

## **The Journey**

Genesis 13

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Peter Hiatt

*“God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten son, that whosoever believes in him, should not perish but have everlasting life.”*

Do you believe?

One of the greatest performers of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century was a French tightrope walker named Charles Blondin. In 1859, he successfully crossed the raging cataract of the Saint Lawrence River on a tight rope: the uncrossable chasm we call Niagara Falls. Blondin actually crossed it several times: once blindfolded, once in a sack, once pushing a wheel barrow, once sitting down midway and eating an omelet.

On one occasion (for which he is perhaps most famous), 10,000 people gathered on each side of the falls. He left the Canadian side with all 10,000 screaming, “We believe, we believe!” He inched his way ever so carefully along that narrowest of paths, 1,100 feet across, 160 feet above the abyss. When he arrived at the US side, 10,000 more were waiting. They all cheered and chanted their praise... like the crowds must have chanted for Jesus on Palm Sunday when He rode into Jerusalem. Like that, they all chanted, “Blondin! Blondin! Blondin!” He raised his hands, quieted the crowd, and then he said, “I’m going back across the falls on the rope, but this time I will carry a man on my back. Do you believe I can do it? Do you believe?” The crowd went nuts, “We believe, we believe, we believe!” Over and over, they chanted into frenzy, “We believe, we believe!” Once again, Blondin calmed the crowd and then he called out, “So then, which of you will be that man?” Funny thing, but at that point, the crowd grew fairly silent. “Who will be that man?” he asked. Silence. Finally, one man began to work his way to the front of the crowd. He climbed on Blondin’s back. He was carried across the chasm from one kingdom to another.

What that man had was faith. Now his faith wasn’t unreasonable, was it? The entire crowd had just acknowledged the reasonableness of what he did. In fact, his faith was reason (*logos* in Greek)—*Logos* that had already made the trip from his head to his heart. Reasonable, yet the crowd probably thought him a fool.

Philosophically speaking, we all have faith in something (usually ourselves). But biblically speaking, faith is faith in God. It starts like a seed and grows into a kingdom. “Christians” are folks that say they believe that God crossed the chasm in Jesus the Christ. Now Jesus stands in our midst and asks, “Do you believe?” We chant, “We believe, we believe, we believe!” And He says stuff like this: “Then love your wife as I love the church.” “Sell your possessions, give to the poor, and follow me.” “Love as I have loved you.” “You believe I crossed the chasm? Then pick up your cross and come follow... In faith, without fear, rejoicing in me always.”

Do you believe?

Let’s pray: Father, we believe. Help our unbelief. Please, please, please... help our unbelief. Send your Word, your seed, and let it grow. Amen.

Last time we began talking about Abraham. In the New Testament, Abraham is called “the man of faith” and “the Father of all who believe.” Abraham had what Eve and the First Adam lacked. You’ll remember that they took the knowledge of good and lacked faith in the good. They were exiled from the garden, which the Jews believed was somewhere near Mt. Moriah. Well, Abraham had faith, but he didn’t always have faith. His faith was a gift he didn’t deserve. But the gift came through a process... and it grew from a mustard seed into an entire new creation.

Genesis 12:1 *“Now the Lord said...”*

Just 12 chapters ago, the “*Lord said,*” and all creation sprang into existence. What God says is His word and Scripture tells us His word is named Jesus. In the beginning, He spoke His Word into nothing and made everything. He speaks His Word into Abram like a seed, a promised seed.

Genesis 12:1 *“Now the Lord said to Abram...”*

It doesn’t tell us how he heard, but that God spoke. Sometimes God speaks and everything moves. God speaks through creation; He speaks through circumstance, open doors, and our conscience. Sometimes He speaks through hopes and dreams planted deep in our soul. Sometimes through words of knowledge and prophetic gifts. God speaks through Scripture. God spoke to Abram and Abram probably felt foolish, because it appears he’s the only one that heard. Well, God speaks His Word.

Two thousand years ago, His Word became flesh and dwelt among us. If you desire Jesus, then God has spoken to you, and you’ve heard. Jesus said it, *“My sheep hear my voice... and they follow me.”*

Genesis 12:1 *“Now the Lord said to Abram, ‘Go from your country and your kindred and your father’s house to the land that I will show you. And I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and him who dishonors you I will curse, and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed. So Abram went...”*

Last time we preached on that blessing. And I put up this overhead [Overhead is shown].

The blessing is a land, a city, a name and seed (and that seed is Jesus). The seed is in Abraham, so Jesus is in Abraham and the faith of Jesus is in Abraham. It’s the Spirit of Christ in Abraham that calls “Abba, Father.” The blessing is faith and finally the blessing is “blessing,” that is love: who is God. Three persons, one substance, constantly blessing, constantly loving.

Paul wrote, *“In Christ, the only thing that matters is faith working through love.”* That is Christ through God. See it begins as a seed of faith and ends in a kingdom of love. You see God is giving himself to Abraham. God is the blessing! But now that’s a little much for a Babylonian nomad... or me... or you. If you offer a toddler a Twinkie or 1,000 pounds of gold, they’ll take the Twinkie, and would be crushed by the gold. They don’t have the capacity for such blessings, faith for such blessings.

Scripture says, *“God is preparing you for an immeasurable weight of glory, beyond all compare.”* As you are now, it would crush you, or utterly freak you out. So God says, “Abram, I’d like to give you a Twinkie... some land and a blessing,” “Peter, how about some bread and wine and a blessing?” Look: it’s only the size of a mustard seed. Well God doesn’t lie, but it grows into a kingdom.

So God promises Abram an incredible blessing that he can barely begin to conceive, and God promises us an incredible blessing we can barely begin to conceive:

We receive the blessing of Abraham. (Gal. 3:14)

Like Abraham, we inherit land... actually the world. (Rom. 4:13)

We receive a city and are a city – the New Jerusalem.

We are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation... God's own people. (1 Peter 2:4)

He gives us our name.

And we've been born of imperishable seed (1 Peter 1:23), and Jesus is the seed.

In Ephesians 3, Paul prays that *"Christ may dwell in our heart through faith, that we might have strength to comprehend the love which surpasses knowledge, that we might be filled with all the fullness of God."*

Like faith empties us of ourselves, making space for the fullness of God. Like faith causes us to hope, and hope gets filled with love (the fullness of God). Faith, hope and love. So faith is the start of the blessing, and the blessing comes by faith.

So how do we get faith? Do you work it up? Do you psych yourself up? Do you try to be smart? Or maybe stupid? Avoid the Discovery Channel and only watch religious TV?

Well, God speaks blessing like a seed into Abram. And lo and behold, in Abraham there is faith like a seed. God says, "Go," and Abraham goes. Now we would expect him to just go and pick up this blessing, because the blessing is grace and comes by grace. It's not dependent on Abraham, but the one who rules all things, so we'd expect smooth sailing from here on out. God promises unspeakable blessing, sends Abram on a journey. And the journey is filled with obstacles, trials and threats to the blessing.

You see faith grows like muscle, and it grows against resistance. It's not that something's wrong, but that something's right. You're a child of Abraham, and an heir of unspeakable blessing. You're on the journey of faith.

Genesis 12:1 This is how the King James puts it: *"Get thee out of thy country and from thy kindred and thy father's house."* That is, "Leave all that you know, and go." "Go where?" asks Abram. "Where's the map?" First lesson of faith, Abram: there is no map.

Hebrews 11:8 *"By faith, Abraham obeyed when he was called to go out to a place which he was to receive as an inheritance; and he went out not knowing where he was to go."* He started to walk before he knew where he was going. People say, "I can't have faith unless I understand." But maybe you can't have faith if you do understand. It's not faith in a map. But faith in God.

God says, "Go to the land that I will show you." It sounds like God's planning on traveling with Abram. So God isn't the knowledge of the way, God is the way.

Years ago, I went on a mission trip with my father. On my return, my family met me at the airport. I'll never forget what my daughter Becky said. She came running up to me in the airport and cried out, "Oh Daddy, I was scared that you'd get lost! But then I knew you couldn't get lost, because you were with YOUR Daddy."

You see, that's how little children navigate... not with a map, but the presence of their Daddy. Not with their knowledge of good, but with the presence of the good. Not by law, but by faith.

Jesus said to the Pharisees, *"You search the Scriptures because you think that in them you have life, and it is they that bear witness to me, yet you refuse to come to me that you may have life."* He said, *"I am the Way."* The Pharisees thought that the Bible was a map (like the knowledge of good and evil). But it's not a map. It's a testament, a testimony, a witness that testifies to a person, who's asking you to follow Him... even climb on His back as He crosses the chasm. And that requires faith.

You know, pretty much all religion (at least all human religion) is a way to not have faith. Its maps, systems, principles and laws, so you can save you, and don't have to trust a savior ... So you can navigate with knowledge rather than faith. Faith is trusting a person more than your knowledge.

So the journey of faith passes through confusion, and disappointment – surrendered expectations. God called Abram to journey to the Promised Land, and when he gets there, it's full of Canaanites and famine. Scripture tells us that our faith, like gold, is tested by fire. So don't be surprised as if something strange is happening to you.

In Genesis 12:10, Abram flees the land and descends into Egypt. In fear, not faith, he deceives Pharaoh, saying Sarah is his sister. He pimps his wife, to save his life. Abram fails the test... but God passes the test. Although Abram is faithless, God remains faithful.

God doesn't test you to see if you have faith, He test you to reveal where you don't have faith. He tests you to burn away what's not of Him, and to purify what is of Him: His Word in You; faith.

Well in Chapter 13, Abram returns to the land, but there's not room in the land for his herds and Lot's herds. There's strife. [A slide is shown] So Abram offers Lot his choice of land. It looks like he might give away his blessing, but I don't think that's a failure. I think that's a success. [A slide is shown] Abraham is so confident in his blessing that he can be a blessing. If you believe God's grace, you'll extend God's grace. In fear, Abraham became a curse to Pharaoh. In faith, Abraham became a blessing to Lot and Sodom.

In Chapter 14, Abraham rescues Lot as well as Sodom. But soon we find what happens to Sodom. His efforts seem futile. [Slide] Yet God is not futile, and according to Ezekiel, he's not done with Sodom. But the journey of faith travels through confusion, disappointment, fear, failure, strife, success, futility and doubt. [Slide]

In Chapter 15 Abram believes the promise and it's *"reckoned as righteousness."* But in the next breath, he doubts. He asks, "How will I know?" You see, all he has is the Word. So far he has no external verification of the promise. "How do I know?" So get this: God has him cut animals in half and lay them on the ground. It's just body broken and blood shed. Then the fire and the cloud pass between the pieces. God calls it a covenant.

You know this life is a crazy journey. We're at war, many of you have lost jobs, people are sick, and marriages are failing. It's a journey of confusion, disappointment, fear, failure, strife, success, futility and doubt. And I'm the Pastor. I wish I had more external verification, that you might know: this is the right

path. But it feels like all I get is a word (a promised blessing), and some body broken and blood shed (a covenant, a testament – a testimony to a person).

1. Word
2. Covenant
3. And maybe Sign of the Covenant

In Chapter 17, when Abram is 99 years old, God says, “Abram, this will be the sign of the covenant between me and you: You will cut the skin off the end of your penis.” “Say what?” “Abram, you will cut the skin off of the end of your penis and so teach all your descendants after you.”

Now, we know that there is profound meaning in circumcision, but the meaning wasn’t revealed for another 2,000 years. Old Abraham has got to feel a bit foolish. [Slide] I mean, some sort of blessing this has turned out to be. Did you realize that Abraham is called a “sojourner” until the day he dies? Sojourner is a biblical word for homeless. [Slide] He’s homeless in his Promised Land. When Sarah dies, Abraham has no place to even bury the body. He buys a grave from a Hittite in the land which God promised him.

The Bible says “Abraham inherited the world,” but it wasn’t in this life. God promised him a great nation and descendants as numerous as the stars of Heaven and sand of the sea. But right up to the end of his crazy journey, he possessed no land. And at the age of 100, his 90 year old wife was still barren.

I mean imagine Abe hanging out with the old guys at the bar in Hebron. They have a little to drink and they all start bragging.

Abe says, “You own 50 sheep? That’s nothin’. Got gave me an entire country, and God made me the Father of nations.”

They ask, “Where’s the country?”

“Here,” Abe says. “He just hasn’t given it to me yet.”

They ask, “What’s your son’s name?”

“Well, I don’t got one.”

They say, “Hey, I don’t think God really promised all of that stuff to you.”

“Did too!”

“Prove it!”

“Okee dokee. (Zip) Just look at my p---. Sign of the Covenant.”

Now I’m not trying to be rude. I’m trying to be biblical. Do you get the point? Abraham must have looked and felt like a fool... a desperate fool. Remember when he was a young 86 in Chapter 16? He tried to manufacture the blessing by sleeping with the maid. He tried to acquire faithfulness with faithlessness. He tried to take the blessing with sin... with self. [slide] You see, the greatest threat to Abraham’s blessing is Abraham. So Abraham fails, because God will not fail.

Chapter 20 – when Abraham is 100 years old, (in fear) he fails once again. He tells another king that Sarah is his sister. Because of Abraham's sin, all the king's household becomes barren. So God has Abraham pray and heal them all. So they all get pregnant, and Sarah is still barren. It's like blessing the world, and not blessing yourself. Abraham must have thought, "God, why have you forsaken me?"  
[slide]

See how weird this is? God promises Abraham this outrageous blessing, and then sends him on a journey on which everything seems to threaten the blessing: confusion, disappointment, fear, failure, strife, success, futility, doubt, foolishness, homelessness, desperation, sin, forsakenness, barrenness, barrenness, barrenness.

And here's more weirdness: I find it tremendously encouraging. I get depressed when I watch religious TV, and I get inspired when I read the story of Abraham, because I feel like Abraham. And maybe you do too. Maybe you're a child of Abraham. God has promised you the greatest blessing, and the world says, "You get nothin'." God says He loves you more than all creation, and all creation says, "You're a fool."

I feel foolish telling you this. And I may not be hearing correctly, but over the last five years or so, several people, independent of one another, have given me the same Bible verse – Isaiah 54:

*"Sing, O barren one, who did not bear; break forth into singing and cry aloud you who has not been in labor for the children of the desolate one will be more than the children of her who is married," says the Lord. "Enlarge the place of your tent, and let the curtains of your habitation be stretched out. Do not hold back."*

A few months ago, we were praying as a Board, asking God where He wanted us to go, and what He wanted us to do. My wife said, "I just heard God say, 'Read Isaiah 54.'" I said "Do you know what Isaiah 54 is?" She said, "No, I have no idea." That's just like God.

*"Sing, O barren one... Enlarge the place of your tent... and don't hold back."*

Yet for the last five years, I've just watched the tent shrink. But God keeps saying, "Remember the promise. Remember the promise. Remember the promise."

You know, I think we're supposed to worship at the Asbury building for a while. And I'm pretty darn sure we're not supposed to hold back. And I know we're supposed to break forth in singing. But I tell you... I usually feel like an old fool. And I think God has me (maybe us) right where he wants us, because the promise came by grace. So God is growing faith in His grace, and *"this, not of ourselves."* The blessing is grace through faith and *"this, not of ourselves."* In other words, we can't manufacture the promised blessing. So He's circumcising our hearts that we could know Him.

Well, as you know, the child of the promise came when Sarah was 90 years old, and Abraham was *"good as dead."* They named him Isaac (which means laughter). When Isaac was a young man, God spoke to old Abraham. It was time to finish the journey. He said, "Abraham, take your son, whom you love, and go to Moriah." Legend has it that Moriah is the ancient site of the Garden of Eden, and the tree of the knowledge. We know it's the site of Jerusalem, the Temple and the Hill of the Skull, where Jesus was nailed to the tree. "Take your son, your only begotten son, the son you love, and offer him to me, on the

mountain. I will show you.” It flew in the face of everything Abraham knew. It flew in the face of the knowledge of good and evil. You see, the last threat to the promise of God is the law of God. It was like God was asking Abraham to surrender the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. Surrender his knowledge of virtue. [A slide is shown]

Kierkegaard wrote:

The opposite of sin is faith. And this is one of the most decisive definitions of all Christianity – that the opposite of sin is not virtue but faith.

Paul wrote, “*Whatever does not proceed from faith is sin.*” So God will burn away all our virtue, our self-righteousness.

Well, Abraham surrendered his knowledge of God and walked by faith in God. He journeyed up Mt. Moriah, lifted the knife... but the angel of Yahweh, the God-man, stopped him and provided a substitute. Jesus is the Word; Jesus is faith; Jesus is the God-man; Jesus is the substitute.

I hope you noticed that Abraham’s journey paralleled Jesus’ journey. His descent into Egypt and especially his journey to Jerusalem. His journey up the mountain, where he was nailed to the tree, bearing our sins. Where He cried out, “*My God, My God! Why have you forsaken me?*” You see, Jesus didn’t know why, and yet He trusted His father and obeyed. It’s like He returned the fruit of knowledge to the tree, was nailed to the tree, and now He is the fruit of the tree: body broken and blood shed – life. He is perfect faith and He gives His faith to us. It comes as a seed, and grows into a kingdom.

Jesus is the Word, the seed, the child of the promise and God is His Father. “*And God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten son*” on Mt. Moriah. On Mt. Moriah, God crossed the chasm; (Father and son) crossed the chasm and revealed His heart of boundless blessing and love. So when old Abraham walked up that mountain in faith, old Abraham was riding on God’s back. No wonder Abraham is called the “friend of God.” In him, God had grown so much faith, he could begin to comprehend the “love that surpasses knowledge.” He could begin to comprehend the blessing. And the blessing is God.

So God blessed Abraham, and Abraham blessed God with faith. He had what the first Adam lacked, and what the last Adam gave: “Faith working through love.” He was a man, made in “*the image and likeness of God.*” He had God’s heart and He inherited an entire new creation.

You know, we tend to think that we have to work up enough faith to make it on this journey called life, but God calls us on this journey to grow faith that is life (His life). This journey, through confusion, disappointment, fear, failure, strife, success, futility, doubt, foolishness, homelessness, desperation, sin, forsakenness, barrenness, and even self-righteousness. Especially self-righteousness.

We think faith is necessary for the journey, but the journey is necessary for faith. You know the man that stepped to the front of the crowd and climbed on Blondin’s back and crossed the chasm from one kingdom to the next? That man was his manager and long-time friend. He’d journeyed with Blondin for years. And that journey produced the faith that finished the journey. The journey of faith ends where it begins – the Heart of God. Jesus: beginning and end. And faith is what God wants from you. And He uses all space and time, all creation, to grow that fruit in you. Faith is what the Father wants.

I used to take my kids camping to grow faith. The journey freaked them out so they'd snuggle next to me in the tent, they'd put their faith in me. On one journey, years ago, we came to Cataract Creek in the Gore Range. The only way across was a log about 10 feet above the water falls. I told the kids exactly what I wanted them to do. I gave them the knowledge of good and evil log crossing in great detail, saying, "Go slow. No sudden movements. Do exactly as I say, when I say." I got half-way across and helped Elizabeth (I was most worried about her – Jon was way more cautious). I got Elizabeth across the chasm and turned just in time to see something that filled me with dread: the eyes of my son, huge and filled with faith. He just leapt from the side of the mountain, fixing to land on my back, which he did. But I'm not Charles Blondin. So when he hit me, we both went tumbling down into the cataract below. But I held onto him as he held on to me. It's a miracle we didn't break a leg or a back. I was soaked; he was soaked; the camera was soaked. I stood him on the side of the creek, I took a deep breath and I tried to scold him... but my heart just wasn't in it. He'd done everything wrong, but everything right. He gave me everything I wanted: he gave me faith in love.

On that night, He took the bread and He broke it saying, "This is my body given to you." Body broken. And in the same way, He took the cup and He said, "This is my blood of the covenant, poured out for the forgiveness of sins. Take and eat." Body broken, blood shed. And in the morning, He climbed up Mt. Moriah. He bore a cross across a chasm... And even into the chasm, because of our disobedience. All in order to win our faith. He did it all: creation, chasm, cross, so we'd believe in him.

So do you believe? Do you want to believe? Then come to the table and receive the seed, in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit.

### **Communion.**

### **Benediction**

So Jonathan's eyes got really big, and he just leapt on me. And we tumbled off that narrow path into the chasm below. I held onto him; he held onto me; I fished him out. I set him on the side and I started to yell at him, but I just couldn't, because he had given me exactly what I had wanted: Faith. And I knew that if he had faith, that faith would grow. And it would take care of all those other things: his log-walking skills, his obedience... it would grow.

Tonight, if your eyes got a little bit big and you said, "Jesus I need you." And you came forward and took the bread and the cup with just a mustard seed of faith. Well that mustard seed was put in you by the living Word, and it grew when you came forward. And as you leave this place, you'll take that seed with you wherever you go. It's imperishable seed. It cannot be destroyed, and it will grow. It grows against resistance, like muscles in your body. It grows throughout your life, until one day, all your plans, all your dreams, all your efforts, all your virtue... will amount to nothing. You'll breathe your last breath. Your heart will beat its last beat. A chasm will open up before you, and there will be a light. Don't run from the light. He's your friend. Look into His face, and He'll say something like this, "Get onto my back. It's time to go home. It's time to rise from the dead. You're a friend of God."

In Jesus' name, believe the Gospel. Amen.



*Disclaimer: This document is a draft and has not been edited by the author. Therefore, there may be discrepancies. Some discrepancies may be minor; some may have to do with theology. When in doubt, please refer to the audio version of the sermon on this website and don't be shy about informing us of errors.*