

Live by faith

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[0 : 00] We're having two readings this morning. So the first is Genesis 12, 10 to 20. And the second is Genesis 14, 14 to 24.

Now, there was a famine in the land. So Abram went down to Egypt to sojourn there. For the famine was severe in the land.

When he was about to enter Egypt, he said to Sarai, I know that you are a woman, beautiful in appearance. And when the Egyptians see you, they will say, this is his wife.

Then they'll kill me. But they will let you live. Say you are my sister, that it may go well with me because of you.

And that my life may be spared for your sake. When Abram entered Egypt, the Egyptians saw that the woman was very beautiful.

[1 : 08] When the princes of Pharaoh saw her, they praised her to Pharaoh. And the woman was taken into Pharaoh's house. And for her sake, he dealt well with Abram.

And he had sheep, oxen, male donkeys, male servants, female servants, female donkeys and camels. But the Lord afflicted Pharaoh and his house with great plagues because of Sarai, Abram's wife.

So Pharaoh called Abram and said, What is this you've done to me? Why did you not tell me that this was your wife? Why did you say she is my sister so that I took her for my wife?

Now then, here is your wife. Take her and go. And Pharaoh gave men orders concerning him. And they sent him away with his wife and all that he had.

So before our next reading, some more chaos occurs with Abraham's nephew, Lot, being given the choice of where he might live.

[2 : 28] And he chooses Sodom. However, a little while later, the people of Sodom are then taken captive by surrounding kings.

So we move to chapter 14, verse 14, to see what happens next. When Abram heard that his kinsmen had been taken captive, he led forth his trained men born in his house, 318 of them, and went in pursuit as far as Dan.

And he divided his forces against them by night, he and his servants, and defeated them and pursued them to Hobah, north of Damascus.

Then he brought back all the possessions and also brought back his kinsmen, Lot, with his possessions and the women and the people. After his return from the defeat of Chidolamah and the kings who were with him, the king of Sodom went out to meet him at the valley of Sharek.

That is the king's valley. And Melchizedek, king of Salem, brought out bread and wine. He was a priest of God Most High.

[3 : 56] And he blessed him and said, Blessed be Abraham by God Most High, possessor of heaven and earth.

And blessed be God Most High, who has delivered your enemies into your hand. And Abram gave him a tenth of everything. And the king of Sodom said to Abram, Give me the persons, but take the goods for yourself.

But Abram said to the king of Sodom, I have lifted my hand to the Lord God Most High, possessor of heaven and earth, that I would not take a thread, a sandal strap or anything that is yours, lest you should say, I have made Abram rich.

I will take nothing but what the young men have eaten and the share of the men who went with me. Let Eina, Eshkol and Mamre take their share.

Well, in the baptisms, we've just had the joy of witnessing expressions of faith.

[5 : 17] I want to ask the question, what does the life of faith look like? Like, what are they signing up for, in a sense? I'm going to suggest first a few things it's not.

Some people find a church when life isn't going well. And that's a really good move. Like, that's a good idea.

If that's your motivation in coming to church, maybe even today. Like, God has all the time in the world for people who aren't doing well and know they need help.

Like, that's a great move. You're surrounded by like-minded people. We're all sinners struggling here. We're rejoicing in Jesus. But sometimes people look for a church and I think sometimes there's a really wrong expectation.

And the thinking goes something like this. If I add some religion, if I add some volunteering in my life, then God will restore my relationships or God will free me from addictions.

[6 : 24] God will help raise my kids to be good people. God will help raise my kids to be good people. It's seeing faith as like you add a bit of God in your life.

That's trying to bargain with God. Faith is not about adding a bit of religion in. There's a musical, The Book of Mormon.

I haven't watched the whole thing. I've just been listening to a few of the songs lately. And there's a song, I Believe. And Elder Price, the main character, sings, I believe that God has a plan for all of us.

I believe that plan involves me getting my own planet. What? Is that faith?

That you're working towards this enormous promise in the afterlife as long as you sacrifice everything for God in this life? I think some people view that's what faith is about.

[7 : 36] It's not about your religious efforts. That's what faith isn't. God tells us. He gives us definitions of faith.

But he does more than definitions in his word. He gives us people. He gives us people as examples. And God calls Abraham the picture of faith.

He is the pin-up boy you should have in your bedroom of faith. Abraham. Abraham. Just to underline where I'm getting this from, Galatians chapter 3 says, Know then that it is those of faith who are the children of Abraham.

Not just natural born descendants, but those of faith. Those who are of faith are blessed along with Abraham, the man of faith. He is the man of faith.

Abraham is the turning point in human history. The rest of the world trying to make a good life for themselves apart from God. And then Abraham.

[8 : 42] He's the picture of faith. When I made my wedding vows to Emma 11 or so years ago, in those vows, there's no ifs or buts or maybes.

They're unconditional. In sickness and in health, but as long as you're kind to me.

Or if work isn't busy. There's no ifs or buts. They're unconditional. Now the big difference between me and God is God completely is faithful in keeping his promises.

He gives unconditional promises to Abraham. No ifs, no buts, no maybes. I will bless you, Abraham. I will make your name great. I will make a massive family out of you.

I'm going to give you land as a permanent home. I'm going to treat others according to how they treat you. I'm blessing you, Abraham, that through you, I'm going to bless the entire world.

[9 : 51] Full stop. No ifs, no buts, no maybes. Now imagine if God said to you, I will bless you forever. Full stop.

Wow. What a promise to live by. And that's why I'm quoting Galatians 3 because I'm not sure about you, but I haven't had God audibly give me a promise like that.

But the promise to Abraham is for you and I. We're called to believe in the same promise. Galatians 3 also says this.

And here's the connection to baptism. I'm not going to go into how all this works. I'm not even sure I understand how all this works, but just see the connection. As many of you as were baptised into Christ have put on Christ.

And if you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's offspring, heirs according to promise, heirs of all the blessing according to promise.

[11 : 01] If you belong to Christ, the promises to Abraham, they're yours. If you belong to Christ. So don't go from Abraham to you. Go from Abraham to Christ to you.

That's important. So in these stories of Abraham, we're going to see what faith looks like, what the life of faith really looks like. I'm going to define it like this from what I think the passage is saying. Faith is when God's promises are even bigger than his own failures, than other people's failures, even bigger than his opportunities to gain.

God's promises are the biggest reality in Abraham's life. That's what the life of faith looks like. So imagine if...

So Emma and I go to event cinemas at Glendale. We see a movie. It ends late, like 11 o'clock. It's dark. And we're walking back to the car, arm in arm, really at peace and having enjoyed the movie. [12:19] And a guy with a knife approaches us. And I just grab Emma and I put her in front of me in between me and the knife. What would you think of me?

That's the kind of cowardice we see in Abraham here. I think it's actually worse because it wasn't just a momentary instinct.

He came up with a plan. There's a famine. God said to stay in this place. I'm going to bless you. He goes to Egypt.

That's not a good sign. And Sarah is so attractive. He's afraid they're going to kill him so that they can have her. That must have been a corrupt place, like if he's fearing that.

But still, that fear drives out all the promises he's just heard. And in his fear, he lies. He pressures Sarah to lie.

[13:29] Say, you're my sister. Sarah, I'm going to give you up for a time. Men might use your body. They might. It's crazy what he does, isn't it?

So that I will be safe. His faith in God to look after him failed big time, putting Sarah in harm's way. God had promised to make him and Sarah into this massive family, and he put it all at risk, letting Pharaoh take her. But God intervenes. He rescues Sarah.

He rebukes Abraham. Don't miss that. He rebukes him through Pharaoh. What is this you have done? But God protects Abraham's life, even though Pharaoh must have been pretty angry.

So he does protect Abraham. And then Abraham leaves Egypt more rich than when he arrived, despite this failure.

[14:46] Not because of the failure, but because God kept his promises. There was no ifs, buts, or maybes. Now, Abraham, I reckon, he could have used, that went okay, that further.

He could have used that as an excuse to keep on doing the wrong thing. But we didn't read this section, but the thing he does straight after this is he goes back to the place where God had made his promises to him.

I think it was a demonstration of repentance. repentance. The riches he came away with out of Egypt weren't the main thing that was on his mind, but the rebuke.

He goes back to the place where God had promised him. So God's promises to Abraham were even bigger than such a massive failure of his faith.

His promises were bigger. I think there's things that we do as Christians, things we say and do, they're just massive failures of faith.

[15:56] What does faith look like when your faith massively fails? If that sentence makes any sense. It looks like believing that God's promises are even bigger.

true faith doesn't take God's guarantees of forgiveness and just use it as an excuse to keep on doing the wrong thing.

It doesn't try and blame I was afraid so I did the wrong thing. It doesn't try and blame things. It doesn't try harder to repay. I think like Abraham goes back to the place where God has made those promises and for us today that place is the cross.

We go back to the cross and see that God's promises are bigger than even my greatest, greatest failures. His promises are bigger.

That kind of faith when you go back to the cross and see God's promises, that faith you'll hear God's rebuke even while you're praising him for his rescue.

[17:03] So that's what the life of faith looks like when you fail. What about when others fail you?

What about other people's failures? Now we didn't read chapter 13 for the sake of time. I'm going to give you like this 30 second highlights reel. Abraham and his nephew Lot.

Lot has been with him the entire time. They're getting too rich and that's the problem and they need to separate and buy rich. It's not bank accounts like our days but it's animals and people working under you to look after the animals.

That guaranteed your future. They needed more land to separate. Now Abraham is the head of the family. He could have gone Lot, you're my nephew, you go there, I'm going to take the best for myself but he doesn't do that.

He's humble. I think he's trusting God and he gives his nephew Lot the choice. Lot chooses the best for himself which is I think a little dodgy.

[18:11] I'm not sure the text definitely says this but it seems a bit dodged. Lot is rich because of Abraham and then he takes the best for himself but the worst thing that the text really points to is that he compromises his relationship with God.

We hear that Lot goes and sets up camp at Sodom. Like Sodom and Gomorrah, I don't know if you're visiting today if you know about the Bible, Sodom is just the picture of not wanting anything to do with God.

Just absolute selfishness. What on earth is Lot doing there? He's trying to get rich. More rich. He's doing partnership there. It's like someone in your family getting the family inheritance and then doing business with people who are being investigated by the federal police.

They're suspected of laundering money through the pokies. They're known to own brothels. You're taking the family inheritance and you're partnering with these people.

[19:25] What are you doing there, Lot? What are you doing there? He's not necessarily said to be doing the wrong thing but he's partnering with these kinds of people.

What are you doing? Now all that is background for chapter 14. Lot gets caught up in a war and he's captured.

Abraham hears about it. Now what does Abraham do? Abraham is safe. Lot has made this choice to go to Sodom.

Like, you deserve it. You made your bed. Lie in it.

You reap what you sow. Abraham could have, you deserve it, Lot, getting caught up with these people.

[20:30] But incredibly, Abraham, God's promises to Abraham are even bigger than whatever disappointment he feels, whatever offence he feels from Lot.

they're bigger even than the risk of the personal loss and Abraham goes after him. He pursues him. He enters the war.

He enters the risk. He enters the mess to rescue him. Maybe fresh in Abraham's mind is that God had just rescued him from his failure.

Yeah. Abraham trusted God's promises and he pursued Lot to rescue him despite his failure.

I wonder who has offended you? Who has acted in a way that you just cannot respect?

[21:36] In our prayer time a small group, one of the guys reminded us that when someone's wronged us and really greatly failed, we might pray as Christians, we might pray for those who have been harmed through this person's actions, we might pray for those who have been harmed because of this person, we might pray for things to be restored, oh God please just put things right, we might pray for justice to be done, but do we pray for that person to be rescued, that person you can't respect, do you pray for their rescue?

In the hope God rescues them. For Abraham, he returns victorious, God was with him, he trusted God's promise, God kept his promise, he brings Lot back, but not only Lot and all his people and the possessions, he brings all the people of Sodom back and their animals and possessions. Abraham, in this moment, he has huge opportunities to gain. He's just made a huge risk and he's got a huge reward, a rightful reward, it's his reward.

God. And then we've got two kings come out, we've got Sodom, we've already met Sodom, and then Melchizedek. Let's focus on Sodom first.

Sodom says, the king of Sodom, give me all the people, but you keep the goods for yourself. So Abraham, give me my people back, you keep the possessions.

[23:31] Now he's not being generous, that's just protocol. He would have nothing if Abraham didn't bring all the people back.

He's not being generous, he's giving Abraham what he deserves for his reward. And Abraham says, no, he refuses, he refuses in a pretty confrontational way.

He says, I'm not going to take a shoelace from you. He does the very opposite of Lot. Lot, wanting to gain wealth, went into partnership, compromising his relationship with God.

Abraham is willing to lose great opportunity to gain a reward he's entitled to, to not go into partnership.
relationship. He doesn't want to compromise his relationship with God, even if the gain he rightly could get is right there on the table.
[24 : 37] I'm not having a shoelace, no way. It's the opposite of Lot. It's strange. He could have got so much out of that situation.

It's strange behaviour. It's costly. I talked to a man once where he was wanting to know more about Christianity and what had motivated him is the girl he loved, a girl who would express love for him, broke it off.

because she basically said to him, I love Jesus more. He knew she loved him.

But he's just like, what? Who is this Jesus? Because she was willing to break it up. It was very costly for her. It's strange.

But you do that sort of thing when you don't want to lose God. And then Abraham does a second costly thing.

[25 : 56] Remember, he deserves the reward. He deserves the reward. This is where Melchizedek comes in. And there's so much in the Bible about Melchizedek in small groups.

Do a deep dive in that. I am going to glance over it. Melchizedek brings supplies. He brings bread and wine. No doubt the fighting men are hungry.

He brings supplies. And this time, Abraham gladly partners with Melchizedek. I'm in your camp. I'm with you, Melchizedek. Why? Because they share the same faith in the Most High God.

They both give credit for Abraham's victory where it's due. Not to Abraham, but because God delivered your enemies into your hand. God kept his promise. They were both rejoicing in God's promises and God's character.

Abraham was rejoicing in Melchizedek, giving all the glory to God, not him. And then he does something weird. He gives Melchizedek 10% of all he has.

[27 : 11] He's just got this reward. Melchizedek brings a meal. He's not paying for the meal. 10% is a high price. He's not doing that. He's not paying for the meal. Why?

Why does he give 10%? If you gave 10% of everything you owned, what's he doing? I think it's a way of completing Abraham's joy in God and his promises.

It's a way of expressing that God himself, his promises are more precious than the possessions. It's costly.

It's strange. It's costly. when God's promises are so precious to a person that they freely give.

It's strange behaviour. I heard of a businessman who was travelling internationally. He's a big shot, big name, worth millions of dollars, and he gave it up to spend more time with his family and with his local church family, and part of his reasons was because the youth group needed more leaders.

[28 : 33] That's weird. That is weird behaviour. That is weird behaviour. When people give up their Saturday morning to willingly, dare I say joyfully, clean the church toilets, that is weird.

You are weird people. That's strange behaviour, people giving freely, when they could be gaining for themselves. It's weird when people choose a house that's not as good as what they possibly could get so that they could stay close to their local church.

It's just weird. Things, people who love the promises of God, they do costly things, but they don't do it begrudgingly. It's weird. It's strange.

It shows there's something bigger in their life. Something is more precious to them. So I think in Abraham, the man of faith, faith isn't just about adding this little bit of religion into your life.

Faith isn't trying to earn a reward in the afterlife. Christian faith is when God's unconditional promises to bless you are just big.

[30 : 06] God's promises just fill your thoughts and every nook and cranny of your life, his promises, they're just big, they're just how you see everything.

like what could be a better thing to build your life on than the most high God who possesses heaven and earth, who cannot lie, saying I will bless you forever through Jesus.

He's got all the control, he keeps his promises. could you build your life on something better than that? Something interesting with Abraham is we see massive failure, right?

And it's not the only one. As we keep reading Genesis, he does something very similar and other things. He fails again. But interestingly, you keep reading scripture and it's as if those failures are washed away.

What's focused on is his faith. God focuses on the moments of faith. How can God do that? I think because Abraham is not just the picture of faith, he's not just the pin-up boy of faith, he points to the one who is the answer.

[31 : 40] He's the answer to all God's promises. Jesus Christ, the most high God, possessor of heaven and earth.

Jesus never uses people to save his own skin. Like Abraham used Sarah. At the cross of Jesus, we see our faithful husband laying down his life for his bride, his people.

His cross is bigger than my failures. Remembering my sins no more, washed away, continually putting me back on my feet.

He just remembers my faith. Wow. All because of the cross. I see myself in Lot. I don't know who you're identifying with in this story, I identify with Lot.

Getting myself into such damaging and hopeless situations, relationally in all sorts of ways, because I'm pursuing my own interests. So foolishly.

[32 : 59] But the cross is even bigger because it shows Jesus didn't just leave me to what I deserved. He pursued me. He risked everything to rescue me and bring me back.

His resurrection is bigger than any opportunity to gain here and now. What good is it if someone offers you the whole world and yet forfeit your soul? The resurrection says that I have the most high God, the possessor of heaven and earth.

I belong to him and all his promises are for me, unconditional. Opportunities to gain?

Can't compare. If you know who we have, you're going to do strange things. You're going to do costly things, freely, gladly, joyfully.

So in Abraham we see the man of faith and he points us to Jesus Christ where we see at the cross all the promises of God.

[34 : 18] Imagine if God said to you, I will bless you forever. That's exactly what he said to us at the cross. No ifs, no buts, no maybes.

The life of faith is the promises at the cross being big in our thinking and in our life.

So know then that those who are of faith are blessed along with Abraham, the man of faith. And if you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's offspring, heirs according to promise.

Let me pray. Let's pray. Lord, help us believe that you are the kind of God that wants to bless us, not based on anything we do or don't do, but purely because that's the kind of God you are.

Lord, I pray that you would increasingly draw us to the beauty of yourself seen at the cross so that your promises would grow to the size that they actually are in our hearts and minds so that we live in a way that pleases you.

[35 : 55] In Jesus' name I pray. Amen.