

Thought for Sunday 7th February 2021

Pastor Gordon Hamilton

Read Genesis 15:1-21 My N.I.V. bible it is headed '*God's covenant with Abram.*' Chapter 15 begins; '*The Word of the Lord came to Abram in a vision.*' Verse 4; '*The Word of the Lord came to him.*' From verse 9 onward the inference changes; '*the Lord said to him...*' verse 13; '*the Lord said to him...*' verse 18; '*the Lord made a covenant with Abram...*' if we then turn to John's gospel chapter 1 and the first two verses we read; '*In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was with God in the beginning.*' Now the writer of John knew Jesus, and John knew Jesus was the Word of God incarnate. Jesus was a man but was also God incarnate, and it is so much easier to believe in someone or something that is tangible, that you can touch or see. We know that in the earlier chapters of Genesis, God spoke to Abram; chapter 12 begins; '*The Lord had said to Abram, 'Go from your country...*' How the Lord spoke to Abram, we don't know, we can only speculate, and on that I'm not going to speculate. In chapters 12, 13 and 14 God speaks and Abram does, suddenly in chapter 15 we find Abram replying. We're told that; '*the Lord came to Abram in a vision.*' And it is that vision into which Abram replies. The Lord says; '*Do not be afraid, Abram. I am your shield, your very great reward.*' But Abram said (or Abram replies), '*Sovereign Lord what can you give me since I remain childless and the one who will inherit my estate is Eliezer of Damascus?*' And Abram said, '*You have given me no children; so a servant in my household will be my heir.*' Some people think it is wrong to speak back to the Lord. If the Lord says something, then we should just trust Him to respond to our requests. For Abram it is just the beginning of a relationship that sees God working His purpose out, in and through him. The relationship began with God telling Abram; Go... and Abram went, total trust, no questions. So when the Lord says to Abram in this vision; '*Do not be afraid, Abram. I am your shield, your very great reward.*' Abram is a bit mystified. One of the rewards of doing what is right, so Abram believed, of doing what the Lord wants you to do, surely is to have children, children to look after you when you are old and you need looking after. Abram was, as we have been told, very wealthy (13:2) but the one thing he lacked was an heir. Who was he going to leave everything to when his life on this earth came to an end? All Abram could see was that his estate would go to Eliezer of Damascus, one of his servants (15:2). There are times when we cannot see an answer to our concerns, our problems, we cannot understand why things happen, that according to our way of thinking, are not the way they should be. In my daily reading the other day, Max Lucado commentated on 2 Corinthians 12:7-9 talking of; '*a thorn in the flesh.*' *Such a vivid imagery. The sharp end of the thorn pierces the soft skin of life and lodges beneath the surface. Every step is a reminder of the thorn in the flesh. The cancer in the body. The child in the rehab centre. The red ink in the ledger. The tears in the middle of the night. 'Take it away,' you plead. Not once, not twice, or even three times. You've outprayed Paul. But what you hear is this; 'My grace is sufficient.'* (God is with you every day – Max Lucado 2015). Let's be honest, we have all done it. Abram wasn't a young man, Sarai wasn't a young woman. We know from Luke 1 that Elizabeth and her husband Zechariah '*were upright in the sight of God... but had no children.*' (Luke 1:6-7) but at the right time, the Lord intervened. I'm sure that Abram and Sarai had been frustrated that they didn't have children but may have accepted the situation as being one of those things. But when the Lord talks of a reward, all Abram can think of is the one thing that really bugs him, he is childless and so responds to the Lord; '*you have given me no children.*' Abram was missing just one thing in his life, an heir. Abram had pretty well everything else he needed or would ever need, but as with all of us human beings, we also have wants, and Abram and Sarai wanted a child,

an heir, being without a child was Abram's 'thorn in the side.' But the Lord took Abram to one side and; *'took him outside and said, 'Look up at the sky and count the stars – if indeed you can count them.'* Then he said to him, *'So shall your offspring be.'* If you go outside on a clear night, where I live near Gatwick airport and with the light pollution, you will be lucky to see a couple of dozen stars. If you can find somewhere where the light pollution is not as bad you will see thousands of white spots in the sky, I can remember when I was in the navy on a clear night, in the middle of an ocean, it was just a mass of white dots, thousands upon thousands of white dots, impossible to count. Genesis 22:17 says this; *'I will surely bless you and make your descendants as numerous as the stars in the sky and as the sand on the seashore.'* Even to pick up a handful of sand is almost impossible to count. What we know is that Abram ended with eight children through his wives Sarai and Keturah, and if you look at the account in Genesis 25 you see he had numerous grandchildren, and if you add the children he had with his concubines (v6), of which 'we' know not how many there were, to count them would be impossible. We believe the promise the Lord had for Abram was for his one true son, of his wife Sarai, or Sarah. In chapter 15 we are still a long way from the birth of Abram's first child with Sarai his wife, but as the writer to the Hebrews says; *'Abraham was faithful.'* Let's read the account in **Hebrews 11:8-19**; *'....'* Even though Abram had not received what was promised at that time, Abram took the Lord at his word. We are told that he brought the offering requested, Genesis 15:9-10, because he was a man who trusted the Lord to fulfil His promise. Which begs the question, do we? In John 14:3 Jesus says; *'I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with me, that you may be where I am.'* I pray you can hold on to that promise, even in this difficult time of Covid-19 the Lord asks us to trust His Word, the Word of the Lord.

You're the Word of God the Father from before the world began;
every star and every planet has been fashioned by your hand.
All creation holds together by the power of your voice;
Let the skies declare your glory, let the lands and seas rejoice!

*You're the author of creation,
You're the Lord of every man;
And your cry of love rings out across the lands.*

Yet you left the gaze of angels, came to seek and save the lost,
And exchanged the joy of heaven for the anguish of the cross.
With a prayer you fed the hungry with a word you stilled the seas;
Yet how silently you suffered that the guilty may god free.

You're the author of creation...

With a shout you rose victorious, wrestling victory from the grave,
And ascended into heaven, leading captives in your way.
Now you stand before the Father, interceding for your own;
From each tribe and tongue and nation, You are leading sinners home!

You're the author of creation...