covenant with the people who supplied that product

- A. Purchased a new cell phone recently? You may not even have noticed
  - 1. But you probably entered into an agreement with the cell phone provider
    - a. To use their services for at least two years – you made a covenant

- A. Have you ever signed your name to any kind of a legal document
  - 1. What about a receipt for a credit card purchase
    - a. Signed a membership card at the library or the YMCA
      - (1) Shook hands to signify an agreement between friends
  - 2. If you have done any of these things, you made/entered into a covenant
    - a. Even if you didn't use that word for it

- A. Perhaps the one time we might hear the word covenant used today
  - 1. Might be at a wedding – although it's not very common
    - a. To use the word covenant to describe a marriage relationship any more either

- A. That probably comes the closest to the type of agreement we're thinking about
  - 1. When we look at our scripture passage and think about a covenant with God
    - a. A commitment made between two parties based on a relationship of trust

## II. The beginning of this covenant between God and Abram goes back to an earlier time

- A. We mentioned last week the promise God made to Abram on a couple of occasions
  - 1. First, when Abram was told to leave his family and go
    - a. God didn't even tell him at that point where – just go to the land I will show you

- A. The promise was that God would make a great nation from Abram's descendants
    - 1. I will bless those who bless you and curse those who curse you, God said
      - a. And through you, Abram, I will bring about a blessing for all families on the earth
  - A. Again, after Abram and Lot separated ways, God spoke to Abram once more
    - 1. Telling him that all the land as far as he could see would be given to him
  - A. At the same time, God told Abram that he would give him many descendants
    - 1. As numerous as the particles of dust on the earth – an uncountable number
  - A. A promise that is repeated here in our text for today, but with a different illustration
    - 1. When God brought Abram outside and said - Look toward heaven
      - a. And count the stars in the sky, if you are able
        - (1) That's how many your descendants will be
    - 2. And Abram said - Okay, God. You've said it, so I believe it.
      - a. Even though he and Sarah did not have even their first child yet
  - A. The rest of our passage today deals primarily with the ceremony
    - 1. That marked the completion of this covenant between God and Abram
    - 2. But I want to spend a bit more time with these opening verses before we get to that
  - A. Because they help us to understand the agreement that was being entered into
    - 1. And that may give us some helpful hints on making covenant with God
      - a. And by the way, if you didn't hold up your hand earlier – listen closely
        - (1) You aren't saved until you've entered into a covenant relationship with God
    - 2. The covenant you agree to may not be exactly the same as the one Abram agreed to
      - a. But it will share a lot of similarities – that's why this text is relevant to us
- III. One of the possible differences can be seen in the very first verse of our passage
- A. Where it says – after these things, referring to the previous chapter
    - 1. The word of the Lord came to Abram in a vision
  - A. Has anyone here this morning heard God speaking to you in a vision recently?
    - 1. Some of you have mentioned from time to time having dreams
      - a. That may have served as a special revelation from God
    - 2. For all we know, that may be the way Abram received this particular vision of God
      - a. There is direct reference to a deep sleep later on
    - 3. Along with a deep and terrifying darkness that fell upon Abram
      - a. After he has followed the directions received in the first message
        - (1) Regarding the preparations to be made for the covenant ceremony

- A. It's not entirely clear how much of what happened in this instance
  - 1. Was a part of Abram's vision and how much was carried out in real life
    - a. But the fact remains that God initiated this conversation
      - (1) God took the first steps in initiating this covenant with Abram
- A. So, we might ask, what if God doesn't come to us and offer to make a covenant
  - 1. What if we don't see or hear God speaking to us like he did to Abram
    - a. Is an invitation to covenant with God only given to certain people at certain times
  - 2. The answer to that question seems to be a very definite – maybe
- A. One of the basic messages of the Bible is that God, ever since the beginning of time
  - 1. Has been working to reveal himself to individuals and to the human race
- A. Sometimes in a direct manner, as it was here with Abram
  - 1. Sometimes through angelic messengers
    - a. Who appear at various times throughout scripture
  - 2. Sometimes through specific people, like Moses or the priests/prophets of the OT
- A. And then, the Bible tells us, God was revealed to us in the fullest way possible
  - 1. Through the incarnation, the birth/life/death and resurrection of Jesus Christ
- A. And it was Jesus who issued the universal invitation – God so loved the world
  - 1. That he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him
    - a. May not perish but may have everlasting life
  - 2. That's God speaking to every person that has ever been born
- A. The reason I say that it may be that not everyone receives that invitation
  - 1. Is that scripture also suggests that unless people hear the word, they cannot believe
    - a. And that puts a lot of responsibility on those who have heard – today
  - 2. Just as it was primarily the responsibility of God's chosen people in OT times
    - a. To be a witness to the world of God's love for all people
- A. The NT Book of Romans also suggests that every person
  - 1. Receives some revelation of God, if only through the creation that surrounds us
    - a. And the Spirit of God that speaks within us
  - 2. So that no one can say that they did not have a chance for salvation
- A. Again, the main thing I want us remember this morning, is that God has already
  - 1. Taken the first steps toward a covenant relationship with each one of us
- A. And God has a very interesting message for Abram at this place and time
  - 1. Do not be afraid, Abram, for I am your shield, your reward shall be very great

- A. As we mentioned last week, Abram was a man who lived a godly life
  - 1. Who built altars to worship God wherever he went
- A. This covenant invitation to Abram was not the same as the invitation to unbelievers
  - 1. That we were talking about a minute ago – Abram was already a believer
- A. Instead, this covenant invites Abram to move up another step
  - 1. In his understanding of God’s purpose and in his relationship with God
- A. That may sound a bit strange to us, if we take it for granted
  - 1. That a person is either saved or not saved and that’s all there is
    - a. To a relationship with God
- A. I do believe that we are saved to the fullest extent immediately
  - 1. When we ask for God’s forgiveness for our sin and promise to follow Jesus
    - a. With all of our heart, soul, mind and strength
- A. But in my experience, and I know from the experience of others, that decision
  - 1. Is often just a first step in walking with God – and sometimes the steps that follow
    - a. Are interspersed with times when we move away from God
      - (1) And then we need to repent and turn back to God again
- A. However, as we continue in our walk of faith, I believe God comes to us
  - 1. From time to time, with an invitation to a deeper level of faith commitment
    - a. Just as I believe God was inviting Abram here in our story
- A. So, when Abram responds to God’s word with the question – God, what will you give me
  - 1. It is not in the selfish sense that we might think of -
    - a. All right God, you’ve told me I’m going to get a big reward for my faith
      - (1) Now tell me what I’m going to get
  - 2. Rather, Abram is responding to God’s invitation in a positive manner
    - a. God, I believe you and I trust you – but how will you make this happen
- A. Because there is one major difficulty with the promise God has given to Abram
  - 1. How are you going to make a great nation from my descendants
    - a. When I don’t have any children to descend?
      - (1) Just how do you plan to fulfill this promise, God
  - 2. Sure, my possessions will all go to one of my servants if I die childless
    - a. Is that what you plan to build this family on
- A. And God comes back to Abram – not with a direct answer to the question “how”
  - 1. But simply to say - Believe me Abram, your going to have a family

- a. And it won't come about through your servant Eliezer
        - (1) But from your own flesh and blood
    - 2. Again, as if to emphasize the point, God has Abram look at the stars
      - a. As an illustration of how numerous his descendants would one day be
  - A. And Abram believed God, and it was reckoned to him as righteousness
    - 1. A better wording might be that Abram continued to believe God
      - a. He was ready for the next step of his faith journey
- IV. So now we are ready to get down to the business of covenant-making
- A. And I don't know about you, but as I've read this scripture in the past
    - 1. I've had a hard time making any connection between cutting animals apart
      - a. And keeping the vultures away from them all day, with covenant making
  - A. Couldn't God have just given Abram a stone tablet, like he gave to Moses
    - 1. With the agreement written out on it, ready for their signatures
  - A. Bible scholars tell us that historical accounts of ancient times
    - 1. Indicate that this ceremony was not as strange to Abram as it might seem to us
  - A. That the sacrifice of animals was often used to solemnize a covenant-making ceremony
    - 1. That Abram would have immediately recognized the significance
      - a. Of the preparation God directed him to make
  - A. In any case, it seems that the culmination of the event takes place
    - 1. With the appearance of the smoking fire pot and the flaming torch
      - a. Demonstrating the presence of God in a physical representation
  - A. As the pillar of cloud and smoke would one day lead Abram's descendants through the wilderness
    - 1. Here God's presence moving between the animal carcasses
      - a. Signifies an acceptance of the sacrifice/offering
        - (1.) And a "closing of the deal" with Abram, a covenant with Almighty God
    - 1. If covenants were made that way today, we might be more cautious about it
      - a. And it would perhaps make more of an impression on us
  - A. We do not want to overlook the fact that before God ratified this agreement
    - 1. He gave Abram a few more details about how it would be carried out
      - a. Including the bad news along with the good
    - 2. Abram's descendants would indeed inherit this land
      - a. But, along the way, they would also give up possession for 400 years

- A. As we look back, it seems evident that this was a reference to the time
  - 1. When Abram's grandchildren and great-grandchildren would go to Egypt
    - a. And become slaves there for several generations, before God rescued them
      - (1) And led them back to the "Promised Land"
  - 2. And perhaps, like so many other Bible prophecies, this prophecy/promise
    - a. Has been repeated more than once down through the history
      - (1) Of the flesh and blood descendants of Abraham
- A. It may be a stretch, but I wonder sometimes if there is a significance
  - 1. In that warning given to Abram, for the people who are his spiritual descendants, too
- A. People who claim God's promises by faith, but do not always see the fulfillment
  - 1. Of those promises during their lifetime
- A. Our lives take many detours and paths, perhaps not as major as a 400 year exile
  - 1. But certainly times when it may look like God is not keeping his end of the bargain
    - a. Or when we might ask, along with Abram – God, what are you going to give me
  - 2. What you've promised doesn't seem to be happening
    - a. In fact, it looks downright impossible
- A. And God comes right back to us, as he did to Abram, saying –
  - 1. You just keep on doing your part, just keep on believing the promise
    - a. Leave the rest up to me, I'll work out the details in my own time and way
- A. And if there's one thing that's clear about this covenant-making with God
  - 1. Even when we don't always keep our end of the deal
    - a. We should never give up believing in God – God always keeps his covenant
- V. Today, we are invited to enter into a different kind of covenant with God
  - A. One that is marked by the sacrifice of Jesus life on the cross
    - 1. And God becomes present with us through the giving of his Holy Spirit
  - A. This new covenant, scripture says, is one that is "written on our hearts"
    - a. So that our hearts and lives are changed forever as we walk with God in faith
  - A. This covenant is different in many ways than the covenant God made with Abram
    - 1. But as I mentioned earlier, there are many similarities as well
      - a. God still calls us to a life of faithful obedience
        - (1) And in return, God promises to be our shield, our protector
  - A. And the final reward will be the same for us as it was for Abraham
    - 1. When these earthly bodies are done away with

- a. God has promised a new life in the glories of heaven forever
- A. I don't know exactly how God is going to do that either
  - 1. But I believe God will make it happen
    - a. What more could we ask for than that?