

Winning the Battle of Belief (Part 3)

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[0 : 00] Verse by verse through this marvelous, marvelous book of God's beginnings and God's faithfulness in all that he's made and done.

Genesis 15, then I did one that was an off message, as it were. Now we're back in 15 for part three. This will close out, God willing, the chapter for us before we get into Abram and Sarai and Hagar in chapter 16.

The title of my message for this morning then is Winning the Battle of Belief, and it's part three, Winning the Battle of Belief. For those of you visiting, in Winning the Battle of Belief, I'm not talking about that we win our salvation through any merit or work of our own. That's not what I mean. And I've taken a couple of sermons to carefully unpack the reality that what I'm talking about is how we walk and live in the faithfulness of Jesus Christ's righteousness by grace through faith as we face the trials, temptations, and challenges of life.

How do we stay faithful? And all of that depends on and is grounded in the foundation of God's own character. It is God's own character that secures and guarantees our faithfulness.

[1 : 33] And so winning the battle of belief, brothers and sisters, is about simply walking with Jesus. It sounds so simple, and it's not, is it?

The world, the flesh, and the devil make sure that it's not an easy proposition for us to walk with Jesus, to walk with our Lord. Winning the Battle of Belief is about you and I living out the faith that God has given to us as a gift that we might believe on His name and become more like His Son. One day, He'll take us into heaven and we'll see Jesus as He is. And all of this, tears, sin, pain, suffering, doubt, will all be gone.

And we'll never have to deal with it again. Hallelujah. We'll even get new bodies, and so all of the pains and stuff will go away too. Now, as we launch into this together this morning, last week, I stressed the thought that you can't work out what isn't worked in.

And those of you who were here probably remember that. I made a theme of it through the message. I want to put this up on the screen for you to track with me as I develop that point a little more moving in and through my introduction here.

[2 : 55] If God's Word isn't worked into your heart, you cannot expect His Word to be worked out in your life. That truth operates within two parallel and related spiritual experiences in your daily life with the Lord.

Now, I want you to hear that carefully so that we walk through it together and you know what I'm talking about here. The truth that you cannot work out what has not been worked in, that truth operates along two particular lines in your spiritual everyday experience.

Now, the first of these experiences in your life each day recognizes God's activity of working His truth into your heart by the ministry of the Holy Spirit.

So, the first part of that experience that you have as a Christian every day of your life is the work that God by the power of the Spirit is doing to work that truth into your heart.

Alright? So, we might refer to that as the operation of the Spirit of God. And that's what we mean when I say that. The operation of the Spirit of God. That's the first one.

[4 : 14] The second experience that you have each day emphasizes your activity of taking God's Word into your heart as a follower, a learner, and a disciple of the Lord Jesus Christ.

So, we have God's activity of working His Word in your heart. And we have your activity of working God's Word into your heart. And so, what we might call your activity or refer to as the operation of the believer in God.

So, we have the operation of the Spirit of God and the operation of the believer in God. And those work together. So, you might ask me, well, Jeff, alright, let's ask this question.

Is it God working His Word into my heart or is it me working God's Word into my heart? And the answer is? Yes. That's right.

I even wrote it in capital letters in my notes. Yes. It's both, isn't it? Unlike our salvation. Our salvation is all of whom? God.

[5 : 20] We provide nothing but sin in that equation. And that needs to be overcome by the love of Christ, doesn't it? The power of Almighty God in a resurrected Lord.

However, in our process of spiritually growing to become more like Jesus, we're in a cooperative effort. In other words, God is not believing for you.

You believe. God is not trusting for you. You trust. God is not obeying for you. You obey. But it is a cooperative effort that you wouldn't be able to do if the Holy Spirit weren't working in your life.

So, it's a both-hand proposition. Now, the question is this. To what degree are you cooperating with the Spirit of the Lord in any of this? To become more like Jesus?

Not enough, Ben says. All right, I'm going to go over there and put my arm around him and join him. Not enough. We're all in that boat. This is what we want to repent of and move forward in.

[6 : 23] Your growth in grace. Your growth in the favor that God has bestowed on you in his Son, Jesus Christ, is a cooperative effort between you and the Lord.

God uses your efforts to learn and take in his words so that you can then work out the truth by applying it to your life situations and circumstances.

But this presupposes something. It presupposes, number one, that you're a Christian, that the Spirit of God lives in you. It presupposes, number two, that you have a steady intake of God's wisdom to be worked out and applied in the situations of your life.

You cannot do what you do not know. No. We don't live the Christian life by accident. My grandfather used to say, even a blind hog can find an acorn every now and again.

And he talked just like that. I'm from middle Georgia. Well, this is not about blind hogs finding acorns every now and again. There's no accidental coincidence, chance, luck in the Christian life.

[7 : 31] You're either growing in the Lord or you're not. There's no neutral ground. If you're not growing in the Lord, you're moving in the wrong direction. There's no stagnation in the Christian life.

Your enemy won't allow that and neither will your heart. Your heart is in constant operation. It's either moving in the Lord and toward the Lord to glorify the Lord or it's not.

This is the proposition that we live in as Christians. Another way to express this spiritual process is you living by the wisdom of God.

Another way would be that we talk about sometimes is the fear of the Lord. The fear of the Lord doesn't mean terror that makes you run away from God. The fear of the Lord is a high and holy reverence for God cultivated and nurtured in your heart as you grow in your love for him.

So living by the wisdom of God is critical to becoming like Jesus. The Holy Spirit in his role acts as your counselor and teacher as you live out the word of God, the wisdom of God.

[8 : 37] You're working out what God is working in. But you need to recognize that for God to work his truth into your heart, you have to pick up the Bible and read it.

You have to pick up the word of God and study it. Make time to be in it and give thought to it. Meditate on it. Memorize it. That's your part.

So here's what I'm going to put up on the screen for you. You need to learn to feed yourself the truth so that you are practicing taking God at his word and then applying, obeying, trusting, putting his word into the work that you live in.

In all that you think. In all that you say and do. The thinking element is God renewing your mind to think about life the way he does. So that you think about being a husband in Jesus.

His wisdom applied to you as a husband, as a wife, as a child, as a worker, a dad, a mom, whatever your role is in life.

[9 : 47] Jesus living in you and the wisdom of God teaching you to look at life and do life. The doing. Thinking about it. Renewing your mind. Thinking God's thoughts after him.

And then moving out to speak the truth in love and to provide actions. Let your hands and your feet take you into actions that serve the heart of Jesus as you serve others.

So that means that you pray for your enemies. That means that you're humble and you're meek when people are mean and the world looks at you and hates you because you love the Lord or you're trying to live a humble life.

You don't return evil for evil. This is the way that we follow in the Lord. Let me give you a couple of references that will encourage you in this.

Let the word of Christ, the scripture, this is his word. Notice, richly dwell within you with all wisdom. [10:47] That wisdom is God's wisdom. You teach, you admonish one another. You do this through psalms and hymns and spiritual songs. Singing with thankfulness in your hearts to God.

I hope we did that this morning together. Being instructed in sound doctrine by the words that we sing. Listen to this next song. We're going to do this, God willing, at the end of the service.

If I drop over dead and can't finish this. Dave, you come up here and finish. My notes are here. This is a pastor over here. And then one of you get up here and sing this song.

And make sure you end. Just let me lay right there. I'm gone. I don't care anymore. Listen to this. The love of God is greater far than tongue or pen can ever tell.

It goes beyond the highest star and reaches to the lowest hell. That's where God rescued you. That's where God rescued you. He rescued you from hell.

[11:50] He transferred you from the domain of darkness into the light of His beloved Son. He snatched you out of Satan's hands.

This is the love of God. This is the love of God. The guilty pair bowed down with care. God gave His Son to win. His erring child He reconciled and pardoned from his sin.

That's good theology. We sing that to God with thanksgiving in our heart because it helps us express that gratitude. All 176 verses of Psalm 119 reveal and rehearse the blessings and benefits and requirements of God's Holy Word.

All 176 verses. Look at just a couple of samples here. How can a young man keep his way pure? By keeping it according to your word.

Now look what he's done. How does he keep it according to your word? How does this man or woman, this person, walk in a way that's pure? Staying away from sexual sin.

[12:55] Staying away from sins of pride and ego and gossip. How do you keep yourself pure? Look, I have treasured your word in my heart. There it is.

God's not doing that for you. You're doing that. By keeping it according to your word. Your word I have treasured in my heart. I'm treasuring it. That I may not sin against you.

Then look at this one. I shall delight myself. Are you delighted in the Lord? Are you delighted in his word? I shall delight myself in your statutes.

The legal aspects of what God brings forward to us in his commands. I shall not forget your word. Deal bountifully with your servant that I may live and keep your word.

What a great prayer. And I saved the best one for me for last. This is my verse. Establish your word or promise to your servant as that which produces reverence for you.

[13:55] Where do I grow in my reverence for God? By being in God's word that reveals his character to me and captures my heart. Leads my heart.

Molds my heart. This is how we grow in the Lord. Now why have I said all this to you? Why have I gone back over this? Because it's so important to how we live our Christian lives.

This process that I've been describing is being highlighted in Abram's life from verses 1 through 6. Will you look at that with me? After these things, the word of the Lord came to Abram in a vision saying, Do not fear, Abram.

I am a shield to you. Your reward shall be very great. This is how Abram responded. O Lord God, what will you give me since I'm childless?

And the heir of my house is Eleazar of Damascus. And Abram said, Since you've given no offspring to me, one born in my house is my heir. Then behold, the word of the Lord came to Abram saying, This man shall not be your heir, but one who will come forth from your own body.

[15:06] He shall be your heir. And God took Abram outside and said to him, Now look toward the heavens and count the stars if you are able to count them. And he said to him, So shall your descendants be.

What a promise. Verse 6, Then he believed in the Lord and he reckoned to him as righteousness. This is where we left off last time.

I took 1 through 5 to preach my first sermon. And then we did verse 6 on its own. And now we'll finish the chapter out. Abram is taking God at his word about this situation and trial in his life.

He's continuing to walk with God and to face life by faith. This is what he's been doing, even though there's been some stumbles that we've seen. He's tried to walk with the Lord.

He's now trying to trust God in what God is telling him and believe to get past what his eyes see and take the Lord's promise by faith.

[16:11] And this true faith is affirmed by the Lord as God assigns this faith response in Abram the value for what it is. You'll remember this from last time, perhaps.

What is the value of this faith response in the eyes of God? Look at the last part here. Abram's faith response is evidence of what God has worked in Abram's heart.

A merit of right standing based fully on the merits of Jesus Christ, which God has bestowed on him by grace through faith. Abram did not earn this through good works.

He did not earn this. This is simply a recapping. Verse six is simply a recapping of what Abram's character in his life has been all along as he's looked to the Lord.

In chapter 14, he was able to go out and conquer this greater army and rescue Lot and all these people and bring them back. He did all of that by faith and trust in the Lord, by depending on God.

[17:12] When he got back, Melchizedek met him out in the field and they both began to worship and praise and cry out to God for thanks because they realized it is God the Lord, the Lord of hosts, the Lord of armies that has delivered this army into our hands.

They recognize that. Now, verse six is saying Abram is continuing to try to trust the Lord in a very hard thing, a very hard thing. Now, and verse six declares what God is working in, Abram is showing now that he's working out.

He is believing God. He is standing on the character of Almighty God. Now, chapter 16, that's going to get rocked a little bit, but you'll see it'll come around.

Nevertheless, that's what we see happening in Abram's life right now. In verses seven through 21, the Lord leads Abram in a spiritually binding agreement between the two of them.

Let's look at that beginning in verse seven. And then God said to Abram, I am here it is again. The I am statement. I am the Lord who brought you out of Ur of the Chaldeans to give you this land to possess it.

[18:26] He said, oh, Lord, how may I know that I will possess it? So God said to Abram, bring me a three-year-old heifer, a three-year-old female goat, a three-year-old ram, a turtle dove and a young pigeon.

So Abram brought all these to God and he cut them in two and laid each half opposite the other. But he did not cut the birds. The birds of prey came down upon the carcasses and Abram drove them away.

Now, when the sun was going down, a deep sleep fell upon Abram and behold, terror and great darkness fell upon him. God said to Abram, while he's in the midst of this deep sleep, know for certain that your descendants will be strangers in a land that is not theirs, where they will be enslaved and oppressed for 400 years.

But I will also judge the nation whom they will serve. And afterward, they will come out with many possessions. All right. What's that nation? Egypt.

This is the bondage in Egypt. As for you, verse 15, you shall go out to your fathers in peace. You will be buried at a good old age. Then in the fourth generation, they will return here for the iniquity of the Amorite is not yet complete.

[19:50] It came about when the sun had set that it was very dark. And behold, there appeared a smoking oven and a flaming torch, which passed between these pieces.

On that day, the Lord made a covenant with Abram, saying, To your descendants I have given this land from the river of Egypt as far as the great river, the river Euphrates, The Canaanites, the Canaanites, the Canaanites, the Canaanites, the Canaanites, the Canaanites, the Canaanites, and the Canaanites, and the Canaanites.

Now, these are obviously are the tribes that make up this particular part of the land of what will be Israel. And God is saying, I'm going to bring judgment on each of them and all of them in a complete way.

So this agreement that God is now making with Abram expresses God's commitment to the salvation of what we know to be his elect, his chosen ones.

That's who God's talking about, who will come in the lineage of Abram. So it's an amazing reality because it doesn't just include Jews, does it?

[21:09] But what this does is it binds, this agreement binds the Lord to his promise to protect and to provide, to secure a land for the national identity of these people as the people of God.

Now, it's very important. So hear this. So what we have, we have a promise related to the Jewish people. And we have here a promise binding for Gentiles who will be grafted in as the people of God.

And yet it's very important that you keep in mind God's promises to the Jewish nation are not the same as his promises to the church. So that we, as Gentiles, saved as just like the Jews, we're saved by grace through faith in Christ.

We are not, not, not the new Israel. We have not replaced Israel in God's program. Okay? So don't take on that theology and think of ourselves in that way. We believe that Israel has promises unique and distinct to them, many of them yet to be fulfilled.

[22 : 21] That's a fascinating study in itself. And we would see if we went into some of these other issues in the, in the Old Testament, we would see that being brought out and then tied it into revelation.

We would see that coming out. Maybe that's in the future. We'll see what God does with all that. The church and Israel are distinct in God's plan.

And as I said, still promises to be fulfilled to the nation of Israel. This is the beginning of what we're seeing in the way of God making a covenant with Abram about this very reality concerning the land. You heard this terrible, sickening, genocidal statement shouted from the mountaintops over the last months, from the river to the sea. That is a derogatory comment aimed at genocide of the Jewish nation.

That says, let's wipe them out from the Jordan River to the sea and everything in between. Well, I've got news for them. They can't overturn what God has promised.

[23 : 29] This is a covenant that will be kept. This land, by God's decree, belongs to Israel. And Israel will have it. And it doesn't matter who gets nukes and who doesn't.

They will not be able to take this land from God's people because God has based His own character in a covenant with Abram that this will be an everlasting promise to His people.

And we are blessed by this because the numbers of people that can't be counted include us as we're grafted in as Gentiles, Gentile believers.

In the same way as Abram, that is, by grace through faith. Abram was saved by grace through faith. We are saved by grace through faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. So we are grafted in to this promise. Now, what I want to do this morning is conclude this little four-part outline in chapter 15. And I want to deal with the fourth truth. This will be the fourth of the truths that I've done so far.

[24 : 34] I've done three others. In winning the battle of belief. And what I mean again, it's remaining faithful to the Lord as we face off with life's challenges. We take God at His word. We don't play games with God's truth.

We apply it to our lives and we let the word change us. Change us how, Jeff? Change us into the image of Jesus. Make us more like Jesus. Folks, listen.

God will bring trials, challenges, temptations, and issues into your life by His design. And He will use those as the God that we read about in Psalm 24.

This great majestic God. He will use those trials, challenges, temptations, and everything else to conform you to the image of His Son. And so you don't want to try to wiggle out of what's hard for you.

Because the sovereign God is designing that in your life. If you play with that, you're going to end up with a four-by-four across the face. And I did, literally. That happened to me. Running from the Lord.

[25 : 38] God will get your attention. Amen? He will. I don't know how He'll do it. He nuances that. That's up to Him, not me. The point is this. You cannot run from the truth of God.

If you're in the Lord, God will discipline you. And you don't want to be there. It's a fearful thing to fall under the discipline of the Lord. When God spans, it hurts.

When He does that spiritual surgery, it's pretty serious stuff. So here's what I'm saying to you. Like Abram, when these trials and challenges and hardships and temptations come into your life, the first thing you ought to do is step back and say, Alright, alright, you've got my attention.

You're obviously wanting to use this circumstance and situation in my life to show me things about my heart. Because what I feel right now is squeezed and it doesn't feel good. Now you need to pay attention to what's coming out.

What's coming out? As God squeezes you through these circumstances, what's coming out? What are you thinking? What are you saying? What are you planning? And if it doesn't please Jesus, you need to get rid of it.

[26 : 49] You need to axe it. A-X-E Cut at the root. Repent and replace.

Repent from that. Turn to the Lord and say, Lord, I'm going to need all of you to help me move through this. And God's going to say, Yeah, that's exactly where I want you.

You didn't know that. You had forgotten that. But I didn't. I'm not going to let you run off into deceitful lusts that defame my name and my word.

If you're my child, if you're God's child, God's going to say to you, as it were, I will discipline you, but I do it because I love you. Isn't that what Hebrews tells us? He's a father who loves his kids. So he disciplines us.

So when you face these things, like Abram is facing right now, everything in Abram's life is saying to him, this cannot happen. What God is telling me cannot happen.

[27 : 52] I'm 85. Sarai, my wife, is 75. She's way past childbearing age. Not only that, she's been barren all her life. She hasn't been able to have kids.

And God is saying, this heir will come from your body, Abram. It will be your child. I don't know. The word doesn't tell us if he said to Abram also, and Sarai, your wife.

Which, Dora, I kind of wish that had been in here. Right? It would be like, oh, okay. You sure? Me and Sarai, we're going to get this done. Absolutely, by the power of the Spirit, it's going to happen. You'll see. You'll see. But he had enough to be faithful, didn't he? God doesn't always give us all the details. He didn't give Abram a blow-by-blow of how he was going to do it, when, the timing, when he was...

He just told him, this is going to happen. And so, remember last sermon? W-A-I-T. You remember that? Wait. That is your cue to wait on the Lord. And wait doesn't mean sit on your spiritual hands and do nothing.

[28 : 56] Oh, no. And I gave you the acronym. You go back and listen to that. All right. Now, you interrupted me, so now I get back to my notes. Okay.

So, the fourth truth in winning the battle of belief, remaining faithful to the Lord, here's the way we dealt with it. The first one was our object of belief. The second one was our enemies or concern the enemies of belief.

We saw that in the second time. And then, the blessings of belief is what we dealt with last week. And now, this week, as we conclude, the wisdom of belief.

Now, you might say, well, Jeff, isn't the wisdom of belief a blessing of belief? Couldn't that have gone under number three? Yeah, it could, but I wanted to highlight it out because most of this chapter is going to be built around this ceremony that God designs.

And what we're seeing in this ceremony is not only the love of the Lord, but the wisdom of God and what He's doing in Abram's life to reassure Him. I think it's a beautiful thing. God didn't have to do this, but He did.

[30 : 00] So, the question we're dealing with, what does the heavenly wisdom of belief in God and His Word establish for us in our daily living on the earth? How does it ground us? What does it do for us?

What does this wisdom carry us into and through? Alright, the foundation, remember, the foundation for our relationship with God is God Himself.

It is in who He is. Who He is is why we are who we are in Christ. So, God's actions to save you by putting you in right relationship with Himself through Jesus are based in His character as the God of salvation.

God saved you by His own character. He is a God of love and salvation. That's who He is. So, that's what He does in perfect, perfect form.

If you notice verse 7 with me, we'll highlight this. God is responding now to Abram and He says, I am the Lord who brought you out of Ur of the Chaldeans to give you this land to possess it.

[31 : 14] Notice the land, the land, the land is always mentioned foremost in this covenant that He's making with Him. And then He asked Him, O Lord, how may I know that I will possess it?

Well, God's got to deal with this first part. In verse 7, God tells Abram, I am the Lord. You see it there on the screen. I am the Lord.

I'm in control. I'm sovereign. I'm king. I am. This is the foundation. He's not going to give him all the details. He's going to remind him, I'm sorry, Abram, in this equation, who is God?

And who's not? Okay. Let's just start right there. Now, this is the reason that all that God does stands. Because He's God.

God's character is the guarantee. for God's promises and actions. So what do we run to to rehearse and to reinforce and to reinvigorate our confidence, trust, and faith in what God is, who God is, what God does?

[32 : 20] We run to the character of Christ, don't we? We run to the person of Jesus. And we camp out in who He is. And we ask ourselves, am I relating to Jesus in a way that is true to who He is?

Or am I trying to make Him into the image I want Him to be in this moment? I want Him to be a God who's going to say yes to my sin and my plan. Nope. It doesn't work that way.

God will never compromise His character to accommodate your sin. Never. And now the Lord calls to mind what He's already done to establish Abram as God's instrument of blessing for other people.

Look what He did. He didn't just do this for Abram. All this effort that God is going to to save Abram and keep Abram faithful, this has gone beyond Abram because the promise goes beyond Abram.

It affected my life. It affects your life. who brought you out. I'm sorry, Abram. Who did that? I did that. You were lost in sin and deceit and doubt serving the moon God.

[33 : 33] Pagan gods. Gods that don't even exist. Demons. And I brought you out. I rescued you. I brought you out of this.

I sought you. I sought you. You weren't seeking me. I sought you. I found you. You didn't find me. I saved you. I safeguarded you.

I brought you out of darkness and death to light and life. And now I am. I am giving you blessings of my love for you.

He's reminding Abram, look around and take in and reflect on all of the ways I've proven myself faithful to you so far. Have I ever let you down?

Have I ever reneged on anything that you've needed that I promised? No, you haven't Lord. Alright. Now verse 8. Oh Lord, how may I know?

[34 : 28] How may I know? This is what this means. How may I be sure or certain? This is a plea for reassurance. Now here's what this isn't.

Abram's response isn't negative. This is a humble, meek, honest request for information. For details to fill in the blanks of what he doesn't know and doesn't understand.

I think it is fascinating how God answers this question. Everything else in this chapter is based on answering this question from this man. The whole ceremony is based on answering this for this man.

That's not a bad thing for us to ask. You just need to be prepared as you go to God's Word and you pray, God help me live your will and you're searching the Scriptures to hear from the Lord.

This is how we hear from God is based on what God's written to us in His Word. You may not be able to turn to page 89 under Exodus 30 and read, this is the college you shall go to.

[35 : 32] Its name is. Its cubits are. You should buy this house and not that one. Buy the one on Wichita not the one on... That's not how it works, is it?

You don't always get all... Marry this one. You need to marry Elizabeth. You do not need to marry Sue. Okay, thanks God. And you hear people do all kinds of craziness to try to discern that.

God doesn't always fill in all the details but He gives us the principles to live by so that we can make wise decisions that are pleasing to Him. Sometimes maybe the Lord, because He knows who you're going to choose, maybe the Lord is up there.

Now this is just Jeff. Maybe the Lord is just up there going, you know, it doesn't really matter. I know who you're going to choose. Just choose one and be faithful. Choose one and be faithful.

Do the best you can. Lord, I weighed them up. Sue and Elizabeth. They're like neck and neck. You know, I need a photo finish thing to figure this out. And God says, you know, choose one, dude, and be faithful.

[36 : 35] Whichever one you choose, serve me. Be a good husband. Be faithful. Have joy in your life. Learn her. Grow with her.

Serve her. Cry with her. Laugh with her. Live life with her. And do it with me. Grab her by the hand and say, honey, follow me as I follow Jesus and we'll have the greatest adventure two people have

ever had.

It won't be easy. It won't be smooth. But as long as we hold hands together as we follow Jesus, we'll be fine.

Abram is concerned about his circumstances that I've outlined for you. And that's why he's asking this. Verse 9.

Bring me all this. A three-year-old heifer, three-year-old goat, three-year-old ram, turtle dove, pigeon. All of this now.

[37 : 35] What is this about? These items are vital to the ceremony, the covenant ceremony God's designing. They reflect sacrifices of God's choosing and they are indicative of what Israel will come to use in its sacrificial system in the priesthood, isn't it?

You recognize these? Later, they will do a lot of sacrificing in the priesthood for this. So what are we seeing developed here? This is the Abrahamic covenant.

This is a biblical covenant. And a biblical covenant, as you see there on the screen, is a holy contract of binding spiritual responsibility. It's quite serious. It comes from the people living in this particular era binding themselves to business or family contracts by a ceremony similar to this.

And God is using what these people are familiar with to bring it into what He wants to do with Abram in establishing His covenant with him. So, important, God is initiating this covenant.

You see that? This wasn't Abram's idea, was it? This is all God. God is initiating. He's saying that He is obligating Himself to fulfill all that He's promised to Abram.

[38 : 50] This ceremony offers Abram then, what is it? A visible testimony of God's fullest commitment to honor what He's promised. God is giving Abram a visual reassurance of what He's promised him.

Abram, I know that you can't see this happening. Your old worn out body, your wife's old barren worn out body, you don't see any possibility for that, but I'm going to give you a visible reassurance now that this promise will be fulfilled.

I'll keep my promise. It's so good. It's akin, I think, to what the Lord has given us in the cross and the empty tomb of the Lord Jesus.

These were God's instruments of demonstrating His commitment to His new covenant to save His chosen ones from death through His Son.

And so we have this symbol of reassurance, don't we? And remembrance. We have an empty tomb that reminds us that we serve a resurrected Jesus, not a Jesus we're putting back on the cross.

[39 : 56] That work's done once for all. If you look with me at verses 10 and 11, He brought all these to Him. This is Abram.

Abram brings all the animals. He cuts them in two. He lays the halves opposite one another. And He didn't cut the birds.

And then this verse inserted here. Kind of weird. The birds of prey came down upon the carcasses and Abram drove them away. Now one of the things that that's telling us is some time has gone by. Abram's gotten all this ready and he's sitting back and he's waiting and nothing's happening. It's been long enough to where the scavenger buzzards or whatever have gotten wind of the carcasses and they've flown in and they're trying to land on them.

So a little time's gone by here. And Abram is being made to wait on the Lord. You see? Wait on the Lord. Very interesting.

[40 : 59] I think these verses record Abram's involvement in the ceremony as he prepares the animals and then as he protects the sacrifice from being spoiled.

But folks, note, this is the only activity which Abram is involved in through the entire event. This is all God had him do. And I think it speaks of Abram being available, obedient, and watchful.

Now catch those. Did you catch them? I probably should have made a slide for that. This is about Abram being available to God, obedient to God, and watchful in the Lord.

And if you don't have that first one, the others are immaterial. Are you available to the Lord in your heart? That's a way of asking, are you humble? Are you receptive to the truth of God working in your heart?

Are you ready to adopt God's plan in your trial so that God can work His Word into your heart and conform you more to Jesus? Are you trying to find a way to get out?

[42 : 08] And you're going to do your plan. I can tell you that will not end well. We have too many examples in Scripture where that does not end well.

Now, friends, as you and I strive to win the battle of belief in our walk of faith, these are our responsibilities as well.

Be available, obedient, and watchful. Now, hear what I'm about to say in the way I say it, please. We must set the table of our hearts to worship God in the same manner as Abram as we walk in covenant with the Lord.

Are you setting the table of your heart for worship every day, not just on Sunday? So, like Abram, being available, obedient, and watchful are aspects of our response.

We are, in this way, responding to God's initiative in our salvation and our response to His ongoing work to set us apart in our service to Him.

[43 : 11] So, we are simply offering a response to the Lord for all of His faithfulness to us in the Lord Jesus. Why wouldn't we want to do that? Why would we want to wiggle out of responding to God in ways that please Him?

I'll tell you why I'd want to wiggle out of that. Because I'm prideful and selfish and greedy among many other things. That's why. And I need to repent of that because it has no place in the life of a believer.

These are the things we fight. And this is why I'm bringing you a message about winning the battle of belief. Winning the battle of being faithful. When it gets hard.

If you're not in a hard place right now, just wait. I don't mean to sound pessimistic. I'm being realistic, I hope, and I'm getting you ready for it.

We are responding to God's grace toward us as we live available, obedient, and watchful in this new covenant in Christ.

[44 : 20] Now, we don't contribute anything to our salvation, neither did Abram. He's already justified in the Lord when these things occur.

So this isn't about Abram getting a second blessing or some weird spiritual ritual to infuse him with greater spiritual ability.

That is not at all what any of this is. He is simply being faithful and obedient to God in what God is calling him to. Abram prepares to worship the Lord according to God's initiative and direction.

That's exactly how we... This is why we do a call to worship. Our call to worship is to put our minds on how God himself has told us he wants to be worshiped by his word.

We worship by the word. We don't make it up. I'm not up here trying to get you feeling happy, feeling full. This is not a happy, clappy event.

[45 : 21] This is a holy event where we're coming before the Lord and putting ourselves unto his word and saying, God, please purge me of anything that isn't pleasing to you that my worship might be received by the Spirit and taken to you and made worthy of you.

That is what I want in this moment more than anything else. If your feelings follow on that and gratitude and tears and hands raised, praise the Lord.

But we don't do this to try to work up the Spirit and convince him to come down. He's living in us. We just need the Spirit to work in us to express a heart of gratitude to God.

I'm thankful that I got up today and got to breathe and my heart's still beating. My wife's still alive to be my best friend. Things are pretty good.

Things are pretty good. Abram prepares to worship the Lord by following God's direction.

[46 : 26] And listen to this. Abram is maintaining a watchful, vigilant, obedient heart before the Lord. Why? Why is Abram doing this? Because our spiritual enemies do not sit idly by in our efforts to please the Lord, do they?

The world, the flesh, and the devil aren't going to sit by and watch you like this and go, oh, bless his heart. Isn't that sweet?

Your enemies are calculating how to take you down, defame Jesus, make a mockery of your faith. That's where they live.

It's why they live. It's who they are. And so that brings us to the birds. The birds may be symbolic of our struggle against the self-centered and worldly and satanic things that would swoop in, as it were, and defile our communion with the Lord.

See, this verse in verse 11, this is a verse about defilement. These birds are considered unclean. And so Abram has to keep them away lest they defile the offering that's going to be made to the Lord.

[47 : 37] Do you see us guarding our heart here from sin? Because it doesn't do us any good to bring our worship to the Lord and harbor secret sin in our life or act like we have no need for confession of that sin.

The Lord's not going to receive that from us. That's hypocrisy. Now, in contrast to these birds of defilement, Abram prepares God's prescribed animals for the Lord.

And it's because God Himself set these animals apart for His holy use. He sanctified them. It's the same for us. As God sets us apart in Jesus Christ as living, holy sacrifices fit for His use.

You see the same thing happening. Because why? God's made a covenant with us. What is that covenant? It's a new covenant in the blood of Christ. Right? Who was the sacrifice?

Jesus. Jesus. And in that new covenant, God has made us fit to serve Him. Look at a couple of verses that flesh this out for you.

[48 : 44] Present your bodies a living... See, we're not dead sacrifices. Thank the Lord He didn't have to split us in half and put us on two sides of the world or something, you know. Present your bodies a living and holy sacrifice acceptable to God which is your spiritual service of what?

Worship. This is a call for you to live this day to day to day. Not just on Sunday. Now notice how we can do this.

I've given you another verse here. Draw near to God and He will draw near to you. You see, you're doing that. Cleanse your hands, you sinners.

Purify your hearts, you double-minded. Oh my goodness. Notice what spiritual activities our drawing near to God involves us in.

What are those activities? We're to cleanse our actions and purify our desires and motives. Now, there are many who believe this verse actually refers to unbelievers and so here that would mean that they need to be saved.

[49 : 53] We can also apply this to our understanding of what Psalm 24 told us. Psalm 25 would tell us we need to be concerned about the purity of our heart and our worship, don't we?

We need to be concerned that we're not coming in here and sitting down and making a mockery of worship because we're hiding sin in our life. We're living in hypocrisy or whatever it is.

not in repentance. Not in repentance. Folks, listen. I am not qualified to do what I'm doing before you save by the grace of Almighty God and Jesus Christ my Lord.

There is nothing that qualifies me to be doing this any more than you aside from the grace of God in my life. He's chosen me to be the proclaimer right now at Grace Church Williamsburg and it is up to me to be faithful in doing that.

What does He have for you? Because whatever He has for you I can't fill that. I couldn't step into your place. That's unique to you in your walk with the Lord. What's He want to do with you?

[51 : 00] What's He wanting to do with you that's not being done because you're being stubborn or prideful or afraid or worried or anxious or preoccupied or distracted or just plain rebellious.

We need to repent. Notice what this last verse says. If anyone cleanses himself from unholy things he will be a vessel for honor.

Sanctified means set apart by God. Made holy. useful to the Master prepared for every good work. Do you want to be useful to the Master? Do you want to live a life prepared for the work God wants to do through you with people that you meet and situations you encounter?

Well, part of that preparedness is cleansing yourself from unholy things. Repenting of unholy things in your life and walking with the Lord.

Now, some people would have a hard time with this. You know, I've been told so I'm told sermons like this run people off. Don't you dare talk about sin.

[52 : 14] Don't you dare get in their faces and talk to them about things that they might say think and do that reflect sin and call them to deal with it. That turns people off.

People only get a little bit of time off through the week. When they come on Sunday they don't want to leave here feeling worse than they did when they came in Jeff. For heaven's sake. Well, I'll tell you what.

When we get into the word of God you should rejoice that God is giving you instruction in love to repent. And repentance should be at the top of your list walking out of that door today.

Living a life of repentance in Christ and that God is giving you that in His love. That's a gift. Are you making the most of that gift? Now if you say Jeff, I'm really not then I can help you.

I can help you. I can pray with you. I can lead you in praying to the Lord and asking God will you help me? Isn't this what Abram did?

[53 : 15] God will you just help me be certain? Will you reassure me? My eyes see this stuff and it just it just drags me down.

Please, please Lord help me see. And God comes and makes this covenant with Abram in this profound way. It's just a beautiful and tender thing.

If, if anyone cleanses himself from unholy things that's the if. Living a holy life is our response of grateful worship to God.

We're responding in humility to God's grace toward us. But listen, don't expect your world to support and encourage and reward you for living a godly life.

The world won't do that. These people should and want to but the world won't. They're not going to pat you on the back for faithfulness to Jesus. So just as you and I couldn't reasonably expect buzzards to go against their instinct toward these carcasses, we can't reasonably expect the world to look in on our communion with God and not respond from their instinct.

[54 : 29] I did. I used to mock Christians while I towed the boat to the lake. Most of your unsafe friends, most of your unsafe family, perhaps even some of your Christian friends, family, or co-workers will not understand or appreciate you setting your life apart to God for holy use.

In fact, the world is intimidated and convicted by our holiness. A lot of the reason they hate us is because we make them look bad. We don't mean to, but when you live for Jesus and not that other stuff, when you're meek in the face of persecution and ridicule and evil and you don't give it back, it makes people look like what they are and they don't like that.

You know, they killed Jesus for that. But there's something even greater for us to see and learn here. And I want to share it with you from the Prince of Preachers.

This is a quote from Charles Spurgeon. I don't have a slide for it. I just wanted you to hear it. In his typical eloquent way, listen to what Spurgeon says. Abram, after being justified by faith, was led more distinctly to behold the power of sacrifice.

That's what this is about. Behold, Abram, the power of sacrifice. By God's command, Abram killed three bullocks, three goats, three sheep, with turtle doves and pigeons, being all the creatures ordained for God's sacrifice.

[56 : 10] The patriarch's hands are stained with blood. He handles the butcher's knife. He divides the beasts. He kills the birds.

He places them in an order revealed to him by God's Holy Spirit at the time. And there they are. Abram learns that there is no meeting with God except through sacrifice.

God has shut every door except that over which the blood is sprinkled. All acceptable approaches to God must be through an atoning sacrifice, and Abram sees this.

while the promise is still in his ears, while the ink is yet wet in the pen of the Holy Spirit, writing him down as justified, Abram must see a sacrifice.

Isn't that how we come to faith? Verses 12-16 rehearse this sleep and this terror and this prophecy about Israel.

[57 : 27] And it's very interesting to me because Abram's terror and great darkness are appropriate for the context of this situation. He has been admitted into the realm of sacrificial blood atonement.

Who is fit for that? Where the suffering and death and spilled blood of the sacrifice was all given on Abram's behalf. He's seeing that.

He's recognizing that this sacrifice, this blood sacrifice had to be made for this covenant to be ratified. That is all sobering him, settling on him.

And this scene, I think, reminds us of what took place as Jesus in his final moments on the cross, when the terror and darkness swept over the land as he died.

Do you remember that in the story? As Jesus died, great darkness and terror, and so all the people that were at the cross fell in terror, and the centurion cried out, or the soldier cried out, this man truly was the Son of God.

[58 : 33] He did that in terror, realizing as it gripped his soul. I think that's what this is. the terror and the darkness are symbols of severe suffering and divine judgment.

Now, there's no deliverance apart from sacrifice and judgment. The punishment for sin is judgment and death. That's why Jesus had to take it for us. Deliverance from sin came by judgment against God's Son and his sacrificial death as our substitute.

Somebody had to pay the death penalty for us. And Jesus was the only one that could do it. And God accepted. Now, we see this as God prophesies Israel's future in both great suffering and in his judgment on the sins of Egypt.

And the Amorite here is a representation for the Canaanite people that were listed later in the passage. So, bondage in Egypt is going to bring great affliction to the Hebrews.

Abram's descendants. But it will also accompany the fulfillment of God's promise to bless the world through Abram. Abram, I'm going to bless the world because the world is going to come to be justified in my sight in the same way you were justified in my sight, by grace through faith in the Savior.

[60 : 02] Abram is putting his faith in the Savior of the world from this side of the cross looking forward to that time. He didn't know it would be Jesus, but he knew that God would bring a deliverer and Abram was trusting that promise.

We look at the cross from the other side looking back and now we see the mystery explained. It is this God-man, Jesus, who hung on the cross as our substitute, taking on our sin as God laid our sin on him, as it were, crediting to him the sin we live and commit, so that he could then die, suffer and die, the death penalty for those sins, not his sins, our sins.

And then God raised him from the dead as evidence of accepting all of that from his son on our behalf. And now God imputes our credits to our account what Jesus earned for us in his perfect sinless life.

he never sinned. And so now we get that righteous life as if we lived it, while he got death as if he had lived our sin.

Do you see the trade? The exchange? That's the miracle of the good news. That's the new covenant in the blood of the Lord Jesus Christ. And this is what we're celebrating, even as Abram celebrates it in this covenant with God.

[61 : 35] All this will come with deliverance, but it will also come with great suffering. So personally now he tells Abram, you're not going to live to see all of this, but you're going to live a long good life and you're going to be buried with your ancestors and all that's good, okay?

Now all of this is good. In verses 17 through 21, we have the most important elements of the covenant that God's making with Abram, and they're the symbols of the smoking oven and the flaming torch.

And what we can say about these, we don't have to unpack this in some mysterious, mystical way, we can simply say the smoking oven and flaming torch represent the presence of God himself in this hallowed ceremony.

This is how God chose to reveal himself in the ceremony with Abram. Remember, Abram's in this deep sleep. Now normally what would happen is you would cut these animals in half and then both parties involved in the covenant would walk between the halves.

And what they did that for was to say, to symbolize, if I break this covenant with you, let what happened to these animals happen to me. And so they were trying to take on the somberness and the seriousness of what this agreement, this spiritual contract held within it.

[63 : 03] Now I want you to notice in the text, only God walked between the animals. Do you see that? Abram didn't walk between them, did he? Only God did in the form of the smoking oven and the flaming torch.

And this is significant because it's God's way of ratifying the covenant with Abram in a way which ensures its fulfillment. In other words, this covenant does not depend on Abram's faithfulness but on God's faithfulness.

And isn't that what happened to us in Christ? What did you contribute to the cross of Christ? Your sin. What else? Nada. Zero, right?

Hallelujah. Hallelujah. That God loved you when you had nothing to offer but your worst. And he took you and his son and gave you his best and when he did it, he didn't hold back.

He got the worst of you and you got the best of him. And that's the way it has to be. And we call that grace. The favor of God on those who don't deserve it in Christ.

[64 : 14] All through Jesus and him alone. God will God to God to you to!! Abram and his descendants.

On that day the Lord made a covenant with Abram and notice to your descendants I have given this land. Folks, that stands. That stands. Verses 19 through 21 as we've already read this list of these

tribes, they represent God's judgment on unbelief and all sin.

So just as Abram contributed nothing when God called him from spiritual death to salvation, all that Abram can do in this ceremony is receive God's promise and blessing of relationship.

Abram, I love you and I'm going to stand by my promise to you. And this ceremony shows it.

Forgiveness comes by looking to God and his covenant with us in Jesus Christ.

So the greater blessing in this sacred ceremony is this reality. I'll put it up here and this is my closing remark for you from Charles Spurgeon. It is only in the midst of the sacrifice that God can enter into a covenant relationship with sinful man.

[65 : 53] God cometh in his glory like a flame of fire but subdued and tempered to us as with a cloud of smoke in the person of Jesus Christ.

And he comes through the bloody sacrifice which has been offered once for all through Jesus Christ on the tree. man meets with God in the midst of the sacrifice of Christ.

You can see why they called him the prince, huh? Let's bow our hearts before the Lord and pray.

Almighty God and Father, we are enraptured with the wonder of the cross of Jesus and the glorious gospel of your favor on sinners through the blood of your son.

And we thank you almighty God that as we are faced with our sin, you have provided a way for us to turn away from sin and to life in the name of Jesus.

So I pray for all those souls who may be here this morning struggling with that faith, not sure, for people who might be struggling in the temptation of sin.

[67 : 10] All of those also who are not sure that they have a relationship with you through Jesus, I pray that you would make clear to them today that your invitation is for them to cry out to you for forgiveness for their sins as they trust that Jesus died for them on the cross and made it personal to them so that they could have eternal life with you and be forgiven for their sins past, present, and future, forever.

Thank you for the wonder of your love for sinners. Thank you for the truth of your word and for the example of these wonderful people in scripture and you don't spare any of the details of their failures as well as their faithfulness.

May we look to you now through this week to help us walk with you in the love of Christ that we might become more like Jesus. In his name we pray. Amen.