

*A Real Hero*  
**Genesis 15:1-6**  
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Congregation of our Lord Jesus Christ, when we think of the definition of a hero, we're inclined to think of someone who is fearless and bold; a hero is someone who gives no thought to putting his own life at risk for the sake of others. That's your "average" hero.

Then there are the *Super heroes* we read about in the comic books, that we see in the movies. They're equipped with super-human powers and freakish abilities which enable them to fight against and overcome the *super villains*.

The truth is, in the real world, our idea and definition of a *hero* is greatly exaggerated; it is greatly distorted. Our world is actually blind to what a real hero is; but the Bible isn't. The Bible tells us what a real hero is, and it has nothing to do with bulging biceps or amazing powers.

In fact, the heroes of the Bible are not even recognized for their bravery or courage. I'm sure that many of the heroes of the Bible trembled in the face of death. And with the exception of Daniel and a few others, many of the Bible's heroes (like Samson), died at the hand of the enemy.

Others were imprisoned, or tortured, or stoned, or beheaded, or burned, or sawn in two. You see, being a hero in God's eyes has nothing to do with super-human strength or with being fearless or brave. Being a hero in God's eyes has to do with one thing and one thing alone.

It has to do with true faith. In God's eyes, a hero is someone who (despite his circumstances), puts his faith and trust in God. This morning, we witness such heroism from Abram. This may seem a bit ironic because in the last chapter we saw Abram do a "heroic" thing: he took up his sword and chased after those four kings, and he brought back Lot and all the people of Sodom.

But even though chapter 15 contains no daring rescue, no chasing after armies, Abram still proves himself to be a hero—a hero of the faith. Here, **Faithful Abram believes the promise of God**: Our attention is drawn to his Abram's faith as:

**1) His fear is dispelled**

2) **His worry is relieved**

3) **His faith is proved**

1) **Abram's fear is dispelled:** Genesis 15 records a vision which the Lord sends to Abram.

Now in the Bible, a vision is not the same as a dream. For example, in Daniel 4, king Nebuchadnezzar had a dream that was sent by God, but a dream comes when a person is sleeping. That person is not awake and alert.

A vision, on the other hand, is something that occurs when someone is awake and alert. In our series in Revelation, you may recall that the Apostle John described himself as being whisked away or taken-up by the Spirit to see heavenly visions.

So when the Lord sends a vision, that person is transported to a supernatural state of mind or consciousness; even though he is awake, and his senses are engaged, he begins to see things and hear things in the spiritual world that are not visible or audible in the earthly world.

So that's what Abram experiences. But there's something unusual about this vision. The text says that the **WORD** of the Lord came to Abram in a vision. We normally associate a vision with the faculty of sight; but here the *word* (which we associate with hearing) takes on visual form. That's significant because it connects, it associates, it equates the Lord with His word.

In the Scriptures the *Word* of God, the *logos* of God, is equated with the Eternal Son of God Himself (John 1:1). So it could be argued that by means of this vision, Abram meets the pre-incarnate Word; Abram meets His Savior; Abram meets the Christ.

Now, let's turn our attention to the *content* of the word that is spoken to Abram. What does the Lord have to say to him? The Lord says, *Do not be afraid, Abram. I am your shield, your very great reward.* We need to ask ourselves **why would the Lord** say this to Abram?

What is it that Abram is afraid of? Is there a threat that the text doesn't indicate? Is he in some kind of trouble or danger? Beloved, it's very unlikely that Abram's fears emanate from some mysterious source or some unidentified threat.

In fact, the first two words of this chapter give us a pretty good indication of the source of Abram's fear. The text says *After this*. In other words, the Lord's words came to Abram *after* his defeat of king Kedorlaomer and the other three kings from the east.

Granted, that might sound a little strange; you'd think that after Abram's victory he would be feeling confident and secure. But as it is, Abram feels just the opposite. He realizes that he may just have made himself a target.

Before he was living in quiet solitude, living peacefully in the hill country of Canaan; but once Abram emerged from the hills to the plains of the Jordan to fight those kings and rescue Lot, Abram made himself famous. He most likely fears retribution, that these very same forces which he joust routed would regroup and come after *him* this time.

So it's quite appropriate then, that the first words spoken to Abram, as the King James and English Standard Version puts it are ***Fear not!*** That's a familiar refrain heard throughout Scripture, isn't it?

It is spoken by God, to His people in a variety of contexts and circumstances--not just when God's people fear an invading army, but when God's people fear being left alone (as the disciples did when Jesus was about to leave them).

There is a fear felt by God's people when they face the unknown, when they face sickness, when they face barrenness, when they face death, even when they face the awesome revelation of God's power and grace. God tells them *Fear not*.

As we know, this is a fear felt by God's people as we live in a world that is hostile to our beliefs; that is hostile to our God; that rejects and attacks our way of life. In this way, Abram's fear is not uncommon to what any child of God would fear. Abram fears what man may do to him.

Now, maybe you hear that and you think, *well I thought Abram was a man of faith? I thought Abram was stronger than that. How could a hero of the faith be commended by God when he fears what **man** might do to him?*

The answer to that is very simple. While we live and walk this earth, none of us (including the great Abram) have perfect faith. In a way, we're very much like the father we read about in Mark 9 who brought his demon possessed child before Jesus to heal him.

The father said *If you can do anything please take pity on us and help us.* Jesus said to him *Everything is possible for him who believes.* And immediately the boy's father replied: *I do believe; help me overcome my unbelief!*

Even those with the strongest of faith struggle with unbelief; they wrestle with doubt; in a moment of trial it is not uncommon for us to take our eye off God (whom we cannot see) and focus only on that which we can see--the imminent danger that threatens us: be it the enemy at the door, or the uncertainty of our job or future, or the thought of losing our spouse, the dread of being alone, or the diagnosis of cancer or some other terminal or debilitating disease.

Even though we're Christians, that fear can creep into our hearts and minds; it can take hold of us; it can weigh heavy upon us, it can so occupy us and paralyze us that there's nothing else we can think about, or talk about. That fear saps our joy, our strength and seemingly all our hope.

But that's why the word of the Lord comes to us. In our moments of doubt and unbelief, in our state of fear and panic, the word says: *fear not, I am your shield, your very great reward.* And as God's people, we need to hear that word (just as Abram needed to hear it) and we need to take that word to heart because...that *word* is **Good News**. That word is the **Gospel**.

For in that word, the Lord reveals himself to be our Savior, our Defender. That's what God is telling Abram. You don't have to fear because I am your shield. I am your defense. I will fight the battle; I will slay the enemy.

And in saying that He is Abram's great reward, the Lord is saying that even if Abram should lose all that he has on earth, he is still wealthy beyond measure because the Lord is his inheritance and reward. The Lord will see to it that Abram is greatly rewarded by his hand.

That harkens back to last chapter when Abram gave his share (a tenth) of all the spoils to Melchizedek (in doing so he gave it unto the Lord); and he refused to keep any of it for himself but gave it all to the king of Sodom—here the Lord rewards him by saying, *I will enrich you.*

In connection with these words spoken by God, I recalled many of the Psalms which sing of the way God protects us and shields us. Think of Psalm 27: 1 *The LORD is my light and my salvation—whom shall I fear? The LORD is the stronghold of my life—of whom shall I be afraid?*

Psalm 46:1-2 *God is our refuge and strength, an ever-present help in trouble. Therefore we will not fear, though the earth give way and the mountains fall into the heart of the sea,* Psalm 56: 3-4 *When I am afraid, I will trust in you. In God, whose word I praise, in God I trust; I will not be afraid. What can mortal man do to me?*

Psalm 118: 6-7 *The LORD is with me; I will not be afraid. What can man do to me? The LORD is with me; he is my helper. I will look in triumph on my enemies.* Or think of the words of Hymn #411: *Fear not I am with thee, o be ye not dismayed; For I am thy God, I will still give thee aid; I'll strengthen thee, help thee, and cause thee to stand, upheld by my gracious omnipotent hand.*

These Psalms do not suggest that God's children laugh in the face of death or that we never fear or tremble when terror or tragedy strikes. No. It's just that these Psalms teach us and remind us that God is our strength; God is our refuge; God is our shield, our protector and defender.

What does that really mean, you ask? Consider this. God sent His only begotten Son, Jesus Christ, into the world. That Son came to suffer and die on the cross, to be buried in a grave, to rise again in three days.

That Son came in the flesh to fight a battle we could not fight; to defeat an enemy (Satan) that we could not defeat; to endure a penalty and punishment that we could never endure (hell itself), and to pay a price we could never meet (the ransom for sins).

I Corinthians 15 teaches is that, in doing so, in Christ's suffering and dying for our sins, in His burial and resurrection, He has removed the sting of death for us; He has emptied the grave of all its terror and power; he has overcome sin and Satan.

In other words, Christ has dispelled our greatest fears in all of life: the fear of death and dying, and the fear of the grave and hell itself! As a result, we can live our lives unto the Lord; and we can know that since Christ Himself is our reward, there is nothing that man can do to separate us from the love of God, in Christ Jesus.

So we can say along with the Apostle Paul, for me to live is Christ, and to die is gain. Brothers and sisters in Christ, what fears do you have this morning? What terrifies you? What unsettles your heart today? Is it something from your past? Is it a present threat? Is it the future? Whatever it is, God says, Fear not, for in Jesus Christ He is your shield, your ever great reward.

**2) His worry is relieved:** So God dispels Abram's fear. But notice, secondly, God relieves Abram's worries. Here Abram picks up on the last part of God's word of encouragement. God said that He was Abram's very great reward. Other versions translate that phrase: *and your reward shall be very great.*

Abram hears that and he must have called to mind all that God has promised him. In chapter 12 God promised *that he would make him into a great nation, that he would make his name great, that all peoples would be blessed through him.* In chapter 13 God promised that all the land which Abram looked upon (north and south, east and west) would be given to his offspring.

Abram knows this; Abram believes this; but he also knows that God's promises to him are predicated on him having an heir, a son. But the years continue to pass by; year after year Abram gets older, and still no son. No heir.

So Abram questions God. Abram asks God *How can this be?* There is a sense in which we can say Abram *complained* before the Lord. And before we consider what it is that Abram actually said, I think it's good for us to pause here a moment and consider this.

Is it ever appropriate, is it ever acceptable to register our complaint before God, to ask God *why?* To ask God *what is going on in my life?* There is a certain mindset within us that is inclined to answer "No! We may never question God. We may never ask why. We are to just accept that God is good and when God does things we don't understand, we just accept it and for forward.

And beloved, I believe that this mindset stems from the fact that we equate our complaints with cries of rebellion; we equate our question of *why?* with a challenging of authority. We think of the way we complain against our parents, or against our boss, or against our elected officials.

Those complaints tend to be laced with bitterness and anger; they're fueled by rebellion and contempt for those in authority. But while that may be true of us most of the time, there *is* such a thing as a Godly complaint against God.

There are moments in life when it is acceptable and appropriate to ask God *why?* There is such a thing as a reverent and sincere "searching out" of the will of God. We hear this Godly complaint emanating from the heart of the Psalmist, as he implores the Lord for justice; as he *complains* before the Lord that the righteous are being downtrodden, that the wicked are prospering.

We hear that godly complaint from the lips of the prophets like Isaiah. In chapter 63:17 he declares: *Why, O LORD, do you make us wander from your ways and harden our hearts so we do not revere you? Return for the sake of your servants, the tribes that are your inheritance.*

God doesn't forbid us to ask him *why?* God isn't offended when we get down on our knees in prayer and cry out before him—asking when he is going to help us, when is He going to answer us, or when is he going to deliver us?

So long as we ask in humility and reverence, and so long as we continue to look to God for the answers, God doesn't condemn the Godly complaints of his saints. Such are Abram's words in

verses 2-3. The fact that he is registering a Godly complaint is evident from the way he addresses God. He says *O sovereign Lord* (Adonai YHWH).

Remember this is a vision which God sends to Abram, and quite clearly Abram is given to see the majesty and greatness of the Lord. This is also the 1<sup>st</sup> time this name for God appears in the Bible and (as it is translated here) it refers to God's absolute rule and authority. So Abram is asking, *O Sovereign Lord, when, and in what way will you bring about your plan and promises?*

He's asking, if the blessing and salvation of all men depend upon his seed, *How can you give me anything, how can you even begin to fulfill your promises to me, when the only heir I have is a servant in my house?*

Eliezer of Damascus was no doubt a trusted servant and steward of Abram's household, possibly in the way Joseph was a trusted servant in Pharaoh's household. So it made sense that Abram sees that his only "heir" at present was a household servant.

The fact that this was a genuine concern for Abram is emphasized by the fact that he mentions it twice within the span of these two verses—a household servant will be my heir. But the Lord quickly alleviates Abram's concerns. First, the Lord assures him that this servant would not be his heir, but rather the promise would be in the form of *a son from his own body*. Abram's heir, the one who would be for the salvation and blessing of all mankind, would be of his own flesh.

After that we read that the Lord took him outside, and told him to look up at the stars in the heavens. *If indeed you can count them, so shall your offspring be*. Here in the suburbs we can't get a good look at the stars, but I recall that on our trip to the Black Hills of South Dakota we camped in a beautifully wooded area, and I remember walking into an open area of the campground and staring up at the sky. The night-sky was sparkling with stars for as far as the eye could see, you couldn't even begin to count them.

Such was the overwhelming assurance that God gave Abram. Just as he had told him in chapter 13 to lift up his eyes to see all the land that God would give him and his off-spring, so he tells him now to lift up his eyes and look to the stars, for that is how many his offspring would be.

But now, how are we to understand this promise? We understand on the one hand that God's promise to Abram would be initially fulfilled and embodied in his son Isaac. Isaac would even be called the son of the promise.

But we should also realize that the promise goes beyond Isaac. For the heir that God will give Abram, the son of his own flesh and blood that will bring blessing and salvation to all nations is ultimately not Isaac. It's not Jacob. It's not Joseph, it's not David.

No. The son, the heir, the one who will bring salvation to the nations is none other than Jesus. Remember, God had promised to make Abram great. God had promised that *He* was his very great reward. So in fact, what God promised Abram was himself.

As Paul writes in Galatians 3, Christ would be the seed, the son of Abram. In Christ would all nations be blessed; and through Christ, Abram's offspring would be countless as the stars on high. That refers NOT to Abram's sons and daughters of his flesh, but to the spiritual seed who have faith in Abram's God and Lord. It refers to the church of Jesus Christ!

As one commentator explain so beautifully, God made promises to many people down through the ages—from Adam and Eve, to Abel, to Enoch, to Noah, to Abram, to Isaac, to Jacob and to David. But the fact is, God's promise is always one and the same from age to age.

All God's promises (in one way or another), are part and parcel of the one promise which God made in Genesis 3:15: that He would send His Son, the seed of the woman who would come and crush the head of the serpent.

In that way, in and through this Son, God reveals himself to Abram *and to us* as the LORD God (Adonai YHWH) who is our shield and defender and Savior, who Himself is our very great reward and our inheritance.

**3) His faith is proved:** So what's left to do, you ask? What does one do when the Lord comes to you with the promise of his protection, with the assurance that His promises will indeed be kept, with the pledge that you will be greatly rewarded in Him? You believe him, of course!

And that's what it says Abram did. Verse 6 says *Abram believed the LORD, and he credited it to him as righteousness*. Here we see that Abram's faith is proved. Very simply this means that Abram believed what God said; Abram put his faith and trust in the power of God to do all that God promised that He would do; and God in turn, accepted him as righteous in His sight.

No, this is not saying that Abram was saved by *reason* of his faith; that his faith justified him saved him. That can never be the case. As I said before, our faith is weak and imperfect. The key is this: Abram put his faith in *GOD*, so even though Abram's faith is a weak faith, an imperfect faith, and even though Abram's faith will falter as early as the next chapter<sup>16</sup>, the fact is Abram's God will not falter or fail. Abram's God is faithful even when he is not.

That is the heart of true faith. To put our hope and trust in the God who saves, in the God who sent His Son, our Savior into this world to save us from our sins. What's the alternative? The alternative is unbelief. It's to turn away from God and say, *I don't need your help; I don't need your protection; I don't need you in my life; I don't need a Savior*.

And for a time in this life, it may seem like you can get along just fine without God. But that time will be short. The troubles and trials of life will come upon you, and your faith in whatever you believe in will be tested and tried and it will be shown for what it is.

But faith in God does not disappoint; faith in God does not fail us – and that's not because our faith is so strong or because we're so brave and fearless. As I said at the outset of the sermon, Christians tremble in fear at the face of death and danger as well.

The difference however, is this, the God in whom we place our trust; the God in whom we place our faith does not fail. He does not falter. He does not forget us or forsake us. In fact, as the Apostle Paul even says when we are weak, then He is strong! God does his best work when we step aside and admit our weakness and inability, and when we put our faith in God to carry out

his plan for us. That is what it means to be a hero, in God's eyes. To believe in God's power to save us, to protect us, to bless us, to prosper us, and to reward us for all eternity. Amen.