

Abraham Part 1

Faith & Fear

Genesis 12

Memory Verses: Hebrews 11:8-9

MANUSCRIPT

Introduction (Me, We, & the Struggle)

Abraham is one of the most important men in all of history. Even though he lived 4000 years ago, he is still looked upon as a prominent figure in today's culture. In 2002 he made the cover of Time Magazine. He has been portrayed on television over a dozen times. We sing songs about him in Sunday School and at VBS. Three of the world's primary religions all view him as a founding patriarch of their belief system and fight to this day as to which one gets to claim him as Father Abraham. The stories of his calling, his covenant with God, the miraculous birth of Isaac, and the sacrifice of Isaac, are all legendary.

For us as believers, we hold Abraham up as a hero of the faith. He is a spiritual father to us all. Throughout both the Old and New Testaments, Abraham is referred to constantly as one we should exemplify. Throughout the next two months we will be looking at the life of Abraham and will see this man through whom God chose to bless the world, and it is my prayer that as we look at the story of Abraham we are challenged to also live lives of exemplary faith.

As we begin this journey, our first story shows us both the good and the bad of Abraham. As we all can remember, as a new follower of God, it is hard to stay the course. Up until we came to faith in Christ we had adopted habits that are not easy to break. Abraham was no different. Though he had accepted the call to follow God, at times he would, ever so slightly, start to creep back into his former ways. Even Abraham, at times, found it hard to remain faithful. This doesn't mean that Abraham's faith in God was fraudulent. Rather, it simply means that his faith was fragile. A rock solid faith takes years, even decades, to forge. What makes Abraham a model of faith is not that he never failed, but that when he did fail in his faith, he immediately repented of his doubt and disobedience and renewed his faith in God. Listen... faith isn't about never messing up. No one can live up to that standard. Rather, **authentic faith is displayed in our willingness to trust God with the mess we've just made.** Faith is for messy people with messy pasts and messy lives who, let's face it, mess up a lot. You are one of those and so am I so let's just praise the Lord.

Today, let's dive in to Genesis chapter 12 and examine the faith of Abraham which caused him to follow hard after his God, and the fear of Abraham which at times caused him to fall off track. And what we will

see today is this... **Faith Follows When Fear Fails.**

Teaching (Expand on the Problem, God)

The first thing we need to see today is that... **Faith is the appropriate response to God's promises.** Look with me at **Genesis 12:1-3**. At the beginning we recognize something very peculiar. Though Abraham comes from pagan Babylon and doesn't even know the one true God, God seeks out Abraham. Listen, I don't want to keep beating this drum more than I have to, but faith always begins with God! God comes to us, we don't come to him. If you come to God it must be because he has drawn you to himself. Here, God comes to Abraham completely void of Abraham's desire to find God.

But not only does God approach Abraham, he immediately makes some very grandiose promises to him. This wasn't just an introduction, this was a divine appointment. Apparently God didn't have time for the pleasantries. It was straight to business. The promises that God gives to Abraham are extremely important. We actually refer to them as the Abrahamic Covenant. God makes this covenant unconditional in chapter 15. The covenant consists of 4 promises. Abraham will become a great nation. Abraham's name will become renowned. All the earth will be blessed through Abraham's lineage. And in verse 7, The land of Canaan will be given to his descendants. Of course we know how these promises will play out. The great nation will be Israel. As we've already discussed, Abraham's name is famous in all the world. The land of Canaan was given to the Israelites and is now the nation of Israel. And of course, all the earth is blessed by Abraham's lineage through his descendant Jesus Christ the Messiah and Lord of all who has saved us from our sins. It is these promises of God that Abraham's faith is based upon. **Abraham was a man of faith because he believed whole heartedly that what God said would come to pass, would in fact come to pass.**

For us this is very important. We can't have a real faith in God if we don't know what God has promised. We must know his promises which means we must know his Word. Do you know the promises of God? If not, how do you have faith. **Romans 10:17** says that faith comes by hearing and hearing comes from the word of God. It is impossible for you to be a person of faith and not be a person of the word of God. As the hymn proclaims, you must be standing on the promises of God! **Let me illustrate what we mean here with this stool.** Of course this is a simple and often used illustration but it does make the point. I think there are many people who say they have faith in God but do not know the promises of God. Why? Why do they say they have faith in God then? What do they mean by "faith in God?" What they mean is that in their minds, they have somehow rationalized the existence of God. They aren't an atheist. So what they mean is that they have a faith of God. But you can't have a faith in God unless you know what

God can do and what he has promised. Take this stool for example. Does this stool exist? Yes of course. You can see it with your eyes. Even if the stool was outside out of sight and you couldn't see it and I said, there is a stool outside. Would you believe that the stool was outside? Probably. Why would I lie about it. In this case, you have a faith of the stool. You believe the stool exists. So what? Who cares if you believe the stool exists. What benefit is it to you that the stool exists. The stool doesn't have any value for existing does it? No. it only has value for what it exists for. So, why does the stool exist? To sit on. So what is the promise of the stool? You can sit on it and it will hold your weight. That's the promise. So when I'm asking to do you have faith in the stool what am I asking? Am I asking if it exists or am I asking if you think you can sit on it and it will hold your weight? The later of course.

The same is with the promises of God. Abraham heard God's promises and responded with faith to those promises. He believed that God was telling the truth. So, do you know the promises of God and have you put your faith in the promises of God?

The second thing we need to see today is that... **Faith is actually realized through Godly performance**. Let's look at **Genesis 12:4-9**.

Notice how old Abraham is. He is 75 years old. Now, of course, Abraham and Sarah lived much longer than the rest of us. So for them 75 was like 40. But even at 40 years old, could you imagine how hard a change this would be? To leave the land you've been in for decades, to leave the only family you've ever known and head out to a land that this mysterious new God will show you? And this is why we love Abraham's faith. Because it wasn't just a bunch of talk. He acted upon it.

Many of us love to say we believe this or we believe that. But very few of us act upon that belief. We say, we believe God wants to save sinners, yet we hardly ever share the Gospel. We say we believe that God can heal the sick and the lame, yet we neglect to intercede in prayer for healings. We say we believe God wants to send people out to the world to reach the unreached, yet very few of us are willing to even go on a short term mission trip. The point is, we can say we believe it all day long, but until we actually act upon our belief it means very little.

Abraham was given a mission by God and he immediately put his faith into action. When Abraham arrives in Canaan in **verses 6 and 7** God appears to Abraham and reaffirms the covenant promise that he will give this land to his descendants. Its like, Abraham, you've put your faith into action, you've been faithful to follow. So let me strengthen your faith and reassure you that I will do what I said I would do. Let me feed the meter of your faith. **When we step out in faith, God will strengthen our faith**. And Abraham responds to God again with action. He responds by performing an act of faith and builds an altar to God there. Later in **verse**

8 he does the same thing between Ai and Bethel. Now this is cool. 600 years later after the battle of Jericho, Joshua and the Israelites are about to take the rest of the land, and the people remember Abraham's altars here and build another altar. This signifies that the people never gave up on the promises of God. They never lost faith. Though, through those 600 years they failed many times, they never lost their way. The point here is this. Faith is expressed through action. Faith in theory is just thoughts. Faith in practice shows true belief. You can't simply "believe" something, or "have faith in something." You must act upon your belief. In the words of James, **faith without works is dead**. Again, let me illustrate with our stool here. I believe there is a stool, but more so I believe the promise of the stool – I believe it will hold my weight if I sit on it. But thats not the end... If I truly believe that, I will not be afraid to sit on it. I must sit on it to show that I have faith in it! Tada! Abraham showed his faith was real because he followed after God. He put his faith in to action and performed as though he truly believed God. You can't be afraid to put your faith into action. Faith follows! **Faith Follows When Fear Fails**.

The third thing we need to see here today is that... **Fear automatically reverts us back to our default process**. Look with me at **Genesis 12:10-15**. This part of the story is very interesting. Up to this point Abraham has been faithful to God, doing what God has told him to do and going where God has told him to go. But now, we see Abraham going off course. Abraham was not told to go to Egypt. So why did he go? Because he feared the famine. He feared that if he didn't leave, he and his people would starve. He feared that God would not provide for him in Canaan as he said he would. Not only did he go to Egypt, mistake one, but he also pretended his very attractive wife was his sister. Why did he do this? Again, because he feared that Pharaoh would kill him to have her. Instead of being a man who fights for his woman, he willing gives her up to another man? This is not just bad... this is really bad! Abraham where is your faith? Now, before we get too down on Abraham, we must realize, Abe is only doing what most of us do in trying times. He is trusting in his own instincts. Mankind is naturally sinful and wicked. In case you have forgotten this, go back and listen to the last series on the fall. Humans are naturally self-centered and self-preserving. Our natural inclinations, our default process, is fight or flight. **Faith is not a natural default setting for us, fear is**. So when we are shaken and take our eyes off of God we revert back to fight of flight. In this case Abraham is in flight. He is willing to flee Canaan for food. He is willing to flee his marriage for safety. He is in a tail spin of self-preservation. Listen friends, your default fight or flight settings are no good when it comes to faith in God. Left on your own you will do something foolish and make an even bigger mess for yourself. If it weren't for the hand of God on Abraham at this time, this might have been the end of his story right here. Fear

always leads to failure. Don't fear what's to come, rather put your faith in God's promises. **Faith Follows When Fear Fails.**

out and obey the calling of God on your life! No fear.. only faith! **Faith Follows When Fear Fails.**

The last thing we need to see here is this... **Faith is always reinforced by God's persistent love.** Let's look at **Genesis 12:16-20.** This should've been the end of Abraham's story. He's left the faith to be led by his fears. But that's not how God works. If God has made a promise to us, he doesn't simply leave us or discard us when we make a mistake. Rather, **When we are faithless, God proves himself even more faithful.** Look at this. God uses a pagan king to rebuke Abraham's lack of faith. Instead of punishing him, he sends him back to Canaan with his wife and with way more prosperity than he had when he came to Egypt. Through a pagan Pharaoh, God puts Abraham's marriage back together, put his ministry back on the path of faith, and blesses him with more wealth and servants. God is not thwarted by lies, doubt, or our messes. His promises are not easily broken. He made promises to Abraham, and even though Abraham messed up, God forgave him and set his feet back on the straight and narrow. God is faithful to us even when we lose our faith. His love never fails! And that's why we say, **Faith Follows When Fear Fails.** Because of God's faithfulness to Abraham in the midst of his mistakes, Abraham's faith increased even more. Faith follows, fear fails, and God is faithful to follow our failures with more faithfulness.

Application

God has a plan for you. A plan to bless you and bless others through you. The greatest blessing of God is his son Jesus Christ. I hope that you have placed your faith in the promise of his salvation. If not, today is the day to let your belief become action. For many of you I'm sure you've already placed your faith in Christ. So let me ask you this, is your faith a stagnant simply head belief, or is your faith a faith of works and action. Do you simply believe the chair is real or have you actually sat in the chair. Today, if you say you believe the promises of God, put them into action. For each of us that could mean something completely different. Pray and ask God what that means for you today. Lastly, some of you have made mistakes in your faith. Today may be a day for you to simply repent and receive God's love and forgiveness. Let him bless you with his never ending love and mercy as he puts you back on track. Let faith follow where fear has failed. **Faith Follows When Fear Fails.**

Conclusion

Hebrews 11:8-9 summarizes today's message beautifully. By faith Abraham obeyed when he was called. By faith he inherited the land of promise. This week God is going to call you to something. By faith, step