

Title: "Living Faith: Abraham and Sarah"

Text: Hebrews 11:8-19; Genesis 17:1-8, 15-22

We are continuing in our series on "Living Faith in 3D,"

-and our focus in second half of this series is on the 'living faith' part of that title.

-What does living faith look like as it is lived out in people's lives?

We are using Hebrews chapter 11 as a guide for this exploration,

-because Hebrews 11 briefly describes the lives of a whole bunch of people who exhibited "living faith" in their lives.

So far we have looked at Abel and Enoch and Noah.

-This week the writer to the Hebrews asks us to consider Abraham and Sarah.

-So listen now to what we are told about what living faith looked like in their lives.

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"By faith Abraham, when called ... obeyed and went, **even though** he did not know where he was going."

"By faith Abraham, **even though** he was past age – and Sarah herself was barren – was able to become a father..."

"By faith Abraham, ...offered Isaac as a sacrifice... **even though** God had said to him, "Through Isaac your offspring will be reckoned."

I obviously want you to pay attention to those two words today: **"even though."**

They are like a little window through which you can see what "living faith" looked like for Abraham and Sarah.

-It looked like this: trusting in God's promises to them, **even though** the fulfillment of those promises seemed what we might call 'elusive' to them.

What do I mean by elusive?

Well if you know Abraham and Sarah's story,  
-which is told at great length back in the book of Genesis,  
-God calls them to leave their home and family back in  
the city of Haran in Mesopotamia  
-in order to go to the land of Canaan

And as we read earlier in the service from Genesis 17,  
-God promises to give them that land of Canaan as their  
own land, for them and their descendants.

However, during Sarah and Abraham's lifetime, do you know  
how much of that land of Canaan they ever owned?  
-Basically, when Sarah died at 127 years old, Abraham  
bought a cave to bury Sarah's body in,  
-and a little plot of ground outside the cave.

That is all the property they ever owned in Canaan.  
-Otherwise they lived in tents as nomads, moving from place  
to place throughout the land, grazing their sheep and cattle.  
-Hebrews says here quite rightly, they lived in the promised  
land as strangers in a foreign country.

That's what I mean by elusive.  
-They were promised the land of Canaan as their inheritance,  
and they trusted in the promise,  
-but in their lifetime, they never actually owned the land of  
promise, they simply lived in it as resident aliens.

Or how about the other great promise of God to Abraham and  
Sarah?  
-God promised to make a great nation of them there in the  
land of Canaan.  
-They would have descendants more numerous than the  
stars in the sky or the sand at the seashore.

But during their lifetime, how many kids was Sarah able to  
conceive?  
-One! And that was when she was 99 years old.  
-Now it was amazing that she had a child at all!  
-She was barren her whole life, and the birth of a child in  
her old age, when she was well past child-bearing age  
was miraculous.

But for 70+ years she prayed everyday for God's promise to be fulfilled for her,  
-and the fulfillment was certainly what we would call "elusive."  
-It took forever to come about!  
-And that whole length of time was painful for her.  
-It was not easy for Abraham and Sarah to keep on trusting that God would do what He said He would do.

From a human standpoint, it seemed impossible that God could do what He said He would do.

And my friends, it is this "in-between time" that I want to highlight for us today from the lives of Abraham and Sarah.  
-That time "in between" the promise of God and the fulfillment of God.

That is where "living faith" is birthed and tried and tested and developed,  
-and that is where "living faith" is always "elusive" and in real danger of dying on the vine.

And it is in this "in-between time" that every one of us live.

We have all been promised "eternal life in Christ,"  
-and we are asked to have faith in that promise **even though** we die, and people around us die.

We have been promised that our sins are forgiven and we are a new creation in Christ.

-And we are asked to have faith in that promise **even though** we know ourselves to have a great deal of the old creation sinfully alive still within us.

We have been promised the gift of God's Spirit living within us and empowering us to live a new kind of life as children of the living God.

-And we are asked to have faith in that promise **even though** we often feel like we are weak and frail and lost and frustrated.

Where is this Holy Spirit? we wonder. We thought He promised never to leave us nor forsake us,

- but we often can't feel His presence,
- and don't know where He is or why He is allowing the things to happen to us that are happening to us.

You see, we all live in the "in-between time."

- That time between the promise and the fulfillment.
- We are trying to hang onto the things that God has told us are truly ours in Christ,
  - but it can be difficult when the fulfillment of those promises are elusive to us.
- Like Abraham and Sarah, we only experience the fulfillment of God's promises in part.

The whole of the promised land was theirs.

- But on this earth in their life-time, they only ended up with a burial plot to call their own.

That is the life that Abraham and Sarah lived.

- And you might well think that life doesn't sound so good.
- You might think, "Why bother?"
  - Why bother hanging on to promises, when the fulfillment is elusive?

I mean, that's just not the American way, is it?

- We want the good life and we want it now.
- We want to win the Superbowl every year.
- We want the United States of America to be the Promised Land, the greatest place on earth,
  - and we don't want to wait, and we don't want anyone else to get in our way.

That is the very present world in which you and I live.

- Why would we want to bother with the promise of another Kingdom?
  - Especially if that kingdom is elusive.
- Why would we want to bother with the promise of an eternal kind of life,
  - when we can't really see it, touch it, grab it, control it, or own it in a way that is concrete and immediate?

Well, there is one word Abraham and Sarah would say in answer to each of us: God.

I'm serious.

-It is God who changed all of the equations of Abraham and Sarah's life.

-It was God who called them out of Haran and to the land of Promise in Canaan.

-It was God who showed up again and again in their lives to walk with them and talk with them.

-It was God who showed them where they were going when they had no idea where they were.

-It was God who revealed Himself to them at every juncture of their lives, and strengthened them to carry on.

-It was God who blessed them and made them prosper.

-It was God who brought forth the child who would ultimately start the line of descendants that would indeed become more numerous than the stars in the sky.

And my friends, amazingly, those descendants of Abraham and Sarah have continued on as a people for 4000 years right up to this 21<sup>st</sup> Century.

-And for 4000 years the Jewish people through thick and thin have been an unbelievably influential people on the whole history of the world.

-They have impacted the history of this planet in ways that are really unimaginable.

-Their "Book" and their story has changed the world.

Abraham and Sarah would say, "It's because there really is a God. And we not only believed he existed, but that He was a rewarder of those who earnestly seek Him.

My friends, God is that "3<sup>rd</sup> Dimension" we have been talking about all year this year.

-God is the One, who when He makes Himself known to us, changes our perspective on everything.

We all of a sudden are taken out of our normal, earthly 2 dimensional way of thinking and seeing reality,

-and we are catapulted into a new 3D kind of way of thinking and seeing reality.

And this is what produces "living faith" in us.

Abraham and Sarah weren't just super-holy or religious people.

-They didn't have a living faith that was somehow inherently in them and helped them believe in spite of all evidence to the contrary.

No. What they had was a God who revealed Himself to them, -and it was in that revelation of who God is, and what God promised, that a living faith was birthed in them.

And it may not have made sense to others around them, -but because of what they had personally experienced of God, it made all the sense in the world to them.

-They may have been living in tents in the promised land, but they were "looking forward to a city with foundations whose architect and builder is God."

And having met God, they were fully convinced that there was such a city to be looked forward to, -and that being a citizen of that city was worth more than anything on earth.

-It made living in tents while they waited no big deal.

That "time in-between" was long for them.

-And at times they were frustrated with how long it was taking to actually taste in full what they were tasting only in part.

-But though they often doubted themselves along the way,

-God kept showing up for them at various times and in various ways,

-so they never really gave up on Him.

But God was the key ingredient in the whole dynamic of living a life of faith when the promised fulfillment is elusive on earth.

They needed God, who was the author of their faith, to keep on showing up in their lives and also be the perfecter of their faith.

And this is no different for you and me.

-If God has never actually revealed Himself to you in some way,

then I am even surprised you would even be here in church today.

I would say, why bother?

- But I am here, and I believe you are here, because God has made Himself known to you at various times and in various ways in your life.
- He has spoken to you through His Word in some way.
- He has opened your eyes to see that there is more in this world than meets the eye.
- He has spoken your name, and called you to Himself, and given you a kind of faith, and hope, and love that are not of your own making.

And it is that gift of God Himself to us, that causes us to have a living faith in what He promises us,

- even though** it sometimes feels like He has forgotten us;
- even though** it sometimes feels like we are crazy to keep on hoping when life around us seems so bleak;
- even though** we don't know how it is all going to work out;
- even though** we're often confused & don't know what to do.

What we have to hold on to is God Himself.

- He is the reward for those who earnestly seek Him.
  - He was Abel's reward, even though what Abel got for his faith was to be murdered by his brother.
  - He was Enoch's reward both in life and in heaven.
  - He was Noah's reward even though Noah lived through a traumatic time of judgment on the earth.
  - He was Abraham and Sarah's reward even though they only tasted in part what God had promised them in full.

Living faith is simply what happens in us when God makes Himself known to us.

- It's what happens when we discover that God is real, and that He is good,
  - and that He has a plan for us,
  - and that plan is to prosper us and not to harm us, it's to give us a future and a hope.

We then hang onto that hope in faith, trusting in the One who made the promise.