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GENESIS 15

Series: Understanding Your Roots

[PRAYER] Heavenly Father, I want to come before you at this moment and ask for your special grace in our lives. Thank you for your protection on Mike Dammann this Christmas Eve when he was in the automobile accident. Thank you that he's here at the Barn with us this morning. I pray for Jack who is experiencing COVID symptoms, but had a negative test. So he's just treating it like COVID, staying home today, isolating. We're praying that you help him continue to feel better. He's feeling better today, Lord. Continue to make him well and keep him safe. We're grateful. Lord, there are others in our fellowship who are experiencing some kind of pain and suffering and challenges. We're asking for your grace to be working in their lives. Lord, we want to see you answer prayers and so we're coming before you to ask for you to do amazing things in our lives this year. We'll give you the honor and the credit that you deserve for that. Thank you, Father, for your love for us. In Jesus' name, amen.

Well over the last several weeks we've been looking at the life of Abraham. We followed Him as he left Ur and he went up to Haran and then came back down to Palestine. We tagged along with him as he went into Egypt where he lied and not so many good things there happened. But then he came back to Palestine and kind of rededicated himself to the Lord. We raced with him up to Damascus where he rescued Lot and the crew from the four kings that had come over. So he came back and we followed him through that whole story.

Now we arrive at Genesis 15 where we have a spiritual tune-up. We have a time in Abraham's life where he really needs to kind of get it back together. He's been through a lot. I really like this passage at this Sunday of this year because we've been through a lot and we can identify with Abraham through all the things that he's been through, all the challenges, good and bad, through the year. He comes to a place where he needs a spiritual tune-up and we all need that today.

What I like to do as I'm studying the scriptures is go in to the story and imagine I'm there, experiencing the same things that Abraham experienced, feeling the same emotions that he's experiencing in that situation and then watch God bless him and then feel that blessing myself and take that away and apply it. That's what we're going to do as we go into Genesis 15 today. So open your Bibles to Genesis 15 and that will help you to follow along in the passage that we're looking at today.

Notice it starts in the passage – *After these things*. What are the *these things*? The things I just told you. After all these things that happened. In other words we're coming to a place in his life where he needs something. Something is going to happen. *After these things the word of the Lord*

came to Abram in a vision: “Fear not, Abram, I am your shield; your reward shall be very great.” I don’t know what Abraham was afraid of. Maybe he was afraid of those four kings, Chedorlaomer and his buddies, that he went over and conquered. Maybe they would be coming back for revenge. I don’t know what he was afraid of. Maybe he was afraid there might be another famine in the land and he’d have to go back down to Egypt again, and you know that would not be a good deal for him to go back to those people again. Or maybe he was just thinking about his life. “My life hasn’t turned out the way I thought it was going to turn out, God. I’ve got some challenges here”. I don’t know what it is, but he’s got some fears and God says – *I am your shield. “Fear not,”* He says, *“I am your shield; your reward shall be great.”*

Now I think we need a spiritual tune-up whenever emotions cross the line. You know in your life as in mine our emotions start crossing the line. You know where that line is. That line is where the emotions aren’t productive anymore. They’re more damaging than helpful. They’re getting us into trouble in one way or another. Damaging relationships, making us feel more isolated, making us feel upset. When those emotions cross the line, we need a spiritual tune-up and God knows that’s what Abraham needs at this moment. Whether it’s emotions or in this case the doubts that Abraham is experiencing. Sometimes we doubt. “God, what are you doing here? I don’t understand. This isn’t what I signed up for. I was expecting you to do different things than you’ve done here. It’s not turning out the way I hoped.” When we experience the doubts, we experience the emotions, we can find ourselves in deep need of a spiritual tune-up and that’s what God wants to do inside of our hearts. He wants to tune us up spiritually. He wants to refocus us so that we’re not taken away by our emotions, so that our doubts aren’t creating this disappointment in our lives, but we are able to trust the Lord in the midst of the difficulties that we experience, not just this last year, but today and going into the next year. We need a spiritual tune-up in our lives.

Now God makes this statement to Abraham. He says – *Don’t fear because I am your shield.* If you were going to look at a shield in the Bible and kind of imagine what does the Bible say about a shield, you would not come to Genesis 15, would you? You would think in your mind of the armor of God in Ephesians 6 because the fourth piece of armor is the shield of faith. It’s that faith that we have that overcomes the emotional challenges that we experience. If our emotions start getting out of control it’s likely that it’s pointing to something in our lives that requires us to have more faith and trust the Lord in situations where we need to trust Him. He’s our shield. That’s what He’s saying here. So Abraham really needs something from the Lord. God knows exactly what he needs. So God tells him this is what you need, I am your shield, you’re going to have a great reward in your life. And Abraham now shares his heart with the Lord.

I hope you can do that with God. I hope you can come to the Lord and be real. That you don’t have to feel like oh I’ve got to have it all together when I come before the Lord. Because God can handle the challenges that we have. Over and over in the Psalms David says, “God, what are you doing?” He makes these difficult statements. And then at the end he says, “God, I put my trust in you.” There’s this ability that we have to come before the Lord and say, “God, I’ve just got to talk to you about what’s going on. I’m not happy with what’s happening. I just don’t understand this.” And so that’s what he does.

Notice in verse 2 he says – *But Abram said, “O Lord God, what will you give me, for I continue childless, and the heir of my house is Eliezer of Damascus?”* You don’t even know who Eliezer of Damascus is. This is the guy who is like his office manager, his business manager, the manager of all the stuff that he has. He said, “God, I’ve got a problem here. My business manager is going to inherit everything I have. I don’t have an heir. What am I going to do? Things haven’t turned out the way I had hoped, the way I thought they were going to turn out when we first got together, God, when you made some promises to me. It’s not working out the way I thought.

Abram continues and he says in verse 3 – *And Abram said, “Behold, you have given me no offspring, and a member of my household will be my heir.”* So he has this ability, he knows God well enough to say, “God, we’ve got to have a talk here. I’m just struggling. Life isn’t turning out the way I thought it would turn out.” You know there are times when people get disappointed with the Lord and the Lord isn’t just doing what they thought He was going to do. And in those moments they have to make a choice. Here’s the choice. You either have to say, “Okay, God isn’t who I thought He was. I’m going to go off and do my own thing.” Or you’re going to say, “God must be different than I thought He was. I need to recommit myself to Him. I need to get to know Him in a new way that I’ve never known Him before.” I would even say sometimes we need to get saved again. That’s probably not theologically correct, but I do feel like sometimes in people’s lives they’re so dragged down in their lives, things are not the way they hoped that they really need to come to Jesus again. They need to come to the Lord and say, “God, you are my shield. Show me who you are now in ways that I never knew before.” So God is going to do that.

Now God’s going to be the counselor in this situation. Notice how He responds to all of this. He says in verse 4 – *And behold, the word of the Lord came to him.* This is a very important moment. Whenever you know that the word of the Lord is about to come, you need to stop. Whatever you’re doing, stop and you look up and you listen. Because when God speaks, something good is going to happen. He’s going to change the way you believe, He’s going to satisfy some concerns, He’s going to give you the peace you need. Something’s going to happen when the word of the Lord comes. Sometimes that word of the Lord comes through a child. Sometimes it comes through a parent or a friend or a boss, someone who’s not even a believer. Sometimes the word speaks through someone. But most of the time the words of the Lord that we receive come directly from God’s word. That’s why we open the Bible with anticipation. Each week we go, “I wonder. I read this Bible a lot. But I wonder what God’s going to say to me today.” There’s this anticipation of opening God’s word and saying, “Okay, Lord. I’m ready. What is this word?” Now watch. This is what the word is and He’s going to take this through.

He says – *“This man shall not be your heir; your very own son shall be your heir.” And he brought him outside and said, “Look toward heaven, and number the stars, if you are able to number them.”*

Here he is out in the darkness with no street lights and God says, “Let’s just go outside for a moment. I want you to look outside and I want you to look at those stars and count them. If you can number them, that’s how many heirs you’re going to have. That’s how many offspring you’re going to have.”

See what God does is He gives him a visual aid. He gives him...we call them windows. When we're preaching a sermon it's very important that a sermon have windows in it. Because the windows allow you to see into your own heart. That's why these illustrations are important. So if I tell you an illustration about a child I was working with or a parent I was trying to help or a story from my own life, you go away and that's what you remember. If I say, "What did I talk about last night?" and you go, "The only thing I remember was that story you told," that's because those are the windows, those are the things that come in. Your heart is open to them and you receive those and you go yes, that's what I need. I'm sure that's why Jesus told so many stories. He called them parables.

Well at one point there was this parable Jesus told about a man who was a sower and he had lots of seed. He took the seed and he threw it out and some of the seed went onto the path and the birds came and took it away. Well after he tells all the parable the disciples say, "Would you please tell us what that parable means?"

So Jesus told them well in the first seed when the birds come, it's like Satan comes and snatches the word from the person because their heart is hard like the hard soil. So it can't receive the word of God because it's hard. Hard-hearted people can't receive the word of God and Satan snatches it out of the way like birds.

Well the second soil, Jesus says, is like the rocky soil. He says the seed falls on the rocky soil and it sprouts up quickly. But the sun comes out and scorches it and it just takes away its life. The pressures of life do that to people. They receive the word and say, Oh yeah, that's great. I like that. Bless the Lord at all times. His praise will continually be in my mouth. This is the day the Lord has made." But then the pressures of the day come and that growth just fizzles away.

God says there's a third kind of soil representing the heart of a person who receives the word, the word comes in, but then there are thorns that grow up and these thorns come up and they choke out the life of that plant. He says that's like the pressures of this world. That's the desire to be happy. If your desire in life is to be happy, you're in trouble. If that's your goal that you want to be happy and happiness is your goal, then that's going to be like those thorns that come up and they just choke out the word of God in your hearts and your life.

But then He says there's a fourth soil. It's this soil that receives the word of God with joy and it sprouts up and grows and turns into a fruitful plant. Now the disciples go away from that. What do you think what they're thinking? Well I want to be one of these fruitful plants. How can my heart be receptive to God and I can listen to that. It's the illustration that Jesus told that they remember, and that's what we see in God's word. The stories, the parables. They remembered those.

God says, "I'm going to take you outside, Abraham, and I want you to look up at the stars and see how many stars there are up there. Go ahead count them. If you can count them you'll be able to count your offspring." So God does this to Abraham who is eighty-five years old at this point. His wife is seventy-five years old and she's barren. She can't have any kids. They've been trying to have children, but no kids are coming out. Okay? There's nothing happening here with

the kid issue. They're trying, but nothing is happening. So this is a really different experience from the reality that Abraham has experienced and the promise of God.

So the next verse is very important in the passage. The next verse says this in verse 6: *And he believed the Lord, and he counted it to him as righteousness.* That phrase, that statement echoes, rings out into the New Testament in James 2 and Romans 4 when both of those writers are talking about salvation. Because the righteousness of Abraham didn't come from his acts of righteousness. It came from his faith. So the New Testament writers take that in and say in order to have relationship with God, you must be righteous. That righteousness is not going to come by you doing a bunch of acts. Because your presence before God doesn't happen because you've done more good than bad. If you think you're a good person because you've done more good than bad, you're missing the point both of those writers are saying. They're saying you cannot get to God on your own righteousness and let's look back at Abraham because we're going to take that phrase from the story and apply it to your life now as a New Testament believer. It's by your faith. Your faith was made righteous before God. So when we trust in Jesus Christ and receive the righteousness of Christ, we have that righteousness and now we have the presence of God. We're able to go into His presence and enjoy that in our lives.

In verse 7 it says this. So God now is going to speak. And in the midst of this He's going to counsel Abraham and give him what he needs in this message. Or it's a call to faith. I think it's this spiritual tune-up that we all need that's represented here in this particular idea. So God *said to him, "I am the Lord who brought you out from Ur of the Chaldeans to give you this land to possess."*

So we have to go back to who is God anyway? We go back and find out yes, this is the God that I trusted in the beginning. This is whom I love. We start there. Because if we're going to come to a promise and God's going to make the promise to Abraham, the promise is only as valuable as the person making it. So he goes back and he says this is who I am. But Abraham said, *"O Lord God, how am I to know that I shall possess it?"* How am I going to know?

Now I have to pause here and I have to tell you a little bit about the culture of the day. Because the culture of the day helps us understand what's happening in this particular passage. Because God is going to make a covenant or a contract with Abraham.

If you wanted to make a contract today you would write it up, have it ratified by a notary or a lawyer, and then it would have all these stipulations in the contract. That's not how they did contracts in those days. Today if you want to have a mortgage on a house, you've got to have thirty pages of all the stuff and you have to sign every page and initial here and there. That's how you ratify a contract in our particular culture. If you're going to rent a house, you've got to go through and sign all these documents because you're agreeing in this contract.

Well that's not how it was in the Old Testament. There were several different kinds of contracts that would be. One was build an altar here and this altar will be this mark between you and between me. You stay on your side; I'll stay on my side. You come on this side then God's going to get you and this altar is going to represent that. So that's one kind of contract they had.

Another one was what they called a salt contract. I liken this one to a shaking of hands. Is your word good? Well let's shake on it. Well in that day they didn't shake on it. They would take the salt and they would say, "Here. I'll give you my salt and you give me your salt." Salt is a really valuable thing. It's a bag of salt and I'll give you my bag of salt and I'll take your bag of salt as a statement of our agreement together.

Another kind of contract we're even going to see later in the book of Genesis was the one where the guy says, "I owe you money, so what I'm going to do is I'm going to give you my staff and I'm going to give you my sandal." That's what they do. I don't know if he just walks away with one sandal or something, but he's giving him a sandal and his staff. The reason why is that's collateral. At any point because he holds those things, he can go into the marketplace, "Hey, that guy still owes me. See I still got a sandal and his staff." That was his way... When he paid him back, he'd want the sandal and the staff back. That was collateral that they would do.

This covenant that we're looking at here is different than all of those. This is the covenant that's really serious. This is the one that says if you don't keep your part, you die. That's what kind of covenant this is. So what happens is you will get a cow and you cut the cow in half. That's going to take you a little bit of time. You put one half of the cow on one side and one half the cow on the other side. Then you get a sheep and you put one half of the ram on one side and one half on the other side. Then you get a goat. You put half of the goat here.... So you create this path of animals. Maybe a couple birds you put there. You don't have to cut them in half. But the idea is you walk in between these. And basically you're saying this: As we walk between this we're agreeing that if one of us doesn't keep their part of the deal it's like they're cut in half and they're dead. That's how serious this covenant is. It's really big.

Now that you know that cultural information, let's go back and read what God says to Abraham. In verse 9 *He said to him, "Bring me a heifer three years old, a female goat three years old, a ram three years old, a turtledove, and a young pigeon."* And he brought him all these, cut them in half, and laid each half over against the other. So he cut them and he laid them across from each other, creating a path between them. *But he did not cut the birds in half.* So that's the covenant they're making.

But verse 11... You can't skip verse 11. This is a bizarre verse and I think it has some great application for us. Let me read it. It says – *And when birds of prey came down on the carcasses, Abram drove them away.* There's a period of time between the giving of the promise and the ratifying of the promise in which Abraham has to do something. He's doing some work in the midst of this.

I want to suggest that Satan wants to take away the promise from you and sometimes you've got to shoo away the vultures, get rid of them. You've got to step in and say, "Get out of here, get out of here," because you're waiting for God's promise to be satisfied and fulfilled. Sometimes in order to experience that peace inside you, God is saying, "I'm not listening to those people. Get out of my life. Don't get in my way here because you're trying to snatch away the promise from me." Who we hang around with is very important. Who you go to for counsel is really important. Sometimes you go to someone for counsel and they're giving you bad advice, you're going, "Get away from me," shooing away the vultures, getting rid of the birds of prey. It's a

challenge sometimes for us, but I think sometimes that's what we need to do. We need to position ourselves well and get rid of those things that are trying to take away the promises that God has given to us that would rob us of the blessing that God wants to provide. That's why we have this verse in here so that we can experience that.

Let's go on to do the next verses. In verse 12 it says this: *As the sun was going down, a deep sleep fell on Abram. And behold, dreadful and great darkness fell upon him.* I don't know if you've experienced this, but this is this darkness that just feels overwhelming. It just feels emotionally upsetting. Very interesting that this takes place in the midst of this story. That Abraham is going off and laying down there and he's just feeling overwhelmed. This is difficult pain that he's experiencing in the midst of this story. That's when God is going to make a statement now.

He's going to make a statement of the promise before they walk through the contract agreement. He's going to make the statement. Here's what the comment is. Here's what God says to Abraham – Here's what I want to promise you. *Then the Lord said to Abram, "Know for certain that your offspring will be sojourners in a land that is not theirs and will be servants there (speaking of their time in Egypt), and they will be afflicted for four hundred years. But I will bring judgment on the nation that they serve, and afterward they shall come out with great possessions.* Remember when they came out they had all the stuff that the Egyptians just said, "Take all our stuff. Get out of here as fast as you can. Don't come back."

Verse 15 – *As for you, you shall go to your fathers in peace; you shall be buried in a good old age. And they shall come back here in the fourth generation, for the iniquity of the Amorites is not yet complete.* I'm giving you, Abraham, a promise. And notice the promise isn't all going to take place in your time zone. It's not all going to take place in a microwave fashion. You're not just going to get it instantly. Sometimes we get discouraged with what God is doing because it's not happening the way we want right now. And sometimes there's a waiting period in the midst of that. But God says, "But you, Abraham, you're going to..." "I've got you" is what He's saying. He's saying you're going to live to an old age. You're going to live in peace. Go to your Father's in peace. I've got you here. You're not going to see the full promise fulfilled. But I've got your back here.

Well that's the proclamation. Now they're going to walk through and the covenant is going to take place. So let's go to the next verses. In verses 17-21 it says – *When the sun had gone down and it was dark, behold, a smoking fire pot and a flaming torch passed between these pieces. On that day the Lord made a covenant with Abram, saying, "To your offspring I give this land, from the river of Egypt to the great river, the river Euphrates, the land of the Kenites, the Kenizzites, the Kadmonites, the Hittites, the Perizzites, the Rephaim, the Amorites, the Canaanites, the Girgashites and the Jebusites."*

Notice though. If you were a Hebrew person at that time and you were reading that story, you'd be saying, "Wait, wait, wait. There's something missing here. Abraham is not walking through the pieces. Only God is." Notice it says there in verse 18 – *On that day the Lord made a covenant with Abraham.* It's not they made a covenant together. This is an unconditional covenant. It is not dependent on anything that Abraham does. It is only dependent on God and

His grace. There's some of those promises that we have before God that are not dependent on anything we do. They're just dependent on God's grace. He offers us that peace. He offers us that joy. It's only dependent on Him and who He is. That is the beauty of this covenant that God makes with Abraham. It is not dependent on the works of Abraham. How does he get anything out of this? It's by faith. It's the faith of Abraham that He enjoys and he experiences God in this unique and special way.

I am just so enamored by this story. That's why I call it "It's Spiritual Tune-up Time." We all need a spiritual tune-up in our lives. When the busyness of life, *after these things* that start chapter 15, they just start to get together and mess with our head. Things start to change. We're not happy with what's going on. We need a spiritual tune-up. We must come to the Lord and say, "Lord, I want to re-center my life on you. Will you please reallocate my emotions and my thinking and my patterns so that I can be focused on you? I want to be close to you. I want to understand you. I want to live my life, Lord, serving you in everything that I do." That is what it means to follow the Lord.

I believe that sometimes Christians find themselves in dark places, difficult places, hard places. It's so important in those moments to be centered on the Lord. You're looking at a new year. You're going into 2021. There are a lot of people saying, "Boy, 2021 is going to be better than last year." Well maybe it will be. There's going to be all kinds of things going on that are different. I'll tell you this. It will be different. The whole political structure is going to be different. You've got different things happening in the medical profession. You've got all kinds of things happening financially. All kinds of things are going to be different. But whether it's a better year or not a better year isn't determined by the political scene or the health crisis. It's going to be determined by your relationship with the Lord.

I want to tell you that it can be a fantastic year because the light shines the brightest in the darkness. As more and more challenges are faced in our lives, we can experience the beauty of God and the greatness of God. So 2021 can be the best year you've seen yet. Not because of circumstances, but because of what God wants to do inside of your heart. It's just amazing. It's God's grace that is so big that it helps us deal with any situation that we're in.

We have tremendous hope going into this next year. I can hardly wait to see what God is going to do in our world, in my life, how He's going to provide for me and that promise that Jesus made. He says – *Lo, I will be with you always, even to the end of the world.* Whoa, whoa, whoa. Well we're getting close to the end of the world I imagine here. But the idea is He's going to be with me always. There's this promise that I have from the Lord that He is with me.

Where are we going to be in the course of this year? If we're going to rely on all the things that are going on situationally, then we'll find ourselves under the circumstance. "Well under the circumstances I'm here." Well what are you doing under the circumstances? We're above the circumstances because we're flying high with the Lord and allowing Him to work in our lives. That's what a spiritual tune-up does in our lives. It's grace. It's God's grace we will experience in 2021. Amen?

If you've never accepted Jesus Christ as your Lord and Savior, I just want to invite you to do that. You need Christ as you face this next year and you face the day. It's only by God's grace that you can experience Him. He loves you. He sent Jesus Christ to die for you. Your job is to have faith and to trust Him as your Savior and your Lord. Then you can experience the amazing grace.