

A picture is worth more than 1,000 words... and in the heart of every person there is a picture.

It's a picture of better... for some it's a picture of:

- What a marriage/family could look like: peace, love, joy in your home to replace all baggage and drama
- Being accepted, healed, free
- Success, fruitfulness, better future financially, relationally
- Ultimately, it's a picture of what it looks like to be loved and to love.

Two guys were involved in a head-on collision in Germany. Severe fog made visibility horrible. Each car was driving at a snail's pace with one guy heading north the other heading south. The fog was so bad, both drivers stuck their heads out their windows. It was only a matter of time before their heads smacked together... a real head-on collision. Both men were hospitalized with severe head injuries, though neither of their cars were scratched. Why? They could not see! This is the problem for many of us – we just can't see beyond the moment... and in the fog of our circumstances, there's a crash.

For some of you, your vision has been clouded, you thought something was out of reach, or maybe not even there anymore. But, all the good that God has promised is out there, even when you cannot see it. If you could see the faithfulness of the One who made the promise... you would have hope. When the Lord gives a promise, it often comes with a picture. The Lord came to Abraham and gave him a promise... a picture that captivated his heart. It was a picture of a better future:

Gen. 15:5-6 NLT

Then the Lord took Abram outside and said to him, "Look up into the sky and count the stars if you can. That's how many descendants you will have!"⁶ And Abram believed the Lord, and the Lord counted him as righteous because of his faith.

What would it take to see that become a reality? Would he work for it, strive for it, would it depend on his goodness, efforts? No, Abraham would have to have one thing: Faith. In other words, he needed to simply believe God. While Paul is teaching us how a person can be saved from eternal judgment (all have sinned!), he gives us a lesson on faith that applies to every area of our lives.

Romans 4:13 ESV

For the promise to Abraham and his offspring that he would be heir of the world did not come through the law but through the righteousness of faith.

The "law" was given by God to Moses around 500 years after Abraham. He could not have obeyed the Mosaic law that wasn't even available when he walked the earth. So how was he saved? Through faith – trust in the promises of God – the same way we all are.

Romans 4:14-15 ESV

For if it is the adherents of the law who are to be the heirs, faith is null and the promise is void.¹⁵ For the law brings wrath, but where there is no law there is no transgression.

When Paul said the law brings wrath, he could not have written something more offensive to the Jews. What?!? They taught that the law brought grace, not wrath.

Look at Romans 3:20 – through the law we become conscious of sin... so where there is no law, there is no transgression of sin. A society that does not regard stealing as a crime has no thieves. The word ‘brings’ implies that the law not only reveals sin, but it produces sin.

Paul suggest that when you prohibit something, you actually create a desire for it. So the law creates a desire for the very things it condemns. For example, when you see a “Wet Paint” sign, don’t you just want to touch it?

Transgression is a willful overstepping or violation of a commandment. If I trespass on private property, I am guilty of trespassing. But if I see a sign saying “Keep Out” and choose to trespass, then I am a transgressor. I knew the law clearly and still broke it. Knowing the law does not make us heirs; it makes us doubly guilty!

Romans 4:16 ESV

That is why it depends on faith, in order that the promise may rest on grace and be guaranteed to all his offspring – not only to the adherent of the law but also to the one who shares the faith of Abraham, who is the father of us all.

“Our father Abraham” – the Jews guarded this phrase as theirs. If a Gentile converted to Judaism, they would have to refer to Abraham as “your father.” This must have shocked the Jews... the link to Abraham is faith, not circumcision.

“Shares the faith of Abraham” – go back to Romans 4:12 where it tells us to walk in the footsteps of the faith our father Abraham had.

Abraham’s Faith:

It was practical, it showed up in everyday life. From his relationships, and how he treated his nephew Lot; to his battle against kings, as if he had been a man of war his whole life; to the facing of disappointment, he lived with delayed promises for years.

What is faith like Abraham’s? What are the footsteps of the faith our father Abraham had?

Faith that depends on grace more than grit | 4:13-16

It was not through obedience to the law that Abraham received the promise.

The promise may rest on grace.

The promises of God for you are rooted in and guaranteed by the character of God... not yours.

Last week we read something shocking – God justifies the ungodly!

Mark 2:14

As he walked along, he saw Levi son of Alphaeus sitting at his tax collector’s booth. “Follow me and be my disciple,” Jesus said to him. So, Levi got up and followed him.

Yes, Jesus called him from tax collecting, but he did that when he was still at his tax table during business hours! He didn’t wait until he gave up his horrible job!

Take a closer look at Levi and see a shocking picture of God’s grace: He is sitting at the tax booth. When Rome conquered an area, they would put a tax on the area. In some places, they broke the economy with such heavy taxes. They would often install a governor – like a fake king – who was responsible to collect the taxes. Herod was that guy, and he would enlist people to do his dirty work.

Tax collectors were some of the most hated people in Israel. They would tax you on whatever they thought they could get; it was totally up to them. If you looked wealthy, they would hit you up. They would become like loan sharks for people that could not pay the taxes, then take their homes, children, or whatever as payment for their debts. They were excommunicated from the synagogue. The rabbis said that repentance was not even possible.

Levi could never say the reason Jesus picked him was because he was so good. NO... in Levi's heart, he was morally bankrupt and he knew it. Yet Jesus came to him, called him by name! Grace comes after you, calls you something that you were not.

So it was with Abraham, the promise came before the law was given, (430 years), before he was circumcised; it could only be received as a gift in faith. This was just the opposite of what the rabbis of the day taught. They said that the promise came to him because of how well he observed the law.

Do you know the reason some people never walk through the doors of a church? Why some come but never jump in with both feet? They think they have to be different, they think they are not good enough yet, but that some day they will be.

We tend to make heroes out of those who have grit, determination, flex their muscles, have willpower, make something happen...

...But what about the mom who is tired, frustrated, sees her children making poor choices, but she continues to pray, love, and serve her family? She is a hero!

...How about the business owner who decides to turn their business over to the Lord and make it His? They will trust Him, not their great marketing plan.

Romans 4:17-19 NLT

That is what the Scriptures mean when God told him, "I have made you the father of many nations." This happened because Abraham believed in the God who brings the dead back to life and who creates new things out of nothing.¹⁸ Even when there was no reason for hope, Abraham kept hoping—believing that he would become the father of many nations. For God had said to him, "That's how many descendants you will have!"¹⁹ And Abraham's faith did not weaken, even though, at about 100 years of age, he figured his body was as good as dead—and so was Sarah's womb.

Faith like Abraham's:

Faith that keeps hoping | 4:17-19

On Palm Sunday, all eyes were on Jesus. To keep hoping, you need all eyes on Jesus.

Look at who He is: The God who brings the dead back to life and creates new things out of nothing. He calls things that are not as though they were.

Look what happens when he speaks! When there was no reason to hope, Abraham kept hoping. Why? "God had said to him..."

Abraham did not close his eyes to the hopelessness of his situation; that is not all he saw. He saw that God is able. Paul said we live by faith not by sight (2 Cor. 5:7). When Paul lost all hope he said to have faith in God. What was the game changer? What God said, and I believe it will be just like He said (Acts 27:25).

There he was – Abraham, 100 years old, looking in the mirror... yikes. When he looked at Sarah... yikes. He thought his 100-year-old body looked as good as dead... but God! But he kept hoping... how could he not?! He

knew that God knew he and Sarah were both old, but He's the One who hung the sun and moon and scattered the stars like sand with both hands! It was ridiculous for Abraham to think their age presented such a Being with an obstacle! Faith is thinking about God, focusing on facts about Him.

His faith did not weaken even though he was driven to despair... why not yet? His faith was not destroyed by delays.

The arch enemy of hope is worry. To keep hoping, you have to stop worrying. Webster's dictionary: fear is defined as "a painful emotion that comes by the expectation of evil."

Hope is the expectation that something good IS going to happen!

Worry means putting more faith in the devil's ability to bring about evil than in God's ability to bring about good.

The average person spends over 14 hours a week worrying about something.

Over a life time that's 45,243 hours or over 5 years.

Why not make a list of what you are not going to worry about? I did.

When you are bound by what you see... you are as good as done. For many of us – dreams die, what could be dies, resolve dies, a little part of our heart dies, because we just can't see getting beyond where we are!

Jesus said in Matt. 6:25-26, 30:

Stop being perpetually uneasy, anxious and worried out your life. Look at the birds. They don't plant or harvest or store food in barns, for your heavenly Father feeds them. And aren't you far more valuable to him than they are? He will certainly care for you.

There is the real reason people worry – they don't know how valuable they are to God. They are not convinced that God is going to take care of them. The only thing that is clear in your sight is what you focus on; everything else is a blur. The key to a life free of worry is focusing on how valuable you are to God!

Romans 4:20-21

Abraham never wavered in believing God's promise. In fact, his faith grew stronger, and in this he brought glory to God. ²¹ He was fully convinced that God is able to do whatever he promises.

Faith like Abraham's:

Faith that grows in adversity | 4:20-21

Abraham never wavered in believing the promise... his faith shows the journey of a faith that was in process. He questioned God, pleaded with God, tried to help God, and his wife laughed at God! Abraham's faith, like ours, was in process... it was growing!

The life of faith is not the perfect life; it is the life which clings to what God has said He will do. It lives through struggles, joys, and failures and grows through it all.

Abraham gave glory to God. Faith is an awareness of who God is! GET YOUR EYES ON HIM!

Jeremiah 17:7-8

But blessed are those who trust in the Lord and have made the Lord their hope and confidence. ⁸ They are like trees planted along a riverbank, with roots that reach deep into the water. Such trees are not bothered by the heat or worried by long months of drought. Their leaves stay green, and they never stop producing fruit.

True faith is growing, strengthening faith. In order to grow, there has to be some tension. It grows in the tension of doubts and disbelief. The truth is faith is not normally found in the Sanctuary on Sunday morning... faith is born in the boxing ring of doubt, impossibility, and meaninglessness.

- Moses... But things are only getting worse! You haven't delivered your promise!
- Abraham... That's all great, but I still don't have a son!
- Gideon... If God is with me, then why did all this happen? Where are all the miracles?

Things, facts, the hard evidence of life were inescapable from Abraham, but they did not rule him. The final word for Abraham was the Promise of God. What Paul wanted the church in Rome to know... something we must know... is that the promise of being counted righteous by faith is a promise for us, too!

Romans 4:22-25 NLT

And because of Abraham's faith, God counted him as righteous. ²³ And when God counted him as righteous, it wasn't just for Abraham's benefit. It was recorded ²⁴ for our benefit, too, assuring us that God will also count us as righteous if we believe in him, the one who raised Jesus our Lord from the dead. ²⁵ He was handed over to die because of our sins, and he was raised to life to make us right with God.

In 1952, Florence Chadwick stepped into the waters of the Pacific Ocean off Catalina Island determined to swim to the shore of California. She'd already been the first woman to swim the English Channel both ways. The weather was foggy and chilly and she could hardly see the boats accompanying her. Still she swam for 15 hours. When she begged to be taken out of the water, her mother was in the boat beside her and told her that she was close and she could make it. Finally, physically and emotionally exhausted, she stopped swimming and was pulled out of the water. It wasn't until she was in the boat that she discovered the shore was less than a half a mile away. At a news conference the next day, she said, "All I could see was fog. I think if I could have seen the shore, I could have made it."

My friend, I want you to see the shore today. I want you to see the victory that is on the other side of this fight. You are not going to just survive this, you are going to thrive. You are going to get through what you are going through. **I want you to see that there is hope for you.**