

The Story – Abraham

We come to a turning point in The Story today with the introduction of Abraham. The first eleven chapters of Genesis have dealt with Primeval history: the creation, the fall, Noah and the flood, the tower of Babel. Beginning with chapter 12, the rest of the book of Genesis deals essentially with the story of Abraham and his family. Abraham, Isaac, Jacob and Joseph.

So who is this guy Abraham and why is he important to our big story? The bible calls Abraham the father of the faithful. The apostle Paul calls him the father of us all. He is revered by Muslims, Jews and Christians. In both the Old and New Testament Abraham is referred to as the friend of God so he is kind of a big deal. There is no way we can do justice to his story or cover the whole story this morning. Let me encourage you once again to join us in our daily reading. If you haven't picked up a reading guide, they are available at the information desk and a new one will be coming out soon. You can catch up to us if you like, but if not, start this week.

Let me see if I can summarize Abraham's life story. Originally named Abram which means "exalted father," in Genesis 17 God changes his name to Abraham which means "father of many" or "father of nations." We will just call him Abraham. We are introduced to Abraham in the last of Genesis 11. He is living with his wife Sarah (her name changes too), his father Terah and other family in Ur of the Chaldeans, believed to be in what is now southern Iraq, near Babylon. Ur was a prominent city with beautiful homes, parks and public buildings, but it was a pagan city. They worshiped the moon god. Abraham's father took the family and moved to Haran in Southeastern Turkey. It was there, when Abraham was 75 years old that God spoke to him to leave his country, his people, his father's household and go to a land God would show him, the land of Canaan. Abraham obeyed and went from living in a house in the city to a lifetime of living in tents like a nomad. In Canaan he lived in Shechem, in Bethel, in Hebron, in the Negev, with sojourns in Egypt and Philistine country. Along the way he rescued his nephew Lot from armed men, entertained angels, interceded on behalf of Lot and the inhabitants of Sodom and Gomorrah. Ironically, though he was called the father of nations he and his wife Sarah were childless. In an attempt to produce an heir and at Sarah's suggestion, he fathered a child with Sarah's servant woman named Hagar. That son was named Ishmael and he became the father of the Arab nations. However, God told Abraham he was to have a son by Sarah and miraculously, when Abraham was 99 and Sarah was 90, God gave them a son, Isaac. It was through the lineage of Isaac and his descendants that Jesus the Messiah, the Savior of the world

would be born. Abraham trusted God, even to the point of being willing to offer his son Isaac as a sacrifice to the God who gave him to Abraham (you'll study that next Sunday). God entered into a covenant with Abraham, giving to him and his descendants the land as an inheritance. God promised to bless those who blessed him and curse those who cursed him. Abraham remarried after Sarah died and had other children and finally, at the age of 175 he died and was buried with Sarah his wife.

That's a quick summary, but allow me to point out some key verses of Scripture that point to Abraham and his significance to our story, the unfolding drama of redemption. Hebrews 11 refers to Abraham and commends him for his faith. **“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**

That's a big part of his story. Look at it like this: **“By faith Abraham, when called... obeyed and went.”** He obeyed and went. Imagine Abraham going home to tell Sarah his wife they were moving. “I heard a voice today, I believe it was the voice of the living God. He told me we were to leave and then follow him all of our lives.” “So where are we moving?” “I don't know. He didn't say. He said he would tell me when we got there. All I know is, we have to follow God! We have to obey God.” That's what Abraham and Sarah did the rest of their lives. They left a settled life in Ur to live in tents because that's what obedience to God looked like for them. Abraham obeyed God!

As followers of Christ I'm afraid we've lost sight of the importance of obedience to God. We want comfort and ease. We want to enjoy the blessings of God without obedience. We bend the truth of God's word in order to accommodate our sin and our lust and our failures. Jesus said, **“If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me.” Matthew 16:24** That instruction to take up our cross and follow him, to die to self and live for him, that's doesn't sell in our culture. “Well, that's hard. I don't think God would ask that of me. God wants me to be happy and fulfilled.” God wants you to be obedient! He calls us to choose surrender and obedience to God. Indulging our own desires when they are contrary to God's word leads to disappointment and death but obedience to God leads to blessing and fulfillment. Jesus said, “Seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness and then all these other things will be added to you.” That's what Abraham, the friend of God, the father of the faithful did. God is calling us to obedience. Don't sit around and think about it, contemplating

obedience, picturing what it might be like. I don't think Abraham laid out the pros and cons on a spread sheet. He said yes to God, packed his things and headed out the door. It's time we obeyed God like our father Abraham! What else does the bible tell us about Abraham?

“Abraham believed the Lord and he credited it to him as righteousness.” Genesis 15:6. What does that mean? The apostle Paul wrote the book of Romans in the New Testament and he quotes this passage when he talks about our salvation using Abraham as an example. We have to take a little time to look at this because this is central to our understanding of our salvation and to understanding the importance of Abraham in the story of redemption.

The apostle Paul is explaining to the Romans and to us that our salvation comes only through our faith in Jesus Christ and his saving grace. There is no other way we can be saved. We can't earn salvation by our own efforts. We can't earn a standing of righteousness. We can't do enough that God will say, “based on your perfect performance and your perfect life, I'm going to declare you are righteous.” It can't be done because he says in Romans 3:23 that we've all sinned and come short of God's righteousness.

To make his point, Paul brings up Abraham. Surely God declared him to be righteous because of his good works, after all he was called the friend of God, right? Wrong. Paul says, **“What then shall we say that Abraham, our forefather, discovered in this matter? If in fact, Abraham was justified by works, he had something to boast about – but not before God. What does the Scripture say? ‘Abraham believed God and it was credited to him as righteousness.’” Romans 4:1-3**

Abraham might have had some good works to boast about in front of others but not before God. None of us can brag about our good works to God because he alone is perfect. We aren't and never will be. Abraham wasn't justified by his good works. What does the Scripture say? “Abraham believed God and it was credited to him as righteousness.” Abraham obeyed God, as we just discussed, but he obeyed because he believed. He put his faith and trust in God and in his word and in his faithfulness.

Abraham believed God and the bible says God credited it to him as righteousness. Paul is using a financial term here. To credit something to you means someone puts something in your account. Abraham believed God and God put righteousness, right standing with God, in his account. Look at Romans 4:4. **“Now when a man works, his wages are not credited to him as**

a gift, but as an obligation. However, to the man who does not work but trusts God who justifies the wicked, his faith is credited as righteousness.” Romans 4:4-5

Paul says, “Put your trust in God and believe in him and his saving grace and he will credit that belief to you as righteousness. Believe and you will be saved. He will credit righteousness to your account instead of crediting your sins against you. That’s his grace and forgiveness. That’s salvation by grace through faith in Jesus Christ. When we put our faith in Jesus as our savior and Lord and believe upon him for salvation, he won’t credit our sin against us and instead credits our account with righteousness. He declares us to be in right standing with God through our faith. Does that make sense? I hope it does.

Now understand, we look at Abraham and he was living before Jesus died on the cross and rose again. How could Abraham be saved or justified by faith in Jesus and his death on the cross? Think of it like this. Abraham and the people in the Old Testament were, by faith, looking forward to the cross. They couldn’t see it, they didn’t understand, but by faith they were believing God would provide the sacrifice for them that would take away their sins. They were looking forward, by faith, just like we look back to the cross and his sacrifice, by faith. Based on their faith, based on our faith, God credits righteousness to our account and says we are justified, forgiven, saved by grace through faith. Let’s look at another verse.

I told you God promised Abraham a son but the years went by and he and Sarah remained childless. God had promised, but where was the fulfillment of the promise? God made a covenant with Abraham. He told him to look up at the night sky and promised him his descendants would be as the stars in the sky, yet there was no son, no heir, but Abraham kept on believing. The bible says, **“Against all hope, Abraham in hope believed and so became the father of many nations, just as it had been said to him...he did not waver through unbelief regarding the promise of God, but was strengthened in his faith and gave glory to God, being fully persuaded that God had power to do what he had promised.” Romans 4:18-21**

God told Abraham he would be the father of many nations. Although he had a son with Hagar, Sarah’s maid, God said he was to have a son with Sarah. He was almost 100 and Sarah was 90 when she gave birth to their son Isaac. Appropriately we call him the son of promise. It wasn’t just that the odds were against that happening, it was impossible. It wasn’t going to happen. How could you keep hoping and believing that you were going to have a child when

you're 99 years old and your wife is 90? But look at the Scripture. "He did not waver regarding the promise of God, being fully persuaded that God had the power to do what he had promised."

Are you fully persuaded? Are you refusing to waver regarding the promise of God? We need to be strengthened in our faith and start giving glory to God, believing God has power to do what he said he would do! God's power hasn't diminished. If he can enable a 90 year old woman to give birth to a son I believe he can do the miraculous in your life. Abraham and Sarah were fully persuaded that God had power to do what he had promised. Let's be like Abraham. Let's get fully persuaded, not wavering in unbelief but against all odds let's keep hoping and trusting in the Lord.

Understand the story here is not just about Abraham and Sarah having a child together. The story is in the lineage of Abraham. Matthew's gospel, opens with this introduction, "**A record of the genealogy of Jesus Christ the son of David, the son of Abraham.**" **Matthew 1:1** and the genealogy ends with, "and Jacob the father of Joseph, the husband of Mary, of whom was born Jesus, who is called Christ." Abraham obeyed God because it was essential that he obey God. Abraham obeyed and kept believing God because the result was the birth of Isaac and his descendants through whom Jesus would be born. God works his redemption through obedient, believing people like Abraham and Sarah

Abraham obeyed God. Abraham believed God and it was credited to him as righteousness. Abraham didn't waver at the promise of God but kept on believing even when circumstances suggested otherwise. Look at this: Abraham never stopped following after God, seeking after him. The writer of Hebrews records, "**By faith [Abraham] 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**. They lived like strangers and aliens in the land because God had made them a promise that the land would belong to them and to their descendants forever. They believed it by faith yet the only land we see Abraham purchase was the cave in which he buried his beloved Sarah. It was a journey of faith.

Eventually they took possession of the land, but it wasn't just the promise of land in the Middle East. The Scripture indicates Abraham had caught sight of another city. The promise of God became more than just a place to plant a tent or build a city to call his own. It was about an

eternal relationship and an eternal city. Abraham believed by faith that he was going to dwell someday in a city that God himself would build and prepare. Paul said Abraham was the father of us all and here we are, living in hope of that same city, believing God himself is the architect, believing Jesus has gone to prepare that place for us and he is coming again to take us to be with him forever. We live with that promise in our heart and it keeps us walking with God. We journey, like Abraham, with a promise burning in our heart, with a city in view. Can you see it? Have you got people waiting on you over there in that holy city? I do and I'm not going to miss it. Not for the world.

The writer of Hebrews spoke of Abraham and his sons and others when he wrote, **“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. People who say such things show that they are looking for a country of their own. If they had been thinking of the country they had left, they would have had opportunity to return. 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.” Hebrews 11:13-16** I'm longing for that city God has prepared for us aren't you? Don't think of stopping. Don't think of turning around and going back to the country you've left. Do like Abraham, keep on going. Keep walking with God.

In Genesis 24 there is a final verse I want you to see. Abraham was sending his servant back to his home country to find a wife for Isaac among Abraham's people. The servant said, “what if the woman won't come back with me?” Abraham said, **“The Lord, before whom I have walked, will send his angel with you and make your journey a success.” Genesis 24:40.** One translation reads, **“The Lord in whose presence I have walked ...will grant success to your journey.”** Here is the secret to a blessed life. Maybe it's the key to understanding Abraham and his journey, He walked in the presence of the Lord. He journeyed in God's presence, trusting, believing, refusing to quit or to give up. This is one of the reasons the apostle Paul referred to Abraham as the father of us all. He was the father of those who follow God by faith. You won't see it all come to fruition. You may not see all of God's promises to you and your family come to pass in your lifetime, but we keep living by faith because we consider the one who promised us to be faithful! We keep walking by faith, looking for that city where in his presence we will live forever. Do you want to live like Abraham?