

Facing Life's Challenges

:: ABRAHAM *The Challenge of Waiting* ::

Sermon 2 Abraham's struggle with trust Genesis 12:8-13:18

Introduction

Walking by faith – it's a journey of learning to live every moment putting your trust in God, his word, and his purpose for your life.

It's Proverbs 3.5-6 Trust in the Lord with all your heart and don't lean on your own understanding, in every way acknowledge him and HE will make your path straight.

For me, there are two times when it is tough to walk by faith – one when times are easy and two, when times are tough. When times are easy, I lose focus, get lazy and become self sufficient. When times are tough, I tend to lose heart, focus on myself and get selfish. In other words, I've come to believe that walking by faith is difficult no matter what the circumstances of life are.

Today, I want us to focus on the challenge of walking by faith when the famines of life hit. Turn to Genesis 12.

Chapter 1: Abraham's obedience 12:5-9

⁵ He took his wife, Sarai, his nephew Lot, and all his wealth – his livestock and all the people he had taken into his household at Haran – and headed for the land of Canaan. When they arrived in

Canaan, ⁶ Abram traveled through the land as far as Shechem. There he set up camp beside the oak of Moreh. At that time, the area was inhabited by Canaanites. ⁷ Then the LORD appeared to Abram and said, "I will give this land to your descendants." And Abram built an altar there and dedicated it to the LORD, who had appeared to him. ⁸ After that, Abram traveled south and set up camp in the hill country, with Bethel to the west and Ai to the east. There he built another altar and dedicated it to the LORD, and he worshiped the LORD. ⁹ Then Abram continued traveling south by stages toward the Negev.

Abram has just passed his first test with a C+. He did live his homeland and he went to the land God had given to him, but he stopped at Haran until his dad died and took Lot with him to the Promised Land. The point is that even though his faith is new and just starting to grow, he has exercised his faith and now is in the land.

God appears to Abram and reaffirms his promise to him.

⁷ Then the LORD appeared to Abram and said, "I will give this land to your descendants.

Abram responds by building an altar to God.

Chapter 2: Abraham's Fear

Remember the context. Abram has arrived in the Promised Land and God came to Abram and reaffirmed his commitment. Abram responded by building an altar to worship and honor God. You might think that this would be the end of the story. Abram responded to God, and God gave Abram an awesome, comfortable life – **they lived happily ever after**: the end. That, however is not the way God works. God is not simply interested in giving Abram stuff, he wants to build Abram into a man of God and a man of faith, so God, who is the controller of nature, allowed a severe famine to strike the land of Canaan.

10 At that time a severe famine struck the land of Canaan, forcing Abram to go down to Egypt, where he lived as a foreigner.

Now the test comes. Abram and Lot have large families, flocks and herds, and they have to find provision for all of them. For us to understand this, we need to remember a world without grocery stores, the internet, refrigeration, worst of all, no Costco! A famine meant no food – end of story. As the famine took root, Abram’s situation became more and more desperate. Before we look at what Abram should or shouldn’t have done, let’s look at:

What Abram didn’t know!

- He didn’t know how bad the famine was going to be
- He didn’t know how long the famine was going to last
- He didn’t know how he was going to provide for his family and the family of Lot

But what did Abram know?

- He knew that God was going to make him a great nation
- He knew that God was going to bless him

- He knew that his family was going to be so substantial that all the nations of the world would be blessed through him.

The problem is that when you focus on the unknowns, your heart will be filled with anxiety and fear and this can actually paralyze you from trusting God and doing the things you need to do!

Principle: when trials hit – focus first and foremost on what you know, not what you don't know!

I would suggest you even take time to journal – to slow your mind down and get God's perspective on your situation, tragedy, or trial.

What's instructive in this situation is what Abram didn't do as far as we know. He didn't come to God with his need. He did what many of us in this situation would do, he simply reacted. There's no food here, there's food in Egypt – let's go!

The reason Egypt looks so good in comparison to Canaan is explained in Deuteronomy

Deuteronomy 11:10-12 (NASB95)

¹⁰“For the land, into which you are entering to possess it, is not like the land of Egypt from which you came, where you used to sow your seed and water it with your foot like a vegetable garden. ¹¹“But the land into which you are about to cross to possess it, a land of hills and valleys, drinks water from the rain of heaven, ¹² a land for which the LORD your God cares; the eyes of the LORD your God are always

on it, from the beginning even to the end of the year.

Egypt was a different kind of land than Canaan – it had a massive river flowing through it. From that river, irrigation ditches could be easily dug. Canaan was a land that depended on God to supply rain every year!

Isn't it interesting, God put Abram in a land that was designed to force Abram to depend on God!

There's a principle in God's word, but to be absolutely fair, this truth was written 1,300 years after Abram. Even so, I believe that this is an eternal principle that every follower of God needs to know. When tough times hit, we have a choice – do we trust God, or do we try to find our own way out. Here's what Isaiah has to say:

Isaiah 30:1-3 (NASB95)

¹ “Woe to the rebellious children,” declares the LORD, “Who execute a plan, but not Mine, And make an alliance, but not of My Spirit, In order to add sin to sin; ² Who proceed down to Egypt Without consulting Me, To take refuge in the safety of Pharaoh And to seek shelter in the shadow of Egypt! ³ “Therefore the safety of Pharaoh will be your shame And the shelter in the shadow of Egypt, your humiliation.

This is critical for us to learn if we are to ever become true faith walkers. Walking by faith is putting your trust in God

even when the circumstances of life are screaming at you to do something different.

Trusting God means coming to him first, not making your decision and then asking him to bless it!

When you don't trust God, when you trust in yourself, you put yourself in situations that lead to sin.

¹¹ As he was approaching the border of Egypt, Abram said to his wife, Sarai, "Look, you are a very beautiful woman. ¹² When the Egyptians see you, they will say, 'This is his wife. Let's kill him; then we can have her!' ¹³ So please tell them you are my sister. Then they will spare my life and treat me well because of their interest in you."

Abram's decision to go to Egypt solved one problem but caused another one. As he was on his way down to Egypt, his heart began to be filled with fear and anxiety. His imagination began to create scenarios that wouldn't work out well for him.

Principle: trusting in yourself leads to fear and anxiety

Sarai must have been a stunner. Remember Abram is at least 75 and Sarai is about 65! Abram goes back to a scheme that he and Sarai had worked out according to Genesis 20:11-13.

Genesis 20:11-13 ^(NLT)

¹¹ Abraham replied, "I thought, 'This is a godless place. They will want my wife and will kill me to get her.' ¹² And she really is my sister, for we both have the same

father, but different mothers. And I married her. ¹³ When God called me to leave my father's home and to travel from place to place, I told her, 'Do me a favor. Wherever we go, tell the people that I am your brother.' "

I don't think that Abram was necessarily willing to give up his wife to anyone who wanted her, he probably thought that he, as her brother, could delay the marriage until they got out of town.

Why did Sarai consent? We learn later, that she is not a shrinking violet. She has a strong will and is not shy about telling Abram what she thinks. I wonder if her inability to bear children made her feel that she was less worthy of her husband's protection.

Chapter 3: Abraham's scheme

Genesis 12:14-16 (NLT)

¹⁴ And sure enough, when Abram arrived in Egypt, everyone spoke of Sarai's beauty.

¹⁵ When the palace officials saw her, they sang her praises to Pharaoh, their king, and Sarai was taken into his palace. ¹⁶ Then Pharaoh gave Abram many gifts because of her — sheep, goats, cattle, male and female donkeys, male and female servants, and camels.

Principle: When you don't trust God those around you suffer

What I don't think Abram counted on was the one interested in Sarai would be the Pharaoh himself. Once that happened there was no delay and Sarai became a part of Pharaoh's harem. Abram is now an utter coward. He receives wealth and gifts from Pharaoh in exchange for his wife and Sarai is now trapped in a foreign land married to a godless, foreign ruler.

Chapter 4: God's Rescue

¹⁷ But the LORD sent terrible plagues upon Pharaoh and his household because of Sarai, Abram's wife. ¹⁸ So Pharaoh summoned Abram and accused him sharply. "What have you done to me?" he demanded. "Why didn't you tell me she was your wife? ¹⁹ Why did you say, 'She is my sister,' and allow me to take her as my wife? Now then, here is your wife. Take her and get out of here!" ²⁰ Pharaoh ordered some of his men to escort them, and he sent Abram out of the country, along with his wife and all his possessions.

I love 2 Timothy 2:13

2 Timothy 2:13 (NASB95)

¹³ If we are faithless, He remains faithful, for He cannot deny Himself.

Even though Abram has forgotten that he has a covenant with the one true God, God has not forgotten. Even though Abram

has been a faithless, gutless chicken – God remembers his covenant with Abram.

God sends a plague on Pharaoh's household and it becomes clear to Pharaoh that it is because of Sarai.

The humiliation of the this section is amazing. Abram, the father of faith is being rebuked for his scheming deception by a godless king!

BUT! Pharaoh, even though he is furious does not take any action against Abram. My guess is that he feared the God of Abram even more than Abram trusted his God. Pharaoh's sentence is get out of here. Abram even gets to take all the wealth that was given him by the Pharaoh.

What is amazing about this entire story is Abram's return to God 13:3-4

Genesis 13:3-4 (NLT)

³ From the Negev, they continued traveling by stages toward Bethel, and they pitched their tents between Bethel and Ai, where they had camped before. ⁴ This was the same place where Abram had built the altar, and there he worshiped the LORD again.

I wish Abram would have done this before he went to Egypt, but he didn't. What really matters is that he calls on God now!

Lessons of faith

- Walking by faith does not protect you from difficult times! Jn 16.33
- Difficult times come from God to test and strengthen your faith Jas 1.2-5
- When difficult times hit – STOP! Be still & know that your Father is GOD!! Ps 46.10
- When you fail, come back to God Jas 4:8

Learning to trust God in the walk of faith

- Take a moment and journal about the last major trial you've experienced.
- How did that trial test your faith?
- How did you respond, with trust or by trying to find your own way out?
- What were the temptations in that trial?
- What did you learn through that trial?