



Sermon Transcription • Abbotsford

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Entertaining Angels Unaware - (Genesis 18:1-15)

[Please Note: This transcript has been lightly edited for ease of reading. Also, some headings have been added in square brackets to aid the reader in locating portions of the sermon.]

During Spring Break my wife and I decided that we would go somewhere, we couldn't afford to go anywhere really special, so we decided to go to central Washington State, which is, you know, a thrill a minute. [Laughter] When I was a kid we used to go in the summertimes to this place, Lake Chelan, which is, really is still in the Okangan Valley, you just keep going south. And so, I thought well we'll go there in March and see how that goes, you know? And it was very different in March than it was in the middle of the summer. So we ran out of stuff to do. Because at that time I had an 8 year old, and a 5 year old son. My little girl hadn't come along yet, and so we were out there, these two boys, not a lot to do in Lake Chelan. Tried to avoid some of the snow, and so one afternoon I said, "Let's play some games." We didn't have the Monopoly or anything, so we had to play games that you do kind of around the campfire. So one of the ones I said to the boys, "Let's do a trust fall." Do you know, when the person falls that at your corporate retreats to show that your boss is really trustworthy because he will catch you apparently. Well this occasion, I said to my son, "Okay Ethan," my oldest, 8 years old, "Can you just fall back into my arms, and I will catch you." And he said, "You won't catch me." And I said, "No, I will catch you, just fall back, trust me, I will catch you."

"Mom, will he catch me?"

"Honey, yes, he will catch you, I promise he will catch you."

"Okay." My little boy Micah, "Just do it Ethan!" Finally, Ethan says, "Okay, okay." So I said, "Ready? One, two, three..." Nothing. He's standing there, stiff as a board. "Okay, let's try it again Ethan. One, two, three..." Nothing. Well this is useless, right, I'm thinking to myself, and so I turn my head over to my wife, and yeah. [Laughter] I turn my head over to my wife, and I don't know what I was going to say to her, like, "This kid won't obey me," or... I don't know what I was going to say to my wife. But while I started talking to her, my son decides at that moment that the spirit has struck, and he's going down. So he starts falling back, and I'm standing there, and all of a sudden, out of the corner of my eyes, I see him with his arms crossed, a smile on his face, going to the ground. And I reached out and I kind of hit him with my arm, trying to catch him, and it turned him sideways, and he stuck his arm out, and crack! I could hear...so he got up, "You didn't catch me!"

"How's your arm?"

"It hurts!"

"Ah, it's just a bruise," right? The next couple days, "It still hurts!" So we came back to Canada, went to the doctor, doctor said, "He broke his arm." And the doctor said, "How did he break his arm?" [Laughter] He doesn't listen! That's how he broke his arm." To this day, if I ask my son, my son will say, "Dad, can you pick this up for me?" or do this sort of thing, "Yeah yeah, you can trust me."



“Can I, Dad?” [Laughter]

It's hard to trust people though, isn't it? I mean, if we're serious about it, we're far happier taking care of our own stuff. Because we know that if we plan it, we can take care of it. It's hard to hand over something important to somebody else and think that they're going to take care of it in the same way that we would, or show the same care about it that we would. That's why we have so many micromanagers around, is because we're just like, “You won't do it the way I want you to.” It's hard to trust other people. I think if you think about it, there are two kinds of character traits that are necessary in a person if they're going to earn your trust. And they're the kinds of character traits that have to be shown over a period of time, and can't just be, like, they show these character traits once of twice. One of them is that they have to have the ability to do the thing that you are asking them to do. Right? They also have to have the will, the desire, to do it. If you think about that in a trust fall, both of those things need to be there in order for you to fall backwards. If they don't have the ability, you're not going to do it. I don't put my 8 year old daughter behind me and say, “Sophie, I'm coming back.” I mean, she can't do it. So I'm not going to trust her to do that particular thing. I also would not fall back in the arms of my son Ethan, for fear that he might return the favour, right? [Laughter] You have to have the desire, the will has to be there. Both those things. Ability and will.

I think that's the way, honestly, it's when we want to trust God. Usually our failure to trust God or our worry comes because we worry about one or both of those issues with God. Do you have the ability to take care of me in this particular circumstance? We know, in our minds we think, yes yes, God is mighty and powerful and can do all these things. But this isn't a written theology, it's a practical theology. In this moment, do I trust that you have the ability to catch me? And we wonder about that sometimes. Or we wonder if he has the will, the desire to do it. Maybe he doesn't have a track record, or maybe we've waited so long and we just haven't seen him come through. We start wondering when things go wrong, God, do you actually want to look after me? If you look at my life over the last little while, it's not going the way someone who has the power to care for me would let it go, if they also had the will to do it. Power, and you have to have the will.

I actually think that this is Sarah's problem in this passage. Sarah is the wife of Abraham, and we've been studying the story of Abraham through the book of Genesis, and she struggles with trusting God. And you know, she's got good reason to, let's just be honest about it. God made promises to her husband and her, he calls them out of this little town Ur and says, “Listen, I'm going to make you a great nation, I'm going to take you to a land that you're going to inherit, and I'm going to give you descendants. You know, the stars of the sky and sand on the seashore. That many descendants are going to be yours.” To this barren woman, that's quite the news. And so she is ready to have the children that the Lord, Yahweh, has promised but, month after month and year after year, it never goes by, and she just starts to wonder, right? As you do. Does God not have the ability to carry this through? Maybe he just, there's something stopping him. Something stopping him in me, or, I don't know. Or maybe he just doesn't have the will, largely just an empty promise in the end. So she gets disillusioned. And when she hears again, later on in her life, years and years and years, I mean we're talking like, 25 years in this case, after the first promise, “Oh, you're going to have a baby.” She's well



past it now, guys. You can imagine why someone would laugh at that, right? This is the story about Sarah laughing.

It's a great little story, it's got a lot of, actually, cultural background that I feel like I need to give you. So here's what I want to do. I want to start by just telling you the story, and then at the end I just have one point I want to make from it, and I think the point will be really clear, especially as we go through toward the end of it, okay?

### **[Tell the Story]**

So here's the story, Genesis 18:1-2,

“The LORD appeared to Abraham near the great trees of Mamre while he was sitting at the entrance to his tent in the heat of the day. Abraham looked up and saw three men standing nearby. When he saw them, he hurried from the entrance of his tent to meet them and bowed low to the ground.”

Okay so, we're going to stop there. There's a lot packed into this, a lot that especially people living in 21st century Canada have a hard time understanding what's going on. Let me give you some background, we'll take this phrase by phrase. The first phrase that's used is Abraham, the Lord appears to him by the great trees of Mamre, you guys know where that is, just outside of Chilliwack there. So the great trees of Mamre were the place that Abraham settled, right? God calls him up out of Ur, he goes to the land where God has promised him, God says, “On the edge of this grove of trees, hey, look that far in front of you and that far behind you, and to each side, everywhere your eye sees, I'm going to give all of this to you. But not yet.” So Abraham is basically a squatter on the land, and he has found this grove of trees, which is really great in the hot sun to put your house under. It's not a permanent house though, okay? It's a tent. Like a bedouin tent. In fact I'll show you a picture of a tent from the bedouin, just to show you in some cases, okay this isn't Narnia we're talking about, he actually was in an actual tent that was in an actual place that was dry and barren, like this. And the tent was like this, wide open front and usually the sleeping quarters and other things inside. It's actually an artist's rendering of what they think Abraham's tent itself looked like, based on some of the historical research that's been done. He's basically out in the middle of nowhere living in a tent, because he doesn't have a permanent structure yet. The land is not quite his, so he has to, like a bedouin, up and move, perhaps, if something happens, like an army comes through or something.

There he is at the entrance of the tent, it says it's in the heat of the day. He's sitting in the shade in the heat of the day at the entrance of his tent, this is the time usually right after lunchtime, right, it's grandpa naptime, sort of siesta time. So in your mind, if we were going to put it in modern language, it's grandpa sitting on his front porch on that summer afternoon in that rocking chair, you know, lemonade nearby. And he's just rocking back and forth. Some of you gentlemen know that that motion happens, and you're at a particular age, and your eyes automatically start to close. It's true, come on guys. You close your eyes, and people say to you, “Don't fall asleep!”



“I’m just resting my eyes.” [Laughter] And you start to rock. This is what Abraham’s doing on the front, and so we don’t know how long his eyes have closed for, but when he opens them up, there are three guys standing there. Now that’s a big deal guys, because he does not live on the main thoroughfare. There are not main thoroughfares. No city or anything like it, he’s in the middle of nowhere. And all of a sudden, three guys show up out of nowhere, and he didn’t recognize it. And in this moment, this is probably the part that we in the West, in the 21st century, struggle to understand the cultural background here. That he has actually committed a *great* social faux pas. The way it worked in those days is, if somebody was travelling through the region, there were no inns along the way, no motels that you could stay in for the most part. So what you did, if you were a traveller, is that you were relying on the hospitality of the people that you came across as you went. And it was expected that if you were somebody who was in a tent, or living in a particular area, and you saw at a distance people coming, and you would often see them at a distance, right? Because that’s part of your safety is making sure that you can see these people, and determine whether or not they have your good or your ill at heart. And so you see them coming, if they’re friendly, your job in this moment is to show them hospitality. To say, “Come in, have some water, rest yourself. Wash your feet. Take care of you. Sit under our trees. Stay the night.” That’s what was socially accepted. The problem here is that Abraham did none of that, because he’s <snoring> you know, on the front porch. And all of a sudden these guys are on him.

We have similar social conventions like this. You know? Sort of unwritten rules that you’re supposed to show hospitality in particular areas. One of them is, you know, you get on the on ramp to a freeway, and you have to merge into traffic? And you know that near lane, there’s cars going by. The expectation, unwritten, is that the people in that near lane either get over to make room for you, or they slow down to let you in. Yes? And if they don’t, you usually try to insist, and if they keep “don’ting” you usually wave at them. [Laughter] I’m not happy about this. “How dare you, there’s all these different lanes of traffic that you could move over to. And you’re not. How dare you?” See, there’s an unwritten rule in our culture that you show hospitality in this moment. Similarly, there’s an unwritten rule that this is the kind of hospitality you show. If you don’t show it, especially in a culture that’s driven by honour and shame, you’ve brought great shame upon your name, upon your people. And so it explains why Abraham, when he opens his eyes, sees these three guys, he immediately jumps to life, and he hurries over to them. Do you see what it said? He hurries over to them and he bows low to the ground.

I used to play tennis against a, well against and with a friend named Hiro. Hiro was an exchange student in high school from Japan. He became a friend of mine when I was in my last year of high school. We used to play doubles together from time to time, and I would be at the net sometimes and he would be returning the serve. He was a very good player, but sometimes, he played a lot of singles, and so he would try to hit the ball in locations that I would sometimes be in the way. So he, and he hit the ball hard too, right? The serve comes, and he’d just launch it, and it would hit me in the back. Oomph. Point to the other team. But when this happened, Hiro would drop his racquet and he’d run to the net as fast as he could, while I was like, “Ouch, that hurt.” And he would bow so low, right? He didn’t speak very good English at all, he would just, “Sorry, sorry, sorry! Sorry, sorry sorry!” His head almost hitting the ground. And I’d be like, “Hiro, it’s okay! It’s just tennis, right? It’s not a big deal.” This is what Abraham’s doing, it’s...the lower the bow, the greater the honour. And he’s very



apologetic for this, and so he feels like, I've got to go overboard to make up for my faux pas. So here's what he does. Genesis 18:3-8,

“He said, ‘If I have found favor in your eyes, my lord, do not pass your servant by. [He speaks to one of the three of them.] Let a little water be brought, and then you may all wash your feet and rest under this tree. Let me get you something to eat, so you can be refreshed and then go on your way—now that you have come to your servant.’ [I’m your servant, I’m your servant, I’m your servant. Can we just take care of you for a little bit.] ‘Very well,’ they answered, ‘do as you say.’ So Abraham hurried [listen to the language here, he hurried] into the tent to Sarah. ‘Quick,’ he said, ‘get three seahs of the finest flour and knead it and bake some bread.’ Then he ran to the herd and selected a choice, tender calf and gave it to a servant, who hurried to prepare it. He then brought some curds and milk and the calf that had been prepared, and set these before them. While they ate, he stood near them under a tree.”

This is a very interesting little scene, because he's like, “Oh, can I...please, please, you know...I didn't see you from a distance, but here you are, please stay, let me show you all the hospitality I'm supposed to show you, just a little water, a little washing of your feet, okay?” The guys are like, “Yes.” “Okay okay, stay here for a minute okay? I'll just be right back.” <running quickly> You know, he takes off running. He goes inside the tent, and he says to Sarah, “Sarah, quick! Make three seahs of bread!” 60 loaves is what that is. “Honey, make 60 loaves of bread!” [Laughter] What? That's a lot of bread for these guys.

A little sidebar here, this one's for free. The bread in those days, the Hebrew word that's used here, actually, is, the NIV does, “the finest flour.” That's right, it's a different kind of bread than the normal bread. So he's going to get the very best bread. That's the good news. The bad news is, when they baked bread in these days, they usually did it over animal dung. So, I don't know what the taste was like. And there's 60 loaves of animal poo bread coming to these gentlemen, right? That's a lot. So, “Sarah, you take care of the bread.” And he runs out the back, and, “Get the fattened calf,” basically, the best one. They didn't eat a lot of meat in those days, you save the best, fattest calf for the best occasions. You probably remember, some of you, in the New Testament, the story about the prodigal son, where the son returns home and the father welcomes him, and he says, “Get the fattened calf, for my son has returned.” Right? It's for that kind of occasion, that kind of celebration, like a wedding party that you get the fattened calf. Well, these guys are going to get that here. So you can see Abraham here, just going overboard with his bow. Right? “You are so honoured.” Brings all this stuff to them. They're swimming in loaves of bread, and they're eating there, and he stands at a distance, as a servant would, humbling himself. Hoping that he has not injured his name too much. And of course as soon as the meal finishes, the words begin. Genesis 18:9-10,

“‘Where is your wife Sarah?’ they asked him. ‘There, in the tent,’ he said. Then one of them said, ‘I will surely return to you about this time next year, and Sarah your wife will have a son.’”



Now here's my question before that. Does Abraham have any idea who these guys are? Like, do we have any indication in the passage that he knows who they are? And the answer's no. I don't know why, maybe a little sleep in his eyes, or he's just so, you know, embarrassed by what's gone on here culturally, that he's like, not paying attention but...all of a sudden, one of these visitors says, "And where's Sarah?" Never seen him before in his life, and he says, "Where's Sarah?" Can you imagine, can you imagine like, an Australian shows up at your doorstep and asks for food, that's what they do. [Laughter] So they show up at the doorstep and they ask you for food, and you're hospitable, you bring them in, never seen them before in your life. You wonder, where are you from? You just showed up. And you have this great meal, and at the end of the meal, they say, "And where is your," and then they use the name of your spouse, who's not currently there because she or he is with the kids. What are you thinking in this moment? You stalker! Like, how do you know the name of my spouse? How dare you? Or, if they're not that, if that's not happening, and they have vision, perhaps.

So Abraham in this moment is starting to figure out, oh my goodness, this might be somebody different, especially as he's been walking with God and meeting with God all along the way, he starts to go, oh wait a minute. But it's the last line that clinches it for him, right? Because he says, the visitor says, "And this time next year I'm going to return and your wife's going to have a son." That's not the first time that Abraham's heard that line. The chapter previously, God said that to Abraham and Abraham was like, "Give me a break, are you kidding, my wife Sarah, is going to have a child? Come on, <laughing>." He laughs. "Ishmael, we did the whole thing about Ishmael Lord, see?" The Lord said, "No no no, it's not going to be Ishmael, it's going to be Sarah, your wife, from her very body, is going to come a son." And he's just like "<Laughing>" "Because you're laughing, I'm going to name him Isaac which means 'laughter.'" So he's already heard this story. He's already heard the line, and so in this moment he's like, "<Gasps> It's the Lord!" And he calls for Sarah. Now, Sarah's not there, right? She's in the tent washing her hands, we hope, from the bread. [Laughter] Genesis 18:10-12,

"Now Sarah was listening at the entrance to the tent, which was behind him. Abraham and Sarah were already very old, and Sarah was past the age of childbearing. So Sarah laughed to herself as she thought, 'After I am worn out and my lord is old, will I now have this pleasure?'"

Isn't that great? Like, "I can't have babies, it's not because I'm choosing that way, it's because I'm well past the age of menopause. It's a physical impossibility. I'm worn out, and have you had a look at Abraham recently? He's an old man. Come on now, it's not going to happen." So she laughs. "Ha, the person who says that kind of stuff is clearly nuts. Laughably nuts. <Laughs>" The only way for her to have a baby is if the one who promises the baby has the ability, I don't know, to create life out of death. Speak light into darkness, or something like that. Genesis 18:13-14,

"Then the LORD said to Abraham, 'Why did Sarah laugh and say, 'Will I really have a child, now that I am old?' Is anything too hard for the LORD? [Like what's the difficulty here? Why is she laughing? Is anything too hard for the Lord?] I will return to you at the appointed time next year, and Sarah will have a son.'"



So he doubles down on it. And he accuses Sarah of something here. He's basically saying, "Listen, the reason that you're laughing is out of unbelief. You don't think I have the ability. So you're not willing to commit yourself to trust me, and be joyful, even, in this moment. Because you have a track record with me, that it's been what, 25 years, and I haven't fulfilled the promise yet. But I'm here to tell you, I'm going to do it." She laughs and is like, "The obstacles are too big." And he's like, "No, there's no obstacle too big for me. So instead of being disenchanted and disheartened, Sarah, and laughing and sad, you should be joyous. Dear woman, you should be joyous." She does, at the end here, what all people caught in sin tend to do. They hide it. You can see in Genesis 18:15,

"Sarah was afraid, so she lied and said, 'I did not laugh.' But he said, 'Yes, you did laugh.'"

Do you think the Lord knows that she is lying here? Uh, she's trying to dupe the one who hears her thoughts...he probably...sin always makes you stupid, you know that, right? Like, there's a scene in the garden of Eden after Adam is caught, or Adam and Eve are, you know, they've eaten the forbidden fruit, and so the Lord comes in the garden, he's walking in the day, and Adam's first kind of words to his wife, in their sinful state are, "Hide. He won't see us behind the tree." Like, really? From the sovereign Lord? Okay, yeah, he's not going to catch you behind that tree over there? Come on, man. Don't be stupid. Well, for her as well, she's got to cover it up. You know what's great about this story, though, we'll bring it up a little bit more next week, is like I said before, the name Isaac, the name of this child, it means "laughter." You've got to realize that everyday, when this woman is standing at the edge of her tent, and calling out the name of her little boy to come in for a meal, she says, "Hey, Isaac! Hey, Laughter! Dinner's ready!" It's like the Lord has placed in her language of everyday, a reminder of this scene. "You laugh. Is anything too hard for me?"

### **[Make the Point]**

Alright, what's the point then? It's actually that line, isn't it? I mean, if I sat you down and I asked you, "Okay, tell me what this story is about." Okay? And I give it to you, you read the 15 verses, I guarantee you, the line that would stick out to each and every one of us is, "Is anything too hard for the Lord?" Right. That's the point. Here's a woman who's facing what she considers an insurmountable obstacle. "How am I possibly going to trust God in the midst of this difficulty? When this is in front of me, how am I going to trust him to fulfill his promises to me? It's too hard!" And the Lord's response to this is, "Is anything too hard for the Lord? Just fall back, I've got ya. Stop despairing. Hope, hope. Because I will fulfill my promises," he says to his covenant people.

I have to pause here for a second, and I actually need to ask you an important question. It's this: what does the Lord promise to his covenant people? You know what I mean by covenant people? I mean those people who are by faith attached to him, and are the recipients of the promises he makes. So they're part of what we call the covenant of faith, the covenant community. So if you are, by faith, a Christian, what promises does God make to you? And I'm pointing this out, or asking the question, because there are lots of people running around these days saying, "I'll tell you what promises God makes to you! New cars! Bigger houses! The feeling you get in your stomach when you see that thing that you want, that's the Lord's promise to you! Name it, claim it, it's yours." I know of those who have



take this passage, in fact, and have used it to try to promise people in their churches that this story is basically teaching that God will bring that thing that he promised to you, that healing in this life, that spouse, those children, whatever. That good life, God will bring it in this life to you, and you're facing opposition and you just need to keep going like Sarah did. That is half true. The half true part is that, yes, the Lord has made promises to us, but they are to be delivered to us, not here and now, but then and there. So Jesus, John 14:1-3

“Do not let your hearts be troubled. You believe in God; believe also in me. My Father’s house has many rooms; if that were not so, would I have told you that I am going there to prepare a place for you? And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with me that you also may be where I am.”

“Don’t let your hearts be troubled, you should have hope in your heart, because I’m going away and I’m going to prepare a place. And when I have it prepared, I’m going to come back and I’m going to take you with me to be there. Hope.” Well you say, “Okay, what’s that place going to be like?” Okay. The end of his life, the same author, John, writes these words, in Revelation 21:3-4:

“And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, ‘Look! God’s dwelling place is now among the people, and he will dwell with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God. ‘He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death’ or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away.’”

There’s a day coming where we will dwell in beautiful light and joy, no tears, no crying, no pain, all of the evil of the world having been undone in the presence of God himself. That’s where Jesus is going, to prepare a place for you, and he’s going to take you to be there. That’s his promise to his covenant people. So don’t let your hearts be troubled. There’s this great scene in the end of *The Return of the King*, it’s the *Lord of the Rings*, the last *Lord of the Rings*, where Frodo and Samwise Gamgee are on the edge of the mountain, having finally thrown the ring into the volcano. Gollum is clutched in as he’s gone in, and they realize in this moment that this fight to bring this ring to this location to destroy it is going to take their lives. And so they lie next to each other at the side of this volcano and basically close their eyes, knowing that their lives will end without seeing their friends again. And they close their eyes, and the screen fades to black. And then there’s a long pause, and then the next scene is this light room, where Frodo is laying in a bed. And it’s bright and cheery and all of a sudden he looks up and there’s Gandalf, his friend, and at the door, all of his friends of the Fellowship, they just keep coming in, over and over. This is J.R.R. Tolkien’s way of saying, “This is what heaven’s going to be like.” That even though sometimes in the present moment we feel like we’re on the side of Mount Doom, and everything is going wrong, in a moment the Lord will make it all better.

My mother, about a year before she died, my mom contracted a form of cancer that they said wasn’t going to kill her, “Don’t worry about it,” she said. But it was actually the thing that killed her. It made her loopy in the middle of the night, they found out, and she fell on her way back from the bathroom in the middle of the night, she hit her head on the side of a dresser, and she died of her head injuries. But it was the cancer that caused it. So I found out that she had cancer about a year beforehand. And I





remember standing, talking to her in her kitchen. And I was like, “You know, it’s hard to deal with, the questions of your parent’s death, you know, impending death. You always know that, yes, of course, we’re all going to die. But Mom, I don’t want you to die,” I said to her. And she said, “Listen, here’s the deal. Let’s you and I make a date. That if I die and I go to be with Jesus, when you get there, let’s have lunch by that lake.” So I have a date waiting for me with my mother. And that kind of news should bring you a kind of hope, shouldn’t it? I mean, in the face of impending challenges and obstacles, you’re supposed to look at that and say “Yes,” but hope should be welling up in your heart, yeah, the future is friendly, thank you Telus. [Laughter] And ultimately for Christians, yes, it is. It is, it doesn’t matter how unfriendly it is in the moment. The future is ultimately going to be remarkably friendly for us. And so, we should be the most hopeful people in the world. And yet, I look around the Christian church, and to myself, and I realize, we probably are about as despairing as we can be. How do you get these people who have all of these reasons to hope to be hopeful, instead of despairing?

But you know what, we understand what it’s like to be Sarah, don’t we? Those promises were made a long time ago. And it doesn’t seem like it’s getting a lot better. And we get sick, listen, I have a friend that I met from high school, 20 years my friend, I haven’t seen him for 20 years. And we got together recently near here, and he told me about his life in the last 20 years. He’s had to deal with some significant health problems. He was a dear friend of mine, we went to church together, and our conversation sort of meandered into questions about faith. And he said, “You know, my faith has changed, and I don’t really know where I am anymore. Like, I believe, yes, all that stuff. But the things in front of me, the obstacles in front of me, are so disquieting, they’re so difficult to face, that sometimes I feel lost in this moment, and I don’t really know what to believe anymore.” You ever feel that way? Where you’re despairing? And yet if you stop and you think about it, passages like this are trying to say, “But you should hope! You should *hope!*” Is anything too hard for God? Yes, huge obstacles in front of us. But we have a God who has a consistent record of overcoming that kind of stuff. You know that, yeah? Can you imagine being Moses on the edge of the Red Sea as he stands there with the army of Egypt behind him? Strongest army in the world, coming toward him and a big body of water in front of him? You know what I’d do if I were there? I’d sit down on the sand and just pout. “Thanks God! Brought us this far and now we’re going to die. I mean, the only way out of this is if you’re the kind of God that could, I don’t know, split a sea or something.” Can you imagine what it was like for the disciples to follow Jesus all those years and get to the end and sit, seriously, at the foot of a cross? Hiding, basically, for fear that they might be found out? And seeing the one that they followed, who made all of these grand promises about kingdoms, and all...he died. Death. He died. Death ends things. You know what I’d do? I’d probably sit on the ground at that cross in the dust and say, “Great God, thanks for all the promises. I mean, the only way out of this is if you’re the kind of God who, I don’t know, can raise the dead.” Over and over and over and over and over and over again in the Scriptures and in the life of Christians throughout the ages, God has proven himself faithful. And he will prove himself faithful to you. His covenant, his people. We ought to be people of hope and not despair.

There’s this great story, I’ll finish with this, this great story in the book of Matthew, chapter 14, it’s a story about Jesus. He’s standing on the shores of the Sea of Galilee, and he tells his disciples, “Hey, get in that boat and go to the other side, I’ll meet you over there tomorrow.” So they head out. They



get to the middle. The wind has come up on the Sea of Galilee, and so these great fishermen who are rowing like crazy can't get any further because the wind is blowing against them, and they're freaked out in the middle of the night. These storms can be really terrifying, and they're wondering whether or not they're going to live or die. "Where's Jesus anyway?" And they see in the distance this guy walking on the waves, you know. Which, if I were there, I'd be like, "Aaaahhh!" I'd be hiding underneath things. "It's a ghost!" They say. And Jesus says, "It's not a ghost, it's just me, I'm just taking a walk." [Laughter] Well, Peter, bold Peter, stands up, "If it's you, tell me to come to you out on the waves." "Come," says Jesus. This is how the passage reads, Matthew 14:29-30:

"Then Peter got down out of the boat, walked on the water and came toward Jesus. But when he saw the wind, he was afraid and, beginning to sink, cried out, 'Lord, save me!'"

How do you see the wind? Well, you see the effects of it. What's interesting about this guy is, he's walking on water as long as his gaze is fixed on Jesus and his power to overcome the waves, yeah? But the moment his eyes are taken off of the one who has the power to overcome all that's around him and he focuses on the stuff that's around him, he's like, "Woah, those are big waves, that's a big wind." And down he goes. The direction of his gaze determined everything about whether he was to rise above it, or sink in it. Jesus reaches out to him, in Matthew 14:31,

"Immediately Jesus reached out his hand and caught him. 'You of little faith,' he said, 'why did you doubt?'"

Guys, he could have been reaching out there. He didn't need to say those words. You know what he could have said? The same thing he said all those years earlier, to Sarah. "Is anything too hard for God?" So you might sit here, and you might say, "Yeah, you know, if I really take a hard look at my life, I am a despairing person right now. Even though I'm a Christian, I despair." And I've just got to ask you, where are you looking? He will fulfill his promises. And if you keep your eyes on him and his power, you will walk on top of the very things that you think are insurmountable in this moment. You can fall back into his arms. He's not looking off into the distance at something else, you won't break your arm. You can trust him. It's time to hope again, yeah? Let me pray,

Father, I'm thankful for your grace and for your Word. And I pray, Father, that the hope that we speak of here would well up in our hearts, especially those of us, Father, who are despairing. And those of us who aren't despairing, Lord, I pray these words would come back to mind in the coming days when we are. Come quickly, Lord Jesus. Renew your world, Lord Jesus. We look forward to it in hope, trusting the promises of the one who made them. In Jesus' name, Amen.