

# The Faithful Family

*Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.*

Date: 03 May 2009

Preacher: Rev Iver Martin

[ 0 : 00 ] Let's turn to the chapter we read in chapter 11 and spend a few minutes this morning looking at the work between verses 8 and verse 19, a passage that tells us about Abraham and his faith.

We'll read some of that passage again in terms of Hebrews 11 and 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.

Then in verse 11, by faith Sarah herself received power to conceive even when she was past the age since she considered him faithful who had promised.

Then verse 17, by faith Abraham when he was tested offered up Isaac and he who had received the promises was in the act of offering up his only son of whom it was said through Isaac shall your offspring be named.

Every time I read the 11th chapter of Hebrews, it reminds me of going through a fragrance shop.

[ 1 : 28 ] I don't know if you've, I'm sure most of us have gone through airports, bigger airports like Glasgow and London and Edinburgh where in order to get to the plane you have to go past a shop, a rather large area that sells fragrances both for women and for men.

And on one or two occasions I've had time to stop at these, I'm sure you've had yourselves. And there's no point in just looking at the bottles or looking at the packages. That's going to do you no good whatsoever because a package that looks nice could, it may not be to your taste.

What happens is you have to test, you have to try these things in order to work out which one. And you'll know that if you try about half a dozen of them, whether it's for men or for women, you will know that each one has their own different character.

Each one has their own different fragrance. And sometimes you're not quite sure if you're only going to buy one or whatever, you're not quite sure what to take.

So there's another section which has sampler packets, which have maybe a half a dozen little bottles of fragrance that you can take home and you can have a sample of several different types.

[ 2 : 41 ] And this is what I think about when I come to the book of Hebrews. The Old Testament is full of men and women, each one of whom had a slightly different fragrance, a slightly different aroma.

And you can read about their lives in detail by going back from Genesis to Malachi. But when you come to Hebrews chapter 11, what you have is a sample of the characters that God wants us to focus on as men and women who loved him and who lived for him and obeyed him and who were men and women of faith.

So here's our sample pack of fragrance in Hebrews chapter 11. And I want to take one of those little bottles. I want to take Abraham and I want to open it and I want us to see the three particular things that God wants us to focus on in this chapter.

There are three instances. Of course, we could have spent chapters as Genesis does describing the different various events that took place in Abraham's life. But this chapter, when we're summing up Abraham in relation to his faith and irrespective of every event that took place in Abraham's life, this is the word that God wants us to focus on as summed up Abraham's life.

Faith. Abraham was the father. Our forefathers, last generation, used to call him the father of the faithful. And I don't mean just somebody who was steadfast or someone who was patient, but someone who was a man of faith.

[ 4 : 26 ] And this chapter wants us to focus, wants to look at three different things, three events that took place. First of all, there was the very beginning of God's calling him.

And I shouldn't say it wasn't the beginning of his life by any means. He was quite considerable age when God called him from his home and hour of the Chaldees. And he told him to leave his homeland, his relatives and everything that was familiar to him, his culture and his language, and go and live the rest of his life in a land, in a country that he had never experienced or never known before.

That's the first thing this chapter wants us to look at. Then the second thing is that when God promised that he would, in his old age, have a son.

Abraham was 100 years old. And Sarah, his wife, was 90 years old when that son was born and when that promise was fulfilled.

This chapter wants us to notice how Abraham believed God even in the face of something that was utterly impossible. It was just as impossible in those days for a man of 100 or a woman of 90 to have a son as it is today.

[ 5 : 39 ] And it required just as much faith to accept what God said on the basis of his word. That's the second thing this chapter wants us to focus on. The third thing it wants us to focus on is in verse 17.

That despite the promise of God that Abraham was going to have a son, one day God commanded Abraham to take that son that he loved and to offer him up as a sacrifice.

That's the third way in which this is the third incident that the chapter wants us to look at. But first of all, I want us to look at the very beginning of these events when Abraham was round about 70 or 70 something in his having lived for most of his life in Ur of the Chaldees, which was a totally different culture altogether in the ancient Near East.

The language of its own and a culture and a framework all of its own. And God called him out of the blue to go and to leave everything that was familiar to him and to go to a land.

Now this was not just a temporary measure. This was to go and to spend the rest of his life in a place, an environment, with a people, with all the uncertainty which that involved.

[ 6 : 52 ] He had no idea what lay in front of him. This was to be a total change of lifestyle. He was to leave the comforts of his home. And they tell me that Ur of the Chaldees was quite a modern, developed area where it had modern plumbing and two-story houses and all the comforts that were characteristic of that time.

And Abraham was to leave them all behind and he was to spend the rest of his life living from place to place in tents. That's what this chapter emphasizes. No longer would he have those comforts that he was used to, but he was to spend the rest of his life living in tents, surrounded by a strange people of strange language and culture and more importantly, a culture which did not recognize his God.

He was to live in a place that was strange to God. And even when he got there, eventually when he got there, his faith was tested. It wasn't to be uneasy.

You would imagine that anyone who was to be required, who God required to be so, to have such a change in his life that God may provide for him, a comfortable existence, make life as pleasant as possible.

But that's not what happened at all. There was war. There was worry. There was a constant concern over his nephew who went with him, his nephew Lot.

[ 8 : 20 ] There was famine. There was temptation. We must never think that these men were beyond temptation and beyond sin. We read that Abraham fell on one or two occasions because his faith was shaken and he went adrift, just like every other person does, even the greatest men in the Bible.

There comes a time when they go astray. We'll see that tonight, by the way. We're going to be looking tonight at the end of the reign of Solomon and how he so catastrophically went astray because he loved many women.

But Abraham, in his own time, momentarily went astray himself. He was brought back to the Lord in Egypt. But the fact, what I'm trying to say is this, that the life that Abraham chose to live in obedience to God did not mean that God provided all kinds of pleasantness and ease for him.

It meant a life that was often hard, a life that was often sorrowful, a faith that was put to the test on many different occasions.

There's no such faith. Any person who has real faith, that faith will be tested at one time or another.

[ 9 : 38 ] There's no such thing as a real faith that isn't tested. And when our faith is tested, it's painful. And it was often painful for Abraham and Sarah and the family at this time.

Often he had to go through long periods of time without hearing God's voice. We read, if you go back to Genesis, that there were several occasions when he heard the voice of God speaking to him.

But those occasions were actually few and far between. For most of his time, between the age of 75 when he arrived in Canaan and 160 when he died, for most of that time, he didn't hear the voice of God.

That meant that every day was a day lived in faith, believing what he had heard and that one day, somehow, even although what God promised him seemed to be impossible, Abraham lived in these promises.

You know, when I was young, when I was a young Christian, it was fashionable at one time to talk about blind faith. Or another way of putting it was, faith was a leap in the dark.

[10:47] People used to talk about that. Faith is a leap in the dark. Although I can understand why people would talk that way, faith is not a leap in the dark.

Abraham's faith was not a leap in the dark. Abraham heard the voice of God. He met with God's presence. He knew that he was listening to the living and the true God and acting upon God's word. And for you and I this morning, faith is not a leap in the dark either because faith is acting on God's word and believing that what God promises will come to pass.

And that when God promises that if we come to Jesus and trust in him, our sins are forgiven and will be forgiven. That is an absolute certainty.

So faith is what rests in that promise. Are you resting in that promise this morning? In other words, if you are, then you are a man or a woman of faith. You are coming to God in trust, believing with all your heart.

[11:55] But it's not just a head belief. It's a belief that acts and lives on that promise. And that faith involves just as much as for Abraham, a total change of life.

There's a sense in which every time God speaks to a person like you and I and tells us that Jesus died for us and invites us to come to Jesus, there's a sense in which he is calling every one of us to leave the past, leave it all behind, and to enter into what is for us an unknown.

But it's not a leap in the dark. It's when we come believing in the God who always keeps his promises and the God who is always true to his word.

So a day will come when despite appearances, you and I will stand in front of God's throne and God will say to us, well done, good and faithful servant, enter into the joy of the Lord.

And as long as we live in this world, that promise seems so remote. In fact, some people tell us, forget all these things. What you need to do is to make the most of this life and to enjoy this life and to make the world as pleasant a place as possible.

[13:15] Of course we try and do that, but we do that because we believe that God is coming. Jesus will one day come and that we believe that one day that there will be a new heaven and a new earth and our lives are lived in that light and in that light alone.

So Abraham, despite all the hardships and the difficulties and the perplexities and the worries, Abraham set his heart on trusting God and it didn't matter what that cost him.

He was going to believe because he loved the Lord. You see, as you go through the life of Abraham, you never get the impression that Abraham is doing anything reluctantly because with faith there comes a love for the Lord.

God does not drag a person kicking and screaming into his kingdom. God persuades that person through the gospel into a changed life, a new life, one in which God takes the center place and God's word is paramount.

It comes in the first place. So that's the first thing that this chapter points to us. By faith, Abraham obeyed when he was called to go out to a place as he was to receive as an inheritance.

[14:29] But the chapter also goes on to tell us that Abraham's faith was able to see beyond Canaan. He could see that Canaan was only part of the promise.

That there was a promise which lay beyond this world and lay beyond this life. a promise that the chapter calls a city with foundations whose designer and builder is God.

The chapter goes on to tell us that all of these people, men and women who look forward to that coming promise, they all died. And they died in faith believing that one day that promise would still be theirs.

And that promise belongs to us through the Lord Jesus Christ this morning. because you and I as we look to him in faith, we look also for that city whose builder and designer is God.

And we, when it comes to dying and breathing our last, we will die in that same faith believing that God will come again and raise the dead and that we will go forever to be with the Lord.

[ 15 : 42 ] That's the first thing then that the chapter wants us to focus on. The second thing is focusing on the promise which was the most impossible of all in natural human terms that one day he would have a son.

But, interestingly, the chapter doesn't focus on Abraham. Elsewhere in the Bible it focuses on Abraham, particularly Romans chapter 4 when Paul talks about Abraham, he talks about Abraham's faith and God crediting that belief as righteousness.

That's what it tells us in chapter 4 of Romans. But, interestingly, Hebrews 11 concentrates on Sarah. Sarah. Now, they both believe the promises but Hebrews wants us to concentrate on Sarah. Verse 11, By faith, Sarah herself received power to conceive. Even when she was past the age, she was 90 years old when she had Isaac.

But, from the point of view of listening to God, if you read Genesis chapter 18, when the angel came to tell Abraham that he was shortly to have a son, she was eavesdropping into the conversation.

[ 16 : 57 ] And she laughed when she heard that. I suppose we can all understand why she might laugh. She probably looked down at herself and she looked at her frail, aged body and a person who was beyond the age of conception by anyone's expectations and probably thought about how utterly impossible that promise would be.

But, interestingly enough, verse 11 tells us there must have been a turning point in Sarah. there must have been a time when her laughter was transformed to faith, when her cynicism was transformed to belief and acceptance of the promise of God.

By faith, Sarah herself received power to conceive, even when she was past age. Here's the way it goes on. Since she considered him faithful who had promised.

In other words, her first reaction to the angel telling Abraham that in a year's time, you're going to have a son who was one of utter disbelief. Not surprising.

I'm sure anyone would have done the same thing. But as she considered it, as the angels went away and as she was left on her own to consider God and his power and why couldn't God, why is it that she found it so difficult to believe that God could do the impossible.

[ 18 : 37 ] And she somehow or other came to understand that this was not a natural process. This conception never a natural process. There's something miraculous about conception anyway.

But this was God's special promise to her. And her choice was either to reject God and his promise and his goodness.

In which case, what did she have? What did she have left in this life? Or to accept God and his promise. Even although it meant accepting something that was utterly unbelievable for her.

And she chose to accept it. She considered him who was faithful. Faithful who had promised. And you know, in a way, it's the same with ourselves today.

When we come to the New Testament and when we see how God promises to us the impossible. Something that is beyond belief. That one day the graves and the cemeteries will be opened and the dead will rise.

[ 19 : 36 ] Even the dead who have been, of course, it's just as impossible for someone who's been dead for a week to rise as someone who's been dead for a hundred or a thousand years. It's just as impossible. And yet, that's what God promises.

That a day will come when Jesus will come again in all his glory with the angels with him. And he promises that every single person who has died, lived and died in the world will rise again.

Those who have lived and died in Jesus will rise to eternal life and go forever to be with the Lord.

Those who have lived and died outside of Jesus will rise to the judgment.

That's what he tells us in John chapter 5. And the question is today, even if we're cynical, are you prepared to stop for a moment and to really think and to really ask yourself, is this for real?

Because it's not a normal human being or just some great person that's promising. This is God who's promising this. And nothing is impossible with God and the God who spoke the universe into existence.

[ 20 : 43 ] If you believe today that God created the universe in its vastness and its complexity and its greatness, then raising the dead should be nothing to him. And that's where faith comes in, a

living faith, a personal faith, not just a belief in a God somewhere, but a belief, a personal faith that takes hold of the Lord and comes to him personally and asks him, Lord, will you please open my heart to your promise?

Will you please persuade me to believe in those promises and show me the way to be saved?

Show me how that I may come to have that promise for myself so that I will have everlasting life.

The first thing the chapter focuses on is Abraham's willingness to go. The second thing the chapter focuses on is Sarah's willingness to accept the impossible.

The third thing that the chapter, the third event that the chapter focuses on is Abraham's obedience coupled with his faith, even when God required him to do the unthinkable.

and that was to take the son that God had given him as a fulfillment of his promise because that's exactly what happened when Sarah was 90 and Abraham was 100.

[ 22 : 11 ] God fulfilled his promise and they had Isaac. That was the son of promise. And my, how they loved that son.

Because not only did they see him and regard him as any parent regards the little boy. But God, but Abraham saw in him, in his face, the goodness and the faithfulness and the power, the extraordinary power of God.

I don't think Abraham could possibly pick up his child at any time without knowing, without being able to look back over the past and see how everything had culminated in this point.

God had fulfilled now his promise. But now, I don't know how old Isaac was, he was probably grown up, a young man. God is telling Abraham to go and sacrifice his son.

I want us just to examine for a few moments, what was the faith of Abraham in obeying? If you go back to Genesis chapter 22, you find the details of how as soon as God had commanded him to do that, he rose up early in the morning, took his servants and he saddled his donkey and off he went to the mountain which God told him to go and he did every single thing without wavering, without hesitating.

[ 23 : 31 ] Where was the faith? That's my question. Where did his faith lie in doing what God asked him to do? How are you able to detect his faith?

That's what it tells us. By faith, Abraham, when he was tested, offered up Isaac. Isaac. I've already said that every faith, every person here today who trusts in Jesus by faith, that faith will be tested. But not in this particular form because there was no one in all the world whose faith was tested like Abraham who was told and was commanded to offer up his son.

But this chapter goes deep into what was going on in Abraham's heart as he made his way to the mountain that God told him to go to.

And it tells us what he was thinking. Of whom it was said, through Isaac shall your offspring be named. And verse 19, he considered that God was able to raise him from the dead, from which figuratively speaking he did receive him back.

[ 24 : 48 ] I want to suggest this morning that Abraham's faith was not simply obedience. I want to suggest this morning that Abraham's faith was somehow able to see how God was revealing himself to Abraham in the command that he gave him.

Let me just go back on that a little moment and just explain it a little bit more fully. God never commands anyone to do anything at random. This was not just some kind of random command to see how strong his sense of obedience was.

There's a whole host of ways in which God could have done that. But God chose this command specifically not just to test the faith of Abraham but to reveal to Abraham and to herself something of himself.

To teach him something. To show him something. To demonstrate. Because remember this is the Bible and from Genesis to Revelation what we have is God revealing himself to us. He's telling us this is how I want you to understand who I am.

So when we come to the story of Abraham we're not just reading about a man who was faithful and obedient to God and God gave this random command.

[ 26 : 07 ] It wasn't a random command. it was full of significance. Full of promise and full of revelation. And I want to suggest to you that when Jesus thousands of years later when he said Abraham saw my day and rejoiced.

That what Jesus meant by that was that somehow Abraham was able to see beyond the commands and the promises of God into the coming of Jesus.

Now we know that he didn't see much but he was able to see something and I want to suggest that the sacrifice of Isaac spoke to him.

He told him something of God's willingness and his intention to send his own son into the world. And so that by the death of his own son at Calvary that our sin would be forgiven and cleansed. That's after all what the whole Old Testament pointed to.

[ 27 : 14 ] That was the object of the Old Testament. Everything in the Old Testament pointed to Jesus Christ. Now look, let's look just for a few moments at some of the ways in which this story points us.

Look at, for example, how the story starts off. When God spoke to Abraham and told him to sacrifice his son, he said that take your son, your only son, who you love.

In other words, it explains to us the extraordinary relationship, the love, the unique love that there was between the father and his son.

God knows how much Abraham loves his son. Now go to the New Testament. And you'll find that unique love demonstrated and announced to us at the baptism of Jesus.

this is my only begotten son in whom I am well pleased in the transfiguration of Jesus. This is my beloved son. Hear him.

[ 28 : 12 ] Listen to what Jesus says about himself. The father, John chapter five, the father loves the son and has given all things to his hand for the father loves the son and shows him all that he himself is doing.

There's one thing that comes across time and again and the life and the ministry of Jesus is the love, the regard, the unique relationship that there was between father and son.

And look at God's precise instruction. He was to take his son and he was to offer him as a burnt offering. Now what was the purpose of the burnt offering in the Old Testament?

It was to take away sin. God ordained and he ordered that his people instead of paying the price themselves for their sin. There was a way of sacrifice in which by a substitute, by taking an animal without blemish and by putting that animal to death and by offering the animal as a burnt offering, God would forgive and accept the death of the animal as a substitute for the death of the person. Thirdly, you can't help notice Isaac's willingness to surrender his life. You would imagine that if he had the slightest inclination that his life was going to come to an end, he would have struggled and he would have objected and cried out and tried to run away.

[ 29 : 42 ] But you never ever get that impression, do you, in Genesis 22, as they make their way towards the mountain and as Isaac asks, where is the lamb for the burnt offering? But lastly, Abraham's answer to that question was this, that God will provide a lamb.

The whole story was a picture, an Old Testament picture of what God would one day do in providing the lamb of God in Jesus' willingness to lay down his life.

I lay down my life, said Jesus, and where Abraham stopped short because God told him at the very last moment, don't touch Isaac.

God, when it came to the death of his own son, did not stop short. Jesus went all the way and he laid down his own life on the cross and he became a burnt offering, a sacrifice.

he never held back. He gave all for our sin. Now when it came to God's son, he truly was the only, the son that he loved.

[ 31 : 13 ] He spared not his own son, but gave him up for us all as God's provision for the removal of our sin.

Today, there's only one way in which your sin and my sin can be removed, cleansed, washed, taken away, sent away, once and for all. And that is the death of Jesus Christ as a sacrifice for our sin.

God's God's God's God's God's word and leaves all behind in order to follow the command and the invitation of God.

That's what God requires you to do this morning. We've been looking today at the faith of Sarah and Abraham as they together accepted and believed the impossible.

That's what God is asking us to do. Believe the impossible. We've been looking today at how Abraham, in obeying the command of God, did the unthinkable in order to demonstrate the unthinkable death of Jesus Christ.

[ 32 : 35 ] The inexpressible death of Jesus Christ. God became man himself and went to the grave itself, rose again so that we could have his gift of everlasting life, so that we could come to know

him and so that we could be men and women of faith ourselves, trusting in him, living for him, discovering day by day his provision and his kindness and his love towards us.

There's the challenge. Do we live for this world, for the hour of the coldies, the comforts, everything that he was used to, or are we prepared to make that journey into the unknown, not as blind faith or a leap in the dark, but taking God at his word and accepting God in his son.

Let's pray. Our Father in heaven, once again, we ask to rejoice in what you have provided for us in the Lord Jesus Christ, and we thank you, Lord, for once again we've been able to focus on what he has done for us as the Lamb of God, who God provided to take away our sin.

We give thanks, Lord, for the faith of men like Abraham and women like Sarah, who in the face of such difficulty and such hardship were prepared to put God first.

We pray to do the same, to accept their example, to live according to their example, and for us to discover that city with foundations whose builder and maker is God.

[ 34 : 28 ] Amen. we're going to sing together.