

Abraham: The Father of the Faithful

Lesson 4: Counted as Righteousness: God's Covenant with Abram -- Genesis 15

It is night, and Abram cannot sleep. The battle is over; he has rescued Lot and refused the king of Sodom's reward, wanting nothing that would let anyone say they made Abram rich. But victory has a way of giving fear room to speak once the noise dies down, and in the dark the old ache returns. He is rich, he is respected, he has seen God act, and still the one thing he longs for has not come. He has no child. The promise of a great nation hangs on an empty cradle, and Abram is not getting any younger.

Into that darkness the word of the LORD comes: "Fear not, Abram, I am your shield; your reward shall be very great." Before God says anything about offspring or land, He gives Abram Himself. I am your shield. I am your reward. And Abram, with the honesty of a man who has waited long enough, finally says it out loud: "O Lord GOD, what will you give me, for I continue childless." It is not rebellion; it is the raw prayer of a believer who is tired of hoping. And God does not rebuke him for it.

Instead, God takes him outside. "Look toward heaven," He says, "and number the stars, if you are able to number them. So shall your offspring be." One old man, one barren wife, and a sky full of uncountable light. And then comes one of the most important sentences in all of Scripture, a sentence Paul will build the gospel upon: "And he believed the LORD, and he counted it to him as righteousness." Abram brought nothing to that moment but trust, and God credited him with a right standing he could never have earned.

Then God does something stranger still. He has Abram prepare a covenant sacrifice, cut the animals in two, and as a deep and dreadful darkness falls, a smoking fire pot and a flaming torch pass alone between the pieces. In that culture, both parties to a covenant would walk the bloody path together, as if to say, "May this be done to me if I break my word." But here God passes through alone. He takes the whole weight of the promise on Himself. Long before Calvary, the God who would one day not spare His own Son is binding Himself, by blood and by oath, to keep His word to the people He loves.

Group Discussion: Before God promised Abram anything else, He said, "I am your shield; your reward shall be very great." God offered Abram Himself as the reward. Why do we so easily want the gifts of God more than we want God Himself, and what difference would it make in your daily life if God truly were your greatest treasure and security?

Personal Reflection: Abram brought his real disappointment and doubt to God honestly: "What will you give me, for I continue childless?" Is there a long-deferred hope or a hard question you

have been afraid to bring honestly before God? What holds you back from speaking it plainly to Him as Abram did?

Read Genesis 15

Study Questions

1. God's first words to Abram in this chapter are, "Fear not, Abram, I am your shield; your reward shall be very great" (v. 1), spoken before any mention of a child or the land. What does it reveal about God, and about the nature of true faith, that He offers Abram Himself as both security and reward before He gives any of His gifts?
2. It is easy to pursue the blessings of God while overlooking God Himself. In what ways do you find yourself wanting what God can give you (comfort, provision, answered prayers) more than you want God? What would change if He, and not His gifts, were your greatest treasure?
3. Abram answered God honestly with his long-deferred grief: "What will you give me, for I continue childless?" (vv. 2–3), and God responded not with rebuke but with the stars and a renewed promise (vv. 4–5). What does this exchange teach about bringing honest doubt to God, and about how God strengthens faith through His word and His promise?
4. Abram did not hide his disappointment or let it quietly poison his trust; he brought it to God. What hard question, unanswered prayer, or buried disappointment have you been keeping at a distance from God? How might honestly bringing it to Him actually strengthen your faith rather than weaken it?
5. Genesis 15:6 says, "And he believed the LORD, and he counted it to him as righteousness," a verse Paul builds upon in Romans 4:1–5. What does it mean that righteousness was credited, or counted, to Abram through faith rather than earned, and why does Paul insist this leaves no room for boasting in our own works of merit or law-keeping?
6. If a right standing with God is credited by grace through faith and not earned by our performance, where are you still tempted to try to earn God's acceptance, to justify yourself by your record, or to measure your standing by how well you have done? How does the gospel of credited righteousness free you from that treadmill?
7. When Abram asked, "How am I to know?" (v. 8), God answered by cutting a covenant, and as darkness fell, He alone passed between the pieces in the smoking fire pot and flaming torch (vv. 9–21). Why is it significant that God bound Himself by oath and passed through alone, and how does this self-binding covenant give the believer assurance and even foreshadow the cross of Christ?
8. God anchored Abram's assurance not in Abram's feelings or performance but in His own sworn promise. When your assurance wavers, do you tend to look inward at your feelings and your record, or outward to what God has promised and sworn in Christ? Where do you most need to rest in God's promise rather than your performance this week?
9. Genesis 15:6 is one of the most important verses on faith in the Bible, but it must be read rightly. The same Abram whose faith was counted as righteousness here is the man whose

faith led him to leave Haran and would later lead him to offer Isaac, the man James points to when he says faith was “completed by his works” (James 2:22). How do we hold together the truth that Abram was justified by grace through faith and not by works of merit, and the truth that the faith which justified him was a living, obedient trust, never a faith that merely believed and did nothing?

10. Look back across this chapter. You have seen God give Himself as Abram’s reward, meet honest doubt with patient promise, credit righteousness to a believing heart, and bind Himself by a blood covenant to keep His word. Name one specific way Jesus is forming you through this part of Abram’s story. What is the single truth about faith, grace, or God’s faithfulness that you most need to carry into this week?

Now or Later

Reflect on these passages: Romans 4:1–12, Abraham justified by faith and not by works, with righteousness counted to him before he was ever circumcised; Galatians 3:6–9, those who are of faith are the true sons of Abraham; Hebrews 11:11–12, by faith Abraham, as good as dead, fathered descendants as many as the stars; James 2:21–24, the same Abraham whose faith was completed by his works; Genesis 22:1–18, the obedient faith that this credited righteousness produced