

080518

Abraham Series: "Living The Promise"

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Grace and peace to you from God the Father and from our Lord and savior, Jesus Christ. Amen

When you're a fresh, wide-eyed, wet behind the ears, second year seminarian preparing for vicarage, where am I going is the big question. A vicarage, which I'm currently serving among you lovely people, is an internship spent in a church learning how to be a pastor. And the seminary can send you literally anywhere. It's stressful. The seminary has a big ceremony where they announce to all the vicars where they're going for the year, and the weeks leading up to that ceremony were big for my wife Sam and I. Our son Bear was born just two days before the ceremony, but even in the middle of all the excitement and sleep deprivation, we still had time to speculate about where we were going. And sweat a little.

Now, I'm not talking down on certain churches. I'm sure all of the guys in my class are going to have great vicarage experiences...BUT. During that vicarage ceremony, it's easy to be motivated by what your eyes tell you is best. It's hard to live in faith. We could go anywhere. Will it be...

Boca Raton, Florida...or Fargo, North Dakota?

Colorado Springs, Colorado...or Juno, Alaska?

Wake Forest, North Carolina (yes, you guys are on the good list) ...or anywhere in Idaho?

See what I mean? It's easy to be motivated by what you see. It's easy to want to go where

the grass looks greener. It's easy to want to control the outcome. Living in faith is hard.

Living in faith...or living by what we see. In continuing our sermon series on the life of Abram, we heard a story about two men and a challenging situation. There isn't enough land to support both of them. The Lord has blessed Abram, and his flocks have grown to the point where there's strife between his and Lot's herdsman. So the two men separate. One man reacts according to what he sees with his eyes. But the second reacts in faith in the promises of God.

The first man is Lot, Abram's nephew. And he makes a decision according to what looks best to his eyes. He and Abram are standing on top of a large hill, looking out over all the land, and he sees a portion that looks best. Lots of water. Good, fertile ground. A big city nearby. This looks like the cream of the crop! This is the land around Sodom. Lot chooses Sodom because it looks best.

And then you have Abram. Abram makes a decision based on faith. For Abram, the surest thing in his life is a promise from God. God has already told him the way that things are going to play out. He's going to be the father of many nations. His descendants will have plenty of land to call their own. All nations will be blessed through him. Abram has promise. No matter what happens, Abram knows that God's going to take care of him. So, he lets go. He lets Lot take first pick of the land, and he goes the opposite way.

Do you see? Abram doesn't just believe the promise. He lives the promise. God's promise ripples out into his own life, affecting his actions in three ways.

First, Abram isn't afraid to let go of control. Because of his faith, Abram isn't afraid to let Lot have first pick of the land. Abram doesn't have to control the outcome. Abram's eyes

might tell him that he's taking second best, but Abram looks to God instead. How hard is it to let God be God and let go? It's hard for me. I want to dictate the outcome.

Sometimes what I see with my eyes scares me, and I want to hold on to control. But look at Abram. He does the opposite. He lets go of control, trusting that God is ultimately the one in control.

Second, Abram lives with boldness. This flows out of letting go of control. Abram lives with confidence and boldness, but he lives with his confidence firmly placed in God's unchanging word. Faith in God's promise allows him to walk out into the unknown with boldness. There are uncertainties in Abram's life. His eyes tell him that his future isn't as certain as Lot's. Those uncertainties are real. Having a promise from God doesn't take those away. But Abram is able to live with boldness, in spite of uncertainties that his eyes see.

Third, Abram places that confidence and boldness in the eternal over the temporary. Lot's a temporary kind of guy. Lot trusts in what he can see to take care of him. But not Abram. He doesn't trust in some material thing for his security. Abram's confidence goes beyond what he can see. All of that confidence is aimed squarely at the God who has spoken promise to him. That's confidence in the eternal.

As Christians, we worship the God of Abram, and that God is a God of promise. God promised Abram land, lots of children, that all nations would be blessed through him. I don't know about you, but God never spoke those promises to me. We don't have those same promises, but we do have a gracious God who still speaks promise to us.

And today, God speaks promise to you. I will never leave you or forsake you. That's a promise. How does that promise shape your

life? You have a God who will never leave you. Nothing, not hardship, trouble, sickness, or death is enough to make God leave you. In spite of what you might see with your eyes, grab hold of that promise from God and live boldly. I go to prepare a place for you, that where I am there you may be also. That's a promise from Jesus, the promise of heaven. The things that we own will fade. And sometimes we put too much trust in them. Your car transmission might break, the dryer might blow a fuse, the roof on your house might spring a leak. Or you might lose those things altogether. Does your life fall apart when that happens? Or do you trust the promise of an eternal heaven? God hears the prayers of the righteous. That's another promise. So maybe instead of trying to control what's happening in your life so much, you take what's happening in your life to God in prayer. You give it to him, because he hears you.

This is what Jesus meant in our gospel lesson when he tells us to build up for ourselves treasures in heaven. The promises of God are the real treasures of heaven. Those promises are found in God's word. They're everywhere. We only just named a few, but if you read the scriptures, you'll see them. The promise of belonging to the family of God in baptism. The promise of forgiveness in the Lord's supper. Those promises never end in church. Like God's promises to Abram, they ripple out into our lives. Our lives can't help but be affected.

So why can't we live in perfect boldness, without control? Why do we keep placing our trust in the wrong things? Abram didn't always live perfectly according to that promise, and neither do we. It's because we're sinful. In spite of wanting to do the right thing, we always seem to go the wrong way. Our desire for control creeps back in. Our fears start to dictate our lives. We look

to our material stuff for security instead of to God. But God is a God of promise, and putting all of your sin on Jesus, on the cross, is his kept promise to you. And He reaffirms that promise to you, time and time again. It's in his nature to reaffirm his promises. That's what he does with Abram. He reminds him of what he's already said he'll do. Likewise, God is constantly reaffirming his promises to us. We constantly need to hear God's word of promise. We need the Gospel. You come to church for that. You come to church imperfect. You bring that imperfection to God and he gives promise. You're reminded of the truth, that God put every single one of your shortcomings on Jesus, and now you are free. God has not left you. He sent his son to die for you. Jesus rose from the dead to make you right with God once more. You're righteous and holy in the eyes of your Father. He looks at you and he sees Jesus. He doesn't see sinners. He sees saints. He sees children of promise. Now go and live, as children of that promise. Amen.

Now may the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, guard your hearts and minds through faith in Christ Jesus. Amen.