A New Normal – Part 1

Finding New Rhythms of Life

# Seed of Faith

## (Genesis 12:1-2)

We’re launching into a brand-new three-part message series today called “A New Normal” and I believe this message this morning is going to speak to you in a very powerful way. This is an important series because we want to end the year strong, we want to be filled with appreciation for what God has given, and full of anticipation for what he’s going to do in this coming year. And so, this series is really about finding new rhythms of life in what really has been a disorienting season and we don’t want to go limping into 2021, but we want to come out of 2020 thanking God for all that he has done.

Over the next few weeks, we’re going to celebrate the fact that God brought us through this year with all of its challenges, and I think we would all have to admit that this year has had its challenges on every level, none of us are excluded, and yet God has brought us through, and so we’re believing and expecting that the best is yet to come. In fact, we’re looking forward to greater things so that we can continue reaching out to more and more people and serving our community. And so, we want to be the body of Christ in a world that needs a touch from Jesus.

In fact, I don’t think the world has ever needed the hope we have in Jesus any more than they do right now. This is the time for us to let our light shine, that’s why Jesus said,

*“Let your light shine before men, that they may see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven” (Matthew 5:16).*

I truly believe that right now, the world needs the hope we have, the love we have, and the life that we have. And so, we want to let our light shine, we want to glorify our Father in heaven, and we’re not ashamed of the gospel of Jesus Christ because it is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes: first for the Jew, then for the Gentile; black people, white people and everyone in between (Romans 1:16). Democrats and Republicans, the small and great, rich and poor, free and slave; Jesus is the hope of the world. And so, as we come to the end of the year, we want to plant seeds of faith and believe God for greater things in 2021.

I want to push off today with a thought from the Old Testament before going to the New Testament, a thought from Genesis before bringing it home in second Corinthians, and I want to talk to those of you who feel like you’re settling down in life. In other words, at one point or another in your life, you had the faith for miracles, you were believing for a great move of God in your life, but then life just kept happening and you started to settle down, you lost your passion when it comes to spiritual things. In fact, there may be some of you right now who’d be willing to settle for a consolation prize, you know God just do anything, because you’ve lowered your expectations of what God might do in your life.

As we begin I want to give you this thought that we’re going to come to again and again throughout this series and I pray that this thought grows and becomes more and more meaningful to you as we progress through the weeks because we’re finding new rhythms of life, like a couple named Abram and Sarai.

## PART ONE: A PROMISE

You may be more familiar with Abraham and Sarah because God changed their names, but when we first meet this couple on the pages of Scripture they’re introduced to us as Abram and Sarai. Anyway, this couple had a dream like many other couples do, they wanted to have children, but no matter what they did, everyone else is getting pregnant and they’re not. Other couples they know, it’s like every time they look at each other they’re pregnant again, but Abraham and Sarah can’t and they’re disappointed.

Well, one day the Bible records in Genesis chapter 12, that God spoke to Abram and challenged him to take a massive step of faith. The Lord said to Abraham in verse one,

*“Leave your country, your people and your father's household and go to the land I will show you. I will make you into a great nation and I will bless you; I will make your name great, and you will be a blessing" (Genesis 12:1-2).*

And so, God calls Abraham into a relationship with himself and says, “You will be the father of many nations.” Abraham heard this and knew immediately that this was it. God said it, it’s going to happen, this is the news we’ve been waiting for, and so he and Sarah begin finding new rhythms of life. They’re picking baby names, planning for the reveal party, and the month comes to an end, but this wasn’t the month, because Sarah’s not pregnant.

Well, Abraham knows that God gave him a promise and certainly God wouldn’t lie, and so maybe he’s just giving them time to prepare, but another month goes by, and another month, and another month, and still nothing. The Bible says that sometime later, maybe 10 years after God made the promise in Genesis chapter 12, sometime later God spoke to Abraham in a vision. And Genesis chapter 15 says,

*"Do not be afraid, Abram. I am your shield, your very great reward." But Abram said, "O Sovereign Lord, what can you give me since I remain childless” (Genesis 15:1-2).*

In other words, what good is your reward, what good is your blessing, when I don’t even have a son? Because from Abraham’s point of view nothing was happening, there was a promise, but that was years ago. Month after month the promise was unfulfilled, 120 disappointments, 120 unrealized expectations, and so instead of being as God said,

*“The father of many nations” (Genesis 17:4).*

Abraham lowers his expectations and says, but I don’t even have a son.

I don’t know who here has been praying for something, believing that God would do something, that he would change something, that he would perform a miracle, and you’ve been praying and you’ve been believing and yet nothing has happened. For those of you who are tempted to lower your expectations of what God might do, I want to encourage you today, that just because you haven’t seen anything, doesn’t mean that God isn’t doing anything.

You see, just like a seed planted in the ground, you can’t see what’s happening under the soil, but God is still working. He’s still sending the sun, he’s still sending the rain, and just because you don’t see anything pushing up out of the ground, doesn’t mean he’s not working. In fact, long before you ever see that sprout break out of the soil, God was working, but like Abraham many of us have a limited perspective. In chapter 15, Abraham is telling God what he can’t see, but he’s inside of his tent, and so God took him outside and said,

*“Look up at the heavens and count the stars — if indeed you can count them." Then he said to him, "So shall your offspring be” (Genesis 15:5).*

God had to take him outside of his limited perspective, outside of his unmet expectations, outside of his tent so that he could see and the Bible says, “Abram believed the Lord…” (Genesis 15:6).

He believed as God communicated to him, illustrating something that is true in his Word. He said,

*“For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways; as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts” (Isaiah 55:8-9).*

And so, God’s Word would not return to him without accomplishing what he desires and achieving the purpose for which he sent it (Isaiah 55:11).

In the same way, for those of you who belong to Christ, I hope you’ll understand if you see the stars in the sky, you’re one of those stars, because you are a seed of Abraham. The Bible says, “If you belong to Christ,” if you been transformed by his grace, if you’ve met his resurrection power and been forgiven of your sins, Galatians chapter 3, verse 29 says,

*“Then you are Abraham's seed and heirs according to the promise” (Galatians 3:29).*

This is so important and here’s what I hope you’ll understand, Abraham was thinking of a son, but God was thinking of you. You are Abraham’s seed and what’s really interesting is that now thousands of years later we are the result of Abraham’s act of faith, which just goes to prove that you can’t measure God’s unlimited power by our own limited expectations.

## PART TWO: A SEED PLANTED

In reflecting on Abraham and that single seed planted in faith, I’m reminded of the apostle Paul. If you’re not familiar with Paul, he’s the one that took the gospel past the boundaries of the Jewish faith and into the Gentile community. He’s the one who destroyed the barrier so that we could know the gospel today. And yet it’s those like Paul who are pioneers of the faith that have to wrestle, struggle, and fight the greatest battles.

You see, Paul was the first one to take the gospel to Corinth, he was the one who started the church there, but as soon as he left Corinth to share the gospel somewhere else, false teachers came in trying to undermine his authority. They began telling the church that he wasn’t teaching the truth and he that wasn’t a real pastor, and so Paul wrote this letter to the Corinthians in response to these allegations and I want to share with you four verses that I think will be relevant to each of our lives.

If you could turn in your Bibles to second Corinthians, chapter 10, I want to read to you from verse 13. This really touched me because you can really hear his heart and how much he loves Jesus Christ and how much he loves the church in Corinth. He says,

*“We, however, will not boast beyond proper limits, but will confine our boasting to the field God has assigned to us, a field that reaches even to you” (2 Corinthians 10:13).*

I want to remind you, that you are a seed planted, we are a field, and if God can reach you and I, we can reach anybody.

Now, to grasp the context, Paul was encouraging them to take up an offering for the Jewish Christians in Jerusalem, but because of these false teachers the Corinthians are resisting him, withdrawing from him, and he’s having to beg them to be a part of it. And so, he’s reminding them that it was he that first came to them with the gospel, nobody else came to them, but he preached the gospel to them and it changed their lives. And so, he says in verse 14,

*“We’re not going too far in our boasting, as would be the case if we had not come to you, for we did get as far as you with the gospel of Christ” (2 Corinthians 10:14).*

In other words, he says, quit trying to act like God hasn’t done anything for you, quit trying to act like it was anything but grace that got you where you are, because we were the first to travel all the way to Corinth with the gospel.

*“Neither do we go beyond our limits by boasting of work done by others. Our hope is that, as your faith continues to grow, our area of activity among you will greatly expand so that we can preach the gospel in the regions beyond you…” (2 Corinthians 10:15-16).*

And so, Paul had every right to boast, he knew that he’d been the first to bring the gospel to Corinth and he’d done it at an incredible rate of speed considering his limited resources. In fact, Paul did more on a donkey than most of us do in our lives with cars, airplanes, the printing press, and the Internet. And so, we’re living in an amazing time when it comes to sharing the gospel and we shouldn’t take our resources for granted because,

*“From everyone who has been given much, much will be demanded; and from the one who has been entrusted with much, much more will be asked” (Luke 12:48).*

I don’t know about you, but I want to maximize the time I’ve been given, the resources I’ve been given and see what God can do through us.

The apostle Paul knew there was no limitation on what God was able to do through him. He knew that he couldn’t be stopped because God is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work within us (Ephesians 3:20). And so, our ability to believe and ask will never catch up to God’s ability to perform. We will never be able to imagine the potential for sharing the gospel that God isn’t capable of exceeding.

But the church in Corinth started giving all kinds of reasons why they weren’t going to follow Paul, they started blaming him for this and that, but it wasn’t really Paul that they had a problem with. It was the fact that Paul was challenging them to a greater faith, challenging them to believe God, challenging them to step away from a self-centered consumer Christianity. And so, he says,

*“Our hope is that, as your faith continues to grow, our area of activity among you will greatly expand” (2 Corinthians 10:15).*

And he challenges them to repent of some attitudes and open their hearts to what God wants to do through them, because God wants to go even farther with the gospel. But the church in Corinth is satisfied, they’re content with where they are, because they’ve heard the gospel, they’ve been saved from their sins, they’ve been blessed, but the essence of God’s blessing is that it always looks beyond itself.

## PART THREE: LOOKING BEYOND

Consider Abraham for a moment, God said, I’m going to bless you and you’re going to be a blessing. In other words, the point of God blessing your life is not just so that it will flow to you, but that it would flow through you. And so, Paul says,

*“Our hope is that… we can preach the gospel in the regions beyond you” (2 Corinthians 10:15-16).*

And so, as we come to the end of the year, as our faith grows, the kingdom grows, but it’s really your faith that God is after. He wants to take you outside of your tent, outside of the box of what you thought was possible, what you think is normal, what keeps you stuck, because the only barrier to finding new rhythms of life is your belief. If you have enough faith, if you believe big enough, there is absolutely nothing that can stop the purpose of God.

But there are some of you whom God has been trying to get your attention, he’s been speaking to you, trying to get his plan through to you, trying to get his purpose accomplished in your life, but you’ve been ignoring him. And so, it’s understandable how Paul could become frustrated with the church in Corinth, because he saw all these people that needed the gospel, that could be reached and a complacent church that was self-centered and content with the blessings that they had received.

And honestly, I understand Paul’s frustration, because I get frustrated with myself and I am so far from being the teacher, missionary and evangelist that Paul is. And so, I get that because I know that there is so much more that God can do through me. That’s why Paul said,

*“Do not put out the Spirit's fire” (1 Thessalonians 5:19).*

But I do it all the time, I don’t even mean to do it, but I quench him all the time. I know there are times when God wants to work through me, but I resist because I’m too focused on myself. I hate that feeling and it’s for this reason that the Bible says…

*“I remind you to fan into flame the gift of God which is in you…” (2 Timothy 1:6).*

You see, it’s just one seed, one selfless act of love, one generous gift looking beyond that can change a generation. And we may not see it today, it may take weeks, it may take months, and it may take years for that seed to take root and produce fruit, but we’ve been blessed to be a blessing. The Bible says,

*“To this you were called so that you may inherit a blessing” (1 Peter 3:9).*

And so, as you’re exploring and finding new rhythms of life, let me encourage you that your one act of faith can initiate an explosive growth of spiritual fruit far beyond what you could ask or imagine. Now, it may not happen immediately, but you have no idea what God can do through a single seed sown in faith.

For those of you who have lowered your expectations of God answering that prayer, I want to encourage you not to grow weary in doing good, because he may not do exactly what you want him to do in the moment, but he’s still working. And so, if you don’t give up, if you keep planting, you will reap a harvest and Jesus said, it’s as simple as planting a seed.

*“I tell you the truth, unless a kernel of wheat falls to the ground and dies, it remains only a single seed. But if it dies, it produces many seeds” (John 12:24).*

In other words, foreshadowing the giving of his own life, he says, if you die to yourself and plant that seed, there could be many lives transformed by the giving of that one life.

You are a seed planted and I know there may be some of you who would say I don’t have a lot of faith, but you are the seed of Abraham, and so how much faith do you need to see a miracle from God? Well, according to Jesus,

*“If you have faith as small as a mustard seed, you can say to this mountain, 'Move from here to there' and it will move. Nothing will be impossible for you” (Matthew 17:20).*

And so, if you have the faith the size of the smallest seed known in Israel, just a mustard seed of faith, you have no idea what God can do through you.

If you’ve started to lower your expectations of God, I hope you understand that God is working, he’s with you and he’s for you. God’s promises are true, his word is alive, and his presence is with us today. We serve a God who can do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work within his church (Ephesians 3:20). Your life is a seed, and you have no idea how much glory God can receive for generations to come through one seed given in faith and through one life devoted to him.

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