

Genesis 15:1-6 His Grace is Greater 1/28/18

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.”² But Abram said, “O Lord GOD, what will you give me, for I continue childless, and the heir of my house is Eliezer of Damascus?”³ And Abram said, “Behold, you have given me no offspring, and a member of my household will be my heir.”⁴ And behold, the word of the LORD came to him: “This man shall not be your heir; your very own son shall be your heir.”⁵ And he brought him outside and said, “Look toward heaven, and number the stars, if you are able to number them.” Then he said to him, “So shall your offspring be.”⁶ And he believed the LORD, and he counted it to him as righteousness.

(Pastor prays)

With the exception of the Lord Jesus Christ who redeems sinners by His blood shed on the cross, there is no other person in the Bible more important than the man named Abraham, but even he was just a man. If Abraham, then, is the most important person in the Bible, then Chapter 15 has to be *the* most important in the Old Testament cannon.

This is the fifth time in the story of Abraham that God appears to him and speaks to him and reveals himself to Abraham. And that is what you and I need. We don't need showmanship, antics or cute turns of phrases. We need the Holy Spirit to awaken our hearts to the beauty of who Christ is and we need to know how we can be right with God.

Every religion in the known world, when boiled down to its essence, exists for one thing – to answer the question of how men and women can be right with God. Genesis 15 gives us the answer to how you can be right with God. This begs the question: Are you right with God? Why do you think you are right with God? In the context of Chapter 15, Abraham is returning from battle and has an encounter with the King of Sodom and also a murky figure named Melchizedek. Chapter 15 opens with a little cleansing phrase “after these things.” That little phrase is in Genesis quite a bit and it is always a beginning of a new story for a new day.

And that's what Sunday is. The Lord's day is a cleansing day that helps us forget what lies behind and helps us get ready to strain forward to what lies ahead. And of all the things that this chapter reminds us of, here we have the foundation of God's covenant of

grace that finds its anchor in Christ, an anchor that makes us stable for tomorrow. I had a hard and busy week last week and I need the sustaining, restoring grace of God found in Jesus Christ. I need to experience what Abraham found out.

God's Grace Will Get Us Through

From the text let me show you what God's grace does.

God's Grace Protects Us When We Are Weak

Notice how it opens up in verse 1. After these things, the word of the Lord came to Abraham. That little phrase "the word of the Lord came" is never seen again in the first five books of the Bible. It's always and only used in the Old Testament to describe how God speaks to the prophets, marking Abram as a prophet.

And now look and see what God said to Abraham in verse 1. *"Fear not, Abram, I am your shield;* Now look, at this point of the story of Abraham, he's been through quite a bit. He has won some battles. In Chapter 14 he has gotten rich and made dumb mistakes. In Chapter 12 he is telling everybody that Sarai was his sister. He heard promises from God several times and had frankly gotten old. It's enough to make you stop and scratch your head if you are Abraham and wonder what's next.

And honestly, some of you are sitting here wondering what's next? I want to say to you, if you are a believer, if you are in Christ, it doesn't matter what's next. Why? Because God says to Abraham, *"Fear not, Abram, I am your shield;* He doesn't say "I'm going to give you a shield" or "you will be shielded." But when you are in Christ, God himself is the shield. And if God is the shield, what are you so anxious and worried about?

Brothers and sisters, this is a theme that runs throughout the Bible that speaks to God's grace – protecting us when we are weak. Remember what the Lord said to Isaiah in Isaiah 54:16-17.

*Behold, I have created the smith
who blows the fire of coals
and produces a weapon for its purpose.
I have also created the ravager to destroy;*

¹⁷ *no weapon that is fashioned against you shall succeed,
and you shall refute every tongue that rises against you in judgment.*

*This is the heritage of the servants of the LORD
and their vindication from me, declares the LORD.*

So be strong in the Lord and the power of His might.

Or what about Job and all he went through. In Job 1, even Satan confessed that whenever he tried to get to Job to hurt him, he'd been turned back because of the hedge that was put around him. If you are in Christ, Colossians 3:3 says, *For you have died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God.* Ephesians 6 says the whole armor of God has been provided and our enemies must break through God himself to get us. Brothers and Sisters, that's good news, good news of God's grace to protect us, good news found at the cross of Christ.

God's grace protects us when we are weak.

God's Grace Perfects Us When We Doubt

We are not perfect – none of us. But in Christ, we are growing in grace each day. Being in God's word, worship, praying, through life events – that's what happened to Abraham. Verse 2 starts the questions and as I read it, listen for the doubt and listen to God's response. Let's read verses 2-5,

But Abram said, "O Lord GOD, what will you give me, for I continue childless, and the heir of my house is Eliezer of Damascus?" ³ And Abram said, "Behold, you have given me no offspring, and a member of my household will be my heir." ⁴ And behold, the word of the LORD came to him: "This man shall not be your heir; your very own son shall be your heir." ⁵ And he brought him outside and said, "Look toward heaven, and number the stars, if you are able to number them." Then he said to him, "So shall your offspring be."

Isn't it good that even in our impatience, the Lord is kind? Abraham right here is learning a basic lesson about being a child of God. God's delays are not God's denials. Look, that is a word of encouragement for you. Keep praying, trusting, working and believing. Part of your own development as a human and as a Christian is waiting and trusting and not short-circuiting the process. In Chapter 16, Abraham short-circuits the process by taking another woman, Hagar. Don't cheat the hard process of God

perfecting you and sanctifying you, getting rid of pride or anger or greed. Maybe He is taking away your idols because He knows the pure worship of the one true God is what's best for you.

You can hear whispers of the doctrine of providence in this text. Remember the second question of the Catechism. What is God? God is the creator and sustainer of everyone and everything. He is eternal, infinite, and unchangeable in His power and perfection, goodness and glory, wisdom, justice and truth. Nothing happens except through Him and by His will.

God is working in our waiting. He is economically sound. He is our God who wastes nothing you face and nothing you have gone through. Take your pain and frustration and impatience and bitterness to the cross of Christ and there you will find grace to help in your time of need.

God's grace protects us when we are weak. God's grace perfects us when we doubt.

God's Grace Pardons Us When We Rebel

And that's just what we are too – sinful rebels who kick against the goals of God's goodness. We've finally made it to verse 6 of chapter 15. Verse 6 is the first verse in the Bible that speaks about faith. In fact, this verse is so important, it's repeated three more times in the Bible to show that we are saved by grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone.

To prove our point, let's go to the great preacher Paul who tells us in Romans 4:1-3 as he talks about how we are actually saved:

“What then shall we say was gained by Abraham, our forefather according to the flesh? ² For if Abraham was justified by works, he has something to boast about, but not before God. ³ For what does the Scripture say? “Abraham believed God, and it was counted to him as righteousness.”

Here is the answer to the most important, most basic question. How can we be right with God? It's faith. And Paul gets even more specific at the end of Romans. Romans 4:23-25, *But the words “it was counted to him” were not written for his sake alone, ²⁴ but for ours also. It will be counted to us who believe in him who raised from the dead Jesus our Lord, ²⁵ who was delivered up for our trespasses and raised for our justification.*

That right there is the astounding news of God's grace. Jesus was delivered to the cross in the place of sinners and raised from the dead to turn sinners into saints. That power of forgiveness and life and restoration and starting over, that joy and cleansing and hope being made right with God is found at the cross of Jesus. It's God's grace that saves us through faith in Jesus. It's grace. Do you believe? Do you think you believe but really nothing has changed? Do you need grace for this week?

(Pastor prays)