

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

### **Abraham: An Exemplary Faith**

Scripture: Hebrews 11:8-19

Code: 90-385

I continue to be so grateful to the Lord for how He honors His Word. Because I have been a little immobile in recent weeks, I've been doing some reading and also doing some listening. And one of the things I've been listening to is a series of 24 sermons by David Martyn Lloyd-Jones. They were preached in the 1950's, so they were preached 50 years ago and it is amazing how absolutely relevant they are to this very moment of this very hour.

He was preaching to a post-war England, a very different culture than this particular culture in America at this time, and yet the relevancy and the power of the Word of God 50 years from when it was preached makes it as vital, as pertinent, as compelling as it was 50 years ago. And this, of course, is a wonderful reminder that the Word of God is timeless, it is absolutely timeless. It is not bound by time. And with that in mind, we come to Hebrews chapter 11 and another illustration of that as we pick up a virtually 2,000 year-old book and see how it applies to us. This book was originally written, this book of Hebrews, to some Jews in a Middle Eastern context and in a culture in Israel very, very different than our own, yet its lessons are equally boundless.

The scope of the writer, as I've been telling you, in this particular section of the book of Hebrews is to prove that the doctrine of salvation by faith is an ancient doctrine. What the writer is trying to say here to these Jewish readers is this isn't something new. They're not two ways to be saved. God hasn't changed His mind. Nor is this a false religion offered to compete with the true. The Old Testament never did teach salvation by works, it always taught salvation by faith. That is not new. Faith has been the only way to please God. Faith has been the only way to be reconciled to God, to apprehend and embrace transformingly the unseen realities of the true and living God. Faith is the only way to enter in to a right relationship with Him.

He wants to get his point across that the New Covenant and the ministry of the Apostles, and the preaching of the gospel isn't in competition with the things that the Jewish people had heard. Sadly they had been given an apostate form of Judaism which had developed into a work system but that was never the intent of God. Salvation has always been by faith and faith alone.

Now in order to make his point to these Jewish people to whom this letter was originally sent, he goes back and picks up the story of heroes of the faith in the history of Judaism. Abel, we've already looked at, Abel and the life of faith. Enoch and the walk of faith. Noah and the work of faith. And we have seen in each case that their relationship with God, their salvation, if you will, was a result not of

works but of faith. They believed the Word of God. They obeyed the Word of God, trusting in God to fulfill what He had promised on their behalf.

All of that was before the Flood, coming up to Noah. Now we're past the Flood and we come to the next major character on the scene in the book of Genesis and it is none other than Abraham, and that's where the writer arrives in chapter 11 and verse 8, "By faith, Abraham..."

By now we've come to a man who lived from, let's say, 2165 B.C. to about 1990 B.C., so we're two thousand years now past creation. In Abraham's day, a new era of human history begins. Before this, God has maintained a sort of general relationship to the whole human race, coming out of the Flood, a kind of general relationship to everybody, until a very, very significant event occurred and that event was the building of the Tower of Babel. Remember that? The building of the Tower of Babel. When men built the Tower of Babel which was really a manifestation of human pride and idolatry, that relationship, that general relationship that they had had with God, God had been generally available to them, was shattered permanently. Mankind was scattered and splattered over the face of the planet and the languages were all changed so they couldn't talk to each other, they couldn't communicate with each other. That was the price for revolting against God. God was openly available to them, they revolted against God and they were scattered. And God abandoned them and this was the first illustration of Romans 1. God gave them over, God gave them over.

This was the origin of heathendom, the Tower of Babel. So now you have a world of people who have no connection to God, they have languages in which there are no revelations of God. There are no written revelations. There are no traditional revelations that are passed down. Man is really alienated. He has been given over to his idolatry. When he knew God, he glorified him not as God and Romans 1 kicked in for the first time and it has cycled all through all of human history ever since. God abandoned them to immorality, to homosexuality, to a reprobate mind.

Mercifully, however, God has a plan. God is going to reveal Himself only He's not going to reveal Himself in a broad sense, He's not going to reveal Himself in a general sense, He's going to reveal Himself in a very specific sense through one man and the people who come from the loins of that one man and that one man is Abraham. Abraham becomes the father of the people of Israel and Israel becomes the nation that is the repository of divine revelation. God's plan is to send His Word but not in some general way, but rather in a specific way to this people called Israel, the children of Abraham, and they will hear His Word, they will possess His Word, they will inscribe His Word in a written fashion and they will proclaim His Word to the nations of the world. They're going to be the evangel to proclaim that salvation is available, that sinners can be reconciled to God through faith. In a very real sense, the fountain of salvation then flows through Abraham, it flows through Abraham. He then becomes the central figure in salvation history. Certainly he is a model of faith and that is critically important if salvation is going to be by faith and it has to be modeled in Abraham because Abraham is the central contact point between God and the revelation of His redemptive plan.

His life becomes the pattern for all who come to God by faith to follow. It is completely a life of faith. Stephen knew that. If you back up a little bit to the book of Acts, you will remember that...well we all remember that Stephen was stoned, we might not remember why he was stoned. He was stoned for the message that he preached and his confession of Christ but if you go back to chapter 7 of Acts, Stephen speaks in verse 2, "Hear me, brethren and fathers, the God of glory appeared to our father Abraham when he was in Mesopotamia before he lived in Haran and said to him, 'Leave your country and your relatives and come into the land that I will show you.' Then he left the land of the Chaldeans and settled in Haran, from there after his father died, God had him moved to this country in which you are now living. But he gave him no inheritance in it, not even a foot of ground." So here when preaching a message of salvation, Stephen begins where you always have to begin, he begins with Abraham.

In Romans chapter 4, the Apostle Paul wanting to defend justification by faith, writes in chapter 4 verse 1, "What shall we then say that Abraham our father, according to the flesh, has found? What about Abraham? How is he saved? For if Abraham was justified by works, he has something to boast about, but not before God for what does the Scripture say?" And then he quotes Genesis 15:6, "Abraham believed God and it was credited to him for righteousness."

The promise then in verse 13 of salvation by faith comes to Abraham and all those who come through the righteousness of faith. Stephen a Jew, Paul a Jew understood the primary place that Abraham played in the history of salvation by faith. Against this is the basic thought of Judaism that a man had to earn his way to God, as we have seen, this is the basis of their whole Judaistic works system. They had decided that Abraham had a relationship with God and that Abraham was chosen and that Abraham was blessed because Abraham was better than everybody else. Abraham was chosen because he was the best, the most moral, he was the best of all the pagans.

That's not what the Bible teaches. And to destroy this, the Holy Spirit here and elsewhere, as we saw through Stephen and through Paul in Romans, goes back to Abraham to reset the record, to establish the fact that Abraham is a man who came to God and lived with God by faith. The New Testament clearly says this again and again. He was justified by faith and by faith alone. That, of course, is a very, very dramatic change from what the Jews are used to.

Another illustration of this comes from Paul's letter to the Galatians, chapter 3 verse 7. "Therefore be sure that it is those who are of faith who are sons of Abraham." It is those who are of faith who are sons of Abraham, for even so, Abraham believed God..quoting Genesis 16:6 again..and it was reckoned to him as righteousness. Therefore be sure that it is those who are of faith who are the sons of Abraham. It's a matter of faith. The end of the chapter, the end of chapter 3, "You are all sons of God," verse 26, "through faith in Christ Jesus." Verse 29, "If you belong to Christ then you are Abraham's descendants."

Now these passages that I read, a number of them go back to that statement in Genesis 15:6, "Abraham believed God and it was counted to him for righteousness." Throughout his life, he believed God. That's what set him apart. He lived by faith. He accepted the Word of God and acted on it.

Now that's what's behind the writer of Hebrews using Abraham here as his model of faith. Now you'll notice that this account of Abraham goes from verse 8 down to verse 19. And that's a big chunk to take, so we're going to have to go across it a little bit on the light side.

Now when you study the Word of God, we want to make sure we approach it legitimately and not in an illegitimate fashion. We study it historically, we take it for its historic value. But often in looking at the accounts of Scripture, particularly the accounts in the Old Testament, we see them as sometimes the New Testament writers see them, not only as historical fact, not only as covenantal fulfillment what they are in themselves, but every often the New Testament writers look at something in the Old Testament and see it as analogous to a New Testament truth. Taking a little bit of liberty, I want to do that tonight and I want to show you as you look at what is here in verses 8 to 19 and you see the elements of the life of faith that Abraham lived, you're going to see a pattern for all of us. What we see in Abraham is analogous to our own faith experience.

So let's ask the question, "What characterized Abraham as a man of faith? What were the components, what were the elements?" Now remember, we've already seen that Abel was a man of faith but only in a partial sense. Abel offered a right sacrifice, that's just part of living a life of faith, it's the important part, it's the initial part, it's the launch point, it's the beginning when you recognize your sin and a need for a sacrifice.

And then we looked at Enoch and this man's faith was not just limited to a sacrifice, in terms of the demonstration of the facts that are given here in chapter 11, but rather that he was a man who walked with God, and we see something beyond, let's say, justification, we see the life of sanctification.

Then we come to Noah and we see further illustrations of faith. Here was a man who was obedient and he obeyed in hope of something to come in the future. We see then that living a life of faith has a starting point with the recognition of sin and sacrifice, it has an ongoing point in terms of walking in faith, and it has a hope-factor, you live this life in obedience to God for something that is coming that you cannot see. Those are all elements of faith. But when we come to Abraham, the whole thing comes together. We get the full picture.

Let me give you five features of faith that show us the completeness of Abraham's faith. This is consistent with him as the prototype for all of us who are children of faith. Here is Grade A faith, here is five-star faith. Here is the pattern for our life of faith.

Let's begin with the pilgrimage of faith, okay? We'll just use some key words here, keep you on track a little bit. The pilgrimage of faith..."By faith Abraham," verse 8, "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." This is, let's call the pilgrimage of faith.

Now I just want you to grab that little phrase, "by faith Abraham when he was called obeyed." When he was called, obeyed. There's something interesting here. When he was called is a present participle. It speaks of the response going on at the same time t he calling is coming. His obedience then is immediate so that in the very process of clarifying the call, the man is already in motion. In other words, a better way to translate it would be, "Abraham, while being called, was obeying." This is indicative of the immediacy of his response. And it is faith because he went out not knowing where he was going. He was told that he would be receiving an inheritance. He didn't know where it was. He didn't know what it was. Not knowing, *epistemi*(?) which we get our English word epistemology which has to do with knowledge, means to put one's attention to, it means to fix one's thoughts on. The bottom line is, he was clueless, he had no concept, no idea of where this calling was taking him. How strong is this faith? Strong enough that when he has no idea where he's going and he is leaving everything familiar and everything he knows, he never even bothers to think about it...not knowing, not contemplating, not giving his attention to, not musing, or fixing his thoughts rather obedience that is so speedy, so consuming that it has no thought of anything other than obedience.

It is not because he saw a brochure of Canaan. It isn't that somebody showed him what the shore was like at the Mediterranean which would be a lot better than the Tigris Euphrates rivers meandering through the fertile crescent in Mesopotamia where he lived. It wasn't because somebody showed him a picture of a great estate that he would have, as I read you in the language of Stephen, he never ever owned anything even when he got to the promised land.

But this is the pilgrimage of faith. This is a pilgrimage of separation...separation. Now let me tell you about Abraham. He was a pagan...he was a pagan, he was an unregenerate pagan. He was where he was with the people he was talking the language he was because he had been the product of the scattering of the people who were thrown all over the place from the Tower of Babel. He is not a secret believer in the true God. We don't have any evidence of that. He is just a pagan like a lot of other pagans. And I might add, he isn't any better than anybody else, and the Scripture never says he was any better than anybody else. "Listen to me," says Isaiah 51:1, "you who pursue righteousness, you listen to me. You want to pursue righteousness? You seek the Lord? Look to the rock from which you were hewn and to the quarry from which you were dug. Look to Abraham your father and to Sarah who gave birth to you in pain. When he was but one I called him, then I blessed him and multiplied him."

The statement that Isaiah's making here is if you want to understand salvation, you look back and realize that you were dug out of a rock by the sovereign power of God. You were dug out of a pit. You were quarried out of the rock of paganism, Heathendom.

More explicitly Joshua 24:2 says that the father of Abraham whose name was Terah, T-e-r-a-h, served other gods. He was not just a pagan, he was a polytheistic, not monotheistic. He was a sinner. He belonged to a pagan family. He belonged to a pagan culture. He lived in a pagan city by the name of Ur in Chaldea. And he lived there until he was 70 years old. By the way, that is about 140 miles from where Babylon would later be built. But God appeared to him. And this again is so analogous to the mighty work of salvation when God appears to the sinner and quarries him, as it were, out of stone. Here's how it happened, back to what Stephen said, Acts 7:2, "The glory...or the God of glory appeared to our father, Abraham." God showed up and said to him, "Leave your country and your relatives and come into the land which I'll show you," and he left.

What marvelous grace. There is no other explanation for God choosing Abraham than sovereign intention, sovereign purpose. The God of glory condescends to come to a pagan in the midst of thousands, hundreds of thousands of pagans living in what used to be the Garden of Eden before the Flood, that area. A man sunk in sin, a man in the pit of iniquity, a man immersed in idolatry and God singles out Abraham and gives him a command to test whether he will believe in Him. Will he believe God enough to obey and go to the land that God promises to give him, even though he doesn't know where it is or what it's like?

Nothing is said about his morality, that is irrelevant. Do you understand that? God doesn't come along in sovereign grace and save the moral people. In fact, in Romans it says in the very section that's talking about Abraham that God justifies the ungodly.

Well Abraham responded with faith. He believed God and a separation took place. He left. He was in the act of obeying when God was still in the act of calling him. And that's the pilgrimage of faith. That's how it starts. He left the land of his birth. He forsook his home, his estate. He severed his family ties. He left loved ones behind. He abandoned comfortable things, familiar things to embrace total uncertainty. This would, for the most part, been an impossible thing for somebody to do. But the life of faith is willing because the life of faith is made willing in the day of divine power. If you want to embark upon the pilgrimage of faith, you make a break with idolatrous things, you make a break with the world, you make a break with familiar, sinful patterns.

Jesus says this, doesn't He? Even in His own ministry, "Hate your father, your mother, your sister, your brethren, even your own life. Take up your cross, follow Me." A life of faith demands a break with everything that is familiar, everything that is old. It's a new world and even though you don't know what it is because you don't really inherit it until you leave this one. It starts with a willingness to separate from everything that is familiar and visible. This is where every Christian's pilgrimage

begins, when you separate from the world. When you, as Paul described it in 1 Thessalonians 1:10, and this is such a simple way to describe it, it says in that letter that the church at Thessalonica could be characterized as those, verse 9 rather, who turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God. I love the next line, verse 10, "To wait for His Son from heaven." That's what the break is, we turn from idols, we turn from the world to wait. We haven't received our inheritance. We've been told what it is and we've acted in faith on that.

That was Abraham. And in that sense he's a figure for us, he is an analogy that we can see, a man of faith separates himself from the world to go toward an inheritance which he is promised but which he will not see or inherit until a future that is at that point unknown to him. John says, "Love not the world, the things that are in the world. If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him." He's saying essentially the same thing. Or at the end of Galatians, Paul talks about being crucified to the world and the world to him. In other words, when he came to Christ, he died to his interest in the world. The world no longer had any grip on him. Or in the words of James, "Friendship with the world is enmity with God." You make your choice. You make the decision to let the world go. Peter writes it this way, "Do not be conformed to the former lusts which were yours in your ignorance, but like the Holy One who called you, be holy also in all your behavior. You let go of those things. Paul says, "You set your affections on things above and not on things on the earth." You no longer are connected or yoked together with unbelievers in the common familiar way you always used to be. And that's the pilgrimage of faith and we certainly saw that in Abraham.

Let's go back to verse 8 a minute. "He went out not knowing where he was going." This is what Paul calls in Romans 1:5 the obedience of faith. No idea where he is going. This is a pilgrimage of faith. That is faith. You don't know where you're going. You've never seen where you're going. You've never experienced where you're going. That's where we are, folks. We walk by faith and not by sight.

And by the way, this journey of Abraham took a long time. He spent five years in a town called Haran which was in the wrong direction, basically going to the land of Canaan would have been south and west, and he went north and spent at least five years in the land of Haran waiting for this to unfold. But his faith never ever wavered. That's where the pilgrimage of faith begins.

Let's look at the patience of faith, verses 9 and 10. "By faith he lived as an alien in the land of promise, in a foreign land dwelling in tents with Isaac and Jacob, fellow heirs of the same promise. For he was looking for the city which has foundations whose architect and builder is God." He is an alien and as I read you in Acts 7:5, he doesn't even own any land. He's just a nomad. He has gathered up everything he owns and all the people he owns and while he was in Haran, he accumulated a mass more of them, it refers to the fact that he developed more people, it doesn't necessarily mean family. He probably as he accumulated wealth and along the way accumulated perhaps more servants to work with him, but he is an alien. He is in the land of promise but he's an alien. He never really takes possession of anything. It's like living in a foreign land. He's a tent

dweller, along with Isaac and Jacob who followed him to whom the same covenant promise was made and reiterated. He sojourns, literally *paroikeo*, *oikeo* means to live in a house, *para*-alongside. So he kind of lived alongside, to dwell beside. He's a foreigner living alongside the people who live in the land. It is promised to him but it is never really possessed. You can read more about that in Genesis chapter 23. And those who came after him shared that same kind of life, Isaac and Jacob, the heirs of promise.

It wasn't very long till all their family was hauled off, remember, into Egypt. And the people of Abraham's loins were there for 400 years. So he is separated from his old life. He's in a land that he really doesn't yet possess. He is a stranger in the world. He is living in a tent. He is a nomad. I think this too is simply analogous to how we live as believers. Some day this world will be ours, right? There is coming a day when the Lord Jesus establishes His millennial Kingdom on the earth, when the earth is renovated from east to west and north to south, when the curse is reversed and there will be glory that fills the earth and Christ will reign. And a lion will lie down with a lamb and the desert will blossom like a rose. And all the things that the prophets talked about will come to pass on the earth and we will inherit the earth. But right now, we're just tent dwellers here. We don't really see the possession of our inheritance. We are pilgrims living alongside the people in this world without ever taking possession of what is promised to us.

The old chorus said, "This world is not my home." So you don't want to invest too much in it, right? Not this version of it. Lay up your treasure in heaven, spend your life and your assets and your powers on things that have the ability to show up in the future in the millennium and the eternal new heaven and new earth. Work for the real rewards, not for the ashes of this earth. And I say ashes because it's going to disintegrate in a holocaust of fire.

So here's Abraham, God's promise never seen by him in his life, he never owned land, wandered through Israel, Canaan as a tent dweller, but never abandoned his faith in a future promise. I think the hardest time of all is the time in between. At the time when the pilgrimage begins, some excitement, God came to me, God in His glory came to me, the true and living God came to me, a pagan man. He spoke to me. And by His power I believed what He said and it was all so wonderful, it was all so glorious. It was all so empowering. He scooped up everything he had and began the pilgrimage. The glow and the glory of that moment may be driving him at the beginning, but then there's that in-between, as he goes to Haran, as he sits there for at least five years until he was 75 years old. Doesn't see the promise. And then migrates all the way back southwest to the land of Canaan.

Goes into the land and is never anything other than a stranger there. But this is the patience of faith. This is the challenge. This is the challenge for us as well. It's analogous for us to remain faithful and to keep our faith strong and joyful and full of anticipation in the long period between the glorious moment of our salvation and the ultimate moment of our glorification. He didn't give up his hope, he continued in hope, he continued in faith, he continued to hold the promise of God high. It drove him. It

motivated him. It pressed him forward.

The man of faith is not the man whose faith is always blazing, like some shooting star, some meteorite, but whose faith like a light is steady and relentless when there's nothing to do but wait, when maybe there's pain in life and disappointment in life, and fear sets in and faith is sustained.

Abraham never grows impatient, never tries to grab a little of the world's goodies, like Lot. It cost him, didn't it? He wanted to pitch his tent toward Sodom and live with the world. His story is a monumental tragedy. The faith of Abraham didn't fail. The faith of Isaac didn't fail. The faith of Jacob didn't fail. That's the patience of faith. That's the faith that endures and that's the true kind of faith. Enduring faith is the only real saving faith.

Paul writing to the Thessalonians in 2 Thessalonians 1:4, "We ourselves speak proudly of you among the churches for your perseverance and faith in the midst of all your persecutions and afflictions which you endure." As we mentioned this morning, endurance is the vindication, the assurance of a real genuine faith. Back to James 1, "Count it all joy when you counter various trials, knowing that the testing of your faith produces endurance." And wouldn't you coming out of that endurance rejoice that you had a faith that can endure anything and thus you know it is a real saving faith?

This was true of Noah. A hundred and twenty years preaching righteousness, building a boat. This kind of faith is really deaf to fatal doubts, it is dumb to discouragements, it is blind to impossibilities and thus it continues to persevere through absolutely everything. And what is the motivation for this? Go back to verse 10, "He was looking for the city which has foundations, whose architect and builder is God." Both the word "city" and "foundations" has a definite article. He was looking for THE city which has THE foundations. Abraham looked for the city which was built by God, the heavenly dwelling of this ???, that's what he was looking for. So how much did God disclose to him? When God came to him, God must have told him who He was and what salvation meant, that there was not only a land to which he would go that God would give him but that there was a city that God Himself would build that God would lay the foundations and be the architect and builder and this was the heaven of heavens.

He could be patient in the land of Canaan. He could be a nomad there. He could wander for all the years that he did because his sights were set on the heavenly city. Ezekiel 48:35 says, "The name of that city will be...I love this name...The Lord is There...The Lord is There. It is named for the main occupant...The Lord is There. He did what Colossians 3:2 says we have to do, "He set his affections on things above and not on things on the earth." He was patient with things below, and he had lots of struggles below. He was patient with all of it because his mind was not fixed on satisfaction that comes in this life, he was looking for something far beyond this.

Again I say, what a contrast to Lot. Genesis 13:12 says about Lot, "Abraham dwelt in the land of Canaan which was where God had told him. Lot threw his...Lot threw his tent, as it were, pitched his tent, in Sodom." Lot wanted the earthy. Abram wanted the heavenly. If you are looking continually at the things of this world, this life, if you are focused on trials and troubles, struggles or success, money, fame, pleasure, you become absorbed like Lot and it's a damning and destructive absorption. If you focus on heaven, on God's promises, then you can live in any circumstance in this life. He endured. He endured.

Another spin on this is given in the account of Moses over in verse 27 when it says similarly, "By faith Moses left Egypt, not fearing the wrath of the king for he endured seeing him who is unseen." You endure when your focus is on what is unseen, the one who is unseen and the unseen reality of the glories of heaven promised to us. It's that vertical perspective that makes the difference, not getting caught up in the horizontal. By the way, it's a purifying hope, 1 John 3, "He who has this hope purifies himself."

So what do we learn about the life of faith? It begins with a pilgrimage of faith which means when God calls, you drop everything, separate from the world and you follow not exactly knowing where God is going to take you, but knowing that He has promised you a future, and promised you heaven in the future and promised you fellowship with Him in the future, and off you go. The pilgrimage of faith then is going to call for the patience of faith as you endure the issues in this world by keeping your eyes on the world to come.

Thirdly, you look at the life of Abraham, you see the power of faith, verse 11. This is kind of an interesting verse. "By faith even Sarah herself...this is the NAS how it reads...By faith even Sarah herself received ability to conceive, even beyond the proper time of life since she considered Him faithful who had promised. 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."

Now you do remember, don't you, the initiation of God's conversation with Abraham regarding this covenant? Go back for a minute to the twelfth chapter of Genesis, we cannot overlook that in our study, in the twelfth chapter of Genesis, the Lord says to Abram, at the beginning, this is his initial call, "Go forth from your country, from your relatives, from your father's house to the land I'll show you, I'll make you a great nation, I will bless you." It's not just a place, it's a people. "I'll make your name great, you'll be a blessing. I'll bless those who bless you and the one who curses you, I'll curse. And in you all the families of the earth will be blessed." So there is this promise that there is going to be a blessing not only of a land to be possessed, but a people to be born out of his loins. This is the promise of God.

So he is waiting for a place and he is waiting for a people. Now the problem is, he and his wife are old and they've never had any children. So we all know that. But here we see the wonderful power of faith. Faith sees the invisible, faith sees the impossible, that's the power of faith. It trusts in God to do what humanly cannot be done. And when there is that kind of faith present, God acts on behalf of that faith.

Now let's go to verse 11 for a minute. Sarah is Abraham's wife. She's a good wife. I'll give her credit for that. First Peter 3:5 and 6 says, "She called her husband lord." That's good. We don't want to diminish the quality of this wifely perspective. She called her husband lord. She got that part of the marriage. But there is nothing in the Scripture that ever talks about her faith. In fact, if you look at the story of Sarah, she demonstrates anything but faith. She's just full of doubt. So when you look at this verse, you have to ask the question...how can it say "by faith even Sarah herself received ability to conceive?" There's nothing in the Scripture that says anything about Sarah's faith. The phrase here, and I want to just do this for you because it's important, the phrase here literally that phrase that says, "received ability to conceive," is literally *katabolen spermatos*. *Katabolen* means to throw down, hence the depositing of the seed, male seed. This is telling us then that she received the deposit of the male seed, even beyond the proper time of life. She then can't be the subject of the sentence because she's the recipient, she's the indirect object of the sentence. The seed is the object and it's given to her.

What is the inclusion of Sarah here? The best explanation of that is that it's what could be called a dative of accompaniment, if you know anything about dative language in the Greek, you can do a whole lot with the dative, and she is an accompanying reality for obvious reasons. You've got to have a wife to bear the child. The verse would be better placed in this kind of language, "By faith He...cause the pronouns are assumed here...By faith he with Sarah received the power to lay down seed, deposit seed even beyond the proper time of life since He counted him faithful who had promised."

In other words, what it is saying is that by faith God gave Abraham the power to impregnate Sarah. The faith is not Sarah's, the faith is Abraham's because he believed. He is a man of faith.

How strong is his faith? Go back to Romans 4 for a minute. Romans 4 and we're really studying Genesis from the New Testament vantage point. Romans 4:19, "Without becoming weak in faith because this promise was so impossible," go back to verse 17, God says, "I'm going to make you a father of many nations, even God who gives life to the dead and calls into being that which doesn't exist," that's what it's going to take, going to have to give life to this dead body, "In hope...verse 18...against hope, he believed." I mean, it was just no way humanly. He believed without becoming weak in faith...verse 19...he contemplated his own body now as good as dead since he was about 100 years old and the deadness of Sarah's womb, yet with respect to the promise of God, he did not waver in unbelief but grew strong in faith giving glory to God and being fully assured that what God

had promised, He was able also to perform.” And then it brings in that statement from Genesis 15:6, “Again it was credited to him as righteousness.” Here...here’s the man who was justified, who has righteousness imputed to him, this man who has an unwavering, undying faith in the face of absolute possibility.

So back to verse 12, Hebrews 11, “Therefore there was born even of that 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.” By the way, that’s part of the promise recorded in Genesis 15:5, Genesis 22:17, Genesis 32:12. And that’s, of course, a hyperbole in one sense, but it simply means that the people who are going to come out of his loins are innumerable, all the millions of Jews born because of the faith of that one man.

And by the way, that vigor that God gave him to produce that child, didn’t just produce that child, produced another child, Ishmael with Hagar, and when Sarah died, according to Genesis 25:2 he took a wife named Keturah and by now he’s over a hundred years ago and this is post-flood and he has six more sons. God gave an enduring power to that body which was as good as dead.

What do we say about the power of faith then? That it is the power of faith that accomplishes the impossible. God makes promises that cannot be fulfilled on a human level and fulfills them to those who believe in Him. For us it’s not so much the miracle power as it is the power to be used by God in the miracle of conversion, in the miracle of spiritual ministry, of life-transforming help in the use of the gifts of the Spirit, in the use of the power of the Spirit in the one-anothers of the fellowship of the body. Faith is the ignition switch to spiritual power that makes us useful and allows God through us to do the 30-, 60- and a hundred-fold kind of harvest. God releases power to do what seems to be impossible. And again that’s what Paul said and we read it again this morning, I’m inadequate for this, you can’t explain this because of me.

So Abraham exhibits the pilgrimage of faith, separation from the world, obedience to the Lord. The patience of faith, he waits for God’s time focused on heaven and never distracted because he doesn’t receive it on earth. He demonstrates the power of faith and that is the ability to do what on a human level is impossible...impossible.

Well quickly, number four, let’s just call it the perseverance of faith...the perseverance of faith. Verses 13 and I’ll go down to the beginning of verse 16. “All these died in faith.” What do you mean “all these?” It goes back to the three that have been mentioned in this section, Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. The Covenant promise to Abraham was repeated to Isaac in Genesis 26, it was repeated to Jacob in Genesis 28 that they would receive a land and a heavenly city, they would have an earthly inheritance and a heavenly one. They all died in faith without receiving the promises. But having seen them with the eye of faith, having welcomed them from a distance, and having confessed that they were strangers and exiles on the earth, for those who say such things make it clear that they are

seeking the country of their own, and indeed, if they had been thinking of that country from which they went out, they would have had opportunity to return. But as it is, they desire a better country, that is a heavenly one. And there again we find the perseverance of faith. It's very much like the patience of faith. Faith is patient to endure and endure all of the lack of fulfillment in this life because it has its focus on the promise that lies ahead. They never saw it.

But then look at the end of the chapter, verse 39, "All these heroes of faith gained approval through their faith and didn't receive what was promised." That's the whole story of the chapter because God provided something better for us so that apart from us they wouldn't be made perfect or complete or whole. The promise was sure because God could be trusted. And they persevered in this faith, looking to that heavenly city .

Now you could even take another word here and call it the positivity of faith. Maybe that's a better thing because it gave them this...this confidence. They had never had the fleeting thought to return, verse 15. They desire a better country, that is a heavenly one. This deposited in their heart a future so bright, so wonderful, so glorious that even though they were strangers, *xenos* meaning a foreigner. They were a *parepidemos*, persons who stay temporarily. They got it, they understood that. But so bright was the promise of God, so trustworthy was the Word of God that they anchored their endurance and their perseverance in the future and it gave them a positive faith to endure anything. We see this with the Apostle Paul, "I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me." How? "Because I know there's something better waiting for me." "Far better...he says...to depart and be with Christ. But I can endure anything as long as He wants me to stay here." This is the absolute confidence in future glory. Job had it "Though worms destroy this body, yet in my flesh shall I see God." Psalm 27:4, "One thing have I desire to the Lord, that will I seek after...I love this...that I may dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of my life." That's Old Testament hope. That's the hope of believers.

And verse 16 ends with a stunning statement, I think one of the most stunning statements in the book of Hebrews. "Therefore because of this faith, this positive faith, this powerful faith, this patient faith, this pilgrim faith, God is not ashamed to be called their God for He has prepared a city for them."

Huh...is that stunning or what? I'm pretty sure I give God plenty of reason to be ashamed to be called "My God." I...I just imagine that Satan goes into heaven as he did in the case of Job and he's always before the throne of God doing...what?...accusing the brethren, and he brings up my name and brings up the names of any and all of us who are so utterly unworthy and says to God, "How in the world can you want to be associated with such people? Wouldn't You like to distance Yourself from them? It is bad for Your reputation." God says, "I'm not ashamed to be called their God and I've prepared a city for them and in that city I've prepared a room for them in My house and I'm going to bring them here and I'm going to glorify them and I'm going to make them like My Son and I'm going to put them on My throne and I'm going to bless them forever and ever and ever."

Sometimes I think we are ashamed to call God our God, but God is never ashamed to call us His children. What an amazing, amazing thought. I can't think of a higher honor, can you? Is that the ultimate honor? God's not ashamed to be identified with me before holy angels? I am the God of John MacArthur. Oh.... So they lived and died in the unrealized promise of faith and God gave them the supreme honor, God was honored to be identified with them.

There's a final note and it is a very important one. A final note and perhaps the greatest credential of Abraham's faith, let's just call it the proof of faith...the proof of faith. The real test, supreme test, not just obedience, ahhh...obedience with sacrifice. By faith Abraham...verse 17...when he was tested offered up Isaac. "Was that not the ultimate test?" "And he who had received the promises was offering up his only begotten son, it was he whom it was said, "In Isaac your descendants shall be called." Now God comes to him, you remember the story in Genesis 22, and says to Abraham, "I want you to go up to the mount and I want you to put your son on the altar. I want you to sacrifice your son on the altar to Me."

Did Abraham know about sacrifice? Absolutely...everybody knew about sacrifice, everybody understood that was in a relationship with God by faith, everyone understood they were sinful, that there needed to be a sacrifice, expiation, propitiation for their sins. Everybody knew about that. They knew. But to sacrifice Isaac, the heir through whom all the promises would be fulfilled? How are you going to have descendants like the sand and the sea if you kill the heir through whom they will all come?

Genesis 22, "God tested Abraham, He said, 'Abraham.' He said, 'Here I am.' Take your son, your only son whom you love, Isaac, go to the land of Moriah, offer him there as a burnt offering on one of the mountains which I'll tell you." Abraham had killed animals many times, offered many offerings to the Lord, built altars and did that. But his son? "He responds, Abraham rose early in the morning, saddled his donkey, took two of his young men with him, and Isaac his son, he split wood for the burnt offering, arose and went to the place of which God had told him. On the third day Abraham raised his eyes and saw the place from the distance. Abraham said to his young men, servants who came, 'Stay here with the donkey.' I love this....'I and the lad will go over there...listen to this...and we will worship and return to you.'"

Wow, you mean he thought Isaac was coming back? You better believe he thought that. He absolutely thought that. He knew that. That's how confident he was in the promise of God. How far would he go? "Took the wood of the burnt offering...in verse 6...laid it on Isaac his son, Isaac carries his own wood, as it were, kind of a picture of Christ carrying His cross...took in his hand the fire and the knife. The two of them walked on together. Isaac spoke to Abraham his father and said, 'My father,' he said, 'Here I am, my son.' 'Behold the fire and the wood, but where is the lamb for the burnt offering?'" You see, they knew about the need for sacrifice. They knew what Abel knew and Enoch

knew and Noah knew and all true believers knew. "Abraham said, 'God will provide for Himself the lamb for the burnt offering, my son.' So the two of them walked on together. They came to the place in which God had told them, Abraham built the altar there, arranged the wood, bound his son Isaac, laid him on the altar on top of the wood. Abraham stretched out his hand and took the knife to slay his son." You say, "Why would he do that? Why would he do that?"

Go back to Hebrews 11, verse 19, "Because he considered that God was able to do...what?...what?...raise people even from the dead." Wow. How did he know that? Because he had been as good as dead, and God had given life to him and life through him to this son.

It's monumental faith. All his dreams were in Isaac. All the promises were in Isaac. He loved Isaac. He waited so long through this long pilgrimage for the first sign of the promise. He knew he had sinned so terribly with Hagar and could have thought that maybe God was changing His mind. He also knew that God's law forbid a man to kill his son, or to kill anybody for that matter. He also knew that God hated human sacrifice and always it was an animal. And he also knew what Genesis 9:6 said that whoever sheds man's blood, by man shall his blood be shed. You kill somebody, you'll die. Why would he do this? Why would he raise the knife? Because his trust was so great that he knew if God had to, He would raise Isaac from the dead. That's the faith of Abraham. He considered that God was able to raise people, even from the dead, from which he also received him back as a type. Type of what? A picture of whom? Who was it who put His life on the altar and came back from the dead? Christ, a figure...it's the word *parabole*, a parable, an analogy, a picture of Christ. Only Christ really died, Isaac did not die. That's faith. That's faith in all its fullness. That's faith having passed the final test.

We see the pilgrimage of faith, separation from the world, the patience of faith, the ability to wait and endure without ever entering into possession. We see the power of faith, to believe God for what is humanly impossible to come to pass. We see the perseverance of faith, the positivity of faith, the focus on heaven that causes us to have a certain indifference to things in this life because we're looking to that glory to come. And the proof of faith, what is the proof of faith? Where is the proof of faith? Really it's manifest in obedience that requires the ultimate sacrifice...the ultimate sacrifice. Though He slay me, yet will I trust Him. Though He ask me to take my son, yet will I trust Him. That's the life of faith as modeled by Abraham.

Well, we got all that in, in an hour or so. Join me in prayer.

Father, we thank You for this wonderful testimony. So much more could be said and we ought to go back and read all those wonderful chapters from chapter 12 on through to the end of the account of Abraham and even into the stories of Isaac and Jacob. And, Lord, we're just so blessed to see the richness of Your Word and to see this history sort of pull together in a summary fashion here as a model for us, to demonstrate what You're looking for in our faith. May we have that true saving faith

that makes a complete break with the world, that faith that patiently endures and waits. That faith that believes you for the impossible and thus sees Your powerful hand and sees the wonder of spiritual miracles happening through us. Give to us that perseverance, that positive attitude that goes through life never losing sight of what is laid up for us. What awaits us in the glory to come. And may we be so trusting of You that we can face any sacrifice, You can ask anything of us, we will gladly give it because we trust You completely. This is the kind of faith that we can't muster, we can't develop, we can't invent. This is a gift that comes from You. We thank You for it. We thank You for the joy of receiving this faith. What can we say? Those of us who possess this cannot commend ourselves, for like Abraham we were dug out of a pit. We were hewn out of a rock of wickedness, that's all Your grace. What a gift and we wait for the day when faith becomes sight, and we enter into that full and glorious inheritance. But in the meantime, may our faith be so demonstrated as to draw people to You and to the gospel. We pray in Christ's 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>).