

Grace and Peace from God our Father and our Lord, Jesus Christ.

Night!!! It is the time of our greatest despair. The problems and concerns that we have pushed to the edge during the day force their way back in and surround us. Minds race, running over the day's conversation, weighing each word over and over again, measuring each look in our own insecurity. Fueling this activity and fanning this despair are fears about the future, worries about the family, questions about money, concerns about illness. Our thoughts are consumed with things unfinished, unpaid for, unknown.

Perhaps it is because the darkness dulls our senses that we become aware of our limits and vulnerability. Even finding our way to the light switch can be hazardous. It might simply be that in the dark we can't see what's coming toward us, and could be surprised at any moment. Perhaps the persistent silence buzzing in our empty ears brings on the despair. Or maybe the dull sound of our own frail heart beat reminds us of our failing body, the threat of illness, or our oncoming age. We sense most profoundly our isolation from other people at night even those whom we love.

In the darkness we replay the disappointments of our lives, the hopes that have not been realized, and we lament the dreams that we have which will never come to pass.

It is dark. It is night, and Abram is awake. We have no idea what kept Abram awake that night or what wrestles him from his slumber.

Thoughts of a dry well might have plagued him. What will he do

o water his sheep when that water is gone? Or maybe he kicks himself thinking of how things might have turned out better for him if he hadn't given Lot the choice of which land to take. He wonders if there will be more problems and discord in the family.

Could be that Abram's mind churns, turning over and over the conversation he had with his neighbors wondering if he has offended them with something he had said. Or the guilt he feels, remembering the times he sold Sarai to Pharaoh or King Abimelech as his sister to save his own skin.

Could be the desert heat keeps Abram awake, or maybe Sarai's snoring roused him that night, and all the fear and uncertainty of life populate the emptiness of the quiet darkness.

Looking over at his aging wife, Abram can recall all the love they have shared through the years, but he fears that they will never have a child.

What had become of God's promise that Abram would become a great nation, and a blessing to all the nations of the earth? ***What had become of the One who had spoken that promise? What kind of God was this? Could this God be trusted?*** Abram's fear of the future looks as dark as the moonless desert night.

"After these things the word of the Lord came to Abram in a vision, 'Do not be afraid, Abram, I am your shield; your reward shall be very great.

But Abram lamented, 'O Lord God, what will you give me, for I continue childless, and the heir of my house is Eliezer of Damascus?' And Abram said, 'You have given me no offspring, and so a slave born in my house is to be my heir.'

But the word of the Lord came to him, 'This man shall not be your heir; no one but your very own issue shall be your heir.' He brought him outside and said, 'Look toward heaven and count the stars, if you are able to count them.' Then he said to him, 'So shall your descendants be.' And he believed the Lord; and the Lord reckoned it to him as righteousness."

Night! It was still night. It was still dark. *Our story does not end with Abram clutching a newborn son, or having any more tangible certainty than before. In every way it is the same.*

There is *no real evidence that Eliezer, the slave, will not be Abram's heir. Abram is no more in control of his destiny and the fulfilment of that promise than before.*

The sky is no brighter, *nor does it illuminate Sarai with a swelled belly.* The well is no deeper; Abram's nephew, *Lot, still has all the good land.* The questions about his family and his neighbors who live next door remain unanswered; and *his shameful acts toward Sarai in earlier days still are still Abram's to struggle with.*

Everything is just as it was before. In fact, the night is still hot and Sarai continues to snore.

And *yet fear no longer consumes Abram. He trusts God's promise spoken to him, and that gives him hope.* God's promise changes Abram's fear to faith. He still sits in the midst of his uncertain, challenging, frightening life. *But the promise gives hope for a different future than what is easily foreseen. A future different from what all the evidence would seem to indicate.*

God's promise challenges the darkness head on, declaring that the darkness will not prevail.

From where Abram and Sarai sit there is no certainty that God will come through. ***Had the God of Abraham not honored the promise to Abram and Sarai the promise as well as the story would have died with them?*** But ***the reason that this story of Abraham and Sarah and the stars of the sky is remembered at all is because God does come through and fulfill the promise to Abram and Sarai. It is remembered by those promised descendants of Abram and Sarai.***

It's a story that is told and retold around campfires as sparks fly up into the night sky like little stars; ***it's told so that in other times of darkness when the promises of God seem impossible Abram's descendants might remember God's faithfulness.*** Those promised descendants of Abram and Sarai tell the story, so that in their sleepless nights, their times of hopeless despair, in famine, slavery, and exile they can take solace and have hope in this One who says "*do not be afraid*" in the darkness.

God continued to fulfill God's promise long after Abram's death in ways that Abram and Sarai could not even foresee. We continue to tell this story when we gather at the meal. We say in the prayer:

"Through Abraham and Sarah you promised to bless all nations. You rescued your Israel, your chosen people. Through the prophets you renewed your promise; and at the close of all the ages you sent your Son, who in words and deeds proclaimed your kingdom and was obedient to your will, even to giving his own life."

God sent Jesus Christ, the light of the world, born of these same descendants of Abram and Sarai, to bless all nations. God continued to be faithful to His promise even when we scorned, beat, mocked and killed Jesus. After we had done all we could to silence the voice of promise, God raises him from death so that the promise might not ever be broken, even by death.

The God of Abram and the Father are the same. God is faithful to his promises. For those of us whose lives sometimes keep us awake at night, we can take comfort in this God who speaks to us from beyond death and says, *"Be not afraid Little Flock for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the Kingdom."*

AMEN !!!