

WALK BY FAITH: ABRAM & SARAI, GEN.12:1-9

The Formidable Unforgotten #3

◆**Intro:** David Smallbone felt God leading him to promote Christian concerts in his homeland, Australia, where only 5 percent of the people believed in Christ. When too few fans filled his seats during one major tour, however, David took a \$250,000 bath in red ink. Creditors repossessed his home, and the father of six looked for work elsewhere. A top artist offered him a job in Nashville, so the Smallbones sold their furniture and other possessions and purchased tickets to the United States.

◆A few weeks after they arrived, however, David was informed that his position was "no longer available." He literally could not get out of bed for several days. When he and his wife explained to their children what happened, they all got on their knees and asked God to help them.

◆Interesting things began to happen. God provided bags of groceries, a minivan, and odd jobs. Then the biggest surprise of all—a recording contract for David's oldest daughter, Rebecca, age 15. She recorded her first album using an old family name, St. James. Flash forward. David promoted his own daughter's sold-out concerts. Rebecca St. James became one of the hottest Christian artists in America. Her brothers, Joel and Luke sang back up for her, eventually going on to record together. Maybe you've heard of *For King and Country*?

◆Father Smallbones reminds me of Abraham, leaving home in pursuit of what he felt God calling him to do, but not knowing anything about the future. He walked by faith.

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◆What is faith exactly? I am using the word in relation to God. And it is of paramount importance to God, obviously, because his Word says things like this:

◆*"And without faith it is impossible to please God, for whoever would approach him must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who seek him." Hebrews 11:6, NRSV.*

◆**1.** Faith requires some sort of hope in the promise of a better future. Of course the only power that can promise anything at all about the future is the power we call God. **So faith is a hope in God, that his good promises about the future, are in fact trustworthy.** The Catechism puts it like this.

◆Q. What is true faith? A. True faith is
not only a knowledge and conviction
that everything God reveals in his Word is true;
it is also a deep-rooted assurance,
created in me by the Holy Spirit through the gospel,
that, out of sheer grace earned for us by Christ,
not only others, but I too,
have had my sins forgiven,
have been made forever right with God,
and have been granted salvation.

◆The first and most basic promise the Christian faith stands on is the gift of forgiveness of sin and the promise of eternal life! True Christian faith takes God at his word that come Judgment Day, Jesus is going to take the stand for me! He is gonna say, "I paid for this one. She's mine. She gets to live!" But Christian faith also

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incorporates a trust that everything God says about what will lead us to life, health, joy... is true and right.

◆A. Such faith by definition requires a willingness on my part to give up control. Look at Abram's example. Look at what God told him! Let's walk through the text.

◆*v1a: leave your country:*

◆Bear in mind they had no cell phones, no FedEx or Amazon that could send you something from China in a couple of days. To leave your country was to be cut off from your history.

◆*v1: leave you father's household:*

◆ What? What about dinner at grandma's? No family rebellions? What about the way I was raised? Our traditions? You should know that Abe's family were not God-followers.

◆ "Joshua said to all the people, "This is what the LORD, the God of Israel, says: 'Long ago your forefathers, including Terah the father of Abraham and Nahor, lived beyond the River and worshipped other gods.'" Joshua 24:2, NIV.

◆They were raised on pagan beliefs! Abe didn't "grow up in church", so to speak. So you see what God was first telling Abram. When God called Abram, he was telling him to convert. "Follow me as your God."

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◆ *v1c: go to a land I will show you.*

◆ Come again? What, can't you just pull it up on a map and show me now? Can I see some of the Tents for sale in Canaan on Zillow first? You don't seriously think I'll just start driving and wait for you to say "Turn here", do you?

◆ *v2: I will make you a great nation:*

◆ Ok now we know this is a joke. Sarai is 65. Anyone here 65? How would you like to have a baby this year? Sarai had never had a child. (11:30) They knew about the birds and the bees back then. So they're pretty sure they know the odds by now.

◆ Admittedly Sarai was runway material (12:14) even at her age. The President of Egypt gets informed! I'm just saying, she had to have it going on for that to happen! But, she couldn't have kids so the whole promise here is like telling a train to take a dirt road; it's ain't gonna happen. And it seemed that way for a long long time. Anybody 90? That's how old Sara would be before she got pregnant.

◆ So Abraham and Sarah are showing us that faith allows that God be in charge, and we submit our demand for what we'd prefer.

◆ **B. Faith requires the trust in someone else's ability to deliver.**

Some other power that is not me, that will insure it turns out all right in the end. Faith admits, "I don't know. I can't do it."

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◆ *"Now faith is being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see." Hebrews 11:1, NIV*

◆ Don't get this wrong. This does not mean faith is by nature unintelligent. We drive the roads every day by faith; faith that the other guy will drive on the other side of the line. Faith that he'll stop at the stop sign. Faith is not the opposite of rationality. All faith has it's reasons. It's just that faith is banking on an "other" person, or power to deliver in a future time what we do not have now.

◆ *"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... "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." Hebrews 11:8, 13 NIV.*

◆ **C.** App time: What does all this have to say to us? What if you and I were to live more by faith? Did you know that it is possible to live a significantly less anxious, fretful, and tense life by choosing to have faith in the true God?

◆ A lot of people are fearful right now. We're tiptoeing around in fear, panicked if we thoughtlessly touched someone or a door knob. I'm not saying we don't be careful, but what if we could simply do our best and trust God for the rest? If I get sick, he will still be God. And meanwhile

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we wouldn't need to live every 24 hours with such upset stomachs.

◆Also, clearly there is a latent fear and hostility in our country. It's come to the surface in rioting where people decide "I must take for myself because no one else is gonna give to me. I must hurt others to be sure I don't get hurt. Since some police make mistakes too, we should not have police at all. I will police myself." Our fear has made us categorically foolish on many levels.

◆Do we realize how much unnecessary fretting there is among our youth, for example, about gender because of the lies our culture is dishing out. God said he made us male and female. Take the Almighty Creator at his word and you won't have to waste your emotions over how you should identify. You are the gender he put in every cell of your body. If we allow for God to be the determining factor in our personal reality, when we trust that, as all of human history has until just recently, we don't even have the issue to wrestle with! But no, because we believe that we must be free to determine our own truth for ourselves, we have mailboxes full of new issues to pain over. I'm saying a lot of it isn't necessary at all.

◆Listen, you are not God. You are not your creator. You don't have to control or decide all things in your life. You are free to trust the True God. This is the world view that allows people like

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◆ Father Damian to minister to lepers in Hawaii even though it's contagious. He walked by faith.

◆ Mother Teresa to live and minister in Calcutta without having a Caribbean island to call her own. She walked by faith.

◆ My friend Lori, a nurse in Chicago, to go to work with Covid patients every day. She's a Christian. She walks by faith. Every time she goes to work she's risking illness. Faith doesn't take away risk, it just puts aside the constant fear of the risks.

◆ **2.** What else do these old characters Abe and Sarai teach us.

Well, you can tell faith is real when it walks the talk. That is, when it acts on what it believes, or lives out what it accepts. We should understand that we are not living by faith just because we know information about God, or his book. When we agree on Sunday morning with God, but disagree in our bedroom, we are not living by faith. For Abram faith was both believing and leaving. It's not assent to information. Demons assent to the truth about Jesus as the Lord of the universe. They are reverent in his presence. But as soon as they're on their own they do all the opposite things. Are we any different? Again, Abraham is our illustration of faith.

◆ *"But someone will say, "You have faith; I have deeds." Show me your faith without deeds, and I will show you my faith by what I do. You believe that there is one God. Good! Even the*

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demons believe that--and shudder. You foolish man, do you want evidence that faith without deeds is useless? Was not our ancestor Abraham considered righteous for what he did when he offered his son Isaac on the altar? You see that his faith and his actions were working together, and his faith was made complete by what he did. And the scripture was fulfilled that says, "Abraham believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness," and he was called God's friend." James 2:18-23, NIV

◆ Abe acted on what God said. Are we acting on what God says? God says, "Stand up and speak the truth." Do we keep to ourselves and not talk politics because it's controversial? "God says, "Help the little guy, the downtrodden." But that's dangerous. I'd have to trust that the life that leads me to is worth it in the end. God says, "Give away your wealth to the needy." But wait a minute. Then I can't trust MYSELF to be able to buy everything I want! What if God doesn't give me that mansion? We are constantly making choices to trust or not to trust God by what we actually do. Again Abe and Sarai are our examples.

◆v6 Large trees are commonly considered sacred places. So the Oak of Teaching could well have been a pagan worship ground. And Abe builds an altar to God there! Calvin comments that it's remarkable that the locals didn't try to stone him.

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- ◆v8 In this verse it looks illustrative of Abrams predicament. Bethel (house of God) on the one hand, and Ai (heap of ruins) on the other. Which way does he go? What will be his future. So he calls on God for directions.
- ◆You and I can do the same thing! We can get up and call on the name of the Lord every day. We can bring him our mixed up feelings. We can bring him our questions and options. If we don't it's not really both Believing and Leaving. Faith does both. It walks the talk. Listen Jesus did not die and rise so that you could just get a street address in heaven. He died to make it possible for us to live, and to walk with God moment by moment.
- ◆**Conclusion:** Years ago Moody Bible College conducted an experiment; they filled a room with 2" poles about 3-4" apart, hanging vertically from ceiling to floor. No bird could possibly fly through the room, save maybe a humming bird! Then they released a bat into the room. It flew all around the room, never knocking into a single pole. Next they blindfolded the bat and released it. Still it maneuvered all around the room never touching anything. Last they tied its mouth shut but left its eyes open. It didn't make it but a few inches without colliding into a pole. Bats don't fly by sight. They use sonar, hearing of the sound of their voice bouncing off objects and coming back.
- ◆Paul said in 2Cor.5:7 "we walk by faith, not by sight". God invites you to walk by faith and not by sight. Call out to him, let his guidance reply to you.

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2Cor.4:13-18

2Cor. 5:1-10

Roman 4:1-5

James 2:18-23

Hebrews 11:8-13