

GENESIS 15:1-6 (THE SOURCE OF RIGHTEOUSNESS)

Introduction: I don't know how many of you have ever taken the time to tell someone about Jesus, but there are a million ways to get started. Once you do, it's good to watch their eyes and body motion and gauge whether your words are having an effect. If not, then you need to change tact.

Some people already know they're messed up. Usually all they need is to be told how to get right with God. You simply tell them of His grace, mercy, and love and explain the path to salvation from the book of Romans.

Others have the "I" problem. When you ask them, "Why should God allow you into heaven?" the first thing they say is "I." "I'm a pretty good guy." "I try to be good to others." "I'm not as bad as this person or that." If you hear the word "I" it is a sure sign that they are much further away from God than they realize.

In this case, you need to give them the law – God's standard. You need to explain His righteousness, His justice, His standard of morality and then show how they measure up against that. When a person, no matter how good they think they are, is measured against perfect holiness, there is nothing left but condemnation.

Jesus says that we are to be perfect just as our heavenly Father is perfect. And yet it's not possible for us to do. When we start doing things in an attempt to merit His favor, we actually move further away from Him because we start trusting in our own deeds. This actually becomes a source of idolatry and further separates us.

In a similar manner, when we give any other reason – and I mean any other reason – than Jesus Christ as our justification for being suitable for heaven, then we are actually making ourselves out to be gods. We have now replaced God's word and His decision with our own decision. Any person on earth who claims they will be saved – for any other reason than Jesus Christ's work – is actually committing blasphemy against God.

Today, we'll discover the Source of righteousness and how to obtain it. When we do, we can confidently say that we have access to heaven and God's eternal home.

Text Verse: "Listen to Me, you who follow after righteousness,
You who seek the LORD:
Look to the rock *from which* you were hewn,
And to the hole of the pit *from which* you were dug.
² Look to Abraham your father,
And to Sarah *who* bore you;
For I called him alone,
And blessed him and increased him." Isaiah 51:1, 2

Today we'll look to our father Abraham and learn to follow the true path to righteousness and so... May God speak to us through His word today and may His glorious name ever be praised.

I. Our Shield and Our Exceedingly Great Reward

Over the last two weeks, we went through Genesis 14 which concerned the battle between the four kings of the east and the five kings of Canaan. It was during this battle that the kings of the east took Lot captive and carried him off toward their home.

But when Abram heard about it, he took his own men and chased after them, defeated them, and rescued Lot and everything he had. When he returned, he was met by Melchizedek, the King of Salem.

He also was offered the booty of the war he won, but returned it to the king of Sodom instead. This is where the account ended and it brings us to Chapter 15.

¹After these things the word of the LORD came to Abram in a vision...

This is the first time that the Bible says, "the word of the LORD came," meaning that Lord has revealed Himself through His word. In the Bible there are several ways in which God revealed Himself.

Sometimes he came through a personal appearance, sometimes by an audible voice, sometimes by visions – either when awake or when asleep, sometimes through an angel, and sometimes by the Spirit of God clothing or moving a person. When these things happened, and however they happened, it is the word of the Lord which was being given and it is therefore a part of His very nature.

The word of the Lord reveals the Lord. Today, we have the word of the Lord which was, as the book of Jude clearly explains, “Once for all delivered to the saints.” In other words, if you want to know the word of the Lord, go to your local bookstore, get a Bible, and read it. God has delivered His message to you through its pages.

¹ con’t **saying, “Do not be afraid, Abram. I *am* your shield, your exceedingly great reward.”**

Al tira Abram, anokhi magen lakh, sekhareykha harbeh meod.
In the Hebrew I just read, the word “I” is stated separately instead of being combined with another word. What this means is that the “I” to Abram is emphatic, I am your shield,,,, I am your exceedingly great reward.

The question that I’m sure each of you just asked yourselves, being the greatest congregation in the whole wide world, is “Why would the Lord say this emphatically to Abram?” “What does Abram have to fear and what reward should he anticipate?”

There are two things tied up in what the Lord says to him. First, being a “shield” means that He is the Protector from harm. Second, being an “exceedingly great reward” means that He is the giver of all that is good.

There are probably a few reasons why Abram needed to be protected from harm. First, he’d just defeated the four kings of the east and he may have worried that the people from there might gather an even greater force together to come and try to kill him because of his triumph.

He also was living in the land of Canaan and the people of the land might simply try to take what he had because he was becoming blessed more and

more as time passed by. It's the jealousy factor that we see in the world to this day.

There are people who don't have who want to take from people that do have; along with blessing will often come jealousy. We see it in our society between individuals and we see it between societies too. People who don't have will thief and steal to get what isn't theirs and what they don't deserve.

There are also reasons why Abram would need to be promised all that is good. When living in the world, good and bad are often so inextricably tied together that when we get something good, it is inevitably tied to something which is or will turn out as bad.

In the previous chapter, Abram turned down all of the spoils of the war he won simply because he understood this very lesson. If he took the spoils, which would have benefitted him a great deal, it would have ended in something bad because others could claim that the wickedness of Sodom is where his wealth came from. It would be like getting rich by being the lawyer for the mob.

From the Lord though comes infinite goodness and there is nothing less than good that comes from Him. This is why the Lord promises to be his shield and his exceedingly great reward. In this one verse then is both something tangible and something that transcends creation and reaches into the eternal and spiritual realm.

This verse is the first real hint which leads to the term which is finally found towards the end of the Old Testament in the book of Jeremiah, "The Lord our Righteousness." It is He who redeems us from death – the shield, and He who grants us eternal life – the exceedingly great reward.

If you're a Christian, then as we'll look at more closely in a minute, you're Abraham's seed and heir. If there's a better verse to start a sermon than chapter 15, verse 1, I can't imagine it. Here we are, 4000 years after the time of Abram and the very promise which we just read, in essence, applies to us today.

The promise stands because it is God's promise, spoken by His own mouth. The Lord Himself is our shield and our exceedingly great reward.

² But Abram said, "Lord God, what will You give me, seeing I go childless, and the heir of my house is Eliezer of Damascus?"

In this verse is something for all of you to notice and learn from. This is the first time in the Bible that the term "Adonai" is used. If you'll take the time to look at verse 1, it will say "LORD" with all capital letters. In this verse, it is translated "Lord" with one capital and three small letters. There is one more "lord" used in the Old Testament which is with all small letters.

LORD with all capitals is translated from the divine name – Jehovah or Yahweh. Lord with a capital and three small letters is Adonai. This is always speaking about the Lord, but it doesn't use His name out of respect. The lord, which is in all small letters is speaking of a human.

It's important to know these for several reasons, but for now, just remember that all caps is the divine name. A cap and three small letters is speaking about the Lord or to the Lord without using His name, and all small is speaking of someone like "mister." As you're reading the Bible, take notice of these differences and you will better understand what is going on.

Abram, using the term Adonai, indicates that he knows he is speaking to the Creator God and yet, what may seem incredible is that he asks "what will you give me, seeing I go childless?"

This isn't a question lacking faith though. Instead, it is demonstrating the high importance placed on having a child and not someone merely born in, or in charge of his house.

To help you understand this thought, imagine God appearing to me and saying, "Do not fear Charlie, I am your shield and your exceedingly great reward." Maybe I'd say, "But Adonai, what will You give me, seeing as how I only have a teeny church on the beach, and we don't know if from week to week it's going to get rained out or not?"

Am I lacking faith in the question, or am I making an obvious statement that all I have is a teeny church on the beach and that I have no idea if from week to week it's going to get rained out.

The very fact that I'm calling Him Adonai means that I understand that He is sovereign and the supreme Governor of all that happens. He is the One who will take care of every matter concerning my present and my future welfare and His personal glory.

The Lord already knows I want to be a preacher and the Lord already knows Abram wants a child. The Lord is in charge of whether I get four walls or not, and He is in charge of whether Abram will get a child or not.

And guess what! Adonai is also in charge of everything you both want and need. He knows already what you will get, and if there is a promise to you, He will fulfill it.

And if there is a desire of your heart, tell it to Him plainly. "Lord, Adonai, I really want to be a preacher and I really want to be able to afford to eat and pay my bills as a preacher. But this is Your world, this is Your word, and these are Your people. Direct my steps and fill my needs according to Your wisdom."

³ Then Abram said, "Look, You have given me no offspring; indeed one born in my house is my heir!"

As Matthew Henry says so beautifully, "Though we must never complain of God, yet we have leave to complain to him." A complaint isn't a lack of faith. A complaint is that state of mind that says, "I am unhappy with how things are going."

I complain all the time... I'm what you might call a whiner. And God hears every one of my sniffing little whines. My wife hears most of them too. I'm not sure why I complain to either of them. God already knows what I'm not happy with and my wife usually can't do anything about the things I'm unhappy about.

But there is something about complaining that helps **us** unpackage the very frustration that we're feeling. This might be what Abram is doing here. He's feeling unhappy about not having a child, even after the Lord promised that his descendants will inherit the land.

By telling the Lord that he hasn't been given any offspring, he's looking at the other options available – which in this case is that someone born in his own house is currently his heir. He may be asking if in fact he should formally adopt Eliezer as his son.

Then Charlie said, “Adonai, you have given me no building; indeed it's supposed to rain tomorrow morning!” And Adonai said, “It'll all work out the way it should, Charlie.”

II. The Source of Righteousness

⁴ And behold, the word of the LORD *came* to him, saying, “This one shall not be your heir, but one who will come from your own body shall be your heir.”

Abram is now given the promise of a son from his own body. It won't be an adopted son, a son of his house – meaning a servant, nor will it be a female. Abram is promised a son by the word of the Lord. When the Lord speaks, it will come to pass.

⁵ Then He brought him outside and said, “Look now toward heaven, and count the stars if you are able to number them.” And He said to him, “So shall your descendants be.”

Before I give my thoughts on here, I want to read you what Google Answers says about how many visible stars there are in the sky –

“You can't count the stars directly. Due to the rotation of the earth, more keep appearing on one side and disappearing from the other. As atmospheric conditions change, some stars become visible and some become invisible. Instead, people look through a tube, count the stars in that field of view, and scale that figure up to obtain an estimate for the total. If you want a specific number, The Yale Bright Star Catalog catalogs

the “naked eye visible stars,” which they consider to be those with a magnitude of 6.5 or brighter. Those have been catalogued and listed, and there are 9110 entries in that list. But if you want to see all of them, you'll need ideal conditions: good eyes, several high altitude viewpoints in different parts of the earth, a moonless night, no aurora, and air that is absolutely still, clear, and dry.”

So a complete counting of all the stars in the visible sky, from every vantage point on earth is 9110 stars. Taken in context, this seems to make the promise suspicious and less than reasonable.

However, this is with the exception of the fact that it's actually impossible to count this number at any one time, which would make the number unknown anyway. Because of this, there are both difficulties and possibilities, based on if you are a Bible believer or a Bible pessimist.

But I'd like to propose a possibility concerning this verse which might answer both dilemmas and actually point to the Person of Jesus at the same time. But mind you, this is so far from any other commentary that you should probably take it with a grain of salt.

The Lord took Abram outside and said,

^{5(cont)}**“Look now toward heaven, and count the stars if you are able to number them.” And He said to him, “So shall your descendants be.”**

But in just a couple verses it's going to say this – “Now when the sun was going down, a deep sleep fell upon Abram...”

This certainly implies that when the Lord was speaking to Abram about the stars it was during the daytime, not the nighttime. So in my mind, there are only two possibilities to answer this dilemma. The first is what comes from verse 1, “The word of the LORD came to Abram in a vision.”

The vision then showed Abram a display of the heavens that was beyond what we see with our naked eye. In other words, he saw what we get to see today with the Hubble telescope. “I am the Creator of all of this. As

immense as is this universe that I have made is as sure as the promise which I am giving to you.”

This is unlikely though because we wouldn't have the same reference as Abram. It would be mixing apples with oranges.

The second possibility, and the one I favor, is that Abram was taken outside **during the day** and told to count the stars if he could do so – which he couldn't because the number was hidden from him. “But Lord, I can't count them – it's daytime... it's beyond my ability to even try. I know they're there and in an astonishing number, but to count that number would be impossible.”

And the Lord's answer – “Just as impossible as it is for you to count them, so shall your descendants be.” But... if this is the case there is something veiled to the eyes of Abram but which is revealed later in the Bible. There actually is one star visible in the daytime sky – and that is our sun.

Abram, nor anyone else for eons, knew that the sun was just one of many stars, but the Lord did. In asking Abram to number the stars, He was giving him an impossible task and yet he was pointing to the ultimate heir of the promise – Jesus Christ. Is this possible?

In Malachi 4:2, the last page of the Old Testament, Jesus is called the Sun of Righteousness. No, Abram couldn't count the stars in the sky because it was daytime and during the daytime the sun is so brilliant that it blocks out all the other stars from view.

They are there, but they're hidden because of the sun's surpassing glory. And here we are, the children of Abraham in a number so vast it can't be counted, and above all of us – in surpassing glory – is the Son of Righteousness... Jesus Christ.

I won't be dogmatic on any of the possibilities. No matter what, the number is ultimately a number beyond comprehension, but I do think that the possibility I've given isn't just likely, but more than probable.

And this leads us directly to the last verse from Genesis 15 today –

⁶And he believed in the LORD, and He accounted it to him for righteousness.

Abram believed in the Lord, and He, the Lord, accounted it to him for righteousness. What needs to happen for the rest of today's sermon is to define "righteousness" and then show where this quality stems from. By doing this, we will see that this verse, Genesis 15:6, is the principle key in our relationship with God.

This is only the second time in the Bible that being righteous is mentioned when speaking of a person. The first time was of Noah and it says he was righteous in his generation, but today is the first time that righteousness is said to be bestowed upon someone and it is done so because of his simple faith – His belief in the incredible.

The word "righteous" is mentioned 555 times in the Bible and we could spend eons evaluating each instance, but what I will do to keep things short today, is to quote you once from Jeremiah, once from Revelation, and then read you Paul's thoughts on Genesis 15 as are written in Galatians chapter 3.

In Jeremiah, we see the term Yahweh Tzidkednu, or – The Lord our Righteousness. This is Jeremiah 23:5, 6 –

"Behold, *the* days are coming," says the LORD,
"That I will raise to David a Branch of righteousness;
A King shall reign and prosper,
And execute judgment and righteousness in the earth.
⁶In His days Judah will be saved,
And Israel will dwell safely;
Now this *is* His name by which He will be called:
THE LORD OUR RIGHTEOUSNESS.

In the Old Testament, if you look closely, righteousness stems from the Lord, not from us. He gives certain parameters by which a person can be

considered righteous, but as Paul will explain, we fail to meet these parameters and therefore righteousness cannot come from us, but must be granted externally.

In Revelation 19, right there at the end of the New Testament, we read this in verses 7 and 8 –

“Let us rejoice and exult, and give him glory; for the marriage of the Lamb is come, and his wife has made herself ready. ⁸And it was given to her that she should be clothed in fine linen, bright [and] pure; for the fine linen is the righteousnesses of the saints.”

Most versions state that the fine linen given to these saints is the “righteous deeds” of the saints, but this is incorrect. It is the righteousness of the saints – it is a righteousness which comes not from our deeds, but from the Lord Jesus and faith in His deeds.

This might seem like splitting hairs, but it’s not. It is the fundamental distinction between Christianity and all other religions. The Christian is declared righteous, as Abram was, by faith alone. When that faith is exercised, a person is declared righteous and stands justified before God.

III. If By the Law

Paul, on several occasions in his writings, states that righteousness is an imputed righteousness and that our deeds have no merit in obtaining it. In fact, in Galatians 3, he very clearly explains how the Law of Moses fails to bestow righteousness upon us.

And so today, I’m going to read you Galatians 3 and explain it without getting into any great detail. Why Galatians 3? Because in this chapter, Paul uses Genesis 15:6 as a basis for the source of righteousness. To understand what happens to us when we exercise faith, we need to understand what happened to Abram.

¹ O foolish Galatians! Who has bewitched you that you should not obey the truth, before whose eyes Jesus Christ was clearly portrayed among you as crucified?

² This only I want to learn from you: Did you receive the Spirit by the works of the law, or by the hearing of faith?

³ Are you so foolish? Having begun in the Spirit, are you now being made perfect by the flesh?

⁴ Have you suffered so many things in vain—if indeed *it was* in vain?

⁵ Therefore He who supplies the Spirit to you and works miracles among you, *does He do it* by the works of the law, or by the hearing of faith?—

⁶ just as Abraham “believed God, and it was accounted to him for righteousness.” (GEN 15:6)

⁷ Therefore know that *only* those who are of faith are sons of Abraham.

⁸ And the Scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, preached the gospel to Abraham beforehand, *saying*, “In you all the nations shall be blessed.” (GEN 12:3)

⁹ So then those who *are* of faith are blessed with believing Abraham.

¹⁰ For as many as are of the works of the law are under the curse; for it is written, “Cursed *is* everyone who does not continue in all things which are written in the book of the law, to do them.”
(DEUT 27:26)

¹¹ But that no one is justified by the law in the sight of God *is* evident, for “the just shall live by faith.” (HAB 2:4)

¹² Yet the law is not of faith, but “the man who does them shall live by them.” (LEV 18:5)

¹³ Christ has redeemed us from the curse of the law, having become a curse for us (for it is written, “Cursed *is* everyone who hangs on a tree”), (DEUT 21:23)

¹⁴ that the blessing of Abraham might come upon the Gentiles in Christ Jesus, that we might receive the promise of the Spirit through faith.

¹⁵ Brethren, I speak in the manner of men: Though *it is* only a man’s covenant, yet *if it is* confirmed, no one annuls or adds to it.

¹⁶ Now to Abraham and his Seed were the promises made. He does not say, “And to seeds,” as of many, but as of one, “And to your Seed,” who is Christ. (GEN 12:7)

¹⁷ And this I say, *that* the law, which was four hundred and thirty years later, cannot annul the covenant that was confirmed before by God in Christ, that it should make the promise of no effect.

¹⁸ For if the inheritance *is* of the law, *it is* no longer of promise; but God gave *it* to Abraham by promise.

¹⁹ What purpose then *does* the law *serve*? It was added because of transgressions, till the Seed should come to whom the promise was made; *and it was* appointed through angels by the hand of a mediator.

²⁰ Now a mediator does not *mediate* for one *only*, but God is one.

²¹ *Is* the law then against the promises of God? Certainly not! For if there had been a law given which could have given life, truly righteousness would have been by the law.

²² But the Scripture has confined all under sin, that the promise by faith in Jesus Christ might be given to those who believe.

²³ But before faith came, we were kept under guard by the law, kept for the faith which would afterward be revealed.

²⁴ Therefore the law was our tutor *to bring us* to Christ, that we might be justified by faith.

²⁵ But after faith has come, we are no longer under a tutor.

²⁶ For you are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus.

²⁷ For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ.

²⁸ There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus.

²⁹ And if you *are* Christ's, then you are Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise.

Now that we've determined the Source of righteousness, please allow me just a couple minutes to explain how you can appropriate that for yourself and stand right before God...

Abram – Declared Righteous by Faith

After Abram's great battle to rescue Lot
And then meeting Melchizedek next
A vision from the Lord Abram got
And at first he seemed a bit perplexed
The Lord appeared to him and told him this
Do not be afraid Abram, I am your shield
Your exceedingly great reward, so don't dismiss
What I tell you, great riches it will yield
But Abram said, "Lord God, what will you give me?"
Seeing as I continue without a child
I have no offspring as you can see
By your words, I feel interestingly beguiled

The heir of my house is this guy Eliezer
The one from Damascus will inherit my razor
Indeed one born in my house is my heir
He'll inherit everything, from my camel to my chair
And behold, the word of the Lord came to him saying
Nope, this one shall not be your heir
I know about this you have been praying
And from your own body, a son will come – do not despair

Then He brought Abram outside and said
“Look now toward heaven, count the stars if you can”
Close your eyes and try counting them in your head
It's something impossible for any man
And He said to Abram who was waiting to hear
“Thus shall your descendants be, so don't you fear.”
And Abram believed the Lord and the promise he made
And to him righteousness was granted for his belief
From this one act came an eternal trade
And fallen man was given the hope of relief

Coming from Abram would be the Savior to all
The Messiah of the world who would give His life
So that to anyone that on His name would call
Would come to the end of all turmoil and strife
Peace with God, righteousness bestowed
By faith alone, nothing else owed
Such is the nature of God towards man
All He asks is faith in the things He has done
A little bit of faith is the heart of the plan
Because through faith in Jesus, the victory is won

Hallelujah and Amen...