

To KNOW Christ and one another more deeply,
To CARE for one another in truth and in love,
To GROW as followers of Jesus,
To SERVE those God has placed in our path.
- CG Mission Statement

Icebreaker

What is your favorite part of creation to look at and why?

Worship: Psalm 136

(Read the poem or a Scripture passage to meditate on)

Practice lectio divina (sacred reading) by attentively reading Psalm 136 aloud several times. Enter into a time of worship through prayer by using a word or a phrase from the passage.

Text for Discussion: Genesis 15:1-18

Turn in your Bibles and read this passage aloud together.

Aid for Discussion: Sermon Summary

Christmas is fast approaching, a celebration that Jesus has come into the world. But our hearts may be numbed to this joy – replacing celebration with sentimentality – unless we take time beforehand to reflect on why Christ needed to redeem creation. This is a call to be emotionally honest with ourselves, facing the brokenness of the world as well as our own personal brokenness. Advent is the season of darkness before Christ’s light entered the world. It offers the time to acknowledge that things are not as they should be. It gives us the space to call out to the Lord to make all things right.

Waiting on God requires a great deal of faith. Genesis 15 shows us what this can look like. God had promised to bless Abraham with prosperity and a son... but many years have passed. He is quite old when God returns, once again promising protection and provision. And Abraham’s response is to talk back to God, seeking assurance. The Almighty doesn’t grow angry over the man’s questions. It takes more faith to cry out to God than to give Him the silent treatment.

God responds by showing Abraham the vastness of the night sky and its multitude of stars – a sign he could always look to for assurance. “And Abram believed the Lord and the Lord counted it to him as righteousness” (v6). He had faith in God’s good promises. This is the heart of what faith is: a sure and certain knowledge that God is benevolent toward us. The stumbling block for many of us isn’t that God is good; it’s that God is benevolent when it comes to us personally.

How can we ever be sure of God’s goodwill toward us? We naturally assume our righteousness (and therefore God’s favor) is a result of our deeds. But if righteousness is defined as “a godly life in complete conformity to God’s will”... well, no one is like that! And yet God considers Abraham righteous. Why? Because he placed his trust in God’s goodness rather than in his own. His faith has made this possible.

Waiting on and trusting in God isn’t passive. Faithfully enduring darkness can be tremendously difficult; it requires courage. But being caught between where we are and what we were hoping for does not mean God has forgotten to be good to us. This is where faith – the most valuable thing in our lives – is forged.

Here in the darkness, God calls Abraham (and us) to know for certain that He will keep His promises. God makes a lasting covenant, which is anchored in His own character, not in the old man's. God alone assumes full responsibility, solemnly committing to do whatever it takes to ensure that His good promises will be fulfilled. Because this story is not about Abraham's faith so much as it is about God's faithfulness. The steadfast love of the Lord endures forever.

Christmas proclaims that God has given us a sign, just as Abraham was given one ages ago. Because there was another day when the sky was darkened, another day when God alone assumed full responsibility to guarantee His promises. That's the assurance of the cross of Jesus: our God will protect and deliver us. And so we can have the courage to wait and to face the darkness around and within us, knowing that God's extravagant love for us endures.

Guiding Question of the Week

(This question is intended as a target for the whole conversation. Do not ask for responses now. It will be repeated later in the study.)

Why was Abram's belief counted to him as righteousness and how does this relate to the gospel message of Jesus Christ coming into the world?

Questions for Discussion

(Remember it is better to wrestle deeply with two good questions than gloss over many. Sub-bullets are intended for potential follow-up.)

- What is something that stood out to you in this sermon and why?
 - Was there anything in this sermon that you would like to discuss?
- How is the Lord a shield to us when we are afraid? How is He our reward?
- What did Abram's question of verse 2-3 reflect about his belief in God's promises and what did he trust instead? See also Genesis 12:2.
 - In what areas of life do you tend to question God about His promises and why?
- How did God respond to Abram in verses 4-5?
 - What can we learn from this interaction between Abram and God that would help us handle our doubts and fears?
- Why was Abram's belief counted to him as righteousness and how does this relate to the gospel message of Jesus Christ coming into the world? See also Romans 4:1-3.
 - What is the object of our faith?
 - If Abram was saved apart from works, what ought we be telling ourselves when we "are trying our best"?
- Why do you think Abram questions God a second time in verse 8?
 - What did God do in response to Abram's second question? What is going on between them in verses 9-18?
 - Explain the "one way love" of this covenant.
 - How would this help Abram have a sure and certain knowledge of God and His promises?
- What gets us through the night as we wait and hope in God's promises? See the prayer of Mark 9:24.
 - What is something you most want to remember from this passage?

Prayer

Write down the names of yet-to-believe friends on 3x5 cards, one name per card. Write a brief description of how to pray for the needs of each person. Hand out the cards and pray in groups of 2 or 3 over the names. Collect them at the end of the meeting so that they can be redistributed to pray again at the next meeting.

Experiment of the Month

(A suggestion for engagement in following the way of Jesus this week)

Spiritual Formation Experience:

For the next few weeks in your personal worship time, use an online concordance to do a Bible search on the things God's people are called to be thankful for. Make a list of your discoveries, journal your reflections and life applications. Share this study with your family or community group at Thanksgiving.

Missional Experiment:

Keep your list of non-believers that you are praying for over the holiday season. Write some of your specific prayers in a journal with the hope that one day you might share the prayer journal with the person you have been praying for.