

July/August 2020

# Do Not Fear

## Our Future Belongs to the Lord



The future was looking bright for Jesus' disciples. Peter had just proclaimed Jesus as the Son of God and received the keys to the kingdom. Jesus had promised that even the gates of hell would not prevail against them (Matthew 16:13-20)! Everything seemed to be moving forward. Yet soon afterward, Jesus began speaking about his coming passion and death. That certainly wasn't the future they had expected.

Can you imagine how the disciples must have felt when Jesus first predicted the fate that awaited him? Confused, shocked, even angry. How could the Messiah be rejected and crucified? The very idea horrified Peter. “God forbid, Lord!” he said. “No such thing shall ever happen to you.” But Jesus rebuked him, saying, “You are thinking not as God does, but as human beings do” (Matthew 16:22, 23).

Jesus knew what lay in store for him. He knew that in order to accomplish his Father’s mission, he would have to suffer, as the prophets had written, and die on the cross. But he also trusted that the Father would raise him from the dead. Jesus was giving his disciples a glimpse into his future, one that probably weighed on them.

And so the disciples had to lay aside their own notions of what Jesus’ life and ministry would look like and what their future with him would hold. They had thought that success awaited the Messiah and themselves as his first followers. But now they had to try to take on God’s plan and trust Jesus as it unfolded.

Sometimes our future weighs on us as well. We don’t know what’s in store for us. The only thing we know for certain is that someday we will die, but we don’t know how or when. We hope for success for ourselves and our families in our future, but who knows how it will turn out?

How easy it can be to look at the future with fear! We worry about our health or our finances. We worry about our loved ones, especially our children and grandchildren. We might live each day expecting bad news, especially if we’re in the middle of a hard situation. We may even fear for the future of society or the Church.

All this worry can cause us to live in a perpetual state of apprehension. It may lead us to overreact or make important decisions without first considering what God might say about them. God does not want us to live in fear! Early in his ministry, Jesus himself told us, “Do not worry about tomorrow; tomorrow will take care of itself” (Matthew 6:34). So how can we learn to entrust our future to the Father, as Jesus did?

**Abraham Trusted God.** Let's look at Abraham, our father in faith, for some guidance. When God called him, he was living in his ancestral home in Ur, modern-day Iraq. God told him, "Go forth from your land . . . to a land that I will show you" (Genesis 12:1). That was a tall order, but God followed up with an even bigger promise: "All the families of the earth will find blessing in you" (12:3).

So Abraham left his home and family. He didn't know the future. He didn't even know where he was going! Yet he trusted in God's promises and let God unfold his plans day by day, all the way to the land of Canaan.

Later, God promised to give Abraham as many descendants as the stars in the sky (Genesis 15:5). This promise must have seemed impossible to Abraham and his wife, Sarah. Both of them were old and had never been able to conceive. But Scripture says that "Abram put his faith in the Lord, who attributed it to him as an act of righteousness" (15:6).

There it was, another promise that required Abraham and Sarah to entrust their future to the Lord. In fact, it took many years before Sarah became pregnant with their son, Isaac. In all that time beforehand, they had to put their faith in God's promises and hold on to them tightly.

**Clinging to God's Promises.** When we fear the future, it's often because we have lost sight of God's promises. Of course, he doesn't promise a problem-free life. He also doesn't promise to give us everything we ask for. But he has made some promises that tell us just how deeply his love for us flows—and we can cling to those promises.

*God promises to be with us always.* The same God who walked with us through our past promises to remain with us "always, until the end of the age" (Matthew 28:20). Even when the future seems scary or uncertain, we know that God will be with us because he has given us his Holy Spirit to be our Comforter and our guide (John 14:19). He promises, "I will never forsake you or abandon you" (Hebrews 13:5).

*God promises us the grace we need to deal with every situation.* Sometimes our future looks different than we expected. We might have been thinking about a comfortable retirement, and instead we are facing a serious illness. Just when we thought our family was complete, another child comes along. We might be surprised by a job transfer to a new city. Whether our surprises are pleasant or painful, God's answer remains the same: "My grace is sufficient for you" (2 Corinthians 12:9). We can count on God to give us the help we need to face each new day, whatever it brings.

*God promises us eternal life in heaven.* God's promises are not just for this life, because our future is not limited to our years on earth. God loves us so much that he wants us to be with him forever. He promises that everyone who believes in Jesus will have eternal life (John 3:16). We have a Savior who is preparing a place for us in heaven (14:2). Eternal life with the Lord and with all the angels and saints is our ultimate future; it is the goal of our lives.

**Making Plans Together with God.** We know that God's plans are for our "welfare and not for woe," to give us "a future of hope" (Jeremiah 29:11). But when it comes to that future, sometimes we move ahead without first trying to understand what his plans are for us. That's what Sarah and Abraham did. As the years passed with no child, they must have wondered why God wasn't giving them the descendants he had promised. Like many of us, they worried about their family's future. So they took matters into their own hands. Instead of waiting on the Lord to fulfill his promise, Sarah sent her maidservant Hagar to Abraham so that he could father a child with her.

What was the result of not entrusting their family to the Lord? Rivalry and discord. After Hagar became pregnant, she lorded it over Sarah, and Sarah retaliated by mistreating her so badly that Hagar ran away (Genesis 16). It took years for God to unravel the knots they had tied through their mistrust. Imagine how much more peaceful their lives could have been if they had held fast to God's promises.

The Letter of James speaks directly to our tendency to make plans without first seeking God's guidance. Since we really have no idea what tomorrow holds, we

should be willing to let go of thinking our way is the only way and say, “If the Lord wills it, we shall live to do this or that” (James 4:15). And when it’s hard to discern God’s will, we should make the best decisions we can and entrust our plans to the Lord. He will surely bless us.

**Have No Fear of Death.** Along with trusting that God holds our earthly future in his hands, we can also entrust our heavenly future to him. Thinking about death can make us uncomfortable or afraid. “I’m not ready to meet the Lord,” we may think. But none of us are ready. So what perspective should we have when it comes to our death? Because of Jesus, we can have confidence instead of dread or fear. Remember Jesus’ promise to his disciples: “Do not let your hearts be troubled. . . . In my Father’s house there are many dwelling places. If there were not, would I have told you that I am going to prepare a place for you?” (John 14:1, 2). If we are living for the Lord as best we can, and we trust in what Jesus himself did for us at Calvary, we will be ready to meet him when that day comes.

As we ponder our future in this world and in the next, we can be sure that God is taking care of us at all times. As the psalmist says, “I trust in you, Lord. . . . My destiny is in your hands” (31:15-16). He is our faithful Father, always. So go ahead and place yourself—and your future—into his loving and trustworthy hands.