

Genesis 15:1-6

The Christian life is a life of constantly **looking ahead**, and yet, the things which lie **ahead** in our lives, are things we **can't see** with our physical eyes. However, **many** of them are things which have been **promised** to us by **God**, and when that's the case, they simply need to be accepted with a heart of **faith**. In that respect, the Old Testament patriarch, **Abraham** serves as a wonderful **example** for us - even though because of his sinful human nature, he was at times **fearful** of what the future held for him. As we look at our text for this morning God tells us **Don't Be Afraid**. In reality, we have no **reason** to **ever** be afraid because the LORD is our **shield**, and the LORD is our **reward**.

Our text begins, "*After **this**, the word of the LORD came to Abram in a vision. 'Do not be afraid, Abram. I am your **shield**, your very great **reward**.'* But Abram said, '*O Sovereign LORD, what can you give me since I remain **childless** and the one who will **inherit** my estate is Eliezer of Damascus?'* And Abram said, '*You have given me **no children**; so a **servant** in my household will be my **heir**.'*"

The first words of our text today are "*After **this**,*" but after **what**? In the previous chapter of Genesis, Abram had just rescued his nephew, **Lot** from the four kings from the east who had invaded the area. After **defeating** them with an army of 318 servants, Abram gave a **tenth** of all the spoils to **Melchizedek**, the king of Salem, who was also a **priest** of God Most High. The writer of the Book of Hebrews explains Abram's actions **this** way. "*Just think how great (Melchizedek) was: Even the patriarch Abraham gave him a tenth of the plunder! Now the law requires the descendants of **Levi** who become priests to **collect** a tenth from the people - that is, their brothers - even though their brothers are descended from Abraham. This man, however, did **not** trace his descent from **Levi**, yet he collected a tenth from **Abraham** and **blessed** him who had the **promises**. And without doubt the **lesser** person is blessed by the **greater** ... One might even say that **Levi**, who **collects** the tenth, **paid** the tenth through Abraham, because when Melchizedek met Abraham, Levi was still in the body of his ancestor.*" Perhaps we'll have the opportunity to talk more about this mysterious man, Melchizedek, in a **future** sermon. But for now, after Abram had met with him, he then **refused** to take any of the **spoils of war** which had been taken from the kings, even though he had a rightful **claim**, so that no one would be able to say, "*I made Abram rich.*" Abram recognized that it was the **LORD alone**, who had made him rich - at least in terms of **earthly possessions**.

But here in our text, Abram has a **problem**. God had **promised** Abram that He would make him into a **great nation** - that He would **bless** him - and that He would bless all people on earth **through** him. The LORD had **already** made Abram pretty **powerful** and **influential** - but how was he going to become a **great nation**? Abram was already 75 years old, and although the LORD had blessed him in **many** ways, He still **hadn't** blessed him with even **one** child. How would Abram's legacy be **passed on**? So Abram **complained** to the LORD, "*O Sovereign LORD, what can you give me since I remain **childless** and the one who will **inherit** my estate is Eliezer of Damascus?*" Apparently the LORD didn't **respond**, because we hear Abram go on to complain a **second time**, "*You have given me **no children**; so a **servant** in my household will be my **heir**.*"

Abram had created a **problem** in his mind, when there really **wasn't** a problem at all. In fact, he had even created a **solution** to his "problem." Since the LORD had not blessed him with a **son**, his **servant**, Eliezer of Damascus, would be his **heir**. It's a good thing God has endless **patience**. We are really good at creating **problems** in our lives, and all too often, like Abram, we come up with **poor** or even **sinful** solutions to those problems. But we need to remember that the LORD is **always** capable of providing the **proper solution** to our problems; and He **does** so, in His own **time** and in His own **way**. We just need to **trust** Him.

Have you ever **complained** to God like Abram did? Have you given God "a piece of your mind" when things in your life haven't gone the way you **wanted** them to go? Our gracious God **allows** us to **do** that, and when we do, we can be confident that the LORD will deal with us in a **loving** and **compassionate** way. He **patiently listened** as Abram, in his **limited** understanding, poured out the desires of his heart. It seemed to Abram like everything which the LORD had **already** done for him would all be for **nothing** - if he didn't have an **heir** who would carry those blessings into the **future**. So Abram thought he would **help the LORD** by designating a **servant** to be his heir.

But the LORD had **other** ideas. He said to Abram, "*This man will **not** be your heir, but a son coming **from your own body** will be your heir.*" God was not going to waffle on **any** of His promises, because He is the **LORD** - the God of free and faithful **grace**. **Love** and **faithfulness** are the very **core** of God's being. He's **serious** about saving lost sinners. So when God promised that Abram's family would be **numerous**, and His name would be **great**, and that he would be a **blessing** to all people, Abram could have **complete confidence** that the LORD would **fulfill** His promises, and that **through Abram** the LORD would send a **Savior** for all people.

We're told that "*Abram believed the LORD.*" How could he be so **confident**, considering all the **doubts** which he had already shown? It was because the LORD had been a **shield** for Abram in the **past**. When we think about what a shield **does**, first of all we recognize that it **defends** us from our enemies, and provides us with **safety**. God had certainly provided Abram with safety in the **past**. He enabled Him to safely travel from Ur of the Chaldees to Haran, and then from Haran to Canaan. God had kept Abram and Sarai safe in **Egypt** when there had been a **famine** in the land of Canaan. God had protected Abram as he **wandered** in the Negev, and had **blessed** him with great wealth. And God had been Abram's **shield even** when he went to war against the 4 kings from the east, in order to rescue his nephew, **Lot**. That **love** and **faithfulness** on the part of the LORD in the **past**, made it possible for Abram to be **confident** that He would **continue** to be his shield in the **future** as well.

The LORD is **our** shield too, and I think it's important to point out that a shield is **portable**, so it can go along **with** us **wherever** we go. That was certainly true for **Abram**, and it's true for **us** too. The LORD asks us to **follow** Him wherever He leads. He asks us to follow the guidance of His **Word**, and live in **obedience** to His **commands**. He calls on us to give Him the **highest** priority in our lives, to let Him **pilot** our ship. To sum it up, God calls on us to **trust** Him - to **believe** what He tells us. But that's not always easy to do. We become **comfortable** with our **lives**, and **jobs**, and **families**, and **homes**. We **like** it when things are **solid** and well-**established**. In fact, sometimes we like it **too much**, so at times like that, the LORD often throws us a **curve**. He decides to shake things **up** in our lives, putting us on a **new** path where everything is **different**, and that's **scary** for us. By nature we want to be in **control**. We want to **call** the shots.

But the LORD tells us **Don't Be Afraid**, because **He** is our **shield**, no matter **what** path we are on. Week after week He gives us the **promises**, "*I will **ble**ss you and **keep** you. I will make My face **shine** on you and be **gracious** to you. I will look on you with **favor** and give you **peace**.*" The LORD will continue to be our **shield** through His Son Jesus Christ.

Consider the **blessings** that are ours through Jesus. Because of our sinful nature, we all **had** a criminal **record** - a record of **sin** after **sin** after **sin**. And **because** of our sin, we faced a day of standing before God's **judgment** seat, to give an **accounting** to Him of our sins. In our sinful condition, that day was a day to **fear**, because God's **judgment** for sin is an **eternal** punishment. But again the LORD says, **Don't Be Afraid**. Because of **Jesus**, our lives now have a **new** record

- a **different** record - a record of **His** perfect **righteousness** and **holiness**. Jesus **blotted out** the record of all our **sins** with His **death** on the cross, and He **replaced** it with His **perfection**. That blessing of a **clean slate** has been earned for **all** people by our Savior - the same Savior who was **promised** to **Abram**. The LORD was **Abram's** reward, and He is **our** reward **too** - not a reward we have **earned**, but a reward which has been freely **given** - a reward which is **credited** to all who **believe** in Jesus.

*“Abram **believed** the LORD.”* That’s what God **wants** from us, isn’t it? So, we would **think** that Abram had **earned** God’s favor - that he was in **good standing** with the LORD. But that’s **not** the case. Our text tells us, *“Abram **believed** the LORD, and he **credited it** to him as **righteousness**.”* In other words, Abram’s faith and actions were **not** righteous, because they were not **perfect**. Nevertheless, he did **receive** righteousness as a **credit** from the LORD. In his letter to the Romans, the Apostle Paul showed that those words apply to **us** as well. He wrote, *“The words ‘it was **credited** to him’ were written **not** for him **alone**, but also for **us**, to whom God will **credit** righteousness - for us who **believe** in him who raised Jesus our Lord from the dead. He was delivered over to death for **our** sins and was raised to life for **our** justification.”*

God has credited His Son **Jesus**, and the **righteousness** which He earned through His perfect **life** and His sacrificial **death**, to **all** those who **believe** in Him. So no matter what comes your way in life, **Don’t Be Afraid**, because the LORD is our **shield** and the LORD is our **reward**. Amen.