

The Call & Faith of Abram

Genesis 12:1-8; Genesis 15

KEY THEMES:Justification by Faith, Living by Faith

[Core Gospel Concepts: Justification, Identity in Christ, Nature of Faith, Obedience]

THE STORY:

After the time of Noah and the Tower of Babel, there was a man named Abram. He was 75 years old. His wife, Sarah, was also old. And they had no children. One day, God appeared to Abram and said, “Abram, you must leave your country. You must leave your family. And you must leave your father and go to a place that I will show to you. And I will make of you a great nation. I will make your name great and you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you and curse those who curse you. And I will bless all the nations of the world through you.”

So Abram took his wife, Sarah, and his nephew, Lot, and he traveled for many months until God led him to Canaan, the Promised Land. Around that time there was a famine in the land. So Abram took his family to Egypt. There, even though Abram sinned by not trusting the Lord and lying to the king, God, in his mercy, protected him and his family, both from famine and from the Egyptians and even blessed Abram with great wealth during that time.

When Abram and his family returned to Canaan from Egypt, they had many animals. Both Abram and Lot were very rich by this time, and the land was not strong enough to support them both, so arguments broke out among their herdsmen. Abram said to Lot, “Let us not quarrel. We are one family. Look over the land. If you choose to go to the right, I will go to the left. If you choose the left, I will go right.” Lot looked at the whole land and saw that the valley of the Jordan River was very beautiful. It was full of tall grass good for animals and water. So he moved his herds to the valley and settled near the city of Sodom while Abram remained in Canaan, and God promised to give him and his offspring that whole land.

Then God appeared to Abram and said, “Do not be afraid. I am your shield and your reward.” But Abram said, “What good is it if you bless me when I have no son to inherit?” And God took Abram out and showed him the sky. He said, “If you can count the stars, then you will be able to count your descendants.” And Abram believed God and God counted it to him as righteousness.

Then God told Abram to offer a special sacrifice in which God appeared to him as a flame of fire between the two halves of carcasses of several animals and spoke to him of the future.

Optional Memory Verse: Romans 3:21-22a - *“But now a righteousness from God, apart from law, has been made known, to which the Law and the Prophets testify. This righteousness from God comes through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe.”*

Introduction Question (discuss with neighbor):

- **How would you explain to someone the relationship between faith and obedience and how we are saved?**
- **When God looks you in the eyes, what is the expression on his face? What if you do good? What if you do bad? What can you do to change the expression on his face when you look at him?**

Teacher's Transition Statement;

Today's story helps us understand the relationship between faith, obedience, and righteousness in the eyes of God.

Learn Story Together (Listening Task):

- **As you're committing this story to memory, consider these questions:**
 - **What promises did God make to Abram?**
 - **Why was Abram righteous in God's eyes?**

Basic Outline of Discussion (to help facilitator lead without reading everything):

- **Abram:** In what ways does he sin? In what ways does he show his faith in God?
- **Hebrews 11:1** How is Abram's faith like what is described in this verse?
- **Lot:** In what ways do we see his sin? How does he not trust God?
- **Righteousness:** Where did it come from?
- **Ephesians 2:8,9** Where does salvation come from? Where does faith come from?
- **Sacrifice:** Why is it important to our justification, i.e. to being declared righteous? What does it have to do with Jesus?
- **2 Corinthians 5:21** The Great Exchange example - our sin / Christ's righteousness.
- **Justification by works:** How do we try to make ourselves right in the eyes of God or others?
- **Sanctification:** How can remembering our justification daily help us to change, to grow more like Jesus?
- **Application:** What needs to change in my life after studying this story? What actions, attitudes, or beliefs? I.e. How can trusting in our justification by grace through faith become the foundation on which we grow in obedience?
- **Sharing:** Who needs to hear this story?

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS (with some possible responses):

- **How does this story portray Abram? Was Abram a sinner? How do we see this?**
- **How is Abram different from Lot? How did Lot look at the world and make decisions?**
 - *Abraham first considered his relationship with God when making decisions while Lot was focused only on himself and his earthly interests.*
- **What does this tell us about man in general?**
 - *Mankind is naturally focused on himself, making decisions based on what is in his own interest, not considering God in the process.*

- **What did God first call Abram to do? What promises did God make to Abram? What were the obstacles to him doing this? What were his struggles? in relation to his family? Lot?**
- **How did Abram solve the conflict between him and Lot? How did this display his faith?**
 - *He let go of some good things (beautiful grassy valley), he was centered on other people, and He trusted God to bless him. Did not cling to his rights.*
- **What did God say to Abram after Lot left him? (Don't be afraid.) What does this show about God?**
 - *Sensitive to Abram's feelings and deep needs, faithful to his promises*
- **So, to review, what are some ways that Abram demonstrated faith?**
- **Did Abram have perfect faith?**
 - *NO, he had doubts, showed through his question of "What good is all this if I have no one to inherit?"*
 - *He stopped trusting God for a time when he lied to the Egyptian king.*
- **What is God's role in faith?**
 - *Faith must be rooted in God's character and promises. God was the initiator. He chose and commanded Abram. He blessed him and guided him. He was faithful to keep his promises.*
- **Read Ephesians 2:8,9 – What does this tell us about where faith comes from?**
 - *It is the gift of God.*
- **Read Hebrews 11:1 - What is faith?**
 - *Assurance of things hoped for, belief in things not seen*
 - **How do we see this in this story?**
 - *Abram goes, doesn't ask questions, doesn't know where he is going, doesn't know how he will get a child in his old age.*
 - *More than head belief. It is a relationship of trust.*
 - **How do we see this?**
 - *Abram trusts God enough to act, to do hard things.*
 - **What do we learn from this story about how faith relates to obedience?**
 - *Faith comes before obedience.*
 - *Faith produces obedience.*
 - *Our faith is seen in our obedience. (Gal 5:6)*
 - **Is faith easy?**
 - *No, there are many obstacles to faith. Not easy.*
 - **What are some of Abram's obstacles to faith?**
 - *Age of self and wife, being without child, going to unknown land*
 - **Does God require perfect faith for him to respond to us in grace? How do we see this?**
 - *No, Abram had doubts and failed to trust at times. For example, he lied to the king of Egypt out of fear.*
- **After you have heard the story, which character quality of God really draws your heart closer to him? (GRACE)**
 - **What do we learn about God's grace from this story? Why was it grace for God to be good to Abram?**
 - *Abram was a sinner. God was very patient with him.*
 - *God was consistent and kept affirming his promises.*

- **God was the primary actor in this story and in this relationship. How do we see God acting on Abram's part?**
 - *Appears to him over and over; called him; repeatedly affirmed His promises; declared Abram righteous; purposed to bless all the nations through him; led him, protected, provided; encouraged him over and over.*
- **What was Abram's response to all of God's initiative?**
 - *He received. By faith. Passive righteousness. Like earth receiving the water.*
- **What was God's response to Abram's faith – especially after showing him the stars and renewing his promises?**
 - *He COUNTED HIM as RIGHTEOUS*
 - **What does this mean, that God credited or counted him as righteous? What does the story show us about what this means?**
 - *He accepted him as His own. He received him into relationship despite his sin. He forgave his sin. The righteousness God gave him was a gift. He did not earn his status of righteousness through his good works.*
- **What had been the obstacle to Abram being counted as righteous?**
 - *His SIN, God's HOLINESS*
- **What was Abram's condition (i.e. what did he "do"?) so that God responded by counting him righteous?**
 - *HE BELIEVED – trusted God's promises and character and acted on the basis of his faith, trusting Him for his future. He did earn his righteousness, but received it.*
- **What did God require Abram to offer in order to continue meeting with him? What does this show us?**
 - *He had to offer a sacrifice. The bloody sacrifice tells us that Abram is a sinner who needs a lamb who would die in his place, a lamb whose blood is shed in his place in order to meet a holy God.*
 - **How does this point to Christ? How was he like the sacrifice?**
 - *Christ is the final, perfect sacrifice that eternally provides a substitute for our sin. When we trust in Him and his death on the cross, our sins are forgiven and we are declared righteous by God.*
 - **What does this teach us about justification?**
 - *Justification is being made right before God, not by our own goodness, but by God's grace, by Him declaring us righteous based on a righteous sacrifice made in our place. We receive it by faith.*
- **READ 2 Corinthians 5:21 – How does this affirm what we've been talking about?**
- **ILLUSTRATION – 2 Book Covers** – *one book labeled with my name contains all the deeds, thoughts, words of my life (obviously deeply tainted by sin), the other contains all Jesus' thoughts, words, actions (completely holy and good) – when I trust in Jesus, God essentially takes the cover off of Jesus' book labeled with his name and puts it on my book, i.e. Jesus is taking credit for my sin and pays the penalty on the Cross. He also takes the book cover with my name and puts it on the book about Jesus, i.e. crediting me with all of Jesus' righteousness. - the Great Exchange of my Sin for His righteousness!*
- **If someone is 1) forgiven of all his sins and 2) given credit for all of Jesus' perfect righteousness, how would this affect them when they stand before God on the day of judgment?**

- o *He's completely accepted by God, and can look forward to eternal life of joy and peace with Him.*
- **If someone is 1) forgiven of all his sins and 2) given credit for all of Jesus' perfect righteousness, how should it affect a believer's life now – especially when he struggles with sin? What specific changes might it lead to in a person's life?**
 - o *He will be more at peace. Will be less worried about what other people think of him or about the problems or challenges he has in his life. It will help him to lie or gossip or boast or be too critical less and less over time. He will become more and more like Christ!*

General Application Questions (discuss with whole group)

- **Every sin is somehow connected to not trusting God.** I.e. from not believing that what God has done in saving us is enough - that we are not really completely righteous in God's eyes through the blood of Christ. From not truly believing God loves us.
- **Name some different sins. Share how each one can be linked to not fully trusting God.**
- **People throughout history have tried to justify themselves, to make themselves righteous before God. Every religion does this. But even believers who are eternally justified before God sometimes slip into living as if they need to justify themselves. What are some ways that people do this?**
 - o *Obedying all the laws of their religion.*
 - o *Trying to do all the right things, to never make a mistake or do anything bad.*
 - o *Doing great and generous things that other people can recognize.*
 - o *Comparing themselves to others in hopes of looking better.*
 - o *Pretending that their sin is not so bad.*
 - o *Trusting in education or riches or power.*

Personal Application Questions (choose one or two for small group discussion):

- **What is one of the obstacles today that makes it challenging to trust God or to really believe he has forgiven you and made you completely righteous in his eyes? How can this story encourage you?**
- **What is one of the actions in your life that seems to be rooted in NOT believing that you are truly forgiven and made right before God? For example, which of your deeds or words are motivated by a sense that you can only satisfy God through your own obedience or righteous behavior? What have you learned in this story that can help you grow in true obedience through faith in the Gospel?**

TEACHER'S REVIEW: Main points about JUSTIFICATION from this story: (Teacher, study through this as part of your preparation for teaching.)

- **Faith: Justification is by faith alone.**
 - o Faith is rooted in understanding what God is really like. He is trustworthy, holy, truthful, faithful, powerful, and gracious.

- Faith is more than just intellectual belief. It is a trusting relationship that results in taking risks, i.e. being willing to step out to obey when we don't see the outcome. (Heb 11:1ff)
 - It is leaning one's whole weight upon God.
 - Faith has obstacles – look at Abram's obstacles to faith:
 - His own sin, doubt, his age, Sarai's age, their lack of child, the long wait
- Faith is expressed in obedience.
- God honors people of faith, even through times of weakness.
- **God's revelation: Abram's justification was rooted in God's revelation** of himself so that he could know him.
 - God was the actor in justifying Abram: He chose him; he reached out to Abram; he called him, justified him; led him; protected him; and was faithful to him. Abram received all that God did for him by faith. God was active. Abram was passive. He simply received.
- **God's goodness / grace. Justification is totally based on God's unmerited grace toward sinners.**
 - Abram was a sinner. Not consistent in his faith, yet God honored, responded to his faith.
 - Abram had not earned anything by his deeds.
- **Counted or credited as righteous: Justification is not being righteous on our own, but having Christ's righteousness** credited to our account because of his shedding his blood for us.
 - God met with Abram, appeared to him in a special way, and related to him.
 - God provided a way for Abram to come into his holy presence.
 - Sacrifice was needed for Abram to relate to God.
 - It was grace, BUT it was not free. Sacrifice was required to atone for Abe's sin.
 - The sacrifice pointed to Christ and his sacrifice.
- **Our justification is the foundation for our ongoing sanctification.**
 - **Colossians 2:6,7** - *⁶ So then, just as you received Christ Jesus as Lord, continue to live in him, ⁷ rooted and built up in him, strengthened in the faith as you were taught, and overflowing with thankfulness.*
 - I.e. You received Jesus through repentance and faith. Continue to live daily in the same way, through repentance and faith, full of thankfulness which leads to obedience.
- **In SUMMARY:**
 - Man comes to God, is justified, only through the bloody substitute that God provides.
 - God responds to faith in that substitute, Jesus Christ, by justifying the sinner.
 - Justification is a one-time, eternal act by God. It cannot be undone!
 - But our faith that leads to justification is a journey with ups and downs, not a one-time act. This persevering faith in our justification is vital for ongoing growth in the Lord.
 - Faith perseveres even when things don't make sense. It is often risky.
 - True faith is known by the works or deeds it produces. i.e. True faith produces obedience. I.e., Obedience flows from faith.
 - True obedience is living in light of our justification, i.e. living as if we have indeed been justified or counted righteous before God.

OTHER HELPFUL VERSES. What do they each say about JUSTIFICATION and how it helps us live our lives daily?

- Romans 4:1-3 – *Abram justified by faith, not by works*
- Hebrews 11: 1-12 – *By faith . . . obedience*
- Romans 5:8 – *Christ died for us and justifies us “while we are still sinners.”*
- 1 John 4:10 – *God love us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for us*
- Romans 1:16,17 – *Salvation for all who believe - A righteousness that is by faith*
- Romans 4:3 – *Abe believed God and credited to him as righteous.*
- Romans 3:21-25 – *had to meet the requirement of the law – sins could only be forgiven by shedding of blood – a righteousness by faith, justified by grace*
- Romans 5:1 – *because we are justified by faith, we have peace through Jesus.*
- Galatians 2:14 - *living in step with the truth of the Gospel.*
- Galatians 2:20b - *“The life I live in the body, I live by faith in (who?) the Son of God, who (did what?) loved me and gave himself for me.” i.e. Since I'm a believer, a child of God, I live my life daily in obedience to God by trusting in the truth of the Gospel, that the Son of God loved me and gave himself for me.*