

Series: God & Abraham #1280

Title: Genesis 15.2-3

Abram's Complaint

Thank you for joining me today from wherever you are and by however you listen as we meet together coast-to-coast here in the United States and all the way around the world. We come now to the end of another week. But we are really still at the beginning of Genesis 15, moving now from verse 1 into verses 2 and 3. And all three verses go together. They are like a set of fine china, dinnerware that one must always buy together, as one. You will be able to pick this up just listening to Genesis 15, verses 1-3 as I read it.

“After these things the word of the Lord came to Abram in a vision, saying ‘Do not fear, Abram, I am a shield to you; Your reward shall be very great.’² Abram said, ‘O Lord God, what will You give me, since I am childless, and the heir of my house is Eliezer of Damascus?’³ And Abram said, ‘Since You have given no offspring to me, one born in my house is my heir.’”

In verse 1 God commands Abram not to fear, because He is Abram's shield and very great reward. Then, in verses 2 and 3 Abram expresses a genuine fear. It's like this: God says, “Do not fear” and Abram responds with “Well, actually, Lord, now that you mention it, *what about the fact that I am childless?*” Now we're getting into why I really love God and Abraham. To me, we see here a reflection of our own relationship with the Living God. God is so *God!* And Abram is so *human!* This is classic! I bet you can relate to this. God being God and we being human.

Did Abram even hear what the Lord just said to him in the vision? Or, as God gave Abram two reasons not to be afraid, is Abram now giving God a reason *to be* afraid? You know what we have here, don't you? We have a man, a human as we are human, and he responds to God with...a complaint! Abram complains *to* the Lord. Do you complain to the Lord? I know you complain, not because I know you personally, but because I assume you are human – even if you do not identify as such – friend, you *are* human and therefore you do complain, because all men and women and children *complain*. In fact, some have perfected this!

Do you know anyone who complains about, well, everything? These are what we call *complainers*. I have one in my extended family. And I absolutely hate going to a restaurant with him, because every little thing from the moment we park the car until the moment we drop him off back at home – everything is wrong, or not up to his standard. Frankly, I get sick of this real quick. It ruins an evening. The complainer. They exist. Maybe you are this one, or have somebody like it in your household. May God have mercy on us!

This is a question I have had as a pastor, “Is it OK to complain to God?” Most of us have no trouble complaining to each other, to the waitress, to the flight attendant, and to the customer service representative, but what about in our relationship with God. In prayer, is it acceptable to issue a complaint to our Lord? Apparently, the answer to this is “yes.” I *really* like what Matthew Henry says in his commentary on these verses. He writes (quote), “Though we must never complain of God, yet we have [permission] to complain to Him, and to be...particular in the statement of our grievances; and it is some ease to a burdened spirit to open its case to a faithful and compassionate friend. Such a friend God is, whose ear is always open (*Genesis 15 On-Line Commentary*, 2).”

The good theologian is right. And what a relief. Step right up to God's complaint department and let Him know what's bothering you. You have a grievance? File it. And your faithful and compassionate Friend – God! – will hear you, Christian. Do guard yourself from complaining *about* God. We do not have permission to complain *of* God. But we do have permission to complain *to* Him. In Genesis 15 we see that the Lord does not interrupt Abram to scold him or correct him. No. The Lord hears what Abram has to say. And He will hear what you have to say.

And then we can read the long span of Scripture and find other servants of the Most High God – names we all recognize – issuing their complaints. Here is one, David. Give ear to Psalm 142, verses 1 and 2. **“I cry**

aloud with my voice to the Lord; I make supplication with my voice to the Lord. ² I pour out my complaint before Him; I declare my trouble before Him." Those are the words of David in Psalm 142.

Alright, so we have established that Abram is on solid ground by complaining *to* God and the substance of the complaint is that Abram is without child. Remember that I told you God's promises to Abram in verse 1 were personal? God says, "*I am* your shield and your reward." God is the actual shield and reward. Well, likewise, in the return, Abram's complaint is also personal. Abram says in verse 3, "You have given no offspring to me." I think we should interpret this as, "God, You have given children to everyone else except *me*. Why not, *me*?" And, oh, that forms the basis for many of our own complaints, doesn't it? God, You have blessed all these other people, but You have not blessed *me*." It's personal.

Let me stick with the specific reason for Abram's lament. Do I speak to you today who complain to God because you have not been able to get pregnant and have children? Maybe you have tried and tried and still no baby? Or perhaps you had a miscarriage or miscarriages (plural), even very late in the term? And you are discouraged and dismayed and *then*, all around you, women are bearing children at a rate commensurate with rabbits in the springtime and you have a complain to make before God: why not me? Why not us? My husband and me? All these other women are mothers, but I am not. All these other men are fathers, but I am not."

I am aware that being unable, for whatever reason, to bear children when you want to have children is one of the most heart breaking trials a woman and her husband can have. And this is what Abram and Sarai – husband and wife – were faced with in Genesis 15. And let me say this. I interpret Abram to be saying, "Lord God, nothing else matters to me now. I have to have a son. Anything else you give me, it just cannot be as good and as necessary as me having my male heir!" The Hebrew word translated as "childless" in verse 2 means stripped. To be childless is to be stripped; laid bare; destitute of child. There is passion in this complaint.

And the phrase in verse 2, "what will You give me," in Hebrew that reads "What could You give me? I do not see what You could possibly give me, God, that would equate with having my own son."

Furthermore, let me remind you that this idea of Abram having his own son, borne to Sarai, was God's idea in the first place. These are the promises of God to Abram in Genesis chapter 12, verses 2 and 3. **"And I will make you a great nation, and I will bless you, and make your name great; and so you shall be a blessing; ³ And I will bless those who bless you, and the one who curses you I will curse. And in you all the families of the earth will be blessed."** That was Genesis 12. And now in Genesis 15 Abram is thinking, "How in the world will I be a great nation without a son? I have no progeny. And how will all the families of the earth be blessed through me when I do not even have my own family – father, mother, with son? Where is my first descendent, Lord, in order that I may then have *many* descendants?"

And *then*, there is the word of the Lord to Abram again this time in Genesis chapter 13, verses 14-16. Listen to *this*. Genesis 13, beginning in verse 14, "**¹⁴ The Lord said to Abram... 'Now lift up your eyes and look from the place where you are, northward and southward and eastward and westward; ¹⁵ for all the land which you see, I will give it to you and to your descendants forever. ¹⁶ I will make your descendants as the dust of the earth, so that if anyone can number the dust of the earth, then your descendants can also be numbered.'**"

You see, Abram having a male heir – this was God's promise! And from that heir comes all these other descendants so numerous they will be like dust of the earth. You cannot count them all. *But*, Abram complains, *where* is my son, where even is a daughter to carry on this family line? **"O Lord God, what will You give me, since I am childless... You have given no offspring to me..."**

We will follow Abram's legitimate complaint on Monday. So enjoy the weekend and join us then, because God Is.

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