

Fear Not

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[0 : 00] Let's turn now to our studies in the life of Abraham in Genesis, to Genesis chapter 15 and verse 1. Genesis 15 and verse 1.

After these things, the word of the Lord came unto Abram in a vision, saying, Fear not, Abram, I am thy shield and thy exceeding great reward.

I think you will remember that in the Garden of Eden, after Adam and Eve had eaten of the forbidden fruit, that God came to Adam and Eve in the Garden.

And we hear Adam saying to God at Genesis chapter 3 and verse 10. I heard thy voice in the Garden and I was afraid because I was naked.

Fear is the earliest recorded self-consequence of sin.

[1 : 17] When Adam and Eve turned, they became afraid.

They became afraid of God. And they became afraid of the circumstances that they saw around them.

And I think we would have to accept today that fear is one of the most prevalent felt consequences of sin in our society.

Government departments are set up to deal with fear. The Home Office has to deal with the law and order of our land because of the fear that people have walking our streets.

The fear that people have to deal with the fear of living in their own homes. The Department of Social Security. The Department of Social Security has to deal with the fear of economic inadequacy.

[2 : 42] The Foreign Office has to deal with the fear of wars. The Foreign Office has to deal with the fear of wars and rumours of wars. The Northern Ireland Office.

Well, we don't need to say much about the fear that that government department has to deal with. But tonight, we are able to know that the government department has to deal with.

It is a much higher place that we can put our faith and our confidence when we think of the fears that we may have.

Fears about our health. Fears about our loved ones. Fears about our work situation.

Fears about our own moral fragility. Fears about death.

[3 : 50] Fears about death. God's salvation in dealing with sin deals with fear. Fears about our own moral fragility.

Fears about our own moral fragility. The psalms that we have been singing tonight. And there are so many of them that we could have chosen. For the people of God are encouraged by God to sing in worship to him.

That he deals with their fears. Fears about death. And that they do not need to be afraid when they know him, the living God.

And then just as God's salvation involves God taking the initiative, that's the way that he deals with our fears.

We come so often to deal with our fears even before they may be properly formulated in our minds. That's certainly the impression that we get here.

[4 : 51] We're not really told what Abraham's fears were at this time. Although he is going to go on in the rest of chapter 15 to express some of his fears.

But the fears that were there already, before they can be expressed, God can. And God says to Abraham, fear not, Abraham.

So by the initiative of God, by the grace of God, salvation deals with our fears.

And then salvation deals with our fears. By bringing us a provision for our fears.

But absolutely no one else can bring to us but God himself. No government office will work to allay our fears with the methodology that God uses.

[6:01] And that he uses when he comes to Abraham here. Do you see the methodology? Do you see the argumentation? Abraham, fear not. I am.

Fear not. I am. Fear not. I am. That really all was the methodology of salvation.

That's what brings a sinner, first of all, into salvation. It's all got to do with the way that God convinces the sinner about God himself.

About who he is. About what he has done. About what he is able to do. About the sureness of his promises. Come to me, God says. Come to me, God says.

God says. And I will give you raise. For I am meek and lowly in heart. God says. God says. God says.

[7:07] God says. God says. God says. God says. and as God continues to deal with our sin and all the consequences of our sin the methodology is the same that central problem with our sin that central consequence that all prevalent consequence the consequence of fear that shows itself in all sorts of forms God comes with the same methodology don't be afraid fear not I am and you don't need me to tell you as you look at the verse that God tells Abraham and tells us this evening who seek to follow in the steps of faithful Abraham he tells us two things about himself to deal with our fears first of all God says that

God is the shield for fear of attack it seems that Abraham feared attack in some way at this point and it seems that his fear of attack had been caused strangely it may seem by the victory that he had enjoyed over the kings who had come in and who had captured Lot and who had defeated the local kings because we read don't we even although it's the beginning of a chapter we still need to notice these connecting phrases that we thought about this morning after these things the word of the Lord came unto Abraham and said fear not I am your shield you're afraid of attack Abraham and you're afraid of attack after these things but I am your shield we can imagine the sort of thought that the evil one may have placed in the mind of Abraham that began to disturb this heart and to make him fearful about what might be about to happen maybe he thought this victory is going to cause new jealousy amongst these local kings maybe they're going to think that I Abraham that I'm after their territory for myself maybe they'll become more suspicious of me than ever before now that they've seen me using some military strength against the foreign kings and maybe they've noticed that my material resources my military resources are really very small indeed only 300 odd servants of mine whom I can arm and maybe they'll continue in their local alliance and seek to defeat me these may have been amongst the fears of attack after the victory and of course it's often after some victory after some occasion when the Lord has been gracious to us and has brought us into some new spiritual blessing it's often at that very time that the evil one will come with all his wiles with new power with new subtlety to seek to sow doubt in the heart that has known faith by God's grace these may have been amongst the fears of Abraham

I don't know what sort of fears you have this evening as a Christian believer they will be of all sorts they will be of great variety and it is really pointless for me to go through them but I do encourage you to think of your own circumstances this evening your circumstances in these days and the different ways in which you may be tempted to feel that you just will not be able to cope you will not be able to stand for Christ in this situation or that situation that seems so difficult as it approaches or perhaps you are in the midst of it and perhaps you cannot get out of your mind the failures that you have known in the past the way you have let the saviour down time and again and as you face some fresh challenge you are saying to yourself and the evil one is encouraging you to say this how can I possibly cope whatever victories I've had in the past they're really going to count for nothing by God's grace somehow these victories came in the past that as I think of the way that I have failed so often to learn the lessons as I think of my present weakness and as I think of the power of the evil one

I will fail this time surely these are the sort of fears of present circumstances that may come to us and into that situation God would come to us people whoever you are whoever you are this evening if you are one of God's people if you are a follower of Jesus no matter how weak your faith may seem to be God would come to you as he came to Abraham he doesn't wait until you have become aware of all the complexities that are causing this fear perhaps the introduction to this sermon has been the way that you have been prompted to the fact that there are fears that you hadn't really recognised and before you might dwell in them anymore

God would come as he came to Abraham before Abraham as far as we know ever gave full expression of them and in that graciousness by which God so often comes and answers even before we ask he would come with a very simple promise and he would say tonight to all his people to everyone of you here who knows and who loves the Lord Jesus Christ whatever difficulty you find yourself in whatever potential difficulty you might be imagining and the evil one loves to work on our imagination God would come and he would say so simply I am your shield I am your shield and by that he wants his people to understand this whatever attack whatever difficulty whatever problem whatever challenge that would bring fear and dread into your heart whatever it might be but to get past me

[15 : 21] God would see it never reaches you without passing my do because I am your shield and whatever comes to you from outside yes and indeed whatever comes from within your own sinful flesh I am a shield that protects from that also there's an all inclusiveness a comprehensiveness about this simple promise of the Lord I am your shield Abraham so fear not whatever your fear is if it's coming from inside or from outside and most likely it's a combination of the two as the evil one works to seek your spiritual and moral defeat fear not

I am your shield and so we must ask as we try to develop that comfort that God gives us we must really ask who is this God who is the God of Abraham and this is a God who is my God and is it sufficient therefore for me to hear from God I am your shield well first of all this is the God who blessed Abraham by sending Melchizedek we must link it I think with Melchizedek as we link it with all the circumstance of chapter 14 that we studied over the last three or four Sunday evening because the text says after these things the word of the Lord came to Abraham and said Abraham fear not I'm your shield I'm the one who came to you when Melchizedek came to you as the priest and the king of the most high God now we can't spend time going over Melchizedek again tonight but we just need to remember but we saw very clearly that Melchizedek was a foreshadowing of the Lord Jesus Christ Jesus is the final king and priest of the most high God the Savior the God who came to Abraham through Melchizedek is the God that has come to his people tonight through Jesus his son and it's the God who speaks in Christ and it's the God who speaks as Jesus speaks who says to you tonight

I am your shield now what does the Bible say about Jesus that would encourage us tonight when we remember that he is our shield that any attack that gets to us has first of all had to come through Jesus it's first of all had to be vetted by him because he's our shield well we've only time to pick one verse from the Bible and I've chosen Ephesians chapter 1 and verse 22 at the very end of that great first chapter of Ephesians where we're told about all the spiritual blessings that Christian believers have and how all power and authority has been given to Jesus and verse 22 says and see that God the Father has put all things under his feet and gave him that Jesus to be the head over all things for the church in other words the Jesus who is your shield is the Jesus who has been given by God the Father everything absolutely everything for the good of the church and if you're a believer tonight that means for your good and it means for my good that's the one who stands between you and every attack every difficult circumstance every pressure every challenge that you might feel tonight

Christ is there monitoring it all and he's the one into whose authority has been given absolutely everything in this world every resource that you could possibly need every circumstance that may need to be changed and developed and altered a little for your good it's under Christ you see it and it's from that standpoint that he says fear not you may be only seen a little of the picture but I who have been given everything I'm your shield the God who blessed Abraham and sent Melchizedek and this is the God who comes with promise before Abraham seems to have had the opportunity to express his fear we've mentioned that already but we can't do it again he's the God who goes before he's the

[21 : 43] God who seems to understand so meticulously so safely we haven't heard anything about Abraham's fear but God knows God comes immediately and says fear not I'm your shield I've known all about it all along because I've been there guarding you and protected you this really reminds me well it reminds me of two things it reminds me first of all of the things that we've been studying recently in the prayer meetings as we've been going through John chapter 14 and when we've been thinking about the Holy Spirit the helper the one who comes alongside us and is sensitive to our every weakness to our every need to our every circumstance and whatever we need we have to all the condescension of the love of God as he comes down from the glories of

heaven and he comes alongside us to be our sister all the love all the humility of the mercy of God our

Savior and all his understanding we've something of that told to us by Paul in 1 Corinthians 10 and 13 there has no temptation taken you that such as is common to man that God is faithful who will not suffer you to be tempted above that you are able but will with the temptation also make a way to escape that you may be able to be that's the sensitivity of God again it's not that he keeps every challenge or every trial or every test from us no we need the challenges we need the tests we need the things that if we become weak and face will cause us to fear but we need not fear because God our shield is there with us and he's there as the sensitive helper he knows what we can manage he knows also what we ought to manage and he's there with all the spiritual power that comes through his holy spirit as the helper to enable us to deal with the difficulty in a way that means that we don't need to fear that we can see the difficulty rather as something that will strengthen us in faith that will strengthen us in love for the

Lord or will strengthen us in some other way fear not I'm your shield and then this God of Abram is the sovereign God who has been revealing his plans of salvation to Abram remember you see that we're dealing when we're dealing with Abram with the life of this prototype Christian the first Christian if you like I'm not saying he's the first Christian in the Bible that he's the first Christian the father of all Christians the first Christian to be clearly described and explained in the narrative of his life to us and haven't we seen right from the beginning how the Christian believer is one into whose life the sovereign God enters with his sovereign authority with his sovereign power there are none of us here tonight who are

Christians but it's because God in his sovereign mercy has entered in and called us to himself and claimed us for himself and that's the God who says I am your shield whatever circumstance you're going through it's all under my authority as your sovereign God and saviour and I am your shield to see it's against the background of God's sovereignty and salvation that we have that verse that we know so well from Romans chapter 8 it's verse 28 that it would be good for us not to stop at verse 28 but always to combine it with verse 29 because again there's a connecting word there at verse 29 and it's the word for or because it gives the reason why all things work together for good to those who love the

Lord to those who are called according to his purpose for because how is it that all things work together for good to those who love the Lord how is it that those who are Christians here tonight no matter what you are going free you can take on board by faith God's reassurance fear not I'm your shield all things will work together for your good because whom he did for know he also did predestinate to be conformed to the image of his son that he might be the firstborn among many brethren all things work together for your good because the God who is sovereign is your saviour and you are in his saving plan and he's been working at it from the endless ages of a past eternity when he knew you in Christ before you were ever born and he predestinated all the circumstances of your life and he's still at work in his sovereignty looking right into the eternity to come when you will be conformed to the image of his son

[28 : 14] I don't know how Christian believers manage when they restrict the sovereignty of God in salvation as Arminians do who say that all that God could do in Christ and the cross was to make salvation possible that's what Arminians say and so they keep the sovereignty of God they restrict it but Calvinist as I hope we are whether we like the term or not don't say that God merely made salvation possible for his people that he made salvation sure for his people when Christ died for them his sovereign control and his sovereign purposes

God sure and certain are over it all the God of Abraham the God of Isaac the God of Jacob the God of our Lord Jesus Christ the God of the Bible is the sovereign God nothing can finally thwart or hinder his sovereign purposes and he's the one who comes to you tonight and says I am your shield therefore see your know but not only does God say I am your shield but he says I am your great reward now Abraham was tasted about that Abraham was tasted about his possession by the king of

Sodom who wanted him to have part of the spoil that Abraham would have none of it and would give all the glory to the Lord but it seems that Abraham must have had fears about that but he was now perhaps nearly ten years in the land of promise and he had nothing that he could call his own and especially he was still childless and he's going to say more about that in chapter 15 as we go on that he had fears he was a wee bit like Adam in the garden that temptation was there remember

how Adam said I was afraid because I was naked see man was made in God's image man was made to be fruitful and to multiply and to glorify God
God's God's God's God's God's love all that we were all that we might be and we have nothing and yet we still have that heart of the man made in the image of God God has placed eternity in our hearts the writer of Ecclesiastes tells us and we have that desire for satisfaction to be as God wanted us to be and we cannot and maybe for a moment Abram turned back in upon himself and he saw how after all these years of faithfulness it seemed that there were no tangible rewards we have that sort of fear seeking faithfully to trust the Lord and the evil one can and please deal is it worth it what have you got to show for it what are you going to be able to offer to your God at the end of the day you've been a Christian for 10 years you've been a Christian for 70 years what have you got to show for it are you going to have anything to bring at the end of the day is there really reward in it at all is it worth it these sort of thoughts can cause us to fear if the devil can get a foothold in our sinful flesh and to us in that condition our God can and he says fear not I'm your reward reward I'm your reward isn't that what your salvation was all about wasn't it about me giving myself for you and giving myself to you oh yes you may have lost much to being a [34 : 09] Christian but I have come to you I have come to indwell you indeed I talk about myself when Christ he talks about the Holy Spirit and again in John 14 and these passages he talks about the Holy Spirit being the Christian possession oh the love of God in the way that he comes down to us and honors us with blessings to great to gain not only do we become God's possession but amazingly when we are saved God becomes our possession Jesus words in John 14 I will pray the father and he shall give you another comforter that he may abide with you forever he'll give them to you and he'll be yours the Holy

Spirit will be yours like a treasure like a gift but not only that he goes on a verse or two later and he says I will not leave you comfortless that's Jesus speaking I will come to you and then a verse or two after that he says if a man love me he will keep my word and my father will love him and we will come to him that's Jesus and the father and we will make our abode with him the body of the believer will be like our home it's where we'll settle down and we'll be in you and with you that's what we have in trust fear of loss fear of not having enough to place before the throne I am your reward not only do we have God as our possession but in having God we have all things isn't that what Paul said in 1st Corinthians all things are yours whether Paul or Apollos or Cephas or the world or life or death or things to come all are yours you are Christ and Christ is yours he said that in a context where the Corinthians were jockeying for position wanting to place themselves under one leader or one teacher or another and Paul has to change round their way of thinking do you not see that the Christian life is not a life of earning of meriting it's a life of receiving by God's grace how are you wondering if one is better than another according to which preacher you put yourself against all things are yours all preachers who can bring you anything of the word of God they've been given to you freely by God grace all the experiences of life even death itself is like a gift that God has given because it will be controlled by God grace for your good all things are yours for your good and for your enjoyment I'm your shield and I'm your great reward one commentator has said this cannot God fill the lonely heart who fills heaven with his glory and F.B. Mayer says to have God is to have all though bereft of everything to be destitute of God is to be bereft of everything though having all Amen let us turn out to Psalm 73 Psalm 73 and we'll sing the verses 23 and 24 and the tune is Lloyd nevertheless nevertheless continually O Lord I am with thee thou dost me hold by my right hand and still upholdest me Psalm 73 and the verses 23 and 24 nevertheless nevertheless continually

[39 : 42] O Lord I am with thee thou dost me hold by my right hand and still upholdest me thou with thy counsel while I live wilt me conduct and guide and to thy glory afterward receive me to abide now may the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ the love of God the Father and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit remain with us now and always

Amen the wonder of salvation in their own experience that they'll at least see and understand more of it and be able to praise God the more for it Paul I think is using that amazing picture to help us to see how God's unsearchable riches enables us to glorify God enables us to come to God gives us access to God as he says in verse Wales oh the lifting power of God's grace that's the course that we have set on if we're the people of God tonight we've already got access and the power of God's grace the riches that there is in

Christ has been given to us so that more and more we might be lifted up to God and sin to you