

“Faith Demonstrated Through Testing”

Heb. 11:8-19

- INTRO. - We have been going through the “Hall of Faith,” and if there is any one message in this chapter, it is that the “just” (in the OT), the true remnant of God, were those who lived a life of faith.
- When you get right down to it, there are really only two ways to live. The vast majority of people live by sight. They base everything on what they can see and observe. You might call this “empirical living.”
- But the *other* way to live (which is far less common) is to live by faith – to live your life on the basis of the unseen. It is a life that is founded upon believing what you cannot fully verify.
- The Christian life is that kind of life. You and I have never seen God, Jesus Christ, or the HS. We have never seen heaven or hell or angels or demons. In fact, we have never seen (with our physical eyes) any of the people who wrote the Bible. We have never seen the original autographs of Scripture.
- Yet we base our eternity on these things. We live with the conviction that all these things are real, and that they are trustworthy. We bank our lives on it – but more importantly, we bank our eternal destiny on it.
- The life we live is (in fact) a faith life – and that’s how the true people of God have always lived. But what we have seen (so far in our study of Heb. 11) is that those who actually live this faith life are few and far between. The vast majority of people do *not* actually live a life of faith.
- I believe that even today our churches are filled with those who are merely paying lip service to the life of faith. Each of us who profess to know Christ should examine our hearts to see if we are truly living by faith.
- As we have seen, genuine biblical faith has certain ingredients that are indispensable. So far we have seen that genuine faith has a certain understanding of worship (and how we must approach God). It involves a life of walking with God and it involves a life of obedience to God.
- Beginning today, we are going to see that it is something that must pass the tests of God. From v. 8 down to v. 19 we have this large section on the life of Abraham.
- There is absolutely no doubt that Abraham is the epitome of faith in the NT. There are more references in the NT that connect faith to Abraham than to anyone else. He is (no doubt) the greatest

example of faith in Scripture. But his faith was severely tested. In this long passage of Scripture we see three ways in which God tested Abraham's faith.

- We won't get through all three of these today, but we will *begin* to look at this incredible example of genuine faith this morning. And when you analyze it, I think we would have to say that Abraham demonstrated the totality of a true life of faith.
- Abraham was (of course) the father of the Jewish people. This is why he presented (here in the Book of Hebrews) as the most strategic example of faith.
- The Jews of that day tended to think that, just because they were physical descendants of Abraham, that they were in God's grace and salvation. What they needed to learn was that they also had to emulate Abraham's faith.
- This is why Abraham is presented so clearly here (and elsewhere in the NT) as the father of the faithful – as the ultimate example of one who truly believed God (and was counted as righteous as a result).
- Another critical point of clarification is the difference between faith and works righteousness. The Jewish rabbis had long taught that Abraham was saved by his works. They believed that God had looked around the earth to try to find a truly

outstanding man – and lo and behold, He found Abraham, who was a man who was truly righteous.

- They believed that it was because of his inherent righteousness that God chose Abraham to be the father of the nation – but the author of Hebrews knew that this was a notion that needed to be corrected.
- He knew that people needed to understand that Abraham was not righteous (in and of himself) but that he was declared righteous by God because of his faith.
- This is something the Apostle Paul also emphasized, along with other NT writers. And we even saw this in the Book of Acts. When Stephen was addressing the Jewish leaders in Jerusalem, he began by showing that Abraham demonstrated that he was a man of faith by obeying God in leaving his homeland.
- He said (as recorded in Acts 7:2-5), “And he said, ‘Hear me, brethren and fathers! The God of glory appeared to our father Abraham when he was in Mesopotamia, before he lived in Haran, and said to him, “Depart from your country and your relatives, and come into the land that I will show you.” Then he departed from the land of the Chaldeans, and settled in Haran. And from there, after his father died, God removed him into this country in which you are now living. And He gave him no

inheritance in it, not even a foot of ground; and yet, even when he had no child, He promised that He would give it to him as a possession, and to his offspring after him.””

- These are the very same things we see (here) in the Book of Hebrews. In Paul’s powerful argument for justification by faith (in Rom. 4) he uses Abraham as the central illustration of that theological principle. We see the same thing in the Book of James.
- So there is no doubt that Abraham is the greatest example of faith in the NT. He is the classic example of what it means to become *justified* by faith – and to *live* by faith.
- In fact, Paul declared in the Book of Galatians that those who are genuine believers in Christ are (in fact) the children of Abraham. Gal. 3:7 says, “Therefore, be sure that it is those who are of faith who are sons of Abraham.”
- What this is saying, is that whether you are a Jew or a Gentile, you are a true son of Abraham through faith in Christ. It’s *not* the *physical* lineage of Abraham that counts, but the *spiritual* one.
- So Abraham is the prototype, (the pattern) for *all* men of faith. *All* who are saved must be saved the very same way Abraham was – by faith.

- Now, this passage is *not* easy to outline – and as I said, we won’t be able to get through all of it today – but I’m going to divide this according to the three major tests of Abraham’s faith – and we begin with:

I. THE TEST OF WORLDLINESS (vv. 8-10, 13-16)

- In order to see this first test, we are going to look at vv. 8-10, and then we are going to drop down to vv. 13-16. Those two sections are connected with each other in regard to thought. (If we can get through this first test today, I think we will be doing well.)
- Look with me at v. 8, “By faith Abraham, when he was called, obeyed by going out to a place which he was to receive for an inheritance; and he went out, not knowing where he was going.”
- Now, it might *not* seem obvious (to us) at first, but Abraham’s first test is the test of worldliness, because he was likely a wealthy citizen of Ur of the Chaldeans (modern day Iraq), and probably had a large house and much property. He lived among a people who were pagans, who worshipped the moon – and yet, when the true God of the Bible called him out from that he immediately obeyed.
- We don’t really know how Abraham got to know the true God, but we know he was committed to Him in the midst of a pagan nation. The sovereign God called him out, and he went willingly.

- The key verb in v. 8 is “obeyed.” All other action in this verse is subordinated to this main verb. In other words, his faith was manifested in his obedience. He did *not* know what lay ahead for him, but he followed God.

- As Bruce writes, “...faith and obedience are inseparable in one’s relation to God...He would not have obeyed that divine call had he not taken God at his word; his obedience was the outward evidence of his inward faith.”

- Now, we’re given the original account in Gen. 12. Turn with me for a moment to Gen. 12. Look at v. 1, “Now the LORD said to Abram, ‘Go forth from your country, and from your relatives and from your father's house, to the land which I will show you...’”

- Of course, he is known as Abram (at this point), but what did he have to leave behind to obey the true God? He had to leave his country, and his relatives, and his father’s house (his inheritance). In other words, he had to leave everything that was stable and everything that was known.

- And what was he going to get out of the deal? He was going to get to follow God to a land that he knew nothing about. In fact, (according to Heb. 11) he was going to have to go out, *not* even knowing where he was going.

- God did *not* give him a map of where he was going to take him (and he didn’t have GPS on his camel). But

notice v. 3, “And I will bless those who bless you, and the one who curses you I will curse. And in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed.”

- What is that? That is the first mention of the Abrahamic covenant. God was entering into a covenant with Abraham, and was leading him out to the land where he would fulfill it.

- Verse 4, “So Abram went forth as the LORD had spoken to him; and Lot went with him.” Remember Lot? He was his nephew, and he ended up in Sodom, which God later destroyed. But look at the last half of that verse, “Now Abram was seventy-five years old when he departed from Haran.” You say, “Wait a minute! I thought you said he was in Ur?” Well, that’s where he started, but by this time his father Terah had moved the family to Haran. However, his ultimate goal was Canaan, the land of Promise.

- Verse 5, “And Abram took Sarai his wife, and Lot his brother's son, and all their substance that they had gathered, and the souls that they had gotten in Haran; and they went forth to go into the land of Canaan; and into the land of Canaan they came.”

- Going back to Heb. 11:8, that’s where God was taking him, but he didn’t know it when he first set out. He made this trek by faith.

- And (by the way) let me just throw something in right here (so you won’t go out and do something foolish). We

need to understand that these unique experiences (of these OT characters) are *not* necessarily normative for Christians today.

- God wants you to emulate Abraham's faith, but *not* necessarily in the same way in which he exercised it. God does *not* expect you to go out (right now) and sell all your stuff and take off to some unknown location. He did this with Abraham, but we need to remember that it was because Abraham had a unique role in God's redemptive history. We don't necessarily have that same kind of role in His plan.

- But in Abraham's case, this was a real test of his faith, because it required him to leave everything he knew behind in order to obey God. Could God put *your* faith to that same kind of test? Of course He could. He very well may ask you to lay aside everything that is precious to you in order to follow Him.

- But go back to Heb. 11:8. Notice that Abraham was "called" by God. That is a present participle, so it should read, "when he was being called." What does this imply? It implies that the moment he understood what God was saying to him, he started packing his bags.

- This was instant obedience. MacArthur says, "It may have taken several days, or even weeks or months, to make final preparation for the trip, but in his mind he was already on the way." From that moment on, everything he did revolved around obeying God's call.

- Now, I think we can rightly apply this to a call to ministry today. When God calls someone into full-time Christian service, it might be years before it comes to fruition, but from the moment He calls, you should begin moving in His direction.

- In fact, the Christian life should be understood as a pilgrimage, from the old pattern of life to a brand new one. The Scripture says, "Therefore if any man is in Christ, he is a new creature; the old things passed away; behold, new things have come." (2 Cor. 5:17)

- Abraham is a picture for us in this regard. We are to leave the old and move on to the new. Salvation always brings separation from the world. God cannot lead us into new ways of living without leading us out of the old ways.

- All the language in this passage is that of a pilgrim, a sojourner, one who is a citizen of a different realm. But the heart of a pilgrim is that of being willing to leave the old behind and move on to the new.

- We saw this attitude in our study of Romans. Rom. 12:2 says, "...do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what the will of God is, that which is good and acceptable and perfect."

- We've talked about the danger of worldliness, but this is a temptation that has prevented some from even

coming to Christ in the first place, but has also prevented many Christians from being all God wants them to be.

- John Wesley once said, “Anything that cools my love for Jesus is worldliness.” Worldliness is more an attitude than an act. It is inwardly wanting to live like the rest of the world. And yet, the Word of God declares, “Do not love the world, nor the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him.” (That’s 1 John 2:15)

- Christian maturity leads to a change in our “want tos.” The more we grow in Christ the less like the world we will be. The more mature we become in Christ the more we will want what God wants instead of what the world is pursuing.

- Well, go on to vv. 9-10, “By faith he lived as an alien in the land of promise, as in a foreign land, dwelling in tents with Isaac and Jacob, fellow heirs of the same promise...” (Stop right there for a moment.)

- Here the other Patriarchs are included, but the point is that they lived by faith as “aliens” (as pilgrims) in the land of promise. They did *not* have permanent dwelling places, but lived in tents.

- Even though the land of Canaan was promised to them, they did *not* own any of it (at this particular time). And this is a powerful reminder that faith often requires waiting. The promises of God do *not* always come about immediately.

- The phrase “dwelling in tents” was the way of travelers and nomads. Even in *that* day and time, tents were *not* seen as permanent dwelling places. Not only Abraham, but also his son and grandson all lived in tents. They never owned any of the Promised Land, except by faith.

- In other words, the land was in sight, but it was *not* in hand. They walked on it but they did *not* own it. The only land Abraham ever owned was a small burial plot. As near as the land was to them, it remained only a promise and *not* a reality. They did *not* build any houses or cities on it.

- Look at it again, “...he lived as an alien in the land of promise, as in a foreign land, dwelling in tents...” This points to another test of Abraham’s faith, which is the test of patience. The fact that God had promised to give him this land *had* to have made it much more difficult for him to be patient.

- And listen, this is often a test of *our* faith as well. MacArthur says, “Often the hardest times for us (as believers) are the in-between times, the times of waiting.” It is a challenge for us to wait on God (at times). We usually want things to happen immediately, but that is *not* always God’s plan.

- The truth of the matter is, Abraham spent a lot of time waiting on God. He had to wait for many years before God gave him the son of promise. He had to wait all his life for God to fulfill His promise of the land of Canaan –

and he (in fact) died without receiving that promise. This is the life of faith. We don't always receive His promises right away, and sometimes we don't even receive them in this life.

- As Christians in America today, this is a real struggle for us. We are so used to instant gratification. We are so used to things happening quickly and easily. But that is *not* always God's plan. Sometime we have to learn to wait on the Lord.

- I think of missionaries that have had to wait years for any tangible fruit. William Carey spent 35 years in India and saw only a handful of converts. And yet, every missionary who has gone to India since that time has been the beneficiary of the groundwork Carey laid.

- He translated the Bible into Indian dialects and planted seeds that are still being harvested today. And just like William Carey, we need to make sure we do not "grow weary in well-doing."

- As we read in James 5:7-8, we are instructed, "Be patient, therefore, brethren, until the coming of the Lord. Behold, the farmer waits for the precious produce of the soil, being patient about it, until it gets the early and late rains. You too be patient..."

- Of course it is discouraging to pray and trust and work and yet see no results. A mother may pray for the salvation of her son for years without seeing him come to

know Christ. A pastor may preach for years without seeing any tangible fruit of his labor.

- But genuine faith is deaf to doubt, dumb to discouragement, and blind to impossibility. Faith hangs on to the promise no matter how long it takes to see the fulfillment of it.

- What was the secret to Abraham's patience? It was his hope in the ultimate promise of God. Look again at v. 10, "...for he was looking for the city which has foundations, whose architect and builder is God."

- Notice, it doesn't say, "he was looking for A city," it says, "he was looking for THE city." John Phillips wrote, "Abraham learned that *a* city won't do when you have caught a glimpse of *the* city."

- There is no doubt that this refers to the eternal city – the New Jerusalem. It is the city "whose architect and builder is God" Himself. Abraham set his heart on it thousands of years before there was even an *earthly* Jerusalem, much less the *new* Jerusalem described by the Apostle John.

- This ultimate city is one "with foundations." A tent has no foundations. A tent just has pegs driven into the ground. So this points to the ultimate stability and permanence of that heavenly city.

- And (of course) this is a picture we often see in the NT. Paul declared (in Phil. 3:20), "our citizenship is in

heaven, from which also we eagerly wait for a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ...

- "This world is not my home, I'm just passing through. My treasures are laid up, somewhere beyond the blue. The angels beckon me from heaven's open door, and I can't feel at home in this world anymore."

- Now, how did Abraham come to this hope of an eternal city? God must have revealed it to him. As Jay Adams writes, "Faith is *not* some hope-against-hope vagary. It is *not* vaporized reality. It is specific and concrete. God, presumably, gave to Abraham information about the heavenly city and country to which he would travel *after having found the promised land.*"

- He says, "We don't read about THAT in the Genesis account, but by the Spirit moving him to pen these words, the writer of Hebrews lets us look inside the mind of Abraham to see what was going on."

- According to this divinely-inspired revelation, Abraham was looking beyond the *earthly* Promised Land to the *ultimate* Promised Land. This is why he could die, still clinging to the promise. He knew his ultimate destiny, even if he never saw the promise of an earthly land fulfilled.

- Because he believed the ultimate promise was certain, he could be patient with God in the fulfillment of the short term promises. And remember our definition of

faith in v. 1, "faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen."

- Because the eternal question was settled in Abraham's heart, the earthly questions could remain unanswered. He didn't have to understand everything God was doing in his earthly life, because he was absolutely convinced that all God's promises would be ultimately fulfilled.

- Or you could put it like Jay Adams does, "Because Abraham knew where he was headed (eternally) he didn't need to know where he was going tomorrow or the next day. Wherever the earthly route took him, it didn't matter because he knew that God was mapping out a road to the eternal city."

- Abraham's ultimate Promised Land was heaven – just like *ours* is. This means that we don't have to know everything in this life and how it is all going to "work out."

- You know I've written about the subject of God's will, and one of the themes we always see in this regard is the desire of people to know the future. People always want to know God's providence in advance – but we can't know that. We can only know what God is doing in our lives by looking *back*.

- God's providence, His mysterious hand on our lives, is a mystery until it happens. Once it happens we can see His hand at work in our lives, but we can't know the providence of God ahead of time.

- And (of course) one of the main reasons *why* we want to know God's providence ahead of time, is so we can be assured that everything is going to turn out alright. We want to know, before we buy a car, if that car is going to be dependable or a lemon.

- We want to know ahead of time that things are going to be good for us – but that is *not* the life of faith. Faith says, "I don't have to know ahead of time what God is going to do, because I trust Him explicitly. I know that whatever He does, it will turn out for my good and His glory."

- And the life of faith trusts God to the degree that if none of His promises are fulfilled in this lifetime, that is OK, because He will ultimately fulfill every promise in eternity.

- This was Abraham's eternal perspective. Even if he *had* possessed the earthly Promised Land in his lifetime, he knew that this was *not* his ultimate inheritance. He was patient because his eyes were on "the city which has foundations, whose architect and builder is God."

- As important as the earthly land was to him, the eternal city was even more important. And he believed that God's promise of that ultimate city would *not* fail. He looked beyond the earthly and set his heart on the eternal.

- You know, I'm sure you have heard the old saying that "it is possible to be so heavenly-minded that you are no earthly good." I guess that is true in certain cases. But

most of the time, the reverse of that is true. It is much more common to be so earthly-minded that we are no heavenly good.

- Even Abraham (way back in the OT) looked beyond the earthly to embrace the eternal. And that is what carried him through his lifetime, as a man of faith, fully trusting God and passing all the tests of his faith.

- Listen, when we trust God for the ultimate, we can handle the temporal. We can go through tough times, and pain and suffering in this life, knowing that we have an ultimate home in heaven forever.

- MacArthur says, "...it is impossible to be of any real earthly good unless we *are* heavenly minded. Only the heavenly minded will have the patience to continue faithful in God's work when it becomes hard, unappreciated, and seemingly unending."

- He says, "There is no greater cure for discouragement, fatigue, or self-pity than to think of being in the presence of the Lord one day and of spending eternity with Him."

- We should never apologize for being "heavenly-minded," (in fact) the NT instructs us to think that way. Paul wrote (in Col. 3:1-2), "If then you have been raised up with Christ, keep seeking the things above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. Set your mind on the things above, not on the things that are on earth."

- It is only when we do that, that we will be able to be patient with the set-backs and struggles of this life. It is only when we set our minds on things above that we will be able to endure with genuine faith the trials and adversities of this earthly life.

- Well, we're going to have to stop here for today. I did *not* even get as far as I had hoped, but we'll pick it up here next time. We're still *not* through with the first main point on our outline.

- But how do we need to respond this morning? Are you trusting God no matter what happens in this life? Are you trusting Him for the things of eternity, even when things don't go quite the way you hoped they would in this life?

- Are you passing the test of worldliness? Are you willing to let go of that which the world says is valuable to have that which God says is truly valuable? Are you truly letting go of the old life to fully embrace the new?

- Are you passing the test of patience? Are you trusting God in the midst of having to wait for Him? Are you trusting Him even when you don't see your dreams come to pass?

- MAKE APPEAL

- PRAYER