

Fear not, I am your Shield

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Date: 08 January 2020

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[0 : 00] We return to the book of Genesis and chapter 15. We will read again at the beginning of the chapter. After these things, the word of the Lord came to Abram in a vision.

Fear not, Abram. I am your shield. Your reward shall be very great. Abram was a person who was given great and precious promises.

He was called by God to leave his country, his relatives, his parental home, to enter on a journey to a land that God promised to show.

God made promises to him at that time. In the promises were, I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing.

I will bless those who bless you, and him who dishonors you I will curse, and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed.

[1 : 15] It is indeed a huge privilege to be the recipient of promises from God.

But this was a wonderful promise. And yet in my view it is something entirely different altogether to go on in life believing the promise.

One thing to receive it. One thing to be the recipient of the promise. It's another thing to go on in life believing and trusting in the promise.

It's a very new promise. It's a very new promise, especially when your trust is undermined by many assailants of different kinds that come to meet you in life.

If I can put it this way, when people are given surgery, let's say for a replacement hip, they are given walking aids to enable them to cope with walking again.

[2 : 31] And it appears to me that that is what God frequently does on a spiritual level in order for faith to move forwards in the life of His children.

The reason I say that is that is what I believe that God is doing in our text this evening. He seeks to encourage and to stimulate Abraham with these words.

After these things, the word of the Lord came to Abraham in a vision. Fear not. Note what of our states. After these things, the word of the Lord came to Abraham in a vision.

It is the first time that this format is used in the Bible. Although it is used many times subsequently in the Scriptures.

Most times when it is used, it is reference to the prophetic office. And so you could say that Abraham is set before us as one who is given prophetic status.

[3 : 57] It was a very important vision that was disclosed to him. It appears to stretch from one period of darkness to the next.

If you look at verse 5, we are told how the Lord said, Abraham attest as to how numerous the stars were the stars in the sky.

He brought him outside and said, look toward heaven. Number the stars if you are able to number them. And then he said to him, so shall your offspring be.

There is no indication that Abraham even attempted to answer because the number of stars is so great. Let us, however, remember that none are unknown to the great Creator God.

He determines the number of the stars. He gives to all of them their names. And you remember how the psalmist demonstrates the wisdom of God from this marvelous statement and knowledge that belongs to the Most High.

[5 : 15] Well, this demonstration obviously took place during the hours of darkness. That seems logical to conclude.

But verse 12 of the chapter tells us, as the sun was going down, a deep sleep fell on Abraham, and behold, dreadful and great darkness fell upon him.

That would appear to suggest that this vision lasted for a whole day. Indeed, indeed, some would pose the question whether this day was a Lord's day.

Was Abraham like John when he was in Patmos? What was true of John in Patmos? He himself tells us, I was in the Spirit on the Lord's day.

Was this a similar day in the experience of Abraham? Well, much as I would like to have a definite answer, I don't have an answer to that question.

[6 : 27] But I will say this, that there are similarities between both visions. In the sense that both recipients are addressed in the same way.

In this context, fear not Abraham, I. In the vision given to John in Patmos, fear not I.

So there you have similarities in the way in which both recipients of these visions are addressed.

And I will seek to expand a little more on that. So, just two thoughts. First of all, a lying call to Abraham. Fear not Abraham.

And secondly, real incentives given to Abraham. First of all, a lying call. Fear not Abraham. What was the reason for fear in the life of Abraham?

[7 : 35] That the Lord deemed it appropriate to draw near to his servant and give him this lying call. Fear not Abraham. Fear not Abraham. It is thought that at this time that Abraham was around, 85 years of age.

I don't know if anybody is as old as that here. But at 85, do you need such a ralinkara? And before anyone hesitates to answer, ah, in my view, as long as we are in the flesh, we require many such ralink calls to enable us to persevere in the path of grace.

What was the source of Abraham's fear? We know from the previous chapter that Abraham declined the offer of further riches.

He already was a comparatively rich person. He had over 300 men at his service. But many who are rich do not in the normal course of events decline the offer of even greater riches.

There is always that hunger in the heart of man to increase wealth. Remember, Abraham conducted a surprise attack on the forces of the four kings, who had taken captive the possessions of the people of Sodom and Gomorrah, as well as taken captive the peoples among whom was his nephew Lot.

[9 : 24] He recovered the possessions through this attack and liberated the captives. On his return from battle, many other things we are told, among other things that we are told of, is the very generous offer made to Abraham by the king of Sodom.

The king of Sodom said to Abraham, Give me the persons, but take the goods for yourself. And you may remember the memorable response of Abraham to this offer.

Was it yes? I'll take it all. Or how about we split it 60-40 or even 50-50? And it was none of these.

And you remember what he said, I have lifted my hand to the Lord God. In other words, I have sworn a oath. That's what it means when he says, He lifted his hand to the Lord God most high.

And you note the reverential manner in which he speaks of the Lord.

[10 : 35] And the way in which he had sworn to God that he would accept nothing of the possessions that were recovered. A man I once knew when he would give you his opinion of his fellow creatures, whether favorable or unfavorable.

We will conclude his remarks with the following words in Gaelic. There you have his address or her address.

In other words, there you have the measure of the person. Abraham's response gives us an insight into the character of this man.

A man who took his values seriously. A man who was first and foremost committed to the Lord, whatever the cost.

And those insights into his character are important in forming a view of Abraham. Given that he turned down the opportunity of increased riches, was God saying to this man, Do not fear.

[11 : 59] Although you have turned down the opportunity, because of your oath and your reverence and esteem of me, I will supply your needs even more abundantly still.

And that is one view. That is, entertain with regard to the fear in the life of Abraham. Abraham.

Others are of the view that Abraham may have feared the fallout from his actions.

In the sense that the four kings would regroup, and that they would come to exact vengeance in the future. That could indeed be real cause for fear.

And there is some logic to it. But it may not have been either of these two reasons that prompted this rallying call addressed to Abraham.

Remember, he was being addressed by the God of glory. For we are told after these things, the word of the Lord came to Abraham in a vision. Remember how reverently and exalted he viewed God.

[13 : 15] Abraham had a high view of God. You know, as a young Christian, seems just like yesterday, but my reason tells me that it wasn't yesterday, that it was a long time ago.

But as a young Christian, when I had the opportunity to hear the late Reverend John McSwain preach, frequently, if not every time that I heard him, I came away from the sermons that he preached, with this view reinforced, how gloriously and exalted he portrayed God in his preaching, and how small he portrayed man.

It is an emphasis that I missed today, and I would like to see it restored. Do you remember how Abraham had this exalted view of God and the smallness of man?

Just to give an example, from later on in the life of Abraham, when he comes to intercede for the residents of the cities of the plain, and he comes before God in deep humility, recognizing the exalted nature of the God with whom he has to do and with whom he pleads and wrestles in prayer, behold, he says, I have undertaken to speak to the Lord, I who am, but dust and dashes.

Dust and dashes. Speaking of the level of humility in the life of this man before the majestic and exalted great creative God with whom he wrestled and pled for those in Sodom and Gomorrah.

[15 : 11] But to return to something that I mentioned in my introduction, the word of the Lord spoken to Abraham was Do not fear. Who spoke these words recorded for us in the vision or the revelation of the Apostle John.

And the answer that the Bible gives us is that it was one like a son of man. And the Apostle John records for us what he heard, a loud voice like a trumpet.

And then he goes on to give a graphic description of what he saw in the midst of the lampstones, one like a son of man clothed with a long rope and a golden sash around his chest.

The hairs of his head were white like snow. His eyes were like a flame of fire. His feet were like burnished bronze.

We find enough furnace and his voice was like the roar of many waters. Now in our text, we do not have any detailed information as to how the word of the Lord oppressed Abraham.

[16 : 23] Save the bold statement that is set before us here after these things, the word of the Lord came to Abraham in a vision. Did Abraham hear a noise?

Or was it a silent disclosure in a vision? Did Abraham see a glorious personality? And if he did, and I say, I say if, was he like John filled with a sense of dread?

For John records for his own reaction to this revelation, When I saw him, I fell at his feet as they did.

It was then and only then that John heard the gracious words of his merciful Savior, Fear not I.

Fear not I. There is emphasis on the little word I. And the reason, then he goes on to give the reason that follows to demonstrate who indeed the I is.

Fear not I am the first and the last and the living one. I died or I became dead. And behold, I am alive forevermore and have the keys of death and hurts.

[17 : 49] And there, there is cause for praise in the life of every child of grace that the man who became dead is alive forevermore and that he lives exalted, a prince and a saviour at the right hand above.

And so you have in our text, Fear not Abraham. I. Again, the emphasis on the I. Remember, there is a formula for one of a better word that is used by Christ himself when during his earthly ministry as the storm parted and he emerged out of the storm strolling on the waves the scriptures tell us and as he drew near to the boat his disciples gripped by fear.

Storm battered in the boat as they sought to grapple with the force of the elements and the message of divine comfort coming from the figure that initially caused them to be frightened.

It wasn't the storm that caused their fright. It is I. Do not be afraid. How reassuring that message sounded to those who were battered in the storm and afraid of the figure that emerged out of the storm.

When John was given the message of comfort on the Isle of Patmos the great battle was over. the victory was won.

[19 : 38] But in the case of Abraham that could only be seen as extremely dimly perhaps in the triumph of the apparent weakness against great strength in the victory over the four kings where good triumphed over evil.

And in addition to that the seed of the woman that would triumph over the seed of the serpent did not yet come. and the promise that was given to Abraham and the call that he received had to do with the very promise of the seed of the woman.

So that the fear of Abraham healed may not have just arisen from the revelation of the one who addressed him but his fear also may have had to do with what had not yet taken place.

you see there was the problem of the passage of time and the lack of fulfillment of the divine promise that led to Abraham's initial pilgrimage.

And so you find Abraham expressing his fear in the passage where the Lord God what will you give me for I continue childless and the heir of my house is a loser of Damascus behold you have given me no offspring and a member of my household will be my heir.

[21 : 08] you can hear his pain and you can hear his very real fear in the petition the first time that Abraham was recorded as speaking to the Lord that doesn't of course mean that he did not address God before and all we believe he did that's not recorded the passage of time appears to militate against the divine promise I continue childless says this man Abraham God had promised that he would be a great nation God had promised that his offspring would possess the land of Canaan and yet despite the greatness of the promise there was mercy I continue childless was the plaintive plea of this man Abraham the promise had not yet been fulfilled and humanly speaking time sinned sinned against it

Abraham wasn't complaining about the shortage of material goods he had planting but his desire was to see God's promise fulfilled and human reason appears at odds with faith in the promise giving rise to fear and so God says do not fear Abraham I perhaps this evening there are fears in your life fears things that have not yet taken place fears that you cannot disclose but keep exclusively to yourself and God is saying to the children of grace fear not

I because God is unchanging and the God of Abraham is the God of covenant faithfulness he is the unchanging God the same yesterday today and forever a welling call and the incentives are twofold as if the welling call reminds Abraham who is the eye that addresses him I am your shield Abraham could relate to that couldn't he he had just come from the battlefield who had been engaged in battle with the four kings he could relate to that statement I am your shield because it is metaphorical and symbolical language it speaks of the protective power of Almighty God it is used often by the psalmist who was himself an experienced soldier and used to the trials of battle but it is also used as a description of the happy status of the people of Israel in the book of Deuteronomy happier you are Israel who is like you are people saved by the

Lord the shield of your help in other words you protect her and the sword of your triumph remember how David expressed in Psalm 3 many are the saints of my soul there is no many are saints of my soul there is no salvation for him in God that's what his enemies were saying and then in direct contrast David's who first said that you are Lord are a shield about me that was his conviction the shield was a protective instrument that is what I understand the message to say here to Abraham as an incentive not to be afraid the fullness of the Godhead surrounds the child of grace as his divine protector in life that is why the psalmist could state in his own the Lord they keeps the Lord they shed and not great trouble a psalm Psalm 121 on thy right hand hast told the moon by night they shall not smile it may let the sun by day the Lord shall keep thy soul he shall preserve thee from all and henceforth they are going out and in

God keep forever will you see the arrows of the enemy have to pass through this shield before they hit the people of God and so you find the psalmist saying Psalm 28 the Lord is my strength and my shield Psalm 84 the Lord God is a psalm shield psalm 19 you are my hiding place and my shield a hiding place to keep us out of danger a shield to protect us in the very midst of danger so you see how the psalmist grace use of this illustration wipes out the book of psalms he is my steadfast Lord my fortress my strength my deliverer my shield and he at home I take refuge do we on the threshold of another year do we view God as our shield why do we need protection from God well Abraham could have thought of the four kings and those who were their followers that they might again rise up against him that they would be seeking vengeance just as the nation of Iran is seeking vengeance against

[27:01] America and perhaps even our own country in the light of what has taken place in the past few days but whatever was in the minds of these four kings and we don't know what the almighty God was saying to Abraham the almighty God who had called him to follow him the almighty God who had given him the grace of faith fear not Abraham for I am your shield and what is always says to every person who trusts in Christ tonight I am your shield I am your protector whatever dangers you may be in whatever enemies you might face in the world and believe me you will face plenty throughout your Christian life that whoever they may be God is your divine protector and you must look to him and because my time is going the second thing that he says here is he speaks of a reward your reward shall be very great a reward if you were to look up a dictionary you would find the definition that a reward is something given in recognition of service effort or achievement is that the kind of reward that Abraham has been addressed with here

I do not think so what is the reward it's certainly not the land of Canaan that was to be given to his posterity but that wasn't his great reward nor is it his posterity that he was to be given that is not his great reward and the replying for it and it seems to me that the great reward that is given to him here is no less than God himself and I think perhaps the authorized version maybe encapsulates it a little better than the ESV here I I Jehovah am your exceeding great reward his own soul what shall a man give in exchange for his soul without

God we have nothing we are empty we are poor we have absolutely nothing we have all what we need from the world but without God we have absolutely nothing but with God as a reward we have riches that are eternal and lasting and sure and you remember how the psalmist how he reflected on this when he wrote the words God is mine inheritance remember how he penned the words that are found in psalm 16 God is of mine inheritance and cup the porch the lot that follow is to me thou dost maintain alone in psalm 119 we have a similar refrain referred to in that great psalm where the psalmist says thou my sure portion art alone you see that is the reward of grace

God himself to have him as your portion do you remember in the life of one of the old testament women of the bible woman by the name of hannah and she had no children she had no family and she caused her much grief and you remember how she brought her cause before of god but you remember her husband asking her why do you weep why do you not eat why is your heart sad then he says something very special to her am I he says not more to you than sons am I not more to you than ten sons how much more is the lord in your life and in mine when he is your reward you cannot quantify the value of god in your life when he is your reward and so surely when he says to you and to me am

I not better for you than the praise of your fellow man am I not better for you than any wealth or even health am I not better for you than anything else in the whole of life is your response to the response of the servant of god whom have I in the heavens high but the Lord alone and the earth whom I desire besides thee there is none you know we don't know how this year will pan out you don't know where you may have to go to live those of us who are getting on in years may find ourselves in residential care here you don't know you may feel lonely there you may feel that there are few encouragements but you know when you have god as your reward you will not be alone maybe your circumstances will drastically alter maybe loved ones will be taken from you or maybe you yourself will come to the stage and be with you when the earthly tempters will have to be laid to one side but even if that is true the lord lives he is your shield he is your reward can you not rejoice in him may god grant that he too might face the challenges of another year and the knowledge that our great god is our shield and our exceeding great reward let us pray oh