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**ABRAHAM AN EXAMPLE OF FAITH**

Today we will look at example of a biblical character - Abraham. In this way we can see the faith that we need in facing the present distress of this pandemic.

Abraham was the forefather of the Jews or Israelites through which Jesus came into the world. Sure of what he hopes for and certain of what he does not see. With Abraham, faith is put into action. Abraham is given a promise from God that he doesn't see, he is told to go to a place he knows nothing about and has to leave the security around him.

The Promise: Genesis 12:1-8: God said, "I will make you into a great nation and I will bless you". Based on what God has said or confident in what is said, he obeys and goes leaving his comforts, family and security. Regardless of the negatives – of being 75 years old, and Sarai being 65 -- they had no children. With all this, plus with his possessions he heads out for a land that the invisible God had promised him. Just the stepping out to go was an act of faith. I often in group would refer to a parched mesquite brush county just outside of this town. I told the people go out to the highway and look west -- nothing but brush and caliche. "Just go". That's what God told Abraham, and that is what he did. He went with no map any real direction. God said, "Just go where I show you." The first point then is faith steps out and obeys.

Abram begins his journey. (Genesis 15) Abram seeing only the physical, becomes somewhat insecure. He is concerned that his servant would inherit his estate. Since the custom then was if the head of the household had no heirs, his servant would inherit his estate. But God takes him outside and shows him all the stars and assures him that he will have descendants more in number than the stars of the heavens. God reassures him upon his believing, he is considered righteous. Afterwards he still has that human need to know, so God gives him a physical sign. Abram has taken the move towards the faith God wants -- he believed God.

Next it's Sarai's turn. (Genesis 16) She has a part in this promise too. Sarai gets to thinking about this promised nation and begins to wonder. First, she is focusing on her ability, and she comes up with an idea, like you and me. We have an idea we want the Lord to try. The idea: Sarai was too old, and Abram was more. She had not had any children, so they might not make it. But there was Hagar, who was younger, and they were running out of time, so Sarai suggest that Hagar do it for her. She could have Abraham's son and God could use him to fulfill this great promise. Good idea, right? Fine if it would have been God's idea, but it wasn't. So, as you can see in the rest of the story in Genesis 16, Sarai suffered for her idea. She was trying to help God out, but he didn't need help. Again -- kind of like us. Yet still Hagar and Abram have a son also, Ishmael. God gives a promise to Hagar that this son will also have a great nation come from him. However, God makes it clear that Abraham and Sarah will have the promised son.

(Genesis 17) Abram is now 99 years old, and it has been thirteen years after the birth of Ishmael. The Lord appears to him and confirms His covenant. He renames Abram, calling him Abraham, which meant a father of many nations. He then establishes his covenant with him by the sign of circumcision, which was to be observed by his descendents, being the Jews. This covenant identified the men as Jews -- a personal sign to indicate they personally belonged to God. Also, he renamed Sarai to be Sarah. These name changes are a verification of God's promise. Abraham meaning a father of many nations and Sarah, a mother of many nations.

Yet here with all these confirming signs and messages, Abraham falls down and laughs -- a hundred-year old man is going to have a son. This could be the laughter if it's really going to happen. He still wants to bargain for Ishmael. God assures him a son will come from Sarah.

At this point Romans 4:18-25 records “against all hope Abraham believed”, (vs. 21) “being fully assured that God had the power to do what he had promised”. With all the physical facts against him plus hoping for Ishmael, he still believed God could do it. Also, in Hebrews 11:11, he considered him faithful who made the promise. With that, (Romans 4:3) Abraham believed God. See there is a difference in “believing in” God and “believing” God. Sometimes that’s the problem -- going from our belief in God and not getting to believing God -- big difference. One is the knowing or understanding that God exists. Then there is the part of faith that steps out with the confidence that God will perform what he promised.

One year later (Genesis 18), three angels in the form of men come to visit Abraham. These men came to reassure Abraham and Sarah that one year from then, they would have a son. Sarah listening in the tent, began to laugh. This could be called the second laugh. Both times they were focusing on their ability, which is what God was trying to get them past. Then one year later, (Genesis 21:1-7) Sarah bears a son and called him Isaac, which means laughter. We can be assured God has a sense of humor for now since God had the last laugh.

It has taken 25 years for this promise to come about. Question: “Why did God make them wait 25 years?” They were now 90 and 100, Sarah’s womb was dead, and Abraham’s body was as good as dead. Couldn’t it have been done earlier?

Romans 4:21 reveals the answer, “...being fully persuaded that GOD had the power to do what he had promised”. All human ability had to be removed. They had to be able to come to believe God that he could do what he had promised.

For our application, the example is that as Abram first believed God (Romans 4:3). In our trials in life, if we will too believe God. Again, move from “believing in” to “believing him”. Believing or trusting him in all our troubles, we will have the true faith down. Secondly, we too are in the position to be fully persuaded that GOD has the power to do what he promised. As Romans 4:23 tells, this was not done for Abraham and Sarah alone, but for us who believe in Him who raised Jesus our Lord from the dead. The answer to this present distress of another pandemic or any calamity is if we will first believe God is bringing about his purpose, he is in control. Then also believe in Him who raised Jesus from the dead, what do we have to be concerned about?

Keep the faith and keep moving forward. Till next time.

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