

Be Faithful 9-30-01

Matt 25:21 (NIV)²¹ *"His master replied, 'Well done, good and faithful servant! You have been faithful with a few things; I will put you in charge of many things. Come and share your master's happiness!'"* Rev 2:10b (NIV) *Be faithful, even to the point of death, and I will give you the crown of life.*

We live in a world that is always measuring value and success by fame and wealth. What does God consider successful? What is He looking for in the heart of mankind? In last week's message on King Asa (Lessons from Asa) we read that the eyes of the Lord roamed the earth to strengthen hearts fully committed to Him. 2Chron 16:9 We know from John's gospel that God is looking for those who will worship Him in spirit and in truth. The author of Hebrews tells us just what it is that will please God. Hebrews 11:6 (NIV)⁶ *And without faith it is impossible to please God, because anyone who comes to him must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who earnestly seek him.*

Our spiritual life begins with grace received through faith. The Holy Spirit works upon every heart to bring the reality of the need to be made right with God, conviction of sin. When, by the grace of God, we respond to the truth that there is a holy God, we see a need to be made right with Him, to find His forgiveness. Then, when we discover that the death of Jesus upon the cross was God's way of doing for us what we could never do for ourselves, we are greatly relieved to know that our debt is paid in full. Faith that God exists and that He has made a way for us to be right with Him is born in our heart, and our spirit is born anew. We are a new creation. We can worship in the new spirit born within us and in the truth of the Way God made for us. We die with Him and are raised with Him to newness of life. We have become a person of faith. We believe what we cannot see but know to be true. That is the first part of pleasing God – believing that He is.

Listen again to what the author of Hebrews said pleases God. Heb 11:6 (NIV)⁶ *And without faith it is impossible to please God, because anyone who comes to him must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who earnestly seek him.* We have taken that first step of faith, to believe God is. Then He draws us on in our faith to earnestly seek Him, to have that heart He looks to strengthen – a fully committed one. The Greek words translated as 'earnestly seek' can be translated as scrutinize, investigate, beg, crave. It is the living out of the new life within, and going deeper in that relationship begun by faith. Just as Jesus always sought the will of His Father, so we please God by seeking to know Him and his will. Then, as we see Him more clearly, we act on it. That is a faithful life, a life that pleases God. You see, He wants you to know Him more deeply because He loves you. The more you know of Him, the more you will want to know and experience. Seeking Him is its own reward – knowing the One who loves us so.

Sometimes our minds get stuck in a pattern of thinking. For example, I think of seeking God as on my face in prayer listening to the still small voice or reading my Bible. That can be seeking God but is not necessarily genuine seeking. We must always consider our heart and its motivation. Looking at the life of Abraham, I see another kind of seeking God, a seeking through life's experiences. He was a faithful man. In fact, God calls him the father of the faithful. Let's take a look and see what it was that pleased God and how Abraham journeyed in faithfulness. The overview of that journey is found in Hebrews 11, the chapter about faithful people. We have looked at verse 6, now let's look at the example given in the

life of Abraham, starting in verse 8. Heb 11:8 (NIV)⁸ *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.*

A life of faith is obedient to God without knowing where God is leading. Do you know where you are headed and what you are going to accomplish? There is not much need of faith in that kind of a life. Abraham couldn't really tell his friends and relatives where he was going or why. Sometimes people ask me what I am doing now. I fumble with an answer because I really don't know. I can tell you all the details of what I plan to do the next few weeks but that is not what I'm doing. I'm trying to follow God each day and I don't know exactly where He is leading, I just know Who is leading. Every time I thought I had figured out where God was leading and what He meant to accomplish, He showed me wrong. Then I have nothing to cling to but Him and who He is. I hope I'm finally learning that it is not important for us to know the where and the why but the Whom. Abraham believed God. That is what God counted as righteousness.

Once Abraham discerned God's will, in this case, heard His voice, he obeyed. Now, at first, he did not obey fully. God told him to leave his country and family. He left but took along Lot, a nephew. The end results of that disobedience were several nations that descended from Lot that plagued Abraham's descendents. As Abraham journeyed through this life of faith he could see the results of his own disobedience. That too, teaches us who God is. In Abraham's case, not leaving Lot behind resulted in Lot's servants fighting with Abraham's servants over pasture; so Abraham let Lot choose an area for his herds. That was another act of faith. He gave Lot the option knowing Lot would choose the best, but at the same time knowing God had promised it all to him. It didn't matter in the short term. To keep peace, Abraham was willing to give the best to Lot. What looked like the best ended up being the end of all Lot's wealth. When God destroyed Sodom and Gomorrah Lot fled with only his wife (who died as a result of looking back) and two daughters. Lot had lived for position (sat in the gate) and wealth, and the things the city could offer Him. Abraham lived to please God. It looked like Lot was more secure, but it was Abraham that rescued Lot and his family when the five kings conquered Sodom. And when JHWH was going to destroy Sodom, it was Abraham who intervened for his life. Who was more secure in reality?

Could Abraham have explained why he was giving Lot the best, the greenest, the most potential for fame and influence? How can the world understand a life that is after a completely different goal? Abraham was separated from the world in order to know God. Heb 11:9-10 (NIV)⁹ *By faith he made his home in the promised land like a stranger in a foreign country; he lived in tents, as did Isaac and Jacob, who were heirs with him of the same promise.¹⁰ For he was looking forward to the city with foundations, whose architect and builder is God.* He believed God rewarded those who earnestly seek Him. He was pleasing God. His sights were not set on this passing world but on a relationship with an eternal God.

This week in the news we have heard a few of the details about the letter of instruction to the hijackers. It has always amazed me how Satan can trick people into worshipping him as if he were God. Remember this is how he became who he is today. He sought the throne of God and to be worshipped as God. (Isaiah 14:13) We read of the hijackers desire for the next life, and although it is a sensuous vision, the desire to please God and the comparative

disdain for this world is much like the genuine worshippers of God. Remember Satan's desire is to be worshipped as God. He seeks lives that will be sold out to him and desire to serve him with their all, forsaking the love of their own life for what they accept by faith. He is a counterfeiter. The similarity is quite normal, but the difference is enormous. What is in the city they seek is not the same as what is in the city we seek. The God we love and serve loves the people of the world. Theirs is quite willing for life in great numbers to be destroyed. (I speak in regards to the Al Queda and similar fanatical sects)

Abraham's sights were not set on an earthly city like Lot's were. His eyes were transfixed by the heavenly city. With creation we groan, waiting to be delivered, adopted as sons, have our bodies redeemed. Because of that desire we watch for our Master's return. Jesus told a parable, a verse from which I read at the start of the message. He had gone on a journey and left his investing to three individuals. Two doubled the money in a wise investment. They were faithful and watching and waiting in expectation for their Master's return. That is where their hope is set. The other did as little as possible, burying it for safety in the ground. When the Master returns and finds two of them have doubled his money, Matt 25:21 (NIV)²¹ *"His master replied, 'Well done, good and faithful servant! You have been faithful with a few things; I will put you in charge of many things. Come and share your master's happiness!'"* This was Abraham's faithful attitude. Obey and use your time wisely in obedience to God, and watch for and expect the Lord's coming to settle accounts. Faithful hearts take action in faith.

Heb 11:11-16 (NIV)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.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.¹³ 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.*

Abraham had tried to see God's promise fulfilled without faith. He used Sarah's idea and had a natural child through Hagar. But this was not the promise of God, for the promise was to come through faith, not natural means. We are so eager to figure out how God can make us successful. But God has his own ways in which He alone gets the glory. Again, Abraham acting on his own only brought a string of misery. Hagar was miserable, Sarah was miserable, and that certainly made Abraham miserable. It surely broke his heart when he had to ask Ishmael and Hagar to leave. These are lessons in faith. Not only do we need to obey fully but we need to refrain from our own scheming to fulfill what we have heard from the Lord. Finally Abraham believes God can do it in His own way and by His power. Though there was a physical land of promise, the Patriarch's hearts were set on a better country, a heavenly one.

Have you ever considered that when Jacob went down into Egypt the size of his family and servants was much smaller than that of Abraham his grandfather? If the goal of the Patriarchs was a physical nation and physical property they were a failure. They were

wandering through this life as strangers and pilgrims. Where are you going Isaac? What do you hope to accomplish? The world would say they lacked motivation and a goal, but they had motivation and goal the world cannot fathom. They were after God and the city He had prepared for them.

Heb 11:17-19 (NIV)¹⁷ 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."¹⁹ Abraham reasoned that God could raise the dead, and figuratively speaking, he did receive Isaac back from death. Abraham's lessons in faith came through observing the mistakes as well as the blessed obedience. Preservation and blessing in his seeking self-preservation had also taught him the mercy of God. He had grown in faith through experience. He had sought God with his life and its lessons. If you look at your life in this manner, I'm sure you will learn the same lessons. God is faithful. His faithfulness draws us to exhibit His faithfulness in our own lives. As our hearts are drawn to Him He increases our strength and our battles.

Now we come to the ultimate test that God has prepared Abraham for during his long life. God asks him to take Isaac – his only and greatly loved son and give him back to God. Abraham does not hesitate. Early the next morning he brings two servants, the wood, the fire, and makes the three day journey to the place God asks for him to sacrifice him. The parallels with the Isaac and the Son of God run through the whole story. God paints a picture for us so clear and bold that it is miraculous that Jewish eyes cannot see it. See Genesis 22 (I see 12 clear pictures of what was to come, astronomical odds.) Abraham's great faith is noted in verse 5 when he declares that WE will come back. He knew that God kept His promises and that this son was the son of promise. Now he is letting go of the one thing that would lay claim to his heart so that God might be his God without rivalry. That is where faith must lead us. It is the condition of a faithful heart. He believes that God will raise him from the dead, if necessary, to fulfill His word of promise. He raises the knife – "ABRAHAM" – the angel of the Lord, which is Jesus, calls out to stop him and we have the revelation of Jehovah Jireh. The Lord provides Himself the sacrifice. This is where all valid faith ultimately leads us: the provision of God in Jesus Christ. There on Calvary (Mount Moriah) the father of faith is spared the death of his son, but grasps the reality that God provides the means to make us right with Himself.

The father of faith grew in faith through his experiences, both good ones and the difficult ones. His life lessons were the voice of God to help him grasp the truths that became greater than any worldly goal could. He believed God and that He is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him. He sought Him in prayer, in worship, but he also sought God with his life. I believe all of you have entered into faith. Now He draws us all on to faithful lives – an expression of his own faithfulness. He leads us to a place of putting Him above everything else. He leads us to a place the world cannot comprehend, of desiring something not of this world, a city which has foundations, whose builder and maker is God. He is leading us to diligently seek Him. It is a place of trust and peace, for our Heavenly Father is always faithful and we need not fret about the details. We just go out, confident in His leading. We don't know for sure where He is leading, but we know Who is leading. Be encouraged. That is pleasing the heart of God.