

HEBREWS 11:11-19 "In Christ, God Is Not Ashamed To Be Called Our God"

Our text this morning continues with the theme of men and women of faith and the way their faith worked itself out in action found in their lives, as seen in obedience to God.

Verses 8-10 highlight the faith of Abraham, and yet as we come to verse 11 it must be noted that without the faith of his wife Sarah, the promised seed, through whom the Savior would come, would not have come to fruition; in this case Isaac.

The NAS translates verse eleven in this way.

Heb.11:11 "By faith even Sarah herself received ability to conceive, even beyond the proper time of life, since she considered Him faithful who had promised;" (NAS)

For those of you who have the NIV your rendering of this passage is as follows:

HEB 11:11 "By faith Abraham, even though he was past age - and Sarah herself was barren - was enabled to become a father because he considered him faithful who had made the promise." (NIV)

The NAS places the emphasis on the faith of Sarah, whereas the NIV places it upon Abraham. The reason for this is because the Greek text which speaks of Sarah conceiving could literally be translated, according to F.F. Bruce, "for the deposition of seed", it does not denote the receiving or conception of seed."

And so the sense would be that it was Abraham who, through faith, deposited the seed to Sarah, making him the subject and the one who is highlighted here. There are others who would suggest that the active noun used for "deposition of seed", could also be used in a passive sense, which would allow Sarah's participation to be included in the act of faith.

The only reason I digress here is to shed a little light on why there would be such a difference between trusted translations as the KJV, NKJV, NAS and others which place Sarah as the subject of faith and the NIV which does not.

To eliminate Sarah as one who played a faith-part in the conception of Isaac would be the equivalent of eliminating her from the act of conception as well.

There are some who would argue that Sarah could not be the subject here because she did not demonstrate faith when told of the promise from God that she would conceive.

If we go back to Genesis we see this clearly. God promised Abraham a son in Genesis 15:1-5, and we read in GEN 15:6 "Abram believed the LORD, and he credited it to him as righteousness."

Well, 10 years after this promise, Sarah gave up on it being fulfilled and told Abraham to have a child through Hagar, Sarah's maid servant. At this time Abraham is 86 years old, according to Gen.16:16.

Four years later the Lord appeared to Abraham, who is now 90, and reestablished the promise that Ishmael, born of the maid-servant Hagar, would not be the heir, but one from Sarah's womb.

Almost ten more years pass. Abraham is now 99 years old. This time "the Lord appeared to him by the oaks of Mamre while he was sitting at the tent door in the heat of the day." (Gen.18:1)

GEN 18:2-4 "Abraham looked up and saw three men standing nearby. When he saw them, he hurried from the entrance of his tent to meet them and bowed low to the ground. 3 He said, "If I have found favor in your eyes, my lord, do not pass your servant by. 4 Let a little water be brought, and then you may all wash your feet and rest under this tree."

Abraham then proceeds to feed these three men, who are in fact angels of the Lord, and some would say a Theophany of the Lord Himself; a theophany being an appearance of God to man in a form man would recognize, prior to Christ coming into the world, who was born of a woman.

These three then ask the question: GEN 18:9-16 "Where is your wife Sarah?" they asked him. "There, in the tent," he said. 10 Then he said, "I will surely return to you about this time next year, and Sarah your wife will have a son." Now Sarah was listening at the entrance to the tent, which was behind him. 11 Abraham and Sarah were already old and well advanced in years, and Sarah was past the age of childbearing. 12 So Sarah laughed to herself as she thought, "After I am worn out and my master is old, will I now have this pleasure? 13 Then the LORD said to Abraham, "Why did Sarah laugh and say, 'Will I really have a child, now that I am old?' 14 Is anything too hard for the LORD? I will return to you at

the appointed time next year and Sarah will have a son." 15 Sarah was afraid, so she lied and said, "I did not laugh." But he said, "Yes, you did laugh." 16 When the men got up to leave, they looked down toward Sodom, and Abraham walked along with them to see them on their way."

Where was Sarah's faith, critics would ask? Why should she be included in this list of people who are seen as one's who had faith in the promises of God, when she didn't trust God at His word concerning the birth of a child to her?

Well, the same question could be asked of any of these people in Hebrews 11. None of these people were without sin or without doubts in their lives. The purpose of the Holy Spirit in our text is not to give a detailed explanation of their lives, which would have to include their times of disobedience and doubt, but rather to show that they did have faith when it counted, and that faith showed itself in obedience as God enabled them believe.

Keep in mind that though men and women are given prominence here in our text, it is really God's faithfulness to His people which is illustrated, as He fulfills His promises and they're received by faith.

Sarah must be seen as one who had faith when it counted, otherwise Isaac would never have been born. She is a sharer in the promise with Abraham, that he would be the father of many nations.

What's interesting about Isaac's name is that it means "he laughs". It's no coincidence that we read in GEN 21:6-7 "Sarah said, "God has brought me laughter, and everyone who hears about this will laugh with me." 7 And she added, "Who would have said to Abraham that Sarah would nurse children? Yet I have borne him a son in his old age."

This same woman, who one year prior, laughed under her breath in disbelief, now laughed out loud with utter belief as the promise from God was fulfilled. This is how it often is with you and me. We don't get very excited about what God plans on doing in our lives because we don't see the end result. By faith we're told to trust God. But as we trust He will be faithful to His promises and when we actually realize them laughter and joy seems quite natural.

This is an amazing thing in Sarah's life. At any time God could have opened Sarah's womb. And yet He waits until it is seemingly impossible for her to have a child. And then He faithfully comes through just as He said He would.

We all do this at times. We wonder when God will deliver, or heal, or meet the need. We get anxious and nervous. We lose sleep and sometimes we give up on hope altogether and, with Sarah, we wonder how it is possible for such a thing to happen. And yet in God's timing we find that truly, all things are possible with God and then we finally rejoice.

The problem with that is God desires for us to have that same joy in Him and His promises even when we don't see them. Remember, God defines faith as "being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see."

And what do we see in Sarah and Abraham? Faith in God, and God being true to His promise.

HEB 11:12 "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."

Physically speaking, both Abraham and Sarah were dead in the sense that they were unable to give birth to a child. And yet what do we see with God time and time again? Out of death, He brings forth life.

This is true in the spiritual sense in that all of us were dead in our trespasses and sins and yet it is God who gives the life to us through regeneration of the Spirit as we are gifted with faith to believe in His Son for redemption.

I like the way Paul puts it in EPH 2:1-5 "As for you, you were dead in your transgressions and sins, 2 in which you used to live when you followed the ways of this world and of the ruler of the kingdom of the air, the spirit who is now at work in those who are disobedient. 3 All of us also lived among them at one time, gratifying the cravings of our sinful nature and following its desires and thoughts. Like the rest, we were by nature objects of wrath. 4 But because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, 5 made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions - it is by grace you have been saved."

If you look at the first verse of Ephesians 2 the Greek word for dead is *nekros* and it could be translated corpse. Spiritually

speaking, you and I outside of Christ, are spiritual corpses. Praise God for the resurrection power of our Lord and Savior, and praise God for the life giving ability He gave to Abraham and Sarah, through whom our Lord Jesus would ultimately be born into this world, the seed of the woman.

A.W. Pink points out that in verse 12 of our text Abraham was given the promise by God that his "descendants (would be) as numerous as the stars in the sky and as countless as the sand on the seashore. He suggests that "the double reference to the sand and the stars calls attention to the two-fold seed: the earthly and the heavenly, the natural and the spiritual Israel."

And it's quite true. The physical descendants of Abraham are those descendants of Jacob who is Israel. Just as true is the fact that not all physical descendants had faith in the promises of God, and yet we know both Jew and Gentile who believe on the Lord Jesus Christ are the children of Abraham.

This is what Paul tells us in GAL 3:7-9 "Understand, then, that those who believe are children of Abraham. 8 The Scripture foresaw that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, and announced the gospel in advance to Abraham: "All nations will be blessed through you." (Gen. 12:3; 18:18; 22:18) 9 So those who have faith are blessed along with Abraham, the man of faith."

And yet for all the promises which were fulfilled in the saints of old the greatest of promises was still unseen and yet future. And yet they remained faithful to live by faith looking forward to those promises.

HEB 11:13-16 "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. And they admitted that they were aliens 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."

These saints of old understood more than we sometimes give them credit for. They were certainly limited to some degree of being able to see clearly how all of this would be worked out by God to redeem mankind, but they knew enough to know that God would do it, and that ultimately His Savior would provide the entrance

into a better country that would last forever, with the benefits of fellowship and life with their Creator-God.

Why else would they admit "that they were aliens and strangers on earth"? This is why our writer poses the truth in HEB 11:15 "If they had been thinking of the country they had left, they would have had opportunity to return."

In other words, if Abraham and Sarah and Isaac and Jacob were longing to go into the country promised to them by God, and if that country were simply Canaan, then the only thing they would need to do was claim Canaan as their home. But that's not what they do. Instead they roamed around in the Promised Land in tents, living as Nomads who had no home and yet they always longed for a homeland which they knew was not of this world.

Dr. Donald Guthrie points out "how surprising it is that a group of nomads should seek so stable a thing as a city." And yet that's exactly what we're told about Abraham in HEB 11:10 "For he was looking forward to the city with foundations, whose architect and builder is God."

Now don't lose sight of what our writer has been doing in this letter. It is addressed to the Hebrew Christians, who in some ways were tempted by other Jews to return to the old ways of Judaism, to return to their "former country".

Our writer is encouraging his readers not to consider only the earthly when it comes to the promise of a land and a city, which is given by God. There is always the temptation to keep our eyes focused on the earthly. God says to look to Him and trust Him to bring them safely home; a home with Him forever.

But the message is for us as well. Are we tempted to go back to the familiar country? Are we tempted to return to the old ways or give up on God because He doesn't come through according to our time, or are we willing to continue on in faith and trust that He will go before us?

Are we tempted to give it all up at times and go it alone? God is reminding us that we can't go it alone. And when we try, we find that when we return to that "familiar land" that it's full of giants, and the grass really isn't greener on the other side; it just looks that way when we can't see with eyes of faith. But reality will set in sooner or later and it may take some time to find our way back.

Like the prodigal, we may find ourselves having to eat with the pigs. That's what going back to the "familiar land" will ultimately produce. God says, 'come out and be separate and trust Me to take you into the promised land where there will be true eternal peace.'

But you know, as we are faithful to walk as pilgrims and strangers in this world, seeking to please God who has called us to a new home, we have the assurance that He is pleased. That's what the end of verse 16 tells us.

HEB 11:16 "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."

I like that. As we seek that city, that eternal abode with our God and Savior, we are told that God is not ashamed to be called our God. Think about that. That's a negative way of stating a positive. It tells us that God is not only not ashamed to be called our God, He is proud to be called our God and proud to call us His children.

When Satan comes to God and accuses us before God daily and tells God how unworthy we are and how faithless we are and what scum we are, God responds, 'I am their Father and proud to be their Father because of what My Son has done on their behalf. They trust that I will bring them home, they have faith that I am a faithful God who loves them and though they stumble I will not let them fall, Satan.'

'You may accuse, but they've been justified and they are declared not guilty by the blood of the One who defeated you at the cross and His glorious resurrection. I am not ashamed of these you accuse before Me. I love them and will love them for eternity, they are Mine.'

How can we even entertain going back to that familiar country where God does not want us putting down roots, when we know how He loves us and only wants us to follow Him daily by faith, trusting that He is a faithful God who works all things to our good?

The trials of life will tempt us to leave God on the sidelines while we try to figure it all out and then come back with a plan that doesn't include Him. This too is what the saints of old were tempted to do.

HEB 11:17-19 "By faith Abraham, when God tested him, offered Isaac as a sacrifice. He who had received 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."
(Gen. 21:12) 19 Abraham reasoned that God could raise the dead,
and figuratively speaking, he did receive Isaac back from death."

The trials of life are often seen as bothersome inconveniences at best, and loathsome devices of destruction at worst. And yet, even the trials of life are those things which we are to trust God in, as we live by faith in a loving God, who will remain faithful to His promise to love and care for us.

Notice where the test came from in Abraham's case. Verse 17 tells us it came from God Himself, according to the NIV. The KJV, NKJV, and the NAS do not specifically say the test came from God and yet we know it did. It was God who commanded Abraham to offer up Isaac, not Satan.

Sometimes Christians have a problem with the fact that God would test us. They assume that since we're in the Kingdom there's no reason to be tested by God. They assume any trial is only sent from Satan. And it's certainly true Satan will be allowed to bring trials our way, as we see in Job's case. But even there it was only by God's permission. He is still sovereign and in His sovereignty He can use Satan's attacks to build us up and glorify Himself in the process just as He did in Job's case.

But again, the question remains, why would God test us? The answer is not that God can learn something of our faith or lack thereof. More important, any test in life, whether directly or indirectly used by God in our lives, is for our sakes and for His glory, and it gives us an opportunity to live by faith.

This is what happened to Abraham. He was told to offer up Isaac. Why? Because God was playing some sort of mind-game with Abraham, playing some sort of cruel joke on him? Of course not! But it did provide Abraham with an opportunity to live in the reality of the promises. What good is faith if it can't be practiced, if it can't be measured through obedience? How is God glorified through a life of disobedience? He's not.

And so, that He may be glorified and that we may be strengthened in our faith, God may place us in situations which leave no way out except to look up to Him. In Abraham's case it was to put to death that very one who was conceived from a dead womb and given life supernaturally.

But Abraham remembered something significant about God and His promise. God promised Abraham in Gen.21:12, which our writer quotes: "In Isaac your seed shall be called." The promise was clear. For the seed to continue through Isaac, Isaac must live. And Abraham concluded, by faith, that his loving God, who called him out of Ur of the Chaldees, and fulfilled all of His other promises, would also fulfill this one.

Abraham reasoned, by faith in the promises, that God had no intention of leaving Isaac dead if it came to that.

HEB 11:19 "Abraham reasoned that God could raise the dead, and figuratively speaking, he did receive Isaac back from death."

Abraham was given a task by God. How did his faith work in that case? He proceeded to obey God despite the fact that there did not seem to be any earthly solution to how God would stay true to His word.

That's how it is with us at times. We see a test in our lives and we begin to try and figure out the best solution, even if we know this will not take an earthly solution, but rather an act of faith as we obey our God despite our feelings to panic, or flee or simply sit down and do nothing. And then we lament the fact that we have to go through another trial.

One of the things we notice about Abraham's life is that he endured and persevered to the end by faith. And this is what testing is designed to produce in our lives as well.

This why James says in JAM 1:2-5 "Consider it pure joy, my brothers, whenever you face trials of many kinds, ³ because you know that the testing of your faith develops perseverance. ⁴ Perseverance must finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything. ⁵ If any of you lacks wisdom, he should ask God, who gives generously to all without finding fault, and it will be given to him."

The pure joy, James speaks of, is not the trial itself, but in knowing how God is able to use that trial to develop perseverance in our lives, with the express purpose of glorifying Himself in that trial, all the while trusting that God is with us; and if He is for us who can be against us?

That's what Abraham understood. By the way, our writer in Hebrews assumes that Abraham knew that Isaac would live even if it took God raising him from the dead. If we look at the narrative

in GEN 22:5 "He said to his servants, "Stay here with the donkey while I and the boy go over there. *We* will worship and then *we* will come back to you."

Abraham knew what he was doing. He knew this act of obedience was an act of worship which involved his son. But, he knew that he and his son would be returning to the rest of Abraham's servants.

It was through this act of receiving his son, his only begotten son, back from the dead in a sense, that we see the sacrifice the Father gave on our behalf. He would send His only begotten Son into the world because He loved us so much, that through Him we might have eternal life, because the Son of God also was brought back from the dead.

Through Abraham's faith in God, being a God of life and resurrection, He believed that only God could deliver. Is this where our faith is? Do we truly believe that God is a God who is life and the giver of life? Will we follow Him by faith and in the process glorify Him so that He may say of us, "I am not ashamed to be called their God"?

Abraham's faith was shown to be from God, and true. And sometimes tests and trials need to bring this out.

1PE 1:3-9 "Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! In his great mercy he has given us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, 4 and into an inheritance that can never perish, spoil or fade -kept in heaven for you, 5 who through faith are shielded by God's power until the coming of the salvation that is ready to be revealed in the last time. 6 In this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while you may have had to suffer grief in all kinds of trials. 7 These have come so that your faith - of greater worth than gold, which perishes even though refined by fire - may be proved genuine and may result in praise, glory and honor when Jesus Christ is revealed. 8 Though you have not seen him, you love him; and even though you do not see him now, you believe in him and are filled with an inexpressible and glorious joy, 9 for you are receiving the goal of your faith, the salvation of your souls."

God has brought us from death to life, giving us eternal life in Christ. May we trust Him with our lives both now and forever. Faith; it's not just a word, it's our life as we place it in the One who is our Life.