

Our Shield & Reward – Genesis 15:1

I. INTRODUCTION

A. *Fear Of A Bomb*

1. Some years ago, when hijacking jet planes had just started as a form of terrorism, a man settled into his seat a few minutes before the jet left the gate.
2. When he was settled, the man next to him leaned over and said, “You know, I used to be deathly afraid of flying.”
3. He looked quite calm now so the first man asked, “How did you get over your fear?”
4. He said, “I went to one of those schools for people who are afraid of flying.”
 - a. “They went over all the statistics about how safe it is.”
 - a. “They told me there was only 1 chance in 10,000 that someone would be on board my flight with a bomb.”
 - b. “That didn't make me feel much better. The odds were still too close.”
 - c. “But then I reasoned that if there was only 1 chance in 10,000 that 1 bomb would be on the plane, there was only 1 chance in 100,000,000 that 2 bombs would be on board. I can live with those odds.”
5. The first man didn't understand this reasoning so he asked, “How does that help you?”
6. He replied, “Ever since then, I carry one bomb on board myself-- just to improve the odds.”

B. *Irrational*

1. Fear can make us do some pretty irrational things.
2. A fear of what *might be* can move us to take all kinds of precautions that are a waste of time and resources.
3. As one woman said; “Worry works! The things I worry about and am afraid of never happen!”

C. *Fear, Worry, Anxiety*

1. If there was every a time in history when we might expect to find people who live without fear, without worry or anxiety, it would

- be present day Americans!
2. We have the highest standard of living in the history of the world.
 - a. there's an *abundance* of the necessities of life.
 - b. our culture is *soaked* in prosperity and luxury.
 - c. we have the strongest military to defend us.
 3. An impartial observer, looking from the vantage point of the *whole* of history could easily conclude our lives would be care-free!
 4. But that's not the case – there's as much fear and anxiety today as there has ever been.
 5. All you have to do is look at the statistics of those seeking professional help and the sky-rocketing number of prescriptions for anti-anxiety medications to realize fear is *growing*, not diminishing.
 6. And now, as our nation looks to a new day of challenge in an impending war in the Middle East, some are becoming frantic.
 - a. they fear that if we attack Iraq, sleeper cells will awaken to carry out attacks here.
 - b. just this last week, the State Department issued the highest level of alert since 9/11.
 - c. the warning is that we may be the target for chemical and biological terrorism.
 7. What we find here in Genesis 15 ought to calm our fears and settle our hearts.

II. TEXT

A. V. 1

¹After these things the word of the LORD came to Abram in a vision, saying, “Do not be afraid, Abram. I *am* your shield, your exceedingly great reward.”

1. God never wastes His words; He never speaks unnecessarily.
2. So if He says, “Do not be afraid,” what do you suppose we can conclude about Abram?
3. He was *afraid!*
4. It's not hard to understand *why* Abram would be fearful.
 - a. he'd just routed a military force many times the size of his own.
 - b. they'd retreated in *humiliation* after being whooped.
 - c. and all the spoils they'd captured had been discarded so they

- could make their escape.
5. Ancient forms of warfare and ideas of honor demanded that if you suffered defeat, you had to recoup and counterattack.
 6. As Abram has just defeated the Mesopotamian alliance, he knows they've gone home to plan their revenge.
 7. And when they return, He knows he'll be facing a very different situation because *they* will be attacking *him*!
 8. So God comes to address his fears and settle his heart.

“Do not be afraid, Abram. I *am* your shield” = I will protect you!

. . . your exceedingly great reward.”

9. Abram's anxiety was from *two* sources.
 - a. the *first* was the fear of a counterattack from the *Northern Alliance*.
 - b. the *second* was his fear for the future as it related to his *family*.
 - 1) you see, God had blessed Abram beyond measure.
 - 2) he was a rich and powerful man with extensive flocks and herds.
 - 3) his household numbered in the hundreds of servants!
 - 4) but Abram *had no child* and this was literally tearing him up!
 - 5) more than anything, what he longed for was a son, an heir to whom the estate would pass when Abram died.
10. God had promised him years before that his descendants would comprise a mighty nation.
 - a. but as yet, not a single child had been born to he and his wife.
 - b. and now, they're no longer young; the child-bearing years are fading.
 - c. Abram is getting desperate, fearful that he'll die with no one to leave his name and house with.
11. It may be difficult for us to relate to Abram's anxiety over being childless.
 - a. many couples today choose *not* to have children.
 - b. they enjoy the freedom of not being tied down to little ones
 - c. not a few people today see kids as a bother and drain on resources.
 - d. perhaps you've seen that bumper sticker on the back of a motor home – “We're Spending Our Children's Inheritance”

12. In the world of Abram's day – people had a much stronger sense of *continuity* between the generations.
 - a. they saw themselves as the descendant of their ancestor and the ancestor of their descendants.
 - b. they were a *vital link* in an important chain called “family”
 - c. and “family” didn't just mean those who are alive at the same time I am –
 - d. family meant the whole line of descent, the entire family tree over many generations.
 - e. each person was handed a legacy by those who had come before, and it was their solemn duty to use it wisely, grow it, and then pass it on to their children.
13. This is what so troubled Abram.
 - a. he knew that he was the starting point, the patriarch of a new family because of the promises God had made to him when he left his home in Babylon.
 - b. God had prospered him immensely.
 - c. with God's blessing, Abram had built a legacy that was simply awesome.
 - d. but there was no one to carry on; no one to turn it over to.
14. And as Abram peers into the future, he's filled with fear.
15. What's to become of his house? Even more importantly - what's to become of God's promise?
16. So God comes to speak to *both* of Abram's fears.
 - a. I am your *protection* & I am your *exceedingly great reward*.
 - b. Do not be afraid, Abram! Or literally – “Fear Not!”

B. Faith & Emotions

1. The previous chapter focused on Abraham's *actions* as he went in pursuit of the Northern Alliance to rescue his nephew Lot.
2. *This* chapter deals with Abram's *emotions*.
3. People with faith are also people with feelings, and feelings must not be downplayed or ignored.
4. Well-meaning Christians emphasize the role of the mind and will but sometimes ignore the emotions; this is a serious error that can lead to an unbalanced life.
5. Emotions are a part of God's design; they're a crucial part of our soul.

6. We're made in the image of God, and this *includes our emotions*.
7. God designed us in such a way that the emotions were meant to be *responders to the truth our minds knew and affirmers of the righteous choices our will made*.
8. Sin has twisted us, distorting the role of emotions so that we often live **FOR** them;
 - a. instead of being *responders to* and *affirmers of* the mind and will.
 - b. they *control* our choices and thoughts
9. Some Christians, realizing this, go *too far* and end up denying their emotions altogether.
10. They give themselves a kind of *spiritual lobotomy* in which they attempt to excise emotion from their lives.
11. God doesn't want us to be unemotional religious robots.
12. He *wants* us to emote, to feel.
13. Think of it – what does God want from us above all else – Love!
 - a. what kind of love does He want?
 - b. well, let me ask you, what kind of love do you want from your husband or wife?
 - 1) do you want a mere intellectual love?
 - 2) do you want a love of cold calculation?
 - 3) it's Valentines' Day this coming Friday
 - 4) how many of your ladies would like the following card from your lover –

How Do I Love Thee? – Let Me Count The Ways!

 - 1) You are a female.
 - 2) You are in reasonably good health.
 - 3) You possess the capacity to be a suitably decent companion to me.
 - 4) I possess the means & potential to support you.
 - 5) Your genetic stock holds the promise of reasonably normal offspring.
 - 6) You're available.
 - c. that's cold calculation that arrives at a mere intellectual position
 - d. we don't want that from our mates – we want passion, emotion, heat, *feeling!*
14. Do you think God wants any less from us as His bride?

15. This whole life ought to be a *love-affair with God*.
16. The point is this – our emotions need to be taken into consideration.
17. In the Psalms, David and others told God *honestly* how they felt about Him, themselves, and their circumstances.
 - a. there were times when David would be really worked up about something.
 - b. he would pour out his heart before God,
 - c. asking that the Lord would help him see if he was in error in the way he was feeling.
18. This is a good example for us to follow.
 - a. don't deny or suppress your emotions,
 - b. rather, let them become triggers that challenge you to ask *why* you are feeling what you're feeling.
 - c. is that emotion a responder to the truth; is it affirming some wise choice?
 - d. or is it your flesh, the old-man seeking to usurp the place of the Spirit in your life?

C. Abram's Need

1. Abram was fearful, and that fear was paralyzing him.
2. So in His mercy and grace, God came to him with a Word of comfort and promise meant to dispel his fear.
3. God never tells us "Fear not!" without giving us a *reason* to put away our fears.
4. He spoke straight to the heart of Abram's fear and so blew it away like smoke before the wind.
 - a. Abram was fearful of attack – God is His Protector!
 - b. Abram was fearful of future provision – God is His Reward!
5. This is the first time we find the oft repeated command to – "Fear Not!"
 - a. God spoke it to many of His people –
 - 1) He said it to Isaac & Jacob, the son and grandson of Abraham. (Gen. 26:24; 46:3)
 - 2) He said to the people of Israel time and again during the Exodus. (Ex. 14:13; 20:20; Num. 14:9; Deut. 1:21)
 - b. as they were preparing to enter the Promised Land and faced the seemingly impossible task of conquering the fortress of

Jericho, God came to Joshua, who'd just taken over the leadership of the nation, and said – Joshua 1:9

Be strong and of good courage; do not be afraid, nor be dismayed, for the LORD your God is with you wherever you go.

D. Our Need

1. What God said to Joshua, Jesus says to us!
2. In Matthew 28:20, Jesus said He would be with us to the very end of the age.
3. Because God is with us, we need never fear!
4. The writer of Hebrews says that the promise God made to Joshua applies to us too!
 - a. in 13:5 & 6 he quotes Joshua & Psalm 118 [Joshua 1:5]

For He Himself has said, “I will never leave you nor forsake you.” ⁶So we may boldly say: “The LORD is my helper; I will not fear. What can man do to me?”

- b. when I hear those words I think of some little kid who's confronted by a bully.
 - 1) the bully's whole aim is to inspire fear
 - 2) he knows if he can get that little guy to fear him then he controls him.
 - 3) but the little guy isn't scared of the bully and the bully can see it.
 - 4) so he threatens the little guy, makes menacing gestures and starts coming at him.
 - 5) that's when the little guy's father comes out from behind the tree and stands behind him.
 - 6) the father is many times bigger and stronger than the bully is bigger than the little guy.
 - 7) the little guy knew all along his dad was poised behind the tree ready to come to his aid if he was needed – and that's why there was never any fear.
 - 8) in fact, he finds the bully to be kind of funny.
5. The devil is a bully who wants to control you through fear.
 - a. he'll threaten you with all kinds of ways.
 - b. but they can all be summed up in the two things God says He

- will be for Abram here.
- c. it all comes down to *protection* and *provision*.
6. What God said to Abraham as the Father of Faith, He says to all of us as the *children* of Abraham.
 - a. He is our Shield, our Protector!
 - b. and He is our Exceedingly Great Reward!
 7. I want to just read several more passages and trust as I do the Spirit will build your faith and deliver you from fear.
 - a. faith comes by hearing the Word of God. [Romans 10:17]
- the antidote to fear is faith in Him.
 - b. so let me just read and let's trust the Holy Spirit to dispel the clouds of fear and deliver us from the paralysis of anxiety.
 - c. and remember as I read these – these are promises God makes to His people.
 - d. they're like blank checks with His signature on them.
 - e. so if you need one or more of them, feel free to indicate that by saying “Amen” – or raising your hand, or whatever.

Isaiah 41:10-14

- 10** Fear not, for I *am* with you; Be not dismayed, for I *am* your God. I will strengthen you, Yes, I will help you, I will uphold you with My righteous right hand.'
- 11** “Behold, all those who were incensed against you shall be ashamed and disgraced; They shall be as nothing, and those who strive with you shall perish.
- 12** You shall seek them and not find them—Those who contended with you. Those who war against you shall be as nothing, as a nonexistent thing.
- 13** For I, the LORD your God, will hold your right hand, saying to you, ‘Fear not, I will help you.’
- 14** “Fear not, . . . I will help you,” says the LORD And your Redeemer, the Holy One of Israel.

Isaiah 43:1-5

- 1** But now, thus says the LORD, who created you, and

He who formed you: “Fear not, for I have redeemed you; I have called *you* by your name; You *are* Mine.

- 2 When you pass through the waters, I *will be* with you; and through the rivers, they shall not overflow you. When you walk through the fire, you shall not be burned, nor shall the flame scorch you.**
- 3 For I *am* the LORD your God, The Holy One of Israel, your Savior;**
- 5 Fear not, for I *am* with you.**

Isaiah 44:2 & 8

- 2 Thus says the LORD who made you and formed you from the womb, *who* will help you: ‘Fear not, My servant and chosen one.**
- 8 Do not fear, nor be afraid.**

Psalms 46:10-11

- 10 Be still, and know that I *am* God; I will be exalted among the nations, I will be exalted in the earth!**
- 11 The LORD of hosts *is* with us; The God of Jacob *is* our refuge.**

Philippians 4:19

My God shall supply all your need according to His riches in glory by Christ Jesus.

1. Our lives are only as big as our faith, and our faith is only as big as our God.
2. If we spend all our time looking at ourselves, we’ll get discouraged.
3. But if we look to God by faith, we’ll be encouraged.
4. God is our shield and our reward, our protection and provision.

Psalm 84:11-12

11 The LORD God *is* a sun and shield; The LORD will give grace and glory; No good *thing* will He withhold from those who walk uprightly.

12 O LORD of hosts, Blessed *is* the one who trusts in You!

Isaiah 12:2

2 Behold, God *is* my salvation, I will trust and not be afraid; 'For the LORD, *is* my strength and song; He also has become my salvation.'"

Psalm 56:11

11 In God I have put my trust; I will not be afraid. What can man do to me?

III. CONCLUSION

A. *For Now & Then*

1. There's a little candy called "Now & Later."
 - a. it's a chewy, gooey sweet that gives you an immediate blast of flavor
 - b. but it takes quite a while to chew it down till it's gone –
 - c. thus the name – Now & Later
2. That's what I hope this morning's message is for you.
3. I pray it will set you free from the fears that beset your life *today!*
4. And I pray *also* that in the *days to come*, as the challenges mount and the temptation to fear grows, this message will prove *even more helpful*.
5. If God is for us – and He is, then who can be & what can come against us?

B. *The Parallel*

1. As we end, I want to ask you to consider the parallels between

Abram's story and ours as a church.

2. You see, God promised Abram many descendants and a land in which they would comprise a great nation.
3. In the same way, God has spoken to us about how large He intends this church to grow to.
4. The day will come when we'll see 2,000 adults coming to services and who call Calvary Chapel of Oxnard their spiritual home.
5. Right now, we're inching close to 900 on Sunday mornings
 - a. the children's classes are full
 - b. second service is too full - parking is a challenge
 - c. we'll do our best to accommodate the growth here but there will come a point at which we just won't be able to stay here.
 - d. we figure that will be at about 1200, well shy of the 2000 the Lord has told us to prepare for.
6. That means we'll need to secure a new home, a new place to meet.
7. To be blunt – the prospect of a building project terrifies me.
 - a. that is – when I think about what we're going to need in a new facility, with plans to have a school as well – in and of myself, I panic!
 - b. and then I remember where we are right now: This building is a total miracle and testimony to the faithfulness, goodness, and power of God!
 - c. those who've been with us since El Rio know that this thing is one big memorial to the Lord!
 - d. there was a day when believing God for a monthly mortgage payment of \$12,000 might as well have been a Million!
 - e. and yet, God's direction was clear – it was time for us to leave the Ur of El Rio and make our journey to the Promised Land of Eastman.
 - f. well, just as Abram was a nomad who moved throughout the land of promise, God is calling us to pick up the tent and move it again.
 - g. where? We're not exactly sure. We can only see that the Lord is now stirring us to seek Him about this whole thing all over again and begin the task of moving to a new location.
 - h. when we think about what it's going to cost, it seems impossible!
 - i. and yet God has made it clear to us – move forward.

- j. where He guides, He provides!
8. He is our exceedingly great reward and will faithfully provide for us as we follow Him.
 9. We can also be assured of this – as we grow in both numbers and maturity, the adversary will do his best to thwart the work God intends to do in and through us.
 - a. his opposition will come in many forms
 - b. there will be attacks from within and from without.
 - c. shall we cower before him? Shall we withdraw and retreat, playing it safe and avoiding his attention?
 - d. No Way!
 10. I don't know about you but I want both my life and my church to be a major thorn in the devil's plans for Ventura County!
 - a. just as Abraham armed his men and went after the Northern Alliance, harassing them till they dropped the captives,
 - b. I want to harass the devil until we've stripped him of those he's taken captive by sin.
 - c. I want to see Ventura County become a *devil-free zone*!
 - d. I know that's a big dream, but my God is a big God!