

The Believer's Great Reward 2-11-07

Genesis 15:1 Inspired from a sermon by T. Watson, M.A.

15:1 NIV *After this, the word of the LORD came to Abram in a vision:*

*"Do not be afraid, Abram.
I am your shield,
your very great reward."*

I prepared to share the first six verses with you this morning, when I realized I couldn't do justice to the magnanimous promise we have in the first verse. I want to spend this morning trying to help us grasp the greatness of the implications in God telling Abram that He is Abram's reward. I am assuming most of you believe that God inspired the Holy Bible. If you haven't reached that place in your faith, I encourage you to consider the largess of this promise and what it can mean to you. I've been trying to wrap both hands around it for the past two weeks, but I feel like I've just pinched it between fingers. I'll preach on the rest of the verse next week, but today let's just focus in on the thought, "*I am...your very great reward.*"

In all honesty, I want you to know that it could be translated simply, "I am your shield. Your reward is exceeding great." Either translation would be an accurate rendering of the Hebrew. I have found that in most cases, unless the context does not fit, when there are two equally valid translations both are acceptable. If the LORD (YHWH) is Abram's reward, then his reward is indeed exceeding great. It could be argued that I am stretching the passage to say that the LORD is declaring Himself to be the reward He gives to Abram, but I think you will see by the end of the message that this is consistent with the rest of Scripture. The best way to interpret Scripture is with Scripture.

I hope that is one thing you are learning at Wayside Chapel. You don't need me to get a good meal from God's word. You just go to it with an expectant heart that is open to the Holy Spirit and you will be fed. Ask questions of the text. If you don't understand an idea, find a similar idea elsewhere in Scripture. Look up another translation. Look where a particular word is used in other places. Maturing children learn to feed themselves. Amen?

First we need to understand that the promises to our father of faith, Abram, are promises for all believers. We have seen that Galatians 3:29 declares that if we are Christ's, then we are Abram's children, children of faith, and therefore we are heirs of the promises. (Galatians 4:7) Are all the nations of the earth blessed through you? How beautiful on the mountains are the feet of those who bring good news. (Romans 10:15) As you share the good news of Jesus, you are bringing that ancient blessing to pass. So Paul also says, ⁹ *So those who have faith are blessed along with Abraham, the man of faith.* Galatians 3:9 NIV Has God given Himself to us as our reward for believing faith?

Commented [notes1]: 29 If you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise.
Gal 3:29 (NIV)

Commented [notes2]: So you are no longer a slave, but a son; and since you are a son, God has made you also an heir.
Gal 4:7 (NIV)

Commented [notes3]: 15 And how can they preach unless they are sent? As it is written, "How beautiful are the feet of those who bring good news!"
Romans 10:15 (NIV)

How can God be your reward? How can God possibly give Himself to His creation? If you have trusted in Christ, you already have experienced Him giving Himself to you! He gave Himself to you when He died in your place on the cross. Every time we celebrate communion we are reminded that He gave us His physical body and blood. He gave His incarnated life for you, to redeem you. (1Corinthian 11:24)

Commented [notes4]: 24 and when he had given thanks, he broke it and said, "This is my body, which is for you; do this in remembrance of me."
1 Cor 11:24 (NIV)

In the same chapter as the above verses, Paul wrote, ¹⁴ *He redeemed us in order that the blessing given to Abraham might come to the Gentiles through Christ Jesus, so that by faith we might receive the promise of the Spirit.* Galatians 3:14 NIV This specifically refers to the promise we are looking at today. The Spirit is the LORD Himself! That is the reward for all who believe as Abram did. God sees that belief and credits us with righteousness. That makes it possible for us to receive His Spirit. He gave us His physical life, and He gives to us His Spirit.

It is here that we overlap with our Wednesday night study. We have just a deposit of the fullness of the Spirit that we will one day receive, something akin to an earnest deposit. (Ephesians 1:13,14) We couldn't take the fullness of God upon us in our present physical state. We have to wait until the transformation. God calls it a wedding feast, and isn't that what the bride and groom do then? They commit themselves to each other. The deepest, richest relationships are those in which each gives the other their all. (Song of Songs 2:16a)

Commented [notes5]: 13 And you also were included in Christ when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation. Having believed, you were marked in him with a seal, the promised Holy Spirit, 14 who is a deposit guaranteeing our inheritance until the redemption of those who are God's possession--to the praise of his glory.
Eph 1:13-14 (NIV)

Please don't think that because you only have a deposit that it is not something to get excited about. The deposit gets bigger as your heart expands to yield to His voice. The more you allow your heart to open to heaven the more heaven fills you heart. (2Corinthians 3:18)

Commented [notes6]: 16 My lover is mine and I am his;
Song 2:16 (NIV)

Let's take the rest of our time together to examine what it means that God is our reward. We can say it, accept the idea, and yet not really let it the implications of that dawn us like the rising sun after a dark winter's night. Let's see the Word illuminate our hearts so that we might know the hope to which we are called. (Ephesians 1:18)

Commented [notes7]: 18 And we, who with unveiled faces all reflect the Lord's glory, are being transformed into his likeness with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit.
2 Cor 3:18 (NIV)

What else could be our reward? Abram already gave up the treasures of Sodom, all its gold and silver, clothing and vessels. What are those things to a person who is looking for a city whose builder and maker is God? Would you be satisfied with anything else? And for those of you who have tasted and seen that the Lord is good, what else do you want but more of Him? (Psalm 34:8) Well, there is heaven, but the Psalmist writes, *"Whom have I in heaven but Thee, and there is none that I desire on earth but Thee."* Psalm 73:25 The real thrill of heaven is the Lamb of God who is the light of the heavenly city. (Revelation 21:23)

Commented [notes8]: 18 I pray also that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened in order that you may know the hope to which he has called you, the riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints,
Eph 1:18 (NIV)

Commented [notes9]: 8 Taste and see that the LORD is good; blessed is the man who takes refuge in him.
Psalms 34:8 (NIV)

How do we experience it now, as limited as it may be? Can we really receive the LORD in an experiential way? Every time you express the fruits of the Spirit, you are demonstrating the fact that you have received the LORD. It is, after all, the fruit of the Spirit, not your fruit, the Spirit's fruit. (Galatians 5:22,23) The love you express is His. The patience is His. The grace and mercy, of course, it's His. The selflessness, has to be His. The peace you experience He says is His very own. (John 14:27) You

Commented [notes10]: 23 The city does not need the sun or the moon to shine on it, for the glory of God gives it light, and the Lamb is its lamp.
Rev 21:23 (NIV)

Commented [notes11]: 22 But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, 23 gentleness and self-control. Against such things there is no law.
Gal 5:22-23 (NIV)

Commented [notes12]: 27 Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid.
John 14:27 (NIV)

even express His glory to some extent. Thank God you aren't always aware of it or you might get prideful. He can so manifest Himself in our lives that we are astonished at His graciousness to the point of overflowing with joy. (Romans 15:13)

Commented [notes13]: 13 May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace as you trust in him, so that you may overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit.
Romans 15:13 (NIV)

How is it possible for a holy God to pour Himself through vessels like us? In Christ, we are made the righteousness of God. We have received that righteousness in God's eyes, even though we are not walking in it completely at this moment. God sees what Jesus accomplished and counts it as our accomplishment. Acts 20:28; 2 Corinthians 5:21

Commented [notes14]: 28 Keep watch over yourselves and all the flock of which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers. Be shepherds of the church of God, which he bought with his own blood.
Acts 20:28 (NIV)

One of the names for God in the Old Testament is El Shaddai. (Genesis 17:1) The word carries a connotation of fulfillment. He is our satisfying reward. Nothing else can truly satisfy the human heart. God did not make our hearts to be fully satisfied with things or even experiences. As much as they can be pleasurable for the moment, they leave us hungering for more. Only the God that satisfies can fill the emptiness of the human heart. (Psalm 16:11)

Commented [notes15]: 21 God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.
2 Cor 5:21 (NIV)

God is our satisfying reward because He created the human heart with such a capacity that only He can fill it. Therefore, He is our suitable reward. The eye is suited for beautiful colors. The ear is suited for lovely melodies. The heart is suited for nothing less than our Creator. Addictions are an attempt to fill the heart with something else. The human heart is insatiable. Only an infinite God can meet that hunger. Every other thing will only make it hungrier.

Commented [notes16]: 1 When Abram was ninety-nine years old, the LORD appeared to him and said, "I am God Almighty ; walk before me and be blameless.
Gen 17:1 (NIV)

Commented [notes17]: 11 You have made known to me the path of life; you will fill me with joy in your presence, with eternal pleasures at your right hand.
Psalms 16:11 (NIV)

He is our pleasant reward. The psalmist wrote that "My meditation of him shall be sweet." (Psalm 104:34) He also wrote that we "worship the Lord in the beauty of His holiness." (Psalm 96:9) It is not as if we have to praise and admire Him. Many earthly masters would coerce their subjects to speak only praise and to admire them for the slightest skill or feature. God only needs to reveal an infinitesimally small glimpse of His beauty and sweetness and we fall on our faces, overwhelmed, crying, "Holy, holy, holy". (Isaiah 6:3)

Commented [notes18]: 34 My meditation of him shall be sweet: I will be glad in the LORD.
Psalms 104:34 (KJV)

Commented [notes19]: 9 O worship the LORD in the beauty of holiness: fear before him, all the earth.
Psalms 96:9 (KJV)

Commented [notes20]: 3 And they were calling to one another: "Holy, holy, holy is the LORD Almighty; the whole earth is full of his glory."
Isaiah 6:3 (NIV)

He is our transcendent reward. We need never fear those glimpses will one day lose their ability to drop us to our knees in awe, for He is infinite. The Creator so transcends the limited creation that we have difficulty imagining the depths and heights of His attributes. Words fail us. As people say about a supreme adventure, "I can't describe it. You have to experience it!" How much more the expression applies to an infinite God. You have to experience Him. My descriptions would fall far too short. (Isaiah 40:18)

Commented [notes21]: 18 To whom, then, will you compare God? What image will you compare him to?
Isaiah 40:18 (NIV)

Because He is an infinite God, there is no possibility of ever earning Him as your reward. The finite could never merit the infinite. All our best efforts from now through eternity future would not be sufficient to earn God as a reward, even if we were successful in being all we hoped to be. (Titus 3:5) We know we rarely are.

Commented [notes22]: 5 he saved us, not because of righteous things we had done, but because of his mercy. He saved us through the washing of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit,
Titus 3:5 (NIV)

Because He is an infinite God, there is nothing lacking in Him. We will never one day in distant future discover a flaw, a shortcoming of His character. You will never one day say, "I didn't know He was like this! If I had known, maybe I would have ..." He

is more than enough for every single believer from Able to Abram to you and me! I've never found Him anything less than all I need. The Lord is our Shepherd, we shall not be in need. (Psalm 23:1) Only an infinite God could meet every need of every believer now and forever.

Commented [notes23]: 1 The LORD is my shepherd, I shall not be in want.
Psalms 23:1 (NIV)

God is an honorable reward. Men seek honor by being the best in their field. They strive their whole life to be held in honor by others. We can spend years of our life to attain a metal trophy or a degree because it brings us honor. But what greater honor could anyone attain than to know God has given Himself to them as their reward? Consider how you have been honored, not by fickle men, but by the eternal God. Could He give you greater honor than rewarding you with Himself?

God is an everlasting reward. Every earthly reward rusts and decays. The honor of men is soon forgotten when the next new star rises. This world's honor is so momentary. I wrote this before the death of the so-called 39 year-old star this week. That death only emphasizes this point. No sooner is this world's honor given than it begins to fade and be eclipsed by others, but God is an eternal reward that never fades. He will be as brilliant a reward on the day we see Him face to face as He will be after a billion years have passed. The passing of time will only cause us to increasingly see His inexhaustible glory. "This is our God forever and ever." Psalm 48:14

We, who know that such a reward is ours, wait for Him with great expectation. What we experience of Him now makes us long for more. And so, Abram lived seeking the city whose builder and maker is God. (Hebrews 11:10) He longed to live in His presence. With such a reward waiting for us, why would we fear death? Do we fear receiving rewards? It is in dying that we realize the fullness of this reward. No wonder the Apostle Paul declared that to depart is far better. (Philippians 1:23)

Commented [notes24]: 10 For he was looking forward to the city with foundations, whose architect and builder is God.
Heb 11:10 (NIV)

He also said that for him to live is Christ. (Philippians 1:21) While longing for that day, we seek to be as open and yield to as much of the Holy Spirit as we are ready to receive. We long for Him to be at work in and through us. Since we have Him as such an exceeding great reward, we ask for His presence and power as we seek to let His life be manifest through us. (2 Corinthians 4:11) We examine ourselves to see if we are in the faith lest we miss such a reward. (Hebrews 4:11)

Commented [notes25]: 23 I am torn between the two: I desire to depart and be with Christ, which is better by far;
Phil 1:23 (NIV)

Commented [notes26]: 21 For to me, to live is Christ and to die is gain.
Phil 1:21 (NIV)

We also see the foolishness of rejecting such a reward. What kind of delusion is required to reject such a gracious offer? What justice is in store for those who refuse the offer! (Isaiah 65:2) I wonder about our altar calls sometimes. It is if we are pleading for people to accept some horrible burden instead of a reward that is too great to fathom. We should run down the aisle to receive such a great reward. We should cry out, "I believe, please help my unbelief."

Commented [notes27]: 11 For we who are alive are always being given over to death for Jesus' sake, so that his life may be revealed in our mortal body.
2 Cor 4:11 (NIV)

Commented [notes28]: 1 Therefore, since the promise of entering his rest still stands, let us be careful that none of you be found to have fallen short of it.
Heb 4:1 (NIV)

Our problem is overcoming our doubts that such an amazing promise is in fact reality. We are taught that if it sounds too good to be true, it probably is. Yet, in this case, we have God's word to stand upon. Our cynical soul would have us believe that such a wonderful thing must be merely the creation of the mind of man. If that is the case, what are we to do with the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus that verified

Commented [notes29]: 2 All day long I have held out my hands to an obstinate people, who walk in ways not good, pursuing their own imaginations--
Isaiah 65:2 (NIV)

the words given to Abram? (John 8:56) This is too fantastic a theology to come from the mind of man. It could only come from the heart of God. Believe it! Let your life be transformed by that conviction. Happy is the man who has faced his doubts and knows that God's promises are true. His peace is the peace of Jesus that passes understanding. (Philippians 4:7) How can that not show in your countenance? (Ecclesiastes 8:1)

Consider how this understanding should affect our daily attitude. What problem can be so big that my exceeding great reward cannot see me through? What call to service is so challenging that my reward cannot show me how to proceed and endure? Knowing this reward is mine, I know I am accepted and loved to the greatest possible extent. Confident joy is the certain attitude of the person who knows God is his reward. My expectation of eternity becomes greater than I can ask or imagine. My thoughts rise to the things that God has prepared for those who love Him. (Ephesians 3:20)

This is how the persecuted continue to smile in expectation. This is how those who have lost all worldly things say with the psalmist, "When I awake, I will be satisfied with Your likeness." Psalm 17:15 Is your earthly treasure gone? Know that your heavenly one cannot rust, be lost, or destroyed. (Matthew 6:20) The Lord is our great expectation both now and forever. Anything less will never satisfy. Anything less is shortsighted. Anything less is really nothing at all for He is everything to us and every good thing comes from His hand. (Psalm 119:68)

How can anyone who realizes these things not be a living instrument of praise? To know that all this is yours, to know you are so loved, and to realize what you are receiving should make your thankfulness continually overflow in praise to God who loves you so. That is why the psalmist sang, *Praise the LORD, O my soul; all my inmost being, praise his holy name. 2 Praise the LORD, O my soul, and forget not all his benefits — 3 who forgives all your sins and heals all your diseases, 4 who redeems your life from the pit and crowns you with love and compassion, 5 who satisfies your desires with good things so that your youth is renewed like the eagle's.* Psalm 103:1-5 NIV

Is this too heavenly minded for you? People warn that we should not be so heavenly minded that we are no earthly good. However, our problem is most often we are so worldly-minded that we are no heavenly good. In our passage today it seems that at the moment Abram was too earthly minded to receive the wonderful heavenly truth that had been spoken to him. Instead of leaping for joy or falling on His face in reverent worship, he complained about something he did not have at the moment. And perhaps that is you this morning. I found I struggled with it all week. Do not be afraid to bring it to God. He will meet you either with His gracious promises or grace to endure.

The day would come when Abram could more fully grasp the wonderful truth that God had spoken to him. May that day begin to dawn in your life and mine, even today! The LORD is your exceeding great reward. -We Declare Your Majesty -

Commented [notes30]: 56 Your father Abraham rejoiced at the thought of seeing my day; he saw it and was glad." John 8:56 (NIV)

Commented [notes31]: 7 And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. Phil 4:7 (NIV)

Commented [notes32]: 1 Who is like the wise man? Who knows the explanation of things? Wisdom brightens a man's face and changes its hard appearance. Eccl 8:1 (NIV)

Commented [notes33]: 20 Now to him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work within us, Eph 3:20 (NIV)

Commented [notes34]: 15 And I--in righteousness I will see your face; when I awake, I will be satisfied with seeing your likeness. Psalms 17:15 (NIV)

Commented [notes35]: 20 But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where moth and rust do not destroy, and where thieves do not break in and steal. Matt 6:20 (NIV)

Commented [notes36]: 68 You are good, and what you do is good; teach me your decrees. Psalms 119:68 (NIV)