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Genesis 15:1-21

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READ GENESIS 15

I hope you watched last week's talk by James because it makes sense of the opening statement by God. Abraham had made a choice to give Melchizedek ten percent of all he had and refused to take any loot from the battle he had won, returning everything to their owners.

So he had fought a battle and comes home with less than he started out. Deflated after the excitement of the chase, the battle, the victory and meeting the kings of Sodom and Salem, he has a vision from God.

*"Do not be afraid, Abram.
I am your shield,
your very great reward."*

Fed up with your own company , tired of being isolated from everybody else, short of cash to spend anyway? God says to you this morning:

"Do not be afraid,
I am your shield,
your very great reward.

The shield can mean two things. It speaks of protection, that's what a shield is for. And it speaks of sovereignty. The connection is that the godly purpose of government is to protect people. So God is saying to you this morning:

"Do not be afraid, <Put your name in here>
I am your sovereign,
I am your Personal Protection,
your very great reward."

The reason we are so keen to keep our worship services going online is because we think you need to be reminded of that as often as is possible. It is too easy to watch the news and be depressed. To stare at the walls and wish you were somewhere else. To be fed up with your expenses swallowing your income before your eyes. Or these days, invisibly as Direct Debits and Standing Orders eat up the bank balance.

But you were created for more than that. You were created to have a relationship with God and enjoy him for ever. The world tells you that money matters, God says relationships matter. And that the most important one is your relationship with him.

He is Your very great reward.

Get that clear and other relationships can develop properly. You see, understanding that God has forgiven you by grace, changes the way you react to others. God's love develops love in our hearts that must overflow to others. There has been so much hate on the streets in the news. We must understand that Black lives matter because everyone is created by and loved by God. In Christ there is no Jew nor Greek, slave or free, we are all one in Christ Jesus. That has to work out in our daily living, in particular to those who are apparently not like us. Whether it is the sort of housing, the income level, the type of job, the colour of skin, the country of origin, what matters is that God expresses his love through you by your love for everyone. There can be no place in your thinking for prejudice against anyone. If the papers say to you a group is evil, remember we are all sinners, saved by grace. It is a sober fact that we are judged by our treatment of immigrants. The Bible is quite clear that the measure of

righteousness is how you treat, the widows, the orphan and the foreigners. God is your Great reward because he loves you with an everlasting love. Jesus died for you while you were an enemy of his Father.

"Do not be afraid, <Put your name in here>
I am your sovereign,
I am your Personal Protection,
your very great reward."

You cannot be a loser because you have Jesus!

But Faith is not without its difficulties! Abram had no children, so in the event of his death, his estate would go to Eliezer of Damascus. But God had promised him, not just a child but innumerable descendants. It says ⁶ *Abram believed the LORD, and he credited it to him as righteousness.*

But faith is a struggle and what happens in these chapters is not Abram firm and forward but a vacillating, struggling man who tries to work out what these great and precious promises mean.

In spite of Abraham's wobbly faith, we have this statement

⁶ *Abram believed the LORD, and he credited it to him as righteousness.*

This is a key Old Testament verse which is interpreted in the New Testament. Believing is critical to our status with God. Not our personal righteousness, which is rubbish but the righteousness of Jesus given to us by grace through faith. And that point is clearly made here. Abraham is not counted righteous because he is innocent before God, but because he believed God. You are not righteous because of how good you are but because you believe in Jesus. And if you have never put your faith and trust in Jesus, sadly, you have no standing before God.

Abraham, as I said before, is important to Jews, Muslims and Christians. For Christians he is the shining example of faith leading to righteousness.

This is so important that it is referred to 3 times in the New Testament. Time does not allow us to explore those passages, so I am setting you some Homework!

Read Romans 4;
Galatians 3;
James 2
Matthew 3:8-10

God is a faithful, compassionate and merciful God. And when we look at what God does in this passage we see his consideration of Abram's humanity at its best.

What do I mean? Well, this strange ritual of Covenant making. God does it to show Abram he means business. In Genesis 1 God says and it is so. And the same God has said to Abram

Genesis 12:2 "*I will make you into a great nation and I will bless you; I will make your name great, and you will be a blessing.*
³ *I will bless those who bless you, and whoever curses you I will curse; and all peoples on earth will be blessed through you.*"

He has already said to Abram.

Genesis 13:14 "*Lift up your eyes from where you are and look north and south, east and west.* ¹⁵ *All the land that you see I will give to you and your offspring forever.* ¹⁶ *I will make your offspring like the dust of the earth, so that if anyone could count the dust, then your offspring could be counted.* ¹⁷ *Go, walk through the length and breadth of the land, for I am giving it to you.*"

He has already said to Abram. Genesis 15:1

*"Do not be afraid, Abram.
I am your shield,
your very great reward.*

But still Abram, being human, is asking questions, trying to work it out. In fact, he is just like you and me. Always trying to piece together the bits of information we have to make sense of it.

So God sets his next statement to Abram in the context of a formal covenant ritual.

The ritual maybe strange but we understand these sorts of rituals. Most commonly in marriage where we set some simple vows into a larger event to emphasize the significance. Both parties basically say. I am free to marry, I am willing to marry you, I marry you. Job done!

Buying a house likewise, is two parties – buyer and seller, signing papers that they agree and will transfer the ownership of a property. It just takes so long!

God could have just said it. He is the creator whose word is unchangeable, he will not change his mind. But for Abram's sake he initiates a ritual to emphasis his commitment.

Well, a somewhat strange ritual involving, a heifer, a goat and a ram, each three years old, along with a dove and a young pigeon. Which are butchered and the animal cut in half and a smoking firepot with a blazing torch appears and passes between the pieces.

To understand this we need to research covenant. In Hebrew the word for covenant בְּרִית H1285 *ber-eeth'* is derived from another meaning to cut meat. So the word itself comes from this ritual. Its what you do when you make a covenant! So God is explaining to Abram that he is making a special covenant with him.

Again, if you want to explore this idea of Covenant further I will include the references on my website.

With Noah: Genesis 6: 18; 9:1-17;

The covenant of circumcision: Genesis 17

The covenant with Abram repeated for Israel

Exodus 2: 24; 6:4

The covenant Law Exodus 24:1-8; Exodus 34

To look further wordsearch 'covenant' in a Bible concordance or online, for example using

www.biblegateway.com

When we have communion, we refer to a New Covenant In 1 Corinthians 11:25 and Luke 22:10 we hear these words referring to the cup of red wine:

*In the same way, after supper he took the cup, saying, “This cup is the new **covenant in my blood**; do this, whenever you drink it, **in remembrance of me.**”*

It is a reminder that God has made a covenant of grace through the death of Jesus. A covenant is a bit like a contract except it is lop-sided. God offers you salvation which you receive in repentance and by believing in the name of Jesus. You receive forgiveness, new life, the Holy Spirit and eternal life. In exchange you offer yourself in his service. To live the life of faith.

Going back to Abraham what new thing did God offer Abraham?

Well, it is a prophecy covering the next few hundred years. God tells Abram that his descendants will be slaves in Egypt for 400 years and that he will bring Abram’s descendants out of Egypt and they will live in the land we know as Israel, today. That is how God replies to Abram’s question

"O Sovereign LORD, how can I know that I will gain possession of it?"

The answer is, it's a long story! Read the rest of Genesis through to the end of 2 Samuel to get the whole story of how it happened.

The important thing to get out of this is that God's word is utterly reliable. Secondly that prophecy is not comfortable. God tells the truth. He does not promise an easy life, health, wealth, influence. In fact Jesus says, In this world you will have trouble! However the rider to that is cheer up! I have overcome the world!

That is why this talk was headed 'Moving towards maturity'. Mature faith knows that life is full of hardships and difficulties but God has a plan for our good. We have a future and a hope. For the present our sins are forgiven and we have begun a new eternal life, we have the Holy Spirit to guide and encourage us and for the future we know that death is not the end, but the gateway to spending eternity in heaven with Jesus.

So we are not dismayed by COVID-19 although it can terrify us, Leaving the EU at the same time may be a disaster but our investment is not in

stocks and shares, even the essentials of life. Our investment is in heaven. Our world is in chaos, spending money it hasn't got to deal with a pandemic it cannot control, led by people who have no idea how to lead. But we have Jesus. He is our Rock in times of trouble. And Jesus calls you to believe, as Abraham, did. Knowing full well that this was not a quick fix, but an eternal certainty. Not looking at the circumstances and even the road ahead, but ^{Hebrews 12:2} *fixing our eyes on Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of faith. For the joy set before him he endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.* ³ *Consider him who endured such opposition from sinners, so that you will not grow weary and lose heart.*

Do not lose heart, stay the course, endure lockdown, the economic chaos, the restlessness around you God is your shield and your very great reward. If you believe in Jesus, you have eternal life. One day you will be with him forever, now you have the Holy Spirit in you to cheer and to guide you.

Pray for faith to believe that, in spite of the present difficulties, following Jesus is the only way that leads to life.