

Genesis 15:1-6

December 25, 2009 – CHRISTMAS DAY

We Would Have Missed Christmas

✦ if not for the fear of Abraham (vv.1-3)

✦ if not for his Offspring in righteousness (vv.4-6)

In the Name of God's only Son from heaven, dear children of the promise:

If we were living in England in 1652, this church service would be illegal. Oliver Cromwell and his Parliament passed legislation on Christmas Eve that said, "No observance shall be had on the five and twentieth of December called Christmas Day, not any solemnity used or exercised in churches in respect thereof." As a Puritan influenced by Anabaptists, Cromwell hated everything Catholic or Protestant. He hunted down priests especially in Ireland. Out in the wild their only refuge was to find a home with a candle burning in the window. Our Christmas custom was their guiding light to a safe haven.¹

In our society it's like Christmas on steroids without Christ. People complain about holiday music in every store, but merchants want us in the mood to buy now and forget the consequences until January. Strangely with all our focus on Christmas, many miss Christ completely. Long before Dr. Seuss' *Grinch Stole Christmas*, **We Would Have Missed Christmas...**

✦ if not for the fear of Abraham (vv.1-3)

His name was still Abram, until the LORD later changed it from *exalted father* (Abram) to *father of many* (Abraham). At the time of our text he had something else on his mind, something that could have ended Christmas long before it began. In some ways Abram must have felt like King Arthur in England about 1100 years before Cromwell. King Arthur faced a vast army of 90,000 pagans. Abram too.

The Bible doesn't give a number, just that it was four foreign kings who ravaged the land of Canaan where Abram lived as a nomadic rancher. Five kings including the King of Sodom tried to stop the Four and failed. In fact, as the victors sacked Sodom and Gomorrah, they also kidnapped Abram's nephew Lot. When the news reached Abram living near Hebron, he called out his army – all 318 of them. We can't begin to imagine how it must have felt to run, after a huge victorious army with a few home trained servant soldiers. But it was the kind of military exploit that still makes headlines in military documentaries. How Abram divided his forces and attacked the vastly superior enemy at night. How Abram pursued them many miles north past Damascus. How he returned with booty and Lot.

How do you feel after a major victory? Great if it's a basketball game or a test you "Aced." But when your life was on the line, when you almost lost loved ones, the morning after may be filled with fear and dread. It's the kind of fear that nearly robbed England of Christmas because of Cromwell. It's the kind of dread that can rob you of Christmas from guilt and shame, from personal disappointment in yourself, from loss of friends and family, the loss of peace that leaves your heart dark like the marshes of wintertime. You can tell Abram must have been feeling that way by listening to the LORD.

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." "Stop being afraid" is just what the angel said to the shepherds outside of Bethlehem before he announced the birth of Jesus. It's what God always says before He gives the Gospel. And this is pure Good News: "I am your shield, your very great reward." Evil kings may advance against you. Political powers may seek to strip you of your rights. Friends and family may turn on you when you're trying your best to love and cherish them. But "I am your shield" to protect you from harm. "I am your very great reward" when it seems nothing else matters anymore.

¹ Notes gathered from Wikipedia and "Christmas Lore," by Mai O'Higgins. Publisher and date unknown.

God knows our hearts. He knows what we need. He knew Abram needed this reassurance first even though something else was really on Abram's mind. Saving Lot by a military victory was awesome. But God's assurance aroused a greater question in His friend: ***"O Sovereign LORD, what can you give me since I remain childless and the one who will inherit my estate is Eliezer of Damascus? You have given me no children; so a servant in my household will be my heir."*** It must have been a decade since God told Abram to leave his family for a land He would show him. God had promised a son to this seventy-five-year-old man and his wife. But at eighty-five and seventy-five, Abram and Sarai were still childless. "O LORD, when will your promises come true for me? Maybe you need some help. Maybe the common custom of adopting a servant as my heir would make everything right. Maybe I didn't hear you right, LORD. Maybe I'm expecting too much Christmas from your promises."

Ever find yourself trying too hard as a Christian. Once I asked Professor Habeck about the passage: ***"Do not be overrighteous...."*** (Ecclesiastes 7:16 NIV) With a twinkle in his eye, he answered, "I'll tell you what I tell everyone else. Is it possible to be overly religious? Yes, but you are in no immediate danger." True for most of us, most of the time. But every once in a while you try too hard to help God, instead of letting God be God. ***"Do not be afraid, Abram. I am your shield, your very great reward."*** When all your struggles rob you of God's peace, don't be afraid. Fear God as a loving son respects his dear father. Trust God to protect you and be Himself ***your great reward*** because there He is in the manger, born the Babe of Bethlehem. With Abram, **We Would Have Missed Christmas...**

✦ **if not for his Offspring in righteousness (vv.4-6)**

Abram did not sit and fret when friends were attacked and family needed help. He jumped up, ran to the battle and won by trusting in God. But when it came to matters of the soul, the eternal life and death issues of heaven, all Abram's military skill and even his personal faith were not enough alone. Try as he might, there could be no peace in his heart until Abram was in a right relationship with God.

So God said, "No. Not your will, but my will shall be done." ***Then the word of the LORD came to him: "This man will not be your heir, but a son coming from your own body will be your heir."*** You set your sights too low when you think you can help me accomplish my miracles in your life. It's not a miracle if you do it. But let me promise the impossible and make it happen, and you will see me as I am.

But the God of the Bible does not just talk. He does not say things that have no meaning for our personal lives or promise something awesome and wonderful, and then not deliver. He has ways of helping us see what does not exist until He creates it. The LORD gave Abram an object lesson he would never forget. ***He took him outside and said, "Look up at the heavens and count the stars—if indeed you can count them." Then he said to him, "So shall your offspring be."***

You're looking for only one. Instead I will give you the One Offspring from whom will come such a multitude of other offspring that you will not be able to count them any more than you could count the stars. You're like someone buying his own present, wrapping it in newspaper and masking tape for pretend. I want to fill you with the greatest Christmas present wrapped in the joy of Jesus, glistening with the light of God, filled with the joy and peace only the Holy Spirit can give. Stop looking for Christmas joy from your family. Find me in my Word of promise and take Christmas back to them.

Under the same starry heaven which Abram saw, the angels sang the glory of God. The shepherds told the story of the Offspring of Abraham born in a manger. No one else could imagine such a glorious salvation for sinners like you and me. But Christmas could not be stopped. Christmas came to Abraham because he ***"believed the LORD, and he credited it to him as righteousness."*** The older you get the more you would rather have a credit card under the tree than a million meaningless presents. This credit card from God in Christ you can never "max out." It is as boundless as God's love for you, as boundless as the stars. Take it to dinner. Cash it out in school. Charge everything to God for fun and family and good cheer. You can never miss Christmas in Christ. Amen.