

## **Genesis 15:1-6**

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Good Shepherd Lutheran Church + Boise, Idaho

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Credited as Righteousness

The Word of the Lord from Genesis 15:6: “[Abram] believed the LORD, and He counted it to him as righteousness.” This is the Word of the Lord.

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen

Abram is troubled in Genesis 15. He’s worried because he doesn’t believe that the Lord is going to keep His promises. Why else would the Lord’s first words be “fear not”? And why else would the Lord reassure him, “I am your shield; your reward shall be very great”?

Abram responds, pours out his complaint: “O Lord God, what will You give me, for I continue childless, and the heir of my house is Eliezer of Damascus? Behold, You have given me no offspring, and a member of my household will be my heir.” Abram wants to be a father, but he has no son. His servant Eliezer is currently in line to be the heir, and for all we know Eliezer has started to act like he’s counting on it. After all, Abram and Sarai are well past their prime. Any kid now would have to be a miracle baby. What are the chances?

The chances are certain, and Abram ought to know because God has promised it. The Lord has promised just two chapters before that Abram will have descendants like the dust of the earth. Since then, God has granted him victory in battle over four kings banded together, and the mysterious king and priest Melchizedek has appeared to bless Abram. In other words, the Lord has been nothing but faithful to Abram in the intervening time; yet here is Abram, doubting that the Lord is going to get the job done.

Know what this means? Abram, one of the great patriarchs of Israel, is made of the same sinful flesh and blood that you are.

And what does the Lord do when Abram voices his doubt and complaint? He remains faithful as always. He brings Abram outside and says, “Look toward heaven, and number the stars, if you are able to number them.” Abram can’t number them, of course: there are too many. Then the Lord repeats His promise to Abram: “So shall your offspring be.” God is going to keep His Word. When all is said and done, Abram won’t just have a kid to inherit his estate. He’ll have more descendants than he could possibly count.

Then comes that verse that Paul will unpack extensively in the New Testament: “And [Abram] believed the LORD, and He counted it to him as righteousness.” Abram is righteous before God because he believes God’s promise. He isn’t righteous because he did the courageous thing and left his homeland for Canaan. He hasn’t earned righteousness by defeating the four kings and rescuing Lot, his family and five other kings to boot. He doesn’t have to do some penance for his complaints and his doubt before the Lord declares him holy again. In other words, he is not righteous by any work that he has done. He is righteous by faith, because he believes the promise of God (then the works follow!); and he only believes the promise because God has given him the faith by which he believes. He is righteous by the Word of God and the work of God.

It’s not just the promise of a son and future generations, though. There’s more to the promise than that. Sure, it won’t be long before Abram slips into Sarai’s tent one night and the miracle baby Isaac is conceived. Isaac will be the father of Jacob, Jacob the father of the twelve

tribes of Israel; and a few generations later you've got a whole bunch of descendants of Abram by blood. Not only that, but the family tree will continue with identifiable descendants to our present day. That's remarkable.

They're still not countless, though: God's promise is more than that. It's not about descendants by blood, but descendants by faith. See, many generations down the line from Abraham and Isaac, another miracle baby will be born to a virgin named Mary: in God's plan on the human side of things, there has to be an Isaac if there's going to be a Jesus. In between Isaac and Jesus, throughout the Old Testament the Lord keeps repeating His promise that the Savior is coming, and everyone who believes in the promised Savior is righteous like Abram, because like Abram they are saved by the faith God has given in the promise. Eventually, Jesus is born of Mary; and grown up, the Son of God incarnate goes to the cross and dies for the sins of the world – including the complaints and doubts of Abram centuries before. He rises again, and He lives and reigns forever. All those who believe in Him – whether they lived before His birth and trusted He was coming or lived after His birth and trust that He has come – are righteous before God.

This includes you. Hear St. Paul in Galatians 3:7: "Know then that it is those *of faith* who are the sons of Abraham." Those who believe in Jesus are the sons of Abraham. They are the fulfillment of God's promise, more numerous than the stars. When the Lord said to Abram in Genesis 15, "So shall your offspring be," He was talking about *you*.

God is still keeping the promise He made in Genesis 15, still adding descendants to Abraham as He adds believers to His Church. This is very good news for you.

See, if Abram was made of the same sinful flesh and blood as you are, then you are made of the same sinful flesh and blood as he is. One easy piece of evidence is this: you also spend a fair amount of time anxious, worried and doubting. In our Gospel lesson for this day, Jesus tells you that you shouldn't be anxious: you're His beloved child, redeemed by His blood, and He is working all things for your good. But you do doubt and worry. There are things that keep you up at night. You may never say out loud, "I don't think the Lord is going to come through this time," but what do your worries testify? Jesus tells you in the Gospel lesson: He says, "O you of little faith."

In other words, you're certainly not righteous in God's eyes because you do such a great job of not worrying or not doubting Him. But then, that's not why Abram was righteous before God, either.

No, the Good News is that you are righteous before God for the sake of Jesus, who has died for all of your sins and all of your worries and all of your doubts. God doesn't say, "I'll call you righteous as soon as you stop worrying." He says, "I call you righteous now because My Son has died for all of your sins – including your worries, your doubts and your fears."

When you find yourself full of worry and doubt, you'll be tempted that you should stop worrying and doubting as a gesture of good faith before you can expect the Lord's help. That is rubbish, the lie of the devil. In reality, it says that you should stop sinning before you can be forgiven. But if you can stop sinning, why did Jesus have to die? No, when you lie awake at night because of worry and doubt, you do what your faith bids you to do: you confess your sin to God, as Abram does in our text. You tell the truth that you're worried and doubting, and you tell Him what you're worried about. And you do so with the glad confidence that the Lord doesn't say, "That's it! I've given you enough chances and I'm done with you!" No, He declares, "I am your shield against the devil and judgment, because I've died for your sins; for My sake, your reward will be very great."

So having confessed your sins, you know you have God's favor. You know you're righteous – by faith, not by works. Now when worry intrudes, as it will, you know what to pray about; if you still can't sleep at night, you have more time to pray! You don't try to hide your worries from the Lord, as if you could; no, you continue to commend these things to the Lord, knowing that you are His beloved child and He will work all things for your good.

There will be plenty in this world to cause you worry and doubt, and that is why you cling to Christ and His Word all the more. It's by His Word that He forgives your sins and strengthens your faith; and by the faith that He gives, He counts you His righteous child. So confess your worries and doubts, and rejoice that the Lord continues to keep His promise to Abram in you; for the Lord Jesus Christ declares to you this night, "I am your shield; your reward shall be very great, because by faith you are My child – and for My sake, you are righteous."

In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen