

God Will Provide the Lamb

Romans 4:1-5, 13-17

INTRODUCTION

While on a vacation several summers ago, my wife Karen graciously accompanied me on a visit to Cooperstown and the Baseball Hall of Fame. Growing up in the era of the Big Red Machine, I was excited to see the exhibits about such players and coaches as: Johnny Bench, Joe Morgan, Tony Perez, and Sparky Anderson.

As a kid ... long enough ago that I don't remember it well ... I also went to the National Football Hall of Fame in Canton, OH. I need to go back again someday.

Visiting those two Halls of Fame requires some planning ... and vacation time ... and tickets. They are worth it, but access isn't easy for most of us.

There is, though, another Hall of Fame that any of us can visit every day ... on the spur of the moment even ... and with no cost. It is found in the 11th chapter of Hebrews, near the back of your Bible. It is known as the "Faith Hall of Fame."

- There you can be introduced to the stories of faith of some of the great saints of the Bible.
 - Moses, Noah, Enoch, Gideon, Samson and Rahab, David and Samuel and more.
- You will also learn the stories of a bunch of unnamed heroes who, according to those verses:

... conquered kingdoms, administered justice ... shut the mouths of lions, quenched the fury of the flames, and escaped the edge of the sword. (Hebrews 11)

Some of the people you will meet in the Faith Hall of Fame:

... were tortured and flogged. They were put to death by stoning; sawed in two; killed by the sword. (Hebrews 11)

And you will also learn about a man named Abraham. We read:

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. By faith he made his home in the promised land like a stranger in a foreign country ... (Hebrews 11:8-9)

The story of Abraham is a fascinating one.

- Here is a 75-year-old man, living in a culture that does not worship the God of the Bible.

- In a time in history that depends on having a heir to continue the family line, he had none, and at age 75 the likelihood of him ever having a son was minimal at best.
- But somehow amid all the voices of his surrounding culture, Abraham heard the voice of God...
 - Calling him to leave where he was for an unknown destination.
 - Telling him that he would not only have a son, but that he would be the father of many nations.
- And perhaps most fascinating of all, Abraham did what God asked him to do.
- But even more fascinating ... God did what He promised and old man Abraham became a father. When he was 99 years old, he had a son. We know him as Isaac.

It was through Isaac that God was going to fulfill the promise of many nations. But one day, quite unexpectedly, God made an unthinkable request. He asked Abraham to take his son Isaac to the top of Mount Moriah and offer him as a sacrifice. How would this hero of the faith respond to that incredible request? Still reading from Hebrews 11:

By faith Abraham, when God tested him, offered Isaac as a sacrifice. He who had embraced the promises was about to sacrifice his one and only son, even though God had said to him, "It is through Isaac that your offspring will be reckoned." Abraham reasoned that God could even raise the dead... (Hebrews 11:17-19)

By faith Abraham ...

- Obeyed the call of God to leave his home and go to another place.
- Lived as a stranger in that promised land as he anticipated what God was going to do.
- Offered Isaac, knowing that the God who had given his 99-year-old body a son could still fulfill His promise that Abraham would be the father of many nations through that son Isaac.

The writer of Romans (our second reading) poses an interesting for us to consider this morning:

What then shall we say that Abraham, our forefather according to the flesh, discovered in this matter? (Romans 4:1)

And then he proceeds to answer his own question. According to the Romans text, Abraham learned two valuable lessons:

LESSON #1: HALL OF FAME FAITH IS DEVELOPED IN SMALL ACTS OF OBEDIENCE

Mary, Mary, quite contrary, how does your garden grow?

With silver bells and cockleshells and pretty maids all in a row.

Those ingredients might grow your garden, but they won't grow your faith.

1. Faith doesn't grow because of the number of good things you do.

It's a common misconception. Many people still try that approach today. "If I do enough good deeds, God will take note and nothing bad will happen to me."

The text makes it clear, though. Efforts results in wages. You get what you deserve.

Now to the one who works, wages are not credited as a gift but as an obligation. (Romans 4:4)

But wages aren't faith. Wages won't earn you selection to the Faith Hall of Fame. Only faith does.

2. Faith doesn't grow by keeping the Law

Look at verse 13:

It was not through the law that Abraham and his offspring received the promise that he would be heir of the world, but through the righteousness that comes by faith. (Romans 4:13)

The Ten Commandments are a great description of what pleases God and what doesn't, but a legalistic approach won't grow your faith.

- The purpose of the Law is to show you that you can't keep the Law.

The Law is not designed to make you good, but to prove to you that you are bad.

3. Faith does grow by doing what God asks you to do

In Luke 11:28 Jesus tells His followers then and now:

Blessed rather are those who hear the word of God and obey it. (Luke 11:28)

It starts with the simple things and builds over time. We think Isaac was a young teenager when Abraham was asked to sacrifice him. That means about 40 years had passed since Abraham had first heard the call of God. The big faith challenge took 40 years.

- But along the way Abraham had to trust God in a bunch of other stuff. You can read about it in Genesis chapters 13-21.
- And his Hall of Fame faith was grown each time he trusted God for the circumstances around him.

And a growing faith is important – very important, because ...

And without faith it is impossible to please God ... (Hebrews 11:6)

In faith Abraham continued to do what God asked, and his faith continued to grow.

LESSON #2: ABRAHAM LEARNED THAT GOD WILL PROVIDE THE LAMB

Even faith-filled Abraham still had that problem we talked about in last Sunday's sermon. Remember? Because of the sin that was unleashed in this world every person who has and who ever will live, has to be covered by the sacrifice of a lamb. Our theme week as we started this Lenten journey was "We need a lamb."

On that difficult day when Abraham and Isaac started to climb Mt. Moriah, young Isaac asked his father:

"The fire and wood are here," Isaac said, "but **where is the lamb** for the burnt offering?" (Genesis 22:7)

His dad, in faith, replied:

"God himself will provide the lamb for the burnt offering, my son." (Genesis 22:8)

And God did. When the time for the sacrifice came, the faith of Abraham was honored. God provided a lamb. And the text tells us:

So Abraham called that place The Lord Will Provide. And to this day it is said, "On the mountain of the Lord it will be provided." (Genesis 22:14)

Abraham needed a lamb and God provided.

APPLICATION

There is a verse of Scripture that I think clearly defines the process God has laid out for each one of us.

For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God— not by works, so that no one can boast.
(Ephesians 2:8-9)

Our theme this Lenten season is intended to point us to Jesus, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.

Behold the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world. (John 1:29)

We need a lamb, and God has provided that lamb. Jesus. By placing our faith in Jesus, His sacrifice on the cross is applied to our lives.

How do we do that?

1. It begins by saying "yes" to His call to follow Him. That is always the first step of faith.

You might pray a simple prayer like this: Dear God, I know I have sinned and I know that nothing I can do on my own can change that. I need a lamb, and so I say "yes" to Jesus. Thank you for providing this Lamb for me. Amen.

2. Your faith grows as you listen to His voice and put into practice what you hear.
 - a. Read the Bible
 - b. Worship regularly with faithful Christians

The goal of Lent is to make us aware of our need for a Lamb. The intensity of that awareness crescendos until Easter when joy together with people of faith all across the world to proclaim our victory in Jesus.

We need a lamb, and God has provided one. Jesus.

Amen.