

THE FAITH JOURNEY BEGINS

Genesis 12:1-9

Sermon for Peace Church

September 13, 2009

PURPOSE – To call people to the journey of faith in God.

MAIN IDEA – Faith is a journey begun by a call from God, leaving securities in the hope of being a part of his blessing to the world.

INTRODUCTION

Let's open our Bibles to Hebrews 11 (p. 1874)

1. We begin today a new series of sermons on the person of ABRAHAM.

In our Bible, he is known as "The Father of Faith".

He is a person who illustrates what faith IS & DOES.

(i) Hebrews 11:1 tells us that, "*Faith is being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see.*"

Verse 6 adds – "Without faith it is impossible to please God, (Abraham illustrates a MOST IMPORTANT SUBJECT) without faith it's impossible to please God - because anyone who comes to Him must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who earnestly seek Him."

(ii) Moving down to verse 8, Abraham illustrates faith in this way:

Read vv. 8-10

2. The image of faith that Abraham's life gives is that of a JOURNEY.

- Many of us have been on journeys this summer – Smoky Mountains, Alaska, Dominican Republic, Mississippi.

- With journeys, you have a STARTING POINT. You have a DESTINATION. You TRAVEL. You MOVE.

(i) Verse 8 – “Abraham was called to go to a place that he would later receive as his inheritance.”

A. Here’s a MAP of Abraham’s FAITH-JOURNEY (screen) – 1800 BC

- It began in UR (Mesopotamian Valley – Tigris / Euphrates Rivers)
- Went up to Harran and then down to Canaan

(ii) His journey was taken in faith because there was a PROMISED PLACE he was heading to.

FAITH travels in the hope of God’s promises.

Faith is not a WISH for a better future;

Faith UNDERSTANDS & TRUSTS God’s promises for a better future.

A. So through faith we please God because it means we take Him seriously – and we MOVE on His promises.

I.e. – If the store manager at Sears in RiverOaks Mall put a promise in the newspaper saying, “You’ll get a free suit if you come to our store at this Saturday noon”, faith not only reads & understands that promise – faith travels there!

Faith is knowledge & TRUST that the Promise-Giver means what he says

So Faith is expressed in action.

Abraham is the father of faith for Christians – because he acted on God’s promises throughout His life.

3. Now Verse 10 states that in this age, he never did see the ultimate fulfillment of God’s promises.

Abraham was looking forward to the city with foundations, whose architect & builder is God – the New Jerusalem. = God’s holy society – Heaven on earth in the age to come!

(i) and that destination is also the ones Christians travel toward in FAITH. We're on the same journey as Abraham.

A. His particular travels took him to the land of Canaan, looking for that city.

B. Our particular travels take us to Jesus, looking for that same city. In the new covenant Jesus is the Promised Land. He is Abraham's Canaan. He is the "place" we go, in order to one day make it to that ETERNAL, HEAVENLY CITY.

Those particulars are different. BUT THE FAITH THAT PLEASES GOD IS THE SAME!

4. THAT FAITH IS A JOURNEY! - *"Come, follow me", Jesus says.*

= walk / travel / move

Are you on the journey of faith? Are we?

Or might you better be described as th person who reads that Sears advertisement & simply turns the page?

Do you know God's promises for you?

Do you believe them? Are you acting on them?

Without faith it is impossible to please God.

Today let's read how Abraham's faith journey begins by turning back to Genesis 12 – the CALL OF ABRAHAM.

Read Genesis 12:1-9

I. GO

Let me draw out 4 dynamics of the Faith Journey from this passage. The first 2 are TWO sides of the same coin – GO & LEAVE.

- That's how some translations have verse 1. Others, like our NIV, have leave & go.
- Bottom line, you can't do one without the other.

1. “Go to the land I will show you”

- As I’ve said, for us today that LAND is JESUS. In the New Covenant He is our Holy Land.

= His person in His character & mission & ministry

(i) The faith-call is about life IN CHRIST

- The faith journey is about you ADVANCING in Jesus!

2. It begins very personal:

> “Abram / John / Heino / Joy – here’s where you need to move forward in Jesus – in your character or ministry in Jesus.”

THE JOURNEY OF FAITH IS PERSONAL.

(i) Acts 7:2 – Stephen was recounting the life of Abraham to the Jewish religious leaders and says, “*The God of glory appeared to our father Abraham while he was still in Mesopotamia, before he lived in Haran.*” ... God broke into Abram’s life.

FAITH IS NOT A LIFESTYLE. IT IS A RELATIONSHIP WITH GOD WHO IS CALLING YOU FORWARD IN JESUS – who He is & what He does.

It is personal – “The God of glory appeared to Abraham ...”

3. And here’s some great news – there wasn’t any particular GOODNESS that Abraham had that led to God calling him. He didn’t MERIT God’s appearance.

He was an idol-worship in UR!

He was a PAGAN.

Josh. 24:2 – Joshua says to the Israelites, “*Long ago your forefathers, including Terah the father of Abraham and Nahor, lived beyond the River and worshipped other gods – but the Lord took Abraham and led him throughout Canaan.*”

(i) It doesn’t matter who you are. It doesn’t matter where you’re at. There’s not enough goodness in us ever to merit God’s call.

Today He calls you to faith just because He wants you to advance in Jesus!

A. DON'T BE DEAF TO HIS CALL thinking, "I'm not ready."

You're as ready as you'll ever be to start moving forward in Jesus!

FAITH is a relationship with God begun with a personal call to grow in Jesus.

II. LEAVE

1. The GOING is accompanied by a LEAVING!

v. 1- *"Leave your COUNTRY, your PEOPLE and your FATHER'S HOUSEHOLD."*

There's a lot in that line!

You can't journey in faith without a leaving. And that's the tough part.

(i) Leave your COUNTRY – Abram lived in UR. It was a pretty advanced society.

It was a well-to-do city, had a lot of culture – had a library, university.

He had to leave it to become a TENT-DWELLER – a NOMAD!

(ii) Leave your PEOPLE – your kin, your subculture, your denominational networks, your "tribal loyalties" – as Towner puts in the quote on your outline.

(iii) Leave your FATHER'S HOUSEHOLD – *"That nuclear unit of relationships, wherein the lonely individual finds the guidance of elders, the loyal support of siblings, the helping hand in moments of crisis."*

(Just as you won't advance in MARRIAGE without the man leaving his mother & father & becoming united to his wife ... leave & cleave!)

2. There's an INEVITABLE LEAVING that comes in the journey of faith.

- We know that here at Peace. In our call, we recognize that we have to leave patterns of worship, structure, program in order to grow in Jesus' character & mission.

(i) In the gospels, when Jesus called people to Himself – it always came with a LEAVING.

A. “Leave your nets” / Leave your father (let the dead bury the dead) / Leave your riches ... Leave your securities - so that you can journey forward in the kingdom with My security”, Jesus said time & again, calling people to the life of faith.

B. “*He who does not love Me OVER father or mother is not worthy of Me*”, Jesus said in Matthew 10.

It reminds of a saying, “*The minute you grow up is the minute you don’t care what your parents think.*”

= Meaning, for Christians, I CARE WHAT GOD THINKS & VALUES above all ... and then I’ll factor in what others think!

3. What might you have to leave to walk the journey of faith?

CHARACTER habits?

Stifling TRADITIONS?

I.e. - I once served a church that had a tradition of everybody going to Grandmas for coffee after Sunday morning worship. A lot of members did it. Then we discerned that it’d be good for us to use that time to grow in JESUS-MINISTRY.

= to welcome newcomers at the church by inviting them to coffee at our homes. IT WAS A CALL OF FAITH.

There was a “leaving” that had to happen of Sunday morning patters ... IT DIDN’T. ...It was too ingrained – TRIBAL WORSHIP

(i) What PEOPLE might you have to leave to journey in faith? Friends? Relatives?

Ray Stedman writes, “*The opinions of others, the traditions of men, the pressures from family and friends, the attitudes of our employers and others around us – these are the kindred we must be willing to forsake when we hear the call of God.*”

4. The journey of faith comes with that cost!

Some commentators see in Abraham's story a STRUGGLE with this.

(i) He first hears the call of God down in UR. He does set out. But, along with his wife, he takes along his DAD & BROTHER. They travel up to Haran with him.

So some commentators wonder about that. Yea, he left his country and his tribal group – but he just couldn't leave his dad & brother. ... It is interesting that after his dad dies there in HARAN, he moves on to Canaan.

A. It's not easy to let go. Abraham, as we'll see, is not a perfect model of faith! But God's very merciful to him ... and us.

“GO & LEAVE” is how the faith journey begins.

IT'S NOT ALL – there's 2 more parts – and the THIRD'S the most exciting!

III. HOPE

1. God gives to Abraham – and you & I – a PROMISE FOR our journey.

“I will make you into a great nation and I will bless you;

I will make your name great, and you will be a blessing.

I will bless those who bless you, and whoever curses you I will curse;

And all peoples on earth will be blessed through you.”

2. God has an AGENDA in this world. It's to bring BLESSING to it.

= acceptance, favor, healing, wholeness, peace, security

= good homes, sound businesses, joy, humility, laughter, LOVE!

Those He calls on the faith-journey, He promises to be part of this wonderful program of BLESSING THE WORLD! (... ISN'T THAT COOL!?!)

(i) In calling him on the journey of faith, God says to Abraham, “I WILL BLESS YOU ... TO BE A BLESSING.”

A. And He wraps Himself into Abraham's life - like a parent with a child – *I will bless those who bless you and curse those who curse you.*" (You curse my kid, you're cursing me; you bless my kid, you're blessing me!)

= I'll IDENTIFY myself with you. We'll become like one another in character & mission – so that, wherever you go, you'll either be a blessing or curse. If people ignore you, they'll be cursed. If they receive you, they'll be blessed.

3. Now as Christians we understand this promise to be ultimately fulfilled in the ultimate faith-walker, Jesus Christ.

Jesus is both PHYSICALLY & SPIRITUALLY the Son of Abraham.

He is uniquely the human being with whom God is identified. He is ONE with God in character and mission.

He is the One who left COUNTRY (of God's glory), people (heavenly society), His Father's household (even unto death on the cross).

He is the One through whom all people on earth RECEIVE the blessing of God.

(i) Therefore it is IN JESUS, that this promise becomes ours!

"I will bless you to be a blessing", God says to people & churches who walk the faith-journey into Jesus' character and mission.

Like Abraham, that's our HOPE!

A. The apostle Paul understood this and taught it.

2 Corinthians 2:14 he writes, *'Thanks be to God who lead us in triumphal procession IN CHRIST and through us spreads everywhere the fragrance of the knowledge of Him. For we are the AROMA of Christ among those who are being saved and those who are perishing. To the one we are the smell of death; to the other, the fragrance of LIFE!'*

= those who curse us are cursed – cause they're rejecting Jesus ... but those who receive us are BLESSED. They are receiving Jesus – who is the fragrance of LIFE!

4. So in Christ, the faith journey holds the SAME PROMISE that God gave to Abraham.

We journey to “Canaan” – we journey into Jesus’ character and mission so that we will become “great” (from a heavenly perspective) and bring God’s blessing into this world!

DOES THAT HOPE EXCITE YOU? IT’S GOD’S PROMISE FOR YOU! FOR PEACE!!

He doesn’t just want us to go on a faith journey for the sake of exercise. It’s for the sake of bringing His blessing to others!

WILL YOU TAKE THAT JOURNEY?

IV. TRUST

ABRAHAM DID.

HE LEFT. HE WENT. HE HOPED. HE TRUSTED! His action shows his trust!

1. Verse 4 – *He left, as the Lord had told him; and Lot went with him (his nephew). Abram was 75 years old when he set out from Haran.*

He was NO SPRING PUP!

The journey of faith doesn’t stop when you hit 40 or 50 or 60 or even 70!

It NEVER STOPS in this age.

There is always more of Jesus for you to journey into – His character, His mission & ministry!

2. And here’s the special gift that comes when we act in obedience to the faith-call we are given:

WHEN HE GETS TO CANAAN, GOD APPEARS TO HIM, CONFIRMS His promise, and reveals more details: “To your offspring I will give this land.” (v. 7)

(i) God appeared to him in UR – and there’s no record of God doing that again until Abraham has taken his step of obedience and made it to Canaan.

Then God gives him FRESH CONFIRMATION that Abraham’s on track with His purposes to be a blessing to the world!

3. The journey of faith requires trusts. We must take that next step. Then God comes ALIVE; REAL again, a FRESH anointing comes revealing more details.

So Abram builds an altar. He worships the Lord there at the Tree. He goes on to pitch his tent on a hill not far away. Builds another altar there and continues to call on the name of the Lord!

(i) Those altars are places of prayer & worship. They are symbols of fellowship with the Lord.

THOSE WHO TAKE THE JOURNEY OF FAITH are gifted with fresh anointing of spiritual fellowship.

CONCLUSION

1. ARE YOU ON THAT JOURNEY?

Perhaps at one point you were, but you’ve lost your way. Now you’re sitting there on the side of the road going nowhere in your life with God.

2. From Abraham’s witness, remember:

- The journey is into Jesus – HIS CHARACTER & MISSION & MINISTRY
- The call comes today, JUST AS YOU ARE! – It is a call to put your life in Him or GROW in Him.

- It will require leaving things behind – “your country, your people, your father’s household”

- But it comes with a great promise: You will be part of God’s blessing program for this cursed world.

- And in acting upon it, you will enter fresh fellowship with God. You will know His presence in your life!

... Without such faith it is impossible to please God, because anyone who comes to him must believe that He exists and that He rewards those who earnestly seek Him. (Heb. 11:6) ... AMEN!