

## SESSION #5

As we return to Abraham's story, we come now to

“**Faith in a Covenant God**” – or perhaps we could call this section “**Living on the Trapeze**”

...let me explain:

- some years ago my wife & I took our 4 yr old granddaughter to the circus
  - one of the fascinating sights we enjoyed most was watching the trapeze artists flying thru the air
- one such trapeze artist family, the Flying Roudellas, reported in an interview that there is a special rapport between flyer and catcher on the trapeze. (The flyer is the one that lets go, and of course the catcher is the one that catches.) As the flyer swings high above the crowd on the trapeze, the moment comes when she must let go. She arcs out into the air. Her job is to remain as still as possible and wait for the strong hands of the catcher to pluck her from the air.

Henri Nouwen wrote: “The flyer must never try to catch the catcher.”
- in other words, **The flyer must wait in absolute trust.** The catcher will catch her, but *she must wait.*
- as we come to Genesis 15, Abram seems to be the ‘flyer’ suspended in mid-air, waiting & waiting for the solid ‘snap’ of the promise to grip his life...but it doesn’t happen – for more than 10 years already (!) it hasn’t happened; and he’s left hanging in the space between the **promise** and the **product** – a ‘**reality gap**’ that is increasingly frustrating
- Abram has been called to live “by faith” – which not only involves trusting the unseen but also something almost as difficult: **waiting**

Brueggemann writes, “It is part of the destiny of our common faith that those who believe the promise and hope against barrenness nevertheless must live with the **barrenness.**”
- your reality might involve job insecurity, a health problem, broken relationship, coping with terrific stress, concern for your child’s education, etc.
- facing these **realities** on one hand, and some of the **promises** of Scripture on the other, may leave you hanging in the same kind of reality gap Abram faced ...and asking similar questions that burn in our hearts: “How can I know the promises are true?” “How can I know the struggle is not in vain?”
- the Genesis passages we consider now help us see the answer through God’s dealings with Abram

### A. we look first at Saving Faith

Gen 15:1

After these things the word of the Lord came to Abram in a vision, saying, "Do not be afraid, Abram. I *am* your shield, your exceedingly great reward."

- this is the **first time** in the Bible we come across these significant phrases & words:
    - \* *the word of the Lord*
    - \* *vision*, \* *shield*, \* *reward*, \* *“I am” as part of God’s identity*
    - \* *do not be afraid*
- ...a very unusual, gold-medal verse!

- God speaks a personal, direct word of encouragement to Abram by name
  - why such an encouragement in such special terms? – what’s the context?
    - the verse begins with “After this...” – referring to events of chap. 14 where Abram battled the armies of 4 kings in a successful effort to rescue his nephew Lot whom they had kidnapped
  - coming out of that stressful experience Abram probably has a couple of concerns:
    - (a) perhaps a fear of **retaliation** by those defeated armies
    - (b) potential **poverty** – land recovering from famine; Lot had taken the fruitful area; Abram had just turned down a rich reward from the king of Sodom, not wanting to be tainted with such a gift nor claiming that the victory was due to Abram’s skill & therefore worthy of reward
- ...perhaps Abram is wondering now if sticking to his principles had been worth it?

- so God comes with a double

**PROMISE (a):**

1) “I am your **shield**”

- as God had been Abram’s defense in his war with the enemy kings He would be his shield in the future
- “[God] is a shield to those who put their trust in him” (Proverbs 30:5)

2) “I am your great **reward**”

- perhaps the Psalmist best expressed what this ‘reward’ would involve:
  - “O LORD, by your hand save me from such men... of this world whose **reward** is in this life... But as for me, *my contentment* is not in wealth but in seeing you and knowing all is well between us. And when I awake in heaven, I will be fully satisfied, for I will see you face to face.” (Ps 17:14-15 NIV & TLB)

- God understands Abram’s fears – and meets them with the assurance of His word
- some wit suggested: “The best way to forget all your troubles is to wear tight shoes.”
  - ...No; when our emotions threaten to blow us away, we need to allow God’s truth to penetrate our minds & secure our emotions

**What was Abram’s first RESPONSE:**

Gen 15:2-3

<sup>2</sup>But Abram said, "Lord God, **what will You give me**, seeing I go childless, and the heir of my house *is* Eliezer of Damascus?" <sup>3</sup>Then Abram said, "Look, You have given me no offspring; indeed one born in my house is my heir!"

- in other words: “OK Lord, that’s fine – I’m grateful You are my shield and eventual reward. But what about the promise of a son? Nothing’s happening here! And time’s running out!”

**and God graciously affirms the PROMISE He had given earlier:**

Gen 15:4-5

<sup>4</sup>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." <sup>5</sup>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."

- the promise is clear: “*a son coming from your own body*” and descendants as numerous as stars
- Griffith Thomas wrote that “God’s **delays** to Abraham were not **denials**.”
  - as we’ll see in a later session he had to wait another 15 years yet, but God’s promise *would* be fulfilled; as Heb. 6:15 says, “And so after **waiting patiently**, Abraham received what was promised.”

**-so now, what is Abram’s second RESPONSE?**

Verse 6

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

- His response this time? – magnificent faith!

*What made the **difference** between Abram’s two **responses**?*

- a new recognition of **who God is**
- the God who could create all these stars out of nothing was powerful enough to give Abram a son out of the ‘deadness’ of his life & the barrenness of Sarai’s
  - Jer. 32:17 “Ah, Sovereign LORD, you have made the heavens and the earth by your great power and outstretched arm. Nothing is too hard for you.” (NIV)
- by linking His power in **creation** with His power in **Abram’s life** to fulfill the promises, **God turns on the light** in Abram’s dark reality gap – and Abram suddenly understands...with his heart!
  - “Abram believed the LORD”
    - in Matt 16:15-17 Jesus asked his disciples – “But what about you? Who do **you** say I am?” Simon Peter answered, “You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.” Jesus replied, “Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah, for this was not revealed to you by man, but *by my Father* in heaven.” (NIV)
- God alone can turn on this kind of light
  - ...this kind of saving faith is a **gift from God** – for Peter, for Abram, for you, for me
    - Gal. 2:8-9 – “For by grace you have been saved, through faith – and even trusting [faith] is not of yourselves; it too is a gift from God.” (NIV & TLB)