

## Scripture Readings

Hebrews 11:1–2

<sup>1</sup> Now faith is *the* certainty of *things* hoped for, a proof of things not seen. <sup>2</sup> For by it the people of old gained approval.

Hebrews 11:8–11

<sup>8</sup> By faith Abraham, when he was called, obeyed by going out to a place which he was to receive for an inheritance; and he left, not knowing where he was going. <sup>9</sup> By faith he lived as a stranger in the land of promise, as *in* a foreign *land*, living in tents with Isaac and Jacob, fellow heirs of the same promise; <sup>10</sup> for he was looking for the city which has foundations, whose architect and builder is God. <sup>11</sup> By faith even Sarah herself received ability to conceive, even beyond *the* proper time of life, since she considered Him faithful who had promised.

### Sermon Text:

Genesis 22:1-14

1 Now it came about after these things, that God tested Abraham, and said to him, “Abraham!” And he said, “Here I am.” 2 He said, “Take now your son, your only son, whom you love, Isaac, and go to the land of Moriah, and offer him there as a burnt offering on one of the mountains of which I will tell you.” 3 So Abraham rose early in the morning and saddled his donkey, and took two of his young men with him and Isaac his son; and he split wood for the burnt offering, and arose and went to the place of which God had told him. 4 On the third day Abraham raised his eyes and saw the place from a distance. 5 Abraham said to his young men, “Stay here with the donkey, and I and the lad will go over there; and we will worship and return to you.” 6 Abraham took the wood of the burnt offering and laid it on Isaac his son, and he took in his hand the fire and the knife. So the two of them walked on together. 7 Isaac spoke to Abraham his father and said, “My father!” And he said, “Here I am, my son.” And he said, “Behold, the fire and the wood, but where is the lamb for the burnt offering?” 8 Abraham said, “God will provide for Himself the lamb for the burnt offering, my son.” So the two of them walked on together. 9 Then they came to the place of which God had told him; and Abraham built the altar there and arranged the wood, and bound his son Isaac and laid him on the altar, on top of the wood. 10 Abraham stretched out his hand and took the knife to slay his son. 11 But the angel of the Lord called to him from heaven and said, “Abraham, Abraham!” And he said, “Here I am.” 12 He said, “Do not stretch out your hand against the lad, and do nothing to him; for now I know that you fear God, since you have not withheld your son, your only son, from Me.” 13 Then Abraham raised his eyes and looked, and behold, behind him a ram caught in the thicket by his horns; and Abraham went and took the ram and offered him up for a burnt offering in the place of his son. 14 Abraham called the name of that place The Lord Will Provide, as it is said to this day, “In the mount of the Lord it will be provided.”

## **A Rooted Faith - Part 1 by John Costa**

**Second Congregational Church—Winsted 6/23/24**

### **Introduction:**

Before we read the text, I just want to mention that today will be the first of a three-part message on defining biblical faith. And per the title, what a rooted faith looks like. This morning we'll see what faith in God looked like in the Old Testament, In the second part we'll look at the New Testament faith of the "disciples *turned* apostles", and finally we'll look at the contemporary Christian faith. There's a common misconception regarding the Christian faith, not only held by atheists and skeptics but even many Christians as well. And that is, that Christians hold a sort of blind faith. A belief in something we can't be certain of. The concept that faith opposes all reason—Faith completely ignores logic and disregards evidence. But in a moment, we'll see if that's truly the case according to the Scripture itself. We'll see, that although we're expected to trust God daily rather than leaning on our own understanding, the basis of our faith in Christ is *grounded* in good reason and *is* supported by evidence. As we'll see in the text today, some of the greatest figures of faith in the Bible *based* their faith on the undeniable experiences they had with a reliable, trustworthy, and almighty God. Now, many of us understand what it means to have personal faith in Christ. But being able to articulate that, through the stigma, and misconceptions around the Christian faith is another story. Believe it or not, the story of Abraham and Isaac does a great job of clarifying the misunderstanding *about* the Christian faith.

### **Illustration:**

So, I remember hearing an old story told by pastors to illustrate faith. It's a story about a family who got caught in a bad house fire. With no way for anyone to get back into the house, the little boy got stuck inside near the second-floor window. Surrounded by smoke and fire the boy couldn't see anything. But his father outside called to the boy, "son, I need you to jump out the window." The boy said, "but I can't see you." "Yes, but you can hear my voice, I'm right here. And I promise I'll catch you." Sure enough, the boy had enough faith to blindly jump into his father's arms. Now, although this is a great illustration of the type of faith believer's place in our heavenly Father, what's often overlooked in the story is that the only reason the boy trusted the man enough to jump, was because it was his own father. I recently heard another story of a man who took three kids in the neighborhood and let them stand on an 8-foot pier. The first child jumped into the man's arms. The second child, without any hesitation, leaped off into the man's arms. The third child, however, just stood there, afraid to jump off. Was it that the third child wasn't as courageous or bold as the other two? No, the first two kids were his children. The other kid belonged to a neighbor.

### **A Rooted and Grounded Faith:**

Sometimes, as Christians, we're encouraged to have faith like a child, or childlike faith. Which might be a shock, actually isn't an actual phrase in the Bible. We are called to enter the kingdom as children—whether that be in humility, meekness, or perhaps faith, we need to remember that children aren't necessarily quick to believe. Children aren't naïve or gullible.

They won't believe just anything or anyone. But a child will trust a loving and caring father who has proven to be a protector—one who has never lied to them or let them down.

The story of Abraham's willingness to sacrifice Isaac is an interesting one. And yet, often misunderstood. This story has been used by some to demonstrate the dangers of religion and to paint God as this maniacal being who arbitrarily asks his children to do horrendous things. They compare this story to religious extremists killing in the name of God, suggesting that Christians are demanded to follow God's commands with blind obedience despite how destructive or illogical it might be. And it's because they see Abraham's willingness to kill his own son as unwarranted or unjustified obedience to God. But is that what really took place? Granted, Although his faithfulness demonstrates obedience and fear of God, it's not about unquestioned obedience, and we'll see why in a moment.

Although some suggest that Christians place their faith in something they can't be certain of, we're reminded that we have good reason not only to believe that God exists but also in the evidence of the life of Christ, His miracles, and his resurrection. And Pastor Dan has recently reminded us of some of these. For instance, he shared what we call "The Minimal Facts", which is only one of many supporting arguments for the faith. To quickly recap, these are five or more historical facts that have scholarly consensus. Not only among evangelical conservative scholars, but critical (atheist) scholars. And one of these is the historical validation of the empty tomb and the hundreds who claimed to witness the risen Christ. And since none of these facts are contested by any reputable scholar, there has to be some plausible explanation—which none can offer. Contrary to popular belief, there *is* scientific, archaeological, and historical evidence that supports the existence of a divine Creator, as well as the validity of the Bible. But even more so, we often forget that one of the greatest pieces of evidence we have is our personal experience—our testimony, deliverance, transformation, and witness of miracles. And yet sometimes Christians believe the lie, that since our personal experience can't be empirically validated, it doesn't count as evidence. And thus, our faith is grounded in nothing but empty hope and wishful thinking. Although there *are* times in our journey when we're required to walk in blind trust over our own understanding, our general faith in God—the very basis of our faith, is not something we blindly believe. But something we *can* hold with certainty and assurance. So, although we may trust that God has the ability *to do* that which is beyond the limitations of science or even our own comprehension, our faith *in* Him is not apart from reason at all.

When we look at the story of Abraham and Isaac...without getting the picture of the bigger context, It may seem that Abraham is so blindly committed to God that he would kill his own son without any good reason except that God said to do it. But the deeper we look into the text, the more we discover that this is a story about faith, a lot more than unwavering obedience. The author of Hebrews actually offers some great insight. In chapter 11, which is all about faith, he opens with a definition of what faith is—which we'll look back on in a moment. However, he uses the rest of the chapter to demonstrate what real faith looks like through different figures of faith but highlights Abraham the most.

In Verse 17-18, he writes:

“By *faith* Abraham, when he was tested, offered up Isaac...verse 18, “He considered that God was able even to raise him from the dead, from which, figuratively speaking, he did receive him back. The key here, which we don’t see explicitly in Genesis, is that Abraham *believed* that God would raise Isaac from the dead. Why would he believe that was something God would do? Verse 17 gives us a hint, as it says, he offered up Isaac, the one whom his offspring would be named. If we recall, Isaac was the seed of promise. God promised that through Isaac, Abraham would have countless descendants, as the stars in the sky. When God first promised Abraham and Sarah they would give birth to a son, they both thought God was crazy for even suggesting it. He was 100, and Sarah was 90 years old. And when Sarah laughed, the Lord said, “Why did you laugh...Is anything too hard for the Lord?” (Gen. 18:10-15). And yet, a year later, sure enough, God proved that He could yet again, do the impossible. Abraham knew, that if God promised that Isaac would be the father of many generations, that God would keep that promise. He knew that God would have to either resurrect Isaac or somehow perform some kind of miracle to keep His covenant.

If we back up to verse one, the author gives a definition that doesn’t quite line up with how faith is often perceived. Now, the word that’s used for faith in Greek is *pistis*, which literally means “to be persuaded of” ... distinct from mere belief, an assurance granted by God. In secular antiquity, the word referred to a guarantee. The word had more to do with trust than it actually did with belief. And the author uses *this* word to build on describing specifically what faith *in Christ* is. He writes, “Now faith is the certainty of things hoped for, a proof of things not seen [NASB].” The ESV translates assurance and conviction.” The KJV uses “substance” and “evidence” and finally the NIV says “confidence” and “assurance.” They all emphasize the idea of confidence and *certainty* in that which we can’t see, and what we put our hope in. We don’t have an empty hope, but certainty, assurance, substance, and confidence. Our faith is not in ignorance or wishful thinking but grounded on proof, conviction, evidence, and assurance. We may be uncertain about tomorrow. But we are confident in who God is and what He is capable of.

When Moses had the faith to go before Pharaoh, The Lord had met him first through a burning bush and spoke audibly to him and demonstrated His power in different ways. When David went to defeat Goliath, he wasn’t filled with doubt and uncertainty. Instead, he looked back on the time when he had the power to kill a lion and a bear by the power of God within him. And when Abraham was willing to sacrifice his own son, not certain about what would happen, He reflected on the countless times that God had proven Himself to be faithful. All the promises that God fulfilled—All the times that God had the power to do the impossible. Abraham didn’t just wake up one day and have this incredible faith in God. It was developed over the times of God demonstrating His faithfulness. In Hebrews, the author helps us to recall this as well. Before calling attention to Abraham’s willingness to sacrifice Isaac, he writes, in verse 8, By faith, Abraham went out without knowing where he was going to receive a land of inheritance, Verse 9, By faith, he went out to a foreign land living in tents, looking forward to a land of promise. Abraham left his home of wealth, comfort, and security for something he couldn’t see on the other side. But God didn’t leave him to have an empty faith. In each situation Abraham was required to trust in God, the Lord came through and proved Himself to be faithful.

Verse 11, by faith, Sarah received the power to conceive, even when she was past the age. And even though this was probably the most challenging test of faith at that point, they both eventually trusted that God had the power to do it. And once again, God fulfilled that promise. Not only an impossible promise that they would give birth to a son. But God also promised that Isaac's descendants would be as many as the stars of heaven and as innumerable as the sands in the sea. So, by the time Abraham was tested to sacrifice Isaac, God had already proven Himself to be more real and powerful than any of the false gods they had formerly known. He proved to them that He had the power to do that which was beyond human comprehension.

In Scripture, God calls His children to trust in His way, instead of trusting in their own understanding, but never called to abandon *reason*. But instead, God provides good reason to trust in His—seemingly impossible power. That being said, we know that Jesus at times praised a faith that didn't have to see to believe. Why then, is it so important to remember that our faith is grounded in substance? Well, because even though God loves a servant who is able to trust in Him beyond the limits of our own understanding, God also desires that our faith be grounded in confidence, not wavering and full of doubt. When we're told to ask for wisdom, the Bible says, "But he must ask in faith without any doubting, for the one who doubts is like the surf of the sea, driven and tossed by the wind...that person is double-minded and unstable in all his ways" (Jas. 1:6-7). We're also told to test and evaluate ourselves to see if we are truly in the faith (2 Cor. 13:5) We're told that we can have assurance of salvation. Paul said, "We have not received a spirit of slavery leading to fear again but received a spirit of adoption" and "The Spirit testifies with our spirit that we are children of God" (Rom. 8:15-16). If we don't believe that we can have full confidence in the God we serve if we feel that our entire walk rests on uncertainty and doubt, what happens when we experience a true test of faith? When Jesus told the parable about the Sower and the Seeds, He said the seeds that fell upon rocky ground received the Word with joy and quickly sprouted up. However, when tribulation arose, they immediately fell away because they had no roots.

### **Conclusion:**

I read a statistic that showed, sadly 75% of children who grew up in the church either leave the church—or the faith altogether—after high school. Sadly, this happens to some adult Christians in our society today too. And there are many reasons why this happens. Whether it be a change in ideals, or a desire for authenticity as they become more evidence-driven. Perhaps their beliefs were challenged. They were unable to provide a logical reason for what and why they believed. Whatever the reason may have been to trigger their unbelief, the better question is, why didn't they hold on to their faith? And the answer is that their faith wasn't firmly grounded. The Scripture reminds us of ways to ensure that our faith is not only authentic but that our faith is grounded in something that can't be shaken. When James explains that our faith is evidenced by our works, he also contrasts mere belief with authentic faith (Jas. 2:19). And when Jesus spoke of those non-true believers who will one day say, Lord Lord, He said, "I never knew you" (Matt. 7:21-23). The Christian faith is more than a mere belief, it's a confident trust in One who has proven Himself to be trustworthy. It's more than a mere religion, it's a personal relationship with Jesus Christ. And a relationship is always a two-way street. We have a God who interacts

with His children, and a Holy Spirit that intervenes in our lives. A God who proves Himself to be all that He claims to be.

Unlike many religions that put their faith in myths and fables, we have a historically validated Lord who lived as a man, demonstrated that He was truly divine, was crucified for us, and rose from the dead three days after He was buried. And unlike others who pray to numerous impersonal deities, we pray to a Father who answers our prayers. A God who can heal our infirmities, a God who at many times performs tangible miracles, a God who delivers us from addictions and strongholds, a God who transforms us from who we used to be to who we are today. Every believer who has a personal relationship with Christ can attest to some experience of deliverance, transformation, healing, or miracle in their life.

In the second part of this message, we'll see that even though Jesus applauded those who had faith without needing to see to believe, Jesus was in the business of showing His power and ability to those who *did* believe. We might take a step of faith, or even a leap of faith in surrendering ourselves to God, but a solid faith is built upon the foundation of His truth revealed. It's grounded on every promise fulfilled. And it grows stronger and stronger with every time we put our trust in Him and He proves Himself to be faithful.