

“The Faith of Abraham and Sarah”
(Hebrews 11:8-12)

Introduction: There is no doubt that faith changes the lives of those who have it. It enables us to see the things which can't be seen with our physical eyes. It gives us the power to take hold of the promises of God. Faith caused Abel to give God the sacrifice which would please Him, while the lack of faith caused Cain to give Him something which wouldn't. Faith is what motivated Enoch to walk in the ways of the Lord, so that the Lord, being pleased with him, took him straight up to heaven as a picture of what the Lord will do for His children on the day He returns. Faith enabled righteous Noah to listen to God's word and to take warning, so that he built an ark to save his household, while at the same time testifying against the world that their deeds were wicked. “Faith is the *assurance* of things hoped for, the *conviction* of things not seen” (v. 1). It gives substance to the invisible things of God.

This evening, we will continue to look at the examples of faith the author to the Hebrews gives us to see how faith made a difference in their lives, and to see what kind of a difference it should make in ours.

I. Let us begin by looking at the example of Abraham.

A. First, the author tells us, by faith, Abraham, when he was called, obeyed.

1. It appears as though the Lord began to call Abram when he was in Ur of the Chaldees.
 - a. Ur was the largest city in Shinar, which was northern Chaldea.
 - (i) It was the principle commercial center of the country, as well as the center of political power. It was near the mouth of the Euphrates, on the western bank, in the Mesopotamian Valley.
 - (ii) Don't forget that the Mesopotomian Valley is where the garden of Eden once was. We shouldn't be surprised then that this is where civilization actually began.
 - (iii) When Ur was originally built, it was believed to have been a port city of Babylonia, since the waters of the Persian Gulf, at that time, reached that far inland. It was also here that a famous temple was built to the moon-god, Sin. Because of this Ur was consecrated to the worship of this moon-god. We can see that very early on, man had turned from the worship of the true God, in order to worship the host of heaven.
 - (iv) All this is to say that Ur was a very important city of Babylonia. It was not just a small village.
 - b. Terah, the father of Abraham, lived in Ur. Apparently, this is where he raised his son Abram. He raised him in the center of idolatrous worship. But I don't believe that it would be too much to assume that Terah represented the faithful line from Noah, and that the true religion was preserved in his family. For one thing, we need to realize that when the Lord called Abram, Abram did not respond as though the Lord was a strange deity, but he simply

- submitted.
- c. When it was approaching the time for the Lord to call Abram, we are told in Genesis 11:31-32 that, “Terah took Abram his son, and Lot the son of Haran, his grandson [he took Lot, because Lot’s father, who was his son Haran, died], and Sarai his daughter-in-law, his son Abram’s wife; and they went out together from Ur of the Chaldeans in order to enter the land of Canaan; and they went as far as Haran, and settled there. And the days of Terah were two hundred and five years; and Terah died in Haran.”
 - d. It is interesting that the Lord here does not call Abram specifically, but it is clear that it was His hand which was moving them, for the Lord later tells Abram when he was finally in the land, “I am the Lord who brought you out of Ur of the Chaldeans, to give you this land to possess it” (Gen. 15:7).
 - e. The Lord was already preparing the circumstances for Abram. It is possible that the Lord actually spoke to Terah to make this move, but we are not told that this is the case.
 - f. But Terah did not make it all the way to Canaan. He got as far as Haran, which is on the way to Canaan, really over half the way there, and settled there.
 - g. Haran was another major city of Babylonia, which was also a center of worship for the same moon-god. It would not be strange, therefore, that Terah would settle here.
 - h. But this is not where the Lord would have Abram to settle.
2. After Terah died in Haran, the Lord said to Abram, “Go forth from your country, and from your relatives and from your father’s house, to the land which I will show you; and I will make you a great nation, and I will bless you, and make your name great; and so you shall be a blessing; and I will bless those who bless you, and the one who curses you I will curse. And in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed” (Gen. 12:1-3).
 - a. The Lord definitely issued a call to Abram here. He was calling him to leave everything which was familiar to him: his country, his relatives and his father’s house. This is not unlike the call which the Lord gives to missionaries today. This is certainly not unlike the call which the Lord gave to His disciples, when He called them.
 - b. And what was Abram’s response? It was the only righteous response that a man can give to God when He calls. We are told, “So Abram went forth as the Lord has spoken to him; and Lot went with him” (12:4). Apparently, Lot wanted to get out of Haran as well, and from what we read in 2 Peter, Lot must have been a true believer, even though he made a very bad choice of places to settle.
 3. But the point to see here is that Abraham obeyed. This is the response of a man who truly believes God. Look at what Abraham did.
 - a. When he was called, he obeyed. He did not hesitate, he did not delay, he obeyed.
 - b. I mentioned a moment ago the disciples of Christ. Remember how they

responded when the Lord called them? When Jesus called Peter and Andrew as they were casting a net into the sea, He told them to follow Him, “And they *immediately* left the nets, and followed Him” (Matt. 4:20). He did the same to James and John, “and they *immediately* left the boat and their father, and followed Him” (v. 22). He even called Matthew while he was sitting in the tax office, while he was working for the Roman government, “and he rose, and followed Him” (9:9).

- c. Abraham did the same. As soon as the Lord called him, he obeyed: he packed up his belongings and headed out of Haran.
 - d. God said that He had a land which He was going to show him. God said that He was going to make him into a great nation, that He was going to bless Abraham, give him a great name, and make him a blessing to many.
 - e. And Abraham started out, not even knowing where he was going.
 - f. I’m sure that the early apostles of Jesus had the same kind of experience: they immediately began to follow Jesus, they didn’t know exactly what they were going to do, but they did know that to do so would cost them their employment. But they got up and followed Him.
4. And I believe that a very important principle we can learn from this is that true saving faith not only believes what God says, it also acts upon it; it submits.
- a. How many times do we find ourselves hesitating to obey the Lord?
 - b. How many times do we find ourselves in a position where we put off doing what the Lord says we should do, simply because we don’t think we understand it well enough yet?
 - c. For instance, we don’t evangelize because we don’t think we can articulate the faith well enough yet. Or we don’t help the needy because we are inexperienced and afraid of being taken. Or we don’t stop engaging in the world’s entertainments, because we’re afraid that we will go too far and give up too much.
 - d. Or maybe we’re afraid to begin to obey the Lord in certain areas of our lives where it will make us stand out from the crowd more. We hesitate because we don’t know what will happen to us. There was a girl who was sitting in the library of the Columbine High School in Littleton, Colorado reading her Bible when those two young men entered with shotguns. When one of them came up to her, he asked her whether or not she believed in God. She said, yes, she did, loud enough for others to hear her. The gunman laughed and said, “Why?” And then he killed her. Now if this girl had thought through the consequences of her actions beforehand, she would have strongly suspected that such a response might be all that was needed to be singled out to be shot. Perhaps she did think of this ahead of time. But when the time came to stand the test, to either tell the truth, or to cower like many of her classmates under the tables, she immediately spoke the truth. And she died for it.
 - e. We need to learn the lesson, as Abraham, to obey the Lord even not knowing what the consequences will be. Jonathan Edwards once wrote in his resolutions, “Resolved, when I fear misfortunes and adversities, to examine

whether I have done my duty, and resolve to do it, and let the event be just as providence orders it. I will as far as I can, be concerned about nothing but my duty, and my sin” (*Resolutions*).

- f. If we could learn to not fear man, but God alone, then we too might be able to obey God and to turn from all sin, not worrying about what will happen to us, but leaving that to turn out just as God has planned it.
- g. May this be an encouragement to us not to delay, but to do what we know to be God’s will immediately.

B. But this wasn’t the only way that Abraham showed his faith. We read further, “By faith he lived as an alien in the land of promise, as in a foreign land, dwelling in tents with Isaac and Jacob, fellow heirs of the same promise; for he was looking for the city which has foundations, whose architect and builder is God” (vv. 9-10).

1. Abraham did reach the promised land.

- a. The Lord brought him into it, showed him the boundaries of it, and even promised that it would be his. The Lord even promised that He would give the land to Isaac and Jacob.
- b. The interesting thing here is that none of these men ever received even a foot of that land. They all lived like aliens in it, like they didn’t own it at all. They lived in tents, which doesn’t have any foundation to it. It is a temporary dwelling, made to stay in places only temporarily.
- c. Notice that Isaac and Jacob didn’t receive any land inheritance from their father Abraham. What they received was the promise, as well.
- d. But that didn’t bother Abraham, nor his son, or grandson. They knew that what God had promised, He would fulfill in His time. They knew that the land would be theirs, that He would give it to their children.
- e. But what is even more interesting here is that Abraham looked beyond the land, which was only a type of what God had really promised, to the reality beyond it. He looked to the city which God had built for those who love Him.

2. And this provides us with another valuable lesson.

- a. How many times do we get our eyes fixed on this world and the things of the world? How many times do we focus on the material blessings of God, thinking that to have these or to not have them is all that matters in life?
- b. Abraham wasn’t so much concerned about the land and his living conditions in the land, as he was about that which was to come hereafter. He lived as a stranger in the land, for he was looking to the new heavens and the new earth, which God had prepared.
- c. Jonathan Edwards once said, it doesn’t really matter who prospers in this life. What really matters is who prospers in the life to come. The health and wealthy people will tell you that God is most concerned about who prospers down below. They neglect eternal life all together as though it is a given that they possess it, and that all they need to worry about is how much they can fulfill their lust with God’s blessings.
- d. But do you know that God believes the material blessings to be so worthless

that He more often gives them to the godless and reprobate, while He stores up the true riches for us. The true riches are in heaven. That is where Jesus says we should be storing up our treasures where we can enjoy them forever, for where our treasure is, there will our heart be as well (Matt. 6:19-20).

- e. And so we should not make our permanent homes here. We should not lay our foundations in this world. But we, like they, should live the life of a pilgrim. We should confess not only with our mouths, but also by the way in which we live, that we are only passing through.
- f. We will see more of this next week.

II. But let us look briefly now at the example of Abraham's wife, Sarah.

A. "By faith even Sarah herself received ability to conceive, even beyond the proper time of life, since she considered Him faithful who had promised; therefore, also, there was born of one man, and him as good as dead at that, as many descendants as the stars of heaven in number, and innumerable as the sand which is by the sea" (vv. 11-12).

1. Sarah was about ninety years old. And even though men did live a bit longer back then, the author says that she was barren and past the age of child-bearing, and that Abraham was also beyond being able to give her a child.
2. But the Lord came to Abraham and Sarah, in the form of a man, and told Abraham that Sarah would indeed have a son.
 - a. Now Sarah was the weaker vessel, and at first she doubted. When she heard what the Lord said, she laughed, and said to herself, "After I have become old, shall I have pleasure, my lord being old also" (Gen. 18:12)? Notice that she calls conceiving and bearing a child pleasurable. This shows us how far our estimation of the Lord's blessing has fallen.
 - b. But after she realized that the Lord doesn't make jokes, she believed, and received the ability to conceive. She considered Him faithful. What the Lord says He is going to do, He will do. God has never denied Himself or His Word.
 - c. We should remember this next time we are tempted to doubt.
 - d. And because both she and Abraham believed in the Lord, there were born to them a vast host of children. This was fulfilled in two ways: in their physical offspring, for the children of Israel became a great host, but more particularly in Abraham's spiritual children.
 - e. The apostle Paul tells us that if we have the faith of Abraham, then we, like Isaac, are the children of promise (Gal. 4:28). And those whom the Lord has chosen to be His, the Bible tells us, is a vast multitude which no man can number.
3. People of God, may these examples of faith, encourage you in your faith.
 - a. The Lord has called us out, as He did Abraham, to leave our country, our relatives, our father's house. He has called us out in order to show us a new country and to give us a new family. That country is heaven, and that family is the body of Christ. We have not seen heaven, nor have we seen the new heavens and the new earth. But we do have His promise that He has prepared

- it for us.
- b. May we therefore be strengthened by the Lord to seek those things which are above and to forsake the things below. May He strengthen us that through the power which Christ supplies, we may obey and follow the Lord immediately, wherever He leads us, and no matter what the consequences to us might be.
 - c. May the Lord grant to us the grace to apprehend His promise, to see it through the eyes of faith, and may He help us to strive towards it until the day we attain it, the day that faith becomes sight. This is my prayer. Amen.

He wants us to live in the light of them, to see them, to believe them, to know that they are ours in Christ Jesus, and to walk faithfully in that direction. If we live as though this were our home, we would likely fear anything that would cause us to lose it [our lives]. But if we see that we are in enemy territory, traveling to our real home, looking for that city which has foundations, we will be much more apt to obey God and not worry about the consequences for our lives here. We should be as Edwards who was concerned to know only his duty and his sin. He wanted to do what God required and to turn away from everything He forbade. The rest he was content to leave in God's hands.