

A Study of the Book of Hebrews
Jesus is Better
Sermon # 19
“The Ingredients of a Life of Faith”
Hebrews 11:8–19

Have you ever stopped to think about how you get God’s approval in life? Can you gain God approval by being religious? No. Can you gain God’s approval by going to church? No. Can you gain God’s approval by keeping the Ten Commandments? No. There is only one way that we can please God. In Hebrew 11:6 we learned that, “... *without faith it is impossible to please Him.*” There are only two ways to live. One way, by far the most common, is to live by sight - to base everything on what you can see. The other way, far less commonly taken, is to live by faith, to base your life primarily and ultimately on what you cannot see. That is the Christian way, the Bible way; that is the way that the people of God have always lived.

Last Sunday in our study of the book of Hebrews we looked at what faith is and what faith does. We saw how faith caused Abel to worship God, Enoch to walk with God and Noah to work for God. Today I want us to see three specific ingredients necessary for a life of faith, drawn from the life of Abraham as recorded in Hebrews chapter eleven beginning in verse eight.

First, True Faith Involves A Willingness To Obey. (11:8)

The life of faith begins with the willingness to heed the call of God to leave behind a life of sin. In verse eight we are told, “*By faith*

Abraham obeyed when he was called to go out to the place which he would receive as an inheritance. And he went out, not knowing where he was going."

This verse tells us that God "called" Abraham. That does not mean that he was called to preach or to go to the mission field or even to perform some act of service. The context is very clear. God called Abraham out of his paganism and idolatry into a relationship with Himself.

It apparently was not Abraham's plan to nor intention to leave his home in Haran. But then God revealed himself to Abraham and called him to life of faith. The life of faith begins with a willingness to leave behind our place of sin and unbelief. The word of God calls not just for faith but for a faith that leads to action in response to the word of God. True faith always leads to decisive action.

At the age of seventy-five Abraham set out for the Promised Land, a land he had never visited and knew nothing about. Perhaps like most of us Abraham was tempted to ask for more details. Yet there is no indication that there was any hesitation or bargaining on the part of Abraham. God called and Abraham obeyed.

Remember as he stepped out on faith that Abraham did not have the advantages that we have today. He did not have the example of godly men and women to stir him nor did he have the written word of God to instruct him. Yet with the slimmest grasp of who God was Abraham launched out and in the process discovered the faithfulness of God.

Abraham left behind an inheritance of faith. We are each given

one life, and we will leave behind an abundance of memories in the lives of those who love us. What will your friends and family, your children and grandchildren know about a life of faith by remembering your life? How will you and I be remembered? Will we be remembered for our faith? Or will our loved ones even have the assurance that we are in heaven?

Living by faith can be a lot like driving in a fog. When driving a heavy fog, you really cannot see that far in front of the car but you keep driving anyway, believing that what you cannot see, you will see once get a little further down the road. When you move forward one hundred feet you can see one hundred more feet than you could not see before. Thus you keep going until you reach your destination, driving by faith.

For some of you here this morning you are hearing the call of God to leave a life of unbelief and begin a life of faith. Perhaps Christ has been calling you for sometime to repent of sin and to receive Him as your Savior. Abraham heard the voice of God and as soon as he understood what God was telling him to do, Abraham said yes, he believed God and responded to Him in faith. What will you do?

Some of you have already made a commitment of faith to Christ yet today you know that God is calling you to something more. Our response to the Lord should be, "Lord I don't know what you want to do with my life...but I am yours."

True faith involves a willingness to obey.

Secondly, True Faith Involves A Willingness to Wait. (11:9-16)

The life of faith did not end for Abraham when he left Ur of the Chaldeans behind nor when he finally set foot on the territory to which God directed his steps.

Verse nine continues the story, *"By faith he dwelt in the land of promise as in a foreign country, dwelling in tents with Isaac and Jacob, the heirs with him of the same promise; (10) for he waited for the city which has foundations, whose builder and maker is God."*

When Abraham arrived in the land of promise (Canaan) he lived there as a resident alien, residing in tents and never owning any property except the burial plot for his beloved wife, Sarah. *"Dwelling in tents"* was the way of travelers and nomads, even in that day tents were not considered permanent residences. Kent Hughes illustrates the point this way, *"To get the feel for what this was like, imagine God promising you and your descendants the land of Guatemala, and then in obedience traveling there and living the rest of your life in your camper, along with your son's families in their campers, moving from place to place. You remain an alien living for the remainder of your sojourn, without full citizenship rights, a perpetual outsider."* [R.

Kent Hughes. Hebrews: An Anchor for the Soul. Vol. 2 (Wheaton, ILL: Crossway Books, 1993). p 97]

What a lesson for us today. The parallels between Abraham's life and the Christian life today, is not difficult to see. The translation of 1 Peter 2:11 in the *"The Message"* says, *"Friends, this world is not your home, so don't make yourselves cozy in it."* It is in fact a dangerous thing when a Christian gets too comfortable in this world.

A great lesson shines forth from this aspect of Abraham's life. As believers we must be willing to walk by faith. We have a tendency to

desire to amass permanent possessions in the here and now but these things can encumber us in our walk of faith. We also need to remember that this world is not our home.

Abraham's faith went far beyond what he experienced in this life. His goal was a permanent, eternal home built by God. Abraham waited patiently for the promise. He never saw God's promise fulfilled; he waited and waited and waited. Often the hardest times for us as believers are the in-between times, the times of waiting.

Verses eleven and twelve testify to Sarah's faith. *"By faith Sarah herself also received strength to conceive seed, and she bore a child when she was past the age, because she judged Him faithful who had promised. (12) Therefore from one man, and him as good as dead, were born as many as the stars of the sky in multitude-innumerable as the sand which is by the seashore."*

Do you ever feel like God has put your life on hold? That is what Abraham and Sarah must have felt like. For twenty-five years they waited for the fulfillment of the promise that God would give them a child. As time went on, Abraham and Sarah passed the normal age of childbearing the waiting became more difficult. He discovered that waiting is one of life's greatest disciplines. Even Abraham this paragon of faith, had problems waiting and attempted to help God fulfill his promises with devastating results.

As we wait it we would do well to remember an important principle. Waiting time is never wasted time. What is God doing while you wait? God may be testing you to reveal how committed you really

are. Regardless of how it appears God is always working behind the scenes preparing the way. God is using life to position us and prepare us to accomplish his vision in our lives. You may have to wait, but remember that God timing is always right. True faith is waiting for the fulfillment of God's promises in God's timing. We never lose when we trust God in the dark.

The descendants of Abraham also demonstrated faith for we are told in verse thirteen, *"These all died in faith, not having received the promises, but having seen them afar off were assured of them, embraced them and confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth. (14) For those who say such things declare plainly that they seek a homeland. (15) And truly if they had called to mind that country from which they had come out, they would have had opportunity to return."*

Verse fifteen illustrate that the failure of the descendants of Abraham to settle down in Canaan was not because their hearts were in "old country" where Abraham had lived before beginning his wandering. It was not that they were living in the glories of *"the good old days"* like we do sometimes. They never returned to Ur even though they could have. There existed in their hearts an empty longing that could only be filled with spiritual reality. Verse sixteen states, *"But now they desire a better, that is, a heavenly country. Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God, for He has prepared a city for them."* The term *"desire"* means to "stretch out after," or "yearn after." They were unwilling to accept short-term satisfaction that would have denied them long-term fulfillment.

In verse sixteen it says that God has "*prepared for them a city*" the word translated "*prepared*" (*hetoimasen*) is in the aorist tense, meaning that it has already been done.

The faith of the descendants of Abraham can be seen in that their lives are "*characterized by two objects a tent and an altar. With the tent they confessed their attitude toward this world; they would not let it's attractions blind them to spiritual realities. With the altar they confessed their relationship to the world to come; they were believers! Thus they adopted the attitude that as far as this world was concerned they were strangers (away from home) and pilgrims (going home).*" [John Phillips. Exploring Hebrews. (Neptune, NJ: Loizeaux Brothers, 1992.) p. 158.]

But make no mistake about it, "*....It is not a metaphysical mirage that they are pursuing, for God has prepared for them a city, a real city, which, has real foundations (v. 10). This is the homeland toward which the man of faith presses on. It is the same goal as that on which Christ urged his disciples to fix their gaze...- he assured them that he was going to prepare a place for them, and would come again to take them to be with him in this blissful abode (John 14:1-3). It is the same goal the apostle Paul, unhindered by present afflictions, pressed on, 'forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead,' in the conviction that our 'citizenship is in heaven' where at last we shall be fully transformed into the likeness of our glorious Redeemer (Phil. 3:12, 20) ; and toward which we who are Christian believers hasten as we 'run with perseverance the race that is set before us, looking to Jesus the pioneer and perfecter of our faith' (Heb 12:1). In such single-minded commitment there can be no*

thought of turning back." [Philip Elgcumbe Hughes. A Commentary on the Epistle to the Hebrews. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Pub., 1977.) p. 480-481.]

True faith involves a willingness to wait.

Third, True Faith Involves A Willingness To Sacrifice. (11:17-19)

The final demonstration of faith, its ultimate proof, is the willingness to sacrifice. Verse seventeen says, "*By faith Abraham, when he was tested, offered up Isaac, and he who had received the promises offered up his only begotten son, (18) of whom it was said, "In Isaac your seed shall be called," (19) concluding that God was able to raise him up, even from the dead, from which he also received him in a figurative sense.*"

It was by faith that Abraham offered his son Isaac as a sacrifice when God tested Him. Abraham demonstrated a willingness to give God the most important thing in his life, his son. What is the most important thing in your life? God will never settle for being second place in your life. God is only interested in being in first place in your life and he will not settle for anything less.

Corrie Ten Boom once commented that she had learned to hold the things of this world loosely in her hand, because she knew that if she grasped them tightly then the Lord would have to pry her fingers away and it would hurt. Is there anything in your life that you are trying to withhold from God? Is there anything that it is going to hurt if God has to pry it out of your hands?

We don't have any trouble sacrificing that which is not important to us anyway. To some of you money is in first place in your life and

you withhold what rightfully belongs to God. The story of the Rich Young Ruler (Matt 19) can be instructive to us at this point. This young man came to Jesus and asked what he must do to inherit eternal life. Jesus told him in Matt 19:16 to, "...*Go and sell what you have and give it to the poor.*" The point was not the money but that Jesus knew that the money was first place in his life. God is not interested in your money he is interested in your heart. When Abraham was willing to give to God that which was the most important thing in his life; God gave it right back to him.

From some of you the most important thing in your life is your family. For others the most important thing in your life is your career, your dreams for the future. If you're afraid to trust God with your possessions, your dreams, or someone in your life, then you need to take a look at the life of Abraham. Because Abraham was willing to give up everything for God, he received back far more than he could even have imagined. You will never give up anything for God that God will not repay many times over. True faith involves a willingness to sacrifice.

Conclusion

As Charles Swindoll points out one crucial question demands an answer. "*If faith is so great why do so few people live it?*" An important reason is that most people would rather do anything than take a risk.

Taking risks, means being vulnerable. And that may affect our finances, our friends, our future, our feelings, our occupation, where

we live, and a host of other considerations. The human tendency is to want to be safe and secure, to hedge our bets, to insure ourselves against loss. Basically, we fail at faith because we fear to risk.” [Charles Swindoll. The Practical Life of Faith: A Study of Hebrews 10-12. Bible Study Guide. (Fullerton, Calif.: Insights For Living, 1989) p. 20]