

Expect Great Things To Happen!

Genesis 15:1-18

- Being childless was seen as a sign of divine judgment in Old Testament theology (Leviticus 20:20-21; 1 Samuel 1:11; Jeremiah 22:30).
- Abram was concerned that a member of his household might have to one day be his heir.
- It was not uncommon in that time for a childless couple to adopt a servant as their heir.
- Abram saw that as his only viable option because he had no child of his own.
- In his mind God had forgotten His promise.
- After all, he and his wife Sarai were getting old. There were some things that even God could not change.

- You certainly can't blame Abram for his concern.
- So when God says to Abram, "I am your shield, your very great reward," Abram responds to God like this: "Sovereign Lord, what can you give me since I remain childless and the one who will inherit my estate is Eliezer of Damascus?"
- You have given me no children; so a servant in my household will be my heir."

- In his infinite wisdom Abram was trying to show God, as far as he could tell, this was the only way things could possibly work.
- God didn't come through, so Abram says to God, "Look, here's where things stand.
- The only possible way out of this situation is for me to choose a slave as my heir."
- Have you ever done that? "Lord, I don't see any way this can possibly work out.
- Here's what you need to do . . ." And we explain to the infinite God what He must do.

- Then the word of the Lord came to Abram: “This man will not be your heir,” God says to him, “but a son who is your own flesh and blood will be your heir.”
- Then the Lord took Abram outside and said, “Look up at the sky and count the stars--if indeed you can count them.”
- Then God said to Abram, “So shall your offspring be.”
- Then the writer of Genesis adds these words, “Abram believed the Lord, and [the Lord] credited it to him as righteousness.”

- With the victory that God had given Abram over the four kings as a backdrop, we see how tenuous Abram's faith really was.
- No matter how many times God had been with him in the past, Abram had difficulty trusting God in his present circumstances.
- And that's often true of you and me as well.
- **The greatest need you and I have is the need to trust God.** We've talked about this many times before, but it's true: our greatest need is to trust God.
- No matter how difficult our circumstances, God will never forget us nor forsake us.

- Pastor Tony Evans tells a wonderful story that comes from one of the *Superman* movies. I know some of you grew up on Superman comics or television shows or movies. “Look up in the sky! It’s a bird, it’s a plane. It’s Superman!”
- In this particular movie, Superman saves a man from a burning building. He rescues him from the top floor and is carrying him to safety by flying through the skies.
- The man looks at Superman and then looks down to the ground. “I’m scared, Superman,” he says. “Look how far down that is.”
- At this point Superman gives him a great answer. It’s the answer of faith. Superman says, “Now if I delivered you from the burning fire, what makes you think I am going to drop you when I’m carrying you to safety?” (2)

- Have you ever felt desperate about a situation?
- Felt like your back was against a wall? Couldn't sleep at night because that need was on your mind?
- Maybe it was a situation regarding your work or one of your children, or your spouse.
- Maybe it was you yourself who needed an outright miracle because there seemed no humanly possible solution to your situation.
- Have you been in that place?
- The next time that happens think of the words of Superman and apply them to God: "If I delivered you from the burning fire, what makes you think I am going to drop you when I'm carrying you to safety?"

- All of us have found ourselves in a troubling place.
- And then, just at that moment when we were inclined to give up, God has come through with some act of hope and promise.
- And for a while we felt a renewed sense of faith and joy.
- But, as time goes by, we forget.
- And then we find ourselves in a difficult spot again.
- We see no way out and so, once again, we doubt God's presence and love.
- When will we learn? God can be counted on. God keeps His promises.

- Most of us have personal dreams, hopes, and goals we would like to see fulfilled.
- Our trouble is that we are prone to discount ourselves and our faith, and we frequently overlook the fact of God in our lives.
- That which may seem impossible for us may be entirely possible with God.
- What would you most like to see come to pass within your lifetime?
- What ideals have you that are well within the natural and intentional will of God, as you understand it to be, that you hope will come to fruition?
- Remember, "Faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen."

- There are times in our lives when our faith is tested by our life circumstances.
- Remember as we began our Lenten journey that life's tests are not designed to weaken us, but to help us grow stronger in our faith journey.
- We said that about temptation, but that's true about all of life's difficult moments as well.

- God established a covenant with Abram.
- He had him look up at the stars and said, “Look up at the sky and count the stars--if indeed you can count them.”
- Then He said, “So shall your offspring be.”
- And God kept His promise to Abram even though Abram could see no possible way that could happen.

- God asks us to trust Him. He tells us about the victory that will be ours if we will just give Him our cares and concerns, but He rarely gives us the full details of the process involved to get us to that victory.
- It is then that God asks us to trust Him.
- As Superman said to the person he was carrying, “Now if I delivered you from the burning fire, what makes you think I am going to drop you when I’m carrying you to safety?”

- **But there's one final thing we need to say. It is one of the foundations this series of messages is built on.**
- **Do not forget that the purpose of all of life's tests is not to defeat us but to make us stronger.**
- This is a truth we are emphasizing in our Lenten journey.
- God wants us each to grow strong in our mental, emotional and spiritual lives.
- And so God has placed us in a world that tests us--but the tests are not designed to defeat us but to make us stronger.

- What promises has God made to you?
- There are some promises God has made to all of us-- the promise to be with us through all our life's journey; the promise to never forget us, nor forsake us; the promise to receive us into our heavenly home when we finish our journey on earth.
- Friend, you can take God at His word. He has established His covenant with you.
- Remember this covenant when you face challenges; when you come up against the hard times.
- Hold on to God's promises.
- Don't lose faith.

- When outcomes seem to have been delayed, and when we want things to happen yesterday, we should not become impatient, aggravated, or take it out on others.
- Rather, we should be prepared, so that when our chance to celebrate life comes, we may rejoice in it.
- We are God's people.
- We are not here as puppets of earthly pressures, or to conform to the ways of the world.
- We are here to be a part of the transformation of life, spiritual initiatives, personalized enrichments, and endurance in enrichments and faithfulness.

- In that wonderful 14th chapter of John's Gospel, in which Jesus offers so much comfort to believers, there are some words from Jesus which we may overlook, that are very important.
- He said, "Very truly I tell you, the one who believes in me will also do the works that I do and, in fact, will do greater works than these, because I go to the Father."
- Upon us is bestowed a trust to do more than has ever been done before!
- What a challenge, for which we should do no less than our best in faith and our personal part in fulfillment!

- Then in this vision God tells Abram to perform a ritual that seemed to have little practical effect.
- As instructed, Abram gathered animals that the Lord prescribed for him to gather, and he slew them on the altar, then he drove away birds of prey that came to eat the flesh of these carcasses.
- What was the point of it all? We are not told.
- And then the Genesis writer adds, "As the sun was going down, a deep sleep fell upon Abram, and a deep and terrifying darkness descended upon him."

- We have made the point that Abram trusted God.
- Abram was a believer, but that does not mean that he did not have his doubts, his uncertainties.
- He has had a wonderful vision of God, yet later that night as he lays in his tent "a terrifying darkness descended upon him."
- This is real life. If you and I have not experienced that terrifying darkness yet, just wait.
- Fortunately the story does not end here

- Abram believes God and Abram discovers that God keeps God's promises.
- In his old age, Abram's wife Sarah does bear him a son.
- And his descendants are as the stars in the sky--both biological descendants and spiritual descendants--for all three of the great monotheistic world religions--Judaism, Islam and Christianity--trace their history back to Abram, whom we know as Abraham.
- God fulfilled God's promise to Abram.
- Though Abram had his times of backsliding, ultimately he took the promises of God seriously and he was rewarded for his faith.
- It's wonderful to encounter somebody who takes God seriously--who believes God's promises.

- How about you? Are you troubled about your future?
- Are you lying awake at night while a terrifying darkness descends upon you?
- Trust God's promises. God will not forget you or forsake you.
- Hang in there and you will see the promises of God fulfilled.
- Being old or needing care in a retirement centre or a nursing home doesn't mean that we are useless or ineffectual.
- It may mean that we are charged with serious responsibility for inspiring those who come after us in ways that we could not otherwise accomplish.
- We must expect great things to happen!

The Closing Prayer:

- Gracious Lord, grant that we shall not be like the impatient servant portrayed in the 12th chapter of the Gospel according to Luke, who, when his Master was delayed in coming, became mean and dissipative, took his anger and resentment out on others, and in spite of his skills and hard work let impatience overrule his self-control. Help us to remember Jesus' words said in summary of that story: "From everyone to whom much has been given, much will be required; and from one to whom much has been entrusted, even more will be demanded." Lord, make us worthy of the trust you have placed in us. This we humbly pray. Amen.

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