

“THE FAITH JOURNEY”

**THIRTEEN LESSONS ON FAITH
AND
THE JOURNEY IT SUMMONS US TO
TAKE!**

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LESSON 1

ABRAHAM – THE FAITH OF A FATHER

BIBLICAL TEXT: GENESIS 22:8

“AND ABRAHAM SAID, MY SON, GOD WILL PROVIDE HIMSELF A LAMB FOR A BURNT OFFERING: SO THEY WENT BOTH OF THEM TOGETHER.”

INTRODUCTION

How would you define the word **FAITH**?

A missionary named John G. Paton faced that dilemma during his missionary journey in Africa.

Though he had mastered the language of the people to whom he had been sent, the natives had no word for **“BELIEVE”**, the simplest definition of the word **FAITH**.

One day, while working on his translating abilities, a native entered his room, flung himself down on a chair, and resting his feet on another chair, remarked how good it was to “lean his whole weight” on the chairs.

Dr. Paton had found his missing word...the word that the native used for **“LEAN YOUR WHOLE WEIGHT”!**

Many patriarchs of the Scriptures lived lives that demonstrated this complete faith in God.

They learned *to lean their whole weight* upon the Lord and trust that He would fulfill all of His promises.

One such man was Abraham, whom we examine in light of his great faith as the father of many nations.

ABRAHAM'S FAITH JOURNEY

ABRAHAM, the son of Terah, was named before his older brothers Nahor and Haran (Genesis 11:27), because he was the heir of the promises.

He lived with his family in Ur of Chaldea until the age of seventy, when the Lord commanded Abram (as he was first named) to journey to a land of promise (Acts 7:2-4).

From this time forward, Abram would demonstrate his unfaltering great faith in the Lord.

His obedience to God's command was only the first of many demonstrations of his willingness to be remolded and reshaped by God.

Faith is a journey, and Abram's faith journey began here in Ur, when God removed him from his comfort zone.

Abram left the security of his family's position of wealth and domination in Ur, and sojourned 300 miles north to Haran, where he abode fifteen years, awaiting further instruction from God.

While they tarried at Haran, Abram's father, Terah, died at the age of 205 years.

It was then that Abram received a second and more definite call, and a promise from God who said, *"Get thee out of thy country, and from thy kindred, and from thy father's house, unto a land that I will shew thee; And I will make of thee a great nation, and I will bless thee, and make thy name great; and thou shalt be a blessing"* (Genesis 12:1-2).

Abram left Haran with his nephew Lot, *"not knowing whither he went"* (Hebrews 11:8).

He trusted implicitly to the guidance of Him who had called him.

God's promise to Abram contained not only temporal but also spiritual blessings.

It implied that he was the chosen ancestor of the great Deliverer whose coming had been long ago predicted (Genesis 3:15).

Abram built an altar to "Jehovah" (in the mountainous district of Bethel, between the towns of Luz and Ai) as confirmation of his faith in the Lord.

Then, forced by famine to relocate his family, he traveled to Egypt, where he used his wife Sarai in a deception scheme that exposed him to the rebuke of Pharaoh (Genesis 12:18).

Sarai was restored to Abram, but Pharaoh loaded him with presents and recommended that he withdraw from the country.

Abram returned to Canaan richer than when he left it, *"in cattle, in silver, and in gold"* (Genesis 13:1-2).

He returned to Bethel, to the place where he had built his altar unto the Lord, and it was here that a dispute arose between Lot's shepherds and those of Abram about water and pasturing the flock.

Abram generously gave Lot his choice of the pasture-ground.

Lot chose the well-watered plain of Sodom, and the uncle and nephew were separated, and Abram, who was encouraged by a repetition of the promises already made to him, moved to the plain or "oak-grove" of Mamre, which is in Hebron.

This was Abram's third resting place in the land of promise.

Chedorlaomer, King of Elam, ravaged the whole country where Lot and his family had chosen to settle, plundering the towns, and carrying the inhabitants away as slaves.

Hearing of the disaster that had befallen his nephew, Abram immediately gathered a band of 318 armed men, and together with the armies of the Amoritish chiefs Mamre, Aner, and Eshcol, he attacked Chedorlaomer and brought back all the spoils of the fallen king, presenting a tenth of the wealth to Melchizedek, in recognition of his character as a priest of the most high God (Genesis 14:18-20), who came forth to meet them with refreshments on his returning journey. (Archaeologists recently discovered a tablet, dated in the reign of the grandfather of Amraphel [Genesis 14:1], in which one of the witnesses is called "the Amorite, the son of Abiramu," or Abram).

When Abram returned to his home at Mamre, the promises already made to him by God were repeated and enlarged (Genesis 13:14); "*The word of the Lord*" (the first time this expression occurs in scripture) "*came to him*" (Genesis 15:1), and Abram now had a better understanding of the nation that would spring from his loins.

But Sarai (now seventy-five years old) grew impatient with God and persuaded Abram to take Hagar, her Egyptian maid, as a concubine, intending to give Abram an heir by way of proxy.

Ishmael, son of Hagar, became Abram's first-born, and heir to the promise (Genesis 16).

When Ishmael was thirteen years old, God again revealed yet more explicitly and fully his gracious purpose.

In token of the sure fulfillment of that purpose, God changed Abram's name to Abraham (Genesis 17:4-5), and the rite of circumcision was instituted as a sign of the covenant between God and Abraham.

God announced that the heir to these covenant promises would be the son of Sarai, though she was now ninety years old, and that his name should be Isaac.

It was at this same time, in commemoration of the promise, that Sarai's name was changed to Sarah.

On that memorable day, as a seal of God's great design, Abraham and his son Ishmael and all the males of his house were circumcised (Genesis 17).

Three months later, three men visited Abraham.

One of the three visitants was none other than the Lord, and the other two were angels in the guise of men.

The Lord renewed His promise of a son by Sarah, who was rebuked for her unbelief.

Then the Lord talked with Abraham, and revealed the destruction that was about to fall on the city of Sodom; and because Abraham was not able to find even ten righteous people with the city for whose sake the city would have been spared,

destruction fell upon it; and early next morning Abraham saw the smoke of the fire that consumed it as the "smoke of a furnace" (Genesis 19:1-28).

Sarah gives birth to Isaac one year after the visitation, and jealousy arises between her and Hagar.

But that is the least of Abraham's challenges, for in the plains around Moriah, God puts Abraham's faith to the severest of tests, saying "*Take now thy son, thine only son Isaac, whom thou lovest, and get thee into the land of Moriah; and offer him there for a burnt offering upon one of the mountains which I will tell thee of*" (Genesis 22:2).

When God wants to take us to a higher level of faith, He challenges us with the impossible.

How could Abraham sacrifice this beloved son for whom he had waited so long?

Was the God he served so selfish as to require that Abraham return his most precious gift?

Had God's promise that Abraham would be "the father of many nations" been scrapped in favor of some other heir?

These are the human questions one might expect to come from Abraham, but instead, he proceeded in a spirit of unhesitating obedience to carry out the command; and when he was about to slay his son, whom he had laid on the altar, his uplifted hand was arrested by the angel of Jehovah, and a ram, which was entangled in a thicket nearby, was seized and offered in his stead.

It is here that Abraham calls the Lord, "**JEHOVAH-JIREH**", i.e., "**THE LORD WILL PROVIDE.**"

Abraham buried his wife Sarah at the age of 127 years old, and lived to see the marriage of his son Isaac to Rebekah.

Then, at the age of 175, Abraham died and was buried in Canaan at Machpelah.

All of his wanderings came to an end, but his faith journey left a deep impression on both the ancient world and on us today.

His religious tradition of monotheism, faith in One God, is celebrated by almost all Eastern nations.

Abraham thus fulfilled his call by God to be "**THE FRIEND OF GOD**" (James 2:23), "**FAITHFUL ABRAHAM**" (Galatians 3:9), "**THE FATHER OF US ALL**" (Romans 4:16).

CONCLUSION

Faith is the persuasion of your mind that a certain belief is true.

Abraham was persuaded to look for "*a city which hath foundations, whose builder and maker is God.*" (Hebrews 11:10).

The primary idea of faith is **TRUST**.

When we believe in something, we have deemed it to be worthy of our trust.

Abraham's faith journey, like our own, was accomplished in degrees, through his experiences on his journey from Ur to Canaan.

With each new experience, Abraham built his storehouse of evidence on which his faith would rest.

How full is your storehouse of evidence?

LESSON 2

CALEB - A BOLD FAITH

BIBLICAL TEXT: JOSHUA 14:12-14

“Now therefore give me this mountain, whereof the Lord spake in that day; for thou heardest in that day how the Anakims were there, and that the cities were great and fenced: if so be the Lord will be with me, then I shall be able to drive them out, as the Lord said.

And Joshua blessed him, and gave unto Caleb the son of Jephunneh Hebron for an inheritance.

Hebron therefore became the inheritance of Caleb the son of Jephunneh the Kenzite unto this day, because that he wholly followed the Lord God of Israel.”

INTRODUCTION

As we studied in the life of Abraham, the purpose of our faith journey is to strengthen us for God’s ultimate purpose.

All of life’s challenges serve to mold us as God’s faith vessels, and prepare us to accomplish His will in spite of our human frailty.

Though we see ourselves as finite human beings, God is still able to use us to accomplish His infinite plans, if we will only believe!

Bold faith is not inherited...it is nurtured by means of life’s experience.

We learn to trust God in the bleakest of circumstances because our experience tells us that **He WILL** deliver us out of it all!

Our faith experience teaches us to ignore the obstacles and see only the bright path that God has cut through our darkest hours.

This bold faith rests in the assurance that the Lord is who He claims to be, and that no situation is too difficult for His Omniscient power.

This next biblical character study reveals how God uses a man’s bold expression of faith to move a frightened nation forward in His plan for their redemption.

CALEB, THE DOG

Caleb, (meaning ‘dog’) was the son of Jephunneh (Numbers 13:6; Numbers 32:12; Joshua 14:6, 14) of the house of Judah.

As one of the family chiefs of the fearless tribe of Judah, Caleb was well known for his strength.

When Moses put together a reconnaissance mission to scout out the Promised Land in the second year after the Exodus from Egypt, Caleb was one of the twelve men selected for the task.

When the group returned from their mission, they brought mixed messages.

The spy mission had been a success, for not a single soldier had been lost while making a complete surveillance of the Promised Land.

After 40 exhausting days in enemy territory, they were now ready to give their report, but they could not agree on its content.

A contingent of ten men were determined to bring a negative report, a *defeatist* attitude, to the people who were anxiously awaiting entrance into the Land of Promise.

There was one strong, positive factor on which they all agreed: ***the land flowed with milk and honey.***

The proof was seen in the fruit they brought back (Numbers 13:27).

The land was fertile and would abundantly feed the people and their livestock, giving them all they could ever need or desire.

But ten spies were gripped with fear as they described the inhabitants of the land as GIANTS, and themselves as mere grasshoppers in their presence.

Their report was so distrusting of God that it was labeled a *bad, evil report* (Numbers 13:32).

But one of the spies was a man of courage and strong faith.

Caleb silenced the leaders standing around Moses who were beginning to murmur and discuss the issues among themselves, and then he boldly and forcefully declared that they should go up and take possession of the Promised Land, and defeat the enemy.

At first, Caleb was overruled by the report of the ten spies who prevailed as they continued to spread lies and exaggerations.

The lies spread like wildfire through the camp, and their own fear and cowardice became stumbling blocks to the tribe of Israel.

The words of Caleb and Joshua were not heard.

Everywhere people heard of walled cities, strong men, giants, and the fabled Nephilim.

No one talked about God's grace.

None recited His miracles.

They had all but forgotten that God had delivered them from the hand of Pharaoh with His mighty rushing waters.

The thunder of Sinai, the fire of God that He had spoken and delivered and graced His people beyond imagination—all these things were forgotten in their fear.

Fear unchecked becomes its own fuel, a self-propelling force that expands as it expands.

The more the people wailed, the more excessive their words.

The more the people cried, the more they protested in rage.

Then they began to aim their anger more directly at God Himself.

Moses and Aaron were the fall guys, but the people were really blaming the Lord for their situation.

God had delivered them from Egypt. He had brought Pharaoh to his knees, had cast horse and rider into the sea, had led them through a barren land, and had provided bread from heaven and water from a gushing rock.

He had spoken, revealing grace and wonder, power and gentleness, direction and the Torah [law].

Yet God was the one at fault!

And they began to curse Him, to condemn His goodness and reject His grace.

WHEN FEAR LEADS TO FAILURE

Forgetful of God's power against Egypt, the people worked themselves into such a frenzy of fear that they wished that God had not brought them here at all.

Why had He not just left them alone?

When fear takes over, all rationale is cast to the wind.

Slavery and the hovels of Egypt began to look good again.

The memory of a variety of food made the memory of oppressive taskmasters less fearsome.

So it was that the frightening words of the faithless spies led to the mourning of the entire community and to their great rebellion against the Lord.

In their ingratitude they preferred death (Numbers 14:2).

Unfortunately, it was death they deserved and death they were to get.

Only their children would survive.

All the rest would die in this desert that they had chosen over the Land of Promise.

Moses and Aaron had done all they could.

They fell face down before the people, helpless and submissive before God (Numbers 14:5).

But the response of Joshua and Caleb was different (Numbers 14:6-9).

These two young men tore their clothes in a symbol of ritual mourning and declared once again the truthful facts about the land they had spied out: *the land was exceedingly good and it would not consume the people as the other spies had claimed* (Numbers 14:7).

Caleb boldly proclaimed that the LORD would lead His people into the Promised Land if they would only obey and please Him.

God would give the land—a land that flowed with milk and honey (Numbers 14:8).

Still, the people plotted to assassinate and to stone the four godly leaders... Moses, Aaron, Joshua and Caleb (Numbers 14:10).

Unbelief and rebellion are very serious offenses against God.

He will not tolerate those who work to tear apart His plans.

When a plague broke out in the assembly of the Israelites, the spies perished along with all those in the assembly over nineteen 19 years of age...except Joshua, Caleb, Moses and Aaron.

They were spared because they trusted God.

Caleb's bold proclamation of his trust in God was the last sermon the Israelites heard before being snuffed out for their unfaithfulness.

FAITH'S REWARD

The last record we have of Caleb is when, at eighty-five years of age, he came to Joshua at the camp at Gilgal, after the people had gained possession of the land, and reminded him of the promise Moses had made to him, to give him a certain portion of land as his inheritance, the land of Kirjath-arba.

His reward of a parcel of land was the fulfillment of God's promise to those who held fast to His Word and trusted His amazing power to deliver them to a land of Promise.

FAITH OVERCOMES FEAR

Fear is a catalyst for failure.

It stifles our ability to move forward in spite of circumstance.

We may claim that we believe God is able to overcome any obstacle placed in our path, but we will never see the demonstration of His power if we refuse to exercise that belief and trust Him.

Bold faith moves a man beyond self-doubt to the place where God will intervene.

The children of Israel saw only the obstacles before them.

Their faith was not strong enough to overcome their limited understanding of their position as God's chosen people.

But Caleb's strength and courage, and his fearless determination to trust God at His Word, allowed him to see the completion of God's promise.

CONCLUSION

There will be times in our life's journey when the way seems difficult and victory seems virtually impossible.

But when God wants to demonstrate His omniscient power, He first takes us to the precipice of impossibility.

That is where He performs His greatest miracles.

Man sees only that which his finite understanding can comprehend.

But faith sees far beyond man's limited horizons.

“Let go, and let God!”

Doubt sees the obstacles.

Faith sees the way!

Doubt sees the darkest night,

Faith sees the day!

Doubt dreads to take a step.

Faith soars on high!

Doubt questions, “Who believes?”

Faith answers, “I!”

—*Gospel Banner*

LESSON 3

JONATHAN – A FAITH THAT LEADS

BIBLICAL TEXT: 1 SAMUEL 14:6

“And Jonathan said to the young man that bare his armor, Come, and let us go over unto the garrison of these uncircumcised: it may be that the Lord will work for us: for there is no restraint to the Lord to save by many or by few.”

INTRODUCTION

Leaders are both born and made.

God predestines a man (or woman) to greatness and then trains him to fulfill his calling, equipping him with talents and abilities suitable to the tasks he will later be called to complete.

The most essential characteristic of sound leadership is the leader’s confidence in his cause.

No man will risk life and limb for a cause in which he does not believe.

In our lesson today, we will become better acquainted with a young man who was willing to put all on the line for the sake of God’s plan for Israel.

TROUBLE BREWS IN ISRAEL

“**JONATHAN**” (meaning ‘God is gracious’; or ‘whom Jehovah gave’), is the name of fifteen or more persons that are mentioned in scripture, but none is more beloved than Jonathan, the son of king Saul, who befriended David and ultimately saved the life of Israel’s young king.

Here in 1st Samuel, the Bible records the establishment of Israel’s monarchy, about 1050 B.C., and the heart-rending account of the relationship between David and Jonathan.

Samuel led Israel for many years in the combined roles of prophet, priest, and judge, but after the people demanded a king like those of the other nations (Chapter 8), God directed Samuel to anoint Saul as Israel’s first king.

When Saul turned from God, David was anointed by Samuel to succeed him.

After David killed the giant Goliath, he was brought to Saul's court, eventually becoming the leader of Saul's armies.

Saul and David enjoyed a congenial relationship as king and protégé, and David and Saul's son, Jonathan, became close friends.

History records the growing madness of the man who would call himself the king of Israel.

Saul's subsequent violent jealousy of David, Israel's next king, forced a wedge between the two, and David had to flee into the mountains to escape Saul's wrath.

Jonathan made the difficult decision to disavow his father and follow David.

Jonathan swore his allegiance to David, who would be the new king (1 Samuel 20:34).

This was the plight of a king's son, and the path that he was forced to follow if he would remain true to his calling as God's ambassador.

And it is here that we can begin to address the argument of whether a leader is born or made.

A YOUNG MAN OF STRENGTH

Jonathan is first mentioned when he was about thirty years of age, sometime after his father's accession to the throne (1 Samuel 13:2).

Like his father, he was a man of great strength and activity (2 Samuel 1:23), and was well trained as a soldier.

It was not long before he excelled in archery and slinging (1 Chron. 12:2; 2 Samuel 1:22).

If Jonathan was chosen from birth to fulfill his role as Israel's protector and David's personal bodyguard, certainly his training in the art of archery and slinging was an essential part of his preparation.

But the inner qualities of strength, valor and fearlessness were born in him as a gift from God.

In chapter 14, we are given a glimpse into the character of this young leader.

THE MAKING OF A LEADER

Jonathan was about to go on a secret reconnaissance mission into the Philistine camp.

The Israelites were in a military conflict where victory, from all outward appearance, was impossible.

They were vastly outnumbered, and were greatly surpassed in military technology.

The Philistines had oppressed the nation of Israel, causing the people to fear for their very lives.

At the beginning, there was nothing in this day that indicated it would be a remarkable day.

But it would!

On this day, God would win a great victory through the bold trust of Jonathan.

Jonathan gives the order for the mission to his armor bearer.

Every "**officer**" in the Israelite army had an "**assistant**" known as an *armor bearer*.

The armor bearer not only carried the leader's armor, but he would help the officer in fighting and administration of the army.

In our text, we listen in as Jonathan gives his armor bearer his instructions. *“Come, and let us go over unto the garrison of these uncircumcised: it may be that the Lord will work for us: for there is no restraint to the Lord to save by many or by few.”*

Jonathan's bold faith was strong enough that he knew there was no way the LORD would forsake Israel.

Sure, the odds were great against them.
But God was greater than the odds.

God had promised to do great things for Israel.

God gave this land to Israel, not to the Philistines.

Jonathan knew God could conquer any foe!

Why not now?
Why not today?
Why not through him?

A SECRET MISSION

Jonathan didn't tell his father about his plans to infiltrate the Philistine camp.

Why not?

It may have been that Jonathan *deliberately* did not tell his father, because he believed his father would have simply said "no."

While the king was sitting under a tree as the picture of defeat, Jonathan's faith was propelling him forward in faith.

God chooses and uses leaders according to the measure of their faith, and some things we do for the Lord are best kept secret because those with less faith may discourage us.

Not even the people knew that Jonathan had gone into the Philistine camp, so we know that Jonathan did not go out of a desire for personal glory.
If that had been his motivation, he would have told at least a few people that he had gone over.

Instead, Jonathan finds a strategic position between the passes, where *there was* a sharp rock on one side and a sharp rock on the other side, where a few men could easily fight against a much larger number from this strategic vantage point.

Jonathan knew that God could overcome any enemy of Israel, whether with a large army or a few good men.

His belief in God's power opened the door for the Lord to guide Jonathan to this place, because Jonathan was boldly trusting God, and acting on that bold trust.

CONCLUSION

Do you believe that “nothing restrains the LORD from saving by many or by few”?

Like Jonathan, we must believe in the power of God to sustain and control our lives to accomplish His will.

Jonathan's wise courage in God was the catalyst that God used to deliver Israel.

Many Christians often feel that God is restrained in one way or another.

In reality, the only thing that restrains God is our *unbelief*.

In Matthew 13:58, it says of Jesus, “*He did not do many mighty works there because of their unbelief*”.

God's *power* is never restrained, but His *will* may be restrained by our unbelief.

He may choose not to act until we partner with Him in trust.

God had a trusting partner in Jonathan!

Does He have one in you?

LESSON 4

NOAH – A FAITH THAT PRESERVES

BIBLICAL TEXT: GENESIS 7:1-5; 9:1; HEBREWS 11:7

GENESIS 7:1-5 (KJV)

“And the Lord said unto Noah, Come thou and all thy house into the ark; for thee have I seen righteous before me in this generation.

[2] Of every clean beast thou shalt take to thee by sevens, the male and his female: and of beasts that are not clean by two, the male and his female.

[3] Of fowls also of the air by sevens, the male and the female; to keep seed alive upon the face of all the earth.

[4] For yet seven days, and I will cause it to rain upon the earth forty days and forty nights; and every living substance that I have made will I destroy from off the face of the earth.

[5] And Noah did according unto all that the Lord commanded him.

GENESIS 9:1 (KJV)

“And God blessed Noah and his sons, and said unto them, Be fruitful, and multiply, and replenish the earth.”

HEBREWS 11:7 (KJV)

“By faith Noah, being warned of God of things not seen as yet, moved with fear, prepared an ark to the saving of his house; by the which he condemned the world, and became heir of the righteousness which is by faith.”

INTRODUCTION

Every Christian parent desires to pass their legacy of faith on to their children.

Every Christian should feel a sense of urgency for kingdom building.

We know that we are entrusted with the preservation of God’s Word, and we are compelled by the spirit of Christ to carry His banner forward at all cost. But how do we instill that urgency in our children and our grandchildren?

In the story of Noah, we see profound evidence of a purpose-filled life guided by Divine intervention, and we become acquainted with a man who was determined to live out his faith legacy and pass it on to his children.

NOAH'S STORY

NOAH (Hebrew for 'rest'), was the grandson of Methuselah (Genesis 5:25-29), who lived as Adam's contemporary for two hundred and fifty years.

The son of Lamech, Noah was about fifty years old at the time of Adam's death.

Noah is the connecting link between the old and the new world, and the second great progenitor of the human family.

The words of his father Lamech at his birth (Genesis 5:29) portray Noah as a type of "rest and comfort" of men under the burden of life (Matthew 11:28).

He lived five hundred years, and then had three sons, Shem, Ham, and Japheth (Genesis 5:32).

He was a *"just man and perfect in his generation,"* and *"walked with God"* (comp. Ezekiel 14:14, 20).

But as the descendants of Cain and of Seth began to intermarry, there sprang up a race among them that was distinguished for their ungodliness.

Men became more and more corrupt, and God determined to sweep the earth of its wicked population (Genesis 6:7).

God entered into a covenant with Noah, with a promise of deliverance from the threatened deluge (Genesis 6:18).

Noah was commanded to build an ark (Genesis 6:14-16) for the saving of himself and his house.

One hundred and twenty years elapsed while the ark was being built (Genesis 6:3), during which Noah bore constant testimony against the unbelief and wickedness of that generation (1 Peter 3:18-20; 2 Peter 2:5).

When the ark of "gopher-wood" (mentioned only here) was at length completed according to the command of the Lord, the living creatures that were to be preserved entered into it; and then Noah and his wife and sons and daughters-in-law entered it, and the *"Lord shut him in"* (Genesis 7:16).

The judgment-threatened now fell on the guilty world, *"the world that then was, being overflowed with water, perished"* (2 Peter 3:6).

The ark floated on the waters for one hundred and fifty days, and then rested on the mountains of Ararat (Genesis 8:3-4); but it was another year before Noah and his family were given permission from God to leave the ark (Genesis 6-14).

When they finally disembarked, Noah's first act was to erect an altar (the first altar mentioned in Scripture) and offer the sacrifices of adoring thanks and praise to God, who had kept His covenant promise to grant Noah possession of the earth by a new and special charter...one which remains in force today (Genesis 8:21-9:17).

As a sign and witness of this covenant, the rainbow was adopted and set apart by God, as a sure pledge that He would never again destroy the earth by a flood.

DELIVERED FROM CONDEMNATION

Such was the powerful legacy of faith experienced by Noah and his family.

When Noah, a righteous man in the midst of a wicked generation, was chosen by God to be spared from the destruction of civilization, the preservation of God's faith relationship with mankind fell to Noah and his sons.

Scripture records, *"And Noah did according unto all that the Lord commanded him."*

Perhaps the strongest word in that Verse of Scripture is the word **'ALL'**. As Christians, we are often guilty of picking and choosing the part of God's Word that we will preserve and follow.

Too often, we choose to adapt to a changing society rather than seek to safeguard **ALL** of Scripture that outlines man's relationship with his Spiritual Father.

Had Noah compromised his values and given in to the wickedness of his generation, even a little bit, our faith legacy with God might have been lost.

In the church today, Satan tries to trick us into believing that if we lower our standards we will extend the church's reach.

The moral interpretations of mankind are increasingly evolving toward inclusiveness at **ANY** cost.

Today, our law says that homosexuality is an alternate lifestyle, and abortion is a form of birth control.

But when Christians allow the Word of God to be compromised in our own lives, we endanger the impact of Christianity on future generations.

Noah could have lowered the boat's ramp when the rains began to fall, and let in the sinners whom God sought to destroy.

But Noah remained true to the Lord, and did **ALL** that the Lord commanded him to do.

He remained steadfast to God's instruction, and God's law.

CONCLUSION

Christians today are charged to keep God's commandments and preserve our faith legacy.

As with Noah and his sons, we too are required to pass on our testimony to the generations that follow, to safeguard our relationship with our Creator, and to do all that the Lord commands us to do.

Noah *"lived after the flood three hundred and fifty years, and he died"* (Genesis 28:29).

But before he died, he left his faith legacy with his sons and their families that they too might be *"heirs of the righteousness which is by faith"*.

And for generation after generation, that faith legacy has been passed on through the obedience of God-fearing people, whose strong testimony of God's goodness has inspired the continuing flow of the gospel message to all generations.

LESSON 5 ENOCH – A PERFECT FAITH

BIBLICAL TEXT: GENESIS 5:19-24; HEBREWS 11:5

GENESIS 5:19-24 (KJV)

[19] “And Jared lived after he begat Enoch eight hundred years, and begat sons and daughters:

[20] And all the days of Jared were nine hundred sixty and two years: and he died.

[21] And Enoch lived sixty and five years, and begat Methuselah:

[22] And Enoch walked with God after he begat Methuselah three hundred years, and begat sons and daughters:

[23] And all the days of Enoch were three hundred sixty and five years:

[24] And Enoch walked with God: and he was not; for God took him.

HEBREWS 11:5 (KJV)

“By faith Enoch was translated that he should not see death; and was not found, because God had translated him: for before his translation he had this testimony, that he pleased God.”

INTRODUCTION

What does it mean to live a life that is *pleasing* in God’s sight?

Is there some magic gospel formula that guarantees resistance to all of life’s temptations?

Perhaps it’s just as simple as this truth... *“Resist the devil, and he will flee from you.”*

To live a life that is pleasing to God, a Christian must remain alert and in control, by the aid of the Holy Spirit.

There must be a singleness of purpose that drives the soul toward spiritual perfection, day after day.

Where do we find that purpose defined in Scripture?...in the shed blood of Jesus on Calvary!

His sacrifice for our sins is all the motivation our soul desires and our spirit requires.

In our lesson today, we see the Spirit of God alive in a man whose only desire was to please God.

WHO WAS ENOCH?

The Enoch of our Scripture text was the son of Jared and the father of Methuselah (Genesis 5:21; Luke 3:37).

There is not much of an account recorded of his life in Scripture.

There are no long biblical records of incidents of valor or acts of extreme leadership.

Yet, the short albeit concise record gives us a crystal clear picture of Enoch's character and his life's work.

His father was one hundred and sixty-two years old when Enoch was born.

Scripture does record that it was after the birth of Methuselah that Enoch "*walked with God three hundred years*" (Genesis 5:22-24).

The birth of a child radically changes the life of most men, but in the case of Enoch, it woke him up to the great responsibility of being a living testimony to his family of the goodness of God.

From the moment of Methuselah's birth, Enoch pursued perfection with a vengeance, motivated by the very spirit of God within him.

No man can walk in perfection without the help of God.

1 Corinthians 2:11 says, "*For what man knoweth the things of a man, save the spirit of man which is in him? Even so, the things of God knoweth no man, but the Spirit of God.*"

If a man desires to please God, he can only achieve his goal by the power of God within him.

If Enoch pleased God...and we know that he did!...Enoch MUST have possessed the Spirit of God within him.

It is that Spirit to which we can attribute Enoch's successful service to God for three hundred years.

NEW WALK AND TALK

What does it mean to allow God to possess your soul, and how does that possession impact your life?

Imagine that you wake up one morning to find that Jesus has become you.

None of your circumstances have changed...you still have to go to work and put up with the same old irritable boss; you still have to endure the same health issues; nothing has changed...except for the fact that Jesus is now in full control of you...body, mind and spirit.

If Jesus lived your life with HIS heart, and allowed His priorities to govern your actions, his passions to drive your decisions, and His love direct your behavior... what would you be like?

Would your co-workers see a difference in you?

Would you react differently to the beggar on the corner?

And what of your friends - Would they notice a change in you?

How would YOU feel?

Would there be a change in your stress level?

Would any of your plans change? Your obligations? Your appointments?

Remember...Jesus is in control of your heart!

That's exactly what God's plan is for each of us...a new heart, because it is the heart that controls man's actions, like the engine of a car, and God wants to be in control.

It's not that God does not love us just the way we are, in spite of our imperfections.

It's just that He refuses to leave us that way.

Ephesians 3:19 explains that only when we are filled with the love of Christ, can we experience the fullness of God...and it is that fullness that controls our 'engine' and compels us to be LIKE CHRIST.

Enoch desired to be **FULL** of God, and he succeeded.

We know this because Scripture records that he lived a life that was pleasing to God and was rewarded with a heavenly home.

In fact, Enoch never even tasted death...he was translated, or transported, from earth to heaven...instantaneously!

The record of Enoch's translation is the first example we have of the rapture, when all of God's saints will be caught up to meet Him in the air.

STUCK IN OUR WAYS

Many Christians offer excuses for their sorted behavior.

“Oh, I can't change. I'm too old to change” or “It's just part of my nature”.

Why aren't we as quick to seek help for our malfunctioning spirit as we are to seek medical help for a broken leg?

We wouldn't limp around with a broken leg for the rest of our lives, so why do we allow our spirits to limp and refuse to allow Christ to repair the damage to our heart?

Enoch did not know the Messiah, but he allowed the Spirit of the Triune God to take up residence inside him.

That presence gave Enoch perfect peace...no more temper...no more fear...no more anger...Enoch was at peace with God.

Enoch had forfeited the things of the flesh for the things of the Spirit.

We know this because Hebrews 11:5 records that Enoch was translated because he *PLEASED* God, and man cannot please God according to Romans 8:8, if he is operating in the flesh (*“So then they that are in the flesh cannot please God.”*).

CONCLUSION

God has ambitious plans for all of us.

The same one who saved your soul longs to take control of your heart.

He calls this process *TRANSFORMATION*.

God is willing to change each of us into the likeness of His Son.

He wants us to have the compassion of Christ, the forgiveness of Christ, and the same intimate relationship with your Father.

Those who take the time to look into the heart of Jesus and discover His ways will develop a spiritual walk like Enoch's.

It's not enough to talk the talk...we have to walk the walk!

If we keep our eyes fixed on Jesus (Hebrews 12:2) we will be able to see what we can become.

LESSON 6 JOSEPH – A FAITH THAT PROTECTS

BIBLICAL TEXT: GENESIS 30:22-24; 37:3-4

GENESIS 30:22-25 (KJV)

[22] “And God remembered Rachel, and God hearkened to her, and opened her womb.

[23] And she conceived, and bare a son; and said, God hath taken away my reproach:

[24] And she called his name Joseph; and said, The Lord shall add to me another son.”

GENESIS 37:3-4 (KJV)

[3] “Now Israel loved Joseph more than all his children, because he was the son of his old age: and he made him a coat of many colors.

[4] And when his brethren saw that their father loved him more than all his brethren, they hated him, and could not speak peaceably unto him.”

INTRODUCTION

Persecution hurts.

It not only hurts the mind of a man, it hurts his spirit.

To counter the hurt, a man develops defenses, most of which can be just as damaging as the hurt itself.

But when a man is resigned to endure persecution for the sake of Christ, persecution immediately loses its sting.

Consider a man who is charged with a crime he did not commit.

If his only defense becomes anger, that anger will eventually consume him.

But if his response is one of love and forgiveness, nothing his accusers say or do will gain them victory over his spirit.

Such was the case of our study subject, Joseph.

In this lesson, through the study of the life of Joseph, we will ponder the effects of persecution, and how God can neutralize its damaging consequences.

THE DREAMER

Joseph was the elder of the two sons of Jacob by Rachel (Genesis 30:23-24), who, on the occasion of his birth, believed that God had taken away her reproach. Thus she called him Joseph, “**the remover**”.

Joseph was a child of about six years of age when his father returned from Haran to Canaan and took up his residence in the old patriarchal town of Hebron.

Scripture records, *"Now Israel loved Joseph more than all his children, because he was the son of his old age,"* and he *"made him a long garment with sleeves"* (Genesis 37:3).

This special coat, a sign of Jacob’s love for his son by his beloved Rachel, was a long, full garment worn by children of rich nobles.

The symbolism in this special gift haunted Joseph’s brothers throughout his childhood, provoking their extreme jealousy.

When he was about seventeen years old, Joseph incurred the jealous hatred of his brothers (Genesis 37:4).

They *"hated him, and could not speak peaceably unto him."*

Their anger was increased and they became enflamed when Joseph told his brothers of his dreams (Genesis 37:11), in which he would one day rule over them.

Joseph merely spoke the truth of his dreams, and believed that God was with him.

It had to be an uncomfortable situation for Joseph.

His father, Jacob, did not conceal his preference for Joseph in the presence of his brothers.

Yet Joseph did not let his preferential treatment go to his head.

Thus, while his brothers hated him, Joseph held no malice toward them.

On a trip to Shechem to find his brothers and bring word of them to his father, Joseph encountered their hostility.

As soon as they saw him coming they began to plot against him, and they would have killed him had it not been for Reuben who intervened.

They ultimately sold him to a company of Ishmaelite merchants for twenty pieces (shekels) of silver (about \$2), ten pieces less than the current value of a slave, for *"they cared little what they had for him, if so be they were rid of him."*

The merchants took Joseph to the Egyptian market, where they sold him as a slave to Potiphar, an "officer of Pharaoh's, and captain of the guard" (Genesis 37:36).

It is here that we begin to see visible proof of God's hand on Joseph.

Scripture records that *"The Lord blessed the Egyptian's house for Joseph's sake,"* and Potiphar made him overseer over his house.

Even when he was falsely accused of rape by a rejected Potiphar's wife, and spent two years in the state prison (Genesis 39-40), his God-given dreams ultimately freed him.

Joseph was brought from prison to interpret the king's dreams.

Pharaoh was so impressed with Joseph's wisdom in interpreting his dreams, that he set him over all the land of Egypt (Genesis 41:46), and gave him the name of Zaphnath-paaneah.

At the age of 35, Joseph married Asenath, the daughter of the priest of On, and became a member of the priestly class.

Joseph's dream of seven years of plenty followed by seven years of famine "over all the face of the earth" was the event that brought the brothers back together for their relationship's healing.

Because Joseph refused to become embittered by his brothers' persecution, God was able to use Joseph to deliver his family through severe famine.

HIDDEN BENEFITS OF PERSECUTION

Joseph's endurance in the midst of persecution could only be attributed to his willingness to trust God at His Word.

Through his dreams as a young boy, he realized that God had a special plan for him.

His endurance training came as a result of the exercise of his spiritual muscles in his relationship with God.

Had Joseph become consumed with anger over his brother's hatred and persecution, Jacob (renamed Israel) and his family would have died.

God used the open and forgiving heart of a young boy to construct a highway out of the death trap of famine and plan a way for His people to eventually find their way to the land promised to their fathers.

God accomplishes great work through us when we allow Him to take control in the midst of our trials.

Vengeance, anger, retaliation and an unforgiving spirit are tools of Satan who seeks to destroy God's plan for our lives.

God protects those who refuse to fall into Satan's trap.

CONCLUSION

Each one of us is in a unique race for Christ.

Our reaction to life's trials is manifested in our ability to endure all through the power of Jesus Christ who sustains us with His promise and His power.

If we are to endure like Joseph, we must keep ourselves on track and not look back.

We must not allow our carnal nature to rise above the spiritual man.

God will perfect in us that which we allow Him to control.

We don't win this race because we beat other contestants; we win because we reach the finish line!

QUESTIONS:

Think of a time when you felt unjustly persecuted. What was your external response? Your internal response?

Jesus is our running companion, but He places others along the way as encouragers, to offer help and even protection.

How have you allowed God to use you as an encourager for those who suffer persecution?

LESSON 7 MOSES – A FAITH THAT OBEYS

BIBLICAL TEXT: EXODUS 2:23-25

[23] “And it came to pass in process of time, that the king of Egypt died: and the children of Israel sighed by reason of the bondage, and they cried, and their cry came up unto God by reason of the bondage. [24] And God heard their groaning, and God remembered his covenant with Abraham, with Isaac, and with Jacob.

[25] And God looked upon the children of Israel, and God had respect unto them.”

INTRODUCTION

How do you handle adversity?

Most of us do OK as long as the occasions are few and far between.

But how do you hold up when your entire life is one challenge after another?

Most would agree that challenges breed character.

But the opposite is also true, that challenges can lead to discouragement and failure.

Psychologists would tell you that there is a type of personality that best survives constant challenge.

They are convinced that there is an ingredient in these individuals that causes them to persevere while others collapse.

Consider the life of Moses.
His life was one challenge after another.

But was his success as a leader attributable to some hidden personality trait?

In our reflections on the life of Moses, we will discover the key ingredient in this seasoned man’s faith that ensured his survival and his success.

THE BULRUSH BABY

At the invitation of Pharaoh (Genesis 45:17-25), Jacob (Israel) and his sons went down into Egypt.

This immigration took place probably about 350 years before the birth of Moses.

Under the king's favor, these Israelites began to *"multiply exceedingly"* (Genesis 47:27), and extended to the west and south.

The Egyptians began to despise them, and the Israelites became sorely oppressed.

But in spite of this oppression, they continued to increase in numbers, and *"the more the Egyptians afflicted them, the more they multiplied and grew"* (Exodus 1:12).

Even when the king tried to reduce their numbers through a secret pact made with the guild of midwives to destroy all Hebrew males at birth, *"the people multiplied"* more than ever.

Baffled and angry, the king issued a public proclamation calling on the people to put to death all the Hebrew male children by casting them into the river (Exodus 1:22).

Into this arena Moses was born.

When he was born, his mother, Jochebed, sought to save him by constructing an ark of bulrushes and floating her baby down the river's edge.

Her plan was successful.

The king's daughter found him, named him Moses (meaning *"saved from the water"*), and unknowingly allowed his real mother, Jochebed, to nurse him and raise him.

All of this was accomplished by Divine intervention.

A LEADER IS BORN

It was not a psychological pre-disposition that set the stage for Moses to become a great liberator.

God had manipulated circumstances to establish the perfect breeding ground for the one who would deliver the Hebrews from bondage.

Moses grew up in Pharaoh's court and was taught by the finest teachers, probably spending twenty years in military training and service.

Josephus records that Moses won a great victory in the war between Egypt and Ethiopia, for which he gained renown as a skillful general, and became "*mighty in deeds*" (Acts 7:22).

Moses returned to the Egyptian court, where he would have been rewarded with wealth and honor.

But Moses, even amid all his Egyptian surroundings, had never forgotten that he was a Hebrew, and he resolved to become acquainted with the condition of his countrymen.

He "*went out unto his brethren, and looked upon their burdens*" (Exodus 2:11).

At this point, The Spirit of the Lord took control; Moses' compassion for his brethren opened the door for the Lord to use him to break the Hebrew yoke of bondage.

OBEDIENCE...THE KEY

Psychologists argue the theory of personality pre-disposition and overlook the truth that obedience to God leads to victory.

Moses made his choice to obey the God of the Hebrews (Hebrews 11:25-27), because he was certain that God would bless him and his people.

Even when Moses lost control of his anger and murdered an Egyptian, God protected and blessed him while in exile in the land of Midian.

It was Moses' quest to know God that drew him to Mount Sinai and the burning bush.

It was here that the angel of the Lord commissioned him to go down to Egypt and *"bring forth the children of Israel"* out of bondage.

He was at first unwilling to go, but at length he was obedient to the heavenly vision.

There is a price for obedience to God.

Many miss their blessing because they are not willing to forgo their own plans for the sake of the Lord, especially when God's plan requires sacrifice.

Moses had to give up the comforts of Midian and place his life at great peril in order to lead the Hebrew people to their blessed Promised Land.

Obedience led Moses back to Egypt to free God's people.

Obedience caused Moses to raise his rod and command the people to witness the power of God as the seas opened up a highway of escape.

Obedience led Moses through the wilderness in search of the Promised Land.

Obedience led Moses to keep the Hebrew people spiritually on track throughout the 40-year wilderness journey.

THE PRICE OF DISOBEDIENCE

While obedience leads to blessings, disobedience leads to disappointment.

Because of Moses' disobedience at Meribah-Kadesh, God would not permit him to enter into the Promised Land.

That privilege would pass to Joshua.

But as the Hebrews encamped in the plains of Moab, ready to cross over the Jordan into the Promised Land, Moses gave the people his last instructions from God and blessed the tribes.

Then he ascended to *"the Mountain of Nebo, to the top of Pisgah, that is over against Jericho"* (Deut. 34:1), where he could see all of the Promised Land.

It was there that he died and was buried by the Lord *"in a valley in the land of Moab, over against Beth-peor"* (Deut. 34:6).

Moses was so great a leader that the people mourned him for thirty days.

Thus died *"Moses, the man of God"* (Deut. 33:1; Joshua 14:6).

While he was distinguished for his meekness and patience and firmness, it was his obedience to God that made him a great leader.

Moses knew that God's orders were not for discussion...they were for **ACTION**.

HE OBEYED, AND GOD BLESSED.

CONCLUSION

Success in this life is not a gift to those who are pre-disposed by some characteristic trait that guarantees achievement.

It is a gift from God to those who obey Him.

In Deuteronomy 5:29, God proclaims, *"O that there were such an heart in them, that they would fear me, and keep all my commandments always, that it might be well with them, and with their children for ever!"*

Obedience is the supreme test of faith in God and reverence for Him.

It is a relationship that must not be broken, because it is the tie that holds us close to God.

1 Samuel 15:22 says, *"Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice, and to hearken than the fat of rams"*.

Obedience is the condition without which no right relationship exists with God. Obedience is the binding ingredient in the covenant relationship between God and Abraham.

"In thy seed shall all the nations of the earth be blessed; because thou hast obeyed my voice" (Genesis 22:18).

QUESTIONS:

Discuss situations in our present culture where refusal to submit to God's higher authority has led to societal deterioration.

America was founded on obedience to God and His moral principles.

Discuss how the removal of **"UNDER GOD"** from our country's pledge will impact our image as a God-fearing nation.

LESSON 8 GIDEON - A FAITH THAT CONQUERS

BIBLICAL TEXT: **JUDGES 6:12-16; 7:7, 21-22A; 8:22**

JUDGES 6:12-27 (KJV)

“And the angel of the Lord appeared unto him, and said unto him, The Lord is with thee, thou mighty man of valor.

And Gideon said unto Him, Oh my Lord, if the Lord be with us, why then is all this befallen us? And where be all His miracles which our fathers told us of, saying, Did not the Lord bring us up from Egypt? But now the Lord hath forsaken us, and delivered us into the hands of the Midianites.

And the Lord looked upon him, and said, Go in this thy might, and thou shalt save Israel from the hand of the Midianites: have not I sent thee?

And he said unto Him, Oh my Lord, wherewith shall I save Israel? Behold, my family is poor in Manasseh, and I am the least in my father's house.

And the Lord said unto him, Surely I will be with thee, and thou shalt smite the Midianites as one man.”

JUDGES 7:7 (KJV)

“And the Lord said unto Gideon, By the three hundred men that lapped will I save you, and deliver the Midianites into thine hand: and let all the other people go every man unto his place.”

JUDGES 7:21-22A (KJV)

“And they stood every man in his place round about the camp: and all the host ran, and cried, and fled.

And the three hundred blew the trumpets, and the Lord set every man's sword against his fellow, even throughout all the host, and the host fled...”

JUDGES 8:22 (KJV)

“Then the men of Israel said unto Gideon, Rule thou over us, both thou, and thy son, and thy son's son also: for thou hast delivered us from the hand of Midian.”

INTRODUCTION

Battles are fought, one at a time.

For the Christian, ‘**BATTLES**’ are an opportunity to live as if God will keep His promises.

Those who live by faith will take God at His Word, no matter how dim our present circumstances may appear.

The more battles we win with the Lord on our side, the more confidence we have in His ability when the next battle arises.

In our lesson today, we will discover that Gideon needed a first-hand battle experience to bolster his belief that God is who He claims to be...a Deliverer and a Conqueror.

His experience would not only strengthen his faith, but also turn him into the faith leader that the Israelites so desperately needed.

A JUDGE FOR ALL PEOPLE

GIDEON (also called Jerubbaal - Judges 6:29, 32) was called to be the judge of Israel during the second period in the history of the Judges.

After the victory gained by Deborah and Barak over Jabin, Israel once more sank into idolatry.

For seven successive years, the Midianites and Amalekites repeatedly crossed the Jordan for the purpose of plundering and desolating the land of God’s chosen people.

Gideon received a direct call from God to undertake the task of delivering the land from these warlike invaders.

Before a good soldier goes to battle, he assesses the strength of the enemy he must face.

That’s often where the difficulty arises.

Man can only assess his enemy from his limited and finite perspective. Such was the case for Gideon.

Joseph Parker once said, *“Gideon was one of those men who required continual encouragement.”*

But we should be careful not to be too critical of this characteristic of Gideon.

He was given a task, which would overwhelm the best of men.

He was placed in circumstances, which seemed impossible to conquer.

In any situation of that nature, the best of men are still just men at their best.

Gideon needed repeated assurances of his calling and renewed assurances of his success to encourage him to fulfill his duty.

We are in need of much encouragement if we have any aspirations about fulfilling the responsibilities of our calling as saints of God.

When evil opposes us, whether our own personal ‘enemies’ or an enemy from without, we need Divine encouragement so we won’t give up and retreat.

The man who does not sense the need for continual spiritual help to keep going may not be trying to do much for the Lord!

It is only those who are attempting to accomplish great things for God who sense the greatness of the difficulties and who, therefore, need continual encouragement to keep going.

So it was with Gideon in our text.

BLESSED ASSURANCE

The Psalmist said, *“As a father pitieth his children, so the LORD pitieth them that fear Him. For He knoweth our frame, He remembereth that we are dust”* (Psalm 103:13,14).

God’s people can expect Him to give them needed encouragement along the way.

While it's true that if God states a promise once, that should be enough, God often desires to continually encourage His own by graciously stating the promise repeatedly in order to reassure His own of the truth, of their calling, and of their prospects.

So God repeatedly encouraged Gideon by a number of confirmations of his calling.

God gave assurances through the visit of the angel of the Lord, through the coming of the Spirit of God upon him, through the response of the people to his call to arms, and through the double sign with the fleece and dew.

We see this principle of God's repeated assurances and confirmations in the New Testament record of Christ's appearances after the resurrection.

Luke says Christ *“shewed Himself alive after His passion by many infallible proofs”* (Acts 1:3).

The grace of God was manifested in “many infallible proofs” that we might be encouraged to believe and obey Him.

Unlike the world that does little to encourage us in the right way, God graciously gives us many encouraging assurances if we learn to listen to Him and observe His working in our lives.

GOD'S BATTLE TACTICS

Once Gideon was convinced that God was with him, he and ten of his servants overthrew the altars of Baal and cut down the Asherah which was upon it.

Then they blew the trumpet of alarm, and the people flocked to Gideon's standard (flag) on the crest of Mount Gilboa to the number of twenty-two thousand men.

This army, however, was reduced by God's instruction to only three hundred. Gideon was directed by God to go against the Midianite hordes with a small band of three hundred soldiers.

Three hundred against one hundred thirty-five thousand was an overwhelming situation; it was a gigantic challenge.

From the human perspective it was suicidal to attempt the attack.

But just before the attack took place, God stepped in and again encouraged Gideon by giving him reassurance of his calling and of his destined victory over Midian.

These three hundred men, strangely armed with only torches and pitchers and trumpets, rushed in from three different points on the camp of Midian at midnight, in the valley to the north of Moreh, with the terrible war-cry, "*For the Lord and for Gideon*" (Judges 7:18, R.V.).

Terror-stricken, the Midianites were frightened and confused, and in the darkness they slew one another.

Of the one hundred and twenty thousand Midianite soldiers, only fifteen thousand escaped alive.

The memory of this great deliverance impressed itself deeply on the mind of the nation (1 Samuel 12:11; Psalm 83:11; Isaiah 9:4; Isaiah 10:26; Hebrews 11:32).

The land would remain at rest for forty years, because God had fashioned a capable leader for His chosen people.

GOD'S PRINCIPLES OF ENCOURAGEMENT

The Christian must remember that there are two principles for God's encouragement.

THE FIRST IS THAT IT COMES ON THE PATH OF OBEDIENCE.

Gideon was walking on that path.

He had faithfully followed the Lord in every detail.

At God's command he had destroyed the altar of Baal, and he had in the hours preceding the attack on Midian reduced the army from 32,000 to a mere 300.

Now he had the army in readiness to attack.
There was no delinquency here on Gideon's part.

He had obeyed well even when obedience was difficult.

Those who obey like that can count on God providing them with needed encouragement.

But those who are unfaithful will lack the assurances that build confidence and give inspiration for duty.

THE SECOND IS THAT GOD'S ENCOURAGEMENT SELDOM COMES BEFORE IT IS NEEDED.

Gideon did not get his inspiring reassurance until his army had been reduced from 32,000 to only 300.

It came at the moment when he was to send that small group of 300 against the enemy's multitude of 135,000.

Sometimes we would like God to give us reassurances long before the need is present.

But God prefers we focus our eyes upon Him rather than upon some stockpile of our supplies.

He will not be tardy in providing needed encouragement, but it frequently does not come until we are at the point where we really need it.

CONCLUSION

God knows exactly when we need help and is always prompt in providing it.

We can count on God to keep us going on the right pathway and to help us to fulfill our responsibilities by giving us the encouraging assurances at just those times when we most need them.

That's why we are *“more than conquerors through Jesus Christ!”*

God's encouragement helps us to conquer the demon of doubt!

QUESTIONS:

The pastoral ministry is fraught with challenges that require your pastor to trust and obey God in spite of the odds.

Congregations often do not see the vision until there is visible proof.

But thankfully, every church has a small band of believers who trust God at His Word.

ARE YOU ONE OF THEM?

If not, what will it take for you to become a Gideon for God?

Recall a time when you faced an impossible situation.

Give the class your testimony of how God gave you “victory in the battle”.

LESSON 9 JEHOSHAPHAT – A FAITH THAT TRUSTS

BIBLICAL TEXT: 2 CHRONICLES 20:5-12

“AND JEHOSHAPHAT STOOD IN THE CONGREGATION OF JUDAH AND JERUSALEM, IN THE HOUSE OF THE LORD, BEFORE THE NEW COURT,

[6] AND SAID, O LORD GOD OF OUR FATHERS, ART NOT THOU GOD IN HEAVEN? AND RULEST NOT THOU OVER ALL THE KINGDOMS OF THE HEATHEN? AND IN THINE HAND IS THERE NOT POWER AND MIGHT, SO THAT NONE IS ABLE TO WITHSTAND THEE?

[7] ART NOT THOU OUR GOD, WHO DIDST DRIVE OUT THE INHABITANTS OF THIS LAND BEFORE THY PEOPLE ISRAEL, AND GAVEST IT TO THE SEED OF ABRAHAM THY FRIEND FOREVER?

[8] AND THEY DWELT THEREIN, AND HAVE BUILT THEE A SANCTUARY THEREIN FOR THY NAME, SAYING,

[9] IF, WHEN EVIL COMETH UPON US, AS THE SWORD, JUDGMENT, OR PESTILENCE, OR FAMINE, WE STAND BEFORE THIS HOUSE, AND IN THY PRESENCE, (FOR THY NAME IS IN THIS HOUSE,) AND CRY UNTO THEE IN OUR AFFLICTION, THEN THOU WILT HEAR AND HELP.

[10] AND NOW, BEHOLD, THE CHILDREN OF AMMON AND MOAB AND MOUNT SEIR, WHOM THOU WoulDEST NOT LET ISRAEL INVADE, WHEN THEY CAME OUT OF THE LAND OF EGYPT, BUT THEY TURNED FROM THEM, AND DESTROYED THEM NOT;

[11] BEHOLD, I SAY, HOW THEY REWARD US, TO COME TO CAST US OUT OF THY POSSESSION, WHICH THOU HAST GIVEN US TO INHERIT.

[12] O OUR GOD, WILT THOU NOT JUDGE THEM? FOR WE HAVE NO MIGHT AGAINST THIS GREAT COMPANY THAT COMETH AGAINST US; NEITHER KNOW WE WHAT TO DO: BUT OUR EYES ARE UPON THEE.”

INTRODUCTION

One of the favorite hymns of the African-American church is **“I WILL TRUST IN THE LORD”**.

The Greek word **“TRUST”** is the very same word as **“BELIEVE”**.

The believer who has a saving faith has a genuine faith...the kind of faith that really saves a person.

Men often profess to trust God, but because of man’s nature: his depravity, evil, deception, and fickleness, they often fall short.

Some men will betray Christ, some will deny their faith under pressure; some will forsake Christ and turn back to the world;

Some will slip and fall back into sin; some will prove to be untrustworthy; some will be weak and easily influenced or “tossed to and fro”; some will lack zeal and genuine commitment; some will lack the courage to stand.

Jesus knows everything about us; nothing is hid from Him.

That’s why He is not able to trust Himself and His blessings to some men despite the fact that they profess to believe.

Joseph R. Sizoo, one-time pastor of the New York Avenue Presbyterian Church in Washington which Abraham Lincoln often attended, said he will never forget the day he held in his hands for the first time the *Bible of Abraham Lincoln*.

It was the Bible from which Lincoln’s mother had read to him as a child.

She had taught him to commit to memory many of its passages.

When he held the book and let it fall open, it fell to a page marked with many thumbprints because it had been read many times.

It was the thirty-seventh Psalm, *“Fret not thyself because of evildoers.... Rest in the Lord, and wait patiently for Him”* (Psalm 37:1, 7).

God measures our belief by our trust in Him.

So it was that God was able to measure the faith of Jehoshaphat.

THE WORD AS ARMOR

JEHOSHAPHAT was the son and successor of Asa, king of Judah.

His twenty-five-year reign, from 872 to 848 B.C., was one of the most encouraging and helpful eras in the religious history of Judah.

Jehoshaphat was thirty-five years old when he began to reign.

After fortifying his kingdom against Israel (2 Chronicles 17:1-2), he set out to cleanse the land of idolatry (1 Kings 22:43).

As a well-trained religious leader who had come under the influence of Judah's great religious leaders during the early years of his life, Jehoshaphat instituted a well-organized program of religious training for his people.

In the third year of his reign he sent out priests and Levites over the land to instruct the people in the law (2 Chronicles 17:7-9).

Man cannot trust what he does not know.

Jehoshaphat knew that his people had to **KNOW** God before they would trust Him.

His carefully administered teaching of the ways of God was what fueled so great a nation to put their whole trust in their Creator.

Careful biblical training has the same impact on us today.

Those who take the time to **KNOW** God, and allow the **WORD** to minister to their souls, develop an **ARMOR** against which no outside force will prevail.

Internationally, the reign of Jehoshaphat was a period of peace because the people had a mind to please God.

They became a superior people.

Even the Philistines and Arabs acknowledged the superiority of Judah by bringing presents and tribute to Jehoshaphat.

This enabled the king of Judah to build fortresses and storage cities throughout the land where he stationed military units.

In addition, he had five army commanders in Jerusalem who were directly responsible to him.

LEANING ON THE TRUTH

In our Scripture text, Jehoshaphat was threatened by a terrifying invasion of Moabites and Edomites from the southeast.

The Moabites had formed a great and powerful confederacy with the surrounding nations.

The allied forces were encamped at Engedi.

The king and his people were so filled with alarm that they all gathered to pray to God.

Knowing that his armies are outnumbered, Jehoshaphat proclaims a fast in all the cities of Judah.

In the court of the temple, the king himself leads a prayer expressing his deep trust in God.

With simple words, we hear him proclaim, *"O our God, wilt thou not judge them? For we have no might against this great company that cometh against us; neither know we what to do: but our eyes are upon Thee."*

Faith is relying completely upon God when the odds are stacked against you.

It is the impossible situations in life that force a man to exercise his trust in God.

Religious skeptics place themselves in a danger zone and eventually fall into ruin.

But those who place themselves in God's hands are delivered through any situation.

Jehoshaphat displayed his absolute faith in God before his people.

Jahaziel, a Levite priest, was so moved by the great faith of his king that he carried a message to the people of God's Divine assurance that, even without fighting, they would see a great victory.

When Judah marched toward the enemy, the invaders were thrown into confusion and they massacred each other.

Complete trust in God always leads to complete victory.

When our hearts are determined to **REST** in the promises of God, He never fails us.

Rest is a central part of our Christian faith.

Our rest (or trust) in God expresses our real beliefs about God and life.

Restless people have not found peace with God or with themselves.

Restless societies are out of sync with God's purposes.

Rest is a discipleship issue and a matter of Christian growth for the individual.

We rest in salvation through Jesus Christ;

We rest in God's sovereignty;

We rest in the Spirit's ongoing creative ministry.

The spirit's inability to "*rest in the Lord*" is rooted in a person's weak theology and spirituality.

BELIEF must lead to **FAITH**, then to **TRUST**, and finally to **PEACE AND REST**.

The people celebrated their victory as a great deliverance wrought for them by God (B.C. 890).

The wealth of the Moabites and Edomites, the spoils of war, were so great that it took three days to collect it all.

Jehoshaphat led his people triumphantly back to Jerusalem, and the fear of God fell on the nations all round them.

Friendly relations prevailed even with the godless ruling family in the Northern Kingdom, Israel, though Jehoshaphat was severely rebuked on numerous occasions for his alliance with them.

The greatest mistake of his reign was his entering into an alliance with Ahab, the king of Israel.

That alliance brought disaster and disgrace upon his kingdom (1 Kings 22:1-33) and made him more determined to return to his original course of opposition to all idolatry, with an ever-deepening interest in the worship of God and in the righteous government of the people.

Christians sometimes make the mistake of partnering with those who eventually end up hindering the growth of the Kingdom of God.

Usually it occurs because of our great desire to follow the Scripture's mandate to be "*at peace with all men*", and to portray an atmosphere of inclusiveness within our ranks.

Jehoshaphat learned the hard way that when we compromise our faith and partner with those who do not share our convictions, we weaken our ranks, and the result is always watered-down religion.

As a result of his great trust in the Lord, Jehoshaphat enjoyed a great measure of peace and prosperity, and the blessing of God rested on the people "*in their basket and their store.*"

Jehoshaphat died after a reign of twenty-five years, at the age of sixty, and was succeeded by his son Jehoram (1 Kings 22:50).

Throughout his life he had this testimony, that "*he sought the Lord with all his heart*" (2 Chron. 22:9), and the kingdom of Judah was never more prosperous than under his reign.

CONCLUSION

The great preacher, Dwight L. Moody's favorite verse was Isaiah 12:2: *"I will trust, and not be afraid."*

Moody used to say: "You can travel first-class or second-class to heaven.

Second class is, 'When I am afraid, I will trust.'

First class is, 'I will trust, and not be afraid.'

The latter is always the better way.
Why not buy a first-class ticket?

QUESTIONS:

Jehoshaphat's compromises with the Northern Kingdom brought disaster and disgrace upon the kingdom of Judah.

Consider the acceptance of homosexuality as an alternate lifestyle in our society, and discuss the impact it will have on Christianity if we compromise and allow it to infiltrate the church.

The structured religious training in our churches is intended to bolster our faith, both individually and collectively.

The level of trust a congregation has in God is directly tied to its willingness to **STUDY** and **KNOW** God.

How does your church register on the 'faith meter'?

How can you encourage the congregation to study as a collective body of believers?

LESSON 10

JOB – A FAITH THAT REDEEMS

BIBLICAL TEXT: JOB 19:25-26

“For I know that my redeemer liveth, and that He shall stand at the latter day upon the earth:

[26] And though after my skin worms destroy this body, yet in my flesh shall I see God:”

INTRODUCTION

“REDEMPTION” is defined as **“SET FREE FOR A PRICE”**.

God redeemed the Old Testament saints through the sacrifice of their firstborn.

The firstborn males of every family were offered ceremonially to God at the Temple, accompanied by a gift of five shekels.

The firstborn beasts were slain on the altar of God.

Christians are freed from the bondage of sin by the great price of the shed blood of Jesus Christ on the cross of Calvary!

The joy of redemption can only be experienced by those who have been set free by the Redeemer.

The unsaved know no such joy because they have not yet come to the realization that they are bound by their sin.

Job knew the joy of heavenly release from sin, for he had a faith that redeems!

HE WHO TURNS TO GOD

Job (meaning “he who weeps” – Hitchcock; or “he who turns to God” - Thompson) was a wealthy and pious landowner who lived in patriarchal times in the land of Uz.

Job is recognized as one of the great Old Testament personages.

Theologians still argue whether or not Job was real or legendary.

If known through legend, it must have originated from some experience similar to the Book's narration, an experience unique enough to become a potent household word.

Interestingly enough, the name **JOB** appears in the old Berlin Execration Texts as the name of a certain prince in the region of Damascus in the nineteenth century B.C., and in the Amarna correspondence dating back to 1400 B.C. as a prince of Pella.

So it may be no coincidence that the story of Job takes place in Uz, somewhere between Damascus and the old kingdom of Pella (Palestine-Syria).

The power and influence of the Book of Job is due to the strength and elucidation of the story.

It is the Job of biblical literature, rather than the Job of legend, who lives in the hearts of men; a character so commanding that, if he was fictitious, he has certainly become real.

Since Hebrew tradition has never invented its heroes, most theologians accept the Book of Job as a true historical record.

WISDOM'S BALM

JOB, who lived in the midst of great prosperity, suddenly became overwhelmed by a series of painful trials that fell upon him.

First, he suffered an attack by the Sabeans, who stole much of his livestock and killed his servants that were tending them.

Secondly, a fire consumed his sheep and the servants who were in charge of the flock.

Thirdly, the Chaldeans attacked, confiscating his camels and killing still more of Job's servants.

Finally, a great hurricane destroyed the house of Job's children, killing all inside.

Yet, amid all his suffering, Job maintained his faith and his integrity.

The entire Book of Job centers around the perplexing question of why the righteous suffer and how suffering can be reconciled with the infinite goodness and holiness of God.

All three of Job's closest friends offer practically the same answer.

They imply that suffering is always the outcome of sin.

This false theology was part of the common belief of Job's day...that all suffering is retributive or 'payback' for some committed evil.

Job had the courage to speak out against that common belief and take his alternate stand that sometimes the wicked prosper and the righteous suffer.

As Christians, we know (though we are sometimes reluctant to accept it) that all suffering is **NOT** punishment.

Jesus warned us, saying *"...In the world ye shall have tribulation: but be of good cheer; I have overcome the world"* (John 16:33).

We must come to understand, like Job, that God does not prevent our trials...He promises to see us **THROUGH** them.

Job desperately asserts his innocence to his wife and his friends, and at times appears almost delirious under the unjust accusations.

When he is finally afflicted with serious illness, Job, himself, comes close to accusing God of injustice; but he regains his confidence in God's Divine goodness.

And, in our Scripture text, he protests to all that he believes he will be vindicated in the end –

"For I know that my redeemer liveth, and that He shall stand at the latter day upon the earth:

[26] And though after my skin worms destroy this body, yet in my flesh shall I see God."

MY REDEEMER LIVETH

Job's certain statement that he would SEE God in the flesh has been the subject of much theological debate.

Job was certain that he would gaze upon God for all eternity.

Whether he meant with the eyes of his resurrected body, or figuratively with the eyes of his soul, we do not know for certain.

BUT OF ONE THING WE CAN BE CERTAIN, JOB KNEW HE WOULD BE REDEEMED!

Job would no longer feel like a stranger, separated from God, for God would be on HIS side.

So certain was Job that his friends accusations were wrong, that he was able to look beyond death to his being acquitted by God and enjoying perfect fellowship with Him.

Like Job, the certainty of our redemption is what sustains us through all of our trials.

As Christians, we believe that no matter what calamities occur in this life, our repentant spirits rest in the assurance that we will one day stand before our Redeemer and receive our reward.

The Apostle Paul reminds us that we serve a God *“who comforteth us in all our tribulation, that we may be able to comfort them which are in any trouble, by the comfort wherewith we ourselves are comforted of God.”*

(2 Corinthians 1:4)

Those who cling too tightly to this life and attempt to rationalize every event according to man's finite understanding reveal the same faulty theology that Job's friends exhibited.

The truth is that WE ALL SUFFER.

The word **“TRIBULATION”** means **“TO BE WEIGHED DOWN EXCEEDINGLY; TO BE PRESSED AND CRUSHED.”**

It is the picture of a beast of burden being crushed beneath a load that is just too heavy.

It is the picture of a person having a heavy weight placed on his breast and being pressed and crushed to the point that he feels he is going to die.

It is at these times in our lives that we are assured of God's comfort for all believers.

God does not have favorites; His mercies and comforts are for everyone.

And He comforts us in **ALL**, not in just a few of our trials and sufferings.

We do not have to bear a single trial or moment of suffering by ourselves.

Our Father—the Sovereign Majesty of the universe who controls all—is not off in the distance someplace far removed from us.

His Spirit, the precious Holy Spirit, is right here with us to comfort us in all our suffering.

This is the truth that Job's faith revealed to him.

TROUBLE, HEARTACHE AND PAIN WILL SOON BE OVER

When his trials came to an end, once more God visited Job with the rich blessings of His goodness and even greater prosperity than he had previously enjoyed.

Trails are for a season.

When that season is over, we have the assurance that we will bounce back with the aid of God's Holy Spirit within us.

Job survived this period of trial for one hundred and forty years, and died at an old age.

His life was an example to succeeding generations of integrity (Ezekiel 14:14, 20) and of submissive patience under the worst calamities (James 5:11).

CONCLUSION

Like Job, tribulation or suffering becomes a challenge to the faith of those who believe in a God of justice.

While some suffering can be attributed to the poor choices our free will allows us to make, others may be a part of God's plan to deepen our spiritual character and our compassion for others.

The mystery of God's goodness and mercy is revealed in this truth... **God is a constant influence in our lives for ultimate good.**

We do not exhibit BLIND faith...we move forward toward our eternal reward with the assurance that our relationship with our Heavenly Father is real...

We know that our Redeemer lives!...and He will one day open the door to His eternal peace...that all who believe may enter in.

QUESTIONS:

We learn from the story of Job, a righteous man, that not all suffering is punishment.

How then do we explain God's promise that the wicked will be punished and the just will be rewarded?

How do Job and his friends differ in their understanding of God's power, love, mercy and forgiveness?

Most of us have felt like Job at one time or another.
What about Job strikes a familiar cord with you?

LESSON 11 DAVID – A FAITH THAT BREEDS CONFIDENCE

BIBLICAL TEXT: 1 SAMUEL 17:37

“David said “Moreover, The Lord that delivered me out of the paw of the lion, and out of the paw of the bear, He will deliver me out of the hand of this Philistine.

And Saul said unto ‘David, Go, and the Lord be with thee.’”

INTRODUCTION

If we were to name the greatest stumbling block to success, it would have to be doubt.

Doubt keeps a businessman from taking risk.

It can hinder a great voice from singing, a brilliant mind from studying, or a great scientist from invention and discovery.

Doubt can even destroy a church’s ministry.

Skepticism and reservation are the enemies of success.

But those who are filled with confidence in their abilities are the ones who consistently achieve.

And while there are many levels of achievement, the same formula holds true for all those who succeed...they believe in themselves.

Every Christian has the ability to succeed, if he will but tap into the confidence that is available through his relationship with Jesus Christ.

As we look at the life of young David, we discover how a Christian can bolster his confidence.

A KING IN THE MAKING

“DAVID” (meaning ‘**BELOVED**’) was the eighth and youngest son of Jesse, a citizen of Bethlehem.

His father seems to have been a man who lived a humble life.

David was red-haired, with beautiful eyes and a fair face (1 Samuel 16:12; 1 Samuel 17:42).

His early occupation was that of tending his father's sheep on the uplands of Judah.

His first recorded exploits were his encounters with the wild beasts of the field.

He mentions that with his own hands he slew a lion and a bear, when they came against his flock, beating them to death in open conflict with nothing but a club (1 Samuel 17:34-35).

While youthful David was busy with his flocks, Samuel paid an unexpected visit to Bethlehem, guided by divine direction (1 Samuel 16:1-13).

There he offered up sacrifice, and called the elders of Israel and Jesse's family to the sacrificial meal.

Among all the men who appeared before him he failed to discover the one he was searching for...the next king of Israel.

Finally, Jesse sent for David, and the prophet Samuel immediately recognized him as the chosen of God, chosen to succeed King Saul, who was departing from the ways of God.

In anticipation of David's crowning, Samuel poured anointing oil on David's head.

David returned to his shepherd life, but *"the Spirit of the Lord came upon David from that day forward,"* and *"the Spirit of the Lord departed from Saul"* (1 Samuel 16:13-14).

DAVID'S RESOURCE FOR HIS RESOLVE

David soon again came into prominence as a young boy.

The armies of the Philistines and of Israel were faced off in battle in the valley of Elah, some 16 miles southwest of Bethlehem.

David was sent by his father with provisions for his three brothers, who were then fighting on the side of the king.

When David arrived in Israel's camp, he was made aware of the state of matters when the champion of the Philistines, Goliath of Gath, came forward to defy Israel.

All the soldiers fled from Goliath's presence and refused to challenge him.

So the king sent word that whoever killed this Philistine would be endowed with the king's riches, including his daughter.

Still there were no takers.

But young David was intrigued by their doubt, saying, *"...[Who] should defy the armies of the Living God?"* (1 Samuel 17:26).

Unlike these soldiers, David had a deep and abiding confidence in God's ability to deliver the Israelites out of the hand of this Philistine giant.

David had declared that the resource for his resolve was the Lord Himself!

David knew that what he could not do alone, he **COULD** do with the help of the Lord.

To understand David's confidence at such a young age, we need only look back to his earlier experience with a lion and a bear.

When King Saul questioned David as to where he obtained such fearless confidence, David told him his childhood experience with a lion and a bear, and how he removed his lamb from a lion's mouth, and slew both the lion and the bear, with the help of the Lord.

Then David declared, *"If the Lord can deliver me out of the paw of the lion and the paw of the bear, He will surely deliver me out of the hand of this Philistine."*

David had the utmost confidence...not in himself, but in the Lord!

NEVER ALONE

A mother once sent her son on an errand to a place he'd never been.

He was a young boy and didn't want to let his mother know that he was afraid to go.

The younger we are, the more we hate to lose face.

Humility often comes with age.

So as the young boy got ready to leave the house, he stopped at the door, turned to his mother, and said, *"It's so far, and I don't know the way. I'm not afraid, but could you come along with me for a little bit of the way?"*

The mother understood his fear and said, *"Mother will come with you all the way."*

The young boy put his hand in hers and left the house in full confidence that everything would be all right.

The Christian must come to understand that he is not **'going it alone'**.

When we venture into unknown territory, the Lord is there to hold our hand, as long as we reach out to Him.

As long as we seek His guidance, we will never lose our way.

HAND IN HAND

David took his sling, and with a well-trained aim threw a stone "out of the brook," which struck the giant's forehead, causing the giant Philistine to fall senseless to the ground.

David then ran and slew him, and cut off his head with his own sword (1 Samuel 17).

David's bravery so inspired the Israeli army that they pursued the Philistines to the gates of Gath and Ekron, killing many and chasing the enemy out of their land.

The popularity that ensued David after this heroic deed awakened a fierce jealousy in King Saul (1 Samuel 18:6-16).

But in the many years that followed, while Saul plotted to kill the boy that would be king, David never lost his confidence in Almighty God.

He believed, as he had said to the Philistine giant, *'no sword, nor spear, nor shield can conquer the Lord of Hosts!'* (1 Samuel 17:45 paraphrased).

CONCLUSION

David's confidence in the Lord led to his success as king at thirty years of age.

His position as king was never challenged, not even by Saul's only remaining son.

When God is for you, who can be against you?

QUESTIONS:

Discuss how our perception of human frailty often hinders the work of the Lord.

Sinful imperfections can render a man helpless and hopeless.

Do you have any giants in your life that you have not asked the Lord to slay for you?

LESSON 12 THE THREE HEBREW BOYS – A FAITH THAT DEFIES LOGIC

BIBLICAL TEXT: DANIEL 3:17

“If it be so, our God whom we serve is able to deliver us from the burning fiery furnace, and He will deliver us out of thine hand, O king.”

INTRODUCTION

Consider what we know about fire.

FIRE IS THE HEAT AND LIGHT that comes from burning substances.

It is caused when there is a rapid union between a substance and oxygen.

The only way to extinguish fire is to remove the oxygen that feeds the fire, through suffocation.

FIRE IS HOT.

Most of us learned this at a young age when we curiously touched the flame of a match or a candle.

Some of us were smart enough to know fire was hot because Mommy said so!

FIRE CONSUMES.

Most substances will burn beyond recognition if the fire is intense enough.

The rare exception would be the outer metal casing of a rocket or space shuttle.

But even that has proven not to be indestructible.

Given your knowledge of fire, would you have followed Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego into Nebuchadnezzar’s fiery furnace?

These three boys knew the properties of fire.

They knew that fire is hot and it consumes, yet they had no fear.

Their faith defied logic.

In the Bible we read many accounts of people who displayed a faith that defied logic:

A leader raises his rod and parts the Red Sea.

A young boy kills an armed Philistine with nothing but a slingshot.

A young man spends a night in a den of lion's without being harmed.

A trusting disciple walks on water

These are just a few of Scripture's examples of faith that defies logic.

Today we'll take a closer look at one of them – the story of Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego.

NEBUCHADNEZZAR'S NIGHTMARE

Daniel and his three friends, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah, were chosen to enter a three-year educational program in the Babylonian language.

They were also to study its extensive wisdom, religious, and historical literature.

Only the best-looking and most intelligent young men were brought into this government-sponsored training program for work in the king's court (1:4, 5).

Daniel and his friends believed that the king's food and wine would defile them (it may have been consecrated to a pagan god), so they diplomatically requested meals of vegetables and water for a ten-day trial.

God honored the dedication of these young men and miraculously gave them good health and more wisdom than the other student, and ten times more wisdom than Babylon's wisest men (1:17-21).

In the second year of his reign, King Nebuchadnezzar had a disturbing dream of a great statue that was destroyed by a rock.

The magicians and wise men of Babylon were called to interpret the dream.

But they admitted defeat, saying they could not tell the king his dream because the gods had not revealed it to them (2:11).

Nebuchadnezzar decided to kill all the wise men, including Daniel and his friends.

But Daniel and his three friends prayed for God's mercy, and He revealed the dream and interpretation to Daniel (2:12-19).

Daniel praised God for His wisdom and power, and for revealing these mysteries of His plan to mankind (2:20-23).

Then he shared the interpretation with King Nebuchadnezzar.

With great faith, Daniel witnessed to the king, revealing that God had told him that the head of the statue in his dream was Nebuchadnezzar (2:28, 36-38).

The other parts of the statue referred to later weaker kingdoms, and the final kingdom was the everlasting kingdom of God (2:44, 45).

Because he could interpret the dream, Daniel and his God were honored, and his three friends were given new jobs and new names.

Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah became Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego.

A new title and a new name are all it would take for some men to cast off their faith in favor of the worship of their new benefactor.

But not Daniel and these three boys; they were different.

The attainment of position and power were never their motivation for service to the king.

They were simply forced by circumstance, as Babylonian captives, to serve King Nebuchadnezzar.

But they were determined to sing their same song of the goodness of God in this strange land.

The pompous Nebuchadnezzar, intrigued by the dream's interpretation, made a statue (probably of himself) and required all political officials to bow down to it to demonstrate their loyalty to him (3:1-5).

The penalty for disobedience was a deadly trip to the fiery furnace.

But Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego had a faith that defied logic.

They believed that God could deliver them from **any** harm, so they refused to bow down before the image of King Nebuchadnezzar.

We can hear their faith's defiance in Scripture's recorded response to the king.

“If it be so, our God whom we serve is able to deliver us from the burning fiery furnace, and He will deliver us out of thine hand, O king.”

All three boys knew about the properties of fire.

They knew that fire is hot.

They knew that fire consumes.

Yet they demonstrated a faith that defied logic.

They believed that they could walk into a blazing fire without fear of death, because they knew they served a God whose power was greater than fire.

The fire of the furnace would have no power over them.

PRIDE'S TRAP

The king, who had previously proclaimed his favor to the God of Daniel, Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego, now had to make a decision.

Would he continue to honor their God, or was his own honor more important?

Nebuchadnezzar's pride won out, and the three boys were thrown into a blazing furnace.

And as they had trusted, an angelic being from God did deliver them unharmed from the blaze.

Nebuchadnezzar was once again forced to recognize the power of God (3:24-30).

Though Nebuchadnezzar was a very proud man, he was finally humbled by God and challenged to recognize that the Lord is the ruler over all mankind (4:17, 25, 32).

STANDING ON HIS PROMISES

The story of Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego is a familiar text, and only one of the many supernatural stories of Scripture whose purpose is to inspire and assure us of God's love, power and protection.

But Christians today have supernatural stories of their own to tell that are just as important!

The same God who delivered the three Hebrew boys is still in the business of delivering today.

And His power still defies logic.

A woman in Newark, New Jersey asked the Lord to remove a brain tumor without surgery...and He did.

A mother prayed for her son who was diagnosed by three physicians, with Cerebral Palsy ...and today he is a normal 21 year old.

A Black woman in Daytona Beach, determined to serve her predominantly white district as a councilwoman, asked the Lord to take control of the election and grant her a victory...She won by one vote!

A navy man once asked his chaplain why he was always talking to the men about Jesus Christ.

"Did you ever see Him?" he asked.

"No" the chaplain replied, "I never did".

“Then how can you tell a man to trust in someone you have never seen?
I can’t see any sense in that” said the seaman.

“Well,” replied the chaplain, “when you head for a place of refuge in a storm, what sense is there to tell the men to let go the anchor when they cannot see the ground below?
On what principle do you trust the ship and your life to a ground you cannot see?”

The seaman replied, “We go by the chart!”

“Exactly,” replied the chaplain, holding his bible.
“And I, too, go by my chart, and it is an infallible one, while yours is not.

It tells me of the only sure ground of my salvation – the atoning work of Christ on the cross.
My faith, like your anchor, takes hold of this unseen but very real ground, so I can ride out every storm in peace and safety!”

The chaplain knew that Christ’s power defies logic!

CONCLUSION

Stories abound around the world of miraculous victories and men with unshakeable faith.

These are the testimonies that will strengthen tomorrow’s Christians to persevere in the face of all of life’s fires...because we serve a God who defies logic.

QUESTIONS:

Logic is the rationale of common sense.

Consider a time when you faced an impossible challenge.

Discuss how your faith helped you to defy logic and hold out for God’s victory.

Storms can strengthen or weaken a structure.

Likewise, life’s storms can strengthen or weaken our faith.

God’s presence makes all the difference in the outcome of the storm.

How?

LESSON 13 CENTURION – A FAITH THAT HUMBLER

BIBLICAL TEXT: MATTHEW 8:5-10

“And when Jesus was entered into Capernaum, there came unto Him a centurion, beseeching Him,

[6] And saying, Lord, my servant lieth at home sick of the palsy, grievously tormented.

[7] And Jesus saith unto him, I will come and heal him.

[8] The centurion answered and said, Lord, I am not worthy that thou shouldst come under my roof: but speak the word only, and my servant shall be healed.

[9] For I am a man under authority, having soldiers under me: and I say to this man, Go, and he goeth; and to another, Come, and he cometh; and to my servant, Do this, and he doeth it.

[10] When Jesus heard it, He marveled, and said to them that followed, Verily I say unto you, I have not found so great faith, no, not in Israel.”

INTRODUCTION

Have you ever struggled with submission to authority?

Most of us have, at one time or another.

It is particularly difficult for men who, from birth, are taught that we are the dominant gender.

As leaders, whether of our families, our churches, or our communities, we are expected to exhibit a certain visible strength.

This is not to say that women are not strong in their own right, but God’s divine order places men at the head of their households.

Men are to their wives what Christ is to the church, and it is a great and awesome responsibility that requires much strength.

So it should not surprise us that men struggle with submission.

We see evidence of that struggle in the number of men on our church roles.

In our lesson today we will discover that men struggle with submission because we have a distorted view of our role as leaders.

HELPLESS, BUT NOT HOPELESS

The story of the centurion parallels the hopeless state of mankind without Jesus.

The centurion was separated from his only source of hope - ***IDEOLOGICALLY, PHYSICALLY, AND SPIRITUALLY.***

IDEOLOGICALLY, he faced the dilemma of being a man who was *rejected*, despised, and hated by the Jews.

PHYSICALLY, he faced the dilemma of asking for healing for a servant who was miles away.

And finally, the centurion faced the dilemma that he was a Gentile, considered by the Jews to be lost ***SPIRITUALLY***, an alien and an enemy to the people of God.

Had he presented himself before the priests in the Temple seeking help for his servant, he would probably have been escorted quickly to the door.

But barriers are Jesus' specialty.

He had the power to span and to overcome the ideas and prejudices that divide man against man, neighbor against neighbor, race against race, nation against nation, employee against employer, child against parent, and wife against husband.

Jesus had the power to reach the man, to pierce the spiritual barriers of his soul and to save him.

But in order for this miracle to take place, there first had to be a demonstration of faith to which the Lord could and would respond.

Jesus can reach the soul of any man who believes in Him, no matter how lost, or how alien, or how much of an enemy to God he has been.

But that man must take the first step, and with a repentant heart and selfless spirit, demonstrate a real faith in the power of God.

Jesus receives any man who truly believes, but He rejects those who do not believe, no matter who they are.

SUBMISSION TO AUTHORITY

The great faith of the centurion aroused Jesus (v.5-9).

Here was a soldier who held a position of authority, but he was ready to yield to Jesus, whom he recognized as the Greatest Authority.

Because of his submission to authority, his humility opened the door for Jesus to heal the Centurion's servant, and Jesus was able to prove He was the Messiah (v.13).

Faith opens the door to real communication with the Father.

The story of the centurion should cause us to wonder if a lack of humility ever hindered the Lord from aiding us in our own distress.

Jesus was aroused by the centurion's humility.

The man's humility is seen in two most unusual acts.

He was a Gentile and a Roman officer, yet he came to a Jew for help.

Approaching a Jew was socially unacceptable and unheard of for a Gentile, but being an officer of Rome made it worse.

Jesus knew that the centurion had great courage and humility to approach Him for help.

And, the centurion came to Jesus as **"LORD,"** acknowledging His superior being and Messiah-ship.

He approached Him as the One who could meet his need.

The centurion knew and confessed that he had a need, a need that other men could not meet.

Confessing that we need the help of another is not a sign of weakness; on the contrary, it is a sign of strength.

Knowing and confessing are both essential when a person really wants the Lord to intercede.

The Centurion knew where to go and to whom to go in order to have his need met.

He was willing to do all he could to have his need met.

He then trusted Jesus to satisfy his need.

Psalm 34:18 says, *“The LORD is nigh unto them that are of a broken heart; and saveth such as be of a contrite spirit”*.

Jesus’ response to the centurion’s cry for help was forceful: *“I WILL.”*

In these two words, we see Christ’s affirmation that He will span and overcome all the barriers and divisions of men to meet a man’s need.

He will meet the need of anyone who truly trusts Him: master or servant, noble or common, parent or child, rich or poor, man or woman, sinner or saint, doomed or saved, helpless or capable, hopeless or assured.

Jesus has no favorites.

He does not favor one person over another.

The centurion approached Jesus **begging**, acknowledging that he was totally dependent upon Him.

There is no other way.

Position, power, fame, wealth, and social acceptability must be laid aside. Our thoughts cannot be focused on self and social acceptability, but only upon Christ and His power.

Only when we remove ourselves out of the picture can Jesus meet our needs.

The centurion revealed the sincerity of his heart through the words that he spoke.

Christ sees our thoughts—what our minds are focused upon when we approach Him.

If our thoughts are focused on self and social acceptability, then our sincerity is weak and lacking.

Submission then becomes a difficult hurdle.

Jesus knows we care more for this world than for Him.

That's why submission and humility are a requirement for Divine intervention.

SECOND, JESUS WAS AROUSED BY THE CENTURION'S SENSE OF UNWORTHINESS.

The centurion did not say, *“My servant is not worthy to have you come”*; but he said, *“I am not worthy.”*

A sense of personal unworthiness gripped this soldier.

Through this statement, the centurion was acknowledging that Jesus Christ is the Sovereign Lord.

He is the One who alone has the power to meet our need.

By faith, the centurion knew that he had to confess his inadequacy and unworthiness to have the Lord help him.

James 4:6b says, *“God resisteth the proud, but giveth grace unto the humble”*.

From the purely social perspective, the greater (the Centurion) proclaimed his inferiority to the lesser (Jesus, a Jew).

Society considered the centurion greater than the poor preacher from Nazareth.

But the centurion humbly confessed a deep unworthiness before Christ.

He saw something of God in Christ, something that caused him to humble himself before Christ.

THIRD, JESUS WAS AROUSED BY THE CENTURION’S LOVE—HIS LOVE FOR A SLAVE.

The centurion was pouring out his heart for another person.

We call that intercessory prayer.

In the eyes of society the person should have been meaningless to him, yet the man meant much to him.

He loved this slave that society considered meaningless.

What a lesson that is for us!

There is a great need for the love that intercessory prayer expresses, the kind of love that breaks down the separation between classes.

“Let love be without dissimulation [hypocrisy]”. (Romans 12:9a).

FOURTH, JESUS WAS AROUSED BY THE CENTURION’S GREAT FAITH.

The centurion believed in the great power of Jesus to span and to overcome all barriers—even the barrier of space and time.

WHAT GREAT FAITH!

It was great because it was a personal faith in Jesus as the Supreme Authority and Power; power over all men, including him, a soldier of Rome, the conquering nation.

He believed Jesus to be Lord over both nature and heaven.

CONCLUSION

We learn a valuable lesson about selflessness from this Centurion soldier.

FIRST, WE LEARN THAT WE MUST SEE GOD IN CHRIST.

Christ is our Intercessor, and our hope.

SECOND, WE MUST SEE VALUE IN EVERY MAN, THE VALUE THAT GOD PUTS UPON EVEN THE POOREST AND UNACCEPTABLE.

We are to humble ourselves before all, because what man sees as weakness, God views as strength.

QUESTIONS:

Have you ever asked God to help someone outside of your family or church; if so, what were the circumstances?

How do we demonstrate our faith in God's ability to handle our problems?