

A Trusting Resolve

[The landowner told the workers,] “I will pay you whatever is right” (Matthew 20:4).

Scripture: Matthew 20:1-16

Song: “I Have Decided to Follow Jesus”

John Bunyan, the famous 17th-century author of *Pilgrim’s Progress*, spent 12 years in prison for preaching to an “unlawful assembly”—a church not authorized by the state. Prison tore him away from his wife and children—an anguish he likened to “pulling the flesh from the bones.” In a painful irony, he could leave prison anytime he wished *if* he agreed to stop preaching! His inner struggle lasted many weeks, until he found comfort in simple faith: “I am resolved,” he wrote in his memoir, “never to deny my profession, though I had nothing at all for my pains.”

Bunyan’s resolve helps shed light on this somewhat perplexing parable—perplexing because we naturally identify with the workers hired early in the day who expected to receive more than the others! But the parable has to do with grace, not labor relations. The workers hired late had no promises from the landowner except “I will pay you whatever is right.” The first hires negotiated. The last ones trusted.

Life is full of uncertainties, but God calls us to walk in the assurance of faith (Hebrews 11:1), trusting Him to do “whatever is right.” Follow God and trust Him. You will never be disappointed.

Father, thank You for providing the grace I need to follow You in faith right now. In Jesus’ name, amen.

May 6–12. **C. Richard Wells** is a long-time professor and pastor. He and Carol, his high-school sweetheart, have three adult children and seven grandchildren.

Reminders to Trust

The LORD said to Abram after Lot had parted from him, “. . . All the land that you see I will give to you and your offspring forever” (Genesis 13:14-15).

Scripture: Genesis 13:14-18

Song: “Standing on the Promises”

Samuel Johnson (1709–1784) knew a thing or two about writing. He wrote numerous essays, books, poems, and plays—even a dictionary! But in one of his essays, he observed that writers often fail to communicate because people won’t *read!* Many people are apt to resist unfamiliar topics, Johnson wrote, and they tend to ignore familiar topics because, sadly, they don’t understand “that men more frequently require to be reminded than informed.”

God’s promise to Abram (Abraham) in today’s passage is a *reminder*. When God first called Abram, He promised him the land of Canaan (Genesis 12:7). But when famine struck, Abram went to Egypt for a time. Months later, he and Lot had to separate because “the land could not support them” (Genesis 13:6). And when Abram graciously allowed his nephew to choose first where he would go, Lot chose the best of the land. So God spoke again to Abram—not to *inform* him, but to *remind* him of what He had promised.

Perhaps Abram felt guilty about his time in Egypt or was saddened by the separation from Lot or even doubted God’s call. (We likely know these kinds of feelings.) But, as we read about God’s reminder to Abram regarding His promises, we are also reminded to stand on God’s promises, for God always keeps them.

Father, when I’m troubled, help me recall Your promises. In Jesus’ name, amen.

No Reason to Fear

[God said,] “Do not be afraid, Abram. I am your shield, your very great reward” (Genesis 15:1).

Scripture: Genesis 15:1-6

Song: “O Worship the King”

When hurricanes turn north up the Atlantic Coast, you might hear mentioned the region of Cape Fear, North Carolina. History records that in 1585, Sir Richard Grenville sailed with seven ships to help his cousin Sir Walter Raleigh establish an English colony on Roanoke Island. One of Grenville’s ships got stranded by the shoals that extend out miles from the Cape, and he wrote in his log, “We were in great danger of a wreck on a breach called the Cape of Fear.” He had good reason to fear a place with such a name!

Abram had possible reasons to fear. He had just rescued Lot by defeating four powerful kings with a surprise attack (Genesis 14:1-16). Would those kings regroup and retaliate? He even had reason to fear his neighbors, who were suddenly aware of a powerful stranger in their midst. In these circumstances, the Lord reassured His servant: “Do not be afraid, Abram. I am your shield, your very great reward” (Genesis 15:1). Old and childless at this point, Abram wondered how God could give him a posterity, so God renewed and confirmed the promise of a son and descendants.

Like Abram, we have reason to fear in a fallen world. There are “conflicts on the outside, fears within,” as Paul said of his own struggles (2 Corinthians 7:5). But like Abram and Paul, we have a compassionate God, who is our shield and great reward.

Father, I will fear no evil, for You are with me. In Jesus’ name, amen.

Bernard's Bumper Sticker

If anyone loves the world, love for the Father is not in them (1 John 2:15).

Scripture: 1 John 2:12-17

Song: “More Love to Thee”

Bernard of Clairvaux (c. 1090–1153), while never owning a car, is nonetheless responsible for inspiring a popular bumper sticker. Maybe you've seen it: “Love me, love my dog.” (Bernard's exact words were, “Who loves me will love my dog also.”) And from that have come the inevitable variations: “Love me, love my cat”; “Love me, love my horse”; and even (brace yourself) “Love me, love my snake.” Bernard's statement was actually making a comparison: he had angels in mind, whom he asserted love us because God does. But his idea can apply in a similar way when it comes to loving God.

In today's passage, John reminds us that to love God is to love the things of God. Earlier in the chapter, John said that love for God is the mark of a true Christian—a theme that weaves like a thread through all of his writings. But it's always with the caveat: “If anyone *obeys his word*, love for God is truly made complete in them” (1 John 2:5, italics added).

In our feelings-centered culture, it's easy to cultivate emotional ideas about our relationship with God, thinking we're living in love toward Him, even while we nurture “the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life” (v. 16). However, no one can truly love God and love the world at the same time.

Father, teach me to love You by loving what You love and hating what You hate. In Jesus' name, amen.

Songs of Deliverance

You are my hiding place; you . . . surround me with songs of deliverance (Psalm 32:7).

Scripture: Psalm 32

Song: “Forgiven”

At around 2 a.m., I bolted awake with a sharp pain just below my breastbone. I had my suspicions, and sure enough, it proved to be what my doctor called an “angry appendix.” You can die from an angry appendix if you ignore the pain. And I tried to do that, but it only got worse. That is, until I humbled myself and put on a hospital gown—you know what I mean!—and let the surgeon do his work.

Like some dreadful disease, sin causes pain that doesn’t let up unless and until it’s dealt with. The pain is a message from God himself, as David wrote, “Day and night your hand was heavy on me” (Psalm 32:4). Yet like people who take antacid for appendicitis, David tried useless alternatives to confession. “I kept silent,” he wrote, but “my bones wasted away through my groaning all day long” (v. 3). However, when David came clean, God’s grace surrounded him “with songs of deliverance” (v. 7).

It’s a truism in counseling that the presenting problem is never the problem. Nobody tells the whole story up front. We love to talk about our triumphs, tribulations, and pet peeves, but not our “secret and shameful ways” (2 Corinthians 4:2). We do well to take David’s advice to come freely to the Lord’s unfailing love and be made right and whole so that we may rejoice!

Father, I will confess my transgressions to You and rejoice in Your forgiveness. In Jesus’ name, amen.

Too Good to Be True

What does Scripture say? “Abraham believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness” (Romans 4:3).

Scripture: Romans 4:1-12

Song: “My Faith Has Found a Resting Place”

Founded in 1841 by George Ripley and a small group that included Nathaniel Hawthorne, Brook Farm was to be a perfect world. Members of the community would choose their work, have all their needs met, and live in harmony. Brook Farm, Ripley declared, would be a light to the world. But never profitable, always in debt, and torn by dissension, the community collapsed in 1847. Hawthorne left long before that, thankful that he wasn't “buried under a dung-heap.”

With few exceptions, if it sounds too good to be true, it likely is. However, while forgiveness through faith in Christ *sounds* too good to be true, it *is* true. In this important text, the apostle Paul points to Abraham as proof. The backstory is Genesis 15, in which God calms Abraham's fear by reiterating His promise of a son and descendants like the stars of the sky. The promise depends on God. Abraham can do nothing except believe or disbelieve—and he believes. Though Abraham is unrighteous, his faith is “credited to him as righteousness.” It sounds too good to be true, but it *is* true—jubilantly true.

Paul assures us that as with Abraham, so with us. As we put our trust in “God who justifies the ungodly,” our “faith is credited as righteousness” (Romans 4:5). Believe, and be forgiven!

Father, You are my refuge and fortress, in You alone I trust. In Jesus' name, amen.

Fully Persuaded

[Abraham] was strengthened in his faith and gave glory to God, being fully persuaded that God had power to do what he had promised (Romans 4:20-21).

Scripture: Romans 4:13-25

Song: “Jesus Saves”

Johanna Quaas, a retired German physical education teacher (b. 1925), competed in gymnastics at the age of 90. Nola Ochs (1911–2016) from Jetmore, Kansas, got a bachelor’s degree at age 95 and a master’s degree at 98. Herbert Lockyer (1886–1984), famous for his 21-volume “All” series, published his first book at age 50 and wrote more than 80 books before his death at 98. All marvelous achievements . . . but not miracles.

At almost 100 years old, Abraham didn’t need better nutrition, greater self-discipline, or extra effort. He needed a miracle. God had promised him a son who would be his own flesh and blood (Genesis 15:4). Yet Abraham’s body was old and worn out, and Sarah was well past childbearing age (Romans 4:19). The apostle Paul wrote that, despite this, “Against all hope, Abraham in hope believed” (v. 18). And God delivered on His promise to Abraham when Isaac was born!

Just as the miraculous birth of Isaac fulfilled God’s promise to Abraham, so the miracle of the resurrection fulfills God’s promise of salvation. The resurrection proves that God has power to do whatever He promises, and so we “believe in him who raised Jesus our Lord from the dead” (vv. 24-25). We who belong to Him know He is faithful—we are fully persuaded!

Father, thank You for always keeping Your promises. I will speak of Your glory and tell of Your power. In Jesus’ name, amen.