



We walk by faith

Hebrews 11: 8-19

Text: *For we walk by faith, not by sight*

I know that you have probably heard this story before, but it makes me smile every time I come across it. In the nineteenth century there was a French circus star known as Charles Blondin. He was a tightrope walker and he astounded the world in 1859 by walking across Niagara Falls on a tightrope. He didn't just do one walk. He did it many times. He did it blindfold. He pushed a wheelbarrow. He took a portable stove over the falls and cooked himself an omelette. He then threw down a challenge. He said to the assembled crowd: "Do you believe I could carry a man on my back across the falls" People enthusiastically said yes until he went up to individuals and offered to take them. They all believed he could do it, but none were prepared to trust him and take a ride. Well, actually there was one person, Blondin's manager called Harry Calcord who went across. Many believed, but only one person had enough faith to go over the falls on Blondin's back.

You've probably already guessed that I want to speak on the subject of faith this morning. My text doesn't come from the passage we read but from 2 Corinthians 5:7 where Paul says (AV) *"We walk by faith and not by sight"*. It's about the fact that as believers we look forward to an eternal future that we cannot see, yet we stand on God's promises in faith.

In fact, that's exactly the definition the writer to the Hebrews gives us in chapter 11:1 *To have faith is to be sure of the things we hope for, to be certain of the things we cannot see.* That's an interesting definition - the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen. There are strong words there: assurance, conviction.

For people in other religions and sometimes even people who profess Christ, their faith isn't one of conviction or assurance. It's the faith of the person who buys their lottery ticket every Saturday. They buy it in the hope they will win the jackpot. Do you know what the chance is of winning the jackpot. 14 million to one - that's the equivalent of being struck by lightning - twice! It isn't the faith of one of my fellow ministers in Churches Together in Swaffham who hopes that by his devout life that God may find him acceptable for eternal life. He's not assured. He's not certain.

Christian faith is about being sure of what we believe - sure enough to make major life decisions on it's basis. May I ask you a question? If you were to die tonight, would you be *sure* that you are going to heaven Yes or no? I know that many of you would say "yes" immediately. Perhaps there are one or two of you who would say "no". Perhaps there are some that would say if you were honest with yourself "I'm not sure". We have a God that wants us to say with the apostle Paul "I know whom I have believed". Maybe you have never trusted Jesus and think it is complicated. It isn't so listen on and maybe He can be part of your life today.

For those of us who have been believers for many years: you know, with the passage of time, we can sometimes find that the passion with which we first accepted Christ can dim with the passage of time as the world wears away at us. Yesterday I drove up from Norfolk. I like driving. I started out fresh, sharp, alert - ready for anything the A1 and the M62 could throw at me. But as the miles go by on these long trips, everything blends into looking the same and by the time I got to Blackpool I was glad to get out of the car! Life's lie that and sometimes our faith can be like it too. As life wears us down - as the stresses, strains, struggles, disappointments of life press at us, somehow we're not so sure and that passion and assurance - that confidence in the Lord we trusted seems to evaporate somewhere.

And we all go through it. Tonight we are going to study the life of a great man of God. He had experienced amazing things wrought by the hand of God. Yet his personal faith failed him. And he tried to run away. The passion had gone, the doubts had set in.

Are you struggling with your faith this morning? Are there doubts nagging? Have you lost that passion for Christ which you once had? If so, the people who were being written to were just like that too. They were Jews who had trusted Christ, but persecution had set in and they had started to

wonder whether it was all worth it.

And the writer brings us the stories from the great saints of old to help us understand the nature of our faith and to encourage us and bring back the passion for Christ which we know we should have but often struggle with. We're going to look specifically at Abraham because in his story we see an example that will encourage us and help us to see how God builds our faith up.

- Faith grows from simple trust

Abraham heard the call of God and he went to live in the land God had promised to him and to his descendants. Verse 9 *By faith he lived as a foreigner in the country that God had promised him. He lived in tents, as did Isaac and Jacob, who received the same promise from God.* 10 *For Abraham was waiting for the city which God has designed and built, the city with permanent foundations.*

He was asked to make a step of faith and to move his family to Canaan. It was away from the comfort of the Chaldean Empire and there were hostile tribes and warlords in Canaan. But on the other hand, it was simple faith. Abraham went to Canaan as a powerful man, with flocks and herds and also a private army so no-one was going to give him much bother.

When God first calls us to believe in Jesus and follow Him, we start with a simple faith. A lot of people think that Christianity is complicated. It is in many ways. Trying to understand the things of God can last a lifetime. But getting to know God is as easy as sitting on a chair. Take the one you're sitting on for example. Do you understand how your chair was made? probably not. Did you check your chair for safety before you sat on it this morning? No. Did you ask someone in church for a health and safety certificate or a risk assessment? No. You just sat on it. Why? Because you trusted that someone would not have put an unsafe chair out for people to sit on. You trusted someone. It was a simple act of trust.

And that's what Jesus is asking you to do this morning. To trust Him. To trust that His death on the cross has dealt with your sin so that you might find forgiveness and as you accept Him into your life, you'll find like Abraham did, that He will deal with all those issues about life you have questions about and situations over which you thought you had no control over. For me it started with simple trust 40 years ago as a 10 year old boy. I wouldn't say my faith is simple now because I've learnt so much about God in those last 40 years. But it started with saying to Jesus "Ok I'll trust you".

- Faith comes in measures

But of course as Abraham went into Canaan, he found that God could be trusted - and he did well there and prospered. Funny, same to with me. Same with many of you I guess too. But what starts as simple faith can get bigger. I reckon that Henry Calcord needed much more faith in Blondin than he did sitting on a chair watching Blondin walk over the falls himself! That was true of Abraham too. It was one thing to become a big cheese in Canaan, but he was old and he and his elderly wife Sarah had no child to leave all his inheritance too. Then God said "You're going to have a son". I don't have time to go through the whole story this morning. You know that it's impossible. Yet God said that the children of Abraham were to be more numerous than all the stars in the sky or the sand on the seashore." And Abraham believed God and it was reckoned to him as righteousness. He believed it. God upped the stakes and we read in Hebrews 11 *It was faith that made Abraham able to become a father, even though he was too old and Sarah herself could not have children. He trusted God to keep his promise.* 12 *Though Abraham was practically dead, from this one man came as many descendants as there are stars in the sky, as many as the numberless grains of sand on the seashore.*

As you walk with God you find that He wants you to trust Him more, but also that you prove Him faithful and trustworthy too. And then you know you can trust Him for the things you don't see just yet - like eternal life. 12 *Though Abraham was practically dead, from this one man came as many descendants as there are stars in the sky, as many as the numberless grains of sand on the seashore.* 13 *It was in faith that all these persons died. They did not receive the things God had promised, but from a long way off they saw them and welcomed them, and admitted openly that they were foreigners and refugees on earth.* Abraham witnessed the miracle of his elderly wife bearing a son, Isaac - but he never saw the rest - but the world today and heaven is filled with Abraham's children - just because he trusted what God said and didn't just dismiss it as impossible. God is faithful and trustworthy.

● Faith that is tested becomes stronger

Faith is not like petrol that runs out as you use it, but is like a muscle which grows stronger as you exercise it. I think that statement is pretty true for me too. You find that you can trust God more once you have proved Him trustworthy. But it works the other way. Sometimes God asks something of you and it seems a tall order, impossible or strange. But God wants you to trust Him - so what do you do? *17 It was faith that made Abraham offer his son Isaac as a sacrifice when God put Abraham to the test. Abraham was the one to whom God had made the promise, yet he was ready to offer his only son as a sacrifice. 18 God had said to him, "It is through Isaac that you will have the descendants I promised." 19 Abraham reckoned that God was able to raise Isaac from death--and, so to speak, Abraham did receive Isaac back from death.* Abraham was prepared to take the risk of killing his own son to obey God, however strange that seemed. He didn't have to of course in the end. His faith was tested and he found God faithful in providing a lamb for the sacrifice. Someone once said that faith is spelt RISK. As you get to understand and listen to God, you find that He calls you to things that you think impossible or unlikely. But in doing them and finding Him faithful, your faith grows. *For we walk by faith, not by sight*

Personal testimony

This morning I believe God wants each one of us to have a "faith lift". God gives us passages like Hebrews 11, not to make us feel bad, but to open our minds to the amazing things that are possible if we do trust Him. We walk by faith and not by sight. How might that apply as a church. Well, you've already seen God's faithfulness in providing you with a new church building. He's given you Isaac, but Isaac's role was to produce offspring that would be as numerous as the stars. The role of this building is to bring glory to God by fulfilling its purpose as a tool to bring people to Christ. In these days is that possible? Yes it is. But it starts by us building on the faith we have, by trusting God for new blessing and take the risks with our time, our money, our friendships and maybe even our lives to see those who are without Jesus find faith and trust in Him. It can happen and by faith it will happen if we trust Him and let the Spirit move. *We walk by faith, not by sight.*

If you've never believed then Jesus wants you to make that simple step of faith this morning. You know, if you want to take a train, you have to get on it. God wants to take you on an amazing journey, but first you have to get on the train by taking that simple step of faith in trusting Jesus. If you want to do that, then all you have to do is ask.

Prayer