

Introduction: How many of you would describe yourself as someone who loves to work? How many of you love work so much that you hope you never take a day off? How many of you have a flawless record of punching the clock? Let me introduce you to Ms. Elena Griffing. **PICTURE**

Ms. Elena, she looks like the kind of woman that would want me to call her that, shows up to work every day at Alta Bates Medical Center in Berkeley, CA with a smile on her face, energy of those 60 years younger than her, and her signature 3-inch heels. **PICTURE**

Though she works as an administrative assistant, she has delivered test results, assisted in the burn center, and on one occasion, helped deliver a baby in the parking lot. Not bad for an 85 year-old woman!

Ms. Elena has been punching the time clock since Harry Truman was in office in the late forties and has not taken a sick day since Eisenhower was in office in 1952, and only took one then because she had to have her appendix removed! Amazingly, if not controversially, she was back in the office the next day typing on her manual typewriter with an IV in her arm. She's only taken 1 sick day in 65 years! Wow.

"I love coming to work. I really truly do. I love watching people get well and every day, I learn and learn and learn. I can't wait to get to work in the morning. . . . Some people retire at 65, but good grief, I was just getting my second wind at 65. I feel like I'm 20." "

FCF: Stories like Elena's inspire us because some days we do not even want to get out of bed, much less enthusiastically go to the same job for 65 years. But Elena also inspires us because she is a great picture of faithfulness. Most of us desire to be dependable in our work life, in our church life, and in our home life. We desire this because God made us in his image and God is a faithful God. I want to introduce you to our Covenant making and covenant keeping God as we consider Jesus as our . . .

"The True & Greater Covenant" **Genesis 15**

Our text this morning will summon us to . . .

The Point: Find great assurance by trusting in the faithfulness of our covenant keeping God.

As we move through Genesis 15, we will first look at what it means to receive the great promises of God through faith. Then we will dive into what sustains and strengthens that faith, namely resting in the faithfulness of God.

I. Receive the great promises of God through faith (Genesis 15:1-6).

Read Genesis 12:1-3. Chapters 12-14 show us how Abraham was Called by God, Blessed by God materially on the journey with his wife Sarah and brother Lot. He even rescued Lot from the hands of Chedorlaomer and his coalition of evil kings. That brings us to chapter 15.

Read 15:1-6

- *"The word of the Lord came,"* (first time we see this in Scripture) God speaks this way to his prophets. What does he say?
- *"I am your shield..."* Abraham just experienced God's protection in battle, and now God promises his present and future protection. God is our Shepherd. He protects us with his rod and staff. God is our Warrior, and he protects us with his shield.
- *"your reward will be very great."* Abraham just defeated a number of kings and he could have plundered his enemies, but he turned his back on those possessions out of obedience to God, and God

says, Abraham, your reward will be very great.” Or is the NIV says, which I really like: “Behold, I am your very great reward.”

In verses 2-3, we find Abraham fearful and doubting.

- Fear is a common response to an encounter with God, but Abraham’s fear extends to his doubts over how God will accomplish his promises. We see this in his words to God. . .
- “What will you give me? Will my inheritance be passed through my servant, Eliezer of Damascus?”
- At this point, it does not look like it will be a member of my own house.

God reestablishes his promises in 4-5

- Verse 4 provides God’s answer. Sometimes God communicates in the smallest, stillest (wc) voice. Other times, he shows up in visions and provides answers in the grandest ways. This is one of those times. Verse 5... Abraham, in this vision, is taken by God outside of his tent. He is told to look up at the stars. And count.” This was an epic moment . . .
- Stars – It is hard for us to appreciate this as city dwellers. Stars... Crittenden County...
- Did you catch that one operative phrase? “if you are able.” What is God saying? You can’t count them! And neither will you be able to count the number of descendents that I will give you. One Republic ain’t got nuthin’ on the God of Abraham.
- He’s still counting stars. Because every time a person places faith in Christ, a son of Abraham is born and a star is born.
- These is a big promise from a big God!

Abraham Believes!

- *Verse 6.* “And he believed the Lord, and he counted it to him as righteousness.”
- Abraham, as he is looking up at the stars, believes God. He leans into the heart of God and trusts that what God says, God will do. And it is his faith that causes God “count” Abraham righteous in his sight.
- This is the question every person in the world should be asking: “How can I be right with God?” The answer, from beginning to end, is faith.
- Do you share the faith of Abraham? For some of you, the only thing that is holding you back from receiving salvation is that simple step of faith. There is no other way to relate to God except through faith, but faith carries great blessing and reward.
- **“Though you have not seen him, you love him. Though you do not now see him, you believe in him and rejoice with joy that is inexpressible and filled with glory, obtaining the outcome of your faith, the salvation of your souls.” (1 Peter 1:8-9)**

T: We should receive all of the great promises of God through faith. #2.

II. Rest assured in the faithfulness of God to fulfill all of his promises (Genesis 15:7-21).

- V 7: “I am the Lord who brought you out from Ur of the Chaldeans to give you this land to possess.”
- Then we find the key question in verse 8. It is an honest question and understandable question. “O Lord God, (he recognizes God as God), *how am I to know* that I shall possess it?”
- Anytime you are reading narrative in the Bible, whether you are in the OT or the NT, pay careful attention to the dialogue. Oftentimes the authors will reveal key truths through the insertion of dialogue that help us interpret the passage.
- Why does Abraham, though believing in God’s promise, ask this question? He is looking for assurance.
- Don’t miss this! Abraham, the father of faith and friend of God, needed assurance. After all, the odds are stacked against him. From the world’s vantage point, it is impossible that he and his wife would bear a child at 90 and 100 years old! Sarah laughed...

- Abraham was looking for assurance, and so do we. I know there are times you struggle in your faith. I know there are times you struggle to believe God's promises. I know there are times you doubt the faithfulness of God.
- "Mature faith takes doubt to God." – Driscoll
- And God graciously speaks back to us the words of **Genesis 18:14**, "**Is anything too hard for the Lord?**"

App: Do you ever struggle to wait for the fulfillment of God's promises? Does your hope ever wane?

- God is seldom early, but he's always on time. From our perspective, God is often late. . . .
- I'm still working on my degree. I was supposed to be done two years ago. I'm still waiting on that job opportunity to materialize. I thought I'd be married by now. What about kids? When is God going to come through? God is seldom early, but he's always on time.
- God's answer to Abraham's question ("how am I to know?") comes in verse 9. The answer is covenant!

T: God extends assurance through a formal covenant bond. Verses 9-21 tell the story.

What is a Covenant?

- As with the image of God, we can trace the covenant theme from the first to the last page of the Bible. God has made covenants with his people from the Garden of Eden to today. Adam, Noah, Abraham, Moses, and David all received covenants from God.
- A covenant is binding agreement by two or more parties.
- The act of dividing of cutting animals in half and walking through the parts was an ancient form of agreement.

O. Palmer Robertson says, "A covenant is a bond-in-blood sovereignly administered."

Bond...

- A covenant establishes the terms of a relationship. There is a bond, an agreement between two people or groups of people.
- This is why the biblical understanding of every marriage is that of a covenant.
- This is part of the reason why our church has a covenant. We're committed to God together and to one another.

In blood . . .

- The animal sacrifice and shedding of blood represents the intensity of the commitment. The covenant carries life-and-death consequences.
- *T: A covenant is not simply a bond-in-blood, but it is a "bond-in-blood . . ."*

Sovereignly administered...

- We see this in verse 17. "When the sun had gone down and it was dark, behold, a smoke fire pot and a flaming torch passed between these pieces."
- You say, "Ok. This seems a bit mysterious. What is going on here?"
- "By dividing the animals and passing between the pieces, the participants in a covenant pledged themselves to life and death." Robertson
- In other words, the one making the covenant is saying, "If I fail to keep this covenant, then may what happened to these animals, happen to me!"
- But who passes through? Is it Abraham? NO! It is God himself. God is the only one who passes through the pieces, which tells us the astounding truth that God has bound himself to the fulfillment of his promises. May I cease to be God if I do not keep these promises.
- This is a unilateral covenant. It is one sided. God, in his grace, initiates the covenant, and God, in his grace takes the full responsibility for making sure the covenant is fulfilled. God owns every covenant he makes! These are covenants of Grace. And oh by the way, this is the *only* way a holy God can relate to sinful man. Grace. All of life is all of grace.
- What's the significance? Verse 18... Here's assurance! God passes through the "On that day the LORD MADE A COVENANT with Abram saying, "To your offspring I give this land . . ."

Why does God delay the fulfillment of his covenant promises? I see at least two reasons and they give us two incentives to wait patiently on God.

Wait patiently because God has a plan (12-16a)

- In this vision God reveals the amazing prophecy of Israel's exile in Egypt. Here we have a preview of the last chapters of Genesis through the first 15 chapters of Exodus.

Wait patiently because God is full of grace (16b)

- "for the iniquity of the Amorites is not yet complete." "is not yet full" "Amorites" seems to refer to the people groups named in verse 20 who were dwelling in the land.
- God was being patient with those rebellious inhabitants of the Promised Land. God's gavel of justice is very slow to fall. He is patient. He does not treat any of us as our sin deserves.
- The same is true today... Why does God delay Christ's return and the restoration of all things? So that mocker can hear the gospel one more time...
- "The Lord is not slow to fulfill his promise as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing that any should perish, but that all should reach repentance." (2 Peter 3:9)

Every covenant God makes rests on his great faithfulness.

- God is Faithful!!! [Maybe we should do an F-Series.. Faithful, forgiving, Father.? There's 3 wks. 😊]
- **"The steadfast love of the Lord never ceases; his mercies never come to an end; they are new every morning; great is your faithfulness. (Lamentations 3:22-23)**
- When you wake up tomorrow, new! Tuesday, new mercies. Some days are so bad, we can hardly wait for the new morning with new mercies to greet us, but we need the unending, always new mercies of God every single day whether bad or good. His love never ceases. His faithfulness is great!
- I hope you realize how deep God's covenant faithfulness runs for his people? There are few clearer statements in Scripture than 2 Tim 2:11-13. **"The saying is trustworthy, for: If we have died with him, we will also live with him; if we endure, we will also reign with him; if we deny him, he also will deny us; if we are faithless, he remains faithful—for he cannot deny himself." (2 Timothy 2:11-13)**
- What a great statement of God's faithfulness to keep us in his grace and enable us to persevere to the end! He has guaranteed his undying love and faithfulness to his people through Christ.
- And when we see the faithfulness of God, we are called to "image" forth that kind of faithfulness. We reflect the glory of God through the faithfulness we extend in our relationships. Does faithfulness characterize your life?
- If we are being honest, we are so self-absorbed and driven by our own selfish desires that the idea of covenant is foreign to our ears and very difficult to keep.
 - Marriages end... May it not be so in our church.
 - There is not a marriage that does not go through difficulty. Covenant...
 - Husbands, are you faithful to your wife? Wives, are you faithful to your husband? Singles, are you being faithful to your potential spouse? Fornication and sexual immorality is like adultery in advance...
 - Are you faithful to your church? We have a church covenant? Do you know what it says? Are you taking it seriously?
- How can we find the motivation and strength to demonstrate faithfulness to God and faithfulness in our most important relationships? Answer. God's True & Greater Covenant.

T: Our faithful God has demonstrated his faithfulness most clearly through the sending of his Son.

1) Jesus is God's True and Greater Covenant

- a. The new covenant Jesus came to establish and fulfill is God's final covenant, a bond-in-blood

sovereignly administered.

b. Isaiah 42:1-9 (Turn to page 602) **“I will give you as a covenant for the people, a light for the nations” (Isaiah 42:6)**

2) Through Jesus, we have all the assurance we need...

a. “All the promises of God find their Yes in Jesus.” (2 Corinthians 1:20) And this should greatly encourage us. God has bound himself to us in his Son.

3) How did God give Jesus as a covenant for us? “bond-in-blood sovereignly administered.”

a. Jesus established the new covenant through his death on the cross.

b. It is HIS blood that was shed. His life for our life. His death in our place for the covenant we failed to keep!

Are you in covenant relationship with the True & Greater Covenant, Jesus Christ?

All who received Christ experience a reconciled relationship with God. There are two signs in the church that tell people you are truly in with God. One marks the beginning of the relationship, baptism. The other marks our continuation in that relationship, the Lord’s Supper. Have you entered into a relationship with Christ? Have you experienced his grace? If not, why wait? Do so today.

If you are in Christ this morning, then we are going to share in the privilege of displaying our continuation in his covenant relationship with God.

Introduce Lord’s Supper: On the night before Jesus was crucified, he shared the Passover meal with his disciples. Jesus broke bread and said, “This is my body, which is given for you. Do this in remembrance of me.” And then he took the cup and said: “This cup that is poured out for you *is the new covenant in my blood.*” (Luke 22:19-20)

If you know that you belong to God through Christ today, then come and experience the blessing of sharing in this communion with God and one another. If you have not yet received Jesus as your Lord, then please do so today! If that’s you, we want to give you an opportunity to nail this down with God.

*I am going to participate and then I will be in the back... It is my prayer that not one person walks out of here unsure of where they stand with the God who loves the world so much that he gave his Son for us as a covenant to be received by faith.

Let’s Pray.