

ABRAHAM'S GREAT REWARD

NO. 2814

A SERMON
INTENDED FOR READING ON LORD'S DAY, JANUARY 18, 1903
DELIVERED BY C. H. SPURGEON
AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON
ON THURSDAY EVENING, JUNE 14, 1877

“Fear not, Abram: I am thy shield, and thy exceeding great reward.”
Genesis 15:1

YOU have probably heard a great many sermons on the first part of the text, “I am thy shield,” so, on this occasion, I am going to leave that portion, in order more fully to consider the second part, “I am thy exceeding great reward.”

Notice first, the circumstances under which these words were spoken to Abraham. It must have been in his memory that not very long before, he had parted from his nephew Lot, and had given him his choice as to which way he would go with his flocks and his herds, and Lot, regardless of the character of the people among whom he was going to dwell, chose the well-watered plain of Jericho or Jordan, in which were the sinful cities of Sodom and Gomorrah. He thought only of temporal advantages, and now he had lost everything in the battle of the four kings against five.

Abraham had an eye to the kingdom of God, and His righteousness, so he had not lost anything, in fact, he was able to restore to Lot all that he had lost. And now the Lord appears to him and seems to say to him, “Thy nephew Lot trusted in what he could see, he followed the leading of his own judgment and chose that which seemed to be for his own immediate advantage, and now he has lost all. But ‘fear not, Abram: I am thy shield, and thy exceeding great reward.’ Thou shalt not lose. Thou hast chosen the good part, which shall not be taken from thee. Thou hast no share of the well-watered plain of Jordan to lose. Thou needest not fret, for thou shall never lose thy portion.” The patriarch might also have said, on his own account, “The LORD is my portion, saith my soul; therefore will I trust in him.”

You, beloved, have probably seen others suffering the loss of all things, and brought to deep despair as the result, but do not be alarmed at whatever happens to you. You have made God to be your refuge, and you shall find a most secure abode in Him. You may have losses and afflictions, these are a part of your lot, but they shall not overwhelm you. You shall be no real losers in the end, but you shall be kept by the power of God, and shall be delivered out of every trial and affliction. He shall be to you also your shield, and your exceeding great reward.

Again, Abraham had just at that time refused the gifts of the king of Sodom. They were his rightful spoil, and he might very properly have taken them, yet he would not do so, lest, in later days the king of Sodom should say, “It was not Abraham’s God that enriched him. It is no use for him to talk about living by faith, for it was my gifts, or the spoils of war that enriched him.” “No,” says Abraham, “you shall never be able to say that. Whatever I have shall be God’s gift to me—not the king of Sodom’s gift. I will be independent of men, I will be dependent only upon the living God.”

The Lord admires this spirit, so He comes and says to His servant, “‘Fear not, Abram.’ Whatever you may have given up for My sake—for My glory’s sake—for the sake of My honor—you shall not be a loser in any respect, for I will be your shield, and your exceeding great reward.”

Have you, dear friend, made any sacrifices for Christ? Have you lately been called to imperil your own interests by pursuing a right course? Have you been steadfast even though you lost friendships? Have you been so firm in your adherence to principle that you have been judged to be obstinate? Well, if so, you shall be no loser through your faithfulness. As certainly as God is in heaven, you shall prove, in some way or other, that in keeping His commandments there is great reward.

It is always a pity when any of the children of God begin to think that they can be enriched by the king of Sodom, or try to find their portion, in any measure, amongst the ungodly sons of men. God's command to His people is, "Come out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the LORD, and touch not the unclean thing," and His promise to those who do so is, "I will receive you, and will be a Father unto you, and ye shall be my sons and daughters, says the LORD Almighty."

We must also remember that at the time the Lord spoke thus to Abraham, the patriarch was not the possessor of a single foot of the land which had been promised to him. The whole of it was to belong to his posterity, and in God's promise, Abraham held the title-deeds to the freehold. Those who were in possession were but leaseholders, and their lease would soon run out, but at that time, Abraham had not even a foot of ground that he could call his own, and when he wanted a sepulcher, he had to buy the cave of Machpelah, in the field of Ephron, in the presence of the children of Heth.

So, in our text, the Lord seems to say to him, "Abraham, you have no possession in this land, you are a stranger and a foreigner in it, but 'fear not,' I am your portion and your heritage—'thy exceeding great reward.' Although others look upon you as a mere Bedouin wandering about with your flocks and herds, and pitching your tents here today and there tomorrow, with no settled resting place, be not you troubled because of that."

It is the same with us, beloved, for the Lord has been the dwelling place of His people in all generations, even as He was the dwelling place of Abraham, and He would have Abraham know that it was so, and feel that he was not penniless, or landless, for the Lord was his "exceeding great reward."

One other circumstance is worth remembering. Abraham had just been paying tithes to Melchizedek, so now was just the time for the Lord to give him a blessing. Have you ever heard a sermon from the text, "Prove me now herewith, saith the LORD of hosts, if I will not open to you the windows of heaven, and pour you out a blessing, that there shall not be room enough to receive it"? I have read discourses upon that passage, but the singularity of the sermons has consisted in the fact that they were not fairly preached from the text, because it runs thus, "Bring ye all the tithes into the storehouse, that there may be meat in mine house, and prove me now herewith, saith the LORD of hosts."

It was their bringing of the tithes that was to be the test as to the time when the blessing should be given to them, and the proof of God's fidelity to His promise should be seen by the filling of their barns and houses by His bounty. Abraham had paid to Melchizedek, as the representative of the Most High, tithes of all, then came the blessing, "Fear not, Abram: I am thy shield, and thy exceeding great reward."

Solomon's word is still true, "There is that scattereth, and yet increaseth; and there is that withholdeth more than is meet, but it tendeth to poverty." The most impoverishing money in the world is God's money locked up in His own steward's possession—left to canker and to rust amongst the gifts of His providence—not the man's own possession at all, but stolen from his Master, embezzled, that he might accumulate more and more, to die a little richer, and so be unfaithful to his stewardship.

O my brethren, this may seem to some of you a thing about which we ought not to speak, but we will hold our tongue about nothing that is a part of the duty of Christians and the will of the Lord, and since we do believe that many professors bring a curse upon themselves through neglect of this duty, we must speak of it. You will find that in faithfully serving the Lord in this matter, He will give you such a blessing upon your substance that you shall praise His name that ever He taught you the value of self-sacrifice and self-denial, and showed you how to consecrate your substance to Him.

These are the circumstances under which these words were spoken to Abraham. Now let us consider the text itself, "I am thy exceeding great reward," and let us ask, first, *What is this reward?* Secondly, *What are the excellences of this exceeding great reward?* And thirdly, *What then?*

I. First then, let us inquire, WHAT IS THIS REWARD? "I am thy exceeding great reward."

It is not the land of Canaan. That was to be given to Abraham, but that was not his great reward. It is not a posterity, though he pined for it. No, it is not anything that God will give him, it is God Himself. I—I, JEHOVAH—the Hebrew is peculiarly emphatic in setting apart the word, "I, JEHOVAH, am thy exceeding great reward." The Lord Himself is the portion of His people.

When Canaan was divided, there was a lot for Judah, and for Simeon, and for Reuben, and so on, but as for the Levites, the Lord was their portion, and we are like the Levites, so many of us as have believed in the Lord. The Lord is our portion, and He is such a portion as excels everything else that we might have.

I do not think that any human mind can ever grasp the fullness of meaning of these four words, "I am thy reward,"—God Himself the reward of His faithful people. This I feel sure of—that although I can enjoy the sweetness of this text for myself, my feeble lips can never tell even the hundredth part of the precious meaning of it, therefore, my brethren, do not depend upon me, but appropriate the text to yourselves. Be not content for me to cook and carve for you, but come and cut from the joint for yourselves, and cut large slices too. Let each man take to himself all that he needs out of this glorious text as he meditates upon it.

Think what a reward it is for us *even to know God*. Years ago we knew that there was a God, at least, we heard so, but He was a perfect stranger to us. We never recognized Him. Possibly we asked His blessing upon our meals, but it was a mere form. We did not see His hand in everything, in fact, we lived almost as if there was no God. If there had really been no God, probably we should have been all the happier.

But now we know Him. We know that He made the heavens and the earth, that He is the Preserver of men, and we see His hand in every gift of providence. As we walk about the earth, we are accustomed to say, "These are His glorious works. My Father made them all. Here is God's pencil painting each flower. Here is God riding on the wings of the wind, and there is God walking on the waves of the sea. To us, God is everywhere." It has made life so happy—at least, I speak for myself—to feel, "My God is everywhere."

Perhaps you remember that simple story of Mungo Park, when he was lost in Africa, recovering his spirits by looking at a little piece of moss, and admiring its beauty, and saying, "Here is God at work even here," and feeling that, if God was there, He was not really lost, He was still safe enough, for His Father was close at hand. It is worthwhile living when we have come into a practical recognition of God, when we have made the acquaintance of that glorious divine being who filleth all in all. If we never had any reward but this, this would be a great one.

But we have gone on from knowing God to *loving Him*, which is much more. A good man once said, "If God did not love me, yet if He would but allow me to love Him forever, I think that I could not be unhappy." Surely you must know that to love God is a most blessed emotion. To look up to Him in all His excellence and goodness, to admire Him with all your heart, to realize that your lip cannot sufficiently extol Him, or your mind think highly enough of Him—this is a most profitable exercise. The very thought of God, to a man who truly loves Him, is ecstasy. If my eternity could be spent in a dungeon with my heart full of love to God, it could not be an unhappy experience so to live.

But at the back of this, there comes a far greater thing. Brethren, we know that *God loves us*. I never dare to try to speak about this great truth, it is a thing to think over rather than to talk of. I like to get away quietly in a corner, and just try to roll this sweet morsel under my tongue, to suck at it till I draw the very essence out of it—God loves me, or as the hymn puts it—

"I am so glad that Jesus loves me."

For God to think of me is something, for Him to pity me, is more, for Him to help me practically, is more still, but for Him to love me, this is the greatest wonder of all. You know how you, being evil, love your own children, but your Heavenly Father loves you far more. You husbands know how you love your wives, yet there is One who loves His church far more, for He gave Himself for her. God loves you, my brother, God loves you, my sister, if indeed, you have been brought to believe in Jesus, and to know this great truth is to have an "exceeding great reward," because if God loves us, everything must be right.

I was going on to say what He would do for us, but it seems to be almost too selfish to go into those details, for *as He loves us, what is there that He will not do for us?* Why! He has already done more for us than He ever can do in the future. He has already given to us His greatest gift, for He has given His Son to us, and in so doing He has given us all things.

Your Father loves you, dear child of God, and therefore He will continue to feed you, and clothe you, and teach you, and support you, and preserve you, and educate you, till He has made you meet His blessed face to see, and then you shall no longer be here at school, but go home to dwell in His blessed presence forever and forever. Is not this an “exceeding great reward”—to know God, to love Him, and to be loved by Him? What more can we desire than this?

Yet we have even more than this, for loving God we come to realize that *we have possession of Him*, so that we can say, “This God is our God for ever and ever.” We say of Jesus Christ, our Lord and Savior, “My beloved is mine, and I am His.” We have bowed before Him, as Thomas did, and cried, “My Lord and my God.”

Just think for a minute, dear friends, what the possession of God means. God is yours in everything that He is. His omnipotence is pledged to strengthen you—His omniscience is engaged to direct you. All His attributes are employed on your behalf. He is everywhere present, and therefore, He will show Himself everywhere strong for your defense. He is immutable, so He changes not in His love to you. He is eternal so His mercy endures forever. Even the sterner attributes of God smile upon the saint, His justice, His righteousness, His glory are all on the side of every believer.

You say, “I am poor,” but how can you be poor with such a rich Father? You say, “I am heavy of heart because of my low estate.” What! with God as yours, with Father, Son, and Spirit yours—the everlasting God, the Creator of heaven and earth, as your Father and your Friend forever and forever, how can you be troubled by reason of the straitness of your circumstances? Brother, chide your heart for its foolishness, end your sighing, and begin to sing. When we have God as our possession, we have an “exceeding great reward.”

And the reward seems to grow all the greater as, in the course of years, *God's infinite mercy has transformed us, at least in part, into His likeness*. God is so fully ours that we enter into fellowship with Him, and receive of His sacred influences till we are changed into His image, even by the Lord the Spirit. As you read the story of Abraham, you can see many of the attributes of God reflected in the character of His noble servant.

Now, child of God, you should mourn that you are so little like God, but you should also rejoice that you are already made somewhat like Him, and that when He shall appear, in whom your life is hid, you shall be like He is, for you shall see Him as He is. Oh, it is worthwhile to have lived, is it not, notwithstanding all the cares of life, when this is to be the end of it all? Though man is born unto trouble, as the sparks fly upward, blessed be God for an existence that has for its end that we should be made partakers of the divine likeness, and should be lifted up to be the sons and daughters of the Most High, and dwell with Him in perfection forever.

I thank God for the great truth of the immortality of the soul with all the dreadful risks of everlasting wrath that surround it. It is worth the risk to have the possibility of becoming like God, and we, who have believed in Jesus, have gone beyond the possibility, for we have the earnest and the assurance, the pledge and the token of the good work commenced within us, which, when it is perfected, shall make us like God Himself.

O my soul, bow thyself before the Lord in reverent and adoring gratitude! You were almost like the devil by nature, and what are you even now? You are dust and deity combined, for the Holy Ghost dwells in you! That body of yours must crumble back to dust, and by and by, it shall be refashioned, in glory, and in power, and then, creature as you are, you shall be near and like your God. Is not this an “exceeding great reward” even now to be in process of preparation for so wonderful a climax as that?

I must also mention that God is our “exceeding great reward” in another sense, namely, that *He deigns to visit us, and speak with us*. We have been moved by divine influences. I am, of course,

addressing myself only to those who have been born from above, and are believers in the Lord Jesus Christ. Upon you, beloved, God has already bestowed a great reward, for He has raised you from your death of sin, and His Spirit abides in you, fashioning and forming you unto perfection. And the Lord has, I trust, often spoken with you. If not often, whose fault has it been?

Some of us can testify that He has drawn very near to our spirits at times. Do you not remember some happy seasons when you felt that you could not have borne any more delight? I mean, when you were so happy that to have been happier might have made you run the risk of death from excess of joy. Oh, the indescribable bliss, the heavenly joys, of a soul when it feels the love of Christ shed abroad in the heart by the Holy Ghost who is given unto it!

II. The time will not allow me to say more on that point, so now I come to inquire, in the second place, **WHAT ARE THE EXCELLENCES OF THE GREAT REWARD WHICH IS PROMISED IN THE TEXT?**

Notice first, that *it is an infinite reward*, “I am thy reward.” Anything earthly that God pleases to give to us, we can take away—carry it off, and house it somewhere. But when God says, “I am thy reward,” we pause, and look, with mingled wonder, love, and praise. This reward is incomprehensible, who can carry it away? Who can even measure it? Who can fathom the depths of this ocean, or soar to this vast height? God gives to other men health, wealth, fame, pleasure, but to you, beloved, He gives Himself. Their gifts are no more comparable to yours than the darkness is to the sun. In giving you Himself, He has given you all that He is, truly, that is an infinite portion.

Then next, this is *a spiritual reward*. There are some people, who will not value it because of this very excellence, and this may be a test between the regenerate and the unregenerate. The ungodly say, “If God will but give us our barns full of wheat, and our winepress bursting with new wine, if He will only fill our purses with gold, and our houses with all manner of earthly delights, that will be enough for us.”

But you, believer, are of another mind, for you have seen through the emptiness and vanity of all material things. You say, “What is the mere pleasure of eating and drinking but that with which a beast is my associate? What if I have honor among my fellow mortals? What is it but so much breath from other men’s nostrils—so much clapping of the hands of fools? That is all it really is.” What is there beneath the sun that, to a man who is born of God, is worth his stooping down to pick it up?

But when he gets his God, the newborn spirit within him, which hungers with an infinite hunger for the highest good, he says, “Here I have all that I want. Father, Son, and Spirit, blessed Trinity, Thou art mine. My awakened spirit feels that this is a sea in which I can swim forever. This is the element in which I can truly live.” To possess God is a great spiritual blessing, so the declaration of the text is true, “I am thy exceeding great reward.”

Notice next, that *this is an eternal reward*, for he who has God as his own shall never lose Him, since God changes not, and he shall never exhaust Him, for who would even think that he can drain dry the infinite all-sufficiency of JEHOVAH? If God be yours, you have all for today, tomorrow, for time, for eternity—all for every exigence and circumstance of life—all for the tremendous terrors of the day of judgment—all for the ages of ages that shall never end, what more can you need?

To have God is, also, *most ennobling*. I do not know that there is anything in a great deal of wealth to make a man noble. Many men seem to get more greedy the more money they have, their soul cleaves to their dust. But he who gets God as his own, oh, what a privileged man is he!

Talk of princes, here is a prince indeed. Emperors and great ones of the earth—you may put as many of them as you please in a barrel, but if they are not saved by the grace of God, they are not worthy, in the sight of God, of being compared with the poorest, weakest, most despised of all His people, to whom He is an “exceeding great reward!” O ye great ones of the earth, ye might well be content to become beggars if ye might but have God to be your everlasting portion!

And what *a soul-satisfying portion and reward* this is! If you have God as yours, my soul, sit you down, and see if you can think of anything else, you cannot do so. Try and let your desires ramble over

other fields, untether them, and give them liberty. But what can they ask for, seek for, wish for, beyond God Himself? There are, alas! some Christians who do not seem to realize the truth of this, and they get dissatisfied with God. You have been serving the Master, my brother or sister, for some months, perhaps it is in the Sunday school that you have been working, but nobody has taken much notice of you, the superintendent has not praised you, so you are discouraged. But remember that when you serve God, He is your reward.

“Oh, but sir! I have been trying to do good in many ways. I have labored hard, but people only misrepresent me.” Did you look for your reward in that way? If you did, I am glad that you are disappointed, because God says, “*I am your reward.*” To know that you love God, and that He loves you, that He is yours, and you are His—that is reward enough for you.

“Oh, but!” says a minister, “you do not really know how badly I have been treated. I have had many years of service in my congregation, and they are most ungrateful, and do not appreciate me, and even want to get rid of me.” But my brother, God does not want to get rid of you, and He will appreciate you, for He loves you with an infinite love. Why did you look to men and women for your reward?

A man may have other rewards if he is content with God as his reward, but he who has any sinister or even secondary aim, in what he does in the cause of God, spoils it all. This is the fly in the precious ointment. We must get rid of everything of this sort, and be just as satisfied to serve God in obloquy and reproach as we are to serve Him amid the acclamations of the multitude.

“It is not easy to do that,” says one. No, beloved, nothing is easy that is good, except to God, and you must go to Him to enable you to act so. But never shun a duty because you think it is difficult. Sit you down with your Lord alone, and He will speak to you, and comfort you, and strengthen you. Remember how Elkanah comforted his wife Hannah when she sorrowed because she had no children? “Am not I better to thee than ten sons?”

And as he drew her close to him, and she felt the warm glow of his loving heart, she realized that it was even so, and that gave her rest, and the Lord seems to draw each weary, sad, disappointed laboring one to Him and say, “Am not I better to thee than all the praises of men? Am not I better to thee than wealth? Am not I better to thee than the health that you have lost? Am not I better to thee than all the world beside?”

And what is your answer? Surely it is this, “Whom have I in heaven but thee? and there is none upon earth that I desire beside thee.” O God, bring us to that blessed position, and keep us there! Then shall we have drunk in the meaning of our text, “I am thy shield, and thy exceeding great reward.”

III. My third question is, WHAT THEN? As God is our exceeding great reward, what then?

First, it is quite clear that *the rewards which are given to believers are of grace, and not of debt.* Do you not see that in the text? Look at it again, and you will perceive it at once. If God is the reward of His people, it is not possible that any being could ever deserve to have God as his reward. It is very possible that a man should deserve the esteem of his fellow men, and I think that most people deserve what they really earn. It would be well if some could have more than they receive, wages are often less than they should be. We may deserve more money than we get, but there is nobody who ever deserved God.

To deserve heaven, has never been possible yet, but even if it had been, that would not be so much as deserving God. This is too big a portion to ever come to us on the ground of law, and merit, and good works, so when the Lord says, “I am thy reward,” it must be all of grace, and there is no possibility of earning this reward. When the men went into the vineyard, and agreed with the householder for a penny a day, they earned it, but when the reward is God Himself, there is nobody who has ever earned that, or who ever can do so. So, my soul, sing you of free and sovereign grace, let your life-song be—

“Free grace and dying love,”—

because the portion you have received is such as could have come to you on no other terms than those of free, rich, almighty, covenant, everlasting grace, and therefore let God be glorified forever and ever.

I want to call your attention next, to the fact that according to our text, *we hold God on a very sure tenure*, because what a man holds as a reward, he knows to be his own. "Why!" says he, "I won this and I may well hold it fast." Now, brethren, you and I have never deserved God, I have told you that is impossible, but He is as surely ours as if we had earned Him, for He is our reward.

A man, I say again, feels the utmost assurance that anything that comes to him as a reward is really his. Let us feel the same assurance and brave confidence concerning God, and even more than if we stood upon the footing of deservings. "I am thy reward," saith the Lord, then "let no man beguile you of your reward." Hold it fast, let not the devil himself take it from you, or rob you of your joy in it. It is yours so surely and so safely that you may at all times rejoice in it as being yours upon the most certain tenure.

Another practical thought may come in here, *if God be our reward, let us take care that we do really enjoy Him*. Let us exult in Him, and let us not be pining after any other joy. You have to go and live in a lonely place where you will have few encouragements, but you will still have your God, so how can you feel lonely? You are coming down in earthly circumstances, your income is decreasing, but your God is not any less than He was, so you are not really a loser.

One dear friend after another is being taken away from you, there is a great probability that the dearest one you have will soon go to the grave, yet the Lord lives, so blessed be your Rock. Rejoice in Him. Possibly you are soon going to the grave yourself, years are telling upon you, and increasing weakness proves that, ere long, you must put off this tabernacle. Well, even if it is so, He who is your All in all will not die. This world is not your rest or your portion, you are not, therefore, losing your portion, you are going home to it, for the Lord Himself is "thy shield, and thy exceeding great reward."

EXPOSITION BY C. H. SPURGEON

GENESIS 14:17-24 AND 15

Genesis Chapter 14. Verses 17-18. *And the king of Sodom went out to meet him after his return from the slaughter of Chedorlaomer, and of the kings that were with him, at the valley of Shaveh, which is the king's dale. And Melchizedek king of Salem brought forth bread and wine: and he was the priest of the most high God.*

One who exercised both the kingship and the priesthood—the only person that we know of who did this, and who, therefore, is a wonderful type of that marvelous King-Priest of whom we read in the 110th psalm and in the epistle to the Hebrews.

19-20. *And he blessed him, and said, Blessed be Abram of the most high God, possessor of heaven and earth: and blessed be the most high God, which hath delivered thine enemies into thy hand. And he gave him tithes of all.*

It must have been peculiarly refreshing to Abraham to be met by a man of kindred spirit, and one whom he recognized as his superior. No doubt he was weary, though triumphant, and so, just then, the Lord sent him special refreshment, and beloved, how sweet it is to us when the greater Melchizedek meets us! Jesus Christ, our great King-Priest, still meets us, and brings us bread and wine.

Often, the very symbols on His table have been refreshing to us, but their inner meaning has been far more sustaining and comforting to our spirit. There is no food like the bread and wine that our blessed Melchizedek brings forth to us, even His own flesh and blood. Well may we give Him tithes of all that we have. Nay, more, we may say to Him, "Take not tithes, O Lord, but take all!"

21. *And the king of Sodom said unto Abram, Give me the persons, and take the goods to thyself.*

They were all Abraham's by right as the spoils of war.

22-23. *And Abram said to the king of Sodom, I have lifted up mine hands unto the LORD, the most high God, the possessor of heaven and earth, that I will not take from a thread even to a shoelatchet, and that I will not take any thing that is thine, lest thou shouldest say, I have made Abram rich.*

Sometimes a child of God will find himself cast, through force of circumstances, into very curious companionship. For the sake of Lot, Abraham had to go and fight the enemies of the king of Sodom, and sometimes, in fighting for religious liberty, we have had to be associated with persons from whom we differ as much as Abraham differed from the king of Sodom, but right must be fought for under all circumstances. Yet, sooner or later, there comes a crucial test in which our true character will be discovered. Shall we personally gain anything by this association? We loathe it even while we recognize that it is needful for the time being, but we have not entered it for the sake of personal gain.

24. *Save only that which the young men have eaten, and the portion of the men which went with me, Aner, Eshcol, and Mamre; let them take their portion.*

They had a right to it. What we do ourselves, we do not always expect others to do. There is a higher code of morals for the servant of God than for other men, and we may often think of what they do, and not condemn them, although we could not do the same ourselves, for we are lifted into a higher position as the servant of the Lord.

Genesis Chapter 15. Verses 1-3. *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. And Abram said, Lord GOD, what wilt thou give me, seeing I go childless, and the steward of my house is this Eliezer of Damascus? And Abram said, Behold, to me thou hast given no seed: and, lo, one born in my house is my heir.*

Perhaps he did not doubt the promise, but he wanted to have it explained to him. He may have wondered if it meant that one born in his house, though not his son, was to be his heir, and that through him, the blessing would come. He takes the opportunity of making an inquiry, that he may know how to act. At the same time, there does seem to be a clashing between Abraham's question, "What wilt thou give me?" and the declaration of God, "I am thy shield, and thy exceeding great reward."

There is a great descent from the language of the Lord to that of the most stable believer, and when you and I are even at our best, I have no doubt that if all could be recorded that we think and say, some of our fellow believers would feel that the best of men are but men at the best, and that God's language is after a nobler fashion than ours will ever be, till we have seen His face in glory.

4-5. *And, behold, the word of the LORD came unto him, saying, This shall not be thine heir; but he that shall come forth out of thine own bowels shall be thine heir. And he brought him forth abroad, and said, Look now toward heaven, and count the stars, if thou be able to number them: and he said unto him, So shall thy seed be.*

Now was his faith tried indeed, he had no child, he was himself old, and his wife was also old, yet the Lord's promise was, "So shall thy seed be" as the stars of heaven. Could he believe it? He did.

6. *And he believed in the LORD; and he counted it to him for righteousness.*

Oh, what a blessing to learn the way of simple faith in God! This is the saving quality in many a life. Look through Paul's list of the heroes of faith, some of them are exceedingly imperfect characters, some we should hardly have thought of mentioning, but they had faith, and although men, in their faulty judgment, think faith to be an inferior virtue, and often scarcely look upon it as a virtue at all, yet, in the judgment of God, faith is the supremest virtue. "This," said Christ, "is the work of God,"—the greatest of all works—"that ye believe on him whom he hath sent." To trust, to believe, this shall be counted to us for righteousness even as it was to Abraham.

7-8. *And he said unto him, I am the LORD that brought thee out of Ur of the Chaldees, to give thee this land to inherit it. And he said, Lord GOD, whereby shall I know that I shall inherit it?*

What! Abraham, is not God's promise sufficient for you? O father of the faithful, though you do believe, and are counted as righteous through believing, do you still ask, "Whereby shall I know?" Ah, beloved! faith is often marred by a measure of unbelief, or if not quite unbelief, yet there is a desire to have some token, some sign, beyond the bare promise of God.

9-11. *And he said unto him, Take me an heifer of three years old, and a she goat of three years old, and a ram of three years old, and a turtledove, and a young pigeon. And he took unto him all these, and divided them in the midst, and laid each piece one against another: but the birds divided he not. And when the fowls came down upon the carcasses, Abram drove them away.*

Here is a lesson for us. Perhaps you have some of these unclean birds coming down upon your sacrifice just now. That raven that you did not lock up well at home, has come here after you. Eagles and vultures, and all kinds of kites in the form of carking cares, sad memories, and fears, and doubts, come hovering over the sacred feast. Drive them away, God give you grace to drive them away by the power of His gracious Spirit!

12. *And when the sun was going down, a deep sleep fell upon Abram; and, lo, an horror of great darkness fell upon him.*

He had asked for a manifestation, a sign, a token, and lo, it comes in the “horror of great darkness.” Do not be afraid, beloved, if your soul sometimes knows what horror is. Remember how the favored three, on the Mount of Transfiguration, “feared as they entered into the cloud,” yet it was there that they were to see their Master in His glory.

Remember what the Lord said to Jeremiah concerning Jerusalem and His people, They shall fear and tremble for all the goodness and for all the prosperity that I procure unto it.” That is the right spirit in which to receive prosperity, but as for adversity, rejoice in it, for God often sends the richest treasures to His children in wagons drawn by black horses. You may except that some great blessing is coming nigh to you when a “horror of great darkness” falls upon you.

13. *And he said unto Abram, Know of a surety that thy seed shall be a stranger in a land that is not theirs, and shall serve them; and they shall afflict them four hundred years;*

It was to be a long while before the nation should enter upon its inheritance. Here is a promise that was to take four hundred years to ripen! Some of you cannot believe the promise if its fulfillment is delayed for four days, you can hardly keep on praying, if it takes four years, what would you think of a four hundred years promise? Yet it was to be so long in coming to maturity because it was so vast. If Abraham's seed was to be like the stars of heaven for multitude, there must be time for the increase to come.

14-17. *And also that nation, whom they shall serve, will I judge: and afterward shall they come out with great substance. And thou shalt go to thy fathers in peace; thou shalt be buried in a good old age. But in the fourth generation they shall come hither again: for the iniquity of the Amorites is not yet full. And it came to pass, that, when the sun went down, and it was dark, behold a smoking furnace, and a burning lamp that passed between those pieces.*

True emblems of the church of God with her smoke and her light—her trying affliction, yet the grace by which she still keeps burning and shining in the world.

18-21. *In the same day the LORD made a covenant with Abram, saying, Unto thy seed have I given this land, from the river of Egypt unto the great river, the river Euphrates: the Kenites, and the Kenizzites, and the Kadmonites, and the Hittites, and the Perizzites, and the Rephaims, and the Amorites, and the Canaanites, and the Girgashites, and the Jebusites.*

He mentions the adversaries to show how great would be the victories of the race that should come and dispossess them. Let us always look upon the list of our difficulties as only a catalog of our triumphs. The greater our troubles, the louder our song at the last.

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