

## THE FAITH OF ABRAHAM

This morning I'd like to talk to you about faith! Specifically the faith of Abraham, because if we have a faith like his, we'll have the kind of faith that #1 will please God and #2 will grant us entrance into the holy city, and isn't that what we're all looking for?

Turn with me in your Bible to **Ephesians 6**. You remember this as the chapter dealing with the whole armour of God. And in the previous verses to verse 16 it already mentions several pieces of the armour but in **verse 16** notice what it says: "*Above all (or on top of everything else that I've already told you, Paul says. On top of all the different pieces of armour I've already mentioned, above all), taking the shield of faith, wherewith ye shall be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked.*"

Have there been any fiery darts hurled at you lately? The shield of faith will keep Satan's darts from penetrating a vital organ, especially our brain.

The word **shield** in this verse, I looked it up in the concordance and it means "door shaped." That is, it wasn't just a small shield that covered the chest of the person, but it was door-shaped, it covered the person from head to toe. And that's what faith will do for each one of us. It will protect us from the fiery darts of the wicked.

I'd like to continue by reading one of my favorite verses in Hebrews 11. In fact, Hebrews 11 is one of my favorite chapters. But specifically **Hebrews 11:6** where the Apostle Paul says, "*But without faith it is impossible to please him (God): for he that cometh to God must believe that He is (that He exists), and that He is a rewarder of them that diligently seek Him.*"

**Diligence:** This verse doesn't imply that God purposely makes it hard to find Him, it just means that God requires us to put forth some effort in our seeking. Everything worth achieving in this life takes effort, doesn't it? Not only to acquire, but to maintain. So why should it be any different with the spiritual reward we're all looking for?

This verse makes it clear that genuine faith is not an option. But at the same time, we should be aware that there is a spurious faith; because James tells us, "*Faith without works is dead.*" One of the Protestant reformers put it this way, "Faith without works is a faith that does not work." However, we're not even going to deal with this kind of faith today—only the **true** faith of Abraham.

After God confused the language of those building the tower of Babel, it wasn't very long before idolatry became well nigh universal once again, just like it was before the flood. And this was the kind of atmosphere Abraham grew up in. His father's household had compromised the true faith by mingling with it the superstitions of heathenism—(pretty much like the Catholics have done).

But even though idolatry greeted Abraham at every turn, he refused to be corrupted by it, and clung to the worship of the true God. And so, because of his integrity, God called Abraham to do a special work by communicating his will to him.

But before Abraham could accomplish his high calling, there were a few tests he must first pass. Notice what it says in **Genesis 12:1-5**—

*“Now the LORD had said unto Abram, Get thee out of thy country, and from thy kindred, and from thy father's house, unto a land that I will show thee: And I will make of thee a great nation, and I will bless thee, and make thy name great; and thou shalt be a blessing: And I will bless them that bless thee, and curse him that curseth thee: and in thee shall all families of the earth be blessed. So Abram departed, as the LORD had spoken unto him; and Lot went with him: and Abram was seventy and five years old when he departed out of Haran.”*

Notice that it says he departed out of Haran. If you read the previous chapter it tells us there that when God called Abraham out of Ur of the Chaldees his father went with him and they traveled as far as Haran. And Abraham's father, Terah, died there in Haran. And when he was dead, Abraham picked up stakes and continued his journey.

Then in **verse 5** it says, *“And Abram took Sarai his wife, and Lot his brother's son, and all their substance that they had gathered, and the souls that they had gotten in Haran; and they went forth to go into the land of Canaan; and into the land of Canaan they came.”*

Notice in verse 5 here, it says that they had gotten souls in Haran while they were there. I want you to know that Abraham and Sarai were witnesses for the Lord. Everywhere they went there were people who could see that Abraham served the God of heaven and they wanted what Abraham had. And so Abraham gathered these people unto himself as he traveled along and his caravan grew.

But notice; in order that God might qualify Abraham for the important work of being the keeper of the true faith, he had to be separated from the associations of his early life:

- His family,
- His friends,
- And all the influences that would interfere with the godly training he was about to receive.

And on top of it all, there was nothing he could say to the rest of his family and friends to make them understand his calling! Because *“spiritual things are spiritually discerned”*. And all of his friends and family members were led by another spirit.

So you can appreciate the fact that this wasn't an easy thing for Abraham to do, or to explain.

Now go back to **Hebrews 11:8-10**: *“By faith Abraham, when he was called to go out into a place which he should after receive for an inheritance, obeyed; and he went out, not knowing whither he went. By faith he sojourned in the land of promise, as in a strange country, dwelling in tabernacles (tents) with Isaac and Jacob, the heirs with him of the same promise:”*

Notice, it says that Abraham sojourned in the land of promise as in a strange country dwelling in tents. As you study the history of God's people and people of the world, you'll find that right from the beginning, when after Cain killed Abel, that he went out and he dwelt in the land and built permanent housing while the descendents of Seth, who basically took Abel's place after Abel was killed, as the people of God, dwelt in temporary housing. And you find the same thing later on after the flood. You have Ham, who would represent the worldly people, building

permanent housing, beautiful housing. In fact the descendants of Ham were among the people who build the Tower of Babel. And then there was Shem, another one of Noah's sons, who represented the people of God and he again dwelt in temporary housing.

It's interesting to me that these godly people lived in such a way that people knew that this earth was not their permanent residence. They were just passing through. And that alone was a witness to the worldly people that there was something different about God's people. And I think there's a lesson in here for us. God doesn't want us to put all our eggs in a worldly basket, so to speak. He wants us to be a witness in this world. He doesn't want us to have big fancy housing, fancy this, and fancy that. He wants us to live simply and economically and be a witness to the world that this is not our permanent home. We're looking for a better place.

Notice in **verse 10**; it tells us why Abraham lived in tabernacles. "*For (because) he looked for a city which hath foundations, whose builder and maker is God.*"

When called out of Ur, all Abraham had to rely on was the naked promise of God without the least outward evidence of fulfillment. Think of it—Abraham abandoned everything in order to go forth, "*he knew not where*", to follow where God should lead.

Notice what it says in ***Patriarchs and Prophets, 126***. "It was no light test that was thus brought upon Abraham, no small sacrifice that was required of him. There were strong ties to bind him to his country, his kindred, and his home. But he did not hesitate to obey the call. He had no question to ask concerning the Land of Promise,—whether the soil was fertile, and the climate healthful; whether the country offered agreeable surroundings, and would afford opportunities for amassing wealth. God had spoken, and His servant must obey; the happiest place on earth for him was the place where God would have him to be."

How is it with you, friend? Would you be willing to give up the security of friends, and family, and familiar surroundings, and a life of ease for what appeared to be a path of self-denial, hardship, and sacrifice? Abraham didn't think twice about it. God had spoken, and he must obey!

Now, we're going to have to skip over a few things that happened from the time Abraham left his home in Ur of the Chaldees until he reached the promised land—but guess what he encountered when he arrived in Canaan? A land full of idolaters that were worse than what he had left back home!! They were so wicked they offered human sacrifice on their polluted alters. Nothing that terrible ever happened in Ur.

And even though Abraham was a man of faith, he must have thought,

- "God, what's going on here"?
- "Did I have to leave home, only to encounter a people who were more wicked and superstitious than what I left"?
- "It's a fertile land all right, God, just like You said, but why did You bring me into a land of such a corrupt people"?

You see, Abraham was perplexed, and he was doing his best to cling to the promise of God on the one hand, but on the other hand he was very distressed about pitching his tent in such a sinful place.

And don't you think God knew of the dark forebodings that were going through his head about then? Of course He did! God knew Abraham needed a little encouragement right then, that he needed some assurance that this was indeed God's plan. And so, God repeated the promise He made earlier—

Notice what it says back in **Genesis 12:6, 7**: *“And Abram passed through the land unto the place of Sichem, unto the plain of Moreh. And the Canaanite was then in the land.”*

Everywhere Abraham went he saw parents who were burning their children upon their altars, people who practiced sodomy and bestiality and every sort of vice imaginable. No wonder Abraham needed a little reassurance right then. Do you see how God was working to strengthen Abraham's faith?

Notice what it says also in **verse 7**: *“And the LORD appeared unto Abram, and said, Unto thy seed will I give this land: and there builded he an altar unto the LORD, who appeared unto him.”*

So, God brings a test, a trial, a temptation in order to elicit a response. And depending on the response, it will either prepare Abraham for his great mission in life or not. And I'm happy to say that he passed the test! Because it says, *“he built an altar unto the Lord.”* That means he responded the way God wanted him to—with trust, and submission, and praise, and thanksgiving, and worship. (Even though he didn't understand the purposes of God.)

As Abraham continued his journey through a heathen land, again his faith was tested. Notice **Genesis 12:9, 10**: *“And Abram journeyed, going on still toward the south. And there was a famine in the land: and Abram went down into Egypt to sojourn there; for the famine was grievous in the land.”*

So here's Abraham and his whole household, traveling around in the land that God said he would inherit, a land flowing with milk and honey, and there's a famine.

- No rain,
- The rivers cease to flow in the valleys,
- The grass withers,
- No pasture for the animals,
- And starvation threatens his whole company.

And the devil says, “where's your faith now Abraham?” But did Abraham begin to question God's leading? Did he look back with longing desire to Ur of the Chaldees? Did his faith waver in regard to the promises of God? After all, a lot was at stake here! His whole company, and the heathen nation was watching to see what Abraham would do—how he would respond to **this** test.

But even though he couldn't explain God's leading. And even though he had not yet received the expectation of the promise, Abraham held fast to the words God spoke to him before leaving his home country—*“I will bless thee, and make thy name great, and thou shalt be a blessing.”* And Abraham must have thought, “I don't understand all this, but I trust God that I am exactly where He wants me to be”

Well, there were several more tests that Abraham would have to go through in order to accomplish God's purpose, and they would get more severe as time went on.

But let's forget about Abraham for a minute and let me ask you a question about the tests that God puts us through. Why is it that we have a tendency— when tests, and trials, and temptations come, to question whether God is really leading us? Why is it when seemingly bad things happen do we question God, or even chastise ourselves for doing something wrong? Why is it when a loved one dies, or we lose our job, or some hoped for deal falls through, or a hundred other hoped for situations don't come to pass; why do we look somewhere to cast the blame, or to doubt God's providence?

Now it's true that sometimes we do make bad decisions; that we are at fault when things go badly, but not necessarily so. What wrong things did Abraham do that he had to go through the tests and trials he went through? He didn't do anything wrong! At least up to this point! He was doing exactly what God wanted him to do, and he was exactly where God wanted him to be!

Here's the point; you may be going through a difficult time right now for no fault of your own. You might even be experiencing mental anguish over some situation because you don't know the outcome—just like Abraham. But more than likely, if you love God and are trying to do what's right, God is putting you through a test to see what your response will be.

And I can tell you of one thing for sure, God knows exactly how to fix the problem—what ever it is; He's just not letting you in on it yet. If He did, it wouldn't be a test of faith, would it?

In *Patriarchs and Prophets*, 129, 130 it says: "God leads His children by a way that they know not, but He does not forget or cast off those who put their trust in Him. He permitted affliction to come upon Job, but He did not forsake him. He allowed the beloved John to be exiled to lonely Patmos, but the Son of God met him there, and his vision was filled with scenes of immortal glory. God permits trials to assail His people, that by their constancy (**unshaken determination**) and obedience they themselves may be spiritually enriched, and that their example may be a source of strength to others. The very trials that task our faith most severely and make it seem that God has forsaken us, are to lead us closer to Christ, that we may lay all our burdens at His feet and experience the peace which He will give us in exchange.

"God has always tried His people in the furnace of affliction. It is in the heat of the furnace that the dross is separated from the true gold of the Christian character. Jesus watches the test; He knows what is needed to purify the precious metal, that it may reflect the radiance of His love. It is by close; testing trials that God disciplines His servants. He sees that some have powers which may be used in the advancement of His work, and He puts these persons upon trial; in His providence He brings them into positions that test their character and reveal defects and weaknesses that have been hidden from their own knowledge. He gives them opportunity to correct these defects and to fit themselves for His service. He shows them their own weakness, and teaches them to lean upon Him; for He is their only help and safeguard. Thus His object is attained. They are educated, trained, and disciplined, prepared to fulfill the grand purpose for which their powers were given them. When God calls them to action, they are ready, and heavenly angels can unite with them in the work to be accomplished on the earth."

And so, when tests come, just know that they are given in order to train us and prepare us for God's call to action. Unless we are first trained, how can we be ready when God has need of our service?

That's what He was doing with Abraham, but I have to tell you that Abraham was not always ready for action—a few times he failed! But God didn't give up on him, and neither will He give up on us.

Remember earlier when I mentioned how there was a famine in the land of Canaan? When the famine came, Abraham didn't beat it back to Ur, he went into Egypt—why? Because Egypt was the closest country to Canaan to flee to, and he intending to go right back as soon as he could.

But while he was there in Egypt, he didn't have enough faith to believe that God would protect him. And so he lied, and told the Egyptians that Sarah was his sister. Remember the story?

Even though Sarah was an old lady by today's standards (close to 70 years old), she was still a very beautiful and desirable woman. And so Abraham, in order to save his own hide, concealed the truth about Sarah being his wife.

Notice what it says in *Patriarchs and Prophets*, 130: “Sarah was fair to look upon, and he doubted not that the dusky (**darkened minds**) Egyptians would covet the beautiful stranger, and that in order to secure her, they would not scruple to slay her husband. He reasoned that he was not guilty of falsehood in representing Sarah as his sister, for she was the daughter of his father, though not of his mother. But this concealment of the real relation between them was deception. No deviation from strict integrity can meet God's approval.”

Let's read the story from **Genesis 12:14-20**: “*And it came to pass, that, when Abram was come into Egypt, the Egyptians beheld the woman that she was very fair. The princes also of Pharaoh saw her, and commended her before Pharaoh: and the woman was taken into Pharaoh's house. And he entreated Abram well for her sake: and he had sheep, and oxen, and he asses, and menservants, and maidservants, and she asses, and camels. And the LORD plagued Pharaoh and his house with great plagues because of Sarai Abram's wife. And Pharaoh called Abram, and said, What is this that thou hast done unto me? (why did you lie to me?) why didst thou not tell me that she was thy wife? Why saidst thou, She is my sister? so I might have taken her to me to wife: now therefore behold thy wife, take her, and go thy way. And Pharaoh commanded his men concerning him: and they sent him away, and his wife, and all that he had.*”

Now here's the most important point: even though Abraham was dishonest, God didn't abandon him, did He? But worked things out so that His divine purpose would yet be fulfilled, (although it wasn't without some distress on Abraham's part because of his lack of faith.) Yes, Abraham failed this particular test, but through repentance he did learn a lesson that would prepare him for future tests.

And according to the Bible, he would fail a few more times, but eventually he would pass the greatest test that any human being would ever be called upon to make—the sacrifice of his son Isaac, which of course represented the sacrifice of Jesus and the Father, that sacrifice that they would make for the salvation of mankind. But we'll have to leave that for another time.

Just remember that the tests and trial we all go through are allowed to come to us for a reason. So, when they come—and they surely will:

- Don't think that God has abandoned you,
- Don't think that He's doesn't love you any more.
- Don't automatically think that you have failed somehow.
- And don't think that God is mad at you!

He's simply trying to correct your defects and train you for service, and ultimately to develop your character, so when He comes back, He can take you home with Him.

Let's look at a couple more verses of Scripture before we close. This is taken from **1 Peter 4:12, 13**. The Apostle Peter says, "*Beloved,*"

Notice how it starts—Beloved—God loves you.

*"think it not strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you, as though some strange thing happened unto you: But rejoice, inasmuch as ye are partakers of Christ's sufferings; that, when His glory shall be revealed,"*

And what is the glory of God? His character. When His character is revealed; where is He going to reveal it? In you! When His character is revealed in you "*ye may be glad also with exceeding joy.*"

Friend, God loves you. And He wants to save you. And He wants you to develop the kind of faith that will get you through the days ahead. We know that the things that are coming upon this world will try men's faith to the uttermost. And remember what Jesus said when He comes back, "Shall I find faith on the earth?" He's going to find some, but not very many.

I want to be a part of those who are found faithful when the Lord comes back, don't you? God help us to spend the time we need to spend on a daily basis studying His word, diligently, as we talked about at the beginning. That we would search the Word carefully and prayerfully so that we not come to conclusions, the kind of conclusions, that people would look at us and say, "They're just a bunch of fanatics." Don't get me wrong. People of the world, no matter how close we are to Jesus, will think we're fanatics. But let's not go beyond what God says.

If we can't find in the Bible and in the Spirit of Prophecy the proof for why we do what we do and why we live like we live, then we'd better be careful not to push these kinds of ideas on other people, because all we'll do is push them away from the Lord.

Anyway, friends, be faithful. Be faithful to God so that when He returns we, along with others for whom we have labored, will be ready to meet Jesus in peace when He comes.