**Genesis 15:1-6** 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." 2 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?" 3 And Abram said, "You have given me no children; so a servant in my household will be my heir." 4 Then the word of the LORD came to him: "This man will not be your heir, but a son coming from your own body will be your heir." 5 He took him outside and said, "Look up at the heavens and count the stars-- if indeed you can count them." Then he said to him, "So shall your offspring be." 6 Abram believed the LORD, and he credited it to him as righteousness.

We are so familiar with the history of Abraham, or so we think. This text occurs right after Abram has a great victory over the four kings and rescues Lot. In the course of this event remember that Abram gets to meet with Melchizedek, priest of the Most High God to whom Abram gives ten percent of the plunder! Remember in all of this, Abram refuses to take anything for himself, but steadfastly maintains that his riches and wealth will always and only be the gracious gift of God.

And then comes this text before us. It occurs right after the great rescue of Lot! Abram at this point is 85 years old. It is clear that God has blessed him and watched over him. It is clear that life seems to be going well and Abram is pretty much indestructible. If you think that, then you did not pay attention to our text for today. If you do, then you will learn lots and you will even realize that this history has been given for your sake. Our theme: **THE STRUGGLE OF FAITH. 1st. Are you afraid? 2nd. Hear the Word. 3rd. Believe the Word!**

I am going to guess that perhaps you missed a very important, very telling opening line of this section. We tend to do that because we almost always get involved in what is being said rather than taking a moment to grasp why it is said. Our opening line tells us why. **“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.’”**

Do you hear it? Do you see why the Lord once again makes his presence, his marvel known to Abram, the man God had called to be his servant? That little line that God speaks. That little line that tells us God knows what is going on in Abram’s head. That little line that so often sums up what is going on in our head! **“Do not be afraid!”**

What was Abram afraid of? Actually it was doubt. God had called him to Canaan some 10 years before. God had promised him the land would be his and his descendants’ land. But now, ten years later, there is no descendant. Abram still has no children and it is something that weighs upon him, something that causes him to doubt and waver in his faith in the promises of God. It is this doubt, this nagging reality of his life of no children at 85 that causes Abram to be in fear…fear that his faith is not true…fear that His God is not real…fear that the promises of God are a bitter and shameless lie!

You and I know that fear, don’t we? The many times we have doubted and questioned the Lord’s goodness and love, the Lord’s compassion and grace in our lives. As sinful human being such a thing, such a fear is not abnormal, but I will tell you, probably pretty normal and usual for our sorry little selves. Normal because even when we are not trying to, we have a tendency to figure that what we want is exactly what God wants for us and then when it doesn’t go our way we start questioning and doubting the Lord. Yep, we know this fear, this doubt of faith that Abram had.

That cancer we are facing, we want God to cure it and take it away and when He doesn’t, we all too often decide that God must not love us or care for us. That trouble that plagues our lives, we think God should just make it disappear and if He doesn’t we think He does not love us. We tend to think our wants are God’s wants. Yet nothing is further from the truth. It may be that God is bringing that trial and difficulty upon your life for the sake of your soul or maybe even for the sake of the souls around you. It may be that God in that disease is pouring out his love upon you because God knows that without this path in your life, you will desert him and fall away from the faith. I am sometimes so frustrated with even my Christian friends on social media, who post a call to give thanks to God because things went their way. I wonder, if things didn’t go the way you wanted would you still give a post of thanks to God for his grace and mercy or would you end up doubting his love and be victim to fear?

We have concerns and worries about our Church. We are given in to fear because we don’t see growth…of course we are looking for growth in numbers rather than growth in faith and trust in God! We doubt the goodness of God and yet, still the wonder and marvel of God is proclaimed, the law and Gospel is still our primary and only weapon in this world for the power of everyone’s salvation! And we would doubt the Lord our God and his promises?

I could go on and on. Our children fall away and we are filled with fear for them, so much so that instead of continuing to be a steadfast light to God’s Word and love for them, we dim our light, accept their sin and begin to doubt the Lord’s wonder and marvel for our lives. We fear for our jobs, our well-being, our marriages, our country, the world and our lives! We are a people filled with fear. Fear that cause us to doubt and deny. Fear that leads to a shattered faith and despondent soul. Do you not hear what the Lord our God says! He says, **“Do not be afraid!”**

For Abram, God reminds him, **“I am your shield. I am your very great reward!”** God directs Abram not to look at the reality of this world, the harsh often stinging reality, but to look at the wonder and marvel of God. It is true, at 85 Abram and Sarai have not even come close to having a child. It looks hopeless! It will stay that way for the next 15 years. And for the next 15 years Abram, soon to be Abraham, will need to look to God for his help and strength, look to God and his gracious love as the heart and core of everything he will be, because in truth there is not a single thing that Abraham is going to do about the situation. God says, “Let your focus be me and what I say and promise. Let your life rest in my hands. The stings and arrows of this sinful world will not bring you down and defeat you. For that matter, I, the Lord your God will not only fulfill my promises but ultimately and surely I will provide you the greatest and most precious treasure you will ever know…I the Lord your God will give you life, eternal and perfect life in the Son you will bear.”

And that’s what God does here! He renews his promise to Abraham. He point blank tells Abraham that a son from his own body (and wife’s) will be his heir. He points to the stars and proclaims that one day Abraham’s descendants will outnumber even that vast array. God gives Abraham His Word on what will be!

And is not the same true for us? Does not God, the Lord our God in his grace and love through His Word give us promises of eternal hope and wonder? Did not God send His Son, descendant of Abraham to be our Savior? Jesus came and lived the perfect life we could not and then in the greatest act of love ever known, Jesus gave His life for ours. He died to pay for our sins. He took on our punishment and damnation, paying the entire and full price for our redemption. And what does He ask of us in return? To believe and trust in Him! To not be afraid. To not let fear cause you to follow and yield to the world’s ways, but to trust in Him. To believe what God says. To know His promises are sure and certain, and as long as our focus is on Him, to know that nothing in this world can destroy our souls.

God’s promises tell us: heaven is your home in Jesus. I am with you, yes, still your shield and very great reward. I will not give you more than you can bear. I will provide strength and help, comfort and hope even in the most dire of circumstances. I, your God and Lord, will take every step, provide every need, and in Jesus will bring you to my eternal and perfect kingdom.” Such is what the Lord has promised. So much so that he tells us in Romans through Paul, **“I consider that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us.”** Here is your challenge: To believe what you’ve got going in this world or to believe and trust what God will give in the next?

For Abraham, what happened here was enough. Our text says, **“Abram believed the Lord.”** He trusted God. Don’t you grasp, that’s why we find that definition of faith in our Epistle reading, **“Faith is being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see” (Heb 11:1).** That’s where it’s at! Trust the Lord. Believe the Lord.

Now get this, this faith of Abram, was a gift of God. God is the one who gave the promises, gave his Word to Abram and God is the one who gave Abram the gift to simply believe what He said. That’s why God tells us, **“Faith comes from hearing the message.”** You cannot believe unless you hear the message. Not man’s message of works and earning salvation, but God’s message of love and a Savior from sin. God’s message that in Christ Jesus all things necessary for salvation are done. It is this message of Jesus, this message of promise and hope, comfort and encouragement, forgiveness and eternal life that causes our trust in God. And God does not and will not disappoint.

Please note then that our text tells us, **“It was credited to him as righteousness.”** This faith and trust that God had given, that Abram utilized, that faith gave this man a credit. It is not what he earned but rather what he had been given. Abram had been given righteousness. He was counted by God as redeemed, restored and forgiven. This is the act of God for Abram’s sake.

Again, so it is in our lives. Trust in God and He says it will be for our righteousness. Trust that God will forgive you. Trust that God will be with you. Trust that God in his Word directs you for your eternal good. Trust that God, because of his promise and His love will bring you to heaven.

And there is our struggle. The struggle to trust in God. The world wants us to doubt him. The world wants us to deny Him and do it our own way. The world screams out to us, “Why you can’t see God, you can’t know he is real and right! Look at your pathetic life and tell me God is with you!” We know the truth of this. God says “here” but the world cries out, “No, over there!” God says, “So it is to be,” but the world says, “How old fashioned and dumb, we have a better way.” Such is the struggle before us. Whether it is the fact that you are 85 and without the child promised or you are 16 and wrestling with the issues of life you have the same struggle. Will it be the Lord and what He has promised and said or will it be the world?

I say to you, like Abraham, hear the Word of the Lord and believe! God has never let his children down. God has never failed to keep a promise and bring His hope to bear. Believe, yes, have faith! And this faith in the promises of God will be for your righteousness too! Do not be afraid! God is our shield. God is our very great reward. Amen.