

Heb 11: 8-10 Faith Displayed in the Call and Life of Abraham

Let me recall the context of Hebrews. The writer is exhorting Hebrew Christians to perseverance in the faith. By coming to Jesus the Great High Priest, they had given up the old system of worship. In Christ, the new covenant had arrived. And some, because of pressures from their culture, their families, and even through hardships and persecutions, were returning to the old. So, the entire book is about supremacy of Christ and his fulfillment of the old covenant. And when we come to chapter 11 the author brings to mind all the OT saints who, by faith looked forward to this fulfillment. And the emphasis is on their obedience, their works from faith. Today, we come to the “Father” of Israel, Abraham, as another example of faith. The Bible says that all those who follow Abraham in faith are “children of God” (Gal. 3:7). This means that we also, by faith, are also the “sons” of Abraham. And by reading about him, we are also encouraged to persevere in this life. So, we need these words just as much as those who lived when this book was written. With this in mind, I have two main truths about the faith of Abraham: 1) The foundation of faith is the call of God (Divine Call); 2) The evidence of faith is obedience to this call (A life of faith). In this 2nd part, I will focus on Abraham’s obedience as he is called from one country to another country and what this means for us.

1. A Divine Call. Look at v. 8: **“By faith Abraham obeyed when he was called . . .”** Last week we considered the fact that for faith to exist, there must be divine revelation. In other words we must know who God is and what he requires of us. We saw this with Abel as he knew what God required in worship. We saw this with Enoch as he knew what God required in righteousness. We saw this with Noah as he knew what required of him as a witness. With Abraham, we see the specifics of divine revelation in his calling.

With Abraham we see a change with the way God has been dealing with the world. Before Abraham, it seems to me that he dealt with men in a general way. After Noah and the earth was repopulated, it seems that mankind knew the ways of God in a general way. However, they rebelled. And the next big event after the flood was what? The men of the earth built a city and attempted to build a tower there (Tower of Babel). And Rom. 1:18-19 fits the context of that heathen world. **“For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who by their unrighteousness suppress the truth. For what can be known about God is plain to them, because God has shown it to them.”** And it was at that time, that God began to deal with one man, Abraham, and his posterity (Abraham and his children). With Abraham we see God coming to one man with a divine call that will be the basis of his faith and his obedience and all who follow.

We see this call in Gen. 12:1-3: **“Now the LORD said to Abram, “Go from your country and your kindred and your father’s house to the land that I will show you. And I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and him who dishonors you I will curse, and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed.”** (See also Acts 7:2-3) Now, what I want us to see this morning is that this call (of Abraham) becomes the basis for our call as well. You might say, *“Jon, God did not call me in the same way as Abraham.”* Well, let’s see! Rom. 8:28 says this: **“And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose.”** In order to explore this further, we must distinguish

between two kinds of calls in the Bible: 1) a general call; and 2) a particular call. We may also name these as an “outward” call and an “inward” call, or an “inoperative” call and an “effectual” call. The first is a call that does not save. The second is a powerful call that does save.

We could say there is a call that goes out to all the earth through creation. As we’ve already seen in Rom. 1:19: **“what can be known about God is plain to them, because God has shown it to them.”** Some may say there is also the call of conscience. In other words, God has planted his “law in our hearts” that we might know there is a God who requires some kind of morality in the world. However the biggest way we see this call is when the Word of God is preached and people hear, but do not receive what they hear. This happens all the time in churches and on streets and in coffee shops and in homes all over the world. This happened with Noah as a preacher of righteousness before the flood. This is the call you give to your cat as he just turns his backside to you and walks off. It is like the old saying, *“you can lead a horse to water but you can’t make him drink.”*

This “general” call is refused by all. Prov. 8:4 says, **“To you, O men, I call, and my cry is to the children of man . . .”** Matt. 20:16 says, **“For many are called, but few are chosen . . .”** I think of the parable in Luke 14 where a man gave a great banquet and sent his servants to gather the invitees. All of them made excuses *“I must tend to the field I bought.” “I must examine my cattle.” “I just got married and need to attend to my wife.”* These are the excuses of the world who hear the call of God. I even think of the Lord Jesus himself as he called to the Jews day after day. We see this “general” kind of call throughout the Bible. It is there. It renders all who hear without excuse. But, this call has no power in and of itself to save.

But, there is another call, a “particular,” “inward,” “effectual” call. I think of John 5:25 as Jesus says, **“Truly, truly, I say to you, an hour is coming, and is now here, when the dead will hear the voice of the Son of God, and those who hear will live.”** Or John 10:3-4 as Jesus speaks about the shepherd. Jesus says, **“The sheep hear his voice, and he calls his own sheep by name and leads them out. When he has brought out all his own, he goes before them, and the sheep follow him, for they know his voice.”** These are the “called according to his purpose” of Rom. 8:28. And in v. 30: **“Those he calls, he justifies.”** We see this ALL those who have faith.

Think of Matthew the tax collector. Jesus saw him at his book and said, **“Follow me.”** And He left everything to follow. Zaccheus (wee little man) climbed the tree as Jesus passed by. And he looked right at him and said, **“Come down, I’m coming to your house.”** And later Jesus says to him, **“salvation has come to this house, since he also is a son of Abraham. For the Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost”** (Luke 19:9-10). And what about Saul? He was on the road to Damascus to persecute and kill Christians. And Jesus appears to him and calls him to follow. And we see no hesitation? Why? Because of this divine call. It is not like the cat who will not come, but like the call of Lazarus from the dead. This “call” is divine. It is powerful. And from this perspective, it is irresistible. The dead Lazarus had no choice but to come alive. This call is none other than the power of regeneration. This is why Jesus says to Nicodemus, **“If you want eternal life, you must be born from above”** (John 3).

So how do we know that Abraham received this divine call? Look at 11:8: **“By faith Abraham obeyed . . .”** This is the same with all the examples of Heb. 11. Brothers and sisters, most folks usually focus on our response, our obedience. But, there would be no real obedience by faith if there is no sovereign divine call of God.

If you are a Christian, you are also called a “son of Abraham.” Why? Because it is the same powerful call. It is the same faith. And though different times and different circumstances, you still live by obedience to the Word of God. 1 Pet. 2:9 says, **“But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light.”**

Application: The Divine call of God includes the means to obey. This is regeneration, the powerful working of the Spirit. Eph. 2 says we are “dead in our trespasses and sins.” In this regard, how can we ever think that our own works could ever produce the righteousness of God, much less the power to obey.

Application: We live different than the world. We live like the folks in Heb. 11. To obey God is to live by faith.

Application: There is no boasting. Eph. 2:8-10: **“For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast. For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them.”**

Application: This “divine” call is also called a “gracious” call. In Gal. 1:15 Paul says: **“But when he who had set me apart before I was born, and who called me by his grace . . .”** 2 Tim. 1:9: **“who saved us and called us to a holy calling, not because of our works but because of his own purpose and grace, which he gave us in Christ Jesus before the ages began . . .”** Do you see the grace of God in your life and the wonder of the gospel to bring all this about? Let’s move on.

2. A Life of Faith. For the remainder of our time, let’s consider the life of Abraham as a display of faith. Let’s read our verses again. And as we do, let’s notice particularly that he was called FROM something to a call TO something: **“By faith Abraham obeyed when he was called to go out to a place that he was to receive as an inheritance. And he went out, not knowing where he was going. By faith he went to live in the land of promise, as in a foreign land, living in tents with Isaac and Jacob, heirs with him of the same promise. For he was looking forward to the city that has foundations, whose designer and builder is God.”** In these verses we see that in the call of God, there is always a call FROM something and a call TO something. Abraham was called from a place and a particular life. He was called to another place to a different kind of life (life faith).

Where was Abraham called from? And what was his life like? For those who may believe that Abraham was a man of faith before this call, let’s consider what the Bible says. In Is. 51:1-2 God reminds Israel of their father Abraham and his previous unregenerate life. He says, **“Listen to**

me, you who pursue righteousness, you who seek the LORD: look to the rock from which you were hewn, and to the quarry from which you were dug. Look to Abraham your father . . .” In Josh. 24:2 God says to Israel: “Long ago, your fathers lived beyond the Euphrates, Terah, the father of Abraham and of Nahor; and they served other gods.” There, not in the land of promise, but in Mesopotamia (Act. 7:2), the Land of Ur of the Chaldeans (Gen. 11:28) was he called. Until he was about 70, he lived in this land with a pagan family. We have no indication that he lived any different or had other goals and aims in his life except what were normal for any other worldly family of his day, without any revelation or knowledge from God, or any desire to go live in another land. This is the clear testimony of Scripture, as if we want to think he had some kind of special “faith” before his call from God.

It was there that the glory of God condescended to this sinful man. And he was not deserving of such grace. He was immersed in idolatry and had no real concern for the things of God. Moreover, this call did not go to the rest of his family. It came to him only. Is. 51:2 says, “**for he was but one when I called him, that I might bless him and multiply him . . .**” Why God did not call his father or his family, we are not told. Rom. 9:18 says, “**So then he has mercy on whomever he wills . . .**” We cannot say that God looked through the future and saw that Abraham would choose him and then decided to call him. NO! In his sovereignty, God has mercy on whomever he wills. He called Isaac, not Ishmael. Jacob he loved, Esau he hated. He received Abel, but not Cain. He chose Jacob over Esau. This is a great mystery, but nonetheless true. What we know about this divine call on Abraham is that for the first time He knew God in a different way. God had become a living reality, an all glorious being. Faith was born. Look back at 11:6: “**And without faith it is impossible to please him, for whoever would draw near to God must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who seek him.**” In Job 42:5 we read: “**I had heard of you by the hearing of the ear, but now my eye sees you . . .**” This is the eye of faith.

And what happens after this. He leaves the city of his people and his family and all the comforts and surroundings of his upbringing, he travels to the Land of Canaan, a land he did not know. He does leave a couple times (Egypt, Gen. 12:10 and Gerar (Gen. 20:1) but comes back. And how does he live in this new land? He wanders around, living in tents, never finding a permanent earthly dwelling. The same can be said of his sons, Isaac and Jacob. Now Jerusalem will be established later in the land, but it will rise and fall, rise and fall, rise and fall. And for the rest of Abraham’s life, by faith he pursues a city not built with human hands, but whose foundation, designer, and builder is God.

The same is true for any person who has faith. And where does this faith begin? It begins with the sovereign power of God’s call. And what follows this call? A different kind of life. There is always a call from “something” to “something else.” If you are a Christian today, there is no difference. Think back to our examples: Matthew, Zaccheus, and Paul. For the remainder of our time, let’s consider some verses. Eph. 2:1-6: “**And you were dead in the trespasses and sins in which you once walked, following the course of this world, following the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience— among whom we all once lived in the passions of our flesh, carrying out the desires of the body and the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, like the rest of mankind. But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us, even when we were dead in our**

trespasses, made us alive together with Christ—by grace you have been saved— and raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus . . .”

Gal. 4:8-9: “Formerly, when you did not know God, you were enslaved to those that by nature are not gods. But now that you have come to know God, or rather to be known by God, how can you turn back again to the weak and worthless elementary principles of the world, whose slaves you want to be once more?

2 Cor. 4:6: “For God, who said, “Let light shine out of darkness,” has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.”

1 Pet. 2:9: “But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light.”

Tit. 2:11-14: Speaking in the context of the coming of Christ we read: “For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation for all people, training us to renounce ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright, and godly lives in the present age, waiting for our blessed hope, the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ, who gave himself for us to redeem us from all lawlessness and to purify for himself a people for his own possession who are zealous for good works.”

If you are a Christian today, this is your experience. It is the same as Abrahams. You were called out of darkness, into light. You were called out of your sin to live in righteousness (in Christ). You were called to leave the things of this world behind as you look for a city whose maker, builder, and designer is God. And I believe this has begun NOW as Christ is building his church in this world. But, sin still remains, the creation still groans. There is a coming a day when sin will be no more. And to know this and live like this is to be a person of faith.