**Genesis 15:1+6:** After these events the word of the Lord came to Abram in a vision. He said, “Do not be afraid, Abram. I am your shield, your very great reward.” 6Abram believed in the Lord, and the Lord credited it to him as righteousness.

By all accounts this is the fifth time that God has appeared to Abraham. Let’s review those accounts. The first time is when Abraham and his Father Terra are approached by the Lord to move out of Ur of the Chaldeans and go to a land he would show them. They got as far as Haran, where they stayed until the death of Terra. The second time is the Lord appearing to Abraham and telling him he should now continue his journey to the land the Lord would show him. Upon his arrival in the land of Canaan, the Lord again appears and tells Abraham that this was indeed the land that he and his descendants would inherit. Please note that Abraham is 75 years old.

The next time, the fourth time of the Lord’s appearance to Abraham, was right after he and his nephew Lot separated. You remember that history, don’t you? The two families were huge and very wealthy. They needed to separate because the shepherds of Lot were disputing with the shepherds of Abraham. So Abraham simply tells Lot to choose where he wanted to go. Literally gives him the choice. Lot’s choice was the best land and area and without batting an eyelash, Abraham went in the opposite direction. It was then that the Lord appeared, no doubt to assure Abraham that everything was going to be okay. Again the Lord emphasizes that the land would belong to Abraham’s descendants, his very offspring. Please bear in mind that at this point Abraham and Sarah are still very much childless!

Not long after this Lot and his family are taken as captives during the rebellion of the five kings against the four. When Abraham hears that Lot is captured, without hesitation he gathers his trained men and takes off after the villains. Abraham defeats these kings and returns everything to the survivors. In other words, though it was his right to keep any and all plunder, Abraham does not. He gives a tenth of the plunder to Melchizedek, priest of God most High. He allows his men to keep what would have been their rightful pay, but he returns everything else. Abraham makes it clear he doesn’t want anyone to be able to declare that they made him rich.

It is then that the Lord appears to Abraham this fifth time. I don’t know exactly what happened, but I suspect that during the battles that occurred Abraham may have had a close call with death. I say that because clearly Abraham is bothered about something. Let’s you and I look at this section and see what we can learn about faith. Our theme will be: **CREDITED RIGHTEOUSNESS.**

Now if you paid close attention to the words before us you can begin to grasp what the problem is that brought the Lord to extend comfort and assurance to Abraham. Our text tells us, **“After these events the word of the Lord came to Abram in a vision. He said, “Do not be afraid, Abram. I am your shield, your very great reward.”**

The events referred to is all that happened in connection with the battles and recovery of Lot and his family. Again, something happened that caused Abraham some worries, perhaps we could say doubts, but do note that the Lord refers to fear. The first thing the Lord says to Abraham is: **“Do not be afraid.”** Remember this is after the battle, after all was said and done. And yet, something is weighing on Abraham’s mind. It is that “fear” that the Lord wishes to address.

Now, please, don’t overlook what else the Lord says. These are words meant to comfort and give hope. **“I am your shield, your very great reward.”** I pray that you and I can fully grasp the importance of those words. God tells Abraham the He is his shield. A shield is a personal protection device. The soldier of that day carried a shield in order to protect and defend himself from the sword, knife, spear and arrow. Now here is where we have to grasp the full intent of the words of God. As a shield, God is special and unique. Unlike a real shield that you have to practice and train with, God as your shield is different. God always protects, always keeps the danger and trouble away. No weapon of destruction, hurt or harm is going to reach you.

The same applies to the idea of God being **“your very great reward.”** The word used here is one that refers to wages or pay. God is telling Abraham that everything He needs is coming from the Lord. Because not only is God the wage, God is the great and abundant wage, the payment beyond all payments. That is why we translate the word as “reward.” In actuality there are two adjectives highlighting the word. God says he is Abraham’s wages, his great wages, his exceedingly abundant wages. There is no doubt that God is reminding Abraham of all the blessings and benefits one has when God is with you.

Dear people, why are you any different than Abraham? Abraham is a believer and follower of the Lord God, well, so are you! Abraham is blessed and protected by the Lord. Well, so are you! Doesn’t God tell us and promise us in Jesus this is so? I have told you time and time again of the great New Testament promises of God for us. That God is always with us. That God will never give us more than we can bear. That God will make all things work for our eternal good. Put all of those things together and you simply have another way of God telling us, **“I am your shield, your very great reward.”** So I say, put aside your foolish earthly ideas and know that God is with you and taking care of you and all the more because of Jesus. Put aside fear, and believe the Lord!

Of course, I want you to grasp that God has appeared to Abraham because clearly Abraham is troubled by something. The Lord allows, yes, even encourages Abraham to state his trouble, to tell Him what it is that is weighing on him. And that is just what Abraham does. He says, **“Lord God, what can you give me, since I remain childless…Look, you have given me no offspring.”**

There is what is troubling Abraham. He’s getting old. When he left Haran he was already 75! For all the years of his life he and Sarah have had no children. I personally think that something happened during the battles in saving Lot that causes Abraham to be dwelling on this. Did he have a close call in death? Maybe it was just that he saw Lot and his children. Maybe it’s the fact that already, physically speaking for Abraham, things are starting to slow down? Either way, what is weighing on this man’s mind is that he has no children, no heirs. And the truth be known Abraham is thinking, “How are my offspring going to inherit this land when I don’t have any?” I think we can grasp his concern.

But in total understanding and with the grace and comfort only God can give here is the response: **“This man will not be your heir, but instead one who will come out of your own body will be your heir. Now look toward the sky and count the stars, if you are able to count them. This is what your descendants will be like.”**

I want you to pay particular attention to a few things here. First, it is made clear that Abraham is having a vision, that is, God is allowing him to see things and experience things that are not a part of our everyday life. But most important is the verses that say, **“The word of the Lord came to him.”** I don’t think we should overlook or underplay the importance of these words.

What can I say of “the word of the Lord?” Do note that in this text this phrase occurs two times. Anytime I hear that phrase in the Old Testament I think of what God reveals to us in the New Testament. For instance, John 1:1-5 say, **“In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was with God in the beginning. Through Him everything was made, and without him not one thing was made that has been made. In him was life, and the life was the light of mankind. The light is shining in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.”** All of us here know this is talking about Jesus. Jesus is the Word!

And if you would, just listen to some of the other numerous passages that speak of this word all the more. John 8:51 Jesus says of the word, **“Amen, amen, I tell you; If anyone holds on to my word, he will certainly never see death.”** Romans 10:17 says, **“So then, faith comes from hearing the message, and the message comes through the word of Christ.”** How about James 1:18, **“Just as he planned, he gave us birth by the word of truth so that we would be a kind of firstfruits of his creations.”** Or 1 Peter 1:23, **“For you have been born again, not from perishable seed but from imperishable, through the living and enduring word of God.”**

I could go on and on in this way. It is clear that Jesus, the Word, faith, salvation and almost everything born of God is all connected. We have faith because of the Word of God. We have the wonder of Jesus because of the Word of God. Jesus is the power, the wonder, the truth and the salvation of all because He is the Word, living, enduring, and yes, eternal. We are children of God because of the Word. We are called, gathered, sanctified and made holy through the Word of God. We are strengthened, comforted, encouraged and made God’s children through the Word of the Lord! Here’s what I can truly tell you. Abraham, because of this Word of the Lord that came to him, simply, truly, absolutely and completely believes what God has promised him. He will be a great nation. He will have descendants as numberless as the stars.

We today, have a better perspective. We know that all of this is true. We know how God is going to wait until Abraham is 100 years old and Sarah is 90. God is going to wait until it is quite clear that the things surrounding child bearing are pronounced “dead” by the Lord. God is going to wait until it is absolutely clear that the child to be born is only because of Him! We know all of this is true. But Abraham, all Abraham had was the Word of the Lord.

And Abraham believed that Word! Now, I don’t know if Abraham got to see in his vision the pre-incarnate Jesus or if he just got to hear the wonder of what God was promising him, but what is clear that Abraham believed. Abraham totally trusts the Lord and it is that faith that grants Abraham the status of “righteousness.”

That means that Abraham is considered before God to be holy, blameless and completely an heir of eternal life and salvation! In other words, though Abraham is a sinner, he is forgiven. Though he has doubts, he is viewed as doubtless. Though he is stained, he is washed clean. Though he has darkness, he is before God the light of holiness. It is very clear that Abraham’s status before the Lord is changed because of this gift of faith.

This same thing is also true for us. Our calling is to believe. To believe the Word and have no doubts. To believe that in Jesus our sins are paid for. To trust that God will clothe us with the holiness of Jesus and open his gates of heaven to us. We are a people who are to hear the Word. We believe the Word, no matter how wrong the world tells us we are, no matter how foolish the world tries to make us feel, we simply, absolutely trust the Word of the Lord. That, dear people, is what faith is all about.

Now, I want you to know that as the next years of Abraham unfold, he is going to show some “faith” problems. So when, in a few years there is no child, Abraham and Sarah decide to produce a child through Hagar the handmaiden. That child is born when Abraham is 86 and recognize that it will be another 14 years before the real heir of Sarah and Abraham will be born. God forgives and overlooks that foolishness. God does that because of His grace and mercy.

And so it is for all of us. Our calling is to hear and believe. And when we waver in sin and foolishness, remember to humbly repent and turn back to the Lord and his wonder. That is the awesome nature of God and that is exactly what God’s Word, time and time again declares to us. That we are forgiven and saved by the grace and wonder of God. That God so loves us that he sent his Son to save and become sin for us. That God has made sure that we have the Word of the Lord, maybe not in exactly the same way that Abraham had it, but nevertheless, the very same Word of the Lord that caused and brought out faith in Abraham. Because Abraham is counted as righteous not because of his flawless goodness (which does not exist) but rather because he heard the promise of the Word of the Lord and he knew that promise was and is true.

I plead that you be the same. Hear the Word of the Lord. Hear His promises and proclamations to you. Hear how He loves you and calls for your repentance. Hear how He forgives you and declares you also “righteous” just for the sake of Jesus! This section should fill you with hope and confidence. Hope because you can actually see that nothing has changed from the time of Abraham until now. Confidence because you know as God kept his Word to Abraham so he still keeps it for us too! We are in Jesus declared righteous. We are heirs of eternal life because our hope is Jesus. That is our faith. Amen.