

Lesson 32
Living Faith
Hebrews 11:8-10

What motivates you to do things? Are you motivated by pride, or by your desire to possess material things, or by your longing for power and prestige? Most people are motivated by the desire for security and material possessions. Deep down inside of man there is a longing to belong and to possess, and the natural man thinks that the possessions and prestige of this world will satisfy that desire. This is why people get upset when they don't get promoted in their jobs, or when they can't have as many things as other people, or when a person snubs them, or when one loses a boyfriend or girlfriend. Behind these desires is the want for security and possessions, and when we do not get them we become insecure. When we go right to the heart of the matter, we find pride, and pride is sin.

Sadly, many Christians are affected by this attitude. The man of faith, however, knows that the prestige and possessions of this world will not satisfy his deepest desires. He is not motivated by these things. Instead, the man of faith is motivated by hope based on the promises of God, and he pushes on in this life by faith until he attains the actual reality of eternal life in heaven.

Abraham is a man who illustrates well the truth that living faith perseveres and endures all through one's life. Abraham was a man who had a life of faith and knew that ***“faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen.”***

THE OBEDIENCE OF FAITH - Hebrews 11:8

“By faith Abraham, when he was called, obeyed by going out to a place which he was to receive for an inheritance ...” -- The key thought here is that “by faith Abraham obeyed God.” Faith and obedience can never be separated, for the natural result of faith is obedience and the natural cause of obedience is faith. Faith and obedience cannot be separated just as sun and light or fire and heat cannot be separated.

From these verses in Hebrews alone, we might get the idea that Abraham lived almost a perfect life, but the Book of Genesis tells us that Abraham was only a man, a sinner, saved by grace, who had his ups and downs as any believer. But Abraham had a bent in his life that characterized faith.

God took the initiative and called Abraham and Abraham obeyed God's call.

“Now the LORD said to Abram, ‘Go forth from your country, and from your relatives and from your father's house, to the land which I will show you; and I will make you a great nation, and I will bless you, and make your name great; and so you shall be a blessing; and 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’” (Gen. 12:1-3).

This was a significant act of faith on Abraham's part. Abraham lived in Ur of the Chaldees in the Euphrates Valley. God, in some way, appeared to Abraham. ***“And he said, ‘Hear me, brethren and fathers! The God of glory appeared to our father Abraham when he was in Mesopotamia, before he lived in Haran’”*** (Acts 7:2). God, at that time, commanded Abraham to leave his country, his family and his home and go to another land, a land which God would give him. We often miss the importance of such a command because we don't know what Abraham was leaving, and what he was asked to give up. Ur, which later was known as Babylon, was a port city on the Euphrates River. It was a flourishing, commercial city. It was known for its legal justice and cultural activities. Even in Abraham's day, Ur had a history that stretched back as much as 2,000 years. Among its treasures are some of the most valuable artifacts archeology has ever unearthed. While Ur was morally decadent, it was also a religious center and was best known for its worship of the moon-god, Nanna, and its great temple of worship. Ur was not some rinky-dink hamlet in the middle of nowhere, but one of the most strategic centers of ancient civilization.

Abraham, before his conversion, was an idolater who served other gods. ***“And Joshua said to all the people, ‘Thus says the LORD the God of Israel, “From ancient times your fathers lived beyond the River, namely, Terah, the father of Abraham and the father of Nahor, and they served other gods””*** (Joshua 24:2). Abraham lived like all the other people of his generation and was a victim of his culture until God called him out. God called Abraham to Himself and commanded Abraham to separate from all of his past life. Abraham owed the whole of his salvation to pure grace, for he deserved nothing from God. God chose Abraham because He chose to do so in sovereign grace. ***“Thou art the LORD God, who chose Abram and brought him out from Ur of the Chaldees and gave him the name Abraham”*** (Neh. 9:7).

When Abraham responded to God's command, he left all that he had of the security of the world. He was a city-dweller and left one of the most modern cities of his day. He left Ur when he was 75 years old and was well established in life. Yet he responded without hesitation to God's command. Abraham, however, had to make a decision to follow God at great cost to his prestige, security and material possessions. God efficaciously called Abraham, but there must have been brief moments of real struggle within his soul as he wrestled with his responsibility of obedience.

God called Abraham and this was an efficacious call, but Abraham still had to exercise faith and obey God. God would not exercise faith-obedience for him. A heavy decision rested on Abraham's shoulders and he chose to serve the living God.

Abraham had a choice and could have said “no” to God's call, but he didn't, showing that he was sovereignly called by God.

“... and he went out not knowing where he was going.” -- Not only did Abraham respond without hesitation but he also responded without doubt. He never questioned God. God never showed him the land but He did promise the land to him. Abraham never asked why and he never even asked where he was going. Abraham, in believing God, took a great risk, and while his friends undoubtedly thought he was a visionary and a religious fanatic, he heard the voice of God and knew he must obey it. It was a risk, but faith is not faith unless it involves a risk. Faith

is self-surrender to God. It is giving up all dependence upon visible security and venturing forth in reliance upon the unseen God and His promises. Faith is the conviction of things not seen. Faith is a risky investment in God, but the greater the initial risk, the greater will be the final blessing.

God has used this verse to thrust many a missionary out to the fields of the world. God sometimes uses verses out of context to lead His people. Missionaries and pastors have forsaken everything because they heard the call of God to preach the glorious gospel of Christ in the four corners of the earth. Abraham is the father of the believing and certainly the prime example of one who “by faith obeyed God.” Have you dared to ask God whether He wants you to be a pastor, teacher or missionary in full-time service? Do you believe that God could provide for you if you forsook all and followed Christ?

What faith, what obedience was displayed by Abraham, but he did not yet have full commitment to God. What the Book of Hebrews does not tell us is that Abraham left Ur with his father Terah, Lot his nephew and Sarah his wife. He was told specifically to leave his family, which would include Terah and Lot. Abraham moved toward the Promised Land, but got only as far as Haran in Mesopotamia, which means “delay.” Abraham was delayed in Haran for a long time because he was not fully obedient to God’s command and let family ties come between him and God. Abraham did not move on towards the land until Terah died in Haran (Gen. 11:31-32).

God permitted Abraham to move on even though he had not yet separated himself from Lot. Abraham then came into the land of Sichem, which was right in the middle of Canaanite country. He was in the land of promise and God reaffirmed His covenant with Abraham. There, Abraham built an altar. Why an altar? Because Abraham knew that the place of blessing for him was in the Promised Land and it was there he was to worship God.

Then a famine came to the land and Abraham did not believe that God could meet his needs in the Promised Land. He had a lapse in faith, pushed the panic button and went to Egypt. But the will of God for him was to be in Canaan, the Promised Land, and to leave Canaan was to leave the center of God’s revealed will for him. Egypt, in the Bible, is a picture of the world. Abraham turned to the world and his own human reasoning to solve his problems, and he fell flat on his face. In Egypt Abraham fell into sin and got into all kinds of trouble.

When we are not obeying God, when we are not in the center of God’s revealed will for us, things go from bad to worse. In Egypt Abraham was a miserable man, so it is that all true believers out of the will of God are miserable, confused and frustrated.

Abraham confessed his sin and got right with God. He then went back into the land, the place of blessing. Then he made a full commitment to God and separated from Lot.

There must be separation unto God and away from sin if the believer is to receive God’s blessing. From the time that Abraham separated from Lot, he was constantly blessed by Jehovah God.

Abraham, from the beginning, had obedience but not mature obedience. It took time for him to

learn the importance of faith-obedience and bring himself into the center of God's revealed will. The place of testing for all believers is when we are obedient to God's revealed will.

THE PATIENCE OF FAITH - Hebrews 11:9

“By faith he lived as an alien in the land of promise, as in a foreign land, dwelling in tents with Isaac and Jacob ...” -- Abraham was not only marked by faithful obedience, he was also characterized by faithful patience. Canaan was the Promised Land. When Abraham arrived in Canaan, he was an alien and foreigner, possessing nothing. He was a nomad, living in a tent and moving from place to place. He had no permanent dwelling place, and his only solid possession was the promise of God that he and his children would possess the land. Abraham lived for 100 years in the land and did not possess one inch of it. For a century he was a pilgrim and a stranger in the land. When Abraham died, the only tangible portion that he owned was a cave in a field that he purchased as a burial place for Sarah.

Abraham endured patiently in faith, knowing that God would fulfill His promise that he and his seed would possess the land forever. Abraham was 175 when he died and did not possess the land. Was God unfaithful to his promise? No, a thousand times no. God will one day raise Abraham from the dead to possess this land in the yet future millennial kingdom. Abraham died in faith without receiving the promise, but one day he will receive it because God is faithful.

“... fellow-heirs of the same promise ...” -- Isaac and Jacob were co-heirs with Abraham in this promise and they never possessed the land either. The Patriarchs were sojourners and just passing through the land even though it rightly belonged to them. God did not permit them to put down any permanent roots because they were pilgrims and strangers.

THE ANTICIPATION OF FAITH - Hebrews 11:10

“... for he was looking for the city which has foundations, whose architect and builder is God.” -- How could Abraham be so faithful in patience? The answer is that he had a great motivation. He looked for the eternal city, the New Jerusalem whose builder and maker is God. Abraham was not motivated by prestige, possessions, power or security, although he had all these things, but by an eternal hope, the hope of being a citizen in God's city. It is evident that Abraham understood that his inheritance was to be more than an earthly possession; it was also to be a heavenly state.

God obviously revealed to Abraham the truth of the eternal city. It is amazing how much Abraham understood. Abraham lived about 2,000 years before Christ. We, today, live about 2,000 years after Christ. Yet, Abraham, looking forward by faith, believing what God had said would take place, looked across 40-centuries of time and beyond to a day when God would set up His eternal city. Abraham understood what the Apostle John saw in the Book of Revelation.

“And I saw a new heaven and a new earth; for the first heaven and the first earth passed away, and there is no longer any sea. And I saw the holy city, New Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, made ready as a bride adorned for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from the throne, saying, ‘Behold, the tabernacle of God is

among men, and He shall dwell among them, and they shall be His people, and God Himself shall be among them, and He shall wipe away every tear from their eyes; and there shall no longer be any death; there shall no longer be any mourning, or crying, or pain: the first things have passed away” (Rev. 21:1-4).

The heavenly Jerusalem, the City of God, is invisible as yet to the human eye, yet more permanent and indestructible than any visible city because it is designed and constructed by God.

Again in the life of Abraham we see the infinite grace of God. Abraham left one of the most prominent cities of his day and God promised him the most important aspect of his inheritance - the eternal city. God gave Abraham the promise of a city that made Ur look like a one-stop town. Why? Because God does exceedingly and abundantly above all we can ask or think when we obey Him.

CONCLUSION

Christian, what motivates you? Have you fallen into Satan’s trap so as to believe that money, power, and prestige can fulfill your innermost desires. Are you genuinely motivated by spiritual realities, namely your great desire to be a part of the New Jerusalem, the Heavenly City? Are you, as Abraham, a pilgrim and a stranger on this earth? God has promised you an eternal inheritance in the New Jerusalem. This is your possession but you do not actually possess it yet, but one day you will. Therefore, you must operate by faith, as did Abraham and patiently endure through life as a sojourner in the world until you enter the New Jerusalem, your Heavenly City.

But what about you, non-Christian? If you were to die tonight where would you go - to heaven or to hell? The eternal city is for all who place their faith and trust in Jesus Christ and for no one else. Have you heard the call of God to salvation? Are you convicted by God about your sins, and do you feel a struggle in your soul - something telling you to yield and receive Christ and something telling you to resist and run from Christ? God is calling. Do not reject this call, but obey God and by faith trust Christ and then you will know that God has sovereignly called you to salvation. Just as God called Abraham thousands of years ago, He may be calling you now. Do not put off this decision, for your eternal destiny hangs on what you do with Christ in this life.