



## How Far will you go?

### Romans 4:1-8

#### HOW FAR WILL YOU GO?

How far will you go to achieve those things in life you regard as most important? Some people will go to any lengths. The following clip involves the historic meeting of two iconic men of the nineteenth century.

#### STANLEY AND LIVINGSTONE CLIP

It's famous scene. As far as the world was concerned, the famous British missionary David Livingstone had disappeared in Africa and Henry Stanley was engaged by a newspaper to track him down, and whilst he was there, to search for the source of the Nile. Livingstone is played by Cedric Hardwicke and Stanley by Spencer Tracey. Stanley is probably correctly portrayed, but he probably never said "Dr Livingstone, I presume". He probably made the words up later to sell newspapers. Africa is an awfully long way to go to see a doctor! I wonder whether Livingstone had a posh voice as in the film, or did he have a broad Scots accent?

#### Who were these two men?

**HENRY MORTON STANLEY** was actually Welsh, being born John Rowlands in Denbigh in 1841. He was a true adventurer and chased after excitement, fortune and fame at almost any cost. He was from a poor family and ended up in the workhouse. When he was 18 he managed to get on the crew of a boat going to the USA and jumped ship in New Orleans. He started working for a man named Henry Stanley. He adopted his name and accent and pretended not to be a foreigner because he was, after all, in the USA illegally. He joined up on the side of the Confederates in the American Civil War but was captured. He deserted the Confederates and joined the Union navy, from which he then deserted as well. After the war he managed to become a journalist. Eventually he became a roving overseas reporter and became wealthy on it. He received a large sum of money to stage the expedition to find Livingstone.

#### STANLEY AND THE FLAG

Here he is flying the American flag looking for Livingstone. He was the true embodiment of White explorers in the nineteenth century, helmeted, served by many bearers, superior, gung-ho, shoot first and ask questions later. He went looking with Livingstone for the Nile, but instead found what he thought was the source of the Congo and travelled home along it. After the successful Livingstone expedition he was hired by the Belgians to lay claim to most of the Congo basin on their behalf, which he did. That wasn't his last change of national allegiance because he returned to the UK, became an MP and was knighted. There seemed to be nothing or nowhere Stanley would go or who he would give his allegiance to for fame and fortune. It also appeared that there is no-one he wouldn't desert to further the fame of Henry Morton Stanley.

**DAVID LIVINGSTONE** was a Scot. He was brought up in a very devout family and went to work in the mill when he was 10. However, he was a promising lad and had a strong Christian faith from a young age, so much so that he was selected for theological training with a view to becoming a missionary. Part of the training was to have a skill to take to the mission field, so he became a doctor. Once he qualified, he went with the London Missionary Society to South Africa, where he proved to be a man before his time in his mission philosophy – living amongst the people, training local people to be evangelists, training locals with various European skills. He was a pioneer and his reports from Africa excited and inspired people back home. He believed that God had called him to be an explorer as much as a missionary and contributed much to European knowledge of the peoples and geography of southern Africa.

Why did he do it? Not like Stanley for fame and fortune. Actually his trips to Africa were done at huge personal expense to himself and his wife and six children who were left behind in Britain when he went off on his missionary tours. I might add that his wife was agreeable to his – the cost was to her as much as to him. He did it all out of a desire to serve his Lord. He died whilst ministering to people at Ujiji in what is now Tanzania.

Who was greatest? The man who tricked, cheated and shot his way to fame and fortune, or the man followed the call of God to Africa? Which one would you prefer to be?

For myself I'd prefer to be known as someone who followed the call of God, whether that made me famous or obscure. All God desires of His people is that they trust Him and follow Him where He leads them.

Do we know God's will so well that we can make life-changing decisions on that basis? Abraham obviously found out God's will and he took some amazing steps on that basis. By amazing, perhaps I should say, potentially dangerous and fatal steps.

Someone once said that FAITH IS SPELT RISK. Sometimes people will take risks because they have faith in themselves. Stanley certainly did – his huge ego give him the faith in his own abilities to make himself rich and famous. He did. But was he rich before God? I wonder. Livingstone also took huge risks which cost him his health and his life. He got some fame but he shunned that, preferring to be in on tour in Africa. He got to be buried in Westminster Abbey but I'm not sure how much he would have approved of that.

We have a God who wants us to take the risk of faith because He wants to bless us through it. It may not be in the same way as David Livingstone – for most of us, what God has in store is not nearly so grand, but equally as significant before Him. He desires that we listen to His voice and to be guided in the direction He would lead us. How does all that happen? Let's be guided by scripture and look at the example of Abraham.

Abraham did some remarkably risky things on the basis of an unquestioning trust of God, where the evidence before him was to the contrary. ABRAHAM FOLLOWED THE CALL OF GOD. His story unfolds in a number of stages and at each stage the risk of trusting God – the risk of faith - seemed to get higher and higher. Because good outcome seemed more unlikely and even impossible as things went along.

- moved first from UR TO HARAN
- then God called him to CANAAN – blessed Him, became a powerful man
- Then God said, I'm going to make you a great nation – will have a son Abram believed God. HAD A CHILD with Sarah
- Isaac was born and then God said, SACRIFICE HIM. Abraham trusted God and he was even more blessed. His offspring did really become like grains of sand on the seashore.

And what do we conclude about Abraham. ABRAHAM BELIEVED GOD. He put his trust in what God had promised and was prepared to follow whatever the risk, trusting that God would deliver. He did.

And at each stage represented a bigger and bigger step of faith.

Following Jesus is much the same. When we first trusted Jesus, it was a short step. But as we walk with God he asks us to change short steps, then long steps and finally leaps! At each stage, the step we need to take is a test of our faith – not for God's benefit, but for ours to prove that He is faithful to His promises, and through it we grow in Christ. Without trusting and obeying, we don't grow in Christ and we fail to understand how amazing and powerful God really is. And that's the problem for many Christians, we get as far as Haran or Canaan, but never get much further in our walk with God when His desire is to take us so much further on.

Let's be realistic. Abe's relationship grew as he trusted God but the tests came and there were failures and disappointments as well as triumphs. But God was always faithful to His promises and Abraham proved this even when he failed.

You may say "that's great but I don't know where my life is going right now – how do I discern God's will?" Good question. Let's see how Abraham learned his lessons.

HOW DO I DISCERN GOD'S WILL?

- by hearing His voice – recognising it with the help of others. Terah, Lot, Sarah. If we spend time with God and His word, we WILL hear His voice – personal time, worship and prayer with others.
- by taking a step and then another – personal testimony. It's trusting Him in those dark times that helps define us as Christians. The Christians that have most impressed me over the years haven't necessarily

been the big guys, the Bible teachers, or those who are famous and blessed with much, but the person who radiates Christ despite horrific health problems, or difficult family situations.

#### HOW FAR AM I WILLING TO TRUST GOD?

There is another issue here. Knowing God's will isn't just a case of finding something out, but of trusting where God is leading and being prepared to go with God as far as He takes us – even if it is the other side of the world. Wherever, it will be out of our comfort zones and will involve risk. Let me close with two questions that relate to all of us who know Jesus this morning.

WHAT IS GOD CALLING ME TO DO?

WHERE IS HE CALLING ME TO GO?

Is where we're at or where we're going where God wants us to go. Are we a Livingstone or a Stanley? Here are a few words from David Livingstone to inspire us as we come before God in prayer.

*Without Christ, not one step; with Him, anywhere! David Livingstone*

Prayer

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