

Our Trustworthy God

Proper 14 Track 2

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Grant to us, Lord, we pray, the spirit to think and do always those things that are right, that we, who cannot exist without you, may by you be enabled to live according to your will; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. AMEN.

Genesis 15:1-6 (NRSV)

After these things the word of the Lord came to Abram in a vision, “Do not be afraid, Abram, I am your shield; your reward shall be very great.”² But Abram said, “O Lord God, what will you give me, for I continue childless, and the heir of my house is Eliezer of Damascus?”³ And Abram said, “You have given me no offspring, and so a slave born in my house is to be my heir.”⁴ But the word of the Lord came to him, “This man shall not be your heir; no one but your very own issue shall be your heir.”⁵ He brought him outside and said, “Look toward heaven and count the stars, if you are able to count them.” Then he said to him, “So shall your descendants be.”⁶ And he believed the Lord; and the Lord reckoned it to him as righteousness.

Hebrews 11:1-3, 8-16 (NRSV)

Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen.² Indeed, by faith our ancestors received approval.³ By faith we understand that the worlds were prepared by the word of God, so that what is seen was made from things that are not visible.⁸ By faith Abraham obeyed when he was called to set out for a place that he was to receive as an inheritance; and he set out, not knowing where he was going.⁹ By faith he stayed for a time in the land

he had been promised, as in a foreign land, living in tents, as did Isaac and Jacob, who were heirs with him of the same promise.¹⁰ For he looked forward to the city that has foundations, whose architect and builder is God.¹¹ By faith he received power of procreation, even though he was too old--and Sarah herself was barren--because he considered him faithful who had promised.¹² Therefore from one person, and this one as good as dead, descendants were born, “as many as the stars of heaven and as the innumerable grains of sand by the seashore.”¹³ All of these died in faith without having received the promises, but from a distance they saw and greeted them. They confessed that they were strangers and foreigners on the earth,¹⁴ for people who speak in this way make it clear that they are seeking a homeland.¹⁵ If they had been thinking of the land that they had left behind, they would have had opportunity to return.¹⁶ But as it is, they desire a better country, that is, a heavenly one. Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God; indeed, he has prepared a city for them.

Luke 12:32-40 (NRSV)

[Jesus said to his disciples,] “Do not be afraid, little flock, for it is your Father’s good pleasure to give you the kingdom.³³ Sell your possessions, and give alms. Make purses for yourselves that do not wear out, an unfailing treasure in heaven, where no thief comes near and no moth destroys.³⁴ For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.³⁵ “Be dressed for action and have your lamps lit;³⁶ be like those who are waiting for their master to return from the wedding banquet, so that they may open the door for him as soon as he comes and knocks.³⁷ Blessed are those slaves whom the master finds alert when he comes; truly I tell you, he will fasten his belt and have them sit down to eat, and he will come and serve them.³⁸ If he comes during the middle of the night, or near dawn, and finds them so, blessed are those slaves.³⁹ “But know this: if the owner of the house had known at what hour the thief was coming, he would not have let his house be broken into.⁴⁰ You also must be ready, for the Son of Man is coming at an unexpected hour.”

One of the commonplaces of being a Christian is that it’s based on faith. The first verse of our reading from the Letter to the Hebrews, our second reading, defines faith for us. It’s **“the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen.”** From one perspective, it’s saying that faith is reliance on invisible, intangible things. So it’s understandable that to many people faith means relying on unreal or imaginary things. But that’s not faith—it’s delusion. I’m sure you’d agree that someone eagerly awaiting to be rescued from their problems by an alien spaceship is deluded.

Our definition uses two synonyms for faith: **“assurance”** and **“conviction.”** Like faith, people sometimes think of these as arbitrary or subjective, like political opinions. If you have assurance or conviction that one party or candidate is better than the other, then you vote that way. But that’s not faith either—it’s what I just described—opinion.

Let me use a simple, but incomplete example to illustrate biblical, Christian faith. Biblical faith is reliance on something completely reliable. It’s trust in something completely trustworthy. Here’s the incomplete example: when you all sat down after I read the gospel, you trusted that your chairs would hold you. You had faith. You had **“assurance”** and **“conviction.”** And sure enough, no one wound up on the floor!

You might say that trusting your chair isn’t really faith—it’s just a given. It’s part of reality because the chairs have been made to hold you. They’re made to be trustworthy and reliable—of course. But that’s exactly how God defines faith—trust in Someone Who is completely trustworthy and reliance on Someone Who is utterly reliable. The Bible teaches that God is reality itself. That’s what makes the example incomplete. Christian faith isn’t trust in something---it’s trust in Someone.

All three of our Scripture readings this morning underline the trustworthiness and reliability of God. Let’s begin with Abraham in Genesis 15. You’ll recall that Abraham and his wife Sarah were not able to have children. This was extremely painful for them in a culture that valued heirs and descendants above just about everything else. God had already promised Abraham that he and his wife would have children, but it hadn’t happened—and they were getting old. So when the Lord appears to Abraham and says, in effect, **“Don’t worry about a thing, I’m here for you,”** Abraham is skeptical. He says, **“O Lord God, what will you give me, for I continue childless, and the heir of my house is Eliezer of Damascus? You have given me no offspring, and so a slave born in my house is to be my heir.”**

The Lord takes him out and shows him the night sky and assures him that his descendants will outnumber the stars. And then we’re given this comment: **“And he believed the Lord; and the Lord reckoned it to him as righteousness.”**

But Abraham’s wife Sarah realizes she’s getting past childbearing age, so she takes control of the situation, and Abraham goes along with it. She gives her maidservant Hagar to Abraham as a concubine. Hagar has a child,

Ishmael. But then, even in her old age, Sarah gives birth to Isaac, the child God had promised, even though she and Abraham are very old.

Our reading from the Letter to the Hebrews explains Abraham's faith like this: **"By faith he received power of procreation, even though he was too old--and Sarah herself was barren--because he considered him faithful who had promised."**

Having faith in God means trusting in him to do something for us, or to provide something for us. Abraham trusted God to provide him an heir—and he did. But the extraordinary miracle of Isaac being born to Sarah in her old age wasn't just a standalone event. It wasn't just so Abraham could brag to his neighbors about what God had done for him and Sarah. When God provided Abraham with an heir, he was establishing the Jewish people as Abraham's heirs.

But that's not all! The Bible teaches us that when we trust in the trustworthy Son of God Jesus Christ, God makes us Abraham's heirs through faith. You see when Sarah was beyond childbearing age and still gave birth to Isaac, God wasn't simply providing her and Abraham with an heir, or with descendants. God was creating a people for himself. And that people includes us—if we put our trust in the trustworthy Son of God, Jesus Christ. Listen to what Paul says in Galatians 3:6-9: **"Just as Abraham 'believed God, and it was reckoned to him as righteousness,' so, you see, those who believe are the descendants of Abraham. And the scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, declared the gospel beforehand to Abraham, saying, 'All the Gentiles shall be blessed in you.' For this reason, those who believe are blessed with Abraham who believed."** When the Lord first called Abraham to leave his home and go to another land, he told him, **"I will bless those who bless you, and the one who curses you I will curse; and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed."** (Genesis 12:3 NRSV)

Our situation is different from Abraham's. We don't need heirs or descendants, so we're not looking for God to provide them for us. So what do we need? We need a relationship with the eternal God of the Universe. We need assurance of the reality of life beyond this life. Abraham and his descendants the people of Israel knew that this world is not all there is. But in our society, we are conditioned and socialized to see life in this world as all there is.

But in the New Covenant God established in Jesus, he has revealed eternity to us. He has revealed himself as the eternal God who calls his people in Jesus to share eternity with himself. That's why we believe that **"For our sake he**

was crucified under Pontius Pilate; he suffered death and was buried. On the third day he rose again in accordance with the Scriptures; he ascended into heaven and is seated at the right hand of the Father. He will come again in glory to judge the living and the dead, and his kingdom will have no end.”

Life in this world will come to an end for every one of us here this morning. The question we all need to answer is **“where will I spend eternity?”** God has provided the answer for us in his gospel. God’s gospel is the good news that God has exalted his Son Jesus to the position of eternal and absolute authority in the universe. God accomplished this by becoming human, immersing himself in the sin and suffering and death of this world, and becoming the focal point for all the accumulated evil and disobedience of humankind—and then absorbing it into himself. He emerged from death eternally alive. He communicates his life to all who trust in his death and his resurrection as having happened as their own.

The conflict that Jesus so often faced among his own people was the conflict between religion and God himself. Religion has to do with doing things to make God or some god happy. But what God is looking for is faith. God is looking for people who trust in him because he is trustworthy and true. So as you prepare to come to God’s table this morning, examine yourself. What do you believe? Do you believe you’ll spend eternity in heaven with Jesus because you’re a good person and have done good things? Or will you trust in the trustworthy God who had his Son to die in your place and carry all your sins to perdition, and to rise again from the dead so that you can live forever in him? Trust in Christ as you take the tokens of his saving death and resurrection this morning.

Let us pray.