

## Faith Follows

*It Follows A Promise*

*It Follows the LORD's Lead*

## A Sermon on Genesis 12:1-8

Year A - Lent 2

12 - March - 2017

JJ<sup>1</sup>

The book and later mini-series, *Band of Brothers*, is about Easy Company of the 101<sup>st</sup> Army Airborne in WWII. Easy's original commanding officer, Captain Sobel, did a fine job of training his soldiers, but didn't have a clue when it came to leading them in battle. Before Easy ever entered combat, several lower ranking officers signed a petition stating that they would not go into battle with Sobel leading them. They knew they were good as dead with Sobel leading them. They wanted Lt. Winters. He was a man they could follow. With an act of treason, these men could have easily faced the death penalty, but they would rather follow a man into battle they could trust.

Today we see that **FAITH FOLLOWS...**it follows someone we can trust in every way, both for our earthly lives and eternal lives. As we look to the call of Abram, we see that **FAITH FOLLOWS A PROMISE AND IT FOLLOWS THE LORD'S LEAD.**

We picture Abraham as a great hero of faith. And properly so. The letter to the Hebrews lists him as a hero of faith. We also know he wasn't always a hero. There are several examples we can think of like the two times he lied about his relationship with Sarah, saying she was his sister, not his wife. We especially remember him

stumbling in his faith when he had a child with Sarah's maidservant, Hagar.

But before all that happened, we're told that Abram lived with his father, Terah. At some point they moved from Ur to Haran. They were supposed to go to Canaan, but Abram's father, Terah, decided to settle for Haran. A big part of the problem was that Terah, at best, was a polytheist. That means, he believed in many gods. Terah may have at least claimed belief in the LORD, but not solely in the LORD. He followed other gods (Josh. 24:2).

Did Abram share his father's beliefs? We don't know with absolute certainty, but Abram was living in a bad spiritual environment. Terah was not the leader to follow. So the LORD stepped in. Now the LORD said to Abram, "Get out of your country and away from your relatives and from your father's house and go to the land that I will show you. I will make you a great nation. I will bless you and make your name great. You will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and I will curse anyone who dishonors you. All of the families of the earth will be blessed in you."

The LORD commanded Abram to leave, but before we hear any response from

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<sup>1</sup> JJ is the acronym for *Jesus Juve*, which is Latin for "Jesus Help". It is a short prayer used by many ministers and sacred musicians at the beginning of their work.

Abram, the LORD makes a great promise to Abram. The command showed Abram that he was living in a spiritually dangerous situation. Going into spiritual battle was going to be deadly. The LORD came to be Abram's leader, to lead him into faith. And faith only **FOLLOWS A PROMISE**. It follows the gospel, and what beautiful gospel it is! "I will make you a great nation. I will bless you and make your name great. You will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and I will curse anyone who dishonors you. All of the families of the earth will be blessed in you."

The LORD tells Abram, "I'm the God who saves you. I'm going to bless you beyond your wildest imagination. You who don't even have a child, will be the father of multitudes! I will make it so that you will be a blessing to all people of the earth because I will bring the Savior out of your descendants!"

Notice, friends, that this promise had nothing to do with Abram or how good a man he was. It had everything to do with the LORD. That's exactly the point Paul made in our second lesson today: "Indeed, the promise that he would be the heir of the world was not given to Abraham or his descendants through the law, but through the righteousness that is by faith. To be sure, if people are heirs by the

law, faith is empty and the promise is nullified. For law brings wrath...For this reason, the promise is by faith, so that it may be according to grace and may be guaranteed to all of Abraham's descendants—not only to the one who is a descendant by law, but also to the one who has the faith of Abraham. He is the father of us all" (Rom. 4:13-16).

**FAITH FOLLOWS A PROMISE.** It follows the gospel and friends, the very gospel

promise made to Abram so long ago, which God has fulfilled, is part of the same promise God makes to you today! All the people of the earth were blessed through Abram's offspring, Jesus. The same promises of forgiveness and eternal life are made to you and me through the gospel so we would believe in Jesus as our Savior. At your baptism, God made those promises to you. He promised to forgive you, and he has.

He promised to be with you always, and he is. He promised he would protect you from the devil's might, and he does. He promised to take you safely home to heaven, and he will.

Through the gift of faith, the LORD has become your leader so that you would follow him all the way to heaven. But you see, the LORD didn't just plunk faith in your hearts and say, "Okay, I'll see you when you get home!" No, friends, **FAITH**



**FOLLOWS and IT FOLLOWS THE LORD'S LEAD.** And to see what that following looks like, all we have to do is look to Abram.

“So Abram went, as the LORD had told him.” Now remember what Abram left. He was told to leave his country, relatives and immediate family. He was called to leave behind a life of idolatry and all its dangers. Abram followed the LORD's lead and left all that behind. The LORD calls on us to be prepared to leave behind those things in our life that get in the way of following him. It may be a job that asks you to compromise your faith and morals through dishonesty or cheating. It may mean closing down a friendship with someone whose behavior is only tugging you down with them. It may mean limiting access to computers and smartphones to keep away from temptation. **FAITH FOLLOWS THE LORD'S LEAD** because it is what leads to victory over sin.

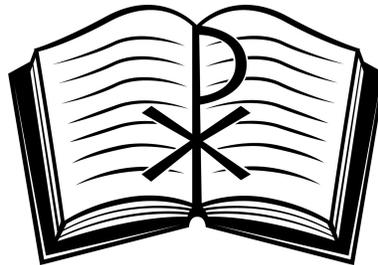
After Abram made it to Canaan, the LORD came with another promise: “I will give this land to your descendants.” Do you remember Abram's response? “Abram built an altar there to the LORD, who had appeared to him.” **Faith also follows the LORD's lead** by going into his house to worship him and feed faith. You see, this is part of faith's response to the LORD's promises. It wants to worship him and to continue to be fed by him. We aren't one and done once we're baptized. It's not

just some golden ticket we keep in our back pocket that we just pull out on our death bed and hand to God. We're also not one and done when it comes to confirmation. Which, by the way, is merely a human creation. How sad it is that so many have the impression that when you're confirmed you're done studying God's Word and don't need to gather together in His house! Instead of confirmation being an affirming of a young person's baptismal faith, it's often viewed as if God has forever confirmed us in our faith as he has the holy angels (1 Tim. 5:21; Lk. 20:36; Mt. 18:10). But that is not

at all the case. Our faith needs to be fed constantly because it's always in need of growing. Anyone who thinks they're fine or that their faith has grown enough is a liar, both about their faith and God's command that we follow him into his house

to worship him and be fed by him.

Then we're told Abram made one more move. And after moving, Abram did two things, one that we've already heard him do, and the other something new. “He moved on from there to the hill country east of Bethel and pitched his tent there, with Bethel on the west and Ai on the east. There he built an altar to the LORD and proclaimed the name of the LORD.” Abram both made a house of worship and worshiped the LORD but he also went out into his community so that others would follow the LORD too. Friends, **faith also follows the LORD's lead** by going



into our community and world with the same gospel promises you and I hold dear because they have created and sustained our faith and we want other to have what we have. You know where it all starts? It starts with you being someone's friend, a Christian friend. It starts with you setting an example in your words and actions as you build relationships with people so that when they feel lost, confused, hurting or alone, you can go to them and tell them about the One who longs to seek and save the lost. You can tell them about the One who brings clarity to the confused. You can tell them about the One who heals their sin-sick souls and promises to always be by their side. You can tell them about Jesus!

Friends, what a beautiful thing our faith is! God has given it to us as his gift through his gospel promises. And he has given us our faith so that we would follow his lead. Through faith, we aren't lost to following after a leader who would just lead us to certain death, like Cpt. Sobel very well may have done with the men of Easy Company. What's more, you and I have someone wiser, stronger, more loving and self-sacrificing even than Lt. Winters who led Easy Company into battle. Our LORD is perfectly wise, all-powerful, and so loving that he not only fought for us, he won the war for us by actually

sacrificing himself for us! And he did all this without our help or asking us to go to the cross with him! He did all this, friends, so that in faith we would follow him. Amen.

SDG<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> SDG is an acronym for *Soli Deo Gloria*, which is Latin for "To God Alone Be The Glory". This is a statement of humility used by many ministers and sacred musicians at the end of their work to let themselves and others know that it isn't about getting glory for themselves, but about giving all glory to God.

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