

Faith – Genesis 15

Here's a question for you. If you were going to be inducted into a Hall of Fame, which Hall of Fame would it be? Why would you be inducted to be in a HOF? Think about it. There is a Football HOF, a baseball HOF, basketball, soccer, rock and roll, country music, barbecue, a clown HOF, quilters have their HOF. There is even a Criminal HOF in Canada. I have been in the Texas Ranger HOF in Waco. It's pretty cool. Which one fits you?

Well, let's think about it. How does somebody get into a HOF? They obviously have to prove that they are better at whatever it is they do than the average person who does it, right? And how does a person prove they are the best baseball player or football player or quilter or whatever? They do what they are supposed to do and what is expected of them better than most people and normally they have to do it for years to be inducted into a HOF.

Did you know that there is actually a Faith HOF? There is. And you have it in your hands. **Hebrews chapter 11** is called the faith chapter. It is sort of the Faith Hall of Fame. It has all the big names in it. Enoch, Noah, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Moses and more are all in there. Even Rahab the prostitute is mentioned. And do you know why she was mentioned specifically? It says that Rahab was not killed with the others who were disobedient. In other words, Rahab's obedience is what put her in the Faith HOF.

It takes obedience to prove your faith. You have to actually do something. You can have faith and not do anything but your faith will always be proven by your actions. Every person mentioned in that chapter did something to prove their faith by their obedience to God. Now, how close are you to being inducted into this most important HOF, the Faith HOF? Well, I want to look at somebody that is not just mentioned in **Hebrews 11**, but he has more written about him than anybody else in the chapter. Abraham is considered by many to be the father of faith (Rom. 4:11). He is the Tiger Woods, the Muhammed Ali, the Michael Jordan of faith. He's the GOAT. The greatest of all time.

But I know what some of you are thinking this morning. You are thinking that you struggle with faith. I know that's what you're thinking because I actually took a poll last Sunday night and asked what y'all struggled with and some of you wrote down that you struggle with faith. I asked everybody to just write down one word about where you struggle and turn it in. Some of those here that night couldn't or wouldn't write anything and some of

them took three sheets of paper double-spaced front and back. So, we are starting a new sermon series on what we struggle with and what does the Bible say? I ask that question a lot in the jail and get some crazy answers sometimes. But I usually just turn to **Philippians chapter 4** no matter what they say. For this study, I want to look at biblical characters that struggled with what we struggle with and for today's issue of faith, we will look at Abraham. Actually, the passage that will be our main focus calls him Abram. It was before God named him Abraham. But it's the same guy.

Turn to **Genesis chapter 15** and let's read **verses 1-6**. As you turn there, we have to admit that when it comes to Abram / Abraham, it's easy to be intimidated. He is first mentioned as being born in **chapter 11** and then right away in **chapter 12** it says that God told Abram to leave his country and go to a land God would show him later. And what does Abram do? It says simply...Abram left. No questions. No goodbyes. No excuses. No waiting. Just left. That's some pretty impressive faith right there, especially since you have to remember that Abram didn't have the Bible to help him understand God. And he didn't have the Holy Spirit living inside of him like believers do today.

But Abram was far from perfect. He had doubts and fears. He said and did the wrong thing sometimes. He had made some powerful enemies along the way and he was getting older and nothing in this life was guaranteed for him. He was wealthy but he knew that might not last. And worst of all, his wife Sarai was barren and had given him no kids and that was weighing heavy on his mind. So, it's in that context that God speaks to him again in **chapter 15**. Let's read it.

After this, the word of the Lord came to Abram in a vision:

“Do not be afraid, Abram.

I am your shield,

your very great reward.”

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

⁴Then 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.” ⁵He 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.”

⁶*Abram believed the Lord, and he credited it to him as righteousness.*

When God tells Abram not to be afraid and that He (God) is his reward, there was a good reason for God to say this. Abram had just defeated a much larger army made up of a partnership of four kings ([Genesis 14:14-16](#)). He had reason to be afraid, expecting an attack of retribution. Abram needed a **shield** because he expected to be attacked. He needed **reward**, because he had denied himself great reward offered from the king of Sodom.

Charles Spurgeon once said, *“When believers need a **shield** or a **reward**, He (God) becomes those things. I do not think that any human mind can ever grasp the fullness of meaning of these four words, ‘I am thy reward.’ God himself is the reward of his faithful people.”*

But what amazes me in this passage is that it says that God appeared to Abram in a vision and gave him those encouraging words but Abram had a complaint. He spoke it nicely and respectfully and God wasn’t mad. But Abram mentioned that he had no kids, no heir to his estate. God told him in **chapter 12** that He was going to make Abram into a great nation but still, here we are in **chapter 15** and no kids yet. And in Abram’s mind, the clock was ticking.

Now, from what we know about Eliezer of Damascus, he was a good guy but he wasn’t a blood relative. He wasn’t a son and that’s what Abram wanted. That’s what Abram thought God was promising him in **chapter 12**. So, Abram gave God a subtle reminder of what he was expecting.

I’m reminded of David when he prayed in **Psalm 55**, *“Listen to my prayer, oh God. Do not ignore my plea. Hear me and answer me. My thoughts trouble me and I am distraught!”* It’s okay to go to God with your true feelings. He knows what you’re thinking anyway. Be honest with Him. Learn from Job and know when to shut up about it but God is big enough to hear your polite but honest complaints. David knew that and he goes on to say in **Psalm 55**, *“Cast your cares on the Lord and He will sustain you.”* And we learned last week in the message about prayer that God will answer you. It may not be in your timing or the way you want it answered but God always answers the prayers of His children.

And God answered Abram. Look again at **verse 4 of chapter 15**. *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.”* And I love what happens next. God gives Abram an illustration. It is

obviously nighttime and God tells Abram to go look up into the sky and count the stars. That's how many offspring you will have, God says.

Then the next sentence really sums up Abram's whole life. He was told to leave his home. He left. God told him to sacrifice his son Isaac later on. He did as he was told without waiting. Everything God told him to do, he did it and everywhere God told him to go, he went there. **Verse 6** says, *Abram believed the Lord, and he credited it to him as righteousness.*

That word "believed" is *am-an'* in the original Hebrew and it is from the same word that we get "amen." When you say "amen" to something, you are saying you truly believe that. Here it means that Abram was full of trust and confidence in God. The word literally means to be unmovable no matter what happens. Nothing was going to change Abram's mind, even the passage of many years because that is exactly what happened. Years and years went by and God waited and waited and waited but Abram never doubted. Yes, he made some bad decisions with his wife's slave girl but ultimately Abram believed God. He am-an'ed God. He believed.

Now, for those of you that struggle with faith, you may be thinking right now that you wouldn't struggle at all with it if God spoke to you like He did to Abram. If God came to you in a vision or spoke to you audibly or even sent an angel, you would believe then, wouldn't you? You would am-an and amen all day long. No struggle. But let me remind you that Abram had none of the scriptures like we do today. If he had it would have been easier for him to believe.

If Abram had the same scriptures we do he could have read what Paul said in **Romans chapter 4**. Paul said, *"What does the scripture say? Abraham believed God and it was credited to him as righteousness."* That would have been nice for Abram to read. That would make him feel better. Or maybe he could have read **Hebrews 11** where it says, *"By faith Abraham, even though he was too old to have children—and Sarah herself was not able to conceive—was enabled to become a father because he considered him faithful who had made the promise. ¹² 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."* That sure would have helped, wouldn't it? But he didn't have that.

He also didn't have the Holy Spirit living in his life like we do. It would have been nice to here God's Spirit say, *"This is the way. Walk in it."* (Isaiah 30:21) But he didn't have that and you do if you are a true believer.

So, what can we do to make sure we are hearing God when He speaks? Isn't that the biggest problem people have that struggle with faith? Is it really God speaking to me or is it just me? Is it Satan speaking? Is it the culture? How do I know? If I **knew** God was telling me to stand on my head, I would be a head-standing sucker. But how do I know it is really Him?

What can you do to hear God better when He does speak? Well, if I started speaking real softly and quietly and you couldn't hear me, what might you do? You might get closer to me. I'm not trying to be a smart Alec when I say you need to get closer to God to make sure you hear Him when He does speak. And how do we do that? Let me give you several ways that you might get closer to God and be able to hear Him better and increase your faith. You can write them down if you want but they aren't really all that profound.

The first thing you do to increase your faith is to go through some seriously bad and difficult times. That definitely increases your faith. In fact, **James 1** tells us to consider it all pure joy when we go through trials because in the end, we will lack nothing. Faith is like a muscle. When you use the measure of faith that God gives you and you believe God for some small thing, your faith grows and strengthens and allows you to have faith in bigger things. So, don't be afraid when fearful times come.

The next thing you need to do to strengthen your faith is to be around other Christians. You know, when I see some of y'all come out of what you have come out of, it strengthens my faith. Some of you have overcome drugs or alcohol or depression or great poverty. Some of you have had cancer. Some of you still have cancer and still praise the Lord! That's encouraging. And where else are you going to see that and be part of that except at church?

It's the same idea with spending time in the Bible. The stories like we have read today about Abe's belief help us to have more and better belief ourselves. Shoot, if Rahab can have faith, you can! Not to mention the others like Moses who was put into a river as a baby by his mother, found by a princess and then given right back to his mother. That is faith-strengthening. What about Noah? *"Uh, hey Noah, I need you to build the world's biggest boat and put all the animals in the world in there and then I'm gonna shut you in and make it rain? What's rain? Aw, don't worry about it. Just believe."*

Or how about Joshua? Don't you know Joshua wanted some clarification when God told him how to conquer Jericho? *"Wait, God. Hang on. Now...you want us to march around the*

city seven times and then holler and the walls will fall down? Are you sure? Can I maybe get a second opinion?" Those stories increase our faith.

Or you can read about all the prophecies in scripture and how they were fulfilled. That will make you believe even more in the God who speaks to you today. All of that, with prayer and fasting and using the faith that God has given you will add up to increased faith. The question is, what are you going to do when God asks you to do something? Maybe He tells you to move. Or maybe He tells you to give something or help somebody or stop some habit you have. Can you trust Him to be there? Can you believe that He will be enough? Can you trust Him when He says you can do all things through Christ or even when He tells you no to your request but He will give you the grace to get through it like He did for Paul?

Music

Do you have faith? I will say again that it takes obedience to prove your faith. You have to actually do something. You can have faith and not do anything but your faith will always be proven by your actions. What is God telling you today? I can't answer that for you. That is just between you and Him. Not sure what He's saying? Get closer to Him. Then have patience like Abram did. God will answer your prayers.

Do you have a relationship with God through His Son Jesus today? It's the only way to hear from Him plus the only way to peace and joy in this life and it is surely the only way to Heaven. Trust in Jesus as the one who died on the cross to pay for your sins and paid the price you couldn't pay. Believe in Him and have everlasting life being rewarded for eternity for what you did on earth. Make that decision right now if you never have before.