

BFFs FOREVER

Studies in the Life of Abraham

Text

Genesis 15:1-6

Topic

Abraham is told that the descendants who will be both born and born-again because of him will be as innumerable as the stars in the heavens

Title

"Starry, Starry Birthright"

Introduction

There are a lot of great songs about friendship. Woody and Buzz are immortalized in *You've Got a Friend In Me*, by Randy Newman.

*And as the years go by
... our friendship will never die
You're gonna see
It's our destiny
You've got a friend in me*

I wonder if God and Abraham had a friendship song? I've been struck by the fact he is three times called "the friend of God" in the Bible.

If God emphasized their friendship, we ought to pay close attention to it - especially since Jesus told His disciples that **we were to consider ourselves His friends.**

The text we have before us reeks of friendship material. Abraham and God talk to each other honestly, intimately, the way only the best of friends can.

I want to be set free to talk to Him as my friend, the way Abraham and God talked together.

I'll organize my thoughts around two points: #1 God Is Your Friend And He Asks You To Count His Blessings, and #2 God Is Your Friend And He Accounted To You His Righteousness.

#1 God Is Your Friend
And He Asks You To Count His Blessings
(v1-5)

If you didn't know who was talking, and you just had some of the dialog, you would conclude that this was a conversation between old friends.

Well, they are old friends, ten years into their relationship. It's a conversation exemplary of the intimacy and the honesty we can have talking to God.

Genesis 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."

God initiated this conversation. He approached Abraham in his time of fear.

While we talk about important spiritual disciplines like having regular devotions and prayer, don't neglect to realize that the Lord is also seeking you. He wants to begin conversations with you. He will approach **you** - often and gently.

"The word of the Lord came to Abram in a vision" seems to mean that God spoke to Abraham in a waking vision. Abraham saw the Lord, he heard the Lord's voice. It was likely a pre-incarnation appearance of the Lord, Jesus Christ.

Abraham had just won a great victory over marauding kings who had taken his nephew, Lot, captive. He'd also won a great spiritual victory by refusing to take the reward offered to him by the king of Sodom.

The result of his victories was fear. It sounds weird, but often victory is followed by fear. Especially spiritual victory, because you wonder if God is really going to come through next time... And the time after that... And on

down the line. It can cause you to camp-out on a victory and stop pressing forward.

“Do not be afraid.” God knew the heart of His friend. God knows your heart, too. Your fears, your stresses, your anxieties; He sees them all and wants to come to you and comfort you.

What are you afraid of today? Don't bother trying to deny it; God sees it. Let Him speak to your heart about it. Let Him alleviate your fears.

God told Abraham, “I am your shield.” **You only need a shield if you are being assaulted by dangers and devils.** So this is a double-promise. God was promising Abraham he'd have trouble in the world, but also that God would be a sufficient shield to protect him.

You *Lord of the Rings* fans, remember in the first movie, *The Fellowship of the Ring*, when the cave troll speared Frodo? It should have killed him but underneath his clothing he was wearing the mithril coat of chain mail. That's sort of how I see the shield God has promised. I'm gonna get attacked and speared, but I'll be fine so long as I have the shield of faith to see me through.

God next told Abraham, “I am... your exceedingly great reward.” Abraham had just refused a great material reward from the king of Sodom. God was here promising Him an exceedingly great *spiritual* reward.

God is my shield against outward attack, out in the world. He is my exceedingly great reward *inwardly*, in my heart, to keep me from spiritual depression and dysfunction. He has promised to reward me one day but more than that - He **is** my reward every day!

Genesis 15:2 But Abram said, "Lord God, what will You give me, seeing I go childless, and the heir of my house is Eliezer of Damascus?"

Genesis 15:3 Then Abram said, "Look, You have given me no offspring; indeed one born in my house is my heir!"

Abraham did not want any great material reward for following the Lord. He only wanted what God had promised him from the beginning - a son to inherit the land God was showing him.

I think we sometimes act like the TV detective, Columbo, when we approach God. He's given us so much but we take it for granted and say, "O, and one more thing..."

Abraham didn't want 'one more thing.' He only wanted the one thing God had promised him.

From a human standpoint, it seemed too late for God to fulfill His promise. He and Sarah were old and past the age of having children.

He needed to learn that God would only fulfill His promises miraculously. God wasn't going to give them Isaac until it was humanly impossible. God had something to show them, and to show the world through them, about spiritual birth.

Never forget you are on display. God wants to show you, and to show the world through you, something miraculous, something only He can get the credit for.

Abraham had already begun trying to figure-out a way to accomplish the miraculous. Maybe Eliezer was going to be his heir.

Too much of what passes for the work of God today is some 'Eliezer' born in our own plans and not in the power of God.

Genesis 15:4 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."

Are you OK with God crushing your plans? When you present 'Eliezer,' if God says, "No," do you accept it? Or do you press on?

It's hard to wait on the Lord. Especially as you grow older. I know I start to think there's no time left, really, to see a revival in Hanford, for instance. It's not true, of course, but it can be a powerful discouragement.

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Genesis 15:5 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."

This conversation was occurring in Abraham's tent. God said, "Let's go outside, I want to show you something." This is one reason why I think this was a pre-incarnation appearance of Jesus and not just a "vision" in Abraham's mind. They physically moved outside and looked up at the night sky.

Abraham's descendants would be as numerous as the "stars." In other places God compared them to the sand of the sea and to the dust of the earth. As the Bible unfolds you come to understand that God was referring not just to the physical descendants of Abraham, the Israelites, but to the spiritual descendants of Abraham - all those who would be saved by believing on Jesus Christ.

God was going to give Abraham one son and then, through him, innumerable descendants.

Do we believe that God *can* and *will* multiply our lives in terms of their long-term effect? Some believers, like Billy Graham, obviously have affected lots of people. Do I think I am less of a Christian than him? Do you?

Truth is, you can't see the effect of your life, of your Christian life. *You could affect one who could affect millions!*

Have you ever heard of a guy named Mordecai Ham? The place to begin talking about him is with another guy you may not be familiar with. Edward Kimball was a Sunday School teacher in Chicago in the late 19th century. He led a 17 year old D.L. Moody to faith in Jesus Christ. As an evangelist Moody would go on to share Christ, it's estimated, with over 100 million people - **all before modern technology!**

Moody would influence a London pastor, F.B. Meyer. As the years went by, Meyer influenced J. Wilbur Chapman; J. Wilbur Chapman influenced Billy Sunday; then Billy Sunday influenced Mordecai Ham.

And it was Mordecai Ham who led Billy Graham to Christ.

You and I are in that kind of mathematical 'flow' when it comes to God. We can 'count' on Him to bless us. Meanwhile, He is your closest friend and will shield you and be your exceedingly great reward.

#2 God Is Your Friend
And He Accounted To You His Righteousness
(v6)

In these six verses, for the first time in the Bible, two absolutely striking phrases occur:

1. "The word of the Lord came," and,
2. "Fear not!"

Also for the first time, the Lord is described as a "shield."

Besides that, one incredibly important word occurs for the first time: "believed."

There are commentators who would argue that verse six is one of the most important, if not the most important, in all the Old Testament. That's because in it you learn exactly how a man is brought into the relationship of being the friend of God. It's how you are saved.

Genesis 15:6 And he believed in the Lord, and He accounted it to him for righteousness.

What is "righteousness?" In its most basic biblical meaning, it is to be right with God. It is to be able to stand in the presence of God without guilt or fear.

The Bible tells me there is **no one** righteous, **not one**, in the human race that can stand in the presence of God because all have sinned and therefore fall short of the righteousness required to stand in God's presence.

I'm further told that the end result of my sin is death. Not just physical death, but eternal separation from God being deservedly punished for my sins in a real place we call Hell.

Are there works of righteousness I can do to earn a right standing with God and avoid going to Hell?

No, there are not. All my good works will always fall far short of God's standard of righteousness which is nothing short of absolute *internal* and *external* perfection. All my thoughts, words, **and** deeds would need to be perfect from conception through my life... And that is not humanly possible.

How, then, did Abraham become the friend of God? How was he saved? "He believed in the Lord, and He accounted it to him for righteousness."

The word "accounted" is a bookkeeping term. It means to *credit*, or to *put into your account*. Think of it like this. You have a spiritual account in Heaven, on the books there. If you were to look at your account, check its balance, all you'd see there is sin that separates you from God. No righteousness; not one iota.

But here God tells you He can make a deposit into your account. He can credit you with, He can put into your account, "righteousness." He can, and He will, **gift** it to you.

All you do to receive this gift of righteousness is "believe in the Lord." That's it. While it's not easy to believe, that's all you must do. And it's all you can do - there is no other way to be made right with God.

How is it that righteousness can be credited to you?

2 Corinthians 5:21 For He made Him who knew no sin to be sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him.

"Him who knew no sin" was Jesus Christ, God come to earth in human flesh. Where did God make Jesus sin? He was made sin for us when He took our place by dying on the Cross at Calvary.

When we believe God about Jesus Christ, He makes an exchange: Jesus takes our sin upon Himself and He credits us, He gifts us, with His perfect righteousness.

We are therefore declared “righteous” when we simply believe in Jesus Christ as our Savior from sin. We are saved!

Let me clear something up. We’ve just read, in verses one through five, about a remarkable promise - several, really - that God made to Abraham. Is that what he “believed,” what therefore caused God to credit him with “righteousness?” Is this when Abraham was truly saved?

No and *no*. Abraham “believed God” prior to these events. I offer two proofs:

1. The form of the verb used in this verse suggests a prior belief. According to competent language scholars, the verb reads, “and he *kept on believing* the Lord.”
2. In the New Testament (Hebrews 11:8) we learn that Abraham first believed God when he set out from Ur towards the Promised Land. He believed and God credited it to him for righteousness.

Have you “believed God?” I didn’t ask if you believed there is a God, or even if you believe that Jesus is God.

Have you “believed God” exchanged His righteousness for your sin when He died in your place on the Cross at Calvary? If not, you are not only *not* the friend of God, **you are His enemy**.

Look to the Cross and cry out to the Lord!

If you have “believed God,” then God is your friend. He is your shield and your exceedingly great reward.

You’re in His ‘flow’ to be able to affect untold millions of people. **Really!**