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Abraham: Faith in the Promise of Redemption **Hebrews 11:8-12, 17-19**

INTRODUCTION

Last week we talked about how God took Noah and His family and spared them from the flood. We saw how God had Noah build a huge boat for the purpose of sparing a family of eight. And we remembered that in contrast to God saving a family of eight through a giant boat, he saved millions through the death of His Son on a Roman Cross.

But what we soon learn is that even Noah had his faults, for we discover in Genesis 9 that he got drunk from drinking too much wine and fell asleep in his tent. What happened next was that one of his sons, Ham, looked upon his father's nakedness and then told his brothers.

Ham did not cover his father's nakedness like he should have; instead he dishonored his father by reveling in his father's sin, but his two other brothers grieved for their father and covered him in an honorable way.

Ham's sin of dishonoring his father resulted in his son Canaan to be cursed. One of the things we learn about Ham's son is that his descendants became a nuisance to Abraham and his descendants.

But that is not all, through Ham's descendants emerges Nimrod who is known as a mighty hunter (hunter of men) who builds his own empire. Instead of calling on the name of Yahweh, the people of Nimrod's empire wanted to make a name for themselves by building a tower reaching to the heavens. So what does God do? He confuses their languages and thus the birth of nations.

Does God decide to wipe out humanity again? No, because the God of the Bible is a covenant keeping God, so He chooses one of Noah's sons, Shem, to be the one in whom the promised seed would come: Abraham is the descendent of Shem through whom God promises to bless all nations.

There are four things we learn from the book of Hebrews about Abraham and his faith in the promise of Redemption...

1. Abraham Followed God

⁸ *By faith Abraham obeyed when he was called to go out to a place that he was to receive as an inheritance. And he went out, not knowing where he was going.*

Turn in your Bibles to Genesis 12. Abraham is minding his business doing his own thing and

what happens? God comes on the scene and calls Abraham,

Now the Lord said to Abram, "Go from your country and your kindred and your father's house to the land that I will show you. And I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing." (Genesis 12:1-2)

God seeks out Abram [Abraham] in Ur and calls him to be His man! Are we seeing a theme here? The God of the universe sought out Adam and Eve, He sought out Noah, and now He seeks out Abraham. Abraham was not standing in a line of volunteers waiting to be picked so that he could be on God's team, and there was nothing in Abraham that would warrant God's favor.

In fact, Abraham came from a pagan ancestry, listen to Joshua 24:2, *Joshua said to all the people, "Thus says the Lord, the God of Israel, 'Long ago, your fathers lived beyond the Euphrates, Terah, the father of Abraham and of Nahor; and they served other gods.'"*

The point is that God did not look down on earth and say, hum, that Abram guy is somebody I could really use on my team. No, for whatever the reason, God saw Abraham and He chose him to be one of the key agents in bringing about His redemptive promise because God wanted to... end of story!

So what was Abraham's response? Oh God, come on; everything I know is here; I just established a great relationship with my neighbor; the pay is good here, if I go to this place your calling me to I might have to take a cut in salary. Is that Abraham's response? NO.

God calls Abraham to leave his home to go to a land that He will show him... and Abraham goes. He leaves all that is familiar to him and follows God. But Abraham did not follow God simply because God said go, Abraham left Ur because God told him, *I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing.* (Genesis 12:2)

In essence, God told Abraham that he would be the avenue through whom God would establish a great nation. It would be through Abraham that God would bring the promised Redeemer.

And what the book of Hebrews helps us understand is that Abraham, in faith, believed God with such a confidence that he was able to leave his homeland for a new home he had never seen before nor would he ever possess; it was would become the land of his descendants.

But not only did Abraham follow God...

2. Abraham Looked for the City of God

⁹ *By faith he went to live in the land of promise, as in a foreign land, living in tents with Isaac and Jacob, heirs with him of the same promise.* ¹⁰ *For he was looking forward to the city that has foundations, whose designer and builder is God.*

The writer of Hebrews tells us that Abraham lived in tents with Isaac and Jacob. This is the way Abraham lived his life. For Abraham, it was not so much the physical manifestation of God's promise that kept him going, it was the promise of God alone that kept Abraham moving towards the land God promised him.

For Abraham, the promise of God was as significant as if it was something he could experience and touch. He moved and lived among the inhabitants of Palestine; Abraham was a nomad who looked to the promise of God and believed with confidence that even though he was a foreigner in a strange land, the land in which he was an alien would be the land of his descendants.

How was Abraham able to wait so long to see the reality of God's promise of a son? He was not looking for a commonwealth that was subject to this world; no, he was looking for the commonwealth of God, a city unlike any city ever built by man: One, *"that has foundations, whose designer and builder is God."* Abraham was looking for the day when paradise would be restored and God would build His city on earth.

Abraham was looking for that place that Peter referred to, *"an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven for you, who by God's power are being guarded through a faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time."* (1 Peter 1:4-5).

If Abraham lived down the street from you, he would be the guy labeled as being "so heavenly minded that he is no earthly good." This is what the world would have us think, that it is not normal to be preoccupied with heavenly things, but God's Word has something entirely different to say, *"You can not be any earthly good if you are not heavenly minded."*

This is why we read in the Bible in Colossians 3:1, *"If then you have been raised with Christ, seek the things that are above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God."* Somehow Abraham, with warts and all, understood that there was a reality other than the world he knew and it was this reality that made living a nomad's life worth while. But that is just part of the deal, Abraham was also convinced that God would be faithful to His promise that he and his wife would have a son.

Abraham not only was called by God, but...

3. Abraham was Blessed by God (verses 11-12)

¹¹ *By faith Sarah herself received power to conceive, even when she was past the age, since she considered him faithful who had promised.* ¹² *Therefore from one man, and him as good as dead, were born descendants as many as the stars of heaven and as many as the innumerable grains of sand by the seashore.*

Do you know what the name Abram means? Exalted father. Do you know how old Abraham was before his first son was born? Eighty-six years old! Can you imagine what life was like for Abraham and Sarah as they traveled?

Stranger: "So what's your name?"

Abraham: "Abram."
Stranger: "Abram?"
Abraham: "Abram!"
Stranger: "Where is your children exalted father?"

But Abraham believed God regardless of the fact that he was getting too old to father any children. Turn in your Bibles to Genesis 15:1-6.

"And he believed the Lord, and he counted it to him as righteousness." (Genesis 15:6)

In the book of Romans, we read of Abraham...

What then shall we say was gained by Abraham, our forefather according to the flesh? ² For if Abraham was justified by works, he has something to boast about, but not before God. ³ For what does the Scripture say? "Abraham believed God, and it was counted to him as righteousness." ⁴ Now to the one who works, his wages are not counted as a gift but as his due. ⁵ And to the one who does not work but trusts him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is counted as righteousness... (Romans 4:1-5).

As we reflect on Abraham and Sarah there is something we really need to understand... they were far from perfect. Even after God counted Abraham as righteous because of his faith, he and Sarah tried to take things into their own hands.

When things were not looking up for Abraham and Sarah, month after month when Sarah's hopes were crushed because she did not get pregnant, when their frustration reached its peak, Sarah came up with what she thought was a brilliant idea. Look at Genesis 16,

Now Sarai, Abram's wife, had borne him no children. She had a female Egyptian servant whose name was Hagar. ² And Sarai said to Abram, "Behold now, the LORD has prevented me from bearing children. Go in to my servant; it may be that I shall obtain children by her." And Abram listened to the voice of Sarai. ³ So, after Abram had lived ten years in the land of Canaan, Sarai, Abram's wife, took Hagar the Egyptian, her servant, and gave her to Abram her husband as a wife. ⁴ And he went in to Hagar, and she conceived. And when she saw that she had conceived, she looked with contempt on her mistress. ⁵ And Sarai said to Abram, "May the wrong done to me be on you! I gave my servant to your embrace, and when she saw that she had conceived, she looked on me with contempt. May the LORD judge between you and me!"

Anytime we think we need to assist God because we feel he needs our help, you need to know that you are going to make trouble. Abraham and Sarah really thought they were doing God a favor by having Abraham getting Hagar pregnant, and all that they did was cause tremendous grief for themselves and for Hagar.

Abraham and Sarah had a lapse in faith, so what does God do? Does God give up on them? No! He reaffirms His covenant promise with Abraham (read Genesis 17:1-8).

In Genesis 21, we discover that God does indeed fulfill his promise of a son to Abraham and Sarah, and Abraham at the ripe old age of 100 and Sarah in her 90's give birth to a son, Isaac (meaning laughter) because God has made laughter for Sarah by giving her a son.

Hebrews lists Abraham and Sarah in the Hall of Faith; they are regarded as people who followed after Yahweh. But what we learn from Genesis is that, yes they followed after God, but they didn't do it perfectly. In their lifetime Abraham was willing to trade in his wife, at the risk of her being violated sexually, for his life. Sarah encouraged her husband to engage in polygamy (and he obeyed), and he wasn't always truthful to others. Yet God called Abraham righteous! There is hope for us all!

¹¹ By faith Sarah herself received power to conceive, even when she was past the age, since she considered him faithful who had promised. ¹² Therefore from one man, and him as good as dead, were born descendants as many as the stars of heaven and as many as the innumerable grains of sand by the seashore

So not only did...
Abraham follow God,
Abraham looked for the city of God,
Abraham was blessed by God,

But finally, we learn that...

4. Abraham Believed God with Confidence (verses 17-19)

¹⁷ By faith Abraham, when he was tested, offered up Isaac, and he who had received the promises was in the act of offering up his only son, ¹⁸ of whom it was said, "Through Isaac shall your offspring be named." ¹⁹ He considered that God was able even to raise him from the dead, from which, figuratively speaking, he did receive him back.

After God made Abraham wait so long for an heir, God asked Abraham to offer his one and only beloved son as a burnt offering. In other words, God asked Abraham to kill his son! Look at Genesis 22:1-3, 5-8, 9-12.

After these things God tested Abraham and said to him, "Abraham!" And he said, "Here am I." ² He said, "Take your son, your only son Isaac, whom you love, and go to the land of Moriah, and offer him there as a burnt offering on one of the mountains of which I shall tell you." ³ So Abraham rose early in the morning, saddled his donkey, and took two of his young men with him, and his son Isaac. And he cut the wood for the burnt offering and arose and went to the place of which God had told him.

Can you imagine how painful those words must have been for Abraham to hear? You want me to what God? Sacrifice the son I had to wait 100 years to receive, and now you want me to kill him? Ok, I'll do it. So they head off and go to the land of Moriah, lets read on...

⁵ Then Abraham said to his young men, "Stay here with the donkey; I and the boy will go over there and worship and come again to you." ⁶ And Abraham took the wood of the burnt offering and laid it on Isaac his son. And he took in his hand the fire and the knife.

So they went both of them together.⁷ And Isaac said to his father Abraham, "My father!" And he said, "Here am I, my son." He said, "Behold, the fire and the wood, but where is the lamb for a burnt offering?"⁸ Abraham said, "God will provide for himself the lamb for a burnt offering, my son." So they went both of them together.

I think every step Abraham took to the alter was filled with pain and anguish over what he was about to do... kill his beloved son. And what about Isaac? "Uh Dad, I see the fire and the wood, but, ummmm, where is the offering?" What is Abraham's response? God will provide son. No commentary, no long explanation, just "God will provide son."

What does Abraham do? He follows through with the instructions...

⁹ When they came to the place of which God had told him, Abraham built the altar there and laid the wood in order and bound Isaac his son and laid him on the altar, on top of the wood.¹⁰ Then Abraham reached out his hand and took the knife to slaughter his son.

The trigger was pulled, Isaac was on the alter, the knife was ready as Abraham pressed it to his son, and as he prepared to make the cut, the angel of the Lord called to Abraham,

"Abraham, Abraham!" And he said, "Here am I."¹² He said, "Do not lay your hand on the boy or do anything to him, for now I know that you fear God, seeing you have not withheld your son, your only son, from me."¹³ And Abraham lifted up his eyes and looked, and behold, behind him was a ram, caught in a thicket by his horns. And Abraham went and took the ram and offered it up as a burnt offering instead of his son.¹⁴ So Abraham called the name of that place, "The LORD will provide"; as it is said to this day, "On the mount of the LORD it shall be provided."

What Abraham did not fully understand is that God was painting a picture of what he would do to his own Son, the promised seed that was promised to come through Eve, Noah, and Abraham. The sacrifice of God's Son would not be temporary like the sacrifice Abraham would make with the ram God provided, no, God Himself would provide the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world – Jesus Christ, who...

...committed no sin, neither was deceit found in his mouth.²³ When he was reviled, he did not revile in return; when he suffered, he did not threaten, but continued entrusting himself to him who judges justly.²⁴ He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, that we might die to sin and live to righteousness. By his wounds you have been healed. (1 Peter 2:22-25)

²¹ For our sake God made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God. (2 Corinthians 5:21)

APPLICATION

Over and over again we will see that, "all the promises of God find their Yes in Jesus Christ." Jesus is the "amen" to the promises of God. Jesus, a descendant of Abraham is how God will bless all the nations. The Jews would be the people group through whom the Messiah would

come, and through Him God would call a people to himself to be the people of God: both Jew and Gentile.

In other words, all those who place their faith and trust in Jesus Christ become children of the promise given to Abraham, for the Bible says,

For not all who are descended from Israel belong to Israel, ⁷ and not all are children of Abraham because they are his offspring, but "Through Isaac shall your offspring be named." ⁸ This means that it is not the children of the flesh who are the children of God, but the children of the promise are counted as offspring.

All of us who have placed our faith and trust in Jesus Christ have become children of the promise given to Abraham, for in Christ (the promised seed) we have life and look forward to that same city Abraham looked for, whose builder and founder is God; a city the Bible calls the New Jerusalem where we will one day live with Jesus Christ, the King of kings and Lord of lords. We will live with him as His Bride, both Jew and Gentile.

This is why we, like Abraham are labeled as aliens in a foreign land. This is not our home, for we belong to the commonwealth of God because we have been identified with Christ; we wear His color, red, the blood of Christ. We belong to His tribe, the tribe of Judah. We who have become Christians have become children of Abraham, but more importantly, children of the most high God.