

# Confidence in the Unseen

## Hebrews 11:1-3, 8-16

### INTRODUCTION

Over the last month as I have rehabbed my knee, I have had an opportunity to watch some of my favorite movies. I needed something to distract me while I was doing all of those therapy exercises. I watched ...

- The Blues Brothers ... John Belushi and Dan Akroyd on a mission from God. Just fun stupid humor.
- Indiana Jones and the Last Crusade. That's the one where Indiana Jones, played by Harrison Ford, was searching for the Holy Grail, along with his father, played by Sean Connery.

The scene I like best in this last movie is where Indiana Jones must take a leap of faith.

- If you know the scene, I think it is the best picture of faith I have ever seen...
- Jones must cross a deep precipice without a visible bridge.
- He must trust that the bridge will appear, and in so doing he demonstrates great faith despite his uncertainty about what he cannot see.

And while the movie gives a great visual picture of faith, Hebrews 11 gives us the best written definition. You've heard it before:

Faith is confidence in what we hope for and assurance about what we do not see. (Hebrews 11:1)

In Indiana Jones terminology, faith is knowing that the bridge is there even if you can't see it when you take that first step.

- This 11th chapter of Hebrews is filled with stories about ordinary people who trusted God for things they could not see.
- Some names you know, like Abraham, Noah, and Enoch.
- But there are many others who remain nameless but are also celebrated in this chapter.

The key thing about faith is that you cannot see what is there. If you can see it, it is no longer a leap of faith. Right?

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In this series of sermons I am reflecting on what I have called "COMMON SINCE." I am building my teaching on how the word "since" is used in the Scriptures. Since makes a statement of truth and then concludes that:

In view of this stated fact, these next statements should be the natural consequences.

Today's COMMON SINCE comes from a different angle than last week's did.

- Last week we established a theological truth: You have been raised with Christ.
  - Faith is expressed in a solid theological truth.
- This week we work from the perspective of the unseen ... a more practical kind of faith.

We find it in the story of Abraham as recorded in our first reading (Genesis 15:1-6).

- Let me remind you of the back story. When we first meet this man in Genesis 12, he is known as Abram ... a name which means "father."
- Now that name Abram is a cruel joke, because Abram has no children, especially no son.
- He is 75 years old, so the likelihood of him ever living up to his name is slim at best.
- But there in chapter 12 God promised Abram that he would become a mighty nation, which Abram rightly interpreted to mean "I'm going to be a dad."

*(God speaking):* And I will make of you a great nation... (Genesis 12:2)

- By the time we get to today's text, three chapters later, many years have passed, and Abram's biological clock has continued to tick.
- Most importantly ... **The fulfillment of the promise is still unseen.**
- So Abram raises this "COMMON SINCE" statement with God.

"Sovereign Lord, what can you give me **since** I remain childless and the one who will inherit my estate is Eliezer of Damascus?" And Abram said, "You have given me no children; so a servant in my household will be my heir." (Genesis 15:2-3)

There's the SINCE. Now what? What should be the natural next steps? What do you do when you can't see the bridge? What do you do when you know God has promised something and it still hasn't happened?

Let's look at the example of Abraham.

## #1: WHAT ABRAHAM DID RIGHT

### 1. He talked to God about the problem

God is never afraid or angry when you confront Him with issues like that. How do I know? Read the Psalms!

My God, I cry out by day, but you do not answer, by night, but I find no rest.  
(Psalm 22:2)

How long, Lord, will you look on? Rescue me from their ravages, Do not let those gloat over me who are my enemies without cause; do not let those who hate me without reason maliciously wink the eye. Lord, you have seen this; do not be silent. Do not be far from me, Lord. (Psalm 35:17ff)

In a previous congregation a man came to talk to me and confessed that he was angry at God. I asked, "What did God say when you told Him you were angry?" He was shocked! "I could never tell God that." I responded "But He already knows what you are thinking. Why not talk to Him about it. King David did."

- This man came back a few weeks later to tell me: "I've had the best prayer times ever since you told me to be honest with God."

Abraham talked this problem out with God. "Lord, You promised, and You haven't delivered! I don't see how this can happen. I'm feeling let down."

And the Scripture says that God responded like this:

Then the word of the Lord came to him: "This man will not be your heir, but a son who is your own flesh and blood will be your heir." He took him outside and said, "Look up at the sky and count the stars—if indeed you can count them." Then he said to him, "So shall your offspring be."

The promise was renewed ... and the result of that was the second thing Abram did right.

## **2. He continued to believe**

Look at verse 6:

Abram believed the Lord, and he credited it to him as righteousness. (Genesis 15:6)

When the Apostle Paul tells this story in the book of Romans, he describes Abram's faith in dramatic terms:

Without weakening in his faith, Abraham faced the fact that his body was as good as dead—since he was about a hundred years old—and that Sarah's womb was also dead. Yet he did not waver through unbelief regarding the promise of God ... (Romans 4:19-20)

He became convinced that if God promised God will do it. 1 Thessalonians 5 says this:

The one who calls you is faithful, and he will do it. (1 Thessalonians 5:24)

That is a good verse of Scripture for us all to memorize. Post it on the refrigerator! (That's where all good things go!)

Abraham moved forward in his life with the certainty that it would happen even if it had not happened yet or if he could understand how. He simply believed.

## #2: TWO CAUTIONS

One of the good things about Abraham is that, even though he did some things right, and even though he qualified for inclusion in the list of faithful people in Hebrews 11, he still made some mistakes along the way.

- My grandson told me the other day "Papa, I like making mistakes because I learn so much from them."
- I don't know that I like making them, but he's right ... I do learn a lot.
- And likewise, we can learn a lot from Abram's mistakes.

### 1. Don't try to fulfill the promise yourself.

If you know the story of Abraham, you will remember that there came a point in time when he decided God needed a little help.

- Abraham – along with his wife Sarah – thought that if he would have a child by another woman, God would get the assistance He needed.
- But the promise was not to be fulfilled through Abraham alone. It was to be fulfilled through Abraham and Sarah.
- And when you watch the nightly news coming out of the Middle East you still see why Abraham's help was not helpful at all.

God doesn't need your help to do what He has promised to do.

- There may be things God asks you to do along the way. True. But those things will never be different that the original promise.
- Whatever God promises, He is very capable of fulfilling it on His own.

Some days my dad would let my brother and I help him when he would work on the car. Most days, though, he would tell us to go play with the neighbors.

- Our help usually wasn't helpful. We would wander off with the tool he needed or lose the bolt or get our heads in the way of what he wanted to see. Mom thought it was sweet, but Dad ... not so much.
- Sometimes I think God must feel the way dad did. "Instead of helping, why don't do you go play with the neighbors?" Right?

Abraham had to learn a hard lesson, even though his intentions were good. So ... just be careful whenever you think God might need your help.

### 2. Don't mistake your wishes for God's promise

I heard a story about a young man and young woman met each other in high school and found they had so much in common. They even shared the same birthday.

A few years later they decided to get married and decided their shared birthday would be a great day for a wedding too. So every year they would celebrate two birthdays and an anniversary on the same day.

The years passed by. They had their struggles, of course, but they stuck it out even though both would confess to being less than perfectly happy. Soon they were standing at the table celebrating their 40<sup>th</sup> wedding anniversary and their 63<sup>rd</sup>

birthday. They made their wishes and blew out their candles. The husband looked at his wife and asked, "What did you wish for?" "Well, we were so young and poor when we got engaged, so I wished for a larger diamond ring." Suddenly, poof!, on her finger was the largest diamond ring either of them had ever seen.

Shocked, the husband said, "Well, I wished for a wife who was 30 years younger than I am." And, poof!, suddenly he turned 93.

We may – and likely do – wish for a lot of things. Things we want with all our heart. Not necessarily bad things, but oh how we want them to be true.

- And sometimes we can convince ourselves that God should want that too.
- And we get disappointed or angry when God does do what we wish.
- We need to remember that just because we want it does not mean God has promised it.

Faith means trusting in what God has promised, not in what we want.

### **APPLICATION**

As I was preparing this sermon, I came across this simple prayer that I copied into my own prayer journal. I offer it to you in closing:

Not so in haste, my heart!  
Have faith in God and wait;  
Although he linger long,  
He never comes too late.  
He never comes too late,  
He knoweth what is best:  
Vex not thyself in vain;  
Until he cometh, rest.  
Until he cometh, rest.  
Nor grudge the hours that roll:  
The feet that wait for God  
Are soonest at the goal.  
Are soonest at the goal.  
That is not gained by speed;  
Then hold thee still, my heart,  
For I shall wait his lead.

Amen.