

I. Introduction

- A. In the movie, "The Last Jedi", Leia Organa said, "Hope is like the sun. If you only believe in it when you can see it, you'll never make it through the night."
 - 1. Said to boost the morale of the resistance fighters when things looked hopeless
 - 2. It's a great quote and rings true.
- B. "To hope against hope"
 - 1. English language idiom
 - 2. Continue to hope for something when the situation appears entirely bleak, when there is no substantive reality to hope in
 - 3. *Hope is critical in our faith. In fact, the author of Hebrews says this, "Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen."
 - 4. Faith is really simply understood as the process of fully surrendering to the kingship, the promises, and the mission of Jesus.
 - 5. Simple to define but difficult to live out

II. Growing faith

- A. Everything dependent on our faith or surrender to God

That is why it depends on faith, in order that the promise may rest on grace and be guaranteed to all His offspring—not only to the adherent of the law but also to the one who shares the faith of Abraham, who is the father of us all, as it is written, "I have made you the father of many nations"—in the presence of the God in Whom he believed, Who gives life to the dead and calls into existence the things that do not exist. (Romans 4:16-17)

 - 1. "That is why..." is saying that because the Law brings wrath, it is by faith or believing God, that His promises are experienced.
 - 2. We don't earn or work for God's promise, we are gifted by His grace.
 - a. When I receive a gift, I receive it by trusting the giver.
 - b. Therefore, to all the dependents of Abraham, under the Law or not, the key has always been our surrendering of our life for the life of Jesus
 - 3. *Nation = Gentiles. "Father of many nations" also could be, "father of many Gentiles."
 - 4. Abraham found that he (and we) experience God through faith (surrender) - it has always been this way
- B. What kind of faith did Abraham have?

In hope he believed against hope, that he should become the father of many nations, as he had been told, "So shall your offspring be." He did not weaken in faith when he considered his own body, which was as good as dead (since he was about a hundred years old), or when he considered the barrenness of Sarah's womb. No unbelief made him waver concerning the promise of God, but he grew strong in his faith as he gave glory to God, fully convinced that God was able to do what He had promised. That is why his faith was "counted to him as righteousness." (Romans 4:18-22)

 - 1. Abraham's faith believed the unbelievable (Romans 4:18)
 - a. There was no real reason to hold on to God's promise because all reality was set against its fulfillment.

- b. Characteristics of faith
 - 1) Faith is not persuading ourselves to believe or just saying we believe, it is quiet confidence and resting in God (the safety of complete surrender).
 - 2) Faith exists in the face of the unbelievable because it does not look at itself, it looks to God.
- 2. Abraham's faith relied on God's strength (Romans 4:19-22)
 - a. Not weakened by his own limitations or the natural world
 - 1) Hopelessness of the mirror—his own deteriorating body
 - 2) Hopelessness of the table—Sarah's age and barren womb
 - b. Strengthened as he gave glory to God
 - 1) God's glory is the greatness of His beauty and all of His holiness and perfection.
The heavens declare the glory of God, and the sky above proclaims His handiwork. Day to day pours out speech, and night to night reveals knowledge. (Psalm 19:1-2)
 - 2) The aim of all things is to display the glory of God.
For from Him and through Him and to Him are all things. To Him be glory forever. Amen. (Romans 11:36)
 - 3) We glorify God by recognizing His beauty and perfection even in this fallen world and we display His glory by surrendering our lives to Him, believing what He says.
 - 4) *This is how Abraham received God's righteousness - he believed the unbelievable and relied on the presence and power of God. He was convinced that God was able to do what He promised no matter how long the night lasted.
 - 5) *Paul's description of Abraham here makes him seem just about perfect.
Anyone know much about Abraham's life?
- 3. Hagar dilemma (Genesis 16)
 - a. Is Paul unaware or ignoring this faithless act in Abraham's life?
 - 1) Paul is focusing on the high points and the ultimate trajectory of Abraham's surrender
 - 2) Abraham does grow in his surrender to God after God corrects him and he, again, believes God.
 - 3) Ultimately, Abraham was surrendered to the point that he was willing to obey God even when it came to his one and only son.
 - b. Culturally, what he did was normative and acceptable.
 - 1) If a head of household did not have an heir from his wife, he could legally choose a surrogate.
 - 2) It was his legal and cultural right to have an heir through Hagar.
 - c. Two lessons from Hagar
 - 1) God does not highlight our failures; He celebrates our faith; He remembers not our sin but He receives glory from our surrender.
 - 2) What is permissible and culturally/legally acceptable does not excuse us from believing and obeying God in absolute surrender. The cultural rights I have do not always translate to a freedom I have in Christ.
- III. Some faith-growing thoughts

- A. There are degrees of faith as we become like Jesus.
 - 1. Throughout our life with Jesus, we will go from a weak faith to a strong, at times even back and forth. Be encouraged that weak faith is still faith.
 - 2. Faith is a process of surrendering more and more of our lives to Jesus and believing Him over anything or anyone else, but make no mistake ...
- B. The journey of faith is toward absolute surrender to Jesus. It is a full exchange of my life for Christ's life.
- C. Story: the unbaptized arms
 - 1. Ivan the Great was the tsar of Russia during the 15th C. He brought together the warring tribes in to one vast empire. He was courageous and a brilliant general
 - 2. As his reign continued, his friends and advisors were concerned that he did not have a family which meant he did not have an heir. A search commenced to find him a wife and that search led to the daughter of the King of Greece.
 - 3. The King of Greece was delighted because this would align Greece in a favorable way with the emerging empire. He had one condition, "Ivan cannot marry my daughter unless he becomes a member of the Greek Orthodox Church." Ivan's response, "I will do it!"
 - 4. So, a priest was sent to Moscow to give Ivan the Orthodox doctrine. Ivan, a brilliant man, learned the catechism in record time. He then made his way to Athens accompanied by 500 of his personal palace guard.
 - 5. He was to be baptized into the Orthodox Church by immersion as was the custom of the Eastern Church. His soldiers, deeply loyal, asked to be baptized with him so the Patriarch of the Church assigned 500 priests to give the soldiers a one-on-one catechism crash course. All 500 soldiers were to be baptized in one mass baptism.
 - 6. 1000 priests and soldiers in the river for baptism, but there was a problem. The Church prohibited professional soldiers from being members; they would have to give up their commitment to bloodshed and war. They could no be killers and church members.
 - 7. After a hurried round of diplomacy, the problem was solved. As the words were spoken and the priests began to baptize, each soldier reached to his side and withdrew his sword. Lifting it high overhead, every soldier was totally immersed - everything baptized except his fighting arm and sword.
- D. True story. And probably true for many of us as well. Abraham's journey of faith was a journey towards full surrender to Jesus, as is ours. In many ways, the Gospel message—that Jesus has defeated all God's enemies and is reigning King—has been soft pedaled. It is common to diplomatically withhold from God the things we don't want to give up—a form of being almost baptized but holding above the waters our wallet, daughter, ideology, etc. In death, without exception, every man and woman ultimately surrenders all they own to God. The Gospel is surrendering everything now. Whatever it is you feel is safer in your hands can only truly be redeemed if it is laid down at the feet of Jesus. What is it that you have held above the waters of surrender in your life?