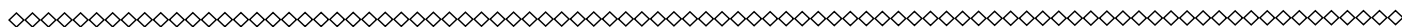




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Sermon Brief
Text: Heb. 11:8-12, 17-19
Title: Living in Faith 2
Lorin L. Cranford

Seeking to faith-
fully proclaim
the whole coun-
cil of God in
scripture!



INTRODUCTION

Today we continue the emphasis on Living in Faith by looking further into the 'roll-call of faith' found in chapter eleven of Hebrews. Last Sunday's focus was on Genesis 1-11 with creation and the primeval history. The emphasis in Heb. 11:8-22 focuses on Genesis 12-50 with the patriarchs of Israel singled out for attention. Today I want to focus on Abraham from this text, which is found in verses 8-12 and 17-19. Hear the words of the writer of Hebrews about Abraham who served as the beginning of the Israelite people.

8 By faith **Abraham** obeyed when he was called to set out for a place that he was to receive as an inheritance; and he set out, not knowing where he was going. 9 By faith he stayed for a time in the land he had been promised, as in a foreign land, living in tents, as did Isaac and Jacob, who were heirs with him of the same promise. 10 For he looked forward to the city that has foundations, whose architect and builder is God. 11 By faith he received power of procreation, even though he was too old — and Sarah herself was barren — because he considered him faithful who had promised. 12 Therefore from one person, and this one as good as dead, descendants were born, "as many as the stars of heaven and as the innumerable grains of sand by the seashore." . . .

17 By faith Abraham, when put to the test, offered up Isaac. He who had received the promises was ready to offer up his only son, 18 of whom he had been told, "It is through Isaac that descendants shall be named for you." 19 He considered the fact that God is able even to raise someone from the dead — and figuratively speaking, he did receive him back. 20 By faith **Isaac** invoked blessings for the future on Jacob and Esau. 21 By faith **Jacob**, when dying, blessed each of the sons of Joseph, "bowing in worship over the top of his staff." 22 By faith **Joseph**, at the end of his life, made mention of the exodus of the Israelites and gave instructions about his burial.¹

As we noted last Sunday, the writer begins in verses one and two with a definition of faith, which then serves as the basis of his evaluation of selected individuals throughout the Old Testament who serve as illustrations of the kind of faith he describes at the beginning.

1 Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen. 2 Indeed, by faith our ancestors received approval.²

Fundamentally faith is assurance and conviction that guided the ancient Israelites. The writer makes the point that through such faith these individuals found approval from God.

The writer to the Hebrews saw in the lives of select Israelites the kind of faith needed by his Jewish Christian readers in the middle of the first Christian century. From these inspiring individuals out of the past the believers of the first century could find both inspiration and insight into living in faith. I believe that we can also find that inspiration and insight that can help us live in faith and thus gain God's approval as they did.

This is particularly true of Abraham. The writer of Hebrews makes four distinct points about Abraham's faith through selecting just four events from the century plus life of this Israelite patriarch. The writer begins with Abraham's departure from the Ur of the Chaldees to move into the Promised Land. He closes with the

¹GNT: 11.8 Πίστει καλούμενος **Ἀβραάμ** ὑπήκουσεν ἐξελθεῖν εἰς τόπον ὃν ἤμελλεν λαμβάνειν εἰς κληρονομίαν, καὶ ἐξῆλθεν μὴ ἐπιστάμενος ποῦ ἔρχεται. 11.9 Πίστει παρώκησεν εἰς γῆν τῆς ἐπαγγελίας ὡς ἀλλοτρίαν ἐν σκηναῖς κατοικήσας μετὰ Ἰσαὰκ καὶ Ἰακώβ τῶν συγκληρονόμων τῆς ἐπαγγελίας τῆς αὐτῆς · 11.10 ἐξεδέχετο γὰρ τὴν τοῦ θεμελίου ἔχουσαν πόλιν ἧς τεχνίτης καὶ δημιουργὸς ὁ θεός. 11.11 Πίστει καὶ αὐτὴ Σάρρα στείρα δύναμιν εἰς καταβολὴν σπέρματος ἔλαβεν καὶ παρὰ καιρὸν ἡλικίας, ἐπεὶ πιστὸν ἠγγήσατο τὸν ἐπαγγειλάμενον · 11.12 διὸ καὶ ἀφ' ἐνὸς ἐγεννήθησαν, καὶ ταῦτα νεκρωμένοι, καθὼς τὰ ἄστρα τοῦ οὐρανοῦ τῷ πλήθει καὶ ὡς ἡ ἄμμος ἢ παρὰ τὸ χεῖλος τῆς θαλάσσης ἢ ἀναρίθμητος. . . .

11.17 Πίστει προσενήνοχεν **Ἀβραάμ** τὸν Ἰσαὰκ πειραζόμενος καὶ τὸν μονογενῆ προσέφερεν, ὃ τὰς ἐπαγγελίας ἀναδεξάμενος, 11.18 πρὸς ὃν ἐλαλήθη ὅτι Ἐν Ἰσαὰκ κληθήσεται σοι σπέρμα, 11.19 λογισάμενος ὅτι καὶ ἐκ νεκρῶν ἐγείρειν δυνατὸς ὁ θεός, ὅθεν αὐτὸν καὶ ἐν παραβολῇ ἐκομίσατο. 11.20 Πίστει καὶ περὶ μελλόντων εὐλόγησεν Ἰσαὰκ τὸν Ἰακώβ καὶ τὸν Ἡσαῦ. 11.21 Πίστει **Ἰακώβ** ἀποθνήσκων ἕκαστον τῶν υἱῶν Ἰωσήφ εὐλόγησεν καὶ προσεκύνησεν ἐπὶ τὸ ἄκρον τῆς ῥάβδου αὐτοῦ. 11.22 Πίστει **Ἰωσήφ** τελευτῶν περὶ τῆς ἐξόδου τῶν υἱῶν Ἰσραὴλ ἐμνημόνευσεν καὶ περὶ τῶν ὀστέων αὐτοῦ ἐνετείλατο.

²GNT: 11.1 Ἔστιν δὲ πίστις ἐλπίζομένων ὑπόστασις, πραγμάτων ἔλεγχος οὐ βλεπομένων. 11.2 ἐν ταύτῃ γὰρ ἐμαρτυρήθησαν οἱ πρεσβύτεροι.

traditional high point of Abraham's life with the offering up of his son Isaac. These points are introduced with the phrase "by faith Abraham..." (vv. 8, 9, 11, 17). From these we can learn much about Abraham's faith and how to live that same way.

BODY

I. By faith Abraham obeyed... (v. 8).

8 By faith Abraham obeyed when he was called to set out for a place that he was to receive as an inheritance; and he set out, not knowing where he was going.

11.8 Πίστει καλούμενος Ἀβραὰμ ὑπήκουσεν ἐξελθεῖν εἰς τόπον ὃν ἤμελλον λαμβάνειν εἰς κληρονομίαν, καὶ ἐξῆλθεν μὴ ἐπιστάμενος ποῦ ἔρχεται.

The writer summarizes in one statement what Luke described in greater detail in Stephen's speech in Acts 7:2-8.

2 And Stephen replied:

"Brothers and fathers, listen to me. The God of glory appeared to our ancestor Abraham when he was in Mesopotamia, before he lived in Haran, 3 and said to him, "Leave your country and your relatives and go to the land that I will show you.' 4 Then he left the country of the Chaldeans and settled in Haran. After his father died, God had him move from there to this country in which you are now living. 5 He did not give him any of it as a heritage, not even a foot's length, but promised to give it to him as his possession and to his descendants after him, even though he had no child. 6 And God spoke in these terms, that his descendants would be resident aliens in a country belonging to others, who would enslave them and mistreat them during four hundred years. 7 "But I will judge the nation that they serve,' said God, "and after that they shall come out and worship me in this place.' 8 Then he gave him the covenant of circumcision. And so Abraham became the father of Isaac and circumcised him on the eighth day; and Isaac became the father of Jacob, and Jacob of the twelve patriarchs.

Both of these texts are summarizing and commenting upon Genesis 12, especially verses 1-9.

1 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. 2 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. 3 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."

4 So Abram went, as the Lord had told him; and Lot went with him. Abram was seventy-five years old when he departed from Haran. 5 Abram took his wife Sarai and his brother's son Lot, and all the possessions that they had gathered, and the persons whom they had acquired in Haran; and they set forth to go to the land of Canaan. When they had come to the land of Canaan,

6 Abram passed through the land to the place at Shechem, to the oak of Moreh. At that time the Canaanites were in the land. 7 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. 8 From there he moved on to the hill country on the east of Bethel, and pitched his tent, with Bethel on the west and Ai on the east; and there he built an altar to the Lord and invoked the name of the Lord. 9 And Abram journeyed on by stages toward the Negeb.

At God's command Abraham pulled up stakes in Ur and moved first to Haran in the northwestern Fertile Crescent, and then into the Land of Promise in the western Fertile Crescent. The writer of Hebrews sees in this action by Abraham a 'faith based obedience' to God. As God called him (καλούμενος) to go to the different places, Abraham obeyed (ὑπήκουσεν) this divine call quickly and without hesitation. The writer asserts that Abraham did not understand where he was going (μὴ ἐπιστάμενος ποῦ ἔρχεται). The Genesis text (12:1) simply says that God called Abraham to leave his home to go "to the land that I will show you." Upon what basis did Abraham do this? "By faith," (Πίστει) declares the writer of Hebrews. Abraham's faith was a step into the unknown. He had no clear idea of where God was taking him. But faith prompted Abraham to obey God's instructions. As the apostle Paul told the Corinthians (2 Cor. 5:7), "we walk by faith, not by sight."

Abraham challenges us greatly here. Faith and obedience are inseparably linked. No one can truthfully claim to have faith in God without obeying God's commands. To make such a claim to faith without obedience is to lie. James 2:14-26 makes this abundantly clear.³

³NRSV: 14 What good is it, my brothers and sisters, if you say you have faith but do not have works? Can faith save you? 15 If a brother or sister is naked and lacks daily food, 16 and one of you says to them, "Go in peace; keep warm and eat your fill," and yet you do not supply their bodily needs, what is the good of that? 17 So faith by itself, if it has no works, is dead. 18 But someone will say, "You have faith and I have works." Show me your faith apart from your works, and I by my works will show you my faith. 19 You believe that God is one; you do well. Even the demons believe—and shudder. 20 Do you want to be shown, you senseless person, that faith apart from works is barren? 21 Was not our ancestor Abraham justified by works when he offered his son Isaac on the altar? 22 You see that faith was active along with his works, and faith was brought to completion by the works. 23 Thus the scripture was fulfilled that

Also from Abraham we can see that faith is focused in God. God is the object of our faith, not what we want from God. Biblical faith never ever tries to impose its will on God. To the contrary, biblical faith is the molding of our will and desires to the will of God. Any so-called faith that tries to tell God what to do is not faith. Instead, it's arrogance and sinful pride that falsely assumes my desires are more important than God's.

II. **By faith Abraham stayed....** (vv. 9-10)

9 **By faith** he stayed for a time in the land he had been promised, as in a foreign land, living in tents, as did Isaac and Jacob, who were heirs with him of the same promise. 10 For he looked forward to the city that has foundations, whose architect and builder is God.

11.9 **Πίστει** παρώκησεν εἰς γῆν τῆς ἐπαγγελίας ὡς ἀλλοτρίαν ἐν σκηναῖς κατοικήσας μετὰ Ἰσαὰκ καὶ Ἰακώβ τῶν συγκληρονόμων τῆς ἐπαγγελίας τῆς αὐτῆς · 11.10 ἐξεδέχετο γὰρ τὴν τοῦ θεοῦ πόλιν ἧς τεχνίτης καὶ δημιουργὸς ὁ θεός.

Abraham spent the bulk of his adult life as a foreigner moving from place to place in Egypt and in the land of Canaan.⁴ He was always an outsider and typically not welcomed by those already living in the land.⁵ But his vision was always beyond his present transient circumstance. He looked for a permanent place of dwelling that God would prepare. God's promise was for an inheritance, that is, the land of Canaan for his descendants. But Abraham was convinced that God had something more permanent and stable for him. Thus his entire life was lived out in expectation of realizing God's promise.

Are you willing to follow God's leading, without clearly knowing where it is going to take you? Abraham lived out his life in a foreign country as an outsider. He did so because God placed him there. His focus wasn't on taking possession of the place where he lived at the moment. He knew this was temporary and would not last. His focus was on the future and the full realization of God's promises. God calls us to live out our lives in this world as pilgrims and foreigners.⁶

At the heart of the idea is that we are to live out our lives looking at this world as being temporary. Our permanent home is not here; it's Heaven. We therefore will always be living 'outside our comfort zone' in this world as people of faith in God. The land of Canaan, even the Land of Promise, was never Abraham's real home. And neither was Ur on the eastern side of the Fertile Crescent. His real home always lay in front of him as a point of hope and anticipation. This is how we as God's people today should be living as well.

III. **By faith Abraham received....** (vv.11-12):

11 **By faith** he received power of procreation, even though he was too old — and Sarah herself was barren — because he considered her faithful who had promised. 12 Therefore from one person, and this one as good as dead, descendants were born, "as many as the stars of heaven and as the innumerable grains of sand by the seashore."...

11.11 **Πίστει** καὶ αὐτὴ Σάρρα στείρα δύναμιν εἰς καταβολὴν σπέρματος ἔλαβεν καὶ παρὰ καιρὸν ἡλικίας, ἐπεὶ πιστὸν ἠγήσατο τὸν ἐπαγγειλάμενον · 11.12 διὸ καὶ ἀφ' ἐνὸς ἐγεννήθησαν, καὶ ταῦτα νενεκρωμένον, καθὼς τὰ ἄστρα τοῦ οὐρανοῦ τῷ πλήθει καὶ ὡς ἡ ἄμμος ἢ παρὰ τὸ χεῖλος τῆς θαλάσσης ἢ ἀναρίθμητος.

...

Here the writer summarizes concepts from Gen. 15:1-6; 17:15-22; and 18:9-15. God made the covenant promise of a son to Abraham upon his leaving Ur. But it was over fifty years later before God kept that promise when Abraham was 100 years old and Sarah 90 years. Abraham's faith in God to give him the promised son eventually enabled God to keep His promise to Abraham. Now was Abraham's trust in God perfect? Not at all! At first Abraham thought that the promised son would be the child of one of his slaves that he had fathered (cf. Gen. 17:18). But God said no to that. Later on Sarah conceived and gave birth to Isaac as God had promised (cf. Gen. 21:1-13).⁷

God wants to do things in our lives that clearly are His doings and not human based actions. To be sure, God works through the dynamics and structures of His created world most of the time. But sometimes He wants to do things in our lives that reach beyond the 'laws of nature' in order to make His presence and

says, "Abraham believed God, and it was reckoned to him as righteousness," and he was called the friend of God. 24 You see that a person is justified by works and not by faith alone. 25 Likewise, was not Rahab the prostitute also justified by works when she welcomed the messengers and sent them out by another road? 26 For just as the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without works is also dead.

⁴cf. Gen. 20:1; 21:23, 34; 35:27.

⁵cf. Gen. 23:4a: "'I am a stranger and an alien residing among you;...'"

⁶The Greek word ἀλλοτρίαν used here occurs some 13 times in the New Testament. For more details, see Stephen G. Dempster, "Foreigner," *Baker's Evangelical Dictionary of Biblical Theology* online.

⁷NRSV: "1 The Lord dealt with Sarah as he had said, and the Lord did for Sarah as he had promised. 2 Sarah conceived and bore Abraham a son in his old age, at the time of which God had spoken to him. 3 Abraham gave the name Isaac to his son whom Sarah bore him."

power clear. He wants to do things in our lives that unquestionably stretch us beyond our own capabilities and strengths. Abraham teaches us that faith, unquestioning trust in God, opens the possibilities for God to work in marvelous ways in our lives.

IV. *By faith Abraham offered up...* (vv. 17-19)

17 *By faith* Abraham, when put to the test, offered up Isaac. He who had received the promises was ready to offer up his only son, 18 of whom he had been told, “It is through Isaac that descendants shall be named for you.” 19 He considered the fact that God is able even to raise someone from the dead — and figuratively speaking, he did receive him back.

11.17 *Πίστει* προσενήνοχεν Ἄβραάμ τὸν Ἰσαὰκ πειραζόμενος καὶ τὸν μονογενῆ προσέφερεν, ὁ τὰς ἐπαγγελίας ἀναδεξάμενος, 11.18 πρὸς ὃν ἐλαλήθη ὅτι Ἐν Ἰσαὰκ κληθήσεται σοι σπέρμα, 11.19 λογισάμενος ὅτι καὶ ἐκ νεκρῶν ἐγείρειν δυνατὸς ὁ θεός, ὅθεν αὐτὸν καὶ ἐν παραβολῇ ἐκομίσατο.

Now the writer alludes to Gen. 22:1-18 where Abraham attempted to sacrifice his son Isaac as a burnt offering to God.⁸ This rather strange demand from God was obeyed by Abraham. How God would keep His promise of a sea of descendants while demanding the life of the son from whom those descendants would come was not clear. The writer suggests that Abraham thought that possibly God would bring Isaac back alive after being killed for sacrifice. The original text of Genesis asserts only Abraham’s faith in God’s provision as he spoke to Isaac (cf. 22:8): “God himself will provide the lamb for a burnt offering, my son.” The place of sacrifice came then to be called “The Lord will provide” (cf. 22:14).

The main point of this narrative is to underscore the extreme willingness of Abraham to obey God’s instructions. Most of the time our obeying God calls upon us to do fairly simple and easy things. But on occasion God calls upon us to step out to do things that seem humanly impossible. Here is where our faith is tested. Do we trust God sufficiently to commit to these giant steps? Abraham’s example challenges us intensely here.

CONCLUSION

Abraham was indeed a man of true faith. His faith was truly assurance and conviction; and it brought him God’s approval. What about your faith?

⁸NRSV: 1 After these things God tested Abraham. He said to him, “Abraham!” And he said, “Here I am.” 2 He said, “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 that I shall show you.”

3 So Abraham rose early in the morning, saddled his donkey, and took two of his young men with him, and his son Isaac; he cut the wood for the burnt offering, and set out and went to the place in the distance that God had shown him. 4 On the third day Abraham looked up and saw the place far away. 5 Then Abraham said to his young men, “Stay here with the donkey; the boy and I will go over there; we will worship, and then we will come back to you.” 6 Abraham took the wood of the burnt offering and laid it on his son Isaac, and he himself carried the fire and the knife. So the two of them walked on together. 7 Isaac said to his father Abraham, “Father!” And he said, “Here I am, my son.” He said, “The fire and the wood are here, but where is the lamb for a burnt offering?” 8 Abraham said, “God himself will provide the lamb for a burnt offering, my son.” So the two of them walked on together. 9 When they came to the place that God had shown him, Abraham built an altar there and laid the wood in order. He bound his son Isaac, and laid him on the altar, on top of the wood. 10 Then Abraham reached out his hand and took the knife to kill his son.

11 But the angel of the Lord called to him from heaven, and said, “Abraham, Abraham!” And he said, “Here I am.” 12 He said, “Do not lay your hand on the boy or do anything to him; for now I know that you fear God, since you have not withheld your son, your only son, from me.” 13 And Abraham looked up and saw a ram, caught in a thicket by its horns. Abraham went and took the ram and offered it up as a burnt offering instead of his son. 14 So Abraham called that place “The Lord will provide”; as it is said to this day, “On the mount of the Lord it shall be provided.”

15 The angel of the Lord called to Abraham a second time from heaven, 16 and said, “By myself I have sworn, says the Lord: Because you have done this, and have not withheld your son, your only son, 17 I will indeed bless you, and I will make your offspring as numerous as the stars of heaven and as the sand that is on the seashore. And your offspring shall possess the gate of their enemies, 18 and by your offspring shall all the nations of the earth gain blessing for themselves, because you have obeyed my voice.” 19 So Abraham returned to his young men, and they arose and went together to Beer-sheba; and Abraham lived at Beer-sheba.