

GENESIS: THE BEGINNING IS NOT THE END

Faith Fuels Faithfulness

TEXT: Genesis 12:10-20; 18, 20; Hebrews 11:8-11, James 2:20-26

INTRODUCTION: Last week we took a look at the Bible's first detailed picture of faith, and to the surprise of some it was in the Old testament; in fact, it was in Genesis. Abraham is noted throughout the Scriptures as a man of faith, a man saved by grace through faith, though he lived more than 2,000 years before Christ entered the world as Jesus of Nazareth.

But we would be remiss if we did not mention today that Abraham's wife Sarah was also a woman of faith. The Book of Hebrews says of Abraham, **Hebrews 11:8** By faith Abraham obeyed when he was called to go out to the place which he would receive as an inheritance. And he went out, not knowing where he was going.

But in the same passage it says of Sarah, **Hebrews 11:11** By faith Sarah herself also received strength to conceive seed, and she bore a child when she was past the age, because she judged Him faithful who had promised.

God had promised Abraham and Sarah a son, a son to be from the physical seed of Abraham and born from the womb of Sarah, his wife. Neither of them was without their times of doubt as they grew older and older, yet remained childless.

However,

- **Ultimately they did believe God.**
- **In spite of times of weakness, they trusted God to keep His promise.**
- **Both Abraham and Sarah were saved by grace through faith.**
- **The faith of both was rewarded by the faithfulness of God.**
- **Their son Isaac was born when Sarah was 90 years old, and Abraham was 100.**

What I believe God wants us to see today as we continue looking at the portion of Genesis that records much of the life story of this couple, is that Faith Fuels Faithfulness.

Before we look at the faithfulness pictured in these passages, we should note something of the relationship between faith and faithfulness.

Faith in Christ means trusting Jesus sufficiently to invite Him to become the Lord and Master of your life.

Faithfulness means consistently living under the Lordship of Christ in obedience.

- Faithfulness is impossible without faith.
- Faith comes first and is the fuel for faithfulness.
- Yet it is sadly possible, even common, for a person to have faith but not be faithful.

In Abraham and Sarah, we see some things that will help those of us who are people of faith also be people who are faithful.

First we see

I. THE FAITHFUL ALLOW GOD TO BE THEIR FRIEND.

James 2:23 And the Scripture was fulfilled which says, "*Abraham believed God, and it was accounted to him for righteousness.*" And he was called **the friend of God.**

- When you trusted the Lord, Jesus became your Savior and Master.
- When you were saved, God became your Father.
- What does it mean for someone to be your friend?

- **You enjoy talking to a friend.**
- **You eagerly read messages from a friend.**
- **You have a strong desire to please a friend.**
- **You are exceedingly inclined to heed the counsel of a friend.**

D. Is God your Friend?

- **Do you enjoy talking with God?**

That's what prayer is.

How much time each day do you spend talking with God?

What do you talk about? Do you just have a set list, like

- Please forgive me of my sins.
- Thank You for this food.
- Help me get through this day.
- Please take care of my family.
- Please, please, get me out of this mess.
- God, I need more money!

Is that the way you talk to a friend?

When God becomes a friend, you enjoy talking with Him in prayer.

- **Are you eager to read messages from God?**

The Bible is God's message to you.

Not only is the written word, God's Word for you, but the Holy Spirit will take that word and make specific applications to your life and needs.

But how much time do you give to letting God communicate with you?
When God becomes a friend, you are eager to read His Word.

- **Do you have a strong desire to please God?**

I don't mean just a sense that you ought to obey Him.

Is the desire to please Him really a driving force in your life?

Does the desire to do what He wants really impact your decisions on what to do and not to do?

For instance, how much does your desire to please God factor in to whether you are present on any given Sunday for Lifechange Group and Worship?

- Where does your desire to please God rank in comparison with your desire to attend football games? (May is a better time to ask this than October, isn't it?)
- Where does your desire to please God rank in comparison with your desire to have your kids involved in travel sports?

How much does your desire to please God factor in to your stewardship of what God has entrusted to your care?

When God becomes a friend, you really, really want to please Him.

When He is your best friend, you want to please Him more than anybody else.

- **Are you exceedingly inclined to heed the counsel of God given in His Word?**

Let me go back to a sore spot I already bumped. That's probably better than creating a new sore spot.

As people decrease their faithfulness to come to church, many justify their decision to do other things instead by asserting, "You don't have to come to church to worship God." Others say, "I can study my Bible without being in Lifechange Group." Now, I don't have time to walk you through an analysis of those statements. I just use the fact that people say or think these kinds of things to raise this question: Are you exceedingly inclined to heed the counsel of God given in His Word? Because God says in Hebrews, **Hebrews 10:24–25** 24 And let us consider one another in order to stir up love and good works, 25 not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as is the manner of some, but exhorting *one another*, and so much the more as you see the Day approaching.

So, I return to the question: How important is the counsel of God in His Word to you in making the decisions of what you do and do not do?

When God becomes a friend, you get serious about heeding His counsel.

E. Being the friend of God will make a real difference in your faithfulness to God.

- **When you pray frequently about everything important,**
- **When you read the Bible regularly,**
- **When you really desire to please Him,**
- **When you take what He says in His Word seriously,**

It will increasingly elevate the level of your faithfulness to Him.

In Genesis 18 we see another characteristic of those who are faithful.

II. THE FAITHFUL DEMONSTRATE GOD´S COMPASSION WITHOUT COMPROMISING HIS JUSTICE.

In Genesis 18, God and two angels have visited Abraham and Sarah at their tent. After the Lord has fellowshiped with His friend, the three depart and Abraham walks with them for a ways. Then the Lord stops because God has decided to reveal to Abraham what He is about to do.

Genesis 18:20–22 20 And the LORD said, “Because the outcry against Sodom and Gomorrah is great, and because their sin is very grave, 21 I will go down now and see whether they have done altogether according to the outcry against it that has come to Me; and if not, I will know.” 22 Then the men turned away from there and went toward Sodom, but Abraham still stood before the LORD.

Remember Abraham´s reaction.

A. He does not argue with the just judgment of the Lord on the wicked.

1. Sodom was a place dominated by homosexuality, perversity, and violence.
2. Abraham does not argue with God´s standard for righteousness.
3. He does not plead the ignorance of those who live contrary to the commandments of God.

B. But Abraham does plea for God´s mercy upon those in the city for the sake of the righteous.

You remember, don´t you. Abraham says, “Lord, if there are 50 righteous, would You spare the city?” God said, “Yes.” So Abraham says, “45?” God said, “Yes.” 40, 30, 20, finally 10? And God said, “Yes.”

Now as you know, not even ten righteous people could be found in the city of Sodom, and God sent His righteous judgment upon Sodom, Gomorrah, and the other cities of perversity on the plain.

C. What I want us to see is that Abraham felt compassion for people, even for those practicing perversity and doing vile, wicked deeds; but his compassion did not lead him to reject God´s standard or to compromise God´s principles.

We who live by faith have the very same challenges before us.

- 1. We must affirm the righteous standards of God without allowing self-righteousness to lead us to hatred.**
- 2. We must have compassion without allowing our compassion to cause us to compromise God's standards by calling evil good or good evil.**

Lastly, not last as far as what the Scripture offers, but last in what we have time for this morning:

III. THE FAITHFUL STILL BATTLE THE TEMPTER.

While clearly Abraham is a man of great faith and great faithfulness, he is still a man; and we remember **Romans 3:23** for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God,

Last week we read about a pause in Abraham's faith.

Today we read about a detour.

Genesis 12:10 Now there was a famine in the land, and Abram went down to Egypt to dwell there, for the famine was severe in the land.

Egypt was not a part of the land to which God sent Abraham. God never told Abraham to go to Egypt. Abraham detoured to Egypt because he doubted God's provision for his family during the famine.

A. Abraham's detour to Egypt caused many painful detours later in his life.

- 1. Abraham took His nephew Lot with him to Egypt.**

Warren Wiersbe said, "**Abraham got Lot out of Egypt but he never got Egypt out of Lot.**"

Taking Lot to Egypt encouraged Lot to want to live in the cities, which ultimately led him to take his family to Sodom.

In the destruction of Sodom, Abraham lost a daughter-in-law, two granddaughters and their husbands, and possibly some great grandchildren.

Do you not think Abraham must have said to himself, "I wish I had never gone to Egypt."

- 2. Abraham took Hagar, an Egyptian woman who became a handmaid to Sarah, back to the Promised Land with his family.**

Hagar became a means by which Abraham and Sarah tried to circumvent God's promise to them.

Hagar became a thorn in the side of Sarah which made her a thorn bush in the side of Abraham.

Hagar's son Ishmael was perceived by Sarah as a threat to Isaac, and she pressured Abraham to send mother and child off alone into the desert.

And most of this does not appear at all to be the fault of Hagar, but of Abraham, who took a detour to Egypt.

Don't you think Abraham must have said a thousand times, I wish I had never gone to Egypt.

Folks, we like Abraham and Sarah, men and women of faith and men and women who desire to be and strive to be faithful, are still tempted by the tempter, and one of the ways he often tempts us is to take a detour, to go somewhere that is not on God's path for us.

CONCLUSION: I was driving back last Wednesday from a meeting I attended in Orlando, literally trucking toward PC westward on 1-10 toward the church for evening services. I had my phone set on maps, not because I did not know the way, but because I like to take the connection on Country Road 167 between 231 and I-10 at Marianna, and I did not want to miss the exit.

But the devil in my phone kicked up a message that said, "Take the next exit and save 14 minutes!" I looked quickly at the screen to see where it was leading me, but before I could really examine it, I was at the exit, and seemingly my steering wheel, all by itself began to take the exit ramp. So I said, "Let's see where this goes."

Now folks, I am living proof that is a bad thing to say when you're in a truck or car just driving down the road, but it's a disastrous thing to say when we are talking about traveling the road of life.

I took the detour, as I have often been prone to do. You say, "Well, where did it take you?" And I say, "I have no idea." However, do you know that things are not good when you make four left turns in a row?

Eventually, I got out. I ended up on my beloved little 167 and came on home to PC, only about 14 minutes later than I otherwise would have arrived.

At the very best, detours while driving cost us time. At worst, they can leave us wandering.

Detours in faith, detours in faithfulness are much more costly.

Just ask Abraham.

- **Are you a friend of God?** Do you talk to Him, listen to His Word, desire to please Him, obey His counsel and commands?
- **Do you maintain the proper balance between upholding God's standard and loving with God's compassion?**
- **Are you on a spiritual detour?** Are you going directions God has not told you to go and do not help get you to where God wants you to be?