

Two Certainties in Life

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[0 : 00] a beautiful song. If you have your Bibles, I want you to turn to Genesis chapter 15. Genesis chapter 15. Benjamin Franklin once wrote in a letter that there are only two things certain in life, death and taxes. And for some of you, that may not be that funny coming in the week coming up. But anyway, I want you to see some other certainties in life today.

And we look at a passage that, you know, there's always those folks who write in their Bibles when the preacher preached a sermon and write the date down. And so if you ever do use it again or even preach from that passage, they come back and tell you, you know, you preach that back, you know.

So if you're one of those smart addicts, I dealt with this passage before Easter and had planned to preach this sermon on a Sunday that I couldn't be here and you didn't want me to be here right before Easter when I got sick. And so then we went into five weeks of emphasis for Easter and talked about the last week of Christ. But I want us to look at this passage again and I want to point out a different aspect than I previously addressed. Now, I realize nobody, unless you wrote it in your Bible, nobody knows I preached this passage six weeks ago. And the reason why is because when I was with some pastors one time on a retreat, an old sage among us said, all you ever need is five years of sermons. I said, really? I said, well, after five years, I mean, you know, you preach it again, they don't know, you know, that you already preached. He said, they don't know what you preached last week, let alone five years ago. So Genesis 15 verse seven says, and he said to him, I am the Lord who brought you out from Ur of the Chaldeans to give you this land to possess. But he said, oh Lord God, how am I to know that I shall possess it? And he said to him, bring me a heifer three years old, a female goat three years old, a ram three years old, a turtle dove, and a young pigeon, and he brought them all. These cut them in half, laid each half over against the other, but he did not cut the birds in half. And when birds of prey came down on the carcasses, Abram drove them away. As the sun was going down, a deep sleep fell on Abram. And behold, dreadful and great darkness fell upon him. 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 and they will be afflicted for 400 years, but I will bring judgment on the nation that they serve. And afterwards, they shall come out with great possessions. 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. 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'll give this land from the river of Egypt to the great river, the river Euphrates. God's covenants are kept and fulfilled by the Lord.

[4 : 02] And there are a few of them in scripture. He made a covenant with Noah and promised that the earth would never be destroyed by flood again. And he put a rainbow in the sky to mark that. In the Hebrew, that word for rainbow was literally bow as in a hunting bow. And it speaks of the wrath of God being eliminated. No longer will God point his bow upon the earth in the way that he did the flood.

Instead, he'll hang that bow up. That's the idea behind the idea of the rainbow. He made a covenant with Moses that actually reestablished and backed up the one that we see here. He made one with David to establish the Davidic throne, which would be fulfilled through Christ, which is the promise of the new covenant in Jeremiah chapter 31 verses 31 through 34.

This is also an establishment of covenant with Abram and is a promise for the prospering and the founding of the nation of Israel. And this is a rare, holy moment. And through it, I want you to get just two certainties. Now, when a preacher says two, people get their hopes up, but I wouldn't if I were you.

Two certainties in life that I feel sure are relevant to us today. And knowing these two certainties will come and planning for them to come, knowing they'll come, will help us to live a more focused life on what God would have us to be. First certainty is this. There's going to be troubles in this world. It's a certain thing. There's going to be troubles in this world. God gave Abram instructions to prepare animals in a certain way, and he did that. And then he sits down and he waits.

He's not sure what's going to happen. But he waits. Have you ever waited on the Lord?

[6 : 20] Not sure of what was going to happen, about the circumstances in your life, but yet you have to pause and wait upon the Lord. A lot of things can happen as you wait on the Lord. Notice what happens to him in verse 10 and 11. It says, and he brought them all these, cut them in half, laid each over, each half over against the other, but he did not cut the birds in half. Listen to this. And when the birds of prey came down on the carcasses, Abram drove them away as the sun was going down.

There'll be troubles in this world. Two troubles that I want to tell you about today. One of them is what I call, based upon this passage, worship vultures. As we wait, as he waits to worship, he has to spend his time waiting to see what God's going to do by shooing away the birds that are trying to destroy the very setting of his worship. Those evil old birds. Birds are often seen as a sign of evil in scripture or evil spirits in, in scripture. We see that in the parable of the sower when the sower goes out and scatters the seed, but it says that those that fell on the hard places, the birds would come and snatch that. Now that seed being the gospel message. And so anytime the gospel message is presented, the evil one tries his best to snatch that away.

And then there's that other passage in Revelation chapter 18, when it talks about a wicked Babylon falling. And it says, and Babylon represents evil in a city. And it says, there are a cage for every unclean and hated bird. Speaking of the demonic influence in that city. When, when Jesus gave the parable of the mustard seed, he talked about the mustard seed being the tiniest seed, but yet it grows into a bush that becomes into a tree. And so, so large that, that even birds go and nest there. Now, that seed of course is, is the gospel. And he's talking about the kingdom of God there. And so that, that bush, that tree represents the family of God, the church of Jesus Christ. And some have interpreted those birds to mean that, that the church will grow. And along the way, there'll be some birds that come on in that church. There'll be some demonic influence that comes in that. There'll be some rascals in that church. There'll be some birds. Thank God that's not talking about us. Amen. I really believe that passage is explaining the fact that the bush grows so large that it's big enough to house birds. But either way, birds are often a sign of evil influence that happens, kind of like the birds of the classic Hitchcock movie of sorts, to come down and cause chaos. So I want you to think about it for just a moment. What are the birds of prey that fly on us when we're trying to worship?

[9 : 52] What are they? Let me give you one worship vulture. The pursuits of the world. Consistent worship is often messed up by the beauty of the things of the world.

And we become guilty of worshiping the created instead of the creator. And instead of worship, we put things, not necessarily bad things, but we put things, wrong things in the way of worship. We prioritize Sunday wrongly. Sunday worship is our regular. As long as there's not another offer that comes up, it's any better. If we get another option, we'll change our priority. When in reality, scripture points out and shows us that it ought to be a priority, that we ought to give God his time. And good things and events and such are not bad, but they can serve in a bad way when they take us away from the place of worship. You have to shoo them away. Now, what I always say is this, miss for the extraordinary, but don't just miss for the ordinary. Because our schedules are so peppered with so many ordinary things. I promise you, the birds of prey will try their best to so get us busy that we no longer prioritize worship in our lives. Don't let it be a distraction. Shoo them away.

The second worship vulture here is the distractions of the soul. For what swoops down upon us often to keep us from having a real worship experience, I'll tell you what it is most likely. It's the favorite sins that we're nesting on. It's the favorite sins that we have in our life. We want to keep a firm grasp on this world as well as be right with God at the same time. And we can't do that because we get too stretched.

[12 : 04] We get a bad case of the can't help it's when we're trying to be like the world, but not much like the world, just a little bit. And yet trying to be in the proper place as well at the same time.

We can sympathize with Paul. In Romans 7, Paul says this. I love this passage. Give me hope. For I don't understand my own actions, for I do not do what I want, but I do the very thing I hate.

For I do not do the good I want, but the evil I do not want is what I keep doing. Now, if I do what I do not want, it's no longer I who do it, but sin that dwells in me.

You know, you have good intentions. You want to do right, but the reality is too many times we don't do right. Have you ever been there? Question is, are you there now? I mean, does that characterize your life? Because I'll tell you, it will distract your soul from worship. Now, admittedly, that's not Abram's problem as he waited. But admittedly, it's common for us. It's common to be distracted by our sin. So I encourage you to confess the mess. Confess it.

Shoo the distractions away from your life. Change course where course needs to be changed because that worship vulture distracts too many from real worship. Third thing is this, the hectic pace.

[13:39] I admire Abram for preparing a place for worship and then waiting on the Lord, waiting on the Lord. It takes an effort to do that. It took him an effort to do that. And he had to spend his time while he was waiting on the Lord, shooing away the vultures. A vulture that you'll have to shoo away in your life is the hectic pace of your life. I mean, the good things that you do every day to put food on the table and clothes on your back and good things for your family. Good things that we ought to be doing, but sometimes that means too much to us. That we sacrifice too much in order to have those things. When Jesus told us in Matthew 6 verse 33, seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness and all these things will be added to you. You know what he's talking about in that context? He's talking about food. He's talking about clothing. He'll provide those things. Don't let the hectic pace of legitimate causes come in the way of worship. And I'll just mention the three worship vultures that I've mentioned today. You need to shoo away some worldly pursuits. The going and the seeing and the going and the doing that takes you away from worship, distracts you in your life.

You need to get rid of the soul distractions, the pet sins that you're coddling, you hold on to, that draws you away from the Lord. You need to watch the hectic pace. Don't be busy building bigger barns so big that you forget you may not have the opportunity of another day. Shoo those vultures away.

Worship vultures is a trouble in this world. Tell you another trouble in this world. Genesis 15 verse 12 says this, as the sun was going down, a deep sleep fell on Abram and behold, dreadful and great darkness fell upon him. I'll tell you another trouble in this world is dark nights.

Dark nights. Some wonderful things were about to happen in Abram's life. This experience that he is about to have is absolutely amazing. But before it comes, he has a dark night.

Have you ever had a dark night? Dark nights are marked by two things. One is bad dreams. Bad dreams. When Jesus said, seek first the kingdom of God and all these things shall be added unto you.

[16:10] He also said this in Matthew 6. And which of you by being anxious can add a single hour to his span of life?

Therefore don't be anxious about tomorrow for tomorrow will be anxious for itself. Sufficient for the day is its own trouble. The reality is we toss and we turn about the worries in the night.

The expectations of Abram had not been fulfilled. Years had passed. Years had passed. And he didn't have a great nation.

Years had passed. His name was not great. He didn't have the land that God had promised him. He didn't have the offspring that God had promised him. He's doing what God told him to do.

And he's shooing off the vultures while he waits on God. And his enemies are breathing down his necks. He gets so wore out that he falls to sleep. And in that sleep, it is deep, but it is dreadful.

[17:20] What about your worries? It could make for some dark nights. It is a certainty of life. You'll have some, but that's not all.

Notice something else about the dark nights. It says in verse 12, there'll be dreadful and great darkness. So not only are there bad dreams, but there's also encroaching darkness.

Because the bad dreams are us. It's the things that we ponder and that we worry and that we deal with. But it's not just us. We can come up with enough crazy stuff on our own.

It's amazing to me when I wake up at 3 o'clock in the morning and I've got something on my mind. It is huge. It is huge. I mean, the world's going to collapse. And I'm going to fall under it. It's all going to go nuts.

And when I wake up in the morning, my life will be ruined. And if I can't go back to sleep and I wake up at 6 o'clock, that ain't no big deal.

[18 : 23] I'll take care of that. But somewhere in the dread of the night, the encroaching darkness just does a number. And I want you to know that the devil and his demons love the darkness.

They love discouragement. They love depression. They love dread. And they feed off of it. They feed off of it.

Now listen, get this. That's a certainty in life. It is common. Now we may not know that because we don't talk about it. We don't talk about it.

We put on our Sunday best. We put a smile on our face. We go about our way. And in reality, the demons of darkness too often haunt us.

And we don't want to talk about that. People don't like to talk about it. And if you do talk about it, not many listen. Lou Holtz said one time, don't tell people about your problems.

[19 : 27] 90% of them don't care and 10% of them are glad you got them. So you got to keep it in perspective. And that makes us feel that much more alone.

But I'm just telling you, you're going to have dark nights. It's going to happen. Elijah wanted to die. Look at how God used Elijah. Elijah wanted to die. David, King David, the mightiest King Israel ever had.

David had nightmares in caves. The Apostle Paul. We get most of the New Testament from the Apostle Paul and the work that he did. Paul said he was afflicted in every way.

And then Peter, the man who couldn't keep his foot out of his mouth, but when the Holy Spirit came upon him, had a boldness and a power. And thousands were saved in one sermon just from sharing the gospel.

And he says this in 1 Peter chapter 4. Beloved, do not be surprised at the fiery trial when it comes upon you to test you, as though something strange will happen to you.

[20 : 30] Therefore, let those who suffer according to God's will entrust their souls to a faithful creator while doing good. I'll tell you, you're going to have troubles.

You're going to have troubles with worship vultures. Things that distract you and get in the way of worship. You're going to have troubles in dark nights.

They're both a certainty. But that ain't what I come to talk about. Because there's a second certainty. And the second certainty, besides the troubles of this world, is the presence of God.

The presence of God. You are not alone. I am thankful that at funerals I can tell families that Jesus will not leave them comfortless.

He will not leave them alone. That he'll come to them. He says that in John 14, 18. And it is a truth that I can share with them and tell them that when the food and the family and the funeral is gone, that God will still be there and he will not leave you alone.

[21 : 44] And I'm thankful for that. I can tell that. But I will tell you, when Jesus said that, it was not at a funeral. Jesus was not speaking at a funeral. He was speaking to men who were about to walk out into a wicked world trying to do the right things of God and not be applauded for what they do.

And Jesus said, even though I will no longer be physically present with you, when you go in my name, I'm going to be there. I'm no longer going to physically be with you, but I'm still there.

And so it is with Abram. And thank God, even better than that, so it is with us. God comes in the night. And we can be assured of that in three ways.

One is he promises. Verse 13 through 16, basically of this passage says, Abram, all that I told you that I'll do, I will do.

God's going to do what he says he'll do. He'll show up. He'll show out. And he does it in Abram's life on a dark and dreadful night.

[22 : 50] He tells Abram to know for certain. Now, I will admit, and I'll show you in coming weeks, that Abram had more hiccups in his life along the way.

But he will be known as a man who trusted God. He's known as a great example of faith. I mean, he's Father Abraham, you know. God promises, thank God, and he keeps his promises.

Not only does he promise, he lies. I touched on this a few weeks ago, so I'll be quick, but God shows up in a dark night and makes his presence known through a smoking fire pot and a flaming torch.

That'll get you attention. And this speaks to the fact that God is light, and in him there is no darkness. Because in the midst of that darkness, with the birds of prey coming, in the midst of that, God let his presence be known through a smoking fire pot and a flaming torch.

He brightened the night. He speaks his guidance. He led the Hebrews in a desert with a pillar of fire.

[24 : 08] That speaks of his holiness. The holy presence of God is often seen by light. You'll see it in the tabernacle. You'll see it on Mount Sinai.

You'll see it on the Mount of Transfiguration. You'll see it when God's confronting and saving Paul. In Revelation 1, it'll really get your attention when it talks about the white hair, the fiery eyes, the feet of bronze, the voice like a raging river, the Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, who, thank God, is walking among the churches that may have struggles along the way.

He is with them in the midst of their struggles because the light of God speaks to a holy and guiding presence.

He promises and he lights. And this is not good grammar, but I don't know how else to put it. He alone.

He alone. Abram didn't walk among those animals.

[25 : 20] In a normal agreement like this, both individuals would walk through that. But God's promises and his presence is not based upon us.

It's based upon him. And the thought behind this, this whole cutting animals in half and laying them out and walking between them.

The whole concept of that is, I'm making a covenant with you and if I don't keep this commitment, make me like these animals. That's the thought behind it. God's saying, I alone will keep my promise regardless.

It's based on him. It's not based on us. It's based on him. Hebrews describes this in Hebrews chapter 6, beginning in verse 13, it says this, for when God made a promise to Abraham, since he had no greater by whom to swear, he swore by himself.

Saying, surely I will bless you and multiply you and thus Abraham, having patiently waited, obtained the promise. For people swear by something greater than themselves and in their disputes, an oath is final for confirmation.

[26 : 50] So when God desired to show more convincing to the heirs of promise, the unchanging character of his purpose, he guaranteed it with an oath so that two unchangeable things in which it is impossible for God to lie, we who have fled for refuge might have strong encouragement to hold fast to the hope set before us.

We have this as a sure and steadfast anchor of the soul, a hope that enters into the inner place behind the curtain where Jesus has gone as a forerunner on our behalf.

Abram was promised by God and his testimony is that Abram trusted the promises of God. He trusted him and you can too because God's promises are eternal.

They don't expire. They're not on a timetable. They're not on my timetable. They're not on your timetable. They're on God's timetable.

He will be where he says he'll be. He will do what he says he'll do and he'll do it because of who he is. It's based on him alone.

[28 : 04] He walked through it alone. What he does for us, he does by his grace and he will not let us down. Yes, Ben Franklin, death and taxes may be certain in life but so are the troubles in this world but thank God.

Even though we have misplaced priorities that rob our worship, even though we have sinful distractions that we struggle to walk away from and even though we experience dark nights and sometimes those that lack faith, thank God.

As certain as all those things are, we're even more certain of the promise of God, the holy guiding light of God that goes down the path for us.

And the reality is that God and God alone will get it done. I don't know what your troubles are but I know you got some.

We ain't gonna talk about all that today because we don't need to. We're on common ground there and I'll tell you in the midst of your troubles, a certainty that you can rest in is God's right there with you.

[29 : 24] He's present. And he'll be everything that you need for him to be exactly the way he wants to be in the time that he wants to be. With every head bowed and every eye closed, do you need to trust him today?

Maybe when you watch these three young ladies be baptized a little while ago, you realize there's never been a time in your life when you've asked the Lord Jesus to come into your life and to change you. You've never truly surrendered your life to the Lord Jesus Christ.

Might be a member of a church, might have attended many times but the reality is when you look at your life, there's an uncertainty there about a security and a relationship with the Lord Jesus that only comes when we answer his initiation.

If you're feeling a pull at all, it's not from you today. It's the sweet Holy Spirit of God giving you the opportunity to respond in obedience to follow him. And if you're here this morning and you've never accepted the Lord Jesus Christ as your Lord and Savior, I want you to know that you can just simply confess your sins to him.

Tell him you're sorry that you're a wrong sinner. Don't you want to live your life from him from this day forward? Only by his strength, only by his presence, only by his power.

[30 : 52] God, I give you my life. If you've never done that, I encourage you to do that today. I'd love to guide you in that process. Maybe you're here and you have done that but you've never acknowledged that through baptism like these young ladies did this day.

And I want you to know that's the first step of obedience and it becomes a hindrance in our lives when we don't do it. So I encourage you to be obedient and follow him. Maybe you're here and God's guiding you to this church.

You know that. God's doing a wonderful work in this church and I thank God for that. It's a blessing each and every day in my life. He's drawing people unto himself and if part of that process is for God to lead you to be a part of us, you come.

I'd love to guide you in that process. But even more so there's those here today with the troubles of this world and the worship distractions and the dark nights that have become such a hindrance in you.

You're not everything you ought to be for the Lord Jesus. And it's not that he don't give you the strength and the ability to do that. It's because you've decided you've went your own way in some areas of your life.

[32 : 02] And today needs to be a day of surrender again. Lord, I give you who I am. You know me better than anybody does. Know me better than I know myself. But God, I give you who I am. I ask you to cleanse me and let me help me to walk with you from this day forward in a way that honors you in a way that's steadfast for you.

I don't know what God's telling you today but I know you'll never be satisfied until you answer him. And I'll never ask you to do more than what God tells you to do and I never want you to be satisfied with less. Just follow God.

Lord Jesus, I love you and I thank you for the time that you've given us today and I ask dear God right now that you'll lead us and that we'll follow as you lead, dear God, in every part of this invitation.

And it's only in Christ's name that we pray and all God's people said, Amen.