

Hebrews – Faith works in the dark - Hebrews 11:7-12

Sign Title: Faith - it works in the dark

October 11, 2009

It is 10:00 at night. You are watching television with your family as a winter storm is howling outside. You hear the snap of a tree and the power is knocked out. (Turn off house lights) You are left in complete darkness. Your wife says to you, honey, There is a flashlight in the laundry room in the back of the cabinet over the washer; trust me, it is there. You start feeling your way down the hall to the laundry room trying to remember where the chairs are and if the matchbox cars that your son was playing with are still on the floor.

The laundry room is not your area of expertise but you are trying to be the fatherly hero so you begin feeling through the cabinet for that flashlight. You keep feeling, no flashlight. What does your wife say? Keep looking! More feeling and still no flashlight. You start wondering, maybe she was wrong, maybe the flashlight isn't in the cabinet but what can you do? It is pitch dark and you can't even see your hand in front of your face. You have no choice but to trust her word.

This is not just a little story, it is a picture of the what often happens in our spiritual life. God turns off the lights and we have nothing left to trust but his word.

We are in Hebrews 11. This morning we are looking at Noah and Abraham, people where God shut off the lights in their life and they had nothing left but to trust God's voice.

Noah - Faith is obeying God.

By faith Noah, being warned by God concerning events as yet unseen, in reverent fear constructed an ark for the saving of his household. By this he condemned the world and became an heir of the righteousness that comes by faith. Hebrews 11:7

The story of Noah and the flood is given in Genesis 6-8. People always talk about Noah and the flood but what is really amazing is not the flood but Noah's faith, his obedience to God's voice for a long time before the flood began. Let's quickly recall the story. The situation on earth was grim. Genesis 6:12 tells us man's wickedness had reached unprecedented levels. God decided to wipe mankind off the face of planet earth. How was he going to do it? A flood.

There was one exceptional character in this wicked world. His name was Noah. The Bible says he was a man of righteousness and a man of faith. God told Noah to build a boat so large that his family and a sampling of the animals could be saved from the flood. God gave Noah all the details for this ship. It was 1 ½ football fields long, 75 feet wide and 3 stories high. The total space was over 100,000 square feet. Where was he going to build this ark? Noah lived between the Tigris and Euphrates, he is 100's of miles away from the nearest body of water. God told him to build the ark in his backyard!

Remember, Noah wasn't saying to himself *Hey, I'm a biblical character, my life will be a good story for kids flannel graph*. Noah was just a normal person like you and me. So let's imagine God spoke to you this week and said, I want you to spend the next 125 years of your life building a boat, bigger than a football field, with no power tools so that in the year 2135 you can save your family from a world-wide catastrophic flood. What would you do?

Most of us would say, *God, I think I ate some bad pizza because I thought I heard you tell me to build mega boat in my backyard, with my own money, using my own 401K plan and it will only take me 125 years. Are you crazy!* I think most of us would have a hard time obeying God. Many scientists believe at this time the earth was covered with a vapor canopy and that it hadn't rained yet. So the idea of rain was something Noah didn't understand. Do you hear how unreasonable God was? Can you picture how in the dark Noah was about how this was all going to work out? What does it say? *Even though he was warned about events not yet seen, in reverent fear, he constructed the ark.*

Noah said, if God says it, even though it doesn't make sense to me, I am willing to believe it is true. People are going to laugh at me for 125 years. People are going to call me the village idiot, my kids are going to be laughed at, I am going to lose my friends over this.... but I fear God more than I fear losing my friends so even though he was in the dark on what a worldwide flood even looked like, he obeyed, even when it didn't make sense.

Folks, that is what faith looks like in real life. Obeying God's Word, even when it makes absolutely no sense.

You may be here this morning and you are saying, "I married the wrong person, they don't treat me right, they don't meet my emotional needs, my friends tell me I have every right to get out of this relationship." Those are the words of our friends and the words of our emotions but what does God say, "

"I hate divorce." Malachi 2:16

They said to him, "Why then did Moses command one to give a certificate of divorce and to send her away?" He said to them, "Because of your hardness of

heart Moses allowed you to divorce your wives, but from the beginning it was not so. And I say to you: whoever divorces his wife, except for sexual immorality, and marries another, commits adultery.” Matthew 19:7-9

Holy fear says, I believe what God says to be true about the sanctity of marriage and God says work through it, not work out of it. Throwing in the towel is saying, God, raising Christ from the dead was not too hard for you. Splitting the Red Sea for an entire nation to walk across on dry land was a small thing for you. Feeding 5,000 with 5 loaves and 2 fishes was a simple thing for you but healing my marriage that is beyond what you can do.

Why does God put us in a marriage that is hard? Many times it is to teach us to obey God’s Word, even when it isn’t easy and doesn’t seem reasonable. Many times it isn’t about God fixing the other person or God changing the circumstance. It is about us learning to obey God like Noah, even when it makes no sense.

No one whose hope is in you will ever be put to shame. Psalm 25:3

There is going to be nobody who says, “That was a really dumb idea, I trust God, he failed me. God never came through.” Faith means, even when I am in the dark about how God can work this out, I will obey him and trust that what he says is right, even it takes a long time for God to prove himself right. Like 125 years. Faith is obeying God even when he leaves us in the dark about how it will ever work out.

Abraham - Faith is waiting on God.

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. Hebrews 11:8

Abraham is the supreme example of faith in the Bible. He was a great man. To this day Christianity, Judaism, and Islam revere him. When you've been dead 4,000 years and three billion people still revere you, you were a great man. Let me quickly review his story from Genesis 12. Abraham lived in the ancient city of Ur. It was the New York City of its day. One day God spoke to Abraham and gave him a command and a promise. The command was to leave his hometown and set off on a journey. But God didn't tell him where to go. The promise was that God would bless him, give him land to call his own, and give him descendants as numerous as the stars in the sky and the sand on the seashore.

Genesis 12:4 tells us how things started out: So Abraham left... Like Noah, he obeyed God even when it didn't make any sense. But for Abraham, faith didn't just involve obeying God when it made no earthly sense, but it also involved waiting on God when it appears God went on vacation.

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. For he was looking forward to the city with foundations, whose architect and builder is God. Hebrews 11:9-10

Abraham got to the Promised Land that God promised him but he never owned it. In fact, it wasn't until he bought the field of Machpelah near Hebron as a family burial plot that he own any land at all. For decades he lived in the Promised Land. Even though God promised him it would all be his, *nothing* happened. It was like God went on vacation and was not returning Abraham's voice messages. Abraham lived in a tent. Picture Abraham living in one of those pop up trailers in the local Promised Land KOA camp ground. He didn't own a

thing, he was a full time squatter. NOTHING happened to show him God was keeping his promise. That would have really been hard. Knowing God promised you the land but saw absolutely no progress for years!

How was he able to do it? How did he keep his faith in God? How could he keep trusting God when he saw nothing? He kept looking forward. He looked forward to his eternal home. He realized the goal of life wasn't getting everything perfect now but goal of life is about having all our desires met in heaven by God. There is a little play on words here. It says Abraham lived in a tent. A tent is a temporary place, but he was looking forward to a city in heaven with foundations. He was looking forward to a permanent place. Abraham understood that fulfillment of the land promise would only be partial and temporary like a tent. Abraham was looking forward to his home in heaven where it was permanent and better.

Friends, realize every good thing God gives us in this life is only temporary (tent like). You ask God for healing, he may give it now but each one of us will get sick again. The great fulfillment is in heaven where we will never be sick again. No cold, no swine flu, that is what we look forward to.

You are a young adult and you ask God for a spouse and he gives you a spouse and you have great satisfaction in that relationship. But here is the news, one of you will die. One of you will leave the other alone. How do we get through the times of aloneness? Realize that when we get to heaven, we will never have to face the times of aloneness again. That is what we look forward to.

Something else I think we should notice here is that all of God's plans are not completed in our lifetime. We usually think that what God is up to begins and ends with us and many times what God is up to is only using us as one link in the chain of something greater than us that God is up to. Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, three generations of tent people in the Promised Land. Three generations of waiting for God to keep his promise when finally they go down to Egypt for food to survive. After Abraham dies, for the 400 years they are in Egypt, the people multiply like rabbits into an entire nation. Then Abraham becomes the father of not just Jews but Christians, because the Bible says that Abraham is the father of all those who are saved by faith. The book of Hebrews will later tell us that those who have gone before us are watching us from heaven can see what is happening on planet earth. Can you picture Abraham in heaven saying, "God, you kept your promise better than I could have imagined!" but see he was only the first link of the chain of what God is doing.

Friends, keep this perspective, we may only be one link in what God is doing. High schoolers, be faithful to Christ now, what God is doing in your life now may not be obvious until your grandchildren. We may die and never understand what God was up to until we view it from the vantage point of eternity. We live in a microwave world where everything is cooked, eaten and discarded in 20 minutes but God doesn't work that way. His plans are often much longer term and the only way to be sure to be on it is to live by faith, trusting God's word and trusting God while we are waiting.

By faith Abraham, even though he was past age—and Sarah herself was barren—was enabled to become a father because he considered himself faithful who had

made the promise. 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. Hebrews 11:11-12

God promised Abraham that from him a nation would come. Abraham thought, *Great, let's get started*. But it didn't start. In fact, Abraham and Sarah blew past the age for bearing children - by decades. Imagine yourself in their place. God told you a nation is going to come from you. He said you would have descendants like the sand on the seashore. Year after year, decade after decade, NOTHING. I imagine that would make their love life a little weird. How would you respond? Would anyone here get disappointed with God? Anyone here get angry? Bitter? At what point do you begin to call God a liar? How about when you are approaching 100?

Let's think about this for a moment. Sarah is 90. Abraham is nearly 100. Do we have any 90+ year old women here today? Would you stand? What would you do if God came to you and said, *You're going to have a baby?* There is a little humor here. It says that not only was Sarah worn out but Abraham was as good as dead. It's not happening with Abraham either.

Here is the fun part. Verse 11 says that Abraham *considered him faithful who had made the promise*. Abraham believed God would still be faithful to his word even though according to Abraham's watch, God was running late. Faith means we believe God will keep his promise even though it seems way late in coming. Faith believes God is reliable and he will keep his word but he is using his own watch and will keep his promise in his time. Faith has many times where God leaves us in the dark about what he is doing.

Doesn't it seem like God leaves us in the dark a lot? The Christian life has a lot more waiting than moving, a lot more red lights than green. Do you have calendar issues with God? Calendar issues are when you think something should have happened in your life but it hasn't

- Maybe, like Abraham, you think God should have given you children by now but it hasn't happened.
- Perhaps, you are waiting for the heart of your child to turn back to God and it hasn't happened.
- Maybe, you are unemployed or underemployed and you are frustrated with God. God, why are you keeping me down?
- Maybe you are angry with God because you sick and it just keeps going on and on and he hasn't made you well. God, I have asked you to heal me so I can be healthy like my friends but it is like you aren't listening.
- Maybe you have calendar issues with God because you are looking for a spouse and God hasn't brought the right person into your life yet. You are saying, God, the pickings are getting pretty slim. You better act fast!

Anyone here have calendar issues with God? What should we do with our calendar issues? In faith, wait on God to fulfill those desires in his time. He may fulfill them in this life. Like Abraham, he may make us wait a really long time, so that when he comes to the rescue he will do it in such a way that there is no question he is the one who did it. He may not fulfill those desires in this life, he may have us wait to the next.

I think we expect too much from this world. Did God ever promise us good health and happy kids and a wonderful marriage? No. He promises that in this world we will have trouble, but take heart, I have overcome the world.

One of the reasons I think God may have us wait a long time for his good gifts is because he is preparing us to handle those gifts. The reason God made Abraham and Sarah wait until they were as good as dead before he gave them a child was to grow their faith, not to destroy their faith. He was making them spiritually ready to receive what he had determined he was going to do all along. Can you imagine how strong their faith was after Isaac was born? Can you imagine many times the story of Isaac's birth was told around the dining room table? Can you imagine the spiritual foundation that gave Isaac when he had calendar issues with God in his life? God had a different calendar that didn't seem to make much sense to Abraham and Sarah, but from God's perspective, it was exactly the right calendar to give Abraham and Sarah a story to remind Isaac that God is faithful, even when it is way past time. It was the calendar they needed so we can read their story and know God is still faithful even when we have calendar issues with him and he leaves us in the dark about what he is doing.

Can you see your life in the lives of Noah and Abraham? These men had to exercise faith when all they had was God's word when they were left in the dark about what God was up to in their lives. Noah obeyed God's word, even when it made no earthly sense, Abraham kept waiting on God's word, even when God seemed long overdue. Neither of them knew what God was up to for a

LONG time. He left them in the dark. It was only later when they realized God knew exactly what he was up to.

Conclusion

Friends, the Christian life is a life of faith. A lot of our spiritual life is obeying God and waiting on God when he leaves us in the dark. When he leaves us in the dark don't rationalize God's Word away. Don't take matters into our own hands and think we know better than he does. We are to simply do what God tells us to do, even when it doesn't *seem* to be the easiest, smartest or most convenient things to do. If what God tells us to do was easy, smart and convenient, I guess the Christian life wouldn't be called a life of faith.

A lot of the Christian life is involves obeying and waiting in the dark trust God's timetable, not ours. If we miss this we will spend our life disappointed. There are a lot of young people disappointed with God because he didn't give them instant success. A lot of men disappointed with God because God didn't give them an instant wife. A lot of women disappointed with God because God didn't give them them the perfect husband. There are a lot of parents disappointed because God didn't give them instant Godly kids. A lot of sick questioning God's love because he didn't give them a quick recovery. A lot of poor angry at God because he didn't give them instant help.

A lot of our Christian lives is obeying and waiting in the dark. Noah obeyed God's Words for 125 years building what looked to be a pretty foolish building projet. Abraham waited till he was over 100 as and good as dead so God could teach him that he will keep his promise, but on his timetable.

Where are you this morning? Anybody groping around in the dark? Keep obeying even when it looks foolish, keep waiting even when it seems God has forgotten. That when faith works best, in the dark.



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