



Sermon-Based Study Guide
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Good Shepherd Church - January 8, 2012

Sermon Title: Climbing Into the Wheelbarrow

Sermon Text: Hebrews 11.7-12

Related Texts: Genesis 18.1-15 and Genesis 12.1-5

I. Start It – Connecting With One Another

What is the biggest risk you have ever taken? What was that experience like for you?

II. Introduction

Hebrews 11 begins with a definition of faith - it is being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see. The Hebrews author has begun to teach and encourage the followers of Jesus who are experiencing difficulty because of their faith and pressure to abandon that faith. As the encouragement unfolds, the author moves from the definition of faith to a number of illustrations of faith by continuing to describe people who exercised faith. As we look at these people not only do we discover many dimensions of faith but we can be motivated by their example to be faithful people ourselves.

III. Study the Text – Read Hebrews 11.7-12

- 1) Let's begin by looking at Noah in verse 7. How does he demonstrate faith as it is defined in 11.1? What things were "not yet seen" by Noah (you may want to look at the account in Genesis 6.9-22)?
- 2) How would you describe Noah's response to God's request/command regarding building the ark? What one word sums up his response?
- 3) If you described Noah's response as being a response of obedience, how would you then describe the relationship between faith and obedience? Does one truly have faith without a response of obedience to God's leadership and commands?
- 4) From Noah the Hebrews author turns to Abraham and Sarah as models of faith. Look at verses 8 through 10. Once again we notice the obedience of Abraham in response to God's call. Take a look at Genesis 12.1-5 to see the original account of this. What did it take for Abraham to be obedient? What did it cost him? What qualities did he exhibit as he responded by faith and obedience to God's call?
- 5) Verse 10 is interesting and also ties back to verse 1. What did Abraham look forward to that he - at the time - could not see?

Note: The imagery of a city is found throughout scripture. Many of the Psalms celebrate the holy city of Jerusalem - the place where the people met with God. The prophets look forward to God's holy city (Isaiah 35 and 52.1 for example) in which the redeemed and righteous will dwell with God. Revelation 21 utilizes the same imagery - the Holy City coming from heaven to a new, restored, fully-redeemed (made right) earth -

heaven and earth brought together in total reconciliation; God dwelling with redeemed humanity; a picture of the fullness of the redemption that has begun through the death and resurrection of Jesus. This image of God's Holy City (dwelling) seems to have been implanted in Abraham's mind from the earliest encounter he had with God.

- 6) Verses 11 and 12 in the NIV (1984) seem to focus on Abraham more than Sarah - that he was made able to father a child though he was well past the age of being fertile. While that is true, other translations including the English Standard Version, Today's New International Version and the New International Version (2010) bring out the significance of Sarah who herself was barren but who was, "enabled to bear children because she considered him (God) faithful who made the promise." This is found in the NIV (1984) footnote as an acceptable translation. So, let's focus on Sarah and her model of faith. Genesis 18.1-15 gives us the account of the messengers telling Abraham that he and Sarah will have a child. She overhears this and laughs at the ludicrous suggestion that she - barren and well beyond child-bearing age (around 85) - would become a mother. However, as the account continues, she does, and the Hebrews author ties together her faith - "(she) considered him (God) faithful..." and her being able to conceive and bear a son as promised. How does Sarah model faith that is truly dependent upon God? Do you agree that faith involves being dependent upon and confident in the faithfulness of God?

IV. Apply It – Reflect and Respond

- 1) Reflect on the models of faith described in this passage - Noah's obedient faith, Abraham's responsive, courageous, persistent, sacrificial, faith and Sarah's dependent faith. How do each encourage and inspire you? How do these characteristics related to faith motivate you or challenge you and your faith?
- 2) Is God nudging or calling or definitively leading you in some direction that calls for a response of faith? How do these examples of faith - Noah, Abraham, and Sarah - help you to respond?
- 3) What are you experiencing that calls for the kind of dependent faith that Sarah had - trust in the faithfulness of God?

The object of our faith is very important.

There is a story of a college student who walked into his dorm room with his head tilted to the side and a fried egg draped over his right ear. "This egg gives me true hope, joy, peace, and meaning for my life," he announced with conviction. However, after a short time he became tired and his neck began to ache (not to mention that the egg began to smell rather sulfurish). The egg was not a reliable object of faith. It simply couldn't deliver on the promise of hope, joy, peace, and meaning for life.

In contrast, Noah, Abraham and Sarah were people who placed their faith in a dependable and trustworthy object - the Being we relate to as the Triune God in three Persons - Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Faith involves having confidence in the faithfulness of God who is trustworthy. That kind of faith allows us to climb into the wheelbarrow that God is pushing - even over something like Niagara Falls. PJ