Notes For Sermon on June 5, 2022

“The Simple Footsteps of Faith”

Mario Moses Camacho

**Old Testament Reading: Genesis 14:17-15:6 (pg. 13, pew bible)**

“After his return from the defeat of Chedorlaomer and the kings who were with him, the king of Sodom went out to meet him at the Valley of Shaveh (that is, the King’s Valley). And Melchizedek king of Salem brought out bread and wine. (He was priest of God Most High.) And he blessed him and said,

“Blessed be Abram by God Most High, Possessor of heaven and earth;

and blessed be God Most High, who has delivered your enemies into your hand!”

“And Abram gave him a tenth of everything. And the king of Sodom said to Abram, “Give me the persons, but take the goods for yourself.” But Abram said to the king of Sodom, “I have lifted my hand to the Lord, God Most High, Possessor of heaven and earth, that I would not take a thread or a sandal strap or anything that is yours, lest you should say, ‘I have made Abram rich.’ I will take nothing but what the young men have eaten, and the share of the men who went with me. Let Aner, Eshcol, and Mamre take their share.”

“After these things the word of the Lord came to Abram in a vision: “Fear not, Abram, I am your shield; your reward shall be very great.” 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?” And Abram said, “Behold, you have given me no offspring, and a member of my household will be my heir.” And behold, the word of the Lord came to him: “This man shall not be your heir; your very own son shall be your heir.” And he brought him outside and said, “Look toward heaven, and number the stars, if you are able to number them.” Then he said to him, “So shall your offspring be.” And he believed the Lord, and he counted it to him as righteousness.”

* **New Testament Reading: Romans 4:13-25** (pg. 1197, pew bible)

“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. For if it is the adherents of the law who are to be the heirs, faith is null and the promise is void. For the law brings wrath, but where there is no law there is no transgression. 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, as it is written, “I have made you the father of many nations”—in the presence of the God in whom he believed, who gives life to the dead and calls into existence the things that do not exist. In hope he believed against hope, that he should become the father of many nations, as he had been told, “So shall your offspring be.”

“He did not weaken in faith when he considered his own body, which was as good as dead (since he was about a hundred years old), or when he considered the barrenness of Sarah’s womb. No unbelief made him waver concerning the promise of God, but he grew strong in his faith as he gave glory to God, fully convinced that God was able to do what he had promised. That is why his faith was “counted to him as righteousness.” But the words “it was counted to him” were not written for his sake alone, but for ours also. It will be counted to us who believe in him who raised from the dead Jesus our Lord, who was delivered up for our trespasses and raised for our justification.”

Sermon – “The Simple Footsteps of Faith” by Moses Camacho

**Introduction**

Some weeks ago I went on a trip to attend an ordination retreat. It’s a mandatory retreat that’s part of my current process of becoming an ordained minister in the church. It was more of an intensive than it was a retreat, sessions involving the history of ECO, reviewing assessments we took, interviews with staff / pastors / assessors as well as getting to meet other ordination candidates from all over the country.

My roommate at the hotel was a gentleman named Wael Melek. He emigrated from Egypt some time ago and settled in Richmond, VA. We had such wonderful conversations getting to know each other and a couple things really stood out to me: He’s serving at an Arabic, ECO church in Richmond called “The Christian Arabic Church.” The congregation, a little more than 200 people, is made up of predominantly Middle Eastern immigrants and refugees. He also told me the story about a tattoo on his wrist. On his inner wrist he had a small Coptic cross. He told me that historically, the overwhelming Muslim society, in the middle eastern and northern Africa, used to brand Christians with this mark. Yet, this mark now has become a symbol of their faith, of pride in what they believe. They wear it proudly despite the persecution they may face. Many people Wael meets have this mark. When they arrive in the states he hears their sad and horrible stories of tragedies that cause them to flee their homes and countries. But he noticed a common element among the Christians he meets: their faith in God remained strong and always grew. They may be refugees, unable to see what will come next, but their hope has only grown in the God who has promised them hope.

**Transition**: When I heard those stories from Wael, it moved me deeply seeing his smile and pride in his people. It got me thinking and led me to see the common theme of living faith in the Word of God. As we heard from Paul in Romans, one of the great examples of having living faith is Abraham, the patriarch. Before focusing on what happens in Gen. 14, let’s look at the context of Abraham’s story.

**The Call and Obstacles**

**(It starts in Gen. 12).** Before his name was changed to *Abraham* by the Lord, God called *Abram* to leave his father’s house to a land he would show him. Abram had no idea where he was going to end up, but God promised: to lead him, to make him into a great nation and that he would be a blessing to the nations. If we look in Ch. 12, we can see Abram what says… actually we won’t see what he says since Scripture only records him immediately obeying the Lord. “He went, as the LORD had told him.” Oh, and he was 75 years old at the start of his story. We don’t know much about this man at this point, but for whatever reason, the Lord called him, and he obeyed by trusting God completely.

Later on, they arrive in Canaan and God appears to Abram saying, “To your offspring I will give this land.” [This moment reminds me a lot of when Mufasa and Simba, from the Lion King, were on a hill and Mufasa says, “Look Simba, everything that the light touches is our kingdom.”… The difference being Abram had no “Simba” and no land. Only having God’s Word, Abram did not say anything to the Lord. The Bible does say that he built an altar in worship and called on the name of the Lord. Seems like this man is truly trusting God.

Sadly, it’s not too long before that trust seems to vanish. Actually, it’s in the same chapter, when a famine that came in the land caused Abram and his wife Sarai to go to Egypt for food and refuge. But when he was there, they deceived Pharaoh by saying she wasn’t his wife so they wouldn’t kill Abram. Was this an action of someone who deeply trusted God to protect him? No, not really. Abram is still human, a part of him did trust and believe the Lord, but he is still a part of fallen creation. Still, the Bible tells us that God and delivered Abram and his wife from their trouble. And, they ended up leaving Egypt a lot more rich than when they came in.

**(Entering Gen. 13)** We see that not only had Abram become rich. His cousin, Lot, who traveled with Abram, also grew quite wealthy, to the point where the land could not support them both. Remarkably, Abram chooses the way of peace and generosity by letting Lot have the first choice of the land. Lot, understandably, chooses the part of the land that looks perfect to the eye, but then finds himself near the wicked city of Sodom. It was after Lot left that the Lord appeared again to Abram and reaffirmed his promise to him: to give him and his offspring the land, adding that they would be as numerous as the dust on the earth. Ooh, what a promise! Still, no response from Abram, but his faith is reaffirmed and encouraged from this reminder of God’s promise. Abram then built another altar to the Lord and worshipped him.

**(Thus we reach a small pause in Abram’s story as we enter Ch. 14)**

Remember, Moses is writing down Israel’s history for the people at Mount Sinai. Everything Moses writes down is meant to be with purpose. So why is he including this story here and what does it have to do with Abraham? I believe it’s so that the people of Israel see that conflict with nations goes back as far as Abraham. When we read this passage, we see it’s the first mention of war in Genesis, involving kingdom rebellion and military conquest. 5 large Canaanite kingdoms and their kings rebelled against their 4 Mesopotamian overlords which lived in the East. Naturally, they didn’t like that. However, the 4 kings defeated the 5. The level of defeat is the equivalent of kicking over a sand-castle. The 4 kings plundered everything; Animals, riches, people including Abram’s cousin, Lot and all his family and possessions. Remember how rich Lot was!

When the dust settles, a survivor from the aftermath of all that war comes to Abram and passes on to him everything that has happened.

**[Question:]** By this point, Abram has become extremely wealthy and it’s estimated he was around 80 years old. Let’s put ourselves in Abram’s sandals for a moment: God has told you, has promised you, that you’re going to inherit this land (from Corpus to Houston, everything in between, will belong to you and your children). You’ve already begun to see a small piece of that coming true. What would you do? Your cousin was taken, but, he made his choice, right? He should’ve known the risks and where he chose to settle. What responsibility is it of mine to risk everything and get involved?... (Hmm…)

The beauty of Scripture is how it reveals details that build a person, constructing pieces of their heart and character, giving us some insight as to why God may have chosen that person.

It says in Gen 14:14 that **as soon** as Abram heard about his cousin, this rich, old, childless man prepared himself for war. Not on a mission to conquer, but to **rescue** his family. He would be someone leaving the comfort, safety and riches of their life to save someone else… doesn’t that sound familiar in our own story of salvation? Thus, Abram chose 318 men, trained and loyal to him. They chased after those kings and the Bible is clear: Abram and his men were so victorious that they not only routed the kings far and wide, they came back with everything and everyone, (imagine it, 5 kingdoms-worth of spoils!!)! Abram’s name would have echoed all throughout the Ancient Near Eastern world. This was it, he had the spoils, animals, the people, the riches worth kingdoms… if he wanted the land, he would only have to reach out and take it.

**{Application}** I could certainly empathize with that temptation. Was God going to make it happen? Or was I supposed to seize the moment when it came? It’s a thin line between acting in faith and trust of the Lord, and acting in selfish ambition. We know for ourselves how selfish ambition plagues us and the world around us. We don’t need to look hard: the invasion of Ukraine and the joyful world of politics (outside and inside the church at times). What about the more personal… how has ungodly desire affected our relationships? The times to seize an opportunity to save your pride, build yourself up, and we simply tear someone down out of hatred or bitterness or ambition, attacking integrity, character, or we become passive aggressive and cut them out, or we speak ill directly toward them and attack even the people we love… Let’s not forget to mention how getting what we want has affected the church. People go and get involved in a church and I hate knowing of the stories of many people leaving to the next one to find one which suits their standards and desires and appeases them and gives them what they want. How do we feel when pastors desert a congregation for those same reasons?... It’s a thin line between acting in faith and trust of the Lord, and acting in selfish ambition.

**[Transition:]** God is going to give Abram the land. The land belonged to those kings. Abram conquered them and dominion reverted to him. But, Abram was simply trying to rescue Lot and his family. And now, the result of his victory meant that he was in a position to seize power, to take what has been promised to him. Is this the way God is going to give him the land?[[1]](#footnote-1)

**The Submission And Foreshadowing**

Now we find ourselves at Genesis 14:17. Abram must be returning in huge spirits of celebration and victory. But as he is returning home, he is met by two kings, and notice how each approached him:

1. You have the King of Sodom who came empty handed.
2. You have the King of Salem, the mysterious Melchizedek, who comes bearing a generous gift of bread and wine.
3. The king of Sodom seems to demand his people back, shortsightedly, with a profound rudeness, expressing no gratitude of any kind, offering Abram to keep all the property for himself as if a “generous gift” from this king.
4. Melchizedek, on the other hand, asks for nothing, but instead blesses Abram and blesses “*El Elyon”,* “God Most High,” revealing to Abram that they worship the same God.
5. Here’s what I’m seeing:
	1. The offer of the King of Sodom is the way of man: shortsighted, stubborn, always looking for a shortcut.
	2. The blessing and reminder of who God is by the King of Salem seems to me the way of God: to remember it’s the Creator of the heavens and the earth who gives enemies into your hand, in his time.

We see that Abram is presented with a choice: if he takes Sodom’s offer, Abram keeps all the property, thus seeming like the fulfillment of God’s promise, (right on schedule)! It’s a tempting decision to make! Let’s keep in mind that Abram wasn’t the only one put in a position like this:

We could start with the Fall, at the temptation of Adam and Eve. They were offered a shortcut to wisdom, but they failed to recognize it as inferior and they submitted to the temptation and ate from the tree.

In 1 Samuel 24 and 26, David, who was anointed when he was a shepherd boy, was told that he would be king. He went on to serve in the King’s palace under King Saul, and eventually was twice put in a position where he could take that which had been promised to him. On one occasion, Saul is hunting David down, convinced David is trying to steal his throne. As Saul hunts David and his men among the caves, Saul gets tired and falls asleep leaving himself vulnerable. David’s men find Saul sleeping and tell David about it: “This is the day the Lord spoke of when he said to you, ‘I will give your enemy into your hands for you to deal with as you wish’ ” (1 Sam. 24:4). David is to have the throne, but was this the way it was going to happen? No, and he refused to lay a hand on “God’s anointed.”

Let’s certainly not forget Jesus Christ in the Gospels. Following his baptism, he’s driven out into the desert, where he is tempted by Satan. He puts him above the temple and tells him that all the kingdoms of the world are to belong to him. Satan offers it all to Jesus if he will only bow down to him. Yet, the Lord Jesus recognized that he was being offered an inferior shortcut and, with less confidence, so did David.

There is much to be said for seizing opportunities as they arise and confronting the deception of our insecurities or living our lives to the expectations of others. I certainly believe there are times when God wants us to step out in faith rather than sit around and wait for him to do something. **But**, there are times when submitting is better than seizing as we seek the will of God in order to achieve our potential and fulfill our callings in this life. Paul, in Roman 4, calls Abraham, “The Father of All Who Believe,” another way of saying “The Father of Faith.” Why? In Genesis 14, we see a beautiful example of living faith which set the standard of faith for all who would dare to heed to call of the Lord.

Abram **submits** to this priest-king by paying a tithe. (Now, I know that might be a trigger word for some of you, but don’t worry we won’t be passing the collection plate around… it will however be waiting for you in the back)… but he pays a tithe, a tenth of everything: It’s unimaginable how much that must have been considering the immense wealth Abram had, but the whole point was to express submission to God and affirm the truth of the blessing the king spoke over him. This was an immense act of faith. We can also see this faith in how he responds to the King of Sodom: “I have lifted my hand to “*YHWH El* Elyon”, the Lord, God Most High, Possessor of heaven and earth, that I would not take a thread or a sandal strap or anything that is yours, lest you should say, ‘I have made Abram rich.’”

Outside of the share of the men who came with him, Abram kept nothing that he plundered and returned everything of his share of the wealth, down to the smallest of sandal straps. Abram gave up a chance for the land, eventually to gain the land. David gave up a chance for the crown, eventually to gain the crown. Christ gave up a chance for the kingdoms, eventually to gain the kingdom. When preparing ourselves for our role in God’s plan or to receive God’s blessing, it is often counterproductive to take the easy way to the goal. [[2]](#footnote-2)

**[Transition}** I bet many of us, especially those of us a little older and wiser, can testify to how unfortunate it was to try and rush God’s plan for your life. How hard was it when you tried to take on life, trusting in your own strength, (or maybe how hard is it right now)? Maybe some of us made it far with no complaints. At least in my life, I had all I thought I wanted, and I felt lost, alone, miserable and just empty. When I read this story, and I think about Abraham, it strikes me as a pivotal moment in time when an “ungodly” man chose to fully place his trust, and full dependence in God and not on his own strength and even kings! It’s a true picture and illustration of someone trusting the Lord to do what he promised he was going to do and that he is who he says he is. This is what impresses God with Abram in Genesis 15.

**The Power Of Simple Faith**

The words “after these things,” is meant to say that what happens here is connected to the narrative beforehand. It’s to say that if you skip everything before, you’ll miss the significance of the now. We don’t know how long after the Lord appeared to Abram. But we can catch a few things.

The Lord knows what’s in the heart. The first thing he says is Fear not, Abram. By name, he calls out to this man, who has shown tremendous faith and loyalty to the Lord God Most High. He gave up the opportunity to have the land because he trusted God. And he was most likely feeling afraid, “did he lose it? Did he mess up God’s plan?” I am so thankful that there is nothing in all the earth that I can do to mess up the plan of God. God comforts and encourages Abram when he says: “I am your shield;” and “your reward will be very great.”

I wish I could hear that and never have to experience doubt or fear again. But I can also relate very much to expressing frustration and fear to God.

Two things to mention: It’s the 1st time Abram speaks to God in a conversation; secondly, Abram specifically expresses his unhappiness with the plan so far. He doesn’t disrespect or dishonor God, he’s very careful about that, but he shares his doubt and fear. “All this mention of land and offspring, yet I still remain childless, Lord.,, I’m about 80 years old. My servant will end up having all of this…” I am moved by this interesting detail: ever notice in conversation between people and God when it says, “Abram said… and Abram said.” If it’s the same conversation, why would an author repeat himself. Just doesn’t make sense right?

What it is is a literary marker to say, the Lord didn’t respond to him… at least not immediately. It means that a certain amount of time must have passed, with silence in between, (it could’ve been minutes, it could’ve been hours), before Abram spoke up again and said, “Behold, you have given me no offspring, and a member of my household will be the heir.” As if God has not heard him and he’s emphasizing the heart behind his doubt.

Let me ask us a question, do you think it is possible to struggle with doubt while maintaining faith?... I would say it is. Many times in my life I find myself praying the prayer of the father with his convulsing son at the feet of Jesus, “I believe, help my unbelief.” To walk on the water with Jesus, yet to start sinking and to cry out, Help me Lord, save me.

To quote the late Rabbi Chanan Brichto, he says this:

“…faith…is not a constant. It is a light which blazes like a thousand suns—at some times; at others, it flickers dimly, casting shadows of changing shapes. But even when it is weak we struggle to brighten the flame—for it is the most precious of commodities. Man knows no blackness to match the darkness when that light has gone out. And no man who has ever seen it will rest happy until it is rekindled. And when it burns bright, all other lamps are feeble.[[3]](#footnote-3)”

The reason Jesus tells his disciples that faith the size of a mustard seed can move mountains is because faith, even that small, placed in the biggest strongest and most mighty Creator, is well placed. Is invaluable, is enormous faith. This is what impressed God about Abraham. The Lord took him outside, showed him all the stars in the heavens and tells him, you will have your own son, and your descendants will be as numerous as the stars. Abram did not say anything, he simply believed. Really, He did not simply believe. In taking God at his word, he embraced faith. This is NOT to be confused with salvation, at least here in this moment. Abram simply had faith in God and took him at his word. God is always impressed with faith. Do you want to impress God? Have faith. Our sacrifices of time, money, resources do not impress God unless they are motivated by faith. All over the Gospels we see how Jesus is moved not by the amount of our experience, our money, our talents or gifts, it is our faith that impresses him.

[Application:] And this kind of faith goes beyond just trusting God he’s going to fulfill a promise. Maybe you or someone you know was laid off and don’t know how bills will be paid; maybe you’ve been given some new responsibilities and have no idea how you will follow through or achieve them. Maybe you have some family or friends going through some difficult health situations wondering what’s going to happen next. Whatever circumstance of life you find yourself in, living faith is not just saying you believe in Jesus as Lord once and you’re done. It’s the kind of faith that lives and moves everyday within you, constantly trusting that God is with you, in all that you do, and who **He is** never changes, meaning his goodness, his faithfulness, his love for you, has been the same since the beginning and will be till the end. That’s the kind of faith that moves the heart of God, and therefore he calls us righteous in his eyes.

**Conclusion**

God certainly appreciates hard work, honesty, purity… But those are the basics. It is our faith that is most capable of impressing him. Biblical faith is more than conviction. Faith in Scripture means it is a claim to knowledge of a higher order of reality. It’s why Paul tells us that this faith, placed in God, placed in His Son Jesus, counts as righteousness, right standing before God, affirming and proclaiming that Jesus is who he says he is, and he has done and will do all that he has promised; that he died on the cross and truly rose from the grave for our forgiveness and freedom from sin.

Abram placed all his hope in God. He’s been before kings, he has experienced wealth and victory, but above it all, the most valuable thing to him is the Word of God which gave him the power to hope against all hope. Abraham will make mistakes as the story continues to unfold, we will make mistakes too, but this kind of faith is about simply believing that God is who he says he is, and that faith doesn’t change when our sin and foolishness gets the better of us. I exhort you church, Have Faith—faith in God’s attributes, faith that he can and will do what he says he will do, faith that he cares about you and me and the world, faith that he is sovereign (absolutely powerful and reigning as King over all things), faith that he is good.[[4]](#footnote-4) Amen?

Let’s Pray…

1. From [*Genesis*](https://ref.ly/logosres/nivac01ge?ref=Bible.Ge13-15&off=33322&ctx=+covenant+advances.%0a~Chapter+14+is+linked), The NIV Application Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2001), 425. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. John H. Walton, [*Genesis*](https://ref.ly/logosres/nivac01ge?ref=Bible.Ge13-15&off=58392&ctx=s+father%E2%80%99s+control.%0a~There+is+much+to+be+), The NIV Application Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2001), 434–435. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. John H. Walton, [*Genesis*](https://ref.ly/logosres/nivac01ge?ref=Bible.Ge13-15&off=75594&ctx=s+we+hold+by+faith.%0a~But+faith%E2%80%94unlike+the), The NIV Application Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2001), 441. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. John H. Walton, [*Genesis*](https://ref.ly/logosres/nivac01ge?ref=Bible.Ge13-15&off=76090&ctx=r+lamps+are+feeble.%0a~This+is+what+impress), The NIV Application Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2001), 441. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)