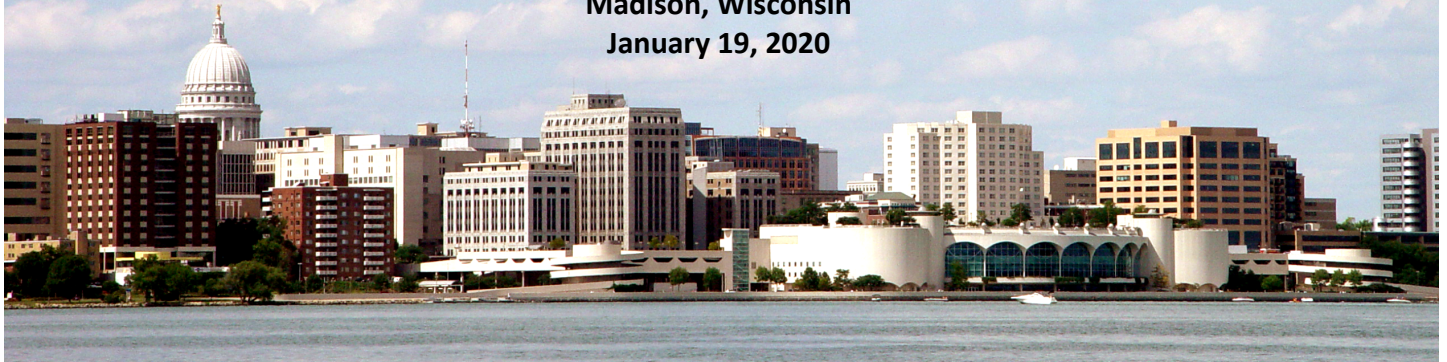


Walking By Faith: Abraham

PART 2 – HEBREWS 11:8-19

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Last week, we looked together at a passage from 2 Corinthians 5, where the apostle Paul said that we have courage, because we as God's people ***"walk by faith, not by sight."*** At the beginning of this new year, we started looking at what it means to ***"walk by faith, and not by sight."*** And we did this by looking at the example of Abraham in Hebrews 11 (p. 1882). And since we didn't have the projector last week, I'll point out again that the image we're using in this series is not really tied to the lesson! This was taken at Gibraltar Rock about a week and a half ago, and we are just using this as a background. Nevertheless, Hebrews 11 is often described as the "Hall of Fame of God's Faithful." And at the beginning of the chapter, the author explains that, ***"...faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen."*** He then explains the importance of faith to God in verse 6 as he says that, ***"...without faith it is impossible to please Him, for he who comes to God must believe that He is and that He is a rewarder of those who seek Him."*** So, we have a very rough explanation of what faith is, and we know that faith is necessary to please God, but now we need to know more. What does this mean for us? What does faith actually look like? And that's why we have Hebrews 11, because in Hebrews 11 we have a long list of great men and women who are considered faithful in the eyes of God. And of all the examples of faith in this chapter, we have more verses dedicated to the faith of Abraham *****PPT***** than to any other. We noted that Abraham's wife, Sarah, is mentioned as well, and that is awesome, because what they did was absolutely a team effort. Last week, we started looking at what their faith caused them to do, and we plan on continuing with that today. All throughout this chapter, faith causes people to do things. Faith is more than a feeling. Faith causes us to act. And that is certainly true of Abraham. So, as we continue, let us look at this paragraph again, and then we'll pick up where we left off.

Let's look together again at Hebrews 11:8-19,

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

⁹ 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; ¹⁰ for he was looking for the city which has foundations, whose architect and builder is God.

¹¹ By faith even Sarah herself received ability to conceive, even beyond the proper time of life, since she considered Him faithful who had promised. ¹² Therefore there was born even 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 seashore.

¹³ All these died in faith, without receiving the promises, but having seen them and having welcomed them from a distance, and having confessed that they were strangers and exiles on the earth. ¹⁴ For those who say such things make it clear that they are seeking a country of their own. ¹⁵ And indeed if they had been thinking of that country from which they went out, they would have had opportunity to return. ¹⁶ But as it is, they desire a better country, that is, a heavenly one. Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God; for He has prepared a city for them.

¹⁷ By faith Abraham, when he was tested, offered up Isaac, and he who had received the promises was offering up his only begotten son; ¹⁸ it was he to whom it was said, "In Isaac your descendants shall be called." ¹⁹ He considered that God is able to raise people even from the dead, from which he also received him back as a type.

I. Again, as we look back at this passage, let's remember, first of all, that "by faith" Abraham OBEYED GOD BY LEAVING HOME.

Last week, we looked at what life would have been like in Ur of the Chaldeans, we studied how Abraham was called by God to leave, and at the age of 75, Abraham obeyed by leaving what was comfortable and familiar, and he lived for the rest of his life in a tent, as a nomad, traveling from place to place, ***"...he went out, not knowing where he was going."*** He packed up and left, without knowing any details. And last week, we compared that to God's call today, where Jesus gives the invitation, ***"If anyone wishes to come after Me, he must deny himself, and take up his cross and follow Me."*** We might not understand all of the details, we might not truly understand the cost involved, but Jesus calls us to leave the life we're familiar with, to give up the old ways, and to follow him. And so, even today, we are encouraged by Abraham's example. He did something very difficult, but he trusted God, and by faith, Abraham obeyed.

II. Last week, we also learned that once Abraham arrives in the Promised Land, he LIVES AS A STRANGER, HE LIVES AS AN ALIEN (and we see this in verses 9-10).

And so, not only does he move, not only does he leave everything behind at the age of 75, but we also find that once he gets to where he is going, Abraham lives continually as if he does not belong there. He lives as a stranger. He lives as a man without a permanent home. Abraham and Sarah are basically weird for the rest of their lives – from a different culture, worshiping a different God, living by a different standard, speaking a different language, wearing different clothing, eating different food, and on and on. And yet, last week, we learned that what was true for Abraham and Sarah is also true of us today. In 1 Peter 2, Peter explains that we as God's people are, ***"A chosen race, A royal priesthood, A holy nation, A people for God's own possession."*** We are also strangers, living in a strange land. And Peter goes on to ***"urge"*** us, ***"...as aliens and strangers to abstain from fleshly lusts which wage war against the soul."*** We are to, ***"Keep [y]our behavior excellent among the Gentiles."*** We are different. And we see this in Abraham. By faith, Abraham lived as a stranger in a strange land, just as we also do today.

III. And then, at the end of our time together last week, we also noticed that by faith, Abraham and Sarah HAD CHILDREN.

By faith, Sarah conceived (in verse 11). We looked at the background to this in the book of Genesis, but Abraham is 100 years old at the time Isaac is born; Sarah is 90 or 91. And yet, by faith, trusting in God's promise, Abraham and Sarah do their part. And the reminder for us is: Even when God's promises seems humanly impossible, God still keeps his word. Our role is to believe the word of God and to act on it.

IV. All of this brings us to verses 13-16 as we now find that by faith, ABRAHAM CONTINUALLY LOOKED FOR A BETTER COUNTRY.

And I know this is similar to the idea of living as a stranger in the land (as we discussed last week), but this seems to be the heart of it. This seems to address the "how" of Abraham living as a stranger. He was able to live as a permanent stranger in the land, not because he wasn't able to go back home, but because his heart was constantly looking for something better. He was looking for a better country.

God made the promise, but Abraham died before seeing that promise fulfilled. The same goes for Isaac, and for Jacob, and the others, and so on, down through the years. As difficult as life might have been, none of them ever went back to Ur, even though they could have done that. In a sense, they longed to go home, but they knew that Ur was not home. And so, based on God's promise, they **"desired a better country, that is, a heavenly one."** That word, **"desire,"** is a word that means, "to stretch out, to reach after, to yearn for." They were continually "longing" for their heavenly home. In a sense, they were homesick for heaven. They desired that **"better country"** that God had promised.

And the country to come is better. In a sense, most of us feel at least a little bit "home" down here. In a sense, I do think of Madison as "home." Some of you have lived here for a lifetime. Some of you have lived here for a very short time. But many of us think of this place as being home. And there is so much to appreciate here. Madison is a great place to eat. Madison is a great place to ride a bike. According to another survey released recently, Madison is one of the best places to retire. But in spite of the benefits, we also have the constant reminders that this is a temporary home, that this place we call home is not perfect, by any means. This past Wednesday, we talked about some of the crime we see all around us. As homey as it might seem here, we still have shootings, and prejudice, and poverty. Madison is a great place to live, but we are looking for something better.

And speaking of desiring a better country, most of us as Christians might think of what Jesus said on the night before he died (in John 14),

¹ "Do not let your heart be troubled; believe in God, believe also in Me. ² In My Father's house are many dwelling places; if it were not so, I would have told you; for I go to prepare a place for you. ³ If I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you to Myself, that where I am, there you may be also.

Jesus, then, is describing the **"better country,"** the place where we are headed, the place he has prepared for us. And we long for that country. We desire it. We reach out toward it. We are homesick for it, even though we have never been there. And yes, we can try to make our home down here, we might be tempted to go back to Ur, back to our old life, but by faith we know that what God has prepared for us is so much better. And so we

live here as exiles. We live here as permanent wanderers. We refuse to store up for ourselves treasures here on this earth, where moth and rust destroy, but we store up for ourselves treasures in heaven. By faith, we look forward to the life to come. By faith we know that our citizenship is in heaven. By faith, we also look for a better country.

V. As we come to the end of this passage, we come to verses 17-19, where we find that by faith, Abraham OFFERS HIS ONLY SON AS A SACRIFICE TO GOD.

The full account is found in Genesis 22. It's familiar to most of us, so we won't take the time to read it. I preached on it back on December 11, 2011, so I'm sure all of you remember it. But basically, when Isaac is a young man, God tested Abraham by telling him to sacrifice his only son as a burnt offering. Isaac, of course, was the son of promise, born to Sarah when she was 90 and Abraham was 100 years old. We can hardly imagine a more difficult test. We aren't really given a reason for this test. We do know that God will test us from time to time. We do know that he tested his people in the wilderness, to see whether they would obey his commandments (in Deuteronomy 8:2). We know that God wants first place in our lives. We remember what Jesus says in Matthew 10:37, where he explains that, ***"He who loves father or mother more than Me is not worthy of Me; and he who loves son or daughter more than Me is not worthy of Me."*** God demands first place in our lives. So God puts Abraham to the test, not to destroy him, but to prove his faith. And, in faith, Abraham obeys.

He doesn't ask for clarification. He doesn't seem to consult with Sarah. He doesn't bargain. He doesn't delay. But instead, immediately, he takes his son Isaac on a three-day journey. At the base of the mountain, Abraham leaves his servants behind, and he says to them, ***"Stay here with the donkey, and I and the lad will go over there; and we will worship and return to you."*** Notice: Even though Abraham has been commanded to sacrifice his son, he still says to his servants, ***"we will worship and return to you."*** Abraham knows that he will not come back alone. And here in Hebrews 11, we have some information we don't have back in Genesis. In Hebrews 11:19, we find that Abraham, ***"...considered that God is able to raise people even from the dead...."*** In other words, Abraham knew that he would sacrifice Isaac, but since Isaac was the son of the promise, the only solution he could see was that God would raise him from the dead. And that's especially interesting, since as far as we know, nobody had ever been raised from the dead up to this point in scripture! The point is: Abraham had faith. He knew that God would work this out.

I would also point out that this is the first time the word ***"worship"*** is found in the Bible (in Genesis 22:5). In this case, the word refers to "bowing down." Sometimes it's easy for us to think about worship as being for us somehow. It's tempting to evaluate worship based on what we get out of it. I would suggest, though, that Abraham's worship was not primarily for him in this scenario! Abraham was worshiping here, not to see what he could get out of it, but he was doing this to honor God. This worship was ***"by faith."***

So, as they make that final hike up the mountain, Isaac wants to know, ***"[I see] the fire and the wood, but where is the lamb for the burnt offering?"*** He knows that something is missing! And Abraham responds by saying, ***"God will provide for Himself the lamb for the burnt offering...."*** By the way, the word ***"provide"*** goes back to a Latin word meaning "to see before" or "to see ahead" – "pro" meaning before, and the second part of the word going back to the basis of our English word "video," "to see." In responding, then, Abraham reassures his son that God will ***"provide,"*** God has already looked ahead and will provide what is needed. Well, they continue up the mountain, and when they get to the top, Abraham builds the altar, arranges the wood, and he then ties up his son and puts him on the altar, on top of the wood. Abraham raises his hand with the knife, and at the last

moment, an angel calls out from heaven and stops the sacrifice. At that moment, Abraham looks around and sees a ram caught in some bushes, so he offers the ram instead of his son.

You might have noticed on your way in this morning that I've put some artwork of this scene on the bulletin board in the entryway. If you haven't looked at those, I would encourage you to check those out before you leave today. It is quite the dramatic scene.

There is so much we could learn from the sacrifice of Isaac, but I want to point out just a few things here at the end, starting with something we skipped over earlier. Back in Genesis 22, Abraham was told to make this sacrifice in the mountains of Moriah. Mount Moriah is mentioned only one other time in the Bible, in 2 Chronicles 3 (nearly a thousand years after the time of Abraham), and Mount Moriah is described as the place where King Solomon would build the temple. It is identified as the place where King David had purchased the threshing floor of Araunah the Jebusite so that David could offer a sacrifice to God. This is the same place where Isaac was sacrificed. Then, roughly another thousand years into the future, this would also be the place where Jesus would come to do much of his preaching and the place where he would ultimately offer himself as a sacrifice for our sins. In other words, the story of Isaac is ultimately the story of Jesus! And there are so many parallels:

- Like Isaac, Jesus is also the son of promise.
- Like Isaac, Jesus' birth was also foretold.
- Like Isaac, Jesus' name was also given by God before he was born.
- Like Isaac, Jesus was also born in a miraculous way (although, obviously, so much more so).
- Like Isaac, Jesus is also described as an only son.
- Like Isaac, Jesus was also bound, or tied up, before the sacrifice.
- Like Isaac, Jesus also carried the wood for the offering.

But then, on a much deeper level, as we look at the sacrifice itself, we realize that the lamb, provided by God, took Isaac's place. In the same way, Jesus (as the Lamb of God) took our place. And so, what God prevented Abraham from doing, God actually did himself, by offering his own Son as a sacrifice on the cross, allowing him to suffer and die. There was no last second substitution for the Son of God.

Conclusion:

With all of this in mind, I'm hoping we can be encouraged and motivated by the faith of Abraham:

- By faith, Abraham obeyed God by leaving Ur.
- By faith, Abraham lived as a stranger and alien, living in tents for the rest of his life.
- By faith, Abraham and Sarah were able to conceive a son.
- By faith, Abraham looked for a better country – he knew that this world was not his permanent home.
- By faith, he offered his son as a sacrifice to God.

Here in Hebrews 11, we've learned that without faith it is impossible to please God. We know that God rewards those who seek him. He rewards those who put him first. He rewards those who trust and obey. Today, we prove our faith by turning away from sin and by allowing ourselves to be briefly dipped in water for the forgiveness of our sins. In Colossians 2:12, Paul refers to being ***“buried with Him in baptism, in which you were***

also raised up with Him through faith in the working of God, who raised [Jesus] from the dead.” If you’re interested in learning more about God and his plan for our lives, we invite you to get in touch. But, if you are ready to take that step, we hope you will let us know as we sing this next song. Let’s stand and sing...

To comment on this lesson: fourlakeschurch@gmail.com