

# Faith That Overcomes

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[ 0 : 00 ] Please turn to our reading in Genesis chapter 15. As God enables us, we're going to look at this encounter between the living God and Abraham.

I guess it's appropriate to think of one man encountering God in such a dramatic way at a time of communion.

When we seek to prepare ourselves today to gather around God's table tomorrow. Because surely you do so with a hope.

And the hope is very simple. You hope, I believe, and I hope you do, to meet with God. And to know more of God.

And for God to feed your soul with himself. And so I want to look today at this story of one man's encounter with God.

[ 1 : 09 ] To try and help us to prepare for coming to the Lord's table tomorrow. And as we do so, maybe it's not too much to say that for some of you here, the thought of going to the Lord's table is quite some thought.

You're daunted by it. And you may even be fearful at the prospect of it, even if you've been there before. And for others that should be there, you won't be there, quite simply in a word, because of fear.

Well, here is a man of great faith. The father of the faith in many ways. Three of the world's religions look to Abraham as their father.

And he truly is a giant of a man. And yet he's here in the story addressed by God right at the beginning, verse 1, as a man who had fear in his life at this stage.

God says to him, his opening words, Fear not, Abram, I am your shield. Clearly, Abraham felt that he was in need of protection. He was in need of a shield.

[ 2 : 20 ] He was in need of someone to be close to him. And it's not too hard to guess why he may have felt like that. If you look at the events in the previous chapter, a whole stramash of kings fighting each other in this part of the world.

Abraham gets involved as he tries a rescue mission for his nephew Lot. He succeeds. So he's deeply unpopular with, obviously, the kings he's defeated in battle.

And he's probably not so popular with the kings of Sodom and Gomorrah because they're now, as it were, in his debt. And in all of that political instability of his times, when life and the future perhaps look somewhat uncertain.

Especially when it came to him having a family that would continue down through the generations. One, he didn't have any children. And two, would his family, his household even withstand at the political times that they were in.

In all of that, there was plenty of reasons to be fearful. And it's into that that our gracious God came and spoke to one of his children in the middle of all of their fears.

[ 3 : 32 ] And I'm sure that this is something that some here may even need today. There's not one of us, as followers of Jesus Christ, that does not experience a fair old bucket load of fears at some point or another in our experience.

It's so easy, is it not, to be afraid of the future. Abraham clearly was. The whole embodiment of the promise here was about future generations.

That would spill out from them. He even gave them the visual aid of the stars. Look, count their numbers. That's what your future is going to be of your family. But so often we don't see the stars. All we see are the foreboding clouds of fear. Like a dark cloud, it sits squatting upon the horizon of our lives. Blocking out all light and blocking out all joy from our hearts.

Have you not known moments like that in your experience? You will, if you haven't. Every one of us will go through these times. Some of you are already presently, at this very moment, going through such times.

[ 4 : 45 ] To you, God is speaking today, right now. For he comes in love to his children. He comes understanding his children. He always comes knowing where his children are at.

And he knows how to speak that word of peace into their hearts. Into any of our situations. So we may come fearful.

And we may come particularly fearful of the future. And even like Abraham, fearful particularly for the future of our own children. Of the ones that we love. What will their future be?

Do we not live in uncertain times today? Do you send your children to school wondering what they're going to be taught? Wondering who they'll mix with? Wondering what influences they'll pick up?

Wondering about those who come new into the community. With a different morality, a different outlook, a different view on life. And how that will affect your whole community. Affect children and young people.

[ 5 : 45 ] There's plenty to be fearful about today. In that sense, today. Then of course there's some of you who are fearful about professing your faith in Jesus. You're here at a communion time.

And you'll probably be Sunday night at home. And tears at the end of it all. Because once more, your fear got the better off you. And you held back from sitting with Jesus at his table.

To you also I believe God is speaking. What does this passage say to us? About these moments when the future can look uncertain. Or when fear gets a grip upon us.

There's several key elements brought out here. The first one to focus upon is faith. You get that in verse 16. God has spoken to Abraham.

He's given him the visual aid of looking up into the heavens at night. Counting the stars. Got that there in verse 5. The amazing thing is. A man who was childless at this stage.

[ 6 : 51 ] He listened to God. He heard the promise. And he just believed it. That's faith. In its simplest.

Verse 6. And he believed the Lord. And God counted it to Abraham as righteousness. That was him. Righteousness. Right in God's sight.

Justified. As if he'd never sinned. Cleansed. There. Why? On the basis of his good works. On the basis of his obedience. On the basis of leaving his country.

And obedience to God. No. On the basis of his faith here. He believed God. He didn't have a son. But he had a promise. From God.

And that is what he took. He took God at his word. In other words. He put his faith in God. At that moment.

[ 7 : 45 ] God accepted him. Therefore. In his sight. What is this faith? What is this faith? It's the key component here. To dealing with our fears.

For the future. What is this faith? That is the key component. In being able to seize the future. For ourselves. For now in this world. And for all of eternity.

What is this faith? Faith here is. Clearly in the whole life of Abraham. It's portrayed. As trust. In God. You see that. If you sketch out. His life. If you. Turn it in. Almost into a dialogue. Between God. And Abraham. As some commentators.

Have done so. It just. Exemplifies. How time and again. Here is a man. Who despite his very evident fears. Trusted in God. Despite the difficulties.

[ 8 : 44 ] Of his life. He trusted in God. Here goes the dialogue. God speaking. God. I'm going to send you out. Abraham. Where?

God. I'll tell you later. Just go. Next conversation. God. I'll give you a land. Abraham. Where? God. I'll tell you later.

Just wander. God. I'll give you a child. Abraham. How? God. I'll tell you later. Just wait.

God. Kill your child. Abraham. Why? God. I'll tell you later. Just walk up the mountain.

Take the knife. And take the wood. What a life. Some of you. Gone through a difficult journey. Few of us. Have probably ever gone through a journey. Quite like Abraham's.

[ 9 : 43 ] In his life. Time and again. God. Challenging him. To do what? To take. God. At his word. And to trust him.

It's all about. Trusting in this God. Of infinite. Power. A God. Who could even. Give Abraham. His son. Back.

From the dead. If necessary. So what is faith? Faith. Is trusting. In the character. And the words. Of God. That you see. The promises. Are absolutely. Backed up. There. Yeah. And amen. Because of the character. Of God. God. And we need to have.

That kind of faith. If we are going to survive. In life. If we are going to be ready. For what life. Might throw. At us.

[10:40] As it were. Because in all the storms. Of life. Which are. Enough. To smash. And destroy. Any one of us. It will be faith.

That will keep you. It's Abraham. And his faith. Who is picked up. As a great example. In the New Testament. You get to the book of Hebrews. And there. In chapter 6. And verse 19.

We are told about Abraham. There. As an example. Of faith. And then it says. To us in verse 19.

We have this hope. As an anchor for the soul. Firm and secure. Do we have this hope?

Do we have this faith? In the character. And in the word of God. So that whatever the storms. May come into your life. Your trust. Trust in.

The character of God. And therefore. In his words. His promises to you. Will be certain. Do you have that kind of faith? Because you will have.

[11:35] These kind of storms. Everybody. Faces these storms. What may break one of you. May not bother another person. It is very individual. The kind of hassles.

And trials. And troubles. That can break us. But they're there. For all of us. In Shakespeare's Macbeth. Apparently it says. Each new morn. New widows howl.

New orphans cry. New sorrows strike heaven on the face. And that is true. Of us. All.

Even in. The brief time here in Stornoway. In the months. Listening to Kenny. Talking about some of the pastoral issues. The sheer scale. Of hassles. That some of the people.

Here have. I went out from an inner city area. As it were. In a poor part of Inverness. A deprived zone. Plenty of problems there. Going out into the rural heartland.

[12:29] The idyllic of the black isle. One would think. Oh. Nobody will have problems there.

They've got life together. Tons of hassles. Tons of issues. Tons of problems as well. That's life.

How many people. Deep down. At night. When you can't sleep. It's fear. That's gnawing away. At us. No one of us knows.

What will come. Out of the blue. But a life of faith. Can overcome that. It's either life will overcome you. Or your faith.

Will overcome life. And Abraham stands before us. As an example. Of a man. Whose faith.

Overcame all. That life. Through atom.

As it were. Why? Because faith. Is the eye. That sees. The character. Of God. It sees. Something. In God. That is worth.

[13:26] Trusting. It sees. His power. Infinite. Sees. His wisdom. All knowing. It sees. His love. So deep. That it trusts him.

In all of his. Character. And being. So you can trust him. He is your anchor. And faith has got to be an anchor.

Everything else in life. If you're to build your life upon it. If you're to try and build your faith upon it. You could put your trust. Your faith. In different things.

In your career. In your money. In your marriage. In your popularity. In your status. In the community. But these things are all like building and shifting sand. They're all like trying to build upon water.

On the sea. It's movable. None of it lasts. None of it can last. So the picture of the anchor comes in. How does an anchor work? You throw it into the water.

[14:22] But it goes down through the water. It touches rock. It's got to touch something that's solid. It's got to touch that which does not move. And there is only one thing. In this entire universe.

That does not move. And that's God. Everything else that human beings put their faith and trust upon. Ultimately does move.

But God doesn't. And that's why we need faith. To overcome life. Our life will overcome us ultimately. And so here.

Is a man. Who glimpses God. As the one constant. The one anchor. In the universe. That you are touching rock. At the bottom of the sea.

The one unmovable. The one I am. The one great one. Who changes not. For he is perfection. It's self. And so Abraham believed.

[15:22] And yet fascinatingly. He still had questions. He still. Had to say to God. But. How can I know?

Look at verse 8. But he said. Oh Lord God. How am I to know. That I shall possess it. There can be fear.

And faith. All at the same time. In your life. Just because you are afraid of things. Doesn't mean that you are not a person of faith. And sometimes.

And sometimes. We just need to glimpse. Something. A sign. Something that will become.

Confirmatory. To our faith. Something that. What will strengthen.

Give us a reassurance. Because. Even though we have faith. But because there is much that there is to fear around us. And that is what we go on to next.

[16:20] That is what God does. Yes there is faith. And you may have faith. But you are still fearful. So what does God do? How does he deal with that? He gives us something else.

And now we move on secondly. To the foreshadowing here. And how that speaks. Into such a time. In our lives. Look at the foreshadowing. That is what we have got.

In this next strange part. Of the story. The reassurance. That comes to Abraham. After his question. In verse 9. Comes in the form.

Of a strange ritual. But obscure. To ourselves. In the 21st century. This is very much.

In the days before lawyers. And binding agreements. That we sign our name to. In the bottom of a paper.

[17:16] But this is God. Giving Abraham. In verse 9. And all this parted animals. Cut in two. And walking between them. God is cutting a covenant.

Literally cutting the animals. Cutting a peace pact. Between him and Abraham. Giving him a confirmation. To look at.

To feed his faith. So he may realize. I really, really, really can. Trust this God. How does it work? Well as I say.

It's a. It's a confirmation. In the days before you have. Bits of paper that you would sign. Like in a marriage certificate. Once you put your signature.

In the bottom of that marriage certificate. Well that's it. It's a legally binding contract. And these days. That did not happen. Today. Your signature. Can make you.

[18:11] Or break you. Depending what you sign your name to. So we have to be careful. What we. Hot bits of paper we sign. They have legal binding power. In the eyes of the law. But in the days before signatures.

Occurred. As it were. There were other ways. Of marking. Such legally binding agreements. And that quite simply. Is all that you've got here. At that level.

The background. To this strange. Ritual. Of taking these different animals. And cutting them in half. And then hanging the carcasses. On either side. As it were. Of the path.

And then someone. Walking down the middle. Of these things. Was quite common. It was weird to us. Because we just signed paper contracts. But to Abraham. This was. The way that you did business.

In the ancient world. It was a quite. A common ritual. And it always happened. Between a. A conquering king. A victorious king. The big king. And the little king.

[19:10] That he had defeated. In battle. And they would. Cut. A peace pact. And they would say. Here's the conditions. Of our peace. You will serve me. You will give X, Y and Z.

And I won't attack you. And I won't kill you. Fairly straightforward. And so what they would do. Then to make that. To sign the covenant. If you would like.

They would act it out. And they would take. These pieces of animals. Hack them up. And then the little king. In particular. Would walk through. The middle. Of these slaughtered animals.

And it was very simply. Saying look. If I break. The peace pact. Let this. Happen to me. Let me be mangled. Let me be butchered.

Let me. Take. The curse. Upon myself. If I break. The peace pact. So Abraham. Knew exactly. What God was saying. Here's the peace pact.

[20:05] Cut them out. Play the pieces. Then I walk. Through the middle. And that's a signing. A peace pact. A peace deal. Abraham. But then here comes.

The shocking part. Abraham. Could have been ready. To just. Start walking down. This avenue. Of carcasses. Because he was.

The little guy. God. Is the great king. God. Is the senior partner. Abraham. The junior partner. But that's not what we read about.

Is it? We're told. Look in verse 17. When the sun had gone down. And it was dark. Behold. A smoking fire pot.

And a flaming torch. So smoke. And fire. Passed. Between. The pieces. On that day.

[ 21 : 02 ] The Lord made a covenant. With Abraham. Those words. Of. A torch. Holy light. And smoke. The same words.

That are used in Exodus. To describe God. Coming down. On Mount Sinai. They're. They're to describe. The very presence. Of God. In all of his power. And holiness.

And majesty. They're a representation. Of God. Himself. And it's God. That walks through the pieces. Jesus. It's not.

Abraham. It's God. Who is walking. And so what is he saying. To Abraham. This is what would have left. Abraham astounded. Amazed. He says.

I'm the one who should be walking. Through that. If I walk down that avenue. Then I'm saying. I take the curse upon me. If I break the peace path. But no. It's God. In his holy light.

[ 21 : 57 ] His holy majesty. And all the. Infinite power. He is walking down that avenue. And he's saying. I will take. The curse. Upon.

Myself. And that is the confirmatory sign. The reassuring sign. To. To Abraham.

To clear out. All his fears. That. He might have an answer. To his question. There. In verse 8. But how shall I know. I will possess the future. How shall I know.

I will have a future. Because our God. Is the God. Who takes our place. And he walks. Down the line. He walked. The line. For us.

That we might not. Have to do it. And what he's saying is. I will take the curse. Of breaking the covenant. Upon myself. And here's the foreshadowing. There's Jesus.

[ 22 : 54 ] We're seeing him. Springing out. Of the book of Genesis. Foreshadowed here. The cross of Christ. Where Jesus has walked the line. On our behalf. Where God did come down.

Where the light of heaven. Descended into the darkness. Of this world. As it did here. In the person of Christ now. And Jesus died on the cross. So what is the cross saying?

It's saying. That. God himself. Has borne. The curse. Of our sin. When we break. The covenant. When we don't remain. Faithful to God.

God has. And will. Always remain. Faithful. To us. Which means. That every one of us here. That we.

Can. Trust. Him. Completely. With our futures. Do you doubt. God's commitment to you. Do you. Somehow doubt. That God loves you.

[ 23 : 52 ] In the midst of the storms. In the midst of all the fears. Do you sometimes doubt. That God really has. Your best interests. In his heart. And what does he say to that? He says.

Look at the cross. Look at me. As I walk down. Through these mangled pieces. Of carcasses. Look at that Abraham. And he's saying to you. Look at the cross. Look at the fulfillment. Of what Abraham saw.

In shadows. He's saying to you. Look at the fulfillment. And let that drive out your fears. So when you see. The elements of the bread and wine. On the table. He's saying.

Look at that. Let that drive out your fears. Let those be the elements. As it were. That sign and seal. Your future. Your blessing. That's what God has done for us.

In Jesus Christ. Jesus says. And undermine for us. All the basis.

[ 24 : 47 ] For our fears. Look at the picture here. Of the animals. Kind of lost on us. In the age of Tesco. Or the co-op. Where all our animals come.

Packaged in plastic. We miss that. The noise. And the mangling. And the horror. And the blood. Of this original scene. Do we not? Maybe some of you folks.

Know a little bit about. Butchering sheep. I don't know. But. But here is a picture. Of the mangling effect. Of sin. Of our own sin.

Jeremiah picks up. In that same picture. Chapter 34 and 18. He says. The men who have violated. My covenant. And have not fulfilled. The terms of the covenant.

They made before me. I will treat. Like the calf. They cut. And two. And then walked. Between its pieces. Sin. Mangles us. Sin. Mangles.

[ 25 : 43 ] Your life. It mangles. Your relationships. Relationships. With your people around you. Your relationship with God. Even your own inner relationship. To yourself. Sin mangles relationships.

And what do we see? In the cross. We see Jesus being mangled. As it were. By our sin. What do you see? You see bread. Tomorrow. On the table. That's torn.

Mangled. By your sin. And my sin. So much so. That Isaiah. Had to proclaim. Just as. There were many. Who were appalled.

At him. His appearance. Was so disfigured. Beyond that of any man. And his form. Marred. Beyond human likeness. Why? Because of our sin. Deal with that.

And you deal with our basis. For fear. And anxiety. About the future. And then you see. The darkness of our sin. The horror of it. There was darkness. That came over the scene.

[ 26 : 42 ] In Genesis 15. There was darkness. That came over Christ's death. At the cross. Mark. Records for us. In chapter 15. In verse 33. And the sixth hour. Darkness came over the whole land.

And at the ninth hour. Jesus cried out. My God. My God. Why hast thou forsaken me? It's our sin. That mangled him.

In our place. It is our darkness. That has been taken. In to him. That caused God. To turn his face away. From his own beloved son.

That is the shocking. Transaction. Of the cross. It's shocking. It's a scene. Of horror. And it's only when you see. These things. It's only when you are moved.

By the cross. With the passion. Of what Jesus. Has done. For us. That you will really. Trust in him. You'll say. How can I doubt. God's commitment.

[ 27 : 36 ] To me. How can I doubt. God's commitment. Even to my family. Or to my children. Down through the generations. How can I doubt. God. No matter what. Storms may brew.

What. No matter what. Storms may lash. Against your life. No matter what. You are going through. Right now. In these days. And you're screaming. Sometimes alone at night. And you're saying. God. God. Where are you? What are you doing? Why are you allowing this. To go through. My experience. Why? And he says. Look. Look.

Look again. That's why he says. Come to the table. That's why. He says. Here's a sacrament. Here's a sign. Here's a seal. Here's something to keep repeating. Because you've got to keep looking.

Back and back. Because life keeps throwing. Storms and storms. At us. And you see there. The one. Mangled for our sin. Taking the darkness.

[ 28 : 30 ] Upon himself. And that is God's commitment. To your future. That is God's solution. There he's taken the curse. There he's taken the darkness. Of our sin.

And therefore. He has taken away the basis. Ultimately. For our fears. About the future. For in there. God has dealt with. Our very fear. Of death.

And if God. Today. Can conquer the fear. Of every single one of us here. Over death. Our own personal death. Then can he not conquer. All the lesser fears.

That plague. Our daily lives. In Jesus. He does that. In Jesus. He paid. Such a bloody price. To cleanse.

And forgive us. And to set us free. From the fear. Of death. Surely. Surely. If he has done that.

[ 29 : 26 ] For us. Surely. We. Do not have to be consumed. By all the other things. That would have us. Be afraid. Tomorrow.

Look at the sacrament. And see it. As God's great antidote. To fear. Fear. For there. He has slain. Our greatest fear.

See there. God's commitment. To you. That it does not depend upon you. Walking. Through the pieces. It does not depend upon. Your obedience. Per se. You do not earn.

Your salvation. You respond. In joyful obedience. To being saved. To the fact. That you now belong. To a God. And that's sure.

And certain. Because it's him. That does the saving. Our salvation. Depends upon. What God has done. For us. It's a gift. Holy. Dependent. Upon God.

[ 30 : 24 ] So how can you have faith in him? You see the character. Of God. You see a God. Who has not. Withheld. Jesus. His only son. From you. For your good.

He wants you. And so you see. In the cross. All of your sins. Been washed away. Like an old stick. Of wood. Floating down a stream.

Going. Going. One day. Gone. Never to find its way. Back upstream. Dream. Ordained to float. Into an ocean. Forever lost from sight. That's what Jesus has done today.

Can do today. For anyone here. So we watch. Jesus walking onto the cross. As it were. For us. As covenant breakers.

Until it breaks. Your heart. In response. To the depth. Of God's love. For someone. Who is quite undeserving. Tomorrow.

[ 31 : 24 ] Around the table. You're watching. This moment. Of history. From Genesis 15. You're watching. It being replayed. As it were. Reenacted. Now. In its. A clear vision.

The elements. Of a broken body. Bread. That is torn. Wine. That's poured out. Abraham.

At that moment. Experienced. The raw. Presence. Of God. And in his. Fears. With his. Faith. God. Reconfirmed.

His. Absolute. Commitment. To Abraham. And his future. And that. Is what God. Is doing. For us. And you see. If you have tasted. That Jesus. And if you know.

That you love. Jesus. And you know. That you. You really do. Belong. To Jesus. Then. You've had. The fulfillment. You've tasted. The substance. substance.

[ 32 : 20 ] So how dumb. Can it be. To remain. And keep yourself. Away. From what is. The echo. Of that substance. Especially. When it might be.

The fear. Of other people. The fear. Of what other people. Will say. About you. If you come. And take. The sacrament. For the first time. How crazy.

Is that? Look at the sacrament. It's the very thing. That drives out. Our fears. Because there. You see. The character. Of God. Is there.

For you. And for me. So take it. And may. By God's grace. Tomorrow. When we do. May he deal. With each one of us. A personal way. With some. Here. Today. Whose fears. Are great. May you just. Taste again.

[ 33 : 18 ] God's. Commitment. To you. Your future. To his. Perfect will. Being done. In the midst. Of life's storms. Honor him.

And glorify him. With your trust. Feed your faith. Tomorrow. That you may do so. Feed it. Upon. Christ. Himself.

When you receive him. By faith. Amen. Let's pray. Amen. Amen.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Lord, We have so many things. In our lives that we're afraid about. Maybe we're like the. People in the days of Moses. Who first heard this story being retold.

afraid of entering into a new land, a new age, a new time with new enemies and new concerns and new anxieties. And Lord Jesus, they heard this story of the God of great commitment, the God who takes the curse upon himself.

[ 34 : 28 ] Lord Jesus, do not ever let us doubt your commitment to us. Father, forgive us when we do, forgive us when we are so swamped by our fears that faith dies, suffocated.

Lord Jesus, instead over these days, show us such a vision of the grandeur, the power and the majesty of our God and his incredible tenderness and intimacy with us, that that will dominate the horizon of our lives and all our trials, troubles and hassles will find perspective before that great vision of who our God is.

So Lord Jesus, bless any here today whose lives are dominated by fear. Drive it out with a greater fear, the fear of awe, that fear that has a life dominated by who and what God is.

Oh Lord Jesus, speak peace to those today who are sitting just questioning, wondering, do I or don't I? Do I come forward? Do I not come forward?

Lord Jesus, do I come forward?