

BY FAITH - ABRAHAM

Good morning!

It's great to be with you today!

I know that it has been a tough week for some of you. It hasn't been easy for me and some of my closest friends as well. So I am trusting that the message today in our "By Faith" series will speak to your hearts and be encouraging and helpful.

Today we are going to be looking at one of the larger than life characters in the bible! Abraham. Affectionately known to many... as Father Abraham!

Now I don't know who picture when you think of him? But for me... I have this idea of a tall, bearded, Gandalf type of a man! I have no idea whether that's right or not. But there is no doubt that he was a great fatherly figure, patriarch of our faith.

In the history of the world, there are a few great big personalities... who just seem to rise above the rest, and chief among these... is Abraham.

Christians, Jews, and Muslims... all have a high respect for him as the "Father" of their faith. Jesus however... was very clear... that Abraham's faith was in Him. Jesus himself said;

"Your father Abraham rejoiced that he would see my day. He saw it and was glad." (John 8:56)

So – Abraham was also looking to Jesus! He was a great man, who lived... By Faith. I hope this series is challenging you... to also be someone... who lives By Faith.

So then, what can we learn from Abraham? If you look closely at his story... you will see times when he displayed remarkable faith... and at other times... you will be hiding behind your hands thinking... *"Abraham! Why? Why would you do that?!"*

So while he is this incredible character, who has been partially idolised... he was actually pretty normal like you and I. Let me give you a bit of the backstory on him from the Genesis account before we turn our attention to Hebrews chapter 11.

WHO WAS ABRAHAM?

Well... we don't hear too much about him before God called him. His first introduction is in Genesis chapter 11... interesting how that ties in with Hebrews chapter 11! But all it tells us... is a bit about of his family tree, and the fact that he and his wife could not have children – I mean, what a terrible way to introduce someone!

It is sad how easy it is for the things that we perceive as faults in our lives... to become wrapped up in our identity. Yet Abram... as he was known then... was called by God... and God changed his identity - he went from Abram... to Abraham... and from childless... to father of a nation.

God still does that today you know... He changes us. He changes our identities. He transforms us! And makes us his children.

In Genesis we read that the people who Abram would have come from in Babylon, were a very godless and arrogant bunch! They tried to build a kingdom of their own apart from God... as a testimony to their greatness! Maybe we are not that different to them?

And what was God's response to that? To call Abram out from among them, to be a man with a new name, and a man who would become the father of a nation that God would make great... by His grace.

So the story of Genesis begins to shift, from creations catastrophic spiral down into sin and wickedness, to God calling people into Covenant. You might have heard of the Abrahamic Covenant. This refers to the promise that God made to Abraham to make him the father of a great nation! To make him a model... of a life of faith, and one of the most important people in the bible.

What else do we know about him? We know he was from Ur of the Chaldeans, present day Iraq, and the key city of the Chaldeans was Babylon.

Jewish tradition says, that Terah, Abram's Dad, owned a shop that made and sold idols, which Abram worked in growing up. So he was the kid whose father made the idols! This great man of faith, literally came from the idol factory!

There are some wild stories told about him when he worked in this shop, in the Midrash, which are probably more based upon the 'hero' status of Abraham than on the truth. But what we do know for sure from the Bible, was that Terah his father worshiped other gods. In Joshua it says;

“Long ago your ancestors, including Terah the father of Abraham and Nahor, lived beyond the Euphrates River and worshiped other gods.” (Joshua 24:2b)

It is against this backdrop... of believing in many gods and worshipping idols... that we are introduced to Abram... and that God reveals Himself to him... as the only true God.

But he still had much to learn... After God made this covenant with Abram in Genesis 15... In the very next chapter, Genesis 16, Abram falls into sexual sin with Hagar.

God then... institutes circumcision... as the outward sign of the Abrahamic covenant in Genesis 17. Men the lesson is pretty apt! You do the crime, you pay the time! Right!

The reason God chose to mark his men on this part of their anatomy is not explained by God... but it makes sense right! It is generally a very important part to us men – the means by which children are conceived, and the cause of some of our greatest sins. Good place to have a constant reminder of your covenant with God!

So circumcision began in Genesis 17 with Abram, who was ninety-nine years of age! Not a nice thing to have to go through at age 99! But it was a sign of his covenant with God, just like the rainbow... was the sign of God's covenant with Noah.

And Abram was circumcised along with every member of his household, as God had commanded. He did this... because God promised that any male who was not circumcised would be cut off altogether by God. And ever since then, Jews have circumcised their sons on the eighth day religiously.

So God spoke to Abram, and Abram responded to God's command in faith, falling down on his face to worship God.

God then changed his name from Abram... which means "exalted father," to Abraham... which means "father of a multitude."

God then also changed his wife's name from Sarai to Sarah, which means "princess." God also promised... that through Sarah the princess, kings would come, with the ultimate fulfilment... being the birth of the King of Kings, Jesus Christ.

So... with that as a backdrop to Abraham from Genesis. Let's take a look at what Hebrews 11 says about him. How did this childless son of an idol maker... become one of the biggest hero's of our faith? Let's see...

Picking up from last week... Hebrews 11 verse 8...

By faith Abraham, when called to go to a place he would later receive as his inheritance, obeyed and went, even though he did not know where he was going. (Hebrews 11:8)

By faith... Abraham obeyed and went.

Point 1 today if you are taking notes, write this down...

1. LIVING BY FAITH MEANS BEING OBEDIENT TO GODS WILL (Heb 11:8)

Obedience is so important for the life of a Christian. If you were to ask me what spiritual depth looks like in a person's life, I would say, it looks like obedience. God called Abraham, and he obeyed and went.

Hebrews does not give us a lot of background to Abram's call – where he was, what was he doing at the time, how God spoke to him? The only details we have... is that he was 75 years old... so it's never too late to listen to God!

Genesis 12 says this;

The LORD had said to Abram, "Go from your country, your people and your father's household to the land I will show you. ² "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. ³ I will bless those who bless you, and whoever curses you I will curse; and all peoples on earth will be blessed through you." ⁴ So Abram went, as the LORD had told him; and Lot went with him. Abram was seventy-five years old when he set out from Harran. (Genesis 12:1-4)

Abram was given a promise and an instruction. He wasn't given a detailed action plan of all he had to do, the steps he would go through. Yet he packed up his family and set off. He obeyed and went. At age 75!

Why?

It can only be because he was absolutely convinced about the promises God gave him. His decision... was based on faith in who God said He was... and in God's plan for his life.

We are not told what the rest of his family thought... we are just told he obeyed and went! That's a great lesson for us on how to live by faith. But there is another great lesson that comes out of this! Second point...

2. LIVING BY FAITH MEANS VENTURING INTO THE UNKNOWN (Heb 11:8b)

Abraham obeyed and went – **even though he did not know where he was going. (Hebrews 11:8b)**

I wonder how all us control freaks out there feel about that? Right! When we live by faith in God – most often, God will lead us to unknown places. Unfamiliar places. We won't always know where we are going. But we need to trust God.

When God calls you to do something – can we demand a detailed plan for every step? No. We have to step out in obedience. Psalm 119 reminds us, sometimes God lights up the whole path ahead of us, but more often than not, He gives us a lamp for our feet, revealing only the first step.

I wonder... And it's a sad thought... But I wonder how many of us have up to now... missed out on God's calling on our lives... because we have been too afraid to take that first step.

Maybe we were worried about what or who we would have to leave behind?

Maybe we refused to take the first step... before God gave us the detailed action plan, full of assurances that it will all be easy and all turn out ok.

But that is not faith, that is control. God finds it very hard to work with people who want to stay in control. Faith steps out in trust. My friends, trust in God. Living by faith... means venturing out into the unknown with God.

Abraham was willing to trust and obey. That's why he is honoured for his faith! God also holds him up as an example for us, not only for his initial obedience, but for his faithfulness in seeing it through.

Thirdly..

3. LIVING BY FAITH MEANS REMAINING FAITHFUL TO WHERE GOD CALLS YOU (Heb 11:9)

Can you say with assurance that you have been faithful to the call of God upon your life? Verse 9 says this of Abraham;

By faith he made his home in the promised land like a stranger in a foreign country; he lived in tents, as did Isaac and Jacob, who were heirs with him of the same promise. (Hebrews 11:9)

He made his home there. He never ran back to what he used to know at the first sign of hardship. He stuck it out. He made his home where God called him. He was faithful to see it through. Verse 10 goes on;

For he was looking forward to the city with foundations, whose architect and builder is God. (Hebrews 11:10)

And because of his faith - Verse 12 says;

And so from this one man, and he as good as dead, came descendants as numerous as the stars in the sky and as countless as the sand on the seashore. (Hebrews 11:10)

Abraham knew... that God could do so much more with his life... than he could do by himself. So many of us... place faith in our hopes and our dreams... in what we want... and in what we can achieve... instead of placing our future in God's hands. Trust me – he is a better builder.

We saw last week just how silly it was for Abraham and Sarah to believe they could start having children at the age of 90. We know that Sarah laughed. So why did Abraham believe?

I don't think it was desperation – I know for many people who face infertility, this is such a painful journey. But Abraham believed the picture that God painted for his future. Sadly, they did mess up the plan when they deviated... and decided to try and have a child with Hagar, but that was not God's picture. That was them learning not to try and take control.

God's plan required the miraculous – and the miraculous is something beyond our control - which can be very scary.

So my friends... I want to encourage you to remain faithful to where God has called you. Remember that God is more capable than you are to build that. So trust him. Trust Him... by faith.

By faith Abel;

By faith Enoch;

By faith Noah;

By faith Sarah; and...

By faith... Abraham...

All these people were still living by faith when they died. They did not receive the things promised; they only saw them and welcomed them from a distance, admitting that they were foreigners and strangers on earth. ¹⁴ People who say such things show that they are looking for a country of their own. ¹⁵ If they had been thinking of the country they had left, they would have had opportunity to return. ¹⁶ Instead, they were longing for a better country—a heavenly one. Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God, for he has prepared a city for them. (Hebrews 11:13-16)

This chapter is about many people of faith... not just Abraham. God not only wants to work in Abraham's life. He wants to work in your life. He wants you... to live by faith as well.

This chapter also teaches us... that not even these great giants of the faith, got to see everything they were trusting God for... happen in their time. They grasped the bigger picture of what God was doing. They knew that they were just passing through, and they knew the full fulfilment of the promise... was still to be revealed.

Abraham lived to see some of the promises of God fulfilled to him in his lifetime, but not all. He got to the Promised Land... but due to famine... he was not well established there... and so he did not see all that God had promised come true.

Yet... many generations later, led by Joshua... Israel finally took its rightful place in the Promised Land.

The lesson? In a quick fix, result orientated world... this can feel crazy... but God calls us to think big-picture, long-term, and to think about those who come after us. God often works through generations of families. That is the case with Abraham.

That is why reaching children and the next generation is so important to us at King of Kings – because it is not just about us! It is all about God's big-plan... and that involves our children... and our children's children. You may not see all the fruit of your faith now, but that does not mean your effort is wasted. So don't give up. Keep living by faith.

The final lesson we can learn from Abraham on faith today is this...and just a warning... it's a toughie!

4. LIVING BY FAITH MEANS BEING WILLING TO SACRIFICE IT ALL FOR GOD (Heb 11:17-19)

Abraham is honoured for his faith, not only for obeying the call of God, for venturing out into the unknown, for remaining faithful to that call, but also most significantly... for passing the ultimate test... making the toughest choice of his life, by being willing to sacrifice everything he held dear. Here is how Hebrews says it in verse 17;

By faith Abraham, when God tested him, offered Isaac as a sacrifice. He who had embraced the promises was about to sacrifice his one and only son, ¹⁸ even though God had said to him, "It is through Isaac that your offspring will be reckoned." ¹⁹ Abraham reasoned that God could even raise the dead, and so in a manner of speaking he did receive Isaac back from death. (Hebrews 11:17-19)

Abraham faced many challenges to his faith during his lifetime. And many times he really messed up. He actually holds the world record... in trying to pass his wife off as his sister, just to save his bacon – and we know he did it twice! There is a Afrikaans word for that... Swak! Very swak!

He certainly is not a picture perfect hero of faith in all he did – he was human, he was fearful, he was pretty normal. Yet when God tested him around who was most

important in his life... and what position God held in his life... Abraham came through.

This is an extraordinary story of faith and sacrifice – And I don't think we can ever understand it all. It is crazy enough for us to imagine sacrificing any of our children... but add to that the fact that this was the promised child!

You see... Parents, don't freak out! God never intended Abraham to go through with the sacrifice... even though some of us... might be willing to trade ours in at the moment! Sorry. That was a joke!

But seriously, it was a test of what was important for Abraham. Now that he had his longed-for-son.... would he still obey God?

Had his son... become an idol in his life... replacing God as the most important thing?

Abraham's faith came through, not knowing that God would stop him – he made his decision even though it must have been the hardest choice he ever had to make.

It's an interesting question to ask yourself – what would God ask you to sacrifice on an altar for Him? What would be your toughest choice? Your biggest sacrifice? When faith... and your desires compete with each other. Have you weighed that up?

CONCLUSION

So how is God speaking to you today? Is He calling you to step out in faith? In obedience? Is he calling you to venturing out into the unknown with him in some way? Are you still being faithful to what he has called you to do? Or are you considering turning back? And are you putting him first? Or is there something else more important in your life that you are not willing to give up?

As we end our look at Abraham today. It is important not to miss the reflection on Jesus. Because the story of Abraham... is also a picture to us of the story of Jesus.

Just like God called Abraham to leave his home... Jesus was also called to leave his home in heaven.

Just like God blessed those who blessed Abraham... we are blessed through Jesus.

Just like God made a covenant with Abraham, to make him the father of many nations, a covenant of circumcision. Jesus also presents us with a covenant. However, His is not circumcision of the flesh... but that of the heart. His covenant removes sin from our hearts... and seals the promise of eternal life.

Finally, just like Abraham was called to sacrifice his one and only son, we know this was a reflection of the ultimate sacrifice to come, of God the father, who was willing to sacrifice his one and only son. Jesus Christ.

What does this mean for you and me?

It means firstly – That our relationship with God, is all tied up in Jesus. It means Abraham's real descendants... the real people of faith, are just those by natural birth,

but those who are descendants by new birth. Those with hearts circumcised by the Holy Spirit... those blessed and welcomed by the heavenly father, who live in a covenant relationship with God... by faith in Jesus Christ.

Everyone starts their relationship with God just like Abram did, just a regular sinner needing a Saviour. Where are you at in your relationship with God today? Do you need to accept Jesus as your saviour? Who layed down his life, that you might be saved?

Or, as a child of God, is God wanting to teach you something again about how to live by faith. Maybe you have been living by fear, or by control? It is impossible to please God without faith! We are called to be a people of faith! God honours faith!

Let's pray together.