

Abram's faith

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[0 : 00] Here's this morning's question arising from Genesis 13 to 14 that I want to ask us! Will you be a man or a woman of faith? In the mess of daily life, right now this week coming, will you be a man or a woman of faith?

As we get going, let me say there's a popular view of faith that's actually really wrong. I don't know if you've seen the film Indiana Jones and the Last Crusade.

Indiana Jones is searching for the Holy Grail and he follows the trail to the canyon of the crescent moon and Indiana Jones steps into a passageway. He makes it past deadly chest-high chainsaws falling on his knees because only the penitent man will pass.

He tiptoes through a life-or-death word puzzle and then finally he stumbles out of a rocky tunnel onto an edge. And there's a massive gap before him, a yawning chasm.

And five metres away across this void, the passageway continues. What is Indiana going to do? Indiana Jones, quote, It's impossible. Nobody can jump this. It's a leap of faith.

[1 : 20] And back in the canyon, his dying father gasps. You must believe, boy. You must believe. And the tense music is rising and Indy screws up his eyes and he takes a deep breath and he raises his foot and he steps out into the gap.

A shaky, uncertain, foolish, screwing up your eyes leap into the unknown.

Which I think is what lots of people think faith is. It goes like this. Over here, if you like, there is science and reason and the world around us.

There's solid things you can touch and see and get your teeth into. Certain stuff to build your life on. Real life. And then over here is faith.

Kind of vague ideas about God. Is there anybody out there? Some of us hope so, but there's nothing solid to hold on to.

[2 : 29] Just wishful thoughts. And so if you're a person who's not big enough to cope with real life over here, then you'll end up trying to grab on to God.

What are you doing? You screw up your eyes and cross your fingers and really try to believe the impossible and then step out in shaky faith.

But that's not what faith is. And it's not what it is to be a man or a woman of faith. Kate's just read from Genesis 13 and 14 all about Abraham and God.

Those are the two characters. And the New Testament, you'll see this on your sheet, describes Abraham as the man of faith. And our model to copy.

Do you want to know what faith is? Do you want to know what it looks like to have faith and live by faith in the mess of daily life? Do you want to know? Well, look at Abraham.

[3 : 33] He's your man. And the way that Abraham is here in these two ancient chapters, it's not a life of wishful thinking, cross your fingers, hope for the best and step out like Indiana Jones.

Rather, Abraham, the man of faith, trusts in the promises of God. He trusts in the promises of God. Back at the start of chapter 12, the Lord spoke to Abraham, go to the land I will show you. And he spoke words of promise to Abraham. In chapter 12, verses 2 and 3, I will make you into a great nation, promise.

And I will bless you. I will make your name great and you will be a blessing, promise. I will bless those who bless you. And whoever curses you, I will curse.

And all peoples on earth will be blessed through you, Abraham, promise. Promises from God to bless not just Abraham, but all peoples on earth through him.

[4 : 36] How does Abraham respond? In chapter 12, verse 4, Abraham went as the Lord told him. He's 75 years old.

He ups and goes. He trusts God. He trusts God's promises. That's faith. Not shaky, wishful thinking, step in the dark.

Faith means you trust in the promises of God. Well, Abraham, the man of faith, in chapter 12, ups and goes and he makes it to the land.

But then there's a famine. And his faith really wobbles as he disappears down to Egypt, fearing for his life. But the Lord is faithful to those whose faith wobbles.

And the Lord rescues Abraham and his family out of Egypt. Until in 13, verses 3 and 4, we're into our reading now today. He's back at Bethel and the altar he's first built.

[5 : 34] And there, Abraham calls on the name of the Lord. He's back. I trust in you. I worship you, my Lord. This is faith.

It's what God calls us to. Through the ups and the downs and the mess of daily life, you trust in the promises of God. Will we?

Will we learn from Abraham and be women and men of faith? Well, here we go then. Genesis 13 and 14.

These long, strange chapters which show us something of the life of faith in action. And what goes on in these chapters is such a long way from Indiana Jones standing on the edge, screwing his eyes up and just hoping.

Look at a couple of bits of it with me. First, chapter 13. Here's the big thrust of it, I think. Trust in the promise-making God. Trust in the promise-making God.

[6 : 39] If in chapter 12, last week, the big problem was a famine, now in chapter 13, the problem is that Abraham and his nephew Lot have got too much stuff. See what happens in verse 5.

Now Lot, who was moving about with Abraham, also had flocks and herds and tents, just like Abraham. But the land couldn't support them while they stayed together, for their possessions were so great that they were not able to stay together.

And quarrelling arose between Abraham's herdsmen and Lot's. And the Canaanites and the Perizzites were also living in the land at that time, busy chocker land.

There's a domestic family quarrel brewing. You're getting in my way with all your stuff and it's not working. How do you solve that?

How do you solve that in family life if you're the bigger person or the bigger sister or the older one? I'm the older one. I'm bigger than you. I come first.

[7 : 37] You get out of my way or else. That's what we do. But not Abraham. So Abraham said to Lot, let's not have any quarrelling between you and me, or between your herdsmen and mine, because we're close relatives.

Here's not the whole land before you. Let's part company. If you go to the left, I'll go to the right. If you go to the right, I'll go to the left. Isn't that great?

Abraham says, let's be at peace. Lot, you go first. You choose where you want to settle. And I'll take the seconds.

I wonder, is there something quite generous about Abraham here? Relaxed almost. As though he knows he'll be okay. I don't need to fight you lot.

There's no need for quarrelling. I'll take the leftovers. You go first. And I wonder if that is because of Abraham's faith.

[8 : 47] He trusts in God. You know, in a world like ours, which refuses to believe in a good God, who promises to bless those who trust in him, life is very competitive, and dog eat dog, we say in English.

Because you're on your own, because you're on your own, basically. And you've got to make it for yourself. You've got to grab the best for you now. If someone offers you two pieces of cake on a plate, you take the biggest one quick for you.

But when you trust in the promise-making God, maybe it frees you from that. I don't need to grab and go first.

I'm happy to take the leftovers. Because I know God is for me. And I'm his friend. Abraham here, saying, go ahead lot.

Because God has promised me this land and blessing. Or think of Jesus himself, putting others first, generously and freely. Because he knows he's safe.

[9 : 55] He trusts in his heavenly Father. This is just a little thing. Is there something here for us about the life of faith? At home, you don't have to quarrel and fight to grab the best portion.

Within your wider family, you don't need to fight tooth and nail for the biggest bit of the inheritance when someone dies. You don't need to fight.

You can make peace. You can be generous. You can go second. Because your heavenly Father has you. And he's promised to be with you and provide for you.

Well, back to the story. And in verse 10, we've looked at Abraham. Lot now chooses. Abraham said, go that way if you want, or that way you choose, I'll go the other way. Lot chooses.

And if Abraham's living by faith, notice that Lot chooses by sight, by what he sees. Lot looked around and saw that the whole plain of the Jordan towards Zoar was well watered, like the garden of the Lord, like the land of Egypt.

[11:09] Well, there it is. With his own eyes, he sees this wonderful, well watered, perfect for him and his cows, bit of land. And so, verse 11, Lot chose for himself the whole plain of the Jordan and set out towards the east and the men parted company.

Well, it looks like the problem's been solved. And, good choice, Lot. You'll be fine in your new paradise place to live. But he won't.

I missed out the comment at the end of verse 10 about the well watered Jordan plain. Did you see? This was before the Lord destroyed Sodom and Gomorrah, which is there.

And verse 12 makes things very clear. Abraham lived in the land of Canaan, that's right in the heart of the promised land, he's trusting his God, while Lot lived among the cities of the plain and pitched his tent near Sodom.

Now the people of Sodom were wicked and were sinning greatly against the Lord. Good choice for Lot? No. Writes one old commentator, Lot fancied he was dwelling in paradise, but he was nearly plunged into the depths of hell.

[12:32] Because living by sight and trusting what you see isn't so safe, you know, in our lives today.

She is so pretty, I'm going to chase after her. He is so rich, he'll make me happy. Hey, we'll go live in that beautiful village over there.

It looks like paradise will be set up for life. I'll take that job. What a salary. I can see that would be wonderful for me. And having chosen by sight, you are nearly plunged into the depths of hell with her or him or the village or the job.

Well, that's Lot. In verse 14 now, we're back with Abraham, living by faith. Look at him again. And once more, God makes promises to him, promises.

The Lord said to Abraham, after Lot had parted from him, look around from where you are to the north and the south to the east and the west. All the land that you see, I will give to you and your offspring forever.

[13:48] My gift to you. Trust me. And there's more. I'll make your offspring like the dust of the earth so that if anyone could count the dust, then your offspring could be counted.

What a promise that is. When you next change the bag in your vacuum cleaner, have a look in the bag at the dust. Tip it out on the floor if you want and try and count it.

Can you count the bits of dust in your vacuum cleaner? If you know where the vacuum cleaner is in your house. Do that and then think about all the dust of the earth. How much is there?

What an amazing promise from God to Abraham. Who is by himself in Bethel with his childless wife. It's an almost unbelievable promise.

You'll have an uncountable number of offspring. Actually, these offspring promised to Abraham will come from every nation and tribe and people and language.

[14:51] There'll be men and women and boys and girls who will share the faith of Abraham. And in these verses, God is promising Abraham us. He's promising Abraham us and the worldwide church.

His offspring, that's who we are, who will join Abraham in the heavenly country. Go, says the Lord, verse 17, walk through the length and breadth of the land for I'm giving it to you.

And so Abraham went to live near the great trees of Mamre at Hebron where he pitched his tents and there he built an altar to the Lord because he's a man of faith.

He's not screwing up his eyes and hoping for the best, Indiana Jones style. He's trusting in the promise-making God. We're talking about faith this morning and the example of Abraham.

Will we be like him? Like Abraham. Put your trust in the promise-making God, the God who, well chapter 14 now, the God who delivers his people.

[16:12] Look at this now with me. If chapter 13 is a domestic family problem, chapter 14 goes international and we're thrust into a war between kings and nations.

There's a lot of ancient dudes here with strange names from strange places. I'm not going to read them because Kate has. Basically, it's four kings from the east, Kedileoma and his gang, and they all go to war against five kings the king of Sodom and his gang.

Nine kings go to war and the four kings come out on top and win and you say, thanks for reading that, Kate, but so far, so what? This is just ancient history. Well, in 14 verses 11 and 12, see what happens.

The four kings seized all the goods of Sodom and Gomorrah and all their food and then they went away and they also carried off Abraham's nephew Lot and his possessions since he was living in Sodom.

Now, this is important because of Abraham's nephew who's been kidnapped. Now, in verse 13, a man who'd escaped came and reported this to Abraham, the Hebrew, and Abraham's still living near the trees of Mamre at Hebron and he's got a couple of allies.

[17:28] What will Abraham, this man of faith, do? I don't know what you think people of faith are like. I think people think people of faith are meant to be pretty spineless and pasty, aren't they?

Oh, it's a faith community, cups of tea and weak smiles. Maybe Abraham will just hide away in his tent and pray. He doesn't. Check out this brave action from a man who trusts in his God.

If you're into this kind of thing, count the verbs. When Abraham heard that his relative had been taken captive, he called out the 318 trained men born in his household and he went in pursuit as far as Dan.

That's about 100 miles to the north. And during the night, Abraham divided his men to attack them and he routed them, pursuing them as far as Hoban, north of Damascus. And he recovered all the goods and brought back his relative Lot and his possessions together with the women and the other people.

Boom! He's decisive, he's bold, he's tactical and he nails them because he loves his family and he will protect them.

[18:41] Will you be a man or a woman of faith? But that's not the end of things. If that was it, chapter 14, end of story at verse 16, you might say, hey Abraham, you're the man, you're the big dog.

But that's not what's going on. In verses 17 to 24, Abraham meets two kings, the king of Sodom and the king of Salem.

After Abraham returned from defeating Kedileomer and the kings allied with him, the king of Sodom came out to meet him in the valley of Shavar, that is the king's valley. Has he come to fight? Has he come to say, well done?

Who knows? Then Melchizedek, king of Salem, brought out bread and wine. So who's this king coming out of nowhere? He was priest of God Most High, just appearing in the story out of nowhere like the son of God.

This king, priest, he serves God and he speaks for him and he blessed Abraham and said, blessed be Abraham by God Most High, creator of heaven and earth and praise be to God Most High who delivered your enemies into your hand.

[20:03] See, that's the truth of what just happened. Like for sure, Abraham acted bravely and boldly because he trusts in his God but it was God Most High, the creator of heaven and earth, the one who's sovereign over the kingdoms of men today, who delivered up those enemies into Abraham's hand.

He did the delivering and Abraham knows that. That's why he gives Melchizedek a tenth of everything. This is for the Lord because the Lord has won the battle.

Put your trust in the promise-making God who delivers his people. You know, just before Jesus came into the world 2,000 years ago, Zechariah, the father of John the Baptist, praised God and he said in Luke chapter 1 verse 72, God is acting to remember his holy covenant, the oath he swore to our father Abraham to rescue us from the hand of our enemies and to enable us to serve him without fear.

And fulfilling God's promises to Abraham, that's what Jesus, the King of Kings, came to do, you know. To deliver us from our sins and from Satan, to deal a death blow to death itself, to deal one day with every nation-state which kidnaps Christians and to rescue all who share the faith of

Abraham from every evil attack and bring us safely to his heavenly kingdom.

That's what the Lord Jesus came to do and has done and will do, deliver us completely. And that is because the promise-making God keeps his promises to us in Jesus.

[22 : 06] And that means that you and I can serve our God without fear and trust him today. So I want to ask again this morning, will we be girls and boys, teenagers, and women and men of faith?

Faith isn't wishful thinking screwing up your eyes and hoping against hope. In the mess of your daily life right now, in the middle of family quarrels and international conflict, we place our trust in the promise-making, promise-keeping God who delivers his people.

That's what faith is. We'll live generously. We'll act bravely because we trust our God. There is one more conversation here right at the end with the king of Sodom.

I love it. I love this. The defeated king of Sodom, who is not a goody, by the way, he's a baddy, he said to Abraham, give me the people and you keep the goods for yourself.

Hey Abraham, let me allow you to keep some of the booty. I'll be generous to you. I'll support you as you come under my influence.

[23 : 35] You know what that's about? Think of the Chinese Communist Party to Christians. We'll support you when you're part of this state-controlled church.

Come under our wing. But Abraham said to the king of Sodom, to this worldly ruler, with raised hand, I have sworn an oath to the Lord God most high, creator of heaven and earth, that I'll accept nothing belonging to you, not even a thread or the strap of a sandal, so that you will never be able to say, I made Abraham rich.

I'll accept nothing but what my men have eaten and the share that belongs to the men who went with me, to Anna, Eshcol and Mamre. Let them have their share. I don't need you to make me rich and I'm not joining your gang because I belong to the Lord, to God most high, to the creator of heaven and earth.

I am God's man and no one else's. Because this God of mine has made promises promises. And this most high God keeps his promises.

And so I, we, will trust in him and will live generously and will take the leftovers and will act bravely and we won't need the world's approval or riches.

[24 : 57] We will keep clinging to the one who wins the victory. We will keep clinging to the one who offers us bread and wine and will serve him without fear until the day comes when all his promises are fulfilled and we're home in his heavenly kingdom because we live by faith.

We put our trust in the promises of the God who has delivered us and will deliver us. Let me lead us in a prayer together.

Let's pray. Let's pray. Let's pray. Our Lord and our God, you are so gracious and truthful.

You have spoken words of promise that find their fulfilment in Jesus. Blessing for us with you when we follow Abraham, the man of faith.

Please help us to know that your words of promise are true and solid and stable and that as we step out in faith and trust you we stand on a sure and firm foundation.

[26 : 13] So make us those who don't listen to the world. Make us those who are generous and brave and act to live to please you and trust you because we know that we're safe in your hands.

We pray in Jesus' name. Amen. Thank you.