

## **Grace to You :: *Unleashing God's Truth, One Verse at a Time***

### **The Faith of Abraham**

Scripture: Hebrews 11:8-19

Code: 1630

In our continuing series in the book of Hebrews, we come to the eleventh chapter tonight - Christian living by faith. And this is a great, great section to just teach the basic principles of living by faith. There are really only two ways to live in life; one is to live by sight, base everything on what you can see - that's the empirical approach, the other is to live by faith, base everything on what you can't see. The Christian lives by faith, we base our lives on what we've never seen. We've never seen God, we've never seen Jesus Christ, we've never seen heaven, we've never seen hell, never seen the Holy Spirit, never seen any one individual who wrote the Bible, never seen an original manuscript of the Bible, never seen any of the graces that God says He dispenses to us, they're not tangible, they're not visible to the eye, the human eye, and yet we bank not only our life but our eternal destiny on those things which we have never seen. That's how the Christian lives.

But the life of faith has some specific ingredients and I think they are pointed out very explicitly here in this particular text as we look at Abraham. Hebrews 11 beginning in verse 8 and going through verse 19 presents to us Abraham as a pattern for faith. And you'll remember that in the book of Hebrews the writer presents the priority of the new covenant. Israel had always followed the covenant that God made in the Old Testament, the sacrificial patterns, etc. etc. And they had always believed that this was of God. They had, however, allowed it to deteriorate into a works system where the old covenant had become nothing more than a ritual of works. The writer of Hebrews comes along and says - let me show you a new covenant. The new covenant in the blood of Jesus Christ replaces the old covenant and it is a covenant of faith. This is one where you only believe, you don't have to work to earn God's approval. And even the old covenant they didn't have to earn God's approval, they didn't have to gain God by works but they misconstrued the whole thing and they got into a works system.

So he presents to them all through the first ten chapters the new covenant, ends chapter 10 by saying you apprehend the new covenant by faith. Now they're so long separated from faith that they've probably forgotten what it is and how it works so he spends all of chapter 11 describing to them how faith works and what it is.

We saw, first of all, that he began with Abel and the life of faith. And then he moved into Enoch and the walk of faith. Then he moved into Noah and the work of faith. Now he comes to Abraham. And Abraham becomes a composite of the pattern of faith. Abraham reveals the totality of a faith life. All of the ingredients that make up a real life of faith. And it's a tremendous thing that he uses Abraham

because, you see, the Jews took all of their lineage back to Abraham who was the first of their race, he was the one chosen by God. And so Abraham is a strategic illustration. If Abraham lived by faith then that sets the pattern, you see? The rabbis had long taught that Abraham pleased God by his works. The rabbis had long taught that God looked around the earth and he found one super-righteous man and that was Abraham and chose him on that basis. That needs to be counteracted, that needs to be contradicted. Abraham was not righteous because he wasn't himself holy, he was righteous because he was a man of faith and God imputed righteousness to him.

So he establishes here that Abraham lived by faith. And if Abraham did so must every other Jew because Abraham is the pattern. For example, in Acts chapter 7 when Stephen wants to pull an illustration of faith he uses Abraham. In Romans chapter 4 when Paul wants to use an illustration of faith it is Abraham. Abraham is the classic example of the life of faith, always used in the face of Jews. Stephen was talking to Jews, non-Palestine Jews in the first part of his ministry, but when he talked about Abraham he was talking to the leaders of Israel in Jerusalem. Paul in Romans 4 was laying out a ground work in an argument with a Jew, the ground work of theology, but his antagonist was a Jew and he uses Abraham as the illustration of faith. The writer of Hebrews is writing to Jews and he also uses Abraham.

And, you see, this is very critical because if a Jew is to buy the fact that life must be lived by faith not by works and legalism, if he is to buy it then the greatest way to sell it to him is to prove to him that Abraham did it. Because Abraham set the pattern for the living of the Jews. He was the first.

And, in fact, the Bible is clear about Abraham's effect and about Abraham's example. It says in Galatians chapter 3 and verse 7 these words:

"Know ye therefore that they who are of faith the same are the sons of Abraham."

Since Abraham was the first man of faith, everybody that comes along putting faith in God is, in a spiritual sense, a child of Abraham. And the Scripture foreseeing that God would justify the Gentiles through faith, preached before the gospel unto Abraham saying, In thee shall all nations be blessed, so then they who are of faith are blessed with faithful Abraham. You go over to verse 26 of the same chapter; "For you are all the sons of God by faith in Christ. Jesus." Then he says in verse 29; "And if you be Christ's then are you Abraham's seed.",

Now we who are Gentiles are not the seed of Abraham physically, we are the seed of Abraham spiritually because of faith. He was the father of faith in the sense of the pattern of faith, as a life pattern. And as the leader of modern society in a sense, because you see the other three, Abel, Enoch and Noah were pre-flood, Abraham is the first man of faith after the flood in the new world apart from Noah who was both pre and aft but after the flood his faith kind of waned, you remember he was caught in sin immediately after. But the first real established man of faith after the flood when

the new world began was Abraham so he sets the pattern for us, the pattern of faith. And so we who live by faith in God are, in a spiritual sense, children of Abraham. We do not become Jews in a physical sense but in the spiritual sense we are the children of Abraham in terms of faith.

Now Abraham's life was characterized totally by faith. Genesis 15:6, clear back then, it says: "Abraham believed in the Lord and you see, he is calling them to leave the old covenant, leave the temple, leave the trappings of Judaism, leave the old priesthood and come to Christ. and just put your faith in Christ, you don't need all the works. And they're having a hard time making the break. And he must establish - Look, you don't need those works, you don't need that old covenant, old priesthood, old sacrifice routine just come to Christ and believe. And in order to establish that that's possible he shows that even Abraham was justified by just believing.

Now in this passage there are five features of faith that show us the complete pattern; the pilgrimage of faith, the patience of faith, the power of faith, the positivism of faith and the proof of faith. And since Abraham is a spiritual prototype of every man of faith, we're going to consider this narrative in its spiritual sense and, I think, that's the sense in which the writer of Hebrews wanted us to consider it. These five features, then, are the standards for faith.

Number one, let's look at it, the pilgrimage of faith. We see Abraham in all five of these things. Verse 8; "By faith Abraham when he was called to go out into a place which he should after receive for an inheritance," what's the next word? "Obeyed, and he went out not knowing where he went." Now if anybody told us that they were going somewhere, they didn't know where, we'd consider them to be in danger of getting into some real trouble. Because they hadn't carefully charted the course. But Abraham was told by God - Get up and get out of this city - I'm going to use you to found a nation. You're going to be father of a nation and through you will all the families of the earth be blessed. And it was through Abraham's loins that finally Messiah came, and it is in Messiah that, all the world is blessed. So God said - Abraham, Get up and go to the land that I'll show you. It's all recorded in Genesis 12 and it's repeated clear through chapter 18, all that deals with Abraham's call and so forth and so on. And Abraham was told to get up and go. Now I like the fact of the use of a use of the Greek tense here, it says in verse 8 - By faith Abraham when he was being called. That's a present participle, while he was being called he was obeying. In other words, at the same moment of the call he obeyed. You might translate it - While being called he obeyed. In other words, it was instant kind of immediate obedience.

Now I like this, too, it says in verse 8 "And he went out not knowing," not epistamai. And that is the kind of knowledge not like gnosis or that kind of knowledge but it's to fix your attention on something, or to put your thoughts on something. Now read it that way - He went, not even putting his thoughts on where he was going. He was so obedient that he didn't even think about where he was going. He just said - God, You say go - I go. Where is immaterial. It's only a question of obedience. That's the pilgrimage of faith.

Now it's - you say, Well, he probably went because Canaan was so attractive. No, he didn't even know where he was going. He had no idea, it was strictly a pilgrimage of faith. Now in a spiritual sense this is a very real lesson for us. Abraham lived in a very unregenerate world. Abraham lived in a city known as Ur, U-r. It was located in Chaldea or Mesopotamia, which is the land between the Tigris and the Euphrates river, far east of Israel. A fertile land where the garden of Eden was originally located, where Babylon, the great city, was finally built and all of that was in that area. And it was a very, very pagan place. In fact, in Joshua. 24:2 it says that; "Terah, the father of Abraham served other gods." So he lived in idolatry.

There is an interesting statement by Isaiah, I think it's in Isaiah 51, where Isaiah gives a little bit of insight into the kind of home that Abraham came from when he says this, Isaiah 51 verse 1; "Hearken to me, ye that follow after righteousness, ye that seek the Lord," he says to Israel, "Look unto the rock from which you were hewn and to the hole of the pit from which you were digged, look unto Abraham." You say - Was Abraham the hole of a pit? Abraham was in bad shape living in Ur. He was living in idolatry. Abraham was a pagan. Abraham was a heathen. And it says - "Look unto Abraham, your father, and unto Sarah who bore you, for I called him alone, and blessed him." Sovereignly God called Abraham out of the pit, the pit of idolatry and paganism. So when some-body comes up and says God chose Abraham because he was such a wonderful fellow you go to Isaiah 51 and tell him that he was a pit.

So Abraham was a sinner. He was living in a vile culture of paganism. And the God of glory condescended in sovereignty to pick Abraham up and found a nation through his loins, sovereign grace. And Abraham responded with faith, he said - Okay, okay, I'll go. And he went even while being called. And that is why God declared him to be righteous. That's the pilgrimage of faith. To forsake his birthplace, his home, his estate, sever family ties, leave loved ones, abandon all of his present habits for future uncertainty, man, it must have been a hard thing to do but he did it. There's a great spiritual lesson in here. I believe that the life of faith begins - watch this - with a break of the idolatrous system in which men have lived so long. When you come to Jesus Christ I think there's a pilgrimage that God demands at that point and that's to leave the pattern of living that you have been involved in and come into a new kind of life. And I don't think I'm spiritualizing the text to say that, I think that's the point here. Abraham's faith separated him from that which was pagan, you see. I mean, "If any man be in Christ he is," what? "He's a new creation, some things have passed away and a few things have become new." Is that what it says? What does it say? "All things have passed away, all things have become new." You see, salvation demands separation, practical separation from the world is the beginning of the life of faith. You say - All right, God, I don't know what You're going to do with me, but I'm going to drop all those old things. I don't know what You're going to substitute for them but I'm going to let them go. That's the pilgrimage of faith to leave the system of the world. That's where faith life begins.

In Romans chapter 12, this is so familiar; "I beseech you, therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God you present your bodies a living sacrifice." That's the beginning, give yourself. "Holy acceptable unto God which is your reasonable service," or spiritual worship. "And be not conformed," what? "To this world." That's the beginning of the life of faith. "But be transformed by the renewing of your mind." And so the beginning, then, is to separate yourself from the world.

Now there are so many, many passages that deal with this. In II Corinthians 6, I'm just going to fumble through a few here, just listen as I read them, jot them down if you want. II Corinthians 6:14; "Be ye not unequally yoked together with unbelievers for what fellowship hath righteousness with un-righteousness, and what communion hath light with darkness?" Now there you have a theological foundation - light and dark don't get together, right? Then you have a practical exhortation, so don't try and make them get together. "What concord hath Christ with Belial (or Satan), what part hath he that believeth with an atheist (or a non-believer)? What agreement hath the temple of God with idols?" You're the temple of the living God so there's no sense fooling around with the idolatrous. So, you see, it's a basic principle.

You have it again repeated in Galatians chapter 1 verse 4, listen to this; Verse 3, "Grace be to you and peace from God, the Father, and from the Lord Jesus Christ," verse 4, "Who gave Himself for our sins." Now watch, "In order that," that's a hina purpose clause, "That He might deliver us from this present evil age." You see? Salvation is, at its very first step, to take us out of the system. It is to send us on a pilgrimage, by faith, into an unknown kind of lifestyle which we've never known before. And, you know, that's a hang-up for a lot of people. I know people who say - Well, I don't want to become all those little goodies I like to do I've got to trade in." You know, you don't say to every guy - Would you like to become a Christian? What-l's involved? Well, you love God a lot and you be holy and sinless and go to church and read the Bible and... And he goes - Oh boy, what a drag. See that's a very common kind of reaction. What; he doesn't understand is that once he becomes a Christian, he gets a new set of price tags, and all the things that use to be valuable are worthless and all the things that use to be worthless are valuable. Because he's different. But you see, for the average guy that kind of a pilgrimage is a little tough to make. And even some who come to Jesus Christ find it hard to make.

Over in Hebrews 13, there's a great thought there. He says, 13, Hebrews 13:13; "Let us go forth, therefore, unto Him outside the camp bearing His reproach." You know, you've got to be willing to pay the price, walk away from the system and go where Jesus went. Watch this, Oh, I love it; "For here we have no continuing city." We're strangers and pilgrims, aren't we? We don't belong here. We have no continuing city but we seek one to come. What are we doing fooling in a system? Let's go with Jesus outside the system.

In James chapter 1 verse 27 we find it again; "Pure religion and undefiled before God and the Father is this," want to know what pure religion is? "To visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction." Did you know that? Listen to this; "And to keep oneself unspotted from the system." That's pure religion, the unspotted by the system. James 4:4, another thought, "You adulterers and adulteresses," pretty strong, James. "Know you not that the friendship of the world is enmity with God, whosoever therefore will be a friend of the world is the enemy of God." That's right. There's no fellowship.

Peter was on the same wavelength in I Peter chapter 1. He says in verse 14, he says; "As obedient children, not fashioning yourselves according to the former lusts in your ignorance." See, you use to be ignorant and you didn't know what else to do but lust, so you just went around lusting all the time. Right? But now that you've come to Christ - cut it out. Don't need to do that anymore. I like it, verse 15; "But as he who called you is holy so be ye holy in all manner of life." Isn't that good? You know what holy means? What does it mean? Separated. Chapter 4 verse 2, this is basic but it's good, we need to be reminded, I need to be reminded; "Christ has suffered to release us from the flesh that we no longer should serve the rest of our time in the flesh, to the lusts of men but," what? "To the will of God."

Second Peter 1:4, "By which are given unto us exceedingly great and precious promises by these you might be partakers of the divine nature having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust." Basic, you see, at salvation is separation. And you say -Well, what is worldliness? Is worldliness playing cards? The Bible doesn't say that. Whew! Is worldliness taking a drink of wine? The Bible doesn't say that. Is worldliness going to movies? The Bible doesn't talk about movies. You say - Are there any principles that apply to all those things? Sure. But you say - What is worldliness? Hang on, worldliness is sometimes an act, but mostly it's an attitude. It's an attitude. You see, now watch this one, it is not just not doing things, hang on now, it is not wanting to do them. Are you with me? And there are really super-worldly people who never do anything really but oh would they like to. But either they're hung up because they're in a position where everybody is focused on them, or they've got a self-imposed legalism that binds them to a system they hate or they don't have the guts to do it. And so you know what happens? They become the worst kind of Pharisaical hypocrites imaginable because they have a masquerade of holiness and they're being ripped up on the inside from the guilt that's inside of them wanting to do what they know they can't do. Worldliness is not so much what you do as what you want to do. Now there are some people who wouldn't do it because if somebody saw you do it ... but if you knew somebody wouldn't see you do it---umph, you'd do it. Now you can be restrained from doing things, you can be restrained from doing things by a self-imposed legalism that just brings terrible guilt. You have enough guilt just thinking about doing them and you don't dare do them, you wind up in such guilt you'd probably have a nervous breakdown.

And then there is the group pressure that keeps you from doing them. Maybe you come to church and you're into a group and you're into a Bible study group and everybody in the group is studying the Bible and you go and it's verses--verses, Bible--Bible, theology--theology and you want to wear the

mask, and you want to play the game and down in your heart you're saying - Um, can't take any more of this Bible, I've got to get out and do something live it up. See. That's worldliness even though you never did it. You say -MacArthur, where do you get that? I get it right out of the Bible. First John 2:15; "Love not," what? "The world, neither the things that are in the world." And you can have none of it and love it all, just like money - the love of money is the root of all evil, not money. And my dad always used to say - you can love money like mad and have none of it. Or you can have a whole lot of it and not love it. But you see, the worldliness is an attitude, it isn't what you do it's what you want to do. Do you know as you grow... and I'm just talking from experience...but as you grow as a Christian you know what happens? You begin to lose desire to do these things. You want to know that every time I want to I go out and rob a bank? And every time I want to I go out and commit adultery. And you know what? I never want to. I never want to. I hope anybody who listens to that tape - be sure to follow through and get that last part. Don't break the tape there or I'm in real trouble. You see, that's what spiritual maturity is all about, you see. It's a process of growing to the place where you not only don't do it you don't want to do it. You see? That's the pilgrimage of faith but it begins by separating yourself and as you concentrate on Jesus Christ pretty soon you don't even care anymore about that stuff. I use to want to go to the movies. Then I'd go away to college or seminary, I'd sign some covenant - I will not go to movies. You know, oh, gee, sign that silly covenant and now I can't go to the movies. I was worldly. I just couldn't go because I'd get in trouble. Now the desire is gone. The time is gone too. I think there's other priorities, you know, my family, my children, my wife, other things I need to do and I don't ... it's just that I don't do things because, I guess, I just don't have any desire to do them. And there other things in my life yet that the Lord needs to give me victory over desires. I have not attained, you know that. But I know there's a progressive lack of desire for the things of the world as you grow in Christ.

Moses had the same thing, look at chapter 11 verse 24. "By faith Moses when he was come to years," when he was mature, "refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter," he spurned it. "Choosing rather to suffer affliction with the people of God than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season." Isn't that good? I mean, he did what he wanted to do. You know, it's a wonderful thing in the Christian life when you do what you want to do. That's when you're mature. You can measure your Christian maturity when you find yourself able to do what it is that you want to do. When you're a young Christian you find yourself saying - Boy, would I like to do that but I can't do that ... you see, I'm a Christian now. Then as you mature pretty soon you find that all the things you want to do are the things you can do. That means you've reached the level where God is not only control of the pattern of your living, He's controlling the pattern of your thinking. And He's in control of your desires. And that's when your life becomes exciting, when God controls your desires.

Well, there's the pilgrimage of faith, it's just saying - All right, I've come to Jesus Christ, I whack off the old and I move into a new dimension, I don't understand all of it but I'm going to go that way, I'm going to believe God to fulfill my life in that. Noah went ... or Abraham went and he didn't know where he was going but he went anyway cause God said get out of this place. And, you know, I imagine

Abraham's neighbors thought he was nuts.

Where are you going, Abraham?

I don't know.

You don't know? You're packing up your whole crowd and you're going and you don't even know where you're going?

No, I don't know where I'm going.

Well, who told you to go?

God.

Which God?

The only true God.

The only true God, eh Abraham? Which one is that?

Well, I don't know His name.

You don't know His name? Don't know where He's taking you.

Don't know where you're going? Do you know why?

No, I don't know that either.

I'll never forget when I spoke out at Valley State College in Rabbi Kramer's ethics class. He asked me to speak on Christian sex ethics. And, this was a very interesting opportunity, to put it mildly. And I first began by saying - Now I want you to realize that I know that you're going to think I'm crazy because I've imposed upon myself this kind of an ethic in morals. Because for you, you see, sex is just a matter of do your own thing, do whatever you want to do, you know, let your glands be your guide, just whatever you feel go do it. See. That's basic - that's the way the world operates. And that's the way you think. Now I said, I feel differently.

I said, I feel that this is God's ordained pattern. And then I said this - And I don't expect you to buy it because you don't have a personal relationship with the God of the universe like I do. Oh, then they'll say - huh-huh-huh. See. And I put them on the defensive immediately by saying they wouldn't accept it and, of course, if you know anything about college students they're just liable to say - Oh yeah?



Which is what I'd hope they'd say, you know.

Then I went in to present the ethics that the Lord Jesus Christ and that the Old Testament presents as to what God's standards are for a pure life, about the fact that God sees sex as something very beautiful and that He has created for marriage, inside of marriage and inside of marriage alone. And I went into all of this, you know, and you can just imagine the reaction in a typical college classroom. But you see, it was because they didn't understand that this was...this was between me and God and this was the desire of my heart because I had a personal relationship with God. And I only wanted to satisfy Him, not myself.

And so you see, to separate yourself from the world is the beginning of the pilgrimage of faith, even though the world thinks you're crazy. They don't understand.

All right, the second thing Abraham shows us is not only the pilgrimage of faith but the patience of faith. Faith not only gets going in the beginning but it's very patient as it moves. I like this in verse 9, "By faith he sojourned," that means he stayed, he just was a kind of transient, *paroikeo* which means...actually *oikeo* means to dwell and *para* means along side, so to dwell along side or dwell beside or among. "He dwelt in the land of promise as in a foreign country, dwelling in tents with Isaac and Jacob," Isaac who came as his son and Jacob who was Isaac's son and all the way down the line, they still dwelled in tents. "The heirs with him of the same promise." You know, that even when he got to the land he never got the promise? You know that in all of Abraham's life in the land he never owned the land? God never gave it to him. The only thing he did was buy a little plot to bury ... as a burial ground, that's all. That was it. He owned nothing and he was a transient in the land. And so he had to be patient. You can imagine him saying - Well now, God, You've got me over here, I've separated myself from the old life, You told me that I'm really going to have a great time and this is just ridiculous, I'm bouncing around from place to place in a tent. He's very much like the believer, you know, God pulled us out of the world and told us He had something better for us but we're still waiting for it, aren't we, in a sense? We haven't gotten to heaven yet, have we? And, I mean, pilgriming through this world can be kind of rough once in a while. And so in a very real sense we need to exhibit what he did - the patience of faith.

Back in Acts chapter 7, you who are studying with us on Sunday morning will remember, in verse 5 - it says that he gave ... Stephen preaching about Abraham says; "And God gave him no inheritance in the land, no not so much as to set his foot on." He only promised that He would give it to him in his seed after him. But he didn't even have a child, so how could he have a seed? That would be raised up. So he had to be very patient. He dwelt in a land as a foreigner and the word paroikeo came to mean one who doesn't even have the rights of a citizen. He was a foreigner in a land. And again he is the perfect picture of the Christian. What does the song say? "This world is not my home, I'm just a passing through." And it's right, we're pilgrims here, strangers in this world.

And as I think about that I have to think with Abraham, you know, don't invest too much in this world. Are you with me on that one? Don't invest too much in this world. Jesus put it this way; He said, "Lay not for yourselves treasures on earth where moth and rust corrupts and thieves break through and steal, lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven where moth and rust do not corrupt, where thieves do not break through and steal." Why? Because where your treasure is - what? "That's where your heart is going to be."

So, you see, as long as you're only a pilgrim here just be patient. Don't invest too much in this world.

You know, it's better to spend Saturday making a Christian man out of your son than making \$10,000 for your bank account. It's better to spend Sunday morning teaching little girls about Jesus than shopping for the newest fashions and spending money and time for leisure vacations. Would you buy that? Sure. Order your priorities, work for the stuff that really matters.

Abraham waited patiently for the really valuable things. He remained faithful. And he never saw God's promise fulfilled, he just waited and waited and waited. You know, and the hardest times are the in-between times. Right? I can imagine that when he first left Ur, Oh, man, was he excited. Right? The first day you got saved, fantastic, exciting. And I can imagine the day that he entered into the presence of God and all the glory and boy, those two days are exciting but the in between times are the tough times. I mean, when you've just got to exist and God keeps saying - It's coming, it's coming, it's coming. You say I know, I keep hearing it but I don't see it. That's the real test of the patience of faith - to work, to work, to work, to wait, to wait, to watch, to watch. See? You know about those Christians who become weary in what? Well doing? They run out of gas. We have a lot of them.

If the Lord was coming next Saturday and we announced it, there are a whole lot of Christians who would work very hard because they knew it would be over by Saturday. Boy, when you start looking at life like that you've lost the patience of faith. Take it a day at a time, believe God.

Abraham never grew impatient. Reminds me of the little story I told you a few weeks ago about the little boy on the street corner. And his dad was hours and hours and hours late. Finally when he came ... you remember that? His dad said - Were you worried, were you worried? No, you promised you'd come, I just waited, I knew you'd come. See? That's the same kind of a thing, we need to be so patient that we're involved.

I think of William Carey. If you've ever read his biography, you understand something of the dimension of the man. He went to India as a missionary, spent 35 years there. In 35 years you could have counted on one hand the people he won to Jesus Christ. Thirty-five years! I mean, after six months I'd be saying - God, are You sure this is where I belong? I'd be getting pretty itchy. Closed

out his life, you know what happened? Every missionary whose ever gone to India since owes his missionary work to William Carey. You know what he spent 35 years doing? Translating all the dialects...translating the Word of God into all the dialects of India. And every other missionary effort that's been carried on there has been based on his work. Now I'm thankful to God that the man knew something about the patience of faith, aren't you? I'm thankful to God that he didn't throw in the towel after three years. That's the patience of faith.

In II Thessalonians 1:4, and you can expand these thoughts, the Apostle Paul says; "So that we ourselves glory in you in the churches of God for your patience and faith in all your persecutions and tribulations that you endure." Isn't that great? He says - I'm excited about the fact that you hang in there when the going gets tough.

Over there in Hebrews 12:1, you remember that verse; "Wherefore seeing we also are compassed about with so great a cloud of witness-es, let us lay aside every weight and the sin which doth so easily beset us and let us run with," what? "Patience," patience, "The race that is set before us." Patience - what a great virtue.

James had something to say about that. James 1:3 ... verse 4 he said...well, 3, yes; "Knowing this that the testing of your faith worketh," what? "Patience." If you really believe God, you'll be patient. Let patience have her perfect will. Patience - great thing ... refines you. And then James also says, I think it's at the end there, chapter 5 verse 7; "Be patient therefore, brethren, unto the coming of the Lord. Behold the farmer waits for the precious fruit of the earth and he has long patience for it until he receive the early and latter rain, be also patient, establish your hearts, the coming of the Lord draws nigh." Isn't that good? Verse 11 he says; "Behold we count them happy who endure. You have heard of the patience of Job, and have seen the end of the Lord; that the Lord is very pitiful, (full of pity) and tender mercy." Be patient. You say - Well, I've been praying to the Lord for two weeks about this deal ... when's He going to resolve it? Be patient. I know people who have prayed for something for 30 years, 40, 50, 60 years. Right? We've all prayed for things for years and years and years and every once in a while we run out of the patience of faith, don't we? And we say - Ah, I guess God's not going to ever do that. Be patient.

This is what made Abraham's life the complete life of faith. Think of Noah. How would you feel never having seen rain after about 90 years of building that boat? Just project that into your brain. That is absolutely absurd. But he just kept building that boat. And for all those years, 100 years or more, people said - Noah--he's out of his mind. And he heard that all of that time and he never stopped because he was patient and he believed God - patient. In God's time. You see, faith is deaf to doubt, dumb to discouragement and is blind to impossibility thus it only knows success.

You say - Well, what was the secret of Abraham's patience. mean, how could he possibly be so patient? Verse 10, "For he looked for a city which hath foundations, whose builder and maker is God."

You know where he had his eyes? Not here, but where? There. He wasn't looking down, he was looking up. He was patient because he was aware of the fact that heaven was waiting. There should be a definite article there, it should say in the Greek - For he looked for the city which hath the foundations, whose builder and maker is God. He was looking for heaven. Abraham was patient because he knew where he was going. That's the patience of faith.

Do you ever just focus on heaven? Oh, it's fun to do that, isn't it? I just sometimes see myself just kind of skipping along the golden streets. Do you ever see that? It's fantastic. And just being in the presence of the Lord and living in the Father's house, everything, boy, and going down to drink in the river of life and taking some of that fruit that's there. Oh, it's terrific.

Ezekiel said this, chapter 48 verse 35, Ezekiel says; "The name of the city from that day shall be," want to hear the name of the city? Quote, "The Lord is there." Isn't that good? That's the name of the city, "The Lord is there." Now you just keep your eyes on the fact that you're going to be there, in His presence, in that city and you can be patient with anything going on here.

You see, it's when you set your affections on things below that you live and die with every little thing. That's why the Apostle Paul said in Colossians 3:2; "Set your affections on things," what? "Above and not on things on the earth." And when you get your affections set on things above you're going to be patient with what happens on earth.

You know, old Abraham didn't care, he was living in an old crummy tent, passed it all around, he didn't care. You know Lot? Lot cared. Lot...the Bible says Genesis 13:12; "Abraham dwelled in the land of Ca-naan, everywhere." Just in the land of Canaan. "Lot dwelt in the cities of the plain and pitched his tent toward," what? "Sodom." Lot wanted to get in on the goodies, the world's fare. Lot wanted the earthly, Abraham wanted the heavenly. He didn't care anything about the earth - Lot did. You remember what happened to Lot? You remember what happened to his wife? Oh, they had to leave the city and she longed to go back, turned around, (snapped fingers) that fast turned into a pillar of salt.

If you look continually at the things of this world, trials, troubles, struggles, money, fame, entertainment, pleasure, then you become absorbed in the impatient desire of the flesh. But if you just keep focusing on heaven, on God, on Jesus Christ, then you don't even care about what goes on here.

Second Timothy 2, great thought, verse 3; "Thou therefore endure hardness as a good soldier of Jesus Christ," endure - why? Watch. "No man that warreth entangleth himself with the affairs of this life." If you're fighting God's battle, you're not going to get messed up in this world.

And old Moses endured, verse 27, look at it in Hebrews 11; "By faith he forsook Egypt, not fearing the wrath of the king; for he endured." You say - How did he endure? How did Moses 40 years in the wilderness, just fumbling around with a bunch of Jethro's sheep, a great leader like that? He was probably mumbling all over that place - Oh, my potential is going down the drain year after year after year. Right. I can't hack this. He says - it's a drag with these sheep out here in this desert. Forty years, I mean, I can learn faster than that, Lord. But Moses endured. You say - How did that guy ever endure? Look at verse 27, "As seeing Him who is invisible." That's a present tense, watch it ... and I'll show you another exciting thing, the word as in the Greek also means while. Watch it. He endured as while he was seeing Him who was invisible. You know why Moses made it for 40 years? Because he never took his eyes off God. And he never got bugged with what was going on around him because he always had his focus in the right place. He just kept looking at Him who was invisible.

Wherever you put your intention is going to determine your life. Look at Hebrews 12, let's go back there again. "Let us run with patience the race that is set before us," what's the next statement? Verse 2, what does it say? "Looking unto, "what? "Jesus." You run the race looking at Jesus. You know there's one thing you can't do, and I've not run much track but I ran some track in high school and college and one thing you learn very fast in running is that you can't watch your feet. Did you ever try running watching your feet while you run? It's impossible...you'll trip all over your own feet besides you'll run into things. You have to look way ahead when you run, you set a point way ahead. If you set a point 5 feet from the front of you you're going to be in real trouble. You set a point... that's the same thing in running a patient race as a Christian. You set your eyes way on Jesus Christ at the finish line and you'll only see your life, watch this, in terms of how close you are to the finish. As long as you're running looking five feet ahead you'll never see any farther than five feet ahead. And you never see the finish line so you never know you're getting there. But if you just keep remembering that everyday is only one day closer to Jesus Christ then the race becomes easy to run with patience. See?

Do you realize that when I first came to Grace Church I was four years further from Jesus? Now I'm four years closer to being in His presence. Now I have to live my life like that. One guy said - It's he that looks down his nose has the wrong slant on things. I didn't say that somebody else said it.

In Hebrews 10:36 it says - "For you have need of patience," isn't that good? And I say that to you and to myself - you have need of patience. "That after you have done the will of God you might receive the promise." Hang on, you say - Well, I've been serving the Lord a long time, I don't seem to be getting much of the goodies. Be patient, be patient, that's part of faith. You really believe God? The people who really live by faith are patient people. Right? People who get up tight - Oh, what's God doing? Oh my world is falling apart ... that is not the patience of faith. Abraham just hung in there and waited till God did all things in His own time. Beautiful, calm, serene, peaceful, there's no reason for Christians to be anxious. Paul says, "Be anxious for," what? "Nothing." Okay.

So what do we see? The patience of faith. Let's look at the third thing, the power of faith. Faith is a powerful thing. Verse 11 and 12, we'll look at in a minute ... but faith, let me just show you just a few introductory thoughts before we hit this ... faith sees the invisible, hears the inaudible, touches the intangible and accomplishes the impossible. Faith is a powerful commodity. Unfortunately most faith is all talk and never really gets to action. But faith that really is true faith has power. Look at verse 11, let's look at it, this is a little problem here so we'll untangle it. "Through faith," I'm going to read it as it is in the King James or whatever you have, "Through faith also Sarah herself received strength to conceive seed and was delivered of a child when she was past age because she judged him faithful who had promised." Now faith brought about a miracle. It was impossible for that couple to have a baby. The Bible says in the book of Genesis, "Sarah was barren." She had never had a child, she was now 90, Abraham was 99. That is past the possibility of child birth, without question. Plus the fact that she was barren. God came to them and said - I'm going to raise up seed, a whole nation from you. Sarah is going to have a baby. Immediately Abraham laughed out loud. Sarah laughed inside. Because it was funny. We knew we couldn't have a baby. This is ridiculous. It was humorous.

Now there's an interesting thing here and I want to deal with it. Because every time you trace Sarah through the Old Testament you never find her having any faith at all. But this verse says by faith - Sarah. And I read all about Sarah and she never had any faith. She laughed at the beginning ... God came to her and exposed her laughing and then she lied to God... then when she had done that she said - Abraham, you'd better go here and you'd better have a baby by Hagar, our servant, or this thing will never come off, so she set this whole deal up, for Abraham to have relationships with a handmaid and produce a child. She never did believe God. And Abraham, you know, just went ahead and did it. And, of course, he produced a child named Ishmael who was the father of the Arabs and every Jew since then has paid the price with the antagonism of the Arab world against Judaism of Abraham and Sarah's sin.

And if you go on in the life of Sarah you never show her exhibiting any faith at all. So I began to read this and I thought - My golly, how can Sarah be one of the heroes of faith? And that hit me as I began to read the verse. And then I went on down and read something else. It says -"Through faith also Sarah herself received strength to conceive seed." And I looked that up in the Greek and I found out exactly what that says ... katabolen spermatos, it means to lay down seed. Now we know obviously that a woman does not plant the seed. A woman receives the seed which is fertilized and the child is a result. So how could it be saying by faith, Sarah, when she didn't have faith, receive strength to lay down seed when she was the woman and women don't do that? Got a problem. Now you've got to figure out how to resolve the problem. Incidentally the phrase - was delivered of a Child - is ... is not even in the original so we just kind of pull that out. Now what are you going to do with it? Well, Sarah can't be the subject of the sentence. If it means to lay down seed then it's got to be a man who is the subject of the sentence. You say - Well, then, who's the subject? Abraham.

Now notice it says - "Through faith Sarah," and then you see the word herself--that word in the Greek can mean many things. Here, I believe, it means he. Let's look at it this way. Through faith he (referring back to whom? Abraham) received strength to katabolen spermatos, lay down sperm or seed. "When he," and the ... and a he or a she in the Greek is the same form. You have to take whether it's masculine or feminine normally just from its use in the verse, so the he or she can go either way. "When he was past age because he judged God to be faithful who had promised." Now whose faith are we talking about here? Abraham's. You say - Well you've got Sarah's name in there, MacArthur, what do you do with it? It's great. The form in which Sarah's name appears is what we call, watch this one, a dative of accompaniment. Got it? You don't got it. In the Greek language there are all different cases, nominative case where the object is. Right? And then you have possession and all this stuff; ablative, genitive, dative, accusative, and all these different cases. Well dative case is a form ending for a word and it gives it a certain meaning. Here there is such a thing as a dative of accompaniment. If we make this a dative of accompaniment it makes all the sense in the world. Through faith he in accompaniment with Sarah received strength to lay down seed. Do you see? And the accompaniment with Sarah is obviously necessary. It's a part of the pro-genitive process. So we understand the verse. It is then through faith that Abraham in accompaniment with Sarah laid down seed because he believed God - God gave him the power to do what his body couldn't do otherwise. Want to hear something exciting? When Sarah died he married a woman named Keturah and had six more sons. The power of God through faith. The faith wasn't Sarah's it was Abraham's. And you see what God can do. God does the miraculous, doesn't He, by faith? He does miracles by faith.

Oh there is so much in the Bible that talks about the faith. Then verse ... the faith of men and in response God works miracles. Now verse 12 makes sense; "Therefore sprang there even of one, and him as good as dead." See. Out of that gate was as good as dead in terms of producing anything. "But sprang from him as many as the stars of the sky in multitude and as the sand which is by the sea-shore innumerable." This guy had children upon children, the whole of the nation of Israel, every Jew that's ever been born up until this time and from now on till Jesus comes, every Jew that will ever be born is a seed of Abraham. And that all came because he believed God. Hey, faith is powerful.

Now don't say - Do you think if I believe God I can have children? If that's in God's will. I think there were two things here;

Abraham's faith and God's will in conjunction. Are you with me? Okay.

Oh, all the millions of Jews came out of that ... the power of faith. Listen, Matthew 20 ... Matthew 19:26; "With men this is impossible but with God," how much is possible? "All things are possible." Don't you like that? You say - Well, you don't know my problem. All things are possible. Jesus said; "If thou canst believe all things are possible to them that believe." Isn't that great? Luke 18:27 Jesus

said, "The things which are impossible with men are possible with God." You really believe God for the impossible. What have you prayed for that you didn't think could be done? And really believed God. Matthew jumps into my mind, 17:19, "Then came the disciples to Jesus privately and said, Why couldn't we cast that demon out? Jesus said unto them, Because of your unbelief. For verily I say unto you if you have faith as a grain of mustard seed," and I don't think that necessarily means little tiny insy-binsy faith, a mustard seed starts slow and explodes. I think Jesus is saying if you have a thriving, increasing, growing faith, you see. "You shall say to the mountain, Move." And you know what that mountain's going to do? Move.

My dad use to always tell the story about the lady who went in her back yard and wanted to get rid of the mountain. She prayed all night the mountain would be removed. Got up in the morning, it was still there, and she said - Ha, I knew it. Well, that's not faith, you know.

The end of verse 20 He says, "Nothing shall be impossible unto you.

Here's one for you, Philippians 4:13; "I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me." Do you believe that? Believe Ephesians 3:20; "Now unto him who is able to do exceeding abundantly above all we can ask or think according to the power that works in us." Well, what kind of things have you claimed for God? There's so many needs in your life and in lives of your friends and loved ones, there's so many needs here at Grace Church, are we really claiming God to do the things that we just can't see in a human realm but they look like they'd have to be miracles, do we really believe God for those things? The Bible says - Is anything too hard for God? Test Him and see. That's the power in faith when you really believe God. Boy, you know something? I think God sort of shames me all the time because I never believe really, I say I believe and maybe I do to a certain point but I don't think I really all the way believe what God can do until I see Him do it and then I say - Boy, God, You did that. You know? Oh, if we could only extend our faith out and see God work greater things.

Well, we can talk more about that. Let's go quickly. Fourthly, the positivism of faith. We saw the pilgrimage of faith, separation from the world; the patience of faith, waiting for God's time focused on heaven; power of faith, doing the impossible. Here's the positiv-ism of faith, verse 13, and I'm just going to go quickly on this and let you go in a few minutes.

Now all these guys, Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, never did see the promised land come into their possession. They never really did know what was happening. And verse 13 lays it out; "These all died in faith." Never saw a thing, just died ... and they lived their whole life believing God, never saw anything happen but never stopped believing Him. "Not having received the promises, but having seen them afar off, and they were persuaded of them, (put it this way) they were positive about them, and they embraced them, and they confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth. For they that say such things declare plainly that they seek a country." They were looking for another place. And truly if they had been mindful of the country from which they came out they might have



had opportunity to return. And, you know, he says they weren't looking back to the country they came from either they were looking for a different country. Verse 16; "But now they desire a better country, that is, an--" what? "Heavenly." Those guys had a positivism about their faith. They died in faith. They were happy to be pilgrims because they knew there was a positive end to their faith. The Bible calls them two things; it first of all calls them strangers, xenos. In the ancient world the fate of stranger was really hard. He was regarded with hatred, suspicion and contempt. In Sparta, for example, xenos, same word, is the equivalent of barbarous which means a stranger was the same as a barbarian. The word also came to mean refugee. So they just were ... were really nomads in the worst sense of the word.

Then secondly, they're not only called xenos in strangers but in the word pilgrims is parepideemos, to get it right. And that means a person who sticks around temporarily. So they knew they were on shifting sand, that their mission was limited in this world. And they sought for something greater and they were sure about it, even though they never saw it.

Are you sure about heaven? Are you really sure? I know some Christians who aren't too sure about it, they have doubts. Do you know some like that? I'm sure about heaven. That's the Positivism of faith. I know it's there. I'm as sure of that as I am that this pulpit's here, that I'm here tonight. You say -How do you know? I just have the witness of the Spirit of God within me by faith that it's true. And I just long to be there and my faith is positive enough that I believe that.

Psalm 27:4 says this; "One thing have I desired of the Lord that I will seek after," what? "That I may dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of my life." The positivism of faith. This is the security of the believer. So many Christians are all torn up. Job went through a mess. Do you remember Job? God took away everything he had, allowed Satan to do it, and he was destitute and he finally stood up and said - Though the worms destroy my body, yet in my flesh, what? Shall I see God. Though my reigns be consumed within me. Boy, he knew where he was going.

The Apostle Paul said - It's nice to be around you people, I like you a lot. Far better to go to be with Christ. That's the positivism of faith, that's the security the believer has. They weren't looking to go back to Chaldea, no sir. They were looking for a heavenly country, verse 16, "Wherefore," you want to know something? This is so good, you know the kind of people God likes? God likes people who believe in Him. You know that? God really likes those people. Verse 16; "Wherefore God is not ashamed to be called their God, for He's prepared for them a city." Who is God not ashamed of? Those who believe, who really live by faith.

If you live by faith God's not ashamed of you. Can you imagine I thought about this today...can you imagine God saying - I'm the God of John MacArthur. ooh, that is strange, isn't it? I mean, that's not much to brag about, I'm the God of John MacArthur ... but in I Samuel chapter 2 verse 30 it says; "Them who honor Me I will honor." You say - You mean God is not ashamed to be called the God of

John MacArthur? Boy, that puts a little different light on how I live my life.

The patriarch's honored God so God said I'm not ashamed to be called their God. And you know what God called Himself? Listen to this, He said it over and over again but in Exodus 3:6 you know what it says? He said this; "I am the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, the God of Jacob .... and later on I became the God of John MacArthur." Boy, I can't think of any greater honor than to live a life of faith and have God want to assign Himself to me. Isn't that great? That's the positivism of faith and God likes positive faith. For He really did prepare a city for them and they believed Him.

Now a final note on Abraham's faith, the proof of it. What's the real test of faith in the long run? "By faith Abraham when he was tested offered up Isaac." Wow! "And he that had received the promises offered up his only begotten son of whom it was said, In Isaac shall thy seed be called." I mean, God had given him a child after all this time and then God said to him one day in Genesis 22 verses 1 to 18, it tells the whole story, God said, I want you to take the son I gave you up on the hill and I want you to offer him as a sacrifice. Oof, can you imagine? Gee, all of this going on, this is a little strange. Go, offer him up. Get up there on Mount Moriah, take him up there, and you offer him. And you know what he did? He went up there, he packed up his stuff, got ole Isaac all dressed up, and said - Isaac, we're going for a camping trip. And you know what he said when he left? He said - We are going, now watch this one, and we shall come again. You say Wait a minute, Abraham. God says you're supposed to give him as a sacrifice. But Abraham knows that the covenant of God was unconditional. You know what Abraham believed? Abraham believed that he would raise Isaac from the dead. Look at verse 19; "Account-ing that God was able to," what? "Raise him up, from," what? "From the dead." You see, Abraham went up in that mountain, said good-bye but I'll be back and Isaac with me. And he went up there. Boy, that must have been a tremendous act of faith, what a monumental faith. Do you have the kind of faith that would sacrifice like that? And believe in resurrection? Boy, that is faith. If God said to me, I want you to take one of your children up and sacrifice them. Whew, awfully hard, even to conceive of that. All of his dreams were in Isaac. How could he reconcile divine promise with divine command, it was confused, he loved Isaac. He had so long waited for the first sign of the promise, and then he had sinned with Hagar and he might have thought that God was going to take away the promise because of what he did with Hagar and God's law forbade a man to kill his son, and the Bible said that by man's...whosoever sheds man's blood by man shall his blood be shed... and all this must have been running in his mind but he really trusted God. And he said - If You want me to kill him, I'll kill him because You'll raise him because You promised me that he'd be the seed. Boy, that's faith, isn't it?

Do you have that kind of faith to sacrifice your life and say, God, I'll do whatever You said because You promised me this is what You'd do. So he took him up there, raised the knife, and at the right moment he heard this noise over in a bush, he looked over there and God had the right animal waiting, the angel of the Lord stopped his arm, he sacrificed the ram. And Isaac only became just a figure, it says; "Which also he received him in a figure." This is a picture of the resurrection of Christ,

the death and resurrection. He didn't really die and rise, so it's not a legitimate type but it's kind of picture of the death and resurrection of Christ.

What is the final proof, then, of faith? It is, watch it, sacrifice. That's the real proof of faith. "If any man will come after Me let him do," what? "Deny himself." That's it. When John Bunyan, great John Bunyan, who wrote PILGRIM'S PROGRESS, what a man of God. When he was in jail, he was thinking of what must happen to his family if he was to be executed for his faith which was pending. He especially thought often during the day and evening about his little blind daughter. He had a special love for her and he thought she...she can't find her own way in the world.

Oh, it disturbed him. And it haunted him and this is what he said: "Oh," he said, "I saw in this condition, I was a man who was pulling down his house upon the head of his wife and children, yet thought I, I must do it, I must do it. The dearest idol I have known, what err that idol be, help me to tear it from Thy throne and worship only Thee." See. Sacrifice anything and everything if you really believe God. That is faith.

The pilgrimage of faith - separated from the world. The patience of faith - waiting for God to work. The power of faith - doing the impossible. The positivism of faith - focusing on God's eternal promise and believing that it's guaranteed gilt-edged. The proof of faith - obedience, self-sacrifice. That's the pattern of faith. Let's pray.

Father, we do thank You, tonight, that we've been able to share together these great principles. We pray that You'll confirm to our hearts that which we have learned. Encourage us to live by faith in Jesus' name. Amen.

Available online at: <http://www.gty.org>

COPYRIGHT (C) 2015 Grace to You

You may reproduce this Grace to You content for non-commercial purposes in accordance with Grace to You's Copyright Policy (<http://www.gty.org/connect/copyright>).