

Lessons from the Dean of Faith (Hebrews 11:1-3, 8-11)

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[0 : 00] Well, it's good to be here today, good to be able to share God's Word with you from the pulpit this morning. I do want to encourage you to be partnering with our pastor this week in prayer as he is on sabbatical.

And just pray that God will speak to him during that time and it will be a season of refreshing. And when he gets back that his batteries will be recharged and all the staff is here ready to serve you so that he can have that quiet time away in the next week or two.

And so thank you for partnering with him in prayer. I want to invite you to turn your Bibles this morning to Hebrews chapter number 11. Hebrews chapter number 11. You know, as a child growing up in church, I recall singing this song quite a bit in the children's choir.

And it went like this. Maybe you've sung it before. Father Abraham had many sons. Many sons had Father Abraham. And I am one of them, and so are you.

So let's just praise the Lord. And then we'd go right arm. And you'd stick your right arm out there. You might pump it a little. And then you'd sing the whole thing again. And right on cue, you would add another action.

[1 : 07] And it became a spiritualized version of the hokey pokey. You put your right arm in. You put your left arm in. You put your right foot in and your left foot in. And you put your chin up.

And you turn around. And then for the grand finale, what do you do? You sit down. Now, that's been a lot of years ago. And I've given a lot of thought to that since.

And I have determined that actually that it's one great big trick. All those folks wanted to do with us singing that song is to burn a little energy out of us and then make us sit down and be quiet.

But I thought of those words. Father Abraham had many sons. Why on earth do we sing about Father Abraham? Abraham. Adrian Rogers, my favorite preacher of all time, once said this.

He said, when you came to Christ, when you were saved by the grace of God, God enrolled you in the school of faith. Life is the classroom. The Bible is the textbook.

[2 : 05] The prophets and the apostles, well, they're the professors. And Abraham would have to be the dean. Father Abraham, the father of faith, the father of them that believe, the dean of the school of faith, whatever you call him, whatever title you give him, don't miss his faith.

I want you to look with me this morning. Hebrews chapter 11, beginning with verse 1. Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen.

For by it, that is faith, the people of old received their commendation. By faith we understand that the universe was created by the word of God, so that what is seen was not made out of things that are visible.

Go down to verse 8. By faith Abraham obeyed when he was called to go out to a place that he was to receive as an inheritance, and he went out not knowing where he was going.

By faith he went to live in the land of promise, as in a foreign land, living in tents with Isaac and Jacob, heirs with him of the same promise. For he was looking forward to the city that has foundations, whose designer and builder is God.

[3 : 20] Will you join me as we pray? Father, I pray that in this time this morning, as we open your word, Lord, just as we have been worshiping you through our singing and our praying and our giving, Lord, we worship you now through the preaching of your word, and Lord, I pray that we be active participants in it, that we would listen carefully to your word, that we would listen carefully, what do you have to say to us, and that we would respond as doers of your word in obedience to your glory and to your honor.

Lord, thank you for those gathered this morning. You brought us here for this appointed time, and we give it to you in Jesus' name. And all of God's people say it. Amen. If you look at Hebrews chapter 10, verse 39 there as it closes out, it's a reminder that we are not to shrink back, church. We are to go forward, and we are to be people of faith. In fact, if you go just a little bit further along, you find in Hebrews 11, 6, it says, Without faith, it is impossible to please God.

And I bet to a woman, I bet to a man, if I walked around and I said, Do you want to please God? We'd all say, Of course we want to please God. Well, without faith, it's impossible. Going back to Adrian Rogers once more, he said, If you please God, it doesn't matter who you displease. And if you displease God, it frankly doesn't matter who you please. John 3, 18 says this, Whoever believes in him, that's faith, is not condemned.

[4 : 49] But whoever does not believe, that's unbelief, is condemned already because he has not believed in the name of the only Son of God. And throughout Hebrews, we have seen that God has provided that perfect sacrifice for sin in Christ.

And even though we're all sinners, and even though we're all deserving of death and hell, because God has made a sacrifice for sin, the only thing preventing us is unbelief.

We have to trust by faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, who is the way, the truth, and the life. Jesus was one time asked, What must we do to do the works of God?

And he had to get them back on course, had to get them back on track. And so Jesus said in John 6, 29, This is the work of God, that you believe in him whom he has sent.

We have to place our faith in Jesus Christ. But I want to share this with you. Not only is it that we have to place our faith in Jesus for salvation, but we are then to live by faith, and faith becomes the mark of the Christian life.

[6 : 00] This morning as we look at Hebrews, chapter number 11, just listening in to the text, looking at the life of Abraham, seeing this man who is called the father of faith, there are three pertinent lessons that I believe we need to learn today.

And then we can go eat fried chicken or whatever you want to have, okay? Lesson number one is this. We must hear what God says. We must hear what God says.

Faith begins with hearing God. Now it's so much easier for us to want to listen to ourselves, and what we think and what we feel or what others think and what they feel, because we maybe want to please them and listen to the world and do what the world says so we can all get along.

But the reality is, if we're going to live by faith, lives that bring honor and glory to God, then the most important thing, the most important one that we need to hear from is God himself. Any other starting point will lead us astray.

Therefore, we have to begin with God's word. Hebrews 11, 8 simply begins with these two words, by faith. Hebrews 11 has been called the great hall of faith chapter.

[7 : 07] And if you read through there, you'll see 18 transitions where it says by faith, by faith, by faith, by faith. Clearly, God is wanting to show us something extremely important here about faith.

When we speak of the faith of Abraham, it's a fair question to ask, when did his faith begin? And we find that not in Hebrews, but we have to go all the way back to Genesis chapter number 12.

His name at that time was not Abraham, it was Abram, and I'll confess I'll probably refer to him both ways throughout this message. But he was living as just a regular guy over there in the Ur of the Chaldees, and he was going about his business, going about his life until God sought him out, until God spoke to him, and it changed his life's course and his eternity.

In the Bible, it says in Genesis 12, 1, Now the Lord said to Abram, and don't miss it, the Lord said to Abram, it is God who is speaking to him, it is God who sought him out.

And how many of us here today understands that the only way that we know that we are a sinner, the only way that we know that we need salvation, the only way we know that Jesus is the solution, and that he will save us, is that God first speak to our heart.

[8 : 28] He has to show us that in ourselves. And so what does God say to Abram? Does God say to Abram, you know Abram, I sure am impressed with you, I sure am impressed with all of your accomplishments, you have a beautiful wife, you have a lovely home, your cattle, they're legit, you have possessions that are tremendous, look at you, Abraham, you're a handsome guy in spite of your age, look at those muscles, look how ripped you are, you must be hitting the gym, Mr. Abraham.

You're the man, how did you accomplish all of this? Maybe you need to write a self-help book and entitle it, Live Ur Best Life Now. Is that what God said? No, what God said to him is, you need to get out of town.

Genesis 12, 1-3 says, Go from your country and your kindred and your father's house to the land I will show you, and I will make you a great nation, and I will bless you, and I will make your name great so that you'll be a blessing.

I will bless those who bless you, and in him who dishonors you, I will curse, and in you all the families of the earth will be blessed. God spoke to Abraham.

Abraham heard what God said. In fact, if you listen closely to what I just read, you'll hear God saying, I will, I will, I will. He said, Go to the land, I will show you.

[9 : 50] I will make you a great nation. I will bless you. I will make your name great. I will bless those who bless you. I will curse those who dishonor you. And all the families of the earth will be blessed.

God's saying, This is what I will do. So Abraham, all you have to do, I'm going to do this. All you have to do is go. All you have to do is trust me.

All you have to do is obey. And spoiler alert, Genesis 12, 4 simply says, So Abram went. By the way, when Abraham left Ur and traveled and obeyed God to leave that place, he was 75 years old. Hear me when I say it. His journey of faith began when he was 75 years old. So perhaps there's someone here today, maybe you're on up in age a little bit, you've never trusted Christ, and you'd say, It's too late for me.

It's just too late for me to turn my life around now and give it to Jesus. It's too late. Or maybe there's somebody you're praying for today and you've been praying, praying, praying that he or she would be saved. And maybe you're just about ready to give up on praying for them.

[10 : 58] And I would say to you, that if Abraham could begin his journey of faith at 75, whether you're 5, 75, or 105, today is the day of salvation. And you can begin your journey of faith today.

When our kids were very young, we wanted to teach them the Bible. And we bought some videos that was called What's in the Bible with Buck Denver. I don't know if any of you have seen those, your kids or grandkids.

And we would use that to help them remember. And they would have silly songs and things on there. And there was one song written by and sung by the fabulous Bentley Brothers. And they sung this about the book of Genesis.

Genesis begins it all. And most appropriately, it's at the beginning of the Bible. Genesis really means beginning. If it were anywhere else in the Bible, that would be kind of confusing.

And from there, we taught the kids the book of Genesis, the beginning. And when we look at that book of Genesis, even before Abraham, even before we meet him, what happens? We see creation.

[12 : 00] The very first verse in the Bible, Genesis 1-1 says, In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth. Now, look right here at Hebrews 11-3 once again.

See how it fits. By faith we understand that the universe was created by the word of God so that what is seen was not made out of things that are visible. So Genesis begins with creation.

But I don't know if you've ever noticed this, but the very last verse in the book of Genesis, this will bless your heart, Genesis 50-26, what does it say? It says, So Joseph died, being 110 years old, and they embalmed him, and he was put in a coffin in Egypt.

So think about it. Genesis begins with creation. It ends with a coffin. It begins with life, and it ends with death, and we can all agree something has gone wrong in there.

And what's gone wrong is in the book of Genesis we see creation, and then we see the fall. We see sin entering into the world, and the penalty of sin following it, and death comes into the world.

[13 : 05] And we follow that on down, and we see the flood, and then we see the Tower of Babel. Remember, God said, I will, I will, I will. If you listen in to what was said at the Tower of Babel, here's what you would have heard.

Come, let us make bricks and burn them thoroughly. Come, let us build a city and a tower with its tops in the heavens. Let us make a name for ourselves, lest we be dispersed over the face of the earth.

And the contrast could not be more striking. We hear mankind here saying, let us, let us, let us. It's all about us. It's all about our name. It's all about our glory.

It's all about our kingdom. It's all about what we can accomplish on our own. Do you hear the pride in there? Who needs God? Who needs it? We've got this.

And so mankind chooses then to worship and serve the creature and the created thing rather than the creator. But on the other hand, in contrast, that's Genesis 11.

[14:08] Genesis 12, right next door to it, not by accident. God says to Abram, not what can you do, not this let us business, but God says to Abram, I will, I will, I will.

Genesis 11 and 12 is a contrasting picture of works apart from God that are futile and faith in the God who is faithful, who does a good work in us, who produces those good works in our lives. Abram hears God. That's where faith begins. It begins with hearing God. I ask you this morning, do you hear God? Do you hear God's voice in your life?

You know, I believe sometimes we think, my goodness, if I could have experienced what Abram could experience, that'd be awesome. It'd be great if God would speak to me like that. He would just appear before me and say, Jason, this is what I want you to do.

This is what I want you to hear. We may think it'd be great if we could have an experience like Moses in front of the burning bush or like Saul on the road to Damascus when Jesus intercepted him.

[15:10] Maybe we would not want that experience, but we look at it and we say, you know, I just wish that God would speak to me that way. And if we're not careful, we'll begin to think like we're at a disadvantage in comparison to those guys.

But brothers and sisters, be reminded of what it says in Hebrews 1, 1 through 2, the very beginning of the book that we've been studying. Long ago, at many times, and in many ways, God spoke to our fathers by the prophets, but in these last days, he has spoken to us by his son.

Church, I want to tell you today, we're not at a disadvantage. We're at an advantage and I'll tell you why. We have the whole counsel of God's word. We have the whole Bible in our hands, the very word of God.

These Old Testament characters and Saul, they had to wait for a visitation. They had to wait for God to break through. But we can open the word of God and hear from him today, right now. We can have the mind of Christ.

God gives us his spirit who lives within us. You see, the reality is we don't have to wait to hear or have a visitation. The reality is we can blow the dust off our Bible and open it up and read it and have confidence that we are hearing the very voice of God speaking to us through his word.

[16:31] Faith begins with hearing. But the second lesson is that having heard, we have to believe. We have to believe what God says. Our problem most of the time is not that God's not speaking, it's that we don't believe and we don't do what God is saying.

We may say that we do, but our actions, our disobedience betray us. Dr. Mark Lederbach, one of my professors at Southeastern Seminary, would always say, stated belief plus actual practice is actually what you really believe.

Well, what was Abraham's actual practice? He heard what God said. I will, I will, I will. He took God at his word and he believed. Romans 10, 17 says that faith comes by hearing and hearing by the word of God.

Abraham heard God. He believed God. And Hebrews 11, 8 says that he was called to go out to a place that he would receive as an inheritance. And he went out not knowing where he was going. Where Abraham lived, quite frankly, he had it made. A lot like us. He had all that he needed. He didn't have children yet. That would be a different story. He had a wife. He had extended family.

[17:41] He had servants. He had wealth. He had fame. He was in a place of comfort and familiarity. He had no reason to leave all that behind. In fact, logically, it wouldn't make sense for him to leave Ur.

But, except for God called him to go. Abraham could have said, I have everything that I need right here. But the Bible says he did go. He went out not knowing where he was going.

Pastor John Phillips, a great British preacher, told a story here about Abraham that has stuck with me through the years. He said, if you would sanctify your imagination, and just think of this, that Abraham was a very wealthy man.

He had a lot of possessions. Can you imagine Abraham walking up into the National Bank of Ur? And he walks up to the teller and he says, I would like to see the president of the bank. And she says to him, well, he's a very busy man.

Do you have an appointment? He said, no, I don't, but just tell him that Abraham is here. So she calls the bank president and sure enough, immediately, he comes rushing out because he's one of the richest men in town.

[18 : 42] He said, oh, Mr. Abram, it's so good to see you, Mr. Abram. What can I do for you today, Mr. Abram? He said, well, I'm actually here to make a withdrawal. Oh, yes, sir, Mr. Abram, that's great.

How much did you want to take out? And Abram said, I want to take all of it out. And he said, say what? He said, I want to take all of it out. Well, why, Mr. Abram?

Did we do something wrong if we not served you well? Why would you want to take it all out? He said, oh, no. He said, actually, I'm leaving town. I'm moving. You're moving? Well, where are you going, Mr. Abram?

I don't know. He said back, you mean you want to take out all of your money and you don't even know where you're going? That's right. What? He said, well, God told me to get up and go out. Not knowing where, but he said that he will show me the land to promise he'll take me there. The bank president said, Mr. Abram, are you feeling well?

[19 : 37] Do you need to see a doctor? What is going on? Do you need a counselor? How about a psychologist? What's going on, Abram? And Abram said, I'll take it all in cash, please. And off he went and he left behind everything that was familiar.

Years ago, I was a missions pastor. I led teams all over the world to do mission trips and when I would take a team out, everybody wanted to know the answers to all the questions before you'd go. Where are we going? When are we going? What are we going to do when we get there? Who can go? What is the cost? What is the weather? Is there indoor plumbing? Is there hot water? Can I get a shower? Is there fried chicken there because we're Baptists? All the questions. And the reality is, no matter how many frequently asked questions, flyers I put together, I couldn't answer every question.

There were some things that were unknown. And I would teach my team. I would say, listen, you know the song Trust and Obey? We're going to make it this, Flex and Obey. For there's no other way to be happy in Jesus but to flex and obey because if you've ever been on a mission trip, nothing ever goes according to plan.

[20 : 41] And here's the deal. Abraham was called to go. And two things are clear. God called Abraham to go, but he didn't provide the itinerary. I want to ask you something.

Would you go on a mission trip with Evan Alexander if he didn't tell you where you were going? And yet, that's exactly what Abraham is facing here.

God called him to step out towards the invisible. We're back to Hebrews 11, 1 which says, Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen. For by it the people of old received their commendation.

By faith we understand that the universe was created by the word of God so that what is seen was not made out of things that are visible. From Genesis to Revelation, it's all been about Jesus Christ. Today, on this side of the cross, we look back by faith on the finished work of Jesus Christ and what he has done. And if we put our faith in him, we are saved. But in the Old Testament days, what about Abel?

[21 : 42] What about Enoch? What about Noah and Sarah and Isaac and Jacob and Joseph and Moses? And Abraham and the rest? What about all of them? Well, they too were commended by faith, looking forward to the cross, looking forward to the promises of God, looking at it from afar off, but by faith, trusting and believing.

You see, we're either commended or condemned. Unbelief condemns us. But belief, faith, through that, we are saved and we are commended.

Hebrews 11, 8 and 10 just reminds us that Abraham was justified by faith, not works. But having been justified by faith, we see his works.

If we add Hebrews 11, 1 through 3, end with Hebrews 11, 8 through 10, it tells us Abraham went out. He didn't know where he was going, but he did so with assurance of things hoped for.

He did so, he possessed a conviction of things not seen. He trusted in the one who called him more than he trusted in his own eyes.

[22 : 47] Can I just pause right there and say in this day of artificial intelligence, AI and all the bit, it would help us to remember that we need to trust what God says. We need to trust what God shows

us in his word even more than what our eyes may see.

Because our eyes will deceive us. We have to hold to God's word. We have to hear and we have to believe. Even when we're believing in that which we cannot see.

There was a man who came to visit the doctor and he was frantically running around in that waiting room making the staff nervous and they finally went back and told the doctor, you've got to see this man.

We don't know what to do with him. He's here. He didn't have an appointment but he wants to see you and he says that he is invisible and he needs help. Can you imagine a guy showing up saying he's invisible?

What do we do doctor? The doctor said well it's easy. Tell him we cannot see him. In the same way Abraham could have said I don't see it Lord.

[23 : 51] It's invisible. I can't see what you're describing. There's no proof but instead God spoke and by faith Abraham believed. His confidence was in the one whom he heard who is faithful who is worthy to be followed more than even what he could see with his own eyes.

Why? He was looking forward to the city that has foundations whose designer and builder is God and in that moment his priorities were completely changed. He realized he was no longer a citizen of this world but a citizen of heaven and Romans 12 2 tells us therefore do not be conformed to this world but be transformed by the renewing of your mind so that by testing you may discern what is the will of God what is the good and acceptable and perfect will.

So we must hear from God. We must believe God and there's one more to finish it out. We must obey God. We must do. We hear. We believe.

We do. We hear. We believe. We obey. Isn't that so simple? By faith Abraham obeyed. Again to quote Adrian Rogers my favorite preacher he said now don't tell me you have faith if you do not obey and you have to obey even when you don't understand Noah had not seen a flood but he had a word and he obeyed faith and works are power faith without works is dead true faith is more than intellectual belief it's belief with legs on it it's not just what you preach it's what you practice that counts and so I ask you are you living by what you already know in the Bible I mean God has spoken to us right are we taking what we've heard and believe it and are we are we doing it we must obey what we already know and by faith Abraham obeyed and he went out not knowing where he was going and he could have asked God he could have said hey what's the itinerary where is the facts page I want to look at all the answers to all the questions and God could have said it's none of your of your business Abram what you need to do is you need to trust me and you need to go and you need to follow you know it's not our responsibility to understand everything it's not our responsibility to have all the answers it's our responsibility to trust God and to obey him even when we can't see

Abraham stepped out into the promises of God even into the unknown some of you know our story some of you don't but back in 2012 I was pastoring a church and I was leading our church through a time of praying Luke 10 2 along with others all across this country it was a prayer initiative praying for workers in the harvest and we were focusing on the cities across North America and how there needed to be churches planted in these cities and how there were churches already there that needed to be revitalized and so we went through a whole month long season of prayer that culminated with a final prayer service and throughout that process and into that last night when we were praying I heard the voice of God speaking to me throughout that whole process as we prayed and it was as if God just whispered in my ear well you're willing to pray are you willing to go you're willing to pray that God would raise up workers for the harvest are you willing to be one are you willing to be an answer to that prayer and with fear and trepidation we put our yes on the table

[27 : 20] God whatever you'd have us to do we're your servants now I want to tell you something that I believe with all my heart this morning it doesn't matter who you are doesn't matter what your situation is if you know Jesus doesn't matter your age doesn't matter anything what matters is are we living our lives with our yes on the table you see the Christian ought to live his or her life with the yes on the table all the time because if our yes is not on the table it means we're unwilling to obey what God may call us to do and so we put our yes on the table and what wound up happening is God called us to what might as well have been a foreign land he called us to Utah to pastor in the middle of LDS country and God put a love in our heart for those people in fact I just returned as Evan alluded to I just returned from Utah and I spent a good bit of time out there meeting church planters meeting those who are doing the work seeing what God is doing and there's some exciting

stories to tell and I did that as the associational missionary also on behalf of our church because when God is doing this great work what a privilege we might have to be a part in that but it all begins with our yes being on the table trust and obey where there's no other way to be happy in Jesus but to trust and obey sometimes we think we have a faith problem could it be that really what we have is an obedience problem let me close out with this verse 13 says these all died in faith having seen the promises of far off how blessed are we these all all these folks that we're reading about in Hebrews 11 by faith we're looking forward to the promises of God and here we are and we are looking back at the finished work of Christ and anticipating the coming of the Lord what an exciting day that we can live

Colossians 3:1 tells us as we live out these days if you then have been raised with Christ seek the things that are above where Christ is seated at the right hand of God set your mind on things above not on things that are on the earth for you have died and your life is hidden with Christ in God when Christ who is your life appears then you will also appear with him in glory without faith it's impossible to please God without faith it's impossible to experience victory so we have to turn our eyes upon Jesus and look full in his wonderful face and the things of earth will grow strangely dim in the light of his glory and grace I would tell you this morning if you have not yet begun your journey of faith if 75 year old Abraham or Abram as it were could begin a new life and a new walk in Christ then so can we if you're here this morning and you have the assurance that you know that you are saved you know the Lord you know that you know your eternal destination is set praise God

I would invite you to pray right now because in this room there's somebody there's some probably multiple people who are here and you've never trusted in Christ for salvation now notice what I'm saying and what I'm not saying you haven't been a church member I'm not saying you haven't served in the church I'm not saying those things I'm saying there's never been a time in your life where you said I need a savior and that you called on the Lord Jesus to save you would you bow your head with me journey of faith begins with a small step of faith God your word says to us that we've all sinned and fallen short of your glory but it also says the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord today within the sound of my voice maybe there's a man woman boy girl who's here today and the reality is even though we talked about faith they've never placed their faith in you

Lord I thank you that you died for our sins I thank you that you were buried and that on the third day you rose again and I thank you that today we can have the confident assurance that we will be with you for eternity if we trust in you by faith and call on you to save us confess with our mouth believe in our heart and we will be saved Lord for whomever it is today that needs to pray this I pray that they would just pray something like this Lord Jesus I realize that I'm a sinner and I realize that sin condemns me to death and hell but Jesus thank you so much that you died in my place and I ask you today to forgive me I want to turn from my sin to you make me a new creature Lord from this point forward I want to begin my walk with you my journey of faith and thank you Jesus for saving me and if you prayed that prayer this morning and you believed in your heart that

Jesus died for you that he was buried that he rose again and that he will save then you can know for certain that you're a child of God for all of us here Lord I pray that we would live by faith that we would die to self daily and take up our cross and follow you so that we might bring honor and glory to your name and now as we have this time of response Lord may we respond in worship may we respond to whatever you're saying to us as we hear you may we believe and may we do may we obey in Jesus name we pray amen let's stand as we have a time of response