Trusting God with All Your Tomorrows

May 22, 2006

The Lord appeared to Abraham one day and gave him an incredible command: “Get thee out of thy country, and from thy kindred, and from thy father’s house, unto a land that I will shew thee” (Genesis 12:1).

What an amazing thing. Suddenly, God picked out a man and told him, “I want you to get up and go, leaving everything behind: your home, your relatives, even your country. I want to send you someplace, and I will direct you how to get there along the way.”

How did Abraham respond to this incredible word from the Lord? “By faith Abraham, when he was called to go out into a place which he should after receive for an inheritance, obeyed; and he went out, not knowing whither he went” (Hebrews 11:8).

What was God up to? Why would he search the nations for one man, and then call him to forsake everything and go on a journey with no map, no pre-conceived direction, no known destination? Think about what God was asking of Abraham. He never showed him how he would feed or support his family. He didn't tell him how far to go or when he would arrive. He only told him two things in the beginning: “Go,” and, “I will show you the way.”

What an incredible thing God was commanding. He told Abraham, in essence, “From this day on, I want you to give me all your tomorrows. You’re to live the rest of your life putting your future into my hands, one day at a time. I’m asking you to commit your life to a promise that I am making to you, Abraham. If you will commit to do this, I will bless you, guide you, and lead you to a place you never imagined.”

The place where God wanted to lead Abraham is a place he wants to take every member of Christ’s body. Indeed, Abraham is what Bible scholars call a “pattern man,” someone who serves as an example of how to walk before the Lord. And Abraham’s example shows us what is required of all who would seek to please God.

Make no mistake, Abraham was not a young man when God called him to make this commitment. He was already an uncle to Lot, and probably had plans in place to secure his family’s future. So he had to be concerned over many considerations as he weighed God’s call. It would mean separating his family from their relatives and friends, and having to trust God completely to provide for them all. Yet Abraham “believed in the Lord; and (God) counted it to him for righteousness” (Genesis 15:6).

The apostle Paul tells us that all who believe and trust in Christ are the children of Abraham. In short, we’re a people who please God by trusting him. And, like Abraham, we are counted as righteous because we heed the same call to entrust all our tomorrows into the Lord’s hands.

Jesus also calls us to this way of living: giving no thought about tomorrow and putting our future into his hands. “Therefore take no thought, saying, What shall we eat? Or, What shall we drink? Or, Wherewithal shall we be clothed? (For all these things do the Gentiles seek:) For your heavenly Father knoweth that ye have need of all these things.

“But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you. Take
therefore no thought for the morrow: for the morrow shall take thought for the things of itself” (Matthew 6:31–34).

Jesus doesn’t mean that we’re not to plan ahead or do nothing about our future. Rather, he’s saying simply, “Don’t be anxious or troubled about tomorrow.” When you think about it, most of our anxieties are about what might happen tomorrow. We’re constantly harassed by two little words: What if?

“What if the economy fails, and I lose my job? How will I pay the mortgage? How will my family be able to survive? And what if I lose my health insurance? If I get sick or have to be hospitalized, we’ll be ruined. Or, what if my faith fails me in trying times?” We all have a thousand “what if” anxieties.

Jesus interrupts our “what ifs” and tells us, “Your heavenly Father knows how to take care of you.”

Christ tells us, “You don’t need to worry. Your Father knows you have need of all these things, and he won’t ever forsake you. He is faithful to feed you, clothe you and take care to supply all your needs.”

“Behold the fowls of the air: for they sow not, neither do they reap, nor gather into barns: yet your heavenly Father feedeth them. Are ye not much better than they?… And why take ye thought for raiment? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow; they toil not, neither do they spin: and yet I say unto you, That even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these.

“Wherefore, if God so clothe the grass of the field, which today is, and tomorrow is cast into the oven, shall he not much more clothe you, O ye of little faith?” (Matthew 6:26, 28–30).

We gladly give all our yesterdays to the Lord, turning over to him our past sins. We trust him for forgiveness of all our past failures, doubts and fears. So, why don’t we do the same with our tomorrows? The truth is, most of us cling tightly to our future, wanting the right to hold onto our dreams. We make our plans independent of God, and then later ask him to bless and fulfill those hopes and desires.

Right now, the church is in a time like none other in history. It is a time of great doctrinal disarray, with the materialistic culture of the world creeping in. God’s people are being taught to dream big dreams, plan for greatness, think big, “go for the gold.” Many Christian parents feel pressured to map out their children’s careers, fearful for their futures if they don’t. Tragically, this has produced a generation of youth so driven to succeed that they’re stressed out, distressed and burning out.

These kids have been sent a message that they can never have enough. As a result, some have gone to extremes, drinking and partying as if everything will come crashing down tomorrow. Many have become overachievers who take prescription drugs to calm their nerves as they try to meet impossible standards. Meanwhile, ordinary kids with simple dreams are made to feel on the losing end, unable to measure up. All have been instilled with a fear of tomorrow.

How did this come about? How did it become the legacy of a generation of older Christians who have known God’s faithfulness? These older believers know God has taken care of them up to now. Why wouldn’t he be faithful to care for their children?

Above this din of confusion and strife — above all the empty striving for material goods and fleshly greatness — a voice is calling out, giving the same command that Abraham heard: “Leave that life behind you. Get up and go, and let me have all your tomorrows. Let me plan your steps, and allow my Spirit to guide you. Surrender all your manmade plans and cast yourself upon me.”

Our forefather Abraham had to lay aside every plan, hope and dream, every concern over his future and his family. And that was no easy thing for him to do. It meant laying aside every fear and anxiety about each tomorrow, and trusting God to bless and keep him through every situation. Yet our heavenly Father asks no less of his people today.

When Paul wrote his letter to the Philippian church, he was in a Roman prison.

As Paul faced his court trial in Rome, he was held under horrible conditions. He was guarded around the clock by soldiers of the Praetorian guard, his feet chained to a soldier on either side. These men were crude, hardened, cursing frequently. They’d seen it all, and to them in their line of work every jailed man was a guilty criminal, including Paul.
Imagine the indignities Paul suffered in that situation. He had no time alone, not a single moment of freedom. Every visit from friends was closely monitored, with the guards probably ridiculing Paul’s conversations. It would have been so easy for that godly man’s dignity to be totally stripped away under that kind of treatment.

Think about it: here was a man who had been very active, loving to travel the open road and high seas to meet and fellowship with God’s people. Paul drew his greatest joy from visiting the churches he had established throughout that region of the world. But now he was chained down, literally bound to the hardest, most profane men alive.

Even some of the Christians who knew Paul began to murmur that he was bringing disgrace on the gospel because of his situation: “If Paul was truly a man of God, such things wouldn’t be happening to him. Why doesn’t the Lord free him? Where is the power in Paul’s prayers? Other ministers of the gospel are being blessed, so why isn’t he? Apollos is having great results with his preaching. And so are the younger ministers, Timothy and Titus. Paul simply has no ministry anymore.”

How did Paul react to being “chained by circumstances”?

We have all heard the familiar saying, “Bad things happen to good people.” Overnight, in a matter of a few hours, our circumstances can be turned completely upside down. Every tomorrow can be taken out of our hands, and our plans and dreams can go up in smoke.

I doubt that anyone reading this hasn’t known someone who has gone through this. Some tragedy happened, something they couldn’t have anticipated, and it changed everything. Overnight, they became chained down by their life’s circumstances. Our ministry receives boxes full of letters describing such chains, with people facing incredible sufferings.

Not long ago, I was waiting in a doctor’s office for my wife, Gwen, when an elderly widow began to tell me about the day her future changed. She and her husband had enjoyed a wonderful life together when he suffered a stroke. She was her husband’s only caretaker, and suddenly both of them were housebound because of his condition. She loved her husband and faithfully cared for him, but for about five years they couldn’t make any plans for “tomorrow.”

Over time he fell into a depression, and one day he called her into the bedroom and began pouring out his complaints to her. He spoke of how the stroke had robbed him of his hopes and dreams. He said she had no idea what it was like not to even be able to go out for a walk: “You can’t imagine what it’s like to just suffer here in bed. All these years I’ve been robbed of a useful life, with no hope for the next day. There’s been no happiness, nothing but sorrow.”

She answered him, “You seem to forget that I was there through it all. You’re not the only one who has suffered. I had hopes and dreams, too. For all these years, you’ve been the total focus of my energy and care. I’ve waited on you hand and foot twenty-four hours a day. All my tomorrows were taken away, too.”

He died shortly after that, and although she missed him she seemed to be a bit bitter about her “lost years.”

Eventually, suffering comes to us all, and right now multitudes of saints are chained down by afflictions. Their circumstances have turned their joy into feelings of helplessness and uselessness. Many are asking in their pain, “Why is this happening to me? Is God mad at me? What did I do wrong? Why doesn’t he answer my prayers?”

For Paul, the issue wasn’t, “Why did this happen to me?” but rather, “How do I react to this situation?”

Paul had two options in his situation. He could spin out into a morbid, sour mood, asking the same self-centered question over and over: “Why me?” He could crawl into a pit of despair, reasoning himself into a hopeless depression, completely consumed with the thought, “Here I am bound up, with my ministry shut down, while others out there enjoy a harvest of souls. Why?”

Instead, Paul chose to ask, “How is my present situation going to bring glory to Christ? How can great good come out of my trial?” This servant of God made up his mind: “I can’t change my condition. I could very well die in this state. Yet, I know my steps are ordered by the Lord. Therefore I’m going to magnify Christ and be a testimony to the world while I’m in these chains.” “Now also Christ shall be magnified in my body, whether it be by life, or by death” (Philippians 1:20).

Paul’s attitude demonstrates the only way we can be emancipated from our dark pit of unhappiness and worry.
You see, it’s possible to waste all our tomorrows anxiously waiting to be delivered out of our suffering. If that becomes our focus, we’ll totally miss the miracle and joy of being emancipated in our trial.

Consider Paul’s statement to the Philippians: “I would ye should understand, brethren, that the things which happened unto me have fallen out rather unto the furtherance of the gospel” (1:12). Paul is saying, in essence, “Don’t pity me or think I’m discouraged over my future. And please don’t say my work is finished. Yes, I’m in chains and suffering, but the gospel is being preached through it all.”

I picture Paul saying, “My affliction has become a source of rejoicing. When the Roman guards leave after their shifts, they tell the whole barracks about my testimony. Then they go home and tell it to their families and friends. In fact, the whole palace is buzzing with talk about the gospel I preach. You may think my hands are tied, that my ministry is over, that I’m a hopeless case who can’t do anything for Christ. On the contrary, these chains have made my preaching bolder than ever.”

Don’t misunderstand: Paul was in no way resigned or indifferent to his circumstances. He was fully in touch with the pain caused by his chains. His mindset was not, “This is the affliction God has allowed, so I’m going to make the best of it. I won’t complain, and I’ll put on a happy face. Nobody will know my pain.” No, never! That isn’t putting all tomorrows into God’s hands.

Note instead Paul’s closing word to the Philippians: “Rejoice in the Lord always: and again I say, Rejoice” (Philippians 4:4). He wasn’t saying, “These chains are a blessing. I’m so happy for this pain of being jailed.” No, I’m convinced Paul prayed daily for his release and at times cried out for strength to endure. Even the Lord Jesus, in his hour of trial and pain, cried to the Father, “Why have you forsaken me?” That is our first impulse in our afflictions, to cry out, “Why?” And the Lord is patient with that cry.

But God has also made provision so that our “what ifs” and “whys” can be answered by his Word. Paul writes, “Knowing that I am set for the defence of the gospel…. Christ is preached; and I therein do rejoice, yea, and will rejoice” (1:17–18). He’s telling us, in other words, “I am determined God’s Word will be validated by my reaction to this affliction. I have set my mind that I won’t disgrace the gospel or make it seem powerless.

“The fact is, Christ is being preached by my calm countenance, by my rest in the midst of all this. Everyone who sees me knows that the gospel I preach takes me through these hard times. It proves that the Lord can take anybody through any situation, any fire or flood, and his gospel will be preached through the experience.”

Here is the message I hear through Paul and Abraham: we don’t have to do something great for the Lord. We only have to trust him. Our role is to place our lives in God’s hands and believe he will care for us. If we simply do that, his gospel is being preached, no matter what our circumstances. And Christ will be revealed in us most especially in our difficult circumstances.

Sam, an elder in our church, once told me, “Pastor David, I watch how you respond to hard times, and it’s a testimony to me.” What Sam doesn’t realize is that his life is a sermon to me. He lives with chronic pain that allows him to sleep no more than a few hours each night. Despite his constant, raging pain, his devotion to the Lord is a testimony to all. Sam may not have a visible ministry, but his life preaches Christ as powerfully as any of Paul’s sermons.

So, is Christ being preached in your present trial? Does your family see the gospel at work in you? Or do they see only panic, despair and questioning of God’s faithfulness? How are you responding to your affliction? Paul spoke of the day when he would stand before the Lord.

Paul writes, “Holding forth the word of life; that I may rejoice in the day of Christ, that I have not run in vain, neither laboured in vain” (Philippians 2:16). Paul was picturing the day when he would stand in Christ’s presence and the secrets of redemption would be unveiled.

Scripture says on that day our eyes will be opened, and we’ll behold the Lord’s glory without rebuke from him. Our hearts will be set on fire as he opens all the mysteries of the universe and shows us his power behind it all. Suddenly, we’ll see the reality of all that had been available to us in our earthly trials: the power and resources of heaven, the protective angels, the abiding presence of the Holy Spirit.

As we behold the awesomeness of these things, the Lord will say to us, “All along, my warriors were camped about
you, an entire army of powerful messengers assigned to you. You see, you were never in any danger from Satan. You never had any reason to fear your tomorrows.”

Then Christ will show us the Father, and what an overwhelming moment that will be. As we behold the majesty of our heavenly Father, we’ll fully realize his love and care for us, and suddenly the truth will come to us in full force: “This was, and is, and forever will be our Father, truly the great ‘I AM.’”

Here is why Paul “held forth” his word about God’s faithfulness. On that glorious day, he didn’t want to stand in the Lord’s presence thinking, “How could I have been so blind? Why didn’t I fully trust my Lord’s purposes? All my worries and questions were in vain.”

Paul is exhorting us: “I want to rejoice on that day, when my eyes are fully opened. I want to be able to enjoy every revelation knowing I trusted in his promises, that I didn’t go about my labors full of doubt. I want to know that I held forth the Word of life in all my reactions to my sufferings, that I fought a good fight, that I proved my Lord faithful.”

Paul then sums it up with this word: “This one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth unto those things which are before” (Philippians 3:13). In short, he thought it was impossible to place his future into the Lord’s hands without first laying down his past. There could be no regrets, no reliving past sins and failures, no wondering what could have been.

Like Paul, I now look forward to my tomorrows, because I know my Father cares…that he keeps his Word…that he works all things together for my good…that he is with me and will never forsake me…that his eye is on me, and his thoughts toward me are good…that his promises cannot fail.

I urge you: trust the Lord with all your tomorrows. And let your present trial preach the message of his faithfulness.

Download PDF [1]

Links