

Winning the Battle of Belief

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- [0 : 00] Friends, we are in Genesis chapter 15. We are marching right along. I'll need to take Genesis 15 in two doses.! I've been trying to bite off each chapter as much as I can.
- and this one is full of rich truth as the others. But in this particular case, I'll need to block it off just a little bit for you. So if you'll join me, I'll read in Genesis 15 from verses 1 down through verse 6.
- Cut it off there. And I'll come back and do more with verse 6, God willing, next Sunday morning. The text reads, After these things, the word of the Lord came to Abram in a vision, saying, Do not fear, Abram.
- I am a shield to you. Your reward shall be very great. Abram said, O Lord God, what will you give me, since I am childless in the heir of my house as Eliezer of Damascus?
- And Abram said, Since you have given no offspring to me, one born in my house is my heir. Then behold, the word of the Lord came to him, saying, This man will not be your heir, but one who will come forth from your own body.
- [1 : 23] He shall be your heir. And then God took Abram outside and said, Now look toward the heavens and count the stars if you're able to count them.
- And God said to him, So shall your descendants be. Then Abram believed in the Lord, and God reckoned it to Abram as righteousness.
- The title of my message for this morning then is Winning the Battle of Belief. Winning the Battle of Belief. And I want to ask you to ponder a part of a verse with me as I begin my message this morning.
- I'll lift it from the New Testament to get you thinking with me about this very issue. The verse that I have in mind is Ephesians 5, verse 8.
- I'm going to put it up here on the screen for you. You're welcome to turn there if you'd like. Ephesians 5, verse 8. In part, that verse reads, You were formerly darkness, but now you are light in the Lord.
- [2 : 28] So we have a tremendous spiritual contrast referring to your soul. Notice formerly. But now.
- These are key elements in the testimony of this verse about your soul. Darkness, of course, represents death. Spiritual death. And light represents spiritual life.
- And you see this in the motif throughout the Bible. Darkness is spiritual death. Light is spiritual life. Exactly what we're talking about here. Also, I'd like you to notice the emphasis of this verse.
- We were formerly living in the darkness of death. This is past tense for you. This is your history. This is my history.
- Before becoming a Christian, we all had this as a testimony describing the state of our souls in relationship to God living in spiritual darkness and death.
- [3 : 29] That's us. Now, we don't need to forget that. We need to rejoice in the fact that that's a former reality. Not a current reality. And that comes as, but now.

Isn't that wonderful? What powerful little words. But now, your reality is something very different. You are living as light in the Lord.

And that is something that God has done in you. Not just to you. He has done that in you. The difference in our condition is explained in the phrase in the Lord.

In the Lord. This has all been accomplished in Christ. We shorten it to say it like that. Darkness and death once defined our deceived souls.

We used to worship ourselves. We were deceived into thinking that any other God besides the one true God could be God for our lives. And of course, we were our biggest God with a little g.

[4 : 34] But now. That's how that should read for us in our souls. But now. Look, because because we are in the Lord, darkness, death, deception are all overcome as His light shines in our hearts giving us His life.

Folks, that is a spiritual miracle. You are a walking miracle in the sense of what God has done to your soul.

To bring your soul from darkness and death to life should be evident to those people that that's happened to. Don't you think? Something as radical as that ought to show up in your life.

And so people who claim to be Christians professing it with their mouth and yet living like hell literally, living like they're controlled more by what goes on in hell than in heaven.

We got a problem with that, don't we? When God saves a human soul, something radical happens in the way of a spiritual transformation. And you would think that transformation would become evident to the people around them.

[5 : 48] they ought to be saying to you from one moment to the next, what happened to you? What is wrong? That's what they said to me. Jeff, what's wrong with you?

You're not cool anymore. I was cool once and now I'm not cool? Yeah, what happened to you? Well, Jesus happened to me.

It's the coolest thing that's ever happened to me. Now, the Apostle Paul goes on to complete his truthful encouragement about our new selves.

All of this is being done because I want to help you understand the power of faith. Paul's going to complete these truthful encouragements about our new selves with this.

He adds this now. See at the bottom of the screen? Paul's going to be walking as children of light. Trying to learn what is pleasing to the Lord.

[6 : 45] That is the element that the people in my life didn't like when this change came over me because of faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. This trying to learn what is pleasing to the Lord made me displeasing to the people who used to be my company, my friends, and the trajectory of my life.

Because I was chasing sin with them. Now, I've moved and gone in a different direction and now I'm trying to learn what is pleasing to the Lord. So, dude, you're totally a turn off man.

You're like water, cold water thrown on the party. So, take a hike. If you want to do the Jesus thing, do it somewhere else. Why? Because God had changed my heart to wanting to please Jeff, which is, that's what I was doing.

I was just chasing personal pleasure, whatever I wanted to do and seemed right for me. That's what I did. Who knows? As long as I didn't get caught. I didn't want mama to catch me, Alonzo. Right?

I was doing things mama taught me not to do. And so, that was my thing. Just don't get caught. You're good. Now, I'm trying to learn what is pleasing to the Lord, which is taking me away from that.

[7 : 54] It's moving me away. Now, what pleases Jeff most is to please the Lord. Whenever we sin, we are making it more about pleasing me than pleasing Jesus.

Every time. Look, this is not rocket science. The Bible is profound, but God condescends to help us understand that's really basically what happens. When you sin, and when I sin, it's about me.

It's about you in that moment. I'm not trying to learn what pleases the Lord. I'm doing what pleases me. And if what pleases me is doing something sinfully selfish towards Suzanne in that moment, that's what I wanted and that's why I did it.

Now, let's just call it what it is. What does faith do with that? What does faith in Jesus do with that? It blows it out of the water. You wouldn't be able to do any different than what I just described in the way of sinful, selfish pleasure if it weren't for faith in Christ.

So, Paul comes here to tell us, try to learn what is pleasing to the Lord because now you've been made a child of the light. Did you see the capital L?

[9 : 03] Is it capital L in your Bible? It should be. That's a reference to Jesus. He is light. He is light.

So, with the life of Jesus giving you and I life, Paul tells us to focus our daily walk on trying to learn what is pleasing to the Lord of life.

If I had to narrow down one phrase that I would use to capture the movement, the activity of the Christian life, I would not say go to church.

I wouldn't even say read your Bible. I probably would not say do other Christian kind of things. I would try to say to you this, try to learn what is pleasing, to spend your life learning to live in a way that pleases Jesus.

So, every decision you make, everything you do, everything you say, everywhere you go, is about you trying to think in terms of will this please Jesus? Will this honor Christ?

[10 : 17] Now, can you imagine how that will revolutionize a marriage? If I'm concerned in my marriage to Suzanne as I relate to her with, Lord, in the way that I'm relating to my wife today and the way I'm thinking about my wife today and what I've got planned in my life with my wife today, will that honor you?

Will that please? Based on what I know your word tells me, is this going to please you? See, I don't do that and sit down and ask myself, okay, Lord, will this please you? And I hear a voice.

That's not, that voice is what got me in trouble in the first place. So I told that voice to take a hike a long time ago. Now I turn to the voice of the Lord in Scripture. God speaks clearly in His Word.

So I turn to the Bible and I ask God to help me think about being a husband that pleases Jesus and I start reading from God's Word about what it is to be a husband that pleases Jesus because He tells me.

Do this and not that. Be this and not that. And guys, you both know, all of us know in here because we studied it together, Ephesians 5 tells us that it's nothing short of loving our wives like Jesus loves His bride.

[11 : 32] That's a pretty big standard. We can't do that apart from faith. Now I've shared all of this with you to support what I'll say next.

This new self, this new life, this new walk, all come to you by faith. That's largely what this chapter is all about.

It is about Abram's faith and even more importantly, God's faithfulness to Abram because that's what he bases his faith on. We are saved by faith.

We live by faith. We persevere by faith so that our faith in Jesus is the most fundamental aspect separating us from darkness, death, fear, unbelief, worry, anxiety.

So what is the counter and antidote, Jeff, to all of these things that plague the human soul as we walk step by step in this life not knowing what the next step will hold? Faith.

[12 : 44] Faith. What counters anxiety? Faith. What counters worry? Faith. What counters uncertainty? Doubt? Fear? Faith. Faith. Faith.

We walk by faith, not by sight. Faith. This is something that we learn. The process of learning to please Jesus is a process of walking by faith.

Now I'm going to go ahead and tell you, I may say this again later, but I'll go ahead and tell you. Some of you have heard me say this before. There is no such thing as blind faith. Zippo.

There is nothing blind about faith in Jesus Christ. He delivered us from blindness. For heaven's sake. He is the light. Faith in the light opens up.

God closes down. And so there's no such, you don't have to worry about, here's another one, that's one, so this one I did over on this side, there's no such thing as blind faith. As we're walking in the faith of Jesus Christ, we're walking in the light, not the darkness.

[13 : 48] And then come over here and tell yourselves, there is no way that I will ever be able to run ahead of God. My faith will never run me out ahead of God so that I get out ahead of Him and look back and go, come on dude, keep up.

No way. But you hear people teach this. Be careful not to get out ahead of God. As if you could do that. What we mean by that, what we mean by that is be careful that you don't forget the Lord and become presumptuous.

that you presume on God and try to obligate God, try to pray God into a corner to make Him do what you think you want done. That's a lot of, there's a whole series of books out that teach you how to pray God into a corner to get Him to do what you want.

Very dangerous. You don't want that. Alright. That's all for free. Let me get back over here. Where was I? So we are living apart from the darkness, the fear, the anxiety, the unbelief, the doubt, the uncertainty.

No. Alright. Here, I'm going to put this up on the screen for you. Winning the battle of belief begins with God's gift of saving faith so that no person can boast about that faith because it's the gift of God.

[15 : 13] You're believing, but it's God's gift that you are able to believe. Okay, we need to understand that. Winning the battle of belief against the enemies of our faith continues by God's grace.

So working in us, the grace of God working in us so that we trust and obey the Lord as His children of light. Anytime you and I sin, we are seeing elements of this statement that I have up here on the screen faltering.

We have moved away from the elements of what's being expressed on the screen here for you when we sin. We are saved by God's gift of faith.

And we live each day by God's gift of faith. We're saved by faith. We are carried forward in our Christian life by faith. This is the reality of what the Bible teaches us about living the Christian life.

faith. We live it by faith in Christ. This is why Paul will encourage the Colossians to be disciplined, stable, and firmly established in their faith in the Lord.

[16 : 23] A lot of stuff in the Colossians about that. Our faith muscle needs to grow. God wants to grow your faith muscle as it were. And to do that, it has to be challenged and exercised. So God will bring things into your life that will challenge you. Things that you need to rely on Him in faith about. One of the most dangerous things that can happen to a pastor is for us to get to a point in our ministry where we can begin to do this without all of the youthful nerves and stuff like that that used to kind of keep us honest and make us go over and over and over and over it.

And we get in the pulpit and we start to rely on it. You can do that in your life too, can't you? In your job, you just kind of get it to where you just kind of can do it in your sleep and it becomes more about you. All pastors can do that too.

What we need to do is we need to do everything that we do each day by faith in the Lord depending on Him. Faith keeps me dependent and focused on God. Faith in Christ.

That's what it does. I don't want to retreat from that. I want to see that continue in my life. And so God will bring these experiences into my life that challenge me.

[17 : 37] things that force me by faith to trust in God and obey the Lord just like the people of old from Hebrews 11 even though I'm not necessarily seeing the results, the immediate results of what I'd like to see or what's going on.

I can know God is working. I need to trust and obey and live by faith. God's got a timing for this. Blah, blah, blah. Right? Now why don't we live like that more?

Now the answer is S-I-N, right? Or S-E-L-F. Sin and self. This is what we're battling. And faith, faith is the issue.

We want to learn how to please the Lord so that we can respond to life by faith in Christ. We don't want to live reactionary. We want to live in a response.

A calculated and proactive kind of response to life. Not being blown everywhere by every wind of doctrine but being able to respond to God by faith as the stuff in life hits us.

[18 : 51] Even stuff we didn't expect. It hits me in an unexpected way but it doesn't derail me because I'm trying to learn to live by what pleases the Lord. And so in this circumstance I didn't see it coming but here it is and so now my main idea here is I need to think in terms of what kind of response do I need to make to this situation in life I didn't expect where I can please the Lord where I can honor Him.

We also use the term glorify God. I want to glorify God. Well, I'll tell you if you learn to please the Lord you're going to glorify the Lord. Lord. That's what we're talking about.

Now this is all introduction. So stay with me. Alright, now I want you to note something with me as we come into the chapter. Note the context of chapter what we call chapter 15.

You remember that when the Bible was originally written there were no chapters and in Hebrew it was all done across the spectrum without any kind of punctuation or anything. Think of that.

So chapter 15 begins this way. Notice after these things. You see that with me? After these things.

[20 : 05] So after what things? Well, on the heels of the previous events that we studied a couple of Sundays ago. What happened a couple Sundays ago?

Well, Abram had to marshal a small army to go out and combat a much bigger army so that he could rescue his nephew Lot and bring all of those people back and then a priest met him that loved the Lord out as Abram was returning from the battlefield and they kind of had what we call a come to Jesus moment.

They literally praised God and worshipped God and thanked God for the victory. They gave God the victory. Abram didn't walk around beating his chest and boasting about his military strategy and his ability as a general.

He didn't do that. He gave all the glory to God for the victory. Alright, now, after all these that's pretty tough stuff, y'all. Going to combat against a much bigger enemy, dividing your forces at night, coming against these guys, confusion, lots of death, lots of bloodshed, lots of being hyped up.

Now you've got to get all these people back to safety. You know, you've got a rear guard making sure that these guys aren't going to circle back around and try to take their revenge. It's a hairy deal.

[21 : 24] After all these things, notice what happened in Abram's life. The word of the Lord came to Abram in a vision. Now think about this with me.

Abram has been given occasion to think about his life. And he apparently in the moments, days, whatever, after this event with Keter-Lammer and this larger army and the combat and all, he's been given an opportunity to think about what's been going on and he apparently drifts toward, for some reason, fear and doubt because that's what God's going to address with him.

He drifts toward fear and doubt. I don't think it's fear and doubt about the combat. He's not having post-traumatic stress here. That's not what's going on. I think that he's looking at this and he thought, you know, I could have lost my life in that.

It could have very well happened. And here I am, I've got Eleazar as my heir. God's promised my descendants will be as numerous and yet my wife's barren and I have no children and I'm 75 years old.

And she's 65 years old. She's beyond childbearing, but she's been barren her whole life. I'm not seeing it. Right? When I look with my eyes and I use my reason, I don't see this promise happening.

[22 : 49] And I think the man is sobered by what just happened to him. Now, I've never been in combat before. I've been in spiritual combat plenty of times, but not in action. I think that all just caused Abram to start reflecting about his life and what was going on and what could have happened and this is where his mind goes.

And now the Lord shows up. The word of the Lord came to Abram. Now, here's what we're dealing with. The Lord is going to meet him in this moment in his life and encourage him.

Genesis 15 then presents us with some common challenges that we all face. And then the chapter grounds the single solution to those challenges in the character of God.

Not in the solution to the problem, but in the character of God. So good. The passage presents us with four truths which guide our hearts to trust and obey the Lord instead of giving in to fears and doubts and worries and anxieties, uncertainties, those kinds of things.

And the first of these essential elements in winning the battle of belief, what I mean by that is winning in the battle to be faithful to God, to trust God, to obey God.

[24 : 07] The first of these is the object of our belief or concerns the object of our belief there in verse 1. In whom and in what are we to believe? Well, look again with me.

After these things, the word of the Lord came to Abram in a vision saying, Do not fear, Abram. God's having to say that to him because Abram's experiencing some fear and God knows his heart.

Do not fear, Abram. I am, isn't that good? I am a shield to you. Your reward shall be very great.

In other words, God's saying, I will make good on my promises. I told you I'd reward you in these distinct ways. I meant it. And I'm going to do it. But Abram's not seeing that happen right now.

The word of the Lord came to Abram in a vision. Now, don't look at this in terms of a vision. Abram is wide awake. So this is a vision that is happening while his eyes are open.

[25 : 02] He's fully conscious. He's aware of everything that's going on. And this vision is happening. Now, I'll talk more about that in just a moment. In whom, in what, are we to believe?

What does the text tell us? The word of the Lord. The word of the Lord. Scripture is what makes our faith in God possible.

No Scripture, no faith. Why? Because it instructs our hearts in what to believe. The object of our belief. It tells us what that should be. Faith comes by hearing and hearing comes by the word of God.

So, no word of God, no faith. No faith in Christ, no salvation, no hope. This is the important relationship between the truth, the word of God, and our faith given to us as the gift of God.

We have to believe the word of God in order to know the God of the word. Alright, now hear that. We have to believe in the word of God to know the God of the word.

[26 : 11] That's the way it works. If you have claimed to live a Christian life and have little or nothing to do with the Bible, you need to be concerned about your faith.

Just let that sit in your heart there for a minute. Without the truth of God's self-revelation in Scripture applied to our hearts by the Holy Spirit, we would not believe in the Lord Jesus.

This is why people who get saved get excited about God's word because they know by the working of the Spirit in them now that they need God's word to know God. And so they get into the word.

Did that happen to you? I need to see some. Did that happen? When you got saved, did the word get, you wanted to read the word? I have someone in my life that is close to me and this man told me recently, this past week, that he has two best friends who were unbelievers just got saved within about a month of each other.

And he said in one of the life of one of these men, he said, he has started reading the Bible just a couple of weeks ago and he's all the way through Leviticus.

[27 : 24] He can't get enough. He said, I'm just going to start at the beginning and start reading. And he's made it through. And he's been faithful. He's excited to know and learn about the God who has saved him.

And this is the relationship that Abram is experiencing now as God comes to him to bring him a word. That is to talk to him. To encourage him in the truth.

Abram, I know what you're thinking. I know what you're being tempted with. But now listen to me. I'm going to tell you the truth. And this is what you put your hope in. This is what God's doing with this man.

Now, in all of this, we can begin by saying that saving faith can only come to Abram if he believes the word of the Lord.

If he believes the word of the Lord. So this is the first time this phrase, the word of the Lord, is used in Scripture. Here it is. You can circle it. First time ever. So as truth, the word of the Lord is significant because it defines reality.

[28 : 34] And this is what Jeff needs in my life and all the roles that I fulfill. I need God to speak truth into my life. I need you to speak truth into my life so that I am living in reality and not in Jeff's world.

You don't want to be part of Jeff's world because Jeff's God in Jeff's world, right? Is that the same with you? You want to be part of the world I live in as I follow in the Lord Jesus Christ and look to Him to be King.

That's what you, and I want to live by His word. That keeps me in reality. That keeps this thing in me in check. This self that wants to continue to kind of wrestle it away in any given moment, especially when that moment's uncertain and I kind of feel like, okay, God, let me have the reins now.

I got this one. That's dangerous, isn't it? And we can get there very, very quickly. Now, I want to share with you, even though this is the first time that this has been used in the Scripture, I believe, I believe that Abram was a believer prior to this situation.

So what we're reading in chapter 15, a couple commentators thought this is probably when Abram came to faith. When I look back on this, I'm like, no, I don't think so. I think this guy was already a believer.

[29 : 52] I'll take you back to chapter 12, verse 8, give you some of the hints that I've used to kind of clue me in on this. Chapter 12, verse 8, then Abram proceeded from there to the mountain on the east of Bethel.

He pitched his tent with Bethel on the west, Ai on the east, and notice what he did. He built an altar. Who did he build it to? The Lord. He didn't build it to a pagan god.

He didn't build it to himself or to a nation or an idea. He built an altar to the Lord, and then what did he do? He called upon the name of the Lord.

You don't call on the name of the Lord if you don't believe. People who don't believe in the Lord don't call on the Lord. I'll give you a couple more. That should be a slam dunk right there. At least it was for me.

But if you look at also chapter 13, verse 4, he is being called to the place of the altar which Abram had made there formerly.

[30 : 56] I just showed you what that was. And there, what did he do? He went back to the altar and called on the name of the Lord. And then in verse 18, Then Abram moved his tent and came and dwelt by the oaks of Mamre, which are in Hebron.

And there he built an altar to the Lord. Then finally, in chapter 14, verse 19, He blessed him and said, Blessed be Abram.

This is Melchizedek blessing Abram. Blessed be Abram. Notice how he refers to him. Of God most high. If somebody were introducing you and wanted someone to know about the most important thing about you, they might say, this is Jeff of the Lord Jesus Christ.

That'd be fine with me. That's what he's saying. Melchizedek is saying, Blessed be Abram of God most high. Then you go down and look at verse 22.

Abram said to the king of Sodom, I have sworn to the Lord God most high, possessor of heaven and earth. That's the declaration of faith, folks. And so these different references help me to think that Abram was already a believer as we come to chapter 15.

[32 : 22] It says, The word of the Lord came to Abram in a vision because Abram was a prophet of God. He served the Lord as a believer.

Now as important as God's word is to Abram and to us, it's who, it's actually who that word reveals to us which is the primary object of saving faith. In other words, I don't simply put my faith in the Bible.

I trust the Bible as God's word. I trust it to be sufficient for life and godliness. I don't have to add to the Bible. I don't have to run out here and get man's wisdom to tell me how to live a life that is pleasing to Jesus.

Everything I need to learn to please Jesus is in the Bible. Alright? I trust that. I believe that. I take that on faith. But my faith is put in who the Bible points me to and talks about in who can save me.

So we trust the Scripture but we put our faith in Christ. Okay? And whose word is this word? Christ's.

[33 : 30] So we believe that. We believe that Jesus is our Savior and this is His word that teaches us how to live a life pleasing to Him. That's the relationship. Look, people like us who put a high view and a high emphasis on the Bible.

This is why when Matt Pike comes to teach he's going to teach the Bible. This is why we bring Matt up here to do. When Mark taught a few weeks ago Mark taught the Scriptures.

When we have men come to this pulpit and teach they teach the Scriptures. We put a high view on the Bible because it's God's word. And we need to hear God's word. People can accuse us of being Bible worshipers.

And they have. And we try to help them understand no, we don't worship the Scriptures in the sense that you're making it sound like we put the Bible in place of Jesus.

That's not what we do. We have a high regard for the Bible because we have a high and holy view of Jesus. Because it's His word. Alright, did I clear that up? I hope that didn't make it more muddy.

[34 : 38] So this is our relationship to the Scripture. He is, and Abram must believe that He is, the Lord of the Word.

So the Word of the Lord has come to Abram and Abram's listening because he knows that God is the Lord of the Word. That's the relationship. And that takes us back to who it is that stands behind the promises being made to Abram.

Abram knows that he's addressing and dealing with what he said to Melchizedek, God most high, possessor of heaven and earth. Excuse me, what he said to the king of Sodom. I'm not going to take anything from you because I swore to the God of heaven, possessor of heaven and earth, the most high God, that I wouldn't do anything like that.

That I just look to Him to take care of me. I don't need kings giving me stuff. God's taking great care of me. I'll just stay there. This is what Abram believes. Now, what is this vision?

How do we characterize it? How do we understand it? We don't want to go off into na-na land with this and think that this is something that we need to be seeking in our lives. We need to get visions of Jesus.

[35 : 50] We need to get visions of God. We need to have God come and appear and talk to us. Listen, I watched a very prominent pastor in a video. I'd already heard this story before.

This was years ago. A very prominent pastor in a certain movement, Christian movement, he said that every morning that he got up and shaved, he would look in the mirror and he would talk to God.

He said that. And God would talk back to him. Well, who's he looking at? Yeah. Now, he didn't mean that he was God. He meant that literally God would show up and speak to him through that experience.

That's wrong. That's not scriptural. Nowhere in the Bible can you base that. So, I'm saying to you, when you pray, you don't need to be worried about visions of God, visions of Jesus, images of Jesus.

You don't have to worry about that. You just take the word as it's spoken to you. You don't need to see anything. You see by faith. You already know that the author of this book is your Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ.

[36 : 56] I think it's one of the reasons that God didn't leave us with any images of Jesus. Because if we had images of Jesus, they'd be plastered all over the place and we'd be worshiping him, bowing down to him.

No. We don't worship the cross either. This is the symbol of our faith and our faith is in Christ. And he's not here anymore. He's in heaven.

So, what is this vision? Well, this is most likely a Christophany. A Christophany. That simply means in theological terms, it's an early manifestation of Jesus.

So, what we believe is this is most likely Abram talking to Jesus Christ before he was incarnate as the Lord Jesus Christ walking around on the earth with the disciples, the second member of the Trinity.

This is what we most likely think this is most likely about. Now, it could be that this is the time that Jesus refers to and I'm going to take you there in John 8, 47.

[37 : 57] Would you go there with me? Now, I'm not going to die on this hill, but it seems plausible to me that this is what Jesus is referring to was this moment in Abram's life.

So, John 8, 47. He's got some Jews here that he's had to confront because they are saying that because they are Abram's descendants, Abraham's descendants, they are automatically right with God.

And he's just told them, you guys are murderers and liars. You're not close to God. And so, in verse 47, he says, he who is of God hears, what?

The words of God. For this reason you do not hear them because you are not of God. And then drop down to verse 56 where it gets really deep.

Look at this. Your father, Abraham, rejoiced to see my day and he saw it and was glad. Now, you have to ask yourself, when did Abraham see that and rejoice and be glad about it?

[39 : 13] Well, this is what the Jews didn't understand. So, in verse 57, so the Jews said to Jesus, you're not yet 50 years old and you've seen Abraham? So, they're incredulous.

They're like, dude, you've lost your mind. Verse 58, Jesus said to them, truly, truly, that's an attention getter. Truly, truly, I say to you, before Abraham was born, I am.

Woo! That was the zinger that they couldn't stand. So, there's some Jews here that are challenging Jesus about his identity. They don't like Jesus' answer that he has just told them.

And so, I'm going to put this up on the screen for you. He who is of God hears, hears, takes in, receives the words of God. For this reason, you don't hear them because you are not of God.

Your father, Abraham, rejoiced to see my day, and he saw it and was glad. So, the Jews said to him, you're not yet 50 years old and you, you claim to have seen Abraham?

[40 : 18] And so, Jesus said, yeah, well, you know, when you're the I am of the universe, that's not a big deal. And they knew exactly what he was doing, is claiming to be God. So, they picked up stones to try and kill him, it says in the next verse.

Now, Abram seems to be battling fear and doubt, so God reassures him. How does he do that? He comes to him and says, Abram, do not fear.

I am a shield to you, your reward will be very great. The issue here is that the people who believe in God and His word with a genuine faith will battle to keep that faith strong and growing.

They're not willing to just let themselves spin off into despondency or spin off into something that causes them to make it all about me kind of thing. they struggle, they pray, they weep.

That's persevering faith, you see? There's nothing wrong with that. All of us have to find and fight discouragement at times. We find ourselves there, right?

[41 : 19] Or some level of that. And so, persevering, struggling through, bringing Christians around you, reaching out to your friends who are in the faith, your pastors who are in the faith, to come around you.

See? The important thing is, is that in those moments we're ministering what to each other? Don't worry, it'll be okay. Well, what if it's not okay? What do you mean okay?

What if the person dies? Is that okay? What do you mean it'll be okay in the sense of the Lord? What do we minister to each other in those times? The word of the Lord. I want you to put your arm around me and I want you to speak the truth and love to me because that's what my heart needs to hear.

Reassure me in the Lord. Bring some truth to my soul. Remind me of the promises of God, the faithfulness of God. Jeff, has God ever done anything in your life in the last 40 years to give you reason to think that He's going to be faithful to you?

Yeah. You want to start rehearsing those with me and let's just pray and thank God for those times of faithfulness and trust that He's going to be faithful again? Any reason to think He's not going to show up?

[42 : 30] No, I don't have any reason to think that. So this is all about your enemy is on you, man. See what we're doing? So now I need you to speak the word of the Lord into my life.

Is it okay that your pastor tells you that I need that from you? I'm doing the same thing you're doing. I'm fighting sin and self just like you.

So this is what Abram's doing. He is trying to remain strong. He's trying to grow. He's trying to fight.

God comes to him and says, look, this is the truth. The greater reality about genuine faith in God and in His Word is that genuine faith will persevere through every trial and test of life in order to keep us joined with the object of our faith, the Lord Jesus Christ.

That's a promise from God. That's not you toughing it out and being tough. A promise of God is that genuine faith will persevere. You may struggle, you may doubt, you may go through seasons of darkness, but God will bring you out.

[43 : 38] This is why I can look people in the eye with great optimism and encouragement in my heart and say, even with tears streaming down my face, I know this is hard for you right now. I know this is tearing you up right now, but trust me, I'm telling you in the Lord, God will help you persevere through this in faith.

He will bring you to the end of this. There will be an out somehow, somewhere, some way. You will either move through this in faith and see the other side of it, or God will bring you home.

That's a win-win. Either way, you're going to win. You're either going to die from this and you're going to go home, or the Lord's going to bring you through it and you'll look back and see the light.

Oh, wow, look at that. And your faith will be even stronger in the Lord. This is what it's promised. God's gift of faith joins us to Jesus, and when God joins himself to you, you cannot be unjoined.

You can't. And we believe that. So the object of our belief, the object of what God is pointing Abram to right now is, Abram, you need to look to me.

[44 : 50] What did I tell you? What did I promise you? You need to realize the I am is your shield. There is no greater shield. There is no greater protection.

Do you remember? What was the name that God told Moses to use when he went to Pharaoh and Moses asked, what name shall I tell him that you have in sending me?

And what did he tell Moses? I am. So that's God's name. I am. The great I am sent you. And so here, God's showing up with Abram and saying, I am your shield.

You can't get any better shield protection than that. I'm going to do what I told you. You're not going to die prematurely. You're not. None of that's going to happen. Now, having said that, I want to bring this last half here.

We need to make careful consideration of a second essential to winning the battle of belief. I told you there are four. I think I'm doing two today. And it's to recognize the enemies of belief.

[45 : 56] The enemies of belief. And we see this in 2 through 5. Abram said, O Lord. Now, here's where he starts to reason with the Lord and say, yeah, but God, you know, here's the deal.

Here's what I see. And here's what I know. O Lord God, what will you give me since I'm childless and the heir of my house is Eliezer of Damascus?

In other words, Abram is saying, Lord, how in the world are you going to pull this off? Okay, I don't have any kids. I've already got a guy lined up to be my heir. I don't get it. And then Abram adds to that in verse 3, since you haven't given me any offspring, I just kind of figure the one born in my house is my heir.

You kind of put that in there. Then behold, the word of the Lord came to him. See, that's the second time here. The word of the Lord came to him saying, this man will not be your heir.

No, the heir for your house, Abram, is going to come from your own body. He will be your blood. And then God took him outside and said, now I want you to look toward the heavens and count the stars if you're able to count them.

[47 : 10] And of course, he can't. He said to him, that's how it's going to be with your descendants. There are going to be so many, you won't be able to count them. And yet, he's standing there before the Lord saying, I got a barren wife.

We're old. She's past childbearing. We don't have anything going. Eleazar's hooked up to be my heir. I don't know. It's not looking good, Lord. The word of the Lord came to him.

Folks, we know that we cannot be unsaved. Amen? We cannot be unsaved. The Lord will help us persevere in our faith in times of trial, hardship. But because we live in a fallen world, we're also living under constant threat of further deception from Satan's schemes.

He seeks to render us ineffective in this service of trying to learn what is pleasing to the Lord. That's what he wants to derail. Trying to learn what is pleasing to the Lord, he wants to get into the middle of that and mess that all up.

Satan will exploit your fears, your doubts, your uncertainties. He will use those as powerful weapons against you. So in the strength of Jesus, we have to daily overcome these enemies to trusting and obeying God.

[48 : 26] If someone were to press me hard about this and say, Jeff, what do you think the number one factor, the number one thing affecting people in their temptation to sin?

What do you think would be the number one in there? There's all kinds of things you could probably say, but I've learned over time that it's not always like this, but the number one I think is fear.

Some element of fear. Something you don't want to happen. Something you want to avoid.

And so you're more likely to give in. That is an element of fear. That fear can go way up or that fear can be a little. But I think fear, that would be the one I'd choose.

Again, won't die on that hill, I'm just saying. Satan is going to seek to derail you. So I'm going to ask this question. What temptations common to mankind worked against Abram's faith as he struggled to trust in God and in His Word.

[49 : 39] That's something that we need to deal with. And I'm going to give you three quick D's. The first one is darkness. Darkness. In other words, what Abram is dealing with here is he speaks to God, he reveals it.

See, there's things Abram can't know, but there's things that he has been told and God is reminding him. Abram, I told you. Haven't I taken you out and said the sand of the seashore? Haven't I said to you already, look at the stars?

I've already done all that. So I'm telling you again, the Word of the Lord, this is my word to you. Right? But what does Abram do? He's tempted to go into the darkness. What do I mean? It's a lack of knowing details and outcomes.

You see? He doesn't know how God's going to do it. I got a barren wife. We're old. Blah, blah, blah. How are you going to do that? And God could answer very easily.

That's not a thing for me, man. It's not. What does this do? It fosters fear. You see it there on the screen. It fosters fear and anxiety when you think like this.

[50 : 43] This refers to a darkness or an uncertainty which stems from fear of the unknown. We don't like that. We want to plug the hole.

not knowing all that God knows about our lives can be a temptation to sin. And so what I mean is that Abram is in the dark about some things.

I'm not saying darkness has filled his heart. I'm saying he's in the dark. He doesn't know. He accepts God's promise to bless him with uncountable descendants, but Abram sees no way for this to truly happen.

Why not? Why not? Why doesn't he believe it? Because the issues causing Abram's fear and doubt haven't gone away. They haven't gone away. He's still childless.

His wife's still barren. He's still an old man and they're getting older. The circumstances haven't changed. And so does that mean the promises have changed?

[51 : 45] No. And this is what God's reminding him. Abram, childless, barren wife, old. So Abram focuses on his own limited understanding and that has to do with the tradition that this chief male servant, Eliezer, will be his heir.

That's their tradition. The promise of God that he makes makes no sense to Abram in light of the tradition, the current situation that he's in.

So verses 4 and 5 are God's answer to Abram's fear and doubt. No, Abram, your heir's going to come from your bloodline. Man, you're going to, it's going to be you.

I'm going to use you. Go out and count the stars again. That's what it's going to be like for you. Now Abram is in a moment. Are you going to believe or not?

You're going to take me at my word? I know. You put your eyes on the circumstances. It doesn't look good, does it? But are you thinking more in terms of what I tell you or what you see? Now look, God's answer, look on the screen there, God's answer is based in this.

[52 : 57] The word of the Lord came to him saying, the word. That is Abram's baseline and it needs to be ours as we face life.

The word of the Lord is the truth we stand on and live by. So what does God tell you in his word? That's that. That's the question to be answered. Whatever the circumstance is, what has God already said to me in his word about this?

Now what God tells Abram is true. Think about it with me. Abram's heir is going to come from his own body. We know that's true, right? Because we read ahead. From his heir, Abram's descendants will be as uncountable as the stars.

But from an earthly perspective, God is saying this seems impossible to you, doesn't it? But nothing's impossible with God. Faith in God, faith in his promise is what's needed in the moment.

You see, it hasn't changed. That's what we need. That's what Abram needs. And I've told you before, faith isn't blind. Faith in the Lord is not blind. It's not senseless.

[54 : 03] It's not unsophisticated. This is what the world will tell you with all of their fanciness, whatever discipline it's in, is that your faith in the Lord is not sophisticated enough. You need a more sophisticated, scientific answer to the issues of life. No. It's not irrational to trust and obey the Lord.

God hasn't told Abram the details for fulfilling the promise. And now I want to put this up so you can see it. When we dwell on the silence of God, on what He hasn't made known to us, on what we don't have, what's not happening, several issues of belief arise in us.

Several issues become issues because we're focused on what God hasn't said, isn't saying, isn't doing, hasn't done. And the first one that I'll give you is we become increasingly impatient, don't we?

Isn't that what happens? It's not happening on your timetable. It's not happening according to the way you do it or what you want. Well, if what you want most is to please the Lord, then that becomes a moot point.

[55 : 19] You don't have to deal with impatience because it's not about you getting what you want when you want it. It's about pleasing the Lord. There's the remedy. What else does it do? We become vulnerable to fear, to worry, to discontentment.

Why? Because we're trying to grab control. We want this done the way we want it done. Finally, we become convinced that the lack of change in our circumstances is a deficiency in the way God is dealing with us.

Don't we say that? Yes, but. But you know, we all do this, folks. I've done it. We become doubtful about God's goodness to us.

That's where it takes us. We become doubtful about God's goodness to us. When you dwell on the silence, when you dwell on the gray spaces, the spaces He hasn't filled in with His truth, His word, or whatever, or what's not happening, you're in trouble.

So don't do this. Don't go there. Another D, doubt, lack of trust. Lack of trust. Abram wants to act.

[56 : 30] I get this. I totally relate to Him in this. He wants to do something. He wants to make something happen. And yet He's confronted with the reality of His wife's barrenness.

So fear, listen, fear, doubt, distress, impatience, they begin to grip and embattle His heart. And in this condition, another danger begins to overtake Him.

What does He do? He fixes His mind on what He cannot control. And in the process, the obvious escapes Him. Wait on the Lord. Wait on the Lord.

That's what He ought to be doing. Sometimes God's answer is, wait. All right, good. I hoped I'd get some, yeah, I know about that one.

Right. You know, it's like sometimes when you pray, and you keep getting a no, and you tell people God's not answering you. No is an answer.

[57 : 33] Right. Wait on the Lord. And how about this final one, deception? Deception. Anytime we're doubting God's goodness, when we're leaning on our own understanding, when we're not willing to wait on the Lord, we're opening ourselves to being deceived by Satan and by our own hearts.

So, Abram needs just what you and I need when we're battling the realities of fear, doubt, worry, anxiety, uncertainties, the things that God's not filling in.

What do we do? Well, look, we need to nourish our souls on the spiritual food our souls need most. And what's that? It's the spiritual food of God's truth.

To inform us and keep us in reality. Jeff, your definition of reality in this moment may not fit reality. So, I need God to make sense of that for me.

And making sense of it doesn't mean that He always changes the circumstances. Maybe that'll happen. Maybe not. And then because God our Father is good and does good to us always, that's why we need to trust Him.

[58 : 48] That's why our faith needs to remain strong. Not because our circumstances are changing, not because we're getting what we want, but because God is good. And He always does good.

Always does good. So, we need to take our eyes off ourselves, our agenda, our sense of our timing, off earthly things, earthly agendas.

We need to refocus on what God has revealed to us. This is what, isn't this, do you not see that in the text? What is God doing with Abram? I'm taking you back to what I have revealed.

You're focused on what I haven't revealed. I haven't told you how I'm going to do this. I'm going to wait, dude. I'm going to wait until you're about 99 years old.

And then, I'm going to open Sarah's womb. And she's going to have a baby by you. But chapter 16, He really messes this thing up.

[59 : 47] And we're seeing missiles and all kinds of stuff happening right now because Abram really messed it up. Really. You can read ahead and then we'll talk about it.

I won't get there for a couple more weeks. I told you, I promised you I would show you a passage in the Bible that will explain to you why ballistic missiles are landing in Jerusalem and Tel Aviv and all these places.

It was written long ago. My God knew that would happen. And so He talked about the people who would make that happen in Genesis chapter 16. That's our God.

That's who we serve. So buckle up for that. I'm almost done. Look at this. We're back to where we were before and then I'm done.

And what is that? The familiar ground of responding to the Lord by focusing on what will most honor and please Jesus in the way of our attitudes and actions.

[60 : 48] We walk in the light of what God is making known to us. You need to take a step based on the light that He's shining on that step. If He doesn't shine it out ahead of you then He wants you to just take that step.

Take the next one. That's what He wants us to do. Take the step. And so what did this come about for Abram?

How did God say this to Abram? Do not fear, Abram. I am a shield to you. Your reward shall be very great. Eliezer's out of the picture.

Your child's going to come from your own body. Let me finish with this. If anyone loves me, Jesus said, he will keep my word and my father will love him and we will come to him and make our abode with him.

But the helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, he will teach you all things and bring to your remembrance all that I said to you. Peace I leave with you. My peace I give to you.

[61 : 50] Not as the world gives do I give. Do not let your heart be troubled, nor let it be fearful. Amen. Let's pray together. Father, we thank you for your goodness and your grace, and we thank you that you have given us faith, and that the object of our faith is your Son, Jesus.

I pray now, Father, that you will send out your people singing in their hearts and rejoicing at the goodness of God to do what you will do to grow us in the likeness of Jesus, that we will become more like him each day of our lives, and that we will take seriously your mandate for us to gather together and encourage each other, to build up each other in our faith.

May you be glorified in that process, in Jesus' name. Amen.