

28—Hebrews 11:8-22—Abraham Lived By Faith

I. Introduction

- A. There aren't many people in the history of the world that have had their story written describing "A Pilgrim's Progress." But we have such story today in the life of Abraham and his family.
- B. This story should encourage us to press on in the faith like he did but we all face a grave enemy that is so prevalent that we hardly even take notice of it. It is so dangerous, some of these Hebrew believers are on the verge of walking away from the faith to have it.
- C. What is that danger? Comfort or in the words from next week's text—fleeting pleasures.
 - 1. Just speaking of myself—I go to sleep in a temperature controlled house, I have any temperature of water for a shower, I have clothes galore, different shoes for different occasions, I have a comfortable recliner to sit in and electricity to power up the light to read by, refrigerators to keep our food safe and cool, numerous appliances to cook with, and the list could go on and on.
 - 2. I have so many things and so many impulses to make myself comfortable it is frankly, unbelievable. I have a personal Facebook page which I rarely use because several people from other countries follow me. Their lives are so different than mine that I'm cautious of what I put on there. But they too have the same desire for comfort as we all do.
- D. But let's not allow comfort to determine how we live and die. And no, I'm not telling you to go live in a cave but rather to be cautious of your desire for comfort. Let us live by faith not by comfort. If you live by faith now, you will live in comfort forever later.

II. Main Point

- A. The main point of faith—the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen is now played out before us in the life of Abraham and his family as they lived by faith and died in faith.

III. Outline

- A. Living by Faith Results in Obedience
- B. Living by Faith Results in dying in faith
- C. Living by Faith Gets Tested

IV. Exposition

- A. As we continue walking through the hall of faith, let us be mindful of what it looks to live by faith in real, ordinary people. How does the assurance of things hoped for determine what Abraham does? How does the conviction of things not seen give him the hope to live for the future promises of God? Just a thought—what would our story of faith look like if we were reading it? Would it be a pilgrim's progress or a comfortable citizen of the state? Let's take a look at how Abraham lived by faith and how that faith resulted in his obedience.
 - 1. Verse 8 begins with faith. There are two things in this verse that Abraham did—by faith he obeyed and by faith he went out not knowing where he was going.
 - a) This account is recorded for us in Genesis 12. These OT stories, according to Romans 15:4, were written for our instruction, that through endurance and through the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope.
 - b) There in Genesis 12, God calls Abraham to go out of the land of his fatherland to Canaan—the promised land.
 - (1) A little context might help us see just how amazing and unlikely this was. Back in Genesis 11, we see the descendants of Noah. In particular, Abraham's father was a descendant of Noah's son, Shem—the faithful son.
 - (2) After the Tower of Babel, these descendants were scattered throughout the earth so that they could not make a name for themselves.
 - (3) However, God intended to make a name for himself through Abraham and restore his intentions at creation to bless the nations. Now, that blessing would come through faith in the coming Son of Abraham.
 - (4) Abraham's father, Terah, settled in Ur of the Chaldeans. There, Abraham took a wife named Sarah who was barren.

- (a) Just as a reminder: there is no story to tell if somehow the promised child in Genesis 3:15 was thwarted by the scattering of the people or somehow could not happen through the line of Abraham who has a barren wife.
 - (b) Yet, God is causing what he promised to come about.
 - (5) “Abraham, like Noah, marks a new beginning.” (Sailhamer)
 - (a) Like Noah, will Abraham obey the Lord?
 - i) It says in Genesis 12:1-3 Now the LORD said to Abram, “Go from your country and your kindred and your father’s house to the land that I will show you. And I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and him who dishonors you I will curse, and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed.”
 - (1) Notice that God is doing all the work.
 - (a) God command, Go.
 - (b) I will show you.
 - (c) I will make you a great nation.
 - (d) I will bless you.
 - (e) I will make your name great.
 - (f) I will bless...I will curse.
 - (2) The bible is clearly a story of the awesome work of God!
 - ii) Abraham responds by trusting the Lord’s promises and the evidence of his faith is shown by him packing up his belongings and going to place that he would receive as an inheritance.
 - (b) This might not be so difficult but it goes on to say that he went out not knowing where he was going.
 - i) Imagine, after the yard sale and everything is loaded up on the moving truck, you have no clue which direction to go.
 - (1) If he had waited for the Lord to tell him what direction to go, he would have likely still been there.
 - (2) However, Abraham packs his bags and waits for God’s direction.
 - (3) Faith and obedience are two sides of the same coin.
 - (a) Separate either of them and you find yourself with a dead faith or an obedience that thinks one’s righteousness pleases God.
 - (b) No. The righteous live by faith.
 - (c) Abraham took God at his word and trusted in him for the promises to come.
2. So, he doesn’t know where he going but when he does find out, by faith he went to live in the land of promise.
 - a) When he crossed the border, the current residents where not there waiting to hand over the land.
 - (1) But rather he lived in the land, as in a foreign land.
 - (a) He lived in temporary dwellings called tents. It says in Genesis 12:7-8 Then the LORD appeared to Abram and said, “To your offspring I will give this land.” So he built there an altar to the LORD, who had appeared to him. From there he moved to the hill country on the east of Bethel and pitched his tent.
 - (b) If he was to obtain an inheritance, it wasn’t much good if he had no children to give it to.
 - (c) But God had promised to give it to his offspring.
 - i) And as we are told there in Hebrews 11 verse 9—he lived there in tents with Isaac and Jacob, heirs with him of the same promise.
 - ii) It’s important to see that the promise goes to his sons but only the sons of God’s own choosing.
 - (1) Not Ishmael but Isaac. Not Esau but Jacob.
 - (2) Not the first born but the second born.
 - b) What makes someone trust the Lord enough to do such a thing?

- (1) Notice that it wasn't the promised land that gave him hope but rather he was waiting for the city that has foundations.
 - (a) This city with foundations is a city that cannot be shaken!
 - (b) Why? Because its craftsman and builder is God himself.
 - (c) If our house is not built on the Rock, then it will fall and us with it.
- 3. As we move to verse 11, we now see that not only did Abraham live by faith but Sarah did too.
 - a) We must recall that Sarah had been barren her entire life.
 - b) We must also remember that God had promised to give the inheritance to Abraham's offspring.
 - (1) Now that's a problem when your wife cannot have children.
 - (2) Yet in verse 11, we hear that by faith Sarah received power to conceive.
 - (3) Not only was she barren but she was past the age of bearing children.
 - (4) What a miracle!
 - (5) The Lord made it impossible for Abraham and Sarah to take any credit for doing this.
 - (a) As God promised, he will make a great nation out of him and he will make Abraham's name great; NOT Abraham.
 - (b) He has nothing to boast about, does he?
 - (c) NO. But trusting in the one who is faithful is sufficient.
- 4. Finally, the section wraps up by making it clear what God had done through this one man—Abraham.
 - a) Notice there in verse 12—though this miraculous birth from one man, and this man was as good as dead, were born many descendants.
 - (1) There are many texts throughout the Bible that describe this scene.
 - (a) But because of Abraham's faith and Sarah's faith, God blessed them with descendants as numerous as the stars of heaven and as many as the innumerable grains of sand by the seashore.
 - (b) When Abraham was waiting for Sarah to be with child, God told him to look at the stars of heaven and know that he would make a great nation from him.
 - i) God promised to do it. He didn't put the responsibility on Abraham but rather he was to simply trust and obey.
 - ii) The stars of heaven were there as a reminder of what God was going to do.
- 5. You might say—I haven't been called by God to move anywhere. But I beg to differ.
 - a) If you have come to faith in Jesus Christ, you are called to follow Jesus.
 - (1) He has commanded the way. He promises to be with us. And he has sent the Holy Spirit to dwell in us.
 - b) Secondly, he has called you to heaven—the city of God. Therefore, you are to live here as a stranger in this land.
 - (1) This journey to heaven has its pitfalls and there's an enemy who wants to direct you off the path and stop the pilgrim's progress. If you press on toward that heavenly city, he can't stop you.
- B. Well, that's what saving faith looked like in Abraham. The righteous live by faith which results in obedience. But now let's explore what faith looks like in death.
 - 1. As we move now to the next section in verse 13, we immediately hear the news that all these—Abraham, Sarah, Isaac, and Jacob—died in faith.
 - a) On one level, we must take note that they endured to the end by God's amazing grace.
 - (1) We need to know that God is faithful to finish the good work he began in them and he will do the same for us.
 - (2) And they died in faith not having received the things promised.
 - (a) In other words, there was never a time in their lives that they lived in the land that it wasn't still the promised land.
 - (b) Indeed, when Abraham died the only thing he owned in the promised land was a grave.
 - (c) That seems strange doesn't it?
 - (d) It's only strange if that was the land Abraham was longing for.

- (e) In verse 10 it said that he was looking forward to the city that has foundations.
- (f) So too here, not only Abraham but also all who died in faith were looking to the future. It even says, that they saw those promises and greeted them from afar.
 - i) What promises did he see? He looked ahead and saw the birth of that promised child in Gen. 3:15—Jesus himself. It says in John 8:56 “Your father Abraham rejoiced that he would see my day. He saw it and was glad.”
- b) So, God does keep his promises and those who trust him will receive them. But while they wait, they lived as exiles and strangers on the earth. Why?
 - (1) They were pilgrims on a journey in a land that was not their fatherland.
 - (2) People who say such things or live this way, make it clear they are seeking the land of their Father, that is the City of God.
 - (a) We cannot go on thinking this land is our home. We will not endure in faith if we keep our minds on our homeland—our hometown.
 - i) If we think this is the land of promise, then we will not long for the better city.
 - (b) Abraham did not continue to think about going back to Ur, the land he had gone out of. He could have went back but he didn't.
 - i) In fact, when he sent his servant to get a wife for Isaac, he made him promise to never take Isaac back there.
 - (3) Why? How can they walk away from family and homes and land and the comforts of life surrounded by their kin?
 - (a) Well, they desired a better country—way better than the land of Canaan—that is, they desired the heavenly one.
 - (b) This next sentence is amazing.
 - (c) To hear God say that he was not ashamed to call Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob their God is absolutely amazing.
 - i) If you are in Christ by faith, God is not ashamed of you.
 - ii) It is his delight to be called your Lord and Savior.
 - iii) Indeed, so much so that he has prepared a city for all who have faith to live with us forever!
 - iv) Church family, we must know that our citizenship is in heaven and from it we await a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ who will transform our lowly bodies to be like his glorious body.
 - v) We must live as strangers and exiles here as we wait for the City of God.
 - (1) Because if you think that you've already received the promises then you will likely stop having faith.
 - (2) The promises come after death. Those who live by faith will also die in faith.
 - (3) It's sometimes very uncomfortable in this land when you live by faith.
 - (4) But those who endure to the end will not be disappointed.
- C. And now the last section. We've observed how to live and die by faith. Now we get to see what it looks like when faith is tested.
 - 1. This is an absolutely stunning scene. It makes no sense if we are not told that God is testing Abraham. In that framework, we then see the reason behind a really strange demand of God to offer his Isaac as a sacrifice.
 - 2. The amazing birth of Isaac according to the promise had happened. The heir of the inheritance had arrived. The one through whom the promise would continue and the hope of that greater Son of Abraham must come from this chosen line.
 - a) The impossible happened so that there could be no claim to God's work.
 - b) God is jealous for his glory. He intends it to be that way so that no man can boast.
 - c) Not only was the birth of Isaac a work of God but also preserving his line.
 - d) Indeed, it says here in verse 18 that “Through Isaac shall your offspring be named.” It had to come through the son of promise.

3. Genesis 22 begins the same way Hebrews 11 verse 17 begins—After these things God tested Abraham.
 - a) If faith goes untested, we cannot know if we really have faith. Thus the Lord asks Abraham to do something that seems to contradict all that he had hoped for.
 - b) It must be noted that God didn't send Abraham a message that said—hey, I just want to let you know that I will be testing your faith today. Be ready.
 - c) In Genesis 22, Abraham prepared for the journey. He had been instructed to do this—“Take your son, your only son Isaac, whom you love, and go to the land of Moriah, and offer him there as a burnt offering on one of the mountains of which I shall tell you.”
 - (1) It goes on to describe how Abraham saddled his donkeys and took two servants with him.
 - (2) He cut the wood needed for the fire to offer the burnt offering.
 - (3) He proceeded to the mountains of Moriah waiting for the Lord to tell him where to go.
 - (4) The journey was very quiet. No one was asking the obvious question.
 - (5) But finally, Isaac breaks the silence—Genesis 22:7 And Isaac said to his father Abraham, “My father!” And he said, “Here I am, my son.” He said, “Behold, the fire and the wood, but where is the lamb for a burnt offering?”
 - (a) Abraham simply replied—Genesis 22:8 “God will provide for himself the lamb for a burnt offering, my son.”
 - i) This reply reveals his faith in the Lord. He doesn't know how it will happen but he trusts that he will. He can't see it but he trusts the Lord.
 - (b) If you know the story, when they arrive at the place of worship, they see no lamb.
 - (c) So, Abraham built the altar and laid the wood on it.
 - (d) He then took his only son and bound him and placed him on the wood.
 - (e) The scene gets even more intense when Abraham takes out his knife to slaughter his son.
 - (f) But at the last moment, the angel of the LORD called to him from heaven and said—“Do not lay your hand on the boy or do anything to him, for I know that you fear God, seeing you have not withheld your son, your only son from me.”
 - i) Did God provide the lamb that Abraham only saw by faith? Genesis 22:13 And Abraham lifted up his eyes and looked, and behold, behind him was a ram, caught in a thicket by his horns. And Abraham went and took the ram and offered it up as a burnt offering instead of his son.
 - d) I want to circle back to something Abraham said to his servants when he left them behind.
 - (1) Genesis 22:5 “Stay here with the donkey; I and the boy will go over there and worship and come again to you.”
 - (a) Did you hear that? I and the boy will come again to you.
 - (b) Abraham had faith long before he got to the mountain. God had tested his faith many times before this day had come.
 - i) God tests us everyday too.
 - (1) This morning, you will be tested...
 - (2) ...when someone acts unkind to you...when someone praises you...
 - (a) Will we pray for our enemies and will we take the credit and glory?
 - (b) God is testing us to see if we will obey his word.
 - (c) Abraham could do that because of what he believed about God. It says there in Hebrews 11:19 that he considered that God was able even to raise Isaac from the dead.
 - i) And figuratively speaking—because Abraham had every intention of going through with it—received him back.
4. In rapid fire, the author of Hebrews gives us three more examples of Abraham's family.
 - a) By faith, Isaac invoked future blessings on Jacob and Esau.
 - b) By faith, Jacob when dying blessed each of the sons of Joseph.
 - c) By faith, Joseph, at the end of his life, made mention of the exodus and gave instructions concerning his bones.

- (1) All of these demonstrated faith in God to the end.
- (2) Their lives and their actions made clear that they were not bound by the fleeting comforts of this world. They longed for the city that is made glad by God. The heavenly city. A better country.
- (3) The pilgrim by faith obeys God no matter what it costs. By faith we live as pilgrims in this land. And by faith, we wait for that great exodus to come. The future blessings are coming for those who die in faith. Our bones will be raised and given a new resurrected body to dwell with God forever.
- (4) Do you have full assurance of things hoped for...things unseen? Do you want fleeting comforts or eternal comforts?
- (5) This side of the grave, the Christian life is not always comfortable but all those things will come to an end.
- (6) Let us look to Jesus—the author and perfecter of our faith.