

a word from Pastor Chuck



What Pleases God?—Part 2

A Shining Example

One day Abram heard that his nephew, Lot, had been taken hostage by a powerful confederation of kings. Abram put together a posse and pursued the kings until he came upon them at night and defeated them in a surprise attack. He freed the hostages and seized the spoil the kings had grabbed in their conquest.

When Abram returned home, the king of Sodom met him. Thrilled to have his people back, he presented Abram with all of the spoil he had recovered. But Abram refused to take any of it. “I have raised my hand to the LORD ... that I am not going to take even as much as a sandal strap,” Abram said, “lest you might say you made Abram rich” (paraphrase of Genesis 14:22-23). Then something truly amazing happened:

After these things ... the LORD came to Abram in a vision, saying, “Do not be afraid, Abram. I am your shield, your exceedingly great reward.”
Genesis 15:1

“Do not be afraid,” God said. But Abram had reason to fear. He had just defeated several powerful kings in a surprise attack, seized their spoil, and brought back the hostages—with only 318 trained servants (Genesis 14:14). These kings controlled forces far superior to those of Abram. No doubt he soon thought, *What will I do if they regroup and come down here? I’m not capable of defeating them without the element of surprise.* But knowing his thoughts, God told Abram, “I am your shield.”

It is also possible that Abram had “seller’s remorse.” It could be that as Abram saw the king of Sodom taking away all of the loot on donkeys—spoil that Abram had refused to accept—he may have thought, *Wow, that was a foolish thing to do. That’s a lot of wealth. Maybe I should have kept at least some of that.* And so the Lord said to Abram, “I am ... your exceedingly great reward.”

A Reward Above All

Abram’s track record indicates that he probably believed the Lord’s words. But he also said, “Lord, I already have more than I could possibly spend in my lifetime—but I don’t have a child to inherit it.”

When you’re both wealthy and old, your thoughts tend to center on your estate. To whom are you going to leave your assets and how are you going to apportion them? The joy is in giving it all away. Therefore, Abram said, “Lord, You have been amazingly good to me. You have blessed me—but the only heir I have is my head servant, born in my house: Eliezer of Damascus” (paraphrase of Genesis 15:2-3).

Believe me, the Lord understands how to reward someone in the best way possible. So God said to Abram, ***“This one shall not be your heir, but one who will come from your own body shall be your heir”*** (Genesis 15:4b).

To drive His point home, the Lord then said, “Come on outside, Abram, and look up into the sky.” Abram craned his neck and saw an impossible number of bright pinpricks of light staring down at him. Imagine this in the days before smog or city lights, when a man could clearly see the vast canopy of stars in the heavens above. As Abram stood looking up at that glorious sky and the countless stars in the heavens, God said, ***“If you are able to number [the stars] ... so shall your descendants be”*** (Genesis 15:5b). How did Abram respond?

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

How is it that God accounted Abram righteous? It certainly was not because of anything Abram had done. To be sure, Abram had done many good works. He had ventured out in faith from Ur, without the slightest idea of where he was going. Abram

was looking for the kingdom of God, and he walked by faith in obedience to God.

When Abram came into the land God had promised him, he built an altar and offered a sacrifice to God. Later, he separated himself from his nephew, Lot, giving him the choice of land. And we just read how Abram defeated a potent confederacy of kings. These are all good works—but Scripture doesn’t give a single hint that God declared him righteous because of any of them.

Nor did the Lord declare Abram righteous because he had fulfilled some ceremony or had gone through some spiritual ritual. The apostle Paul later takes special care to point out that God declared Abram righteous long before He ever gave him the ritual of circumcision. In Romans 4, Paul explains that

Abraham was justified by faith and not by works.

Abram, who later came to be called Abraham, was justified by faith and not by works. Had works justified him, he would have been able to boast. Because he was justified by faith apart from works, all he could do was boast in the God who justified him—the Lord who rewarded him out of all proportion.

Abram simply looked up into the heavens, saw the countless stars, and believed God’s promise. And for that, God smiled upon Abram with great pleasure and rewarded him beyond all expectation or hope.

In the same way, God says to you, “I am your exceedingly great reward. Your faith pleases me, and I intend to reward you far beyond your wildest imaginations.” 🍀

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