

Abraham's Problem & Our Problem

Gen. 15:1-7

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I. Introduction

II. Text: Genesis 15:1-7

1 After these things the word of the LORD came to Abram in a vision, saying, "Do not be afraid, Abram. I am your shield, your exceedingly great reward." 2 But Abram said, "Lord GOD, what will You give me, seeing I go childless, and the heir of my house is Eliezer of Damascus?" 3 Then Abram said, "Look, You have given me no offspring; indeed one born in my house is my heir!" 4 And behold, the word of the LORD came to him, saying, "This one shall not be your heir, but one who will come from your own body shall be your heir." 5 Then He brought him outside and said, "Look now toward heaven, and count the stars if you are able to number them." And He said to him, "So shall your descendants be." 6 And he believed in the LORD, and He accounted it to him for righteousness. 7 Then He said to him, "I am the LORD, who brought you out of Ur of the Chaldeans, to give you this land to inherit it."

III. Abraham's Problem of Childlessness

The Lord visits Abraham, and he appears to be _____ (v. 1). Why? Abraham tells us why: "Lord God," he says, "what will you give me, seeing I go *childless*?" God has given him glorious promises, but they hang upon him having _____. But there's one problem: he doesn't have any children. As it stands, a servant of his house is his heir (v. 2-3). Abraham is shaken, but the Lord isn't fazed. The Lord reiterates to Abraham His promise, this time using still a more glorious image. Instead of the dust of the earth, the Lord promises that Abraham's offspring will be like the stars of the night sky (v. 5). Abraham looked up at the night sky, and his fears were quelled. He believed the Lord, and the Lord accounted his faith to him as _____ (v. 6).

IV. Paul's Teaching on Justification by Faith

At the advent of Jesus Christ, the _____ of God apart from the Law is revealed, being witnessed by the Law and the Prophets. This is not a righteousness we ourselves present to God by our works. It is the righteousness of God, which He gives to us through faith in Jesus Christ, so that all who believe in Jesus Christ, and trust in Him for the _____ of God are justified freely by His grace through the redemption that is in Jesus Christ. How can this be? Paul explains:

God set forth Jesus Christ as a propitiation by His blood, through faith, to demonstrate His righteousness, because in His forbearance God had passed over the sins that were previously committed, to demonstrate at the present time His righteousness, that He might be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus (Romans 3:25-26).

V. Paul Interprets Gen. 15:6

Abraham could not be justified, according to his flesh—that's what Paul implies in Rom. 4:1-4. This is because Abraham's _____ were among those 'passed over' in former times. His sins went unpunished by God. His sins were not counted against him. This is because his sins were borne by Jesus Christ. He was in as much need of Jesus Christ as you or me. He was not justified by his works, not by his obedience. He was justified by _____, as the Scriptures say: "Abraham believed God, and it was counted to him for righteousness."

VI. Our Problem

What would hinder the _____ of God's promises? Is it childlessness? Not really. There were plenty of children. The descendants of Abraham were as numerous as the stars of the heavens. Paul saw all of this and he knew what the true problem was—it's sin. If anything could hinder God's promise to His people, it was sin. It would be our stubborn and rebellious hearts, and the enormous debts we've run up against God's Law.

Justification by faith is precious. It is, in the words of Martin Luther, "the _____ to paradise," for we have no works of our own. If we stand at the gate of heaven, and Peter asks us why we should be allowed in, we can say, "For God has promised." God has promised that all who look to Him, trusting in the name of Jesus Christ, can come and dwell with Him forever as children of the Most High God.

VII. According to the Flesh

According to the flesh, Abraham and Sarah could in no way bring to pass the promise of God, that their offspring would be as the stars of the night sky. In Rom. 4:19, Paul says that Abraham's own body was already dead, since he was already about a hundred years old; and Sarah's womb, also, was dead. They could not bring to pass the promise. To put it another way: were it left up to them, God's masterplan of redemption would end with _____. But they didn't trust in themselves. Their hope did not rest in their own ability to have children, but in the "God who gives life to the dead and calls those things which do not exist as though they did" (Rom. 4:17). Their trust was in Him, and in His promise, and the Lord was pleased to reckon that faith to them as righteousness.

Abraham stood for more than just himself. He was a _____ for us, for all mankind stands dead and fruitless apart from God. In Abraham's fear at the beginning of our chapter—his fear that the promise would fail because of childlessness—Paul saw the greater problem of sin. Childlessness was not going to be a problem for Abraham or for the people of Israel. God was kind and made them fruitful and multiplied them. But God hadn't yet solved *sin*. Sin devoured the history of God's people, and it threatened to overtake the good and glorious promises of God.

But what does God say to Abraham? "Do not be afraid" (v. 1). Abraham has no children, but he should not fear—and the same goes for you. You have no righteousness, do not be afraid. Do not be afraid, but look to Christ, who is the true Son of Abraham and who is the righteousness of God—Christ is your _____, and He is your all.

VIII. From Dead to Fruitful

What did it look like for God to actually prove good on His promise to Abraham? Abraham, who was as good as dead, started bearing fruit. God miraculously raised him to life so that he could play his part in bringing about the promise of God. Abraham was justified on account of his faith, and by this faith, he was able to play his role in bringing God's promised future to pass. And the same goes for us. We are justified by trusting in God, and by this faith we are made _____. By faith, the Lord fills us with "love, joy, peace, long-suffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control" (Gal. 5:22-23), and we, too, play our role in bringing about God's promised future: "a new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells" (2 Pet. 3:13).

IX. Conclusion