

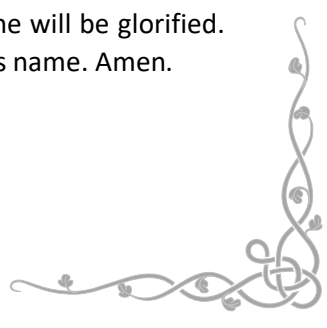
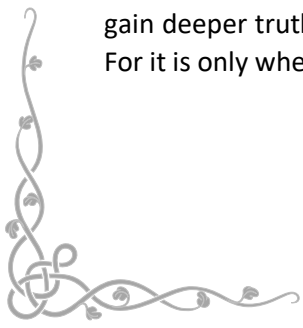
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| Topic | The Nature of God's Promises |
| Reference | Genesis 15 |
| Date | 31 May 2020 |
| Speaker | Yee Dian Lee |

Once again, it is my joy and privilege to be sharing with you from the Word of God. After more than two months of movement control order (MCO), I trust all of you are keeping well and staying safe. I would much prefer to see all of you face to face physically. In fact, I'm trying very hard to picture all of you seated in front of me. Because it's not easy for me to speak into the camera and I'm not very sure how to do this. Throughout the MCO, Peter and Arnold have shouldered the bulk of the preaching and I was thinking since they have become quite adept at delivering recorded sermons they should continue to do so. But this morning, it is my turn to face the camera. If anything this is a sign that our situation today is very different from what we had barely three months ago. We are living in truly extraordinary times. With this Covid-19 pandemic still raging near and far. What is happening today is by far unprecedented especially in terms of the sure global scale of the crisis. On an individual level we've been forced to rethink many of the things that we have taken for granted. More crucially this new normal as they call it brings into sharp focus the larger questions of life. What do I live for? What do I anchor my life upon? What are the really important things? Although most of us have not had a close brush with the virus, what it has done to us is that it has turned our life upside down. The world and also our lives will never be the same after this.

Now extraordinary times call for extraordinary response. If you have not spent at least some time over the past few weeks to ponder over or to reflect upon the deeper matters of life and faith then I would say that the pandemic has been wasted on you. In any case this is precisely what we're going to do this morning. The intent of the sermon is to compel us or to propel us to re-examine the deeper issues of life and faith, in order to help us to take a fresh look at the very foundation of our faith by.

By providence our text today; Genesis chapter 15 actually offices some deep insights into the real questions that we should ask ourselves during this MCO. We are now in the midst of a running series on the Book of Genesis and this morning we have come to chapter 15 with the sermon title, the nature of God's Promises. The passage itself is relatively short, only 21 verses long. At a glance the text doesn't have any of the high dramas that we see in other chapters of Genesis. It is mostly a conversation between God and Abram. At this point in the book, Abraham was known as Abram. God changed his name to Abraham later in chapter 17. What we have here in chapter 15 is for most part an encounter between God and Abram. They were like going back and forth, but let me assure you what this chapter lacks in drama it more than mix up with profound theological insights. In fact embedded in these verses is theological dynamite. So be ready for an intense theological ride that will help us understand God's nature more deeply by us studying the way he make covenants with those he called his own.

But first let us commit this time to the Lord in prayer. Shall we pray. Our Father in Heaven we realize that our minds are to finite. Our faculty is too limited to understand you and your nature. Your ways and your thoughts are higher, much higher than ours but even so favour us by opening up the text for us this morning, so that we gain deeper truths about you. So that our lives may be turned upside down, so that you alone will be glorified. For it is only when you are glorified that our lives will be most satisfied and we ask this in Jesus name. Amen.



As I mentioned a minute ago our text today is mostly a dialogue between God and his men of faith, Abram. Although his name would later become Abraham, I shall just stick with Abraham as it is the more familiar name to us. Since there are only two characters in this exchange, I shall divide the sermon into two parts. First, we shall take a look at Abraham and consider what was going on in his mind. In the second we shall examine closely God's amazing response to what Abraham said and then we shall conclude with a pertinent application point.

My wife and I have been members of the Oasis SS19 Life Group since its inception in 2010. It has been 10 years and it has become such an integral part of our lives. This is our weekly zoom meeting on Friday nights ever since the MCO began. Many years ago when things were more normal back then we met to watch the 1971 movie Fiddler on the Roof, which was three hours long and so we watch it over two sittings. If you haven't seen this before, I highly recommend it especially now that you are not going out much. There is one scene in the movie when the main character, Tevye suddenly ask his wife Golde this million-dollar question. Do you love me? Do you love me? And she was taken by surprise and tried to avoid the question and when pressed further she started to give all kinds of evasive answers. It is not that she didn't love him. There is no question about her love for husband. Theirs was a rock-solid marriage. They had been married 25 years and had five children, five daughters in fact between them.

The wife was deeply committed to the husband and vice versa. And yet he popped this question, do you love me? I dare not ask my wife this question. You will never know what kind of answers you might get but jokes aside we have been married 26 years and we have two kids between us. Ours is not a perfect marriage but we do enjoy a stable and committed marital relationship. And yet there could be occasions for a question like, do you love me? Perhaps in a subconscious quest for reassurances.

We see something like this in the first half of our text. Abraham ask God, are you really going to carry out what you promised to do? How can I be sure you're going to keep your promises? Now let's jump into the text. Genesis 15 and take a closer look at what was happening. The text opens with God speaking to Abraham,

Do not be afraid, Abram. I am your shield, your very great reward.

The first two words after this tell us that this is a continuation of what had happened in chapter 14. Let's take a brief look at the events of the preceding chapter. In chapter 14 where four northern kings from Mesopotamia who in conflict with five kings from the plains of River Jordan. Bible scholars call this the war of the nine kings, four plus five nine. Well it turn out that the alliance of these four northern kings prevailed and they defeated the five southern kings. And in the process they took Abraham's nephew, Lot captive. Lot was living in the city of Sodom and when this was reported to Abraham, he quickly mastered a force of 318 trained servants and they went after the Northern armies. The next thing Abraham and his men emerged victorious and Lot was rescued.

This 17th century painting shows the Northern armies in retreat and Abraham's men in pursuit. The immediate question is how could a mere contingent of 318 men overcome the combined strength of four armies. Well if you remember the story of a Gideon in Judges chapter 7 who assembled an army of 32,000 to fight the Midinettes God said too many and had him reduced it to just 300. If God on your side you don't need so many soldiers. Now back to verse 1 why then was Abraham afraid. He had just defeated the Northern armies. Why the fear now? At first he didn't want to get involved in the differences between the two warring camps but because of his nephew he had to intervene. Now that he had made new enemies he was afraid that they might assemble an even bigger army to come after him. And here in one of the most touching scenes in the Bible, the Heavenly Father down to his fearful child to comfort him,

Do not be afraid I am your shield.

The psalmist also wrote in Psalm 28,

The Lord is my strength and my shield

Verse 1 begins with,

The word of the Lord came to Abram.

The word of the Lord came to Abraham and this is repeated in verse four. The word of the Lord came to him. It was God who approached Abraham, not Abraham going to God for help and this is worthy of note because in the whole book of Genesis this is the only time this was happening. Elsewhere in the Old Testament we often come across this phrase the word of the Lord came to so-and-so. When God wanted to speak to his people through his prophets the word of the Lord came to Samuel, the word of the Lord came to Elijah, to Isaiah, to Jeremiah and so on. And here for the first time the word of the Lord came to Abraham, not for the purpose of transmitting his message but for the Lord to assure him.

During this coronavirus crisis that has dragged on for months now, you may be in a state of fear or anxiety, you may not necessarily be afraid of being infected with the virus, although the dangers are still out there, but you may be anxious over the possibility of being laid off from your job. I heard that a small number in our congregation has been retrench. Or you may be worried about the possibility of your business going under. How am I going to pay my staff? Or you may find it hard to bear with the months of solitude and isolation. If you are in such a situation may Genesis 15 verse 1 speak to you. May the word of the Lord come to you to assure you and to smooth your soul. May God come for you with his words. I am your shield. Now if you need help or simply someone to someone to talk to, please don't hesitate to call the folks at the Talk2Us Ministry.

Now the last bit of verse one needs a bit of explanation. God also assured Abraham, I am your very great reward. Why the assurance of reward? Now this is because after his victory in chapter 14 Abraham gave away all the spoils of war, all the goods that he has seized from defeated armies. He kept nothing for himself or his men except for some food to feed his men. God was saying to Abraham don't fret about such things because I'm the one who will be rewarding you. Now I understand this that the greatest rewards in life come not from human endeavours nor from earthly schemes but from what our Heavenly Father graciously bestows.

Now coming to the gist of the first part of the sermon, what was Abraham's response to God's overture to him? Amazingly and perhaps also shockingly, he didn't say oh thank you Lord for your promise to be my shield and my reward. Instead, his reply in verse two,

Sovereign Lord what can you give me, since I remain childless and one who will inherit my estate is Eliezer of Damascus

Now Eliezer was Abraham's servant and his designated heir since Abraham had no son at this point in Genesis. Now to paraphrase what Abraham was saying here, it was that telling God, well I do appreciate what you're saying, promising to be my shield and reward and all that but please allow me to walk you back to your earlier promise. You see back in Genesis 12, God told Abraham to relocate from the land where he was born and raised in a place called Ur which is mentioned in verse 7 of our text and to move west to the land of Canaan and Abraham obeyed and this is what Abraham God promised him in Genesis 12 verse 2

I will make you into a great nation and I will bless you. I will make your name great and you will be a blessing.

After he had arrived at Canaan God promised Abraham again in verse 7 of chapter 12 –

To your offspring I will give this land.

So at the beginning of our text Abram was like reminding God, let's just put aside this new promise of shield and reward, what about your earlier promise that you will make me into a great nation that my offspring would possess this land. Of course God remembered that promise because he himself repeated this in verse 7 of our text,

I'm the Lord who brought you out of Ur...to give you this land to take possession of it.

So Abraham was showing some doubt. Look you haven't fulfilled the first promise and now another promise, I'm still childless and I don't have a son, how are my offspring going to take possession of this land. I have no choice but to designate my servant Eliezer to be my heir. Verse three is the but a repeat of verse two

And Abram said, "you have given me no children; so a servant in my household will be my heir."

Now many Bible scholars find these two verses, 2 and 3 to rather baffling because if you were to name a Bible character who epitomizes faith its Abraham. The very name Abraham is synonym with faith but here the giant of faith seemed to be harbouring some doubt. He wasn't so sure if God would keep his promise. Nothing has happened since the first promise. What is most shocking is that he expressed doubt not once but twice in our text. After his first doubt was addressed by God in verses 4 & 5 which we shall discuss further in the second part, after God even repeated his promise in verse 7 Abraham asked again in verse 8,

Sovereign Lord how can I know that I will gain possession of it?

In other words are you sure you will do as you promise. He was still not very convinced. In a while we shall examine God's response to his second expression of doubt here. Doubt from our so-called hero of faith, but the immediate lesson for us is that genuine faith allows room for doubts just like in the Fiddler on the Roof, Tevye and his wife's rock-solid 25-year-old marriage allows for a question like do you love me. So also in our exercise of faith in God it's okay to ask God will you do as you promise. In fact if your doubts about God and his promises it is healthy to express them rather than to suppress them.

God doesn't demand a perfect faith from us. He doesn't press us for a hundred percent faith. What he asks of us is true faith, sincere faith for even simple faith as opposed to a faith that is fake or phony or a faith that comes from a mouth rather than from the heart. God seeks a faith that is genuine which allows room for doubt and He will see to it that our faith will grow over time and that our faith in Him will mature. To side a hypothetical example, it is actually not also hypothetical because it has happen often in remote parts of China. Now let's take an illiterate lowly person in a village in China. She hears the gospel, she acknowledges that she's a sinner and she believes in the person of Jesus who died for her sins and she accepts the salvation that comes from God but she hasn't been told or shown the historical evidence for Jesus. No one has yet explained to her that the Bible is truly the Word of God, citing to her all the proofs and yet she believes and commits her life to Jesus. Now you may call it beginning faith but it comes with sincerity and authenticity and that is enough for God. This simple genuine faith.

Jesus says in Matthew 17 that our faith can be as small as the mustard seed. Look how small it is but a mustard seed can grow into a towering tree and in the process it is acceptable or even natural for us to have episodes of doubts or questions and our Father in Heaven is a kind who addresses these doubts. After Thomas expressed

doubt Jesus told him to touch the scars on his hands and side in John 20 and Thomas believed. But Jesus also remarked blessed are those who have not seen and yet have belief.

Which brings us to part two of today's sermon. The more interesting part as we examine God's twofold response to Abraham. But before that I wish to briefly touch on verse 6.

Abraham believed the Lord and He credited it to him as righteousness

This verse is quoted three times by Paul in Romans 4 and also in Galatians 3. This is intriguing because it is mentioned right between Abraham's two expressions of doubts in verse 2 and 3 and in verse 8. And some people see this as problematic because very soon after this verse he again expressed doubt but this squares with what we've learned so far that what God seeks is a genuine simple mustard seed faith which allows for doubts and questions. Even after Abraham was declared righteous because of his faith he led up his doubt again and again God addressed it. To be credited with something means to be given something that you didn't have before. If you credit 100 hundred into my bank account it wasn't there before and now it suddenly appears in the credit column. When God credits righteousness to us, it is not because of our righteous acts, if there are any. But simply because of our faith, even beginning faith. Remember, it was based on Abraham's faith not anything that he did that God credited righteousness to him.

Let's move on to part two of the sermon and examine how God responded to Abraham's expressions of doubt. Twofold response. As I've already mentioned our God is one who addresses our doubts and answers our questions. It may take a bit of time but He doesn't want to leave us hanging out to dry. Our doubts and questions may impede our spiritual progress and God doesn't want that happen. How does God address our doubts on this side of history? Well in a variety of ways, often through his word as written in Scripture, also through Sunday Sermons, Gamma classes, live group meetings, where his word is being studied. So make it a point to be part of a Gamma group or a live group to get deeper into the word, which is why I started by talking about the SS19 Life Group. Now do you know there are nine gamma groups and 20 lives group live groups in FBC that you can choose from. Please join with a group, stay connected especially during this MCO when we are all so isolated from each other.

Now let's see how God reacted when Abraham said hey I'm still childless and you promised me many descendants. In verse five in another touching scene from the Bible you can almost imagine God putting his arm around Abraham as he brought him out into the open. In verse 5

He took him outside and said, "Look up at the sky and count the stars - if indeed you can count them." Then He said to him, "So shall your offspring be."

God was using the metaphor of the countless stars in the night sky to describe Abraham's offspring. As a matter of fact this is the second time God was doing this. There is a verse in chapter 13 verse 16 that reads almost the same as this verse. In 13 verse 16 God used the analogy of the dust of the earth,

I will make your offspring like the dust of the earth, so that if anyone could count the dust, then your offspring could be counted.

With two metaphors back-to-back God was like telling Abraham, I told you before and I'm gonna tell you again. My promise will come to pass and your descendants will be very many. Now when God says something twice you can be doubly sure that he will act upon what he says. Now be that as it may let me make this lesson more

practical for you. When doubts are brewing in your heart and questions sprouting in your mind. Here are few steps you can take. A drawing from the first seven verses in our text.

1. **RELAY** your doubts to God from verses two and three when Abraham add his doubt and also in verse eight when he wavered for the second time. God wants you to relay your doubts to him. He wants to hear them. He will not scold you. How dare you question me? Instead He will gently reveal to you in his own ways and timing.
2. **RECEIVE** the Word of God. From verse 4 when the word of the Lord came to Abraham as elaborated earlier God often addresses your doubts through the pages of Scripture, so be a diligent and serious student of the Bible. Immerse yourself in the Word of God.
3. **RECAPTURE** the vision of God. From verse 5 when God brought Abraham to see the night sky. The stars up there are also a metaphor for us, pointing us to the larger picture of God's mighty and eternal plans. Hence broaden your vision of what God is doing and be motivated.
4. **REVIEW** your journey thus far. From verse 7 when God reminded Abraham how he faithfully brought him out of Ur into Canaan. So trace your spiritual journey from the beginning and be reminded of God's faithfulness to you all these years.
5. **RESOLVE** to believe in God. from verse 6 where Abraham believed and it was credited to him as righteousness. Make a willful decision to believe. Believe is the decision, a commitment not a feeling and your doubts will slowly diminish. That's how faith works.

So remember the five steps you can take all starting with the same letters; Relay, Receive, Recapture, Review and Resolve.

I bring you now to the second part of the sermon. In the second part of the sermon we see God's twofold response to Abraham. We have just discussed his first response, now let's examine his second response from verse 9 which is really the high point of the text. The narrative is reaching a climax and this is going to get interesting. After Abraham's second expression of doubt in verse 8 God instructed him in verse 9 to bring 5 different types of animals, a heifer, a goat, a ram, all three years old plus the dove and a pigeon. What is the heifer? A heifer is a cow but a cow card that hasn't yet given birth to a calf. In other words a young cow. What about a ram? What is the ram? A ram is the male sheep as opposed to a ewe, which is a female sheep. So here God was being very specific. A heifer or a young cow, hence female but the sheep must be male, a ram and not a ewe. But what about the goat? The gender was not specified. Here is a good example to show that when you want to study the Bible in depth it's good to read various translations because although in the NIV the word used here is goat, in most other English translations the original Hebrew word is translated as she goat. So the goat has to be a female. As for the reasons behind this particular selection of animals and their respective gender I'm not too sure, although we might be able to guess why the three year old sheep must be a male.

To move on Abraham did accordingly and he brought the animals to God and in verse 10 he proceeded to cut the heifer, the she goat and a ram into two. I believed each animal was cut lengthwise and not cross sectionally and he started to arrange one half of one side and the other half on the opposite side. So there were two parallel rows of half carcasses, three pieces on each side. No one knows why Abraham didn't cut up the birds, maybe because they were too small and besides both were somewhat similar and so he placed the two dead birds facing each other within the two rows of the larger animals. What is this strange thing that Abraham was

doing? God didn't ask him to do that but just to bring the animals to him. Why this bizarre animal slaughter and the careful arrangements of the dead creatures? To shed light on this we need to refer to this obscure verse in Jeremiah 24:18, which reads

Those who have violated the terms of the covenant they made before Me. I will treat like the calf they cut in two and then walked between its pieces.

The calf they cut in two and walk between its pieces. Here God was very angry with the Israelites for their disobedience and he threatened them with some kind of a punishment. They had violated the terms of the Covenant with God. The exact nature of their rebellion against God is a story for another time, but this verse paints a picture of a very strange covenant making ritual common in the ancient world. The way a contract was sealed in ancient biblical times. What happen is that when two persons wanted to come into an agreement a calf or some other animal was cut into two and the two parties to the agreement would then walk between the pieces of the carcass as if to say if I breach the terms of this contract, if I break my promise under the terms of this contract may I be cut down or cut up like this animal. Any violation of the terms of the contract means that the offender would suffer terrible fate like this the animal. You see people in those days took their contracts very-very seriously. The ritual involved was bloody with animal blood all over the place and it was taken solemnly as they walk between the pieces of the dead animal. I used the word strange or bizarre to describe this because it's hard for us to understand this through our modern lens.

Today if you and I want to enter into a contract we type up a few sheets of paper, agree mutually to what's written inside, sign on the dotted lines and then have it stamped to make it a legal document. If you breach the terms of the contract I'll sue you in court and get the court to compel you to pay up to compensate me for my loss. It is all very civil even gentlemanly, no need to have you cut up. And maybe that's why today contracts are sometimes not taken seriously, but not so in the days of Abraham or Jeremiah. As a matter of act, whenever we see the phrase to make a covenant in the English Old Testament, the original Hebrew verb is to cut. So the ancient Hebrews would say to cut a covenant not make a covenant which is where we get the idiom to cut a deal. Have you wondered why we say to cut a deal? It has its roots in the Hebrew phrase to cut a covenant, which refers to cutting up the animals in the covenant ritual.

Coming back to verse 10 when God told Abraham to bring the animals, He knew exactly what to do. God didn't have to say oh you cut the animals into two like this or and arrange the pieces like that. Abraham knew that God wanted to cut a covenant with him. He realized that he was about to sign a contract with God and he proceeded to prepare for the covenant ritual. He knew exactly what was going on. He didn't make a fuss. He simply obeyed, just as he obeyed when he uprooted himself and his family from Ur to Canaan. You know besides belief obedience is the other big component or manifestation of faith and that's why God credited it to him as righteousness in verse 6. And this is what it might have looked like as Abraham finished preparing for the Covenant ritual. A grotesque scene of dead animals. Now while waiting for God to show up in verse 11 some birds of prey appeared to help themselves to the carcasses and these were unclean birds as opposed to the dove and the pigeon and they threaten to derail or disrupt the covenant ritual. And so Abram had to chase them away. Now the side lesson for us is that when we are in the covenant relationship with God we need to be watchful, we need to be vigilant. The birds of prey here can be taken to symbolize Satan and his attempts to destroy or damage our relationship with God.

Coming to the climax of narrative, we see in the next verse that Abraham fell into a deep sleep. It was getting dark as the Sun was setting but then another darkness described as thick and dreadful overwhelmed Abraham and so it was a double darkness. Darkness of the night and another dreadful darkness. Dreadful meaning it

terrified Abraham. It was a frightening moment for him. Why? I suppose while waiting for God to show up for the covenant ritual he thought about it, what if he couldn't keep his end of the deal. He will surely be cut down. This covenant ritual might not be such a good idea. Least of all making a contract with God Almighty himself. As he thought about it he became desperate. Now what were the terms of the contract that Abraham was supposed to keep. They are not stated in our text Genesis 15 but later in chapter 17 when the covenant was reaffirmed the terms of the contract became clear.

In summary, on God's part he will make Abraham the father of many nations, He would greatly increase his number, He will be his God and the God of his descendants and the whole land of Canaan God would give as possession to him and his descendants. As for Abraham's part, God said to him I am God Almighty, walk before me faithfully and be blameless. This is chapter 17 verse 1. Now God would do for him and his descendants all the things he mentioned. All they needed to do based on this verse was to walk faithfully or to be faithful to God and to be blameless. To be blameless means to be free from wrongdoing by keeping God's commandments, but what if they fail to be faithful and be blameless. Suddenly Abraham began to feel dreadful and we who are on this side of history know well from the pages of scripture that the Israelites failed miserably time again. Before the actual ritual took place, God provided Abraham details of how his descendants will come to possess the land of Canaan from verses 13 to 16. God gave him a glimpse into the future where the Israelites will be oppressed in a foreign land but later would return to claim the promised land.

Now we will not go into these verses, 13 to 16 as it is a separate account of the Israelites exodus from Egypt and there eventual entry into Canaan. After this prophetic verses from God himself the covenant ritual was about to begin.

Suddenly in verse 17 a spectacular thing happened. A smoking fired pot with a blazing torch appeared and passed between the pieces. Some translations say, a smoking furnace or oven. The fire part here is really a kind of a portable oven. It came with a blazing torch which is also translated as fiery flame. What is going on here? God was supposed to show up for the ritual but what is this smoking fire pot with a fiery flame or what do the smoke and fire symbolize. If you recall the exodus account as the Israelites left Egypt God's visible presence was with them day and night in the form of a pillar of cloud which look like smoke and a pillar of fire. Exodus 13 21

By day the Lord went ahead of them in a pillar of cloud and by night in a pillar of fire.

The unmistakable conclusion is that the smoking pot with the firing flame was the physical manifestation of God's holy presence at the scene. God appeared in all his glory and majesty. Some people call this Shekinah glory. Although the Hebrew word Shekinah doesn't appear in a Bible but Shekinah means the awesome glory of God's divine presence. And perhaps this is the real reason why Abraham was terrified, meeting God in all his consuming glory is a terrifying experience as what Isaiah found out in Isaiah 6. Face to face with God's holy presence, Isaiah cried,

Woe to me! I'm ruined my eyes have seen the king the Lord Almighty

And so God finally appeared on the scene in person and in the rest of verse 17 he passed between the pieces of carcasses the Abraham had arranged and with this the covenant ritual was concluded, the contract was sealed. Verse 18.

On that day the Lord made a covenant with Abram

So the ritual was over. At this point you may jump out of your seat and ask, hey what about Abraham. Didn't he also have to walk between the pieces. The astounding thing is this, no Abraham wasn't required to walk between the cut-up animals. God alone did it. But what does this mean. Wasn't both parties supposed to do so to seal the covenant. You see my fellow believers God was in effect telling Abraham if I fail to keep my end of the deal let me be the one who gets cut up but if you violate the Covenant let me be also the one who gets cut up. Did you get it correctly or not? If I violate the covenant I get cut up, if you violate the Covenant I'm the one who gets cut up. Wow! What kind of a covenant is this? You're right there has never been nor will there ever be a covenant like this. God in his foreknowledge knew that his people will not be able to live up to the terms of the Covenant. Hence the most profound thing about our text today is that on the fateful night in Genesis 15, God passed a death sentence on himself. Listen God passed a death sentence on himself when you vowed to pay the penalty on our behalf; the death penalty that should be ours to bear.

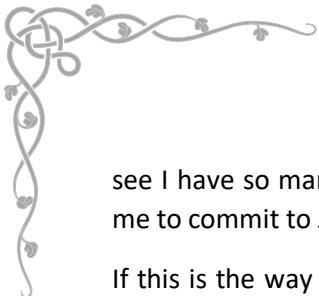
If you recall the double darkness we discussed earlier, the darkness of the night and another dreadful darkness they came over Abraham. Well two thousand years after what happened in this chapter another dreadful darkness envelope a small hill outside the walls of Jerusalem in a place called Calvary. The sky turned dark, dreadfully dark when Jesus who God Himself was cut down as he hung on the cross to die a gruesome death. Genesis 15 is the foreshadow of the crucifixion. When Isaiah described the suffering and death of Jesus in Isaiah 53 in verse 8 he wrote

For He was cut off from the land of the living; for the transgression of my people He was punished.

If you understand Genesis 15 then you can appreciate why Isaiah use the phrase cut off. The word cut here is clearly covenant language. In direct reference to what Abraham did in verse 10 of our text when he cut up the animals. In conclusion let me offer you some thoughts for application. We started out with a title the nature of God's promises. We set out to learn about God's nature through the way he makes promises. Well, what have you learned about God's nature? For one thing, God keeps his promises no matter what, even if it would cost him his own life. He never fails to keep his end of the deal. He is a faithful God.

Secondly God loves us so much that he was willing to suffer the fate that should have befallen us. His love for it is so deep, so high, so wide that he suffered and died on our behalf so that we might be safe. As Isaiah wrote, he was punished for our transgressions.

But what does all this mean to us in a practical sense? How should we respond? Now to answer this let me ask you a somewhat difficult question. After what Jesus has done for us why are we still so reluctant or hesitant to commit ourselves wholeheartedly to him? What is holding us back? Now to address this I bring you back to the early part of the sermon when we discuss Abraham's doubts. When Abraham expressed doubt twice in our text, it sounded like he was not 100% sure if God would carry out what he promised to do. He might have harboured some reservations whether God would really do what he said he would. We're still whether God could do what he said he would do. But I also described how a dreadful darkness overcame Abraham while he fell into a deep sleep and he was terrified. Possibly because he started having doubts about himself and his descendants. What if he and his people could not live up to the terms of the Covenant and as we have seen violators of the Covenant faced severe consequences. Now what I'm trying to put across is that, in our relationship with God we may also experience doubts but these doubts actually have two facets. On the surface it may look like a lack of confidence in God but it also can be a case of us not being sure of ourselves. We may harbour reservations about God and his promises but they could actually be driven by reservations about ourselves. We are unsure about ourselves. Hey! I may not be able to live up to this contract. I may not succeed in walking faithfully and blamelessly. Look I cannot commit myself hundred percent of this. I mean I can commit but not fully, can't you



see I have so many other commitments; my career, my business, my position, my children etc. You cannot ask me to commit to Jesus 100 percent. I can't do it if.

If this is the way you think the way you reason then you have misunderstood the gospel. If I have not made it clear enough, look God is not asking you to walk between the pieces of the cut up animals, he had already done that all by himself and not only that he later allowed himself to be cut down in your place because he loves you. Now do you believe that? If you believe so even with mustard seed faith God will credit it to you as righteousness. Jesus has already paid the penalty for your inability to walk faithfully and blamelessly. Do you genuinely believe that and accept what he did for you? This is the gospel. The question is not if you are able to commit to him. The real question is whether you are willing to commit to him. If you are willing to take this first step of faith with all sincerity, God will provide you the strength and guidance for you to commit more and more to him step by step.

If there is one lesson that we should have learned from the Covid-19 pandemic, it is the revaluation of the things we use to value or an overhaul or what we considered to be important. Look the children still cannot go to school. Until recently the restaurants were not allowed to open. Many businesses have suffered terribly. Some people have lost their jobs. Even our church has been closed for a while and all this is happening within the short span of two to three months. What we use to hold dear; businesses, jobs, education, food, even church. All these earthly things are really very fritting, very uncertain. If you have not realized that during this MCO then you have learned very little.

In the final analysis at the end of the day the most important thing in life is our relationship with God whose promises to us are rock solid and will never be shaken by any virus.

Return to where we started back to the scene from Fiddler on the Roof where Tevya asked his wife do you love me. God is asking you and me during this MCO, do you love me? Do you love me? Do you love me? Just as Jesus asked Peter three times in John 21, for is written in Deuteronomy 6 verse 5,

Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength.

Shall we close in prayer. Our Father in Heaven to your question do you love me many of us would have difficulty answering yes truthfully. Because we anchor our lives on so many other fleeting things. Nevertheless accept our mustard seed faith and cause it to grow bigger and bigger each day. So that we may commit to you with all our heart, soul and strength as we consider in all the extent of your love for us from our text today. In Jesus name we pray. Amen.