

Our Fear, God's Grace

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Date: 25 May 2025

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[0 : 00] You may be seated. Good morning. My name is Matthew Capone, and I'm one of the pastors here at Cheyenne Mountain Presbyterian Church,! And it's my joy to bring God's word to you today.

A special welcome if you're new or visiting with us. We're glad that you're here. And we're glad that you're here not because we're trying to fill seats, but because we're following Jesus together as one community.

And as we follow Jesus together, we become convinced that there's no one so good. They don't need God's grace. And no one so bad that they can't have it.

Which is why we come back week after week to hear what God has to say to us in his word. We're continuing this morning our series in the book of Genesis on the story of Abraham.

Genesis tells the origin story of Israel, God's people, which begins with Abraham. And that's our focus. We're not doing the entire book, but instead looking just at chapters 11 through 25.

[1 : 03] And the reason for that, as I've been telling you, is to prepare us to go back to our series on Romans. Because when we return to Romans chapter 4, Paul will be telling us about Abraham.

It's also a great chance for us to ask the question, what does it look like for us to follow God in faith? This week and next week, we are going to see two different threats to faith.

This week, it's going to be the threat of pragmatism and fear. And next week, it's the threat of comfort and wealth. And so with that, I invite you to turn with me in God's word to Genesis chapter 12.

You can turn in your worship guide. You can turn on your phone. You can turn in your Bible. No matter where you turn, Proverbs chapter 30, verse 5 tells us every word of God proves true.

He's a shield to those who take refuge in Him. And so that's why we read now Genesis chapter 12, starting at verse 10. Now there was a famine in the land.

[2 : 10] So Abram went down to Egypt to sojourn there, for the famine was severe in the land. When he was about to enter Egypt, he said to Sarai, his wife, I know that you are a woman beautiful in appearance.

And when the Egyptians see you, they will say, this is his wife. Then they will kill me, but they will let you live. Verse 13.

Say you are my sister, that it may go well with me because of you, and that my life may be spared for your sake. When Abram entered Egypt, the Egyptians saw that the woman was very beautiful.

And when the princes of Pharaoh saw her, they praised her to Pharaoh. And the woman was taken into Pharaoh's house. And for her sake, he dealt well with Abram.

And he had sheep, oxen, male donkeys, male servants, female servants, female donkeys, and camels. Verse 17. But the Lord afflicted Pharaoh and his house with great plagues because of Sarai, Abram's wife.

[3 : 21] So Pharaoh called Abram and said, What is this you have done to me? Why did you not tell me that she was your wife? Why did you say, she is my sister?

So that I took her for my wife. Now then, here is your wife. Take her and go. And Pharaoh gave men orders concerning him, and they sent him away with his wife and all that he had.

I invite you to pray with me as we come to this portion of God's word. Our Father in heaven, we do praise you and we thank you again this morning that you have given us your word.

That you speak to us in ways that we can understand. And we ask that you would do that again this morning. That you would use this passage in a powerful way in this community and in our lives.

You would use it to grow our knowledge of you. You'd use it to increase our love for you. Most of all, you would use it to show us Jesus. That we would love him and serve him more and more.

[4 : 27] And we ask these things in his mighty name. Amen. For my first three years after college, I lived in Williamsburg, Virginia.

And among its many claims to fame, well, one of Williamsburg's features is that it has Busch Gardens, the amusement park. And so as locals, the popular thing to do would be to buy an annual pass.

And then what we would do is we would go in the evenings just for a couple hours to skip the crowds. And so we would laugh at all the tourists who had to come, pay an overpriced fee for one day, and have to fit everything in to however many hours they were there.

And so we kind of pat ourselves on the back, right? We could show up whenever we wanted, ride a few rides, go back home, it would be there for us tomorrow. Now, if you're familiar with amusement parks, you know that there are two kinds of people in this world.

There are people that love roller coasters, and there are people that hate roller coasters. And the Capone family is on the team hate roller coasters. I will say I'm a slight exception.

[5 : 41] I am willing to tolerate them. So I can ride a roller coaster maybe two at max three times in a day, and then I'm done. But I knew people who would go, and they would just ride them all day.

Now, I think, how can your body, like, manage this? But for whatever reason, it had its attraction.

Now, there's another ride at Busch Gardens called the Mock Tower, and it is what it sounds like.

It was a drop tower, which is a tower, and it was 23 stories high. And what you would do is you would get strapped into this gondola, and you would slowly ride up the tower, all 23 stories.

You'd get to look out the great views of Virginia, and then suddenly you would get sent into a complete free fall. You ride up slowly, and then you go down quickly, and you get to experience dropping 23 stories, which I know is the desire of many of your hearts.

I bring up the drop tower because it helps us understand what's happening in this story, and it really captures where we're at in Genesis right now.

[6 : 52] Last couple weeks, we've had this slow ascent with beautiful views of how wonderful Abraham and his faith are. God tells him to go.

He doesn't tell him where, and what does Abraham do? He goes. Hebrews chapter 11 presents him as this great model and example of faith. Look at Abraham, who risked more than any of us ever will.

We have these amazing promises that we talked about last week, this beautiful vision of how Abraham's going to be a blessing to the nations, and we see him as he travels around the promised land.

He's setting up these altars and worshiping God. I mean, how could it get any better? Abraham, what a great example.

And then verse 10. Suddenly, in one verse, the cord is pulled. The beautiful vision is over.

[7 : 54] The gondola begins to drop in free fall back to earth. Abraham is still a man. He's sinful.

He's fearful. He's flawed. And he still lives in a world wrecked by sin. And so that takes us right here, the beginning, verse 10.

Yes, God has promised blessing, and it's not all going to happen right now. Now there was a famine in the land.

Yes, God has given this beautiful vision. Abraham still lives in a world filled with famines. Same is true of our lives today, right?

Great promises. Great realism. You may have these great moments in your marriage, right, where you have come together with just clarity and inspiration, and the two of you are focused on God and his kingdom, and you're excited about what the future holds.

[9 : 06] And then in the next moment, you have a fight because your spouse has jumped to conclusions about something you said and didn't believe the best of you.

Maybe you have a vision of how you're going to use your resources for good and bless the community around you, and you're filled with excitement about it, and then the stock market drops, and you have nowhere near the wealth you thought you did.

Maybe you've developed the gifts that God has given you, and you have work that has power and purpose and inspiration to it, and then the next day you get laid off or you're fired.

Verse 10 reminds us, as we look at God's great promises and the future that is before us, we do still live east of Eden.

We do still live in a world wrecked by sin. Now, it's not just the circumstances that come crashing down. What happens here also reveals the cracks in Abraham's character.

[10:20] Remember, we've seen him. He has this great faith. He takes God at his word. He leaves everything behind, and then, very quickly, the next story, not so great faith.

Instead, what he has for us is fear and anxiety. He's entering the land of Egypt because of this famine. In verse 13, right away, he decides he's going to cook up a lie.

Say that you are my sister, that it may go well with me because of you. And it's not just that he's lying. He's lying because he's afraid. We see there in verses 11 and 12, I know that you are a beautiful woman.

When they see you, they're going to kill me. So let's tell a lie. We're going to tell a lie because I'm afraid of what happens if I don't. And even worse than that, we're going to tell a lie, verse 13, because I'm selfish.

That my life may be spared for your sake, which is what every wife longs for her husband to say to her.

[11:33] No, he's doing the exact opposite of what he should be, right? He should be putting himself to protect Sarai. Instead, Sarai is being used as a shield to protect him.

Problem is this. Genesis chapter 12, verse 2, God made a promise. And God's promise to Abraham was this, I will make of you a great nation.

If Abraham gets killed, which is his fear, there will be no great nation. Abraham doesn't believe that God will do what he said he's going to do.

Abraham doesn't believe that God is powerful enough to actually keep his word without a little help. If I don't lie, this is the thinking, God's plan will be thwarted.

And so he takes matters into his own hands. The irony here is that as he takes matters into his own hands, he's incredibly foolish. This is not even a great plan. It's not just that for God's promise to come true, Abraham has to keep living.

[12:54] Sarai also has to keep moving. And so he puts her at risk even as he saves himself. For the promise to be fulfilled, actually both of them have to make it out of Egypt intact.

And yet in Abraham's world, the means justifies the ends. His fear gets in the way of his faith.

One man puts it this way, pragmatism is the opposite of faith. And pragmatism is the opposite of faith because it doesn't leave room for God's supernatural power to be at work in the world.

And so it decides not to follow first principles to trust that God will protect and honor. The great Presbyterian minister Francis Schaeffer, who lived in the 20th century, preached a sermon called God's Work in God's Ways, which is exactly what it sounds like.

That if we're going to follow God in his mission, we don't get to make it up as we go along. No, it doesn't make sense to follow God and then operate by our own principles. It doesn't make sense to say, God is going to keep his promise and I have to lie to make it happen.

[14:14] And in that sermon, he says this, this is on page seven of your worship guide. Let us ask ourselves the hard questions. Do we really believe God exists?

Do we really believe God exists? And do we really believe God?

If you sacrifice your integrity to keep your job, you don't believe that God will provide for you. If we cheat and cut corners, we do not believe that God has or will give us enough.

If we put our ultimate hope in children and success and wealth and pleasure and comfort, then we do not believe what we sang earlier today, in his glory is my good.

First Samuel chapter two says this, it's from God who's making this statement. Those who honor me, I will honor and those who despise me shall be lightly esteemed.

[15:35] Those who honor me, I will honor. Good words here for Abraham to remember.

Good words for us as well. Of course, it reminds us, this passage of the story that men of great faith, women of great faith are still works in progress.

still tempted by fear, still find it challenging, but to believe that God will do what he's promised.

And so that's why we sing things like what we sang this morning. A mighty fortress is our God. Did we in our own strength confide, our striving would be losing.

We're not the right man on our side, the man of God's own choosing. Christian, do you believe the right man is on your side?

[16:44] If you do, you can follow God and his word no matter the risk. Thankfully, this story, as it shows us Abraham's failure, is also, and even more, dripping with God's grace.

Because despite Abraham's sin and failure and unbelief, God is still faithful. despite Abraham's failure, God keeps his promises.

I mentioned already God's promise in verse 2 of chapter 12 that he is going to make Abraham a great nation. I'm sorry, verse 3.

But that's not the only promise that shows up in verse 3. He also says this, Him who dishonors you I will curse, and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed.

What happens to Pharaoh? Verse 17, God keeps his promise to curse. The Lord afflicted Pharaoh and his house with great plagues because of Sarai, Abram's wife.

[18 : 11] So God provides a way up. He curses those who dishonor Abram. And he does it despite Abram's failure and sin and fear.

Abram foolishly thinks he needs to protect himself. He thinks he's smart enough. What we see here is only God is powerful enough.

As Abram puts together this silly plan to save his skin, it's actually God who rescues him from Egypt.

The point is this. The nature of God is that he keeps his promises in the middle of our failures.

The nature of God is that he keeps his promises despite our failures. Remember when we were in the book of Judges, I told you over and over about 2 Timothy 2, verse 13.

[19 : 25] If we are faithless, he remains faithful for he cannot deny himself. Abraham is faithless.

God remains faithful because he cannot deny himself. What did we sing? Page 2 of your worship guide.

Great is thy faithfulness. O God, my Father, there is no shadow of turning with thee. Abraham turns, God does not.

Keeps his promises no matter what. And in that, there's great encouragement and humility for us. Encouragement because God does not abandon us when we forget him.

God does not abandon us when we forget him. there's also great humility because it reminds us of what God tells his people all throughout the Old Testament which is this.

[20 : 41] I didn't choose you because you were anything special. I didn't pick you because you were hot stuff. No, I chose you because I chose you.

don't pat yourself on the back. Don't assume you're more moral than the world around you. By the way, Pharaoh in this story is more upright than Abraham, which is a theme we'll see again.

The man who doesn't believe in Yahweh, more faithful than the one who does. Pagans look better than Abraham. They look better than God's people. God chose you because he chose you.

It's what we're told in Psalm 103. As a father shows compassion to his children, so the Lord shows compassion to those who fear him.

For he knows our frame. He remembers that we are only dust. Christian, if you are faithless, God remains faithful, for he cannot deny himself.

[22 : 01] And how do we know that's true? We know it's true for a better and greater reason than Abraham. We have more reason to trust God than his people in the Old Testament because we have seen and we know what they only looked forward to, which is Jesus and his death and his resurrection.

We have more reason to take God at his word because we have seen that he has kept it in the most important way. He's kept it in sending his son, his only son, to become a man, to live the perfect life that we should have lived, to die the death we should have died, and then he rose him from the dead.

And so because of that, we know that God is a God who will keep his promises. We can follow him, we can trust him, no matter what.

And so that's why we can sing, hallelujah, all I have is Christ, hallelujah, Jesus is my life. Let's pray. Our Father in heaven, we praise you and thank you that our belonging to you does not depend on us and our faithfulness, but on you and your faithfulness.

We thank you that when we are faithless, you are faithful, for you cannot deny yourself. We ask that you remind us of that truth, and it would lead us to love and follow and serve and obey you.

[23 : 38] We ask these things in Jesus' name. Amen. I invite you to stand. for our closing hymn.