

Trust?

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 11 February 2018

Preacher: Graeme Shanks

[0 : 00] Well, good evening, everyone. It's great to see you tonight. Thank you so much for coming. Glad Scotland won. Otherwise, I was fearful for how we would get this evening. But thank you so much for coming. Thank you for Fiona and the band for leading us thus far.

And as we'll journey through this chapter, we'll just see that the truths that we've been singing are so beautiful and so poignant for what we're going to be looking at this evening. So why don't we pray? Maybe you want to have Genesis 15 open in front of you. Let's pray and then let's get into God's word together.

Holy God and dearest Heavenly Father, we just want to ask that you would be with us now as we turn to your word. That by your spirit that you would help us to grasp something more of your greatness and something more of the greatness of your Son.

And our Saviour Jesus Christ, in whose name we pray. Amen. So how does a politician sleep? So they lie on one side and then they turn over and they lie on the other side.

What do dinosaurs and honest bankers have in common? Both extinct. I'm sure you've heard many, many jokes at that before.

[1 : 23] And believe you me, if you hunt hard enough on the internet, you will find thousands of them. But they illustrate something that we all know to be true. That there are certain people in life who we have real difficulty taking at their word.

Example of how this worked out for me this week. On Tuesday, my wife Alex phoned me up and she told me that our car had a flat battery. Now I couldn't immediately get back and she managed to call somebody out and get the car started again.

I managed to get home and I took the car to an unnamed garage and for a free battery check. You ever done this before? Your battery goes dead, you take it for your free battery check once I think. I soon realised why it was called a free battery check. Because I got there and the mechanic advised me that lo and behold I needed a new battery. And it would be about £100 to get a new battery.

And lo and behold he just happened to have a battery and he was free to fit it. And I must say my immediate thought was that I was extremely suspicious.

[2 : 23] And I think because I'm a tight Scot, I said I'll think about it. And I drove home. But it's not true in life. We know that there are certain people whose word we have difficulty in believing.

So here's the question I want to ask you at the outset of this evening. As you think about your own life. I don't know how you come here this evening. Maybe you come and you're a regular to this church.

Maybe you come here this evening and this is your first time ever at Brunsfield. Maybe this is the first time you've been at church in a while. Maybe you wouldn't even call yourself a Christian. I want you to think about your life.

I want to ask you this evening. Is there anyone in your life who you can trust? Is there anyone in life who will be 100% true to their word?

Is there anyone in life who will never ever let you down? And is there anyone in life on whose word you and I can base and build our lives?

[3 : 24] Is there anyone in life who we can trust? Because trust is right at the heart of this passage this evening. So here's Abraham.

And the thing about Abraham is that he is asking himself those kind of questions. And he's specifically asking them in relation to God. Now if you want to flick back to Genesis chapter 12. Where we started out this series a number of weeks ago. God has spoken to Abraham. And he's made him some pretty big promises.

So if you just flick your eyes there. He's promised them a great nation. Great nation are going to come from Abraham. And he is going to have that great nation.

And that great nation will live in a land flowing with milk and honey. And God through Abraham would bring blessing to the whole world. Now they are big promises. Big, big, big promises.

[4 : 21] And we've got to ask ourselves as a reader. I'm sure the question that Abraham is asking himself. Is God good for his promises? Is God good for his promises? Or is he going to turn into another joke like the politician and the banker?

Well here is the big thing that this passage would teach us tonight. Really simply. That the God of the Bible is good for his word. Really simply. If you get one thing from this evening.

And I really pray and hope that you get more than one thing from this evening. But if there's one thing. Make it that. That the God of the Bible is good for his word. In fact so much so that I want you to get it. That I would love us to repeat it.

Okay. One, two, three. The God of the Bible is good for his word. Now a few weeks ago we saw Abraham respond to a family crisis. His nephew Lot had been caught up in a skirmish.

He'd been effectively kidnapped by. If you want to scan your eye over chapter 14 there. Kidnapped by Ker-de-Lomar and the kings that were allied with him.

[5 : 24] What's Abraham going to do? Lot's been kidnapped. Abraham chooses to get involved. And because God is the one who's orchestrating all things. Despite the fact that Abraham has an inferior army.

Abraham manages to defeat the larger and more powerful armies. And rescue Lot. But the most significant moment for Abraham was not the battle. It was what happened when he was returning from the battlefield.

Because he's approached by two kings. The first king. The king of Sodom. A nation who represent all that God hated.

And the second king. The king of Salem. And a priest of the one true God named Melchizedek. And both of them. What did they do? They offer their right hand of allegiance to Abraham.

And the question we've got to ask ourselves as the reader is. Who is Abraham going to choose? Who will Abraham side with? It's a real test of his integrity. A real test of his faith.

[6 : 25] A real test of what this guy is really made of. And what we find is that Abraham sides with God. Why? Because he's confident that this God who has spoken to him is the real deal.

Well hot on the heels of that test come our verses this evening. And it would appear that Abraham finds himself asking, Is God good for his word? Can I trust you God?

Can I trust you? Are you really all that you're hyped up to be? And God once again so graciously and lovingly says, Abraham, Abraham, I'm good for my word.

I am good for my word. So let's look at this together, shall we? Firstly, verses 1 to 6. God says, Abraham, like Fiona said, My word is a word that you can count on.

Verse 1 of chapter 15. What do we read? The word of the Lord came to Abraham. The word of the Lord came to Abraham. It's not just a throwaway line.

[7 : 30] See what's going on here. It's a wonderful truth about who this God is. That this God makes the first move. He made Abraham. He loves Abraham.

And he knows Abraham. And he knows the questions. And he knows the doubts that are deep inside Abraham's heart. Now what are those doubts? Look what the Lord says.

Don't be afraid. Don't be afraid. Now we've got to ask, if we not, why would he be afraid? Why would he be afraid? Well, could it be that he's thinking maybe, can I really trust you God?

I mean, yes, I've defeated those enemies because you were with me. But I mean, there's no guarantee that's going to happen again. Yes, I, maybe somebody wants to get the door. Yes, I have said no to worldly pleasures and yes to God.

And I did it then. But there's no guarantee that I will always do that. See, Abraham's afraid. And stepping into his troubled situation and speaking into his troubled heart.

[8 : 33] Like a caring mother or father. Do you see how God steps in with his word? Not just any random thoughts. But the right words. For the right man.

At the right moment. This is the kind of God that we're dealing with. As Abraham thinks of his surrounding armies round about. I'm sure want him dead.

What does God say? I'm your shield, Abraham. I am your shield. Not I will give you a shield. Not take up your shield. But I am your shield.

I will protect you. Now, presumably Abraham has to stop at this point. And he's got to think about who is in his corner. And as he looks to his corner, he's not looking at Mike Tyson. He's not looking at Tyson Fury. In his corner is the God of angel armies. The God that has revealed himself to Abraham.

[9 : 33] It's the God of the universe. He is the possessor of heaven and earth. Abraham, I am your shield. And then as Abraham thinks of his possessions.

Remember those possessions that he turned down when he said no to the king of Salem? And that wee voice goes in his head. I'm sure like the worst game show host ever. Here's what you could have won. Abraham must have thought, what was I doing?

Did I make the right call? What does God say? See it? Abraham, I am your great reward. I am your great reward. You are worried about the fact that you may have failed to add some digits to your bank account.

Well, let me tell you, I am the possessor of heaven and earth. Your reward, Abraham, is me. It's not stuff. It's me. Now, what a wonderful truth about this God.

Let's just stop and think about that for a minute. That not only does he know our hearts, not only does he know our troubled minds, not only does he know our doubts, but he steps into them with words of comfort and words of promise.

[10 : 41] This is the kind of God that we're dealing with here. Leading, comforting, shepherding all by his words. The words of the old hymn, Praise my soul, the King of heaven.

Father like he tends and spares us. Well our feeble frame he knows. In his hands he gently bears us, rescues us from all our foes.

Praise him, praise him, praise him, praise them widely as his mercy flows. This is the kind of God we're dealing with here in Genesis 15. What a God. What a God.

But here's Abraham. And he's probably thinking to himself, God, that's great. I mean, don't get me wrong. I love when you go on the whiteboard and chuck words up there, vision stuff.

I love that. But here's the problem. If you remember back to biology, there's a big problem. Surely you can see you've promised me a big family, but what have you not given me?

[11 : 40] You've not given me any children. You've not given me a son. Now if you do the maths between, sorry, by the ages recorders in these chapters, it's something like eight or nine years that have come and gone since God first called Abraham and made those promises.

Eight and nine years, that is a long time. A long time. And still, there is no child. And at his age, Abraham, probably in his 80s and given Sarah's age, I mean, the odds are not in their favour.

And that's a real problem. That is a real problem. So reader, you can appreciate, can you not, Abraham's frustration. You can understand his questions.

And you can feel his pain. I mean, that's a real question. God, how can I know? How can I know? Now, I do not love how real the Bible is sometimes.

How real the Bible is sometimes. Because is that not what it is like in the Christian life? God, I just don't get it. I just don't get it. Don't understand what you're doing.

[12 : 50] I don't understand what you've said. I just don't get it. Well, here, as it were, is God giving us permission, as his people, to come to him with our frustrations.

God is saying, come to me with your questions. Come to me with your pain. And in all of that, know that I am God. And know that I am good. And know that I am gracious.

And know that I care. And know that I am sovereign. And know that I have a plan. This is the kind of God that we're dealing with here in Genesis 15. And you see that in the way that God responds to Abraham.

Now, I remember last summer, we're a very frugal family. So my wife, Alex, went on Gumtree and found a balance bike to give to our little girl. So Chloe, we give her the balance bike.

We take her around to the park, just around the corner for us, to find her safe space to try out her balance bike. So she gets her wee frozen helmet on. She gets her trainers on.

[13 : 53] We go around to the park and she goes for it. Now, we've all been in that situation, haven't we? Either we've been the child in that situation or we've been the adult in that situation. It's never pretty, is it? In fact, it's probably more like one of the clips you've seen.

You've been framed. It's that kind of thing, isn't it? So she goes for it and she falls. She goes for it again and she falls. She goes for it again and she falls again. Do you know what I didn't say to her? I didn't say, Chloe, how can you not get this?

How can you not get this? I mean, this is so second nature to me. How can you not get this? What are you doing? No, she fell again. I said, come on, get up.

She fell again. Come on, get up. I want to help you get this. I want to help you get this. It's exactly what God is doing here with Abraham. Do you see, God, he doesn't put space in his hands when Abraham doubts here.

God doesn't go running and say, do you know what? I'm going to go find someone else to give those big promises to who actually has the spine to believe me. God doesn't throw in the towel and say, I'm done with you.

[14:55] Do you see, God graciously meets Abraham in his doubting. And God says to Abraham, let me help you get this. Let me help you get this. What I got, I mean, this is the kind of God that we're dealing with here.

Verse five, love what he does. Let's go for a walk outside. It's amazing how, isn't it, often a good walk just brings that sense of perspective. Let's go for a walk outside.

It's a dark night. God says, what does he say? Look up. What does he see? What do you see when you look up? Now you do this an average night in Edinburgh. You don't see a lot.

Because of the smog, because of the light pollution, you look up and maybe, what do you see? One or two stars. This is more like if you've ever been out in the middle of nowhere camping and you look up. The only time I've ever experienced anything like this is when I was in Mozambique.

And I just remember pitch black looking up and going, wow. Wow. Wow. This is what Abraham's doing here.

[16:00] If you've ever had a moment like that, this is what he's experiencing here. He looks up and what does he see? Stars. Thousands of stars. And what does God say? He says, count them.

And I love to think that Abraham actually had a shot at counting them. Do you know what? One, two, three, four, five, six, seven, eight, nine, ten, eleven, twelve, thirty, forty, fifteen, sixteen, seventeen, eighteen. And there's the point where he says, right, I get it. I get it.

I understand what you're trying to say. God breaks in, end of verse five. So shall your offspring be. Abraham, in your mind, you are thinking, one child, let me tell you, I, the one who created the stars, the one who spoke them into existence, the one that calls them out each by name, that's how many descendants I'm thinking of for you.

See what God is doing. How gracious and how patient is this God? He gives Abraham this visible picture. Something that he can understand.

Something that he can see to help him grasp the truth and remember the truth of God's spoken word. This is what's going on here. How good is this God?

[17:09] And a side note, that's exactly what we do every time we take communion together. I don't know if you've ever thought about it like that. That God has given us something that we can see, something that we can understand, to help us grasp and to help us remember the truth of his word.

But why is God doing all of this? It's to show Abraham that he is good for his word. He is good for his word. And though Abraham, you see, he can't physically see the plan unfolding right in front of him.

Verse 6, he decides that he's going to believe God. He is going to count on the name of the Lord. He chooses to walk by faith and not by sight.

His heart, God, I'm trusting you. His heart, Lord, I'm going to walk in the light of your words. That's why we call him the father of the faith.

This is him living by faith and not by sight. But here's the question. If that's what Abraham believes to be true about God, what does God believe to be true of Abraham?

[18:17] This sinful man, this fallen man, this man who made mistakes, this man who will continue to make mistakes. What does it say? Because he trusts God, he is declared righteous.

The word meaning to be right before God. This is Abraham. God says, Abraham, because you believe in my promises, you are deemed righteous. Do you see that Abraham doesn't need to do anything?

Doesn't need to do anything other than trust and walk in light of the fact that God will do everything. Actually, verse 6 is one of the most important verses in the whole of Scripture because it's the very definition of what it means to have faith.

Have you ever wondered what true faith is? Maybe you've heard someone like Dan Brown, author of the Da Vinci Code, that says this, faith is the acceptance of which we imagine to be true, that which we cannot prove.

Let me say that again. Faith is the acceptance of that which we imagine to be true and that which we cannot prove. I mean, is that what faith is? Not according to the Bible.

[19 : 28] You see, Abraham shows us what true, gritty, biblical faith is. It is not poking around, hopefully in the dark, for something to cling on to in life.

It is trusting that God is who he says he is. And knowing that what he says is true and walking in the light of it. Verses 1 to 6, God says, Abraham, my word is a word that you can count on.

And secondly, verses 7 to 21, God says, Abraham, my word is a word that you can be certain about. So God has just assured Abraham, hasn't he, about the people aspect of that promise that he made in Genesis 12.

What else had God promised Abraham? A place. Again, verse 7, God takes the initiative in assuring Abraham of the certainty of his promise.

What does he say? I am the Lord. The covenant name of God. This is Yahweh. He is the promise-making and promise-keeping, steadfast, never-changing, all eternity God.

[20 : 36] This is the kind of God that we're dealing with here. The God, do you see him declare, who has taken Abraham out of the land of Ur of the Chaldeans, where he started out at the tail end of chapter 11, and the God who has led him to the land of Canaan where he currently is.

This is the God who is speaking to Abraham. But Abraham looks out. What does he see? He sees his enemies possessing the land.

But you see, God's promise is not that, Abraham, you will live in Canaan. It is not, Abraham, you will have a timeshare in Canaan. His promise is that he and his descendants will possess Canaan. It will be their home. And their enemies will be no more. It will be theirs. The Amorites who are currently living there and who are graciously being given time by God to turn to him, they will one day have to answer for their sin.

God knows what he's doing. God knows where he's leading these people. Again, that's a hefty promise. That's a hefty promise. How can Abraham be sure?

[21 : 46] Again, God shows Abraham something visible to help him grasp the truthfulness and trustworthiness of his word. Verse 9.

All this strange stuff, okay? Of collecting animals, cutting some of them in half, lining up on either side opposite each other. I mean, what is going on there?

Love the Old Testament for stuff like this, do you not? What is going on there? What's going on there is something common in this day. It's the making of a covenant. A covenant is a binding promise.

The closest thing I guess we have is a marriage. Two parties making binding promises to one another. That's what's going on here with all these animals. These parties are saying to one another, if either of us falter on our side of the covenant, then we will become like these dead animals.

Now just think about that for a moment. Here is God saying, Abraham, to show you how committed I am to following through on my promises, let's make a covenant.

[22 : 52] That's the lengths that God will go to to help Abraham see just how trustworthy his word is. That God would even be willing to take that curse on himself if he is not true to his words.

That's astounding. This is the kind of God that we're dealing with here. The God of the Bible is good for his word. And God doesn't simply tell Abraham that possession is going to happen.

He tells him how it is going to happen. From verse 12, it's going to be a long time. See, this plan that God has hatched before the foundation of the world, and this plan will not go down according to our timetable.

It will go down according to his. We're so impatient, are we not? So impatient. In our age of fast food, in our age of next day delivery, I mean, I clicked buy on Amazon at 11 o'clock last night, and it came at 3 o'clock today.

Incredible. Age to living. Super fast broadband makes us impatient. As Dale Ralph Davis says, he puts it like this, we always want God to march to our microwave time.

[24 : 03] I think it's a great phrase. We always want God to march to our microwave time. These verses tell us that God is not in a rush with his plan. He's not in a rush. He has a plan.

And this plan will go down exactly as he has said it will go down. And praise God that that is true because his ways are so much better than our ways. And his wisdom is so much wiser than ours. And what is this plan? 400 years in Egypt as mentioned there. Do you see it? But when you do the math, it's actually the time gap between this promise and Abraham's descendants being rescued from slavery.

It's somewhere between 600 and 800 years. I mean, that is a long, long time. And it's going to be a hard time. Do you see that? They will be ill-treated slaves.

So God's covenant promises will come to pass exactly as he said they would. Be assured of that. But in the meantime, life will be long and life will be hard. Again, is this not the Christian life?

[25 : 08] Faithfulness and trust in God in the everyday unspectacular grind of life. And I love how God tells us that that is how it's going to be.

Love how he doesn't hide the small print from us. God says, I know what's going to happen. And I love you enough, Abraham, to tell you. So that when it happens, as you've passed that message on, you'll say that's exactly how God said it was going to be.

Does it not give us truth to cling on to when things are hard? That this is how our God has told us it's going to be. When we, like Abraham, cry, how can we know?

How can we know? God says, I've told you. I've given you my word. I've spoken. Abraham, that's the plan. Oh, and by the way, drops this one in, you won't get to see the fulfillment of it.

You see, this is not about Abraham. This is not about him. This is about this gracious God who, beginning with Abraham, is working out his plan to bring blessing to the nation so that he can dwell with his people fully and forever.

[26 : 19] This is the kind of God that we're dealing with here. Friends, how often, and this is something I felt convicted of this week, how often do we make the story about us? It is never about us.

It is about this God who is true to his word. This is the kind of God that we're dealing with here. The kind of God who doesn't just suggest a covenant, but who makes a covenant.

This smoking brazier and blazing torch, they represent him. God walks through. What is Abraham doing this whole time?

He's not saying, here I am, Lord. He's sleeping. Do you see it? He's asleep. He could not be any more passive in this covenant if he tried to be.

But that's the whole point. That Abraham doesn't need to do anything other than trust and walk in light of the fact that God will do everything. My word is a word that you can count on.

[27 : 24] And my word is a word you can be certain about, says God to Abraham. The God of the Bible is good for his word. Have you heard that phrase, it takes tooth to tangle?

Which for years I thought referred to the soft drink until I realized I actually referred to the dance. It takes tooth to tangle. It takes tooth to covenant. Okay? Two parties. God will never be anything other than true to his word.

I can guarantee that. Never be anything other than 100% true. But Abraham? Abraham is not like that. And you are not like that.

And I am not like that. If I give it another chapter, Abraham is all over the place again. Give it tomorrow, I'm sure I will be all over the place again. So where does that leave us?

Well the marvel is, so committed is God to his promises to Abraham, that not only is he willing to open himself up to the potential possibility of death, but he years later, sent his son, one of Abraham's descendants, Jesus into this world.

[28 : 39] The perfectly righteous one, the covenant keeper, who would be treated like a covenant breaker, who would be treated like you and I deserve, who would take our covenant breaking curse upon himself, who would become like one of those dead animals, and who would die on the cross.

Now why? Well so that covenant breakers like you and like me, would in him, be treated as if we were covenant keepers.

That is how committed God is to his word. That he will make a way, so that even the failure of his people, even our failure, will not stand in the way of him accomplishing his promises.

That is how committed this God is to his word. This is the kind of God that we are dealing with here. And so we are invited tonight to follow the example of Abraham.

What did he do? He believed that God was good for his words. He believed that he didn't need to do anything other than trust and walk in the light of the fact that God would do everything.

[29 : 54] And it is the same for you and I tonight. How are we made right with God? You will see Paul pick this up in Romans 4, if you want to go home and check it out later. Exactly the same way that Abraham was.

Believing that God is good for his word. And by trusting that God deems us righteous, because we have done that. Except standing where we do in this story, we don't see this plan in embryo form. We see where it was leading all the way along. It was leading to Christ. To be a Christian is to believe that we don't need to do anything other than trust and walk in light of the fact that Christ has done everything.

He's done everything. Absolutely everything. And so when you and I find ourselves, friends, in the place of Abraham in this story, when we find ourselves asking, Lord, how can I know? Do you find yourself asking that? I find myself asking it on a daily basis. Lord, how can I know? How can I know? How can I know that I am forgiven? How can I know that I am right with you?

[31 : 12] How can I know that my fallenness, my heart that is prone to wander, how can I know that you will be true to that? And how can I be sure about what you have said is ahead of me?

The promise of heaven. How can I be sure? How can I be sure? Well, God would comprehensively say tonight, how can you be sure?

Look to the cross. Look to the cross. How can you know you are forgiven? Past, present, and future. Look to the cross. Look to the cross.

Robert Murray McShane, a great Scottish preacher, died when he was 29. He used to say, for every one look at my sin, I take 10 looks at Christ on the cross. God says, look to the cross. How can you be sure? How can you be sure? Look to the cross. The call tonight is to trust this God, to come to this God, to trust his son, to receive forgiveness, to place our hope fully in every word that proceeds from his mouth.

[32 : 23] And like Abraham, receive him. Receive him. And what's the difference between a lawyer and a liar?

Try not to look at anyone in the room here. Simply the pronunciation. How many car salesman jokes are there? None. They're all true stories. Well, I hope we've seen tonight that God is not like us.

He is not like us. Is there anyone in this life whose word we can fully trust? The God of the Bible is good for his word.

That is the message of Genesis chapter 15. Standing on the promises of Christ my King, through eternal ages let his praises ring. Glory in the highest I will shout and sing, standing on the promises of God.

Standing, standing, standing on the promises of God my Saviour. Standing, standing, I'm standing on the promises of God.

[33 : 30] Let's pray together. Father. And maybe just in this silence, before we head out into another, what I'm sure will be a busy week, maybe just use this time of reflection just to come to God and say, help my unbelief.

Help me believe your promises. Every word of the Lord proves true.

He is a shield for those who trust in him. Father, thank you so much for your steadfast love. And Lord, we ask that you would help us all this week, Father, to know the truth of your promises.

Father, that by your Spirit, you would help us to stand firm on every word that proceeds from your mouth. Lord, thank you that you are a God full of compassion and never changing, never giving up steadfast love.

And it's to you we look tonight, Father, asking that you be with us for the rest of the week. In Jesus' name, amen.