

I want you to imagine yourself in two hypothetical scenarios. Then, I want you to then tell me in which scenario you'd have an easier time trusting. **Scenario A:** You're sick. The doctors have performed countless tests and consulted with numerous experts from across the country, but everyone's stumped about what's wrong. They've tried different medications and treatments, but instead of getting better, every day you just seem to be getting worse. **Scenario B:** You're sick. The pain is excruciating at times, but the doctors quickly and easily identified the cause. They've prescribed the right medicine, and surgery is scheduled. It's a very routine procedure, and after it's done, everything will return to normal.

Which scenario would make it easier to trust? Pretty obviously scenario B! Now, certainly, there would still be some unknowns, but when the future looks much brighter and far more certain, it's so much easier to trust, isn't it? It's easier to trust when there's visible evidence that everything will be OK.

But what about when there isn't? What if your life feels a lot more like scenario A than scenario B, whether the problem is with your health, or your job, or your family? What if you have more questions than answers? More uncertainties than certainties? Seemingly more reasons to doubt than reasons to trust?

When your present, your future, or both, look completely uncertain, can you still trust? Can you still see through **Eyes of Faith When the Vision's Bleak?**

Yes, you can. And here's why—Christ is risen! In our sermon series, "Life through Easter Lenses," today we'll explore why seeing our lives within the context of the resurrection dispels our doubts, no matter how bleak the vision might seem.

We find a great example of that in today's Old Testament reading, in the person of Abram. You might know Abram by his more commonly-used name, Abraham. This chapter of Genesis takes place before God changed Abram's name, which means "exalted father" into Abraham, which means, "the father of many."

For a little background, when Abram was 75 years old, God told him to pack up and leave his homeland for a new land God would show him. And so Abram did! With his wife, his nephew, their servants, and their stuff, Abram set out into the unknown. Talk about trusting in an uncertain future!

Abram trusted despite the uncertainty, because God made him a number of promises. ***"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. I will bless those who bless you and whoever curses you I will curse; and all peoples on earth will be blessed through you."***

And over the course of the next 25 years, God certainly kept those promises. He blessed Abram with great wealth, strong faith, safety, and success in everything he did. Then, in a vision, God speaks to comfort Abram, and remind him how God had kept his promises, saying, ***"Do not be afraid, Abram. I am your shield, your very great reward."***

But although God had made and kept so many promises to Abram, there was still one promise left unfulfilled. God had promised to make Abram into a great nation.

That promise must have hung over Abram like a dark rain cloud. Jabbing at his heart, prodding his mind like a thorn in his sandal. Because although God had promised Abram a great nation would spring from his offspring, Abram didn't have any offspring. What's more, Abram was nearly 100, and his wife Sarai was also old and barren. So in Abram's eyes, things were looking bleak.

Abram's doubt is almost palpable as he laments, ***"O Sovereign Lord, what can you give me since I remain childless and the one who will inherit my estate is Eliezer of Damascus?"*** He then repeats his problem, as if he needs to alert God to the problem. ***"You have given me no children; so a servant in my household will be my heir."***

Abram had often shown great trust that God would keep his promises. And yet, what he saw in his life left him feeling doubtful. He saw an old man with an old, barren wife. Where was the visible proof that God would indeed make him into a great nation? The vision was pretty bleak.

Believing by seeing grew difficult when the clock was ticking, each passing day making it less likely that he would bear a son. At that point in history, a man could legally adopt one of his servants to be his heir. But even though that servant, Eliezer, would legally be his heir, Abram was keenly aware that it wouldn't be his family line that would lead to the Savior. Without a son, Abram's future was bleak.

Maybe it's not hard for you to imagine how Abram felt. Because maybe as you view your life, the vision seems pretty bleak also. Or at least, uncertain. Maybe like Abram and Sarai, you're struggling with infertility. Maybe you're in a financial hole, and it looks bleak that you'll ever climb out of it. Maybe you long to be married, but the "right" person always turns out to be very wrong. Maybe you're caught in an addiction you can't break. Maybe depression and anxiety darken your days. Maybe the doctor's prognosis is grim. Maybe you've got a new job, but you don't know if it will work out. When the future looks bleak or uncertain, it's really easy to doubt, and really hard to trust.

It's a bit like trying to see through glasses with the wrong prescription. Rather than helping you to see things more clearly, those lenses instead make things less clear, and often give you a headache.

That's why we shouldn't view our lives through the wrong lenses. We shouldn't view the world around us through worldly lenses. Because looking at our lives through those lenses makes our vision less clear, and will lead to headache, heartache, or worse!

We instead need to see our lives through eyes of faith. We need to look through Easter lenses—the lens of Christ's resurrection, to get a true view!

When Abram's doubt crept in, God responded, ***"This man will not be your heir, but a son coming from your own body will be your heir."*** Do you see what God does here? He doesn't immediately plant a son in Sarai's womb. Rather, he doubles down on the promise he'd already made. A few years later, Abram would indeed hold his son Isaac in his arms. But for now, God simply reminds Abram of the promise he'd made, and tells him, "Believe it! Not because of visual evidence, but simply because I've promised."

That said, God still understands the benefit of visuals. So he leads Abram out under the night sky, and says, ***"Look up at the heavens and count the stars—if indeed you can count them. So shall your offspring be."*** Experts estimate that around 8,000 stars are visible in the sky on a clear, Middle Eastern night. Think what a powerful visual reminder that would have been for Abram! Every time doubts crept into his mind, all he had to do was poke his head out of his tent, and be reminded of God's promises.

It's interesting, that God doesn't add any visible evidence to convince Abram he could trust God to keep his promise. Even the visual God provided wasn't evidence. Stars aren't proof that an old barren woman would have a baby. Rather, both in his words and with his visual., God simply reminds Abram of his promises.

It seems like that wouldn't make much difference. Wouldn't Abram have looked around and still seen the same bleak landscape for his future?

And yet, we're told that ***"Abram believed the LORD, and he credited to him as righteousness."*** That's because faith isn't founded on visible proof or compelling evidence. Our faith is founded on God's promises. Abram trusted because God's Word works! By the Spirit's power, God's promises strengthen faith, so that even when the vision is bleak, we can still see life through eyes of faith. In fact, as the writer to the Hebrews says, ***"Faith is being...certain of what we do not see."*** Abram couldn't see a child forming in his wife's womb, but he saw through eyes of faith, because God keeps his promises.

And through Abram's faith, God credited him with righteousness. That doesn't mean Abram himself was morally perfect. Far from it! In fact, not that long after this account, Abram tries to speed along the process by having a son by his wife's servant, rather than trusting God to provide him a son through his wife. Abram wasn't perfect.

But rather, through faith in God, Abram received the perfection of the Savior he believed God would send through his family line. And that wasn't just the case for Abram.

In Romans 4, the apostle Paul uses this example of Abram to explain, ***"Abram did not waver through unbelief regarding the promise of God, but was strengthened in his faith... being fully persuaded that God had power to do what he had promised. The words "It was credited to him" were written not for [Abram] alone, but also for us, to whom God will credit righteousness—for us who believe in him who raised Jesus our Lord from the dead."***

You see, when you have spirit-produced faith that Jesus is your Savior, you have Jesus' perfect life credited to your account! And that means no matter how smudged, filthy, and bleak God's vision of your life should be, God sees you as perfectly clean on account of Jesus.

That's why viewing life through Easter lenses dispels our doubts. No matter how bleak and uncertain your future might seem, is it anything that God, who conquered sin, death, and hell can't handle? If God promised long ago that the Savior would rise again from the dead on the third day, and he did, do we ever have to worry that God will fail to keep his promises?

In his Word, God doubles down on his promises; promises to save; to protect; to love. And like Abram's stars, God gives us visible reminders of his promises for the times doubts creep in.

The ultimate visual of the empty Easter tomb, where salvation, protection, and love shine forth brightest. The empty Easter tomb, which serves to remind us that God never fails to keep his promises. The empty Easter tomb, that reminds us of the fulfillment of God's most important promise to Abram—through his offspring, ***"all peoples on earth will be blessed."*** Our living Lord, who never fails to keep his promises. He is risen!