

Following God's Dream – Genesis 12:1-4

I. Introduction:

- A. What is your definition of faith?
1. Google defines it as *“complete trust or confidence in someone or something.”*
 2. Does that summarize **your** definition? It's not bad, but now consider what Noah Webster says.
 3. Two hundred years ago, faith was: *“Belief; the assent of the mind to the truth of what is declared by another, resting on his authority and veracity, without other evidence.”*
 4. From there Webster gives us one and a half columns of more detailed explanation.
 5. I think **that** is better than what my computer provided.
- B. But Biblicists often point to **Hebrews 11:1** as the Holy Spirit's definition of faith.
1. *“Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen.”*
 2. But is that a definition? What does that even mean? Do we have to define the definition?
 3. The word *“substance”* is translated *“confidence”* in **Hebrews 3:14**.
 - a. *“Now faith is the **confidence** we have in things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen.”*
 - b. Faith is possessing assurance that God will provide something we, as yet, only hope to have.
 4. The other word in that verse, *“evidence,”* is used in only one other scripture, and you know it well.
 - a. **Second Timothy 3:16** – *“All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness.”*
 - b. What is *“reproof”* if it is not **proving** to our rebellious hearts what it is we need to hear?
 - c. Strong's definition of *“evidence”* is the very understandable concept of – *“proof.”*
 - d. In other words, *“Faith is the assurance we have in things hoped for, the proof of things not yet seen.”*
- C. But how can we have confidence in things we haven't received and in things which we don't fully understand?
1. Where do we find the proof for things not yet seen? Ah, there is the crux of the matter.
 2. The Christians' proof and confidence for things not yet received resides in God and His Word.
 3. It rests in what God has *“declared... resting on **HIS** authority and veracity, **without additional evidence.”***
 4. If God said it, that settles it, and faith accepts it as fact, even though our hands have not yet handled it and our eyes have not yet seen it.
 - a. For example, by faith we believe that God created all things.
 - b. We know that Noah built an ark, because God told us, and we don't need to find that ark's remains.
 5. And the same principles apply to seeking God's will.
- D. There is a slight improvement I'd like to make on Noah Webster's definition.
1. He said, faith is *“belief; the assent of the mind to the truth of what is declared...”*
 2. What I need to do, and what I think you probably need to do, is move from the agreement of our **mind**, moving into the assent of the **heart**.
 3. When our hearts agree with God, that is when our faith begins to do things – accomplish things.
 4. That is when it responds to what it is convinced is true.
 5. For example, it is not with the mind that man believes unto righteousness, it is with the heart (**Rom. 10:10**).
 6. Following salvation, in living our Christian lives, that second step of faith is absolutely necessary.
 7. I would like my faith to be as practical and life-changing as Noah's, or in tonight's example, as Abram's.
 8. God said unto Abram, *“Get thou out of thy country... unto a land that I will shew thee.”*
 - a. *“So Abram departed, as the Lord had spoken unto him.”*
 9. God said to Peter, *“Come,”* & he stepped out onto the water, willing to walk to wherever the Lord directed.

II. Practical faith, powerful faith, may be **UNPRECEDENTED** faith.

- A. *“Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen.”*
1. God had said unto Abram, leave your homeland and leave your family to go into a land I will show thee.
 2. Tonight I'm not in the business of criticizing Abram, pointing out his inconsistencies and sins.
 - a. It may have taken a couple of steps for him to leave Ur, and then Haran and his father.

- b. And he may have permitted his nephew tag along, or more likely he gave him an invitation to join him.
- c. But my point is: Abram by faith did what the Lord directed.

- B. I say that this faith was unprecedented, because we have no record that this had ever been done before.
 - 1. Perhaps the Lord had spoken in the same way to Enoch or Methuselah, but we have no record of it.
 - 2. So why did Abram, with all his heart, believe the Lord? Why did he put his feet into action?
 - 3. Why did he obey God, without Google Maps, and without making a reservation at the La Quinta on the east side of Bethel? The simplistic answer is that he trusted Jehovah.
 - 4. Abram had an unprecedented and practical faith in what the Lord told him. He trusted God's *"veracity."*
 - 5. He, like many early American Baptists, heard the voice of God telling him to take his family into the wilderness of North Carolina, or Kentucky, or Oregon, and he obeyed, trusting God to bless.
- C. Beloved, God may ask you to do something – not only unprecedented for you, but unprecedented generally.
 - 1. Do it. Trust the Lord for the outcome, but do it. When the Holy Spirit says, *"go,"* step out of the boat.
 - 2. It may be a long way to the Promised land, but it'll be one step closer after you take your first step.
- D. What would have happened if Abram had stayed in Haran? Of course, it's a waste of time even to consider.
 - 1. *"By faith Abraham, when he was called to go out into a place which he should after receive for an inheritance, obeyed; and he went out, not knowing whether he went" (Hebrews 11:8).*
 - 2. Just because, as far as you know, the Lord has never asked anyone else to do what He is telling you to do, that is no reason not to obey and do it.
 - 3. Had anyone ever walked on water before Peter did? Had anyone ever built an ark before Noah did?
 - 4. The Lord may have a thousand *"firsts"* yet in His plans, and a dozen of them may have your name on it.
 - 5. Faith is *"the agreement of the heart to the truth of what God has said, resting on His authority and veracity, without necessarily any other evidence."*
 - 6. And then faith responds to it, by leaving Haran according to God's instructions.
- E. Anticipating things: do know what Abram found when he got to the place God had for him?
 - 1. *"And Abram passed through the land unto the place... And the Lord appeared unto Abram, and said, Unto thy seed will I give this land..."*
 - 2. When Abram got to the place where the Lord intended for him, Jehovah was there to greet him.
 - 3. That is always, ultimately, what lays at the end of a journey of faith – the Lord.

III. The demand for practical and powerful faith will sometimes come in an UNSEEN way.

- A. It would be wonderful if every divine directive had a chapter and verse to authenticate and empower it.
 - 1. Without a doubt, the Lord will never direct Abram to do something contrary to His word, nevertheless, He will often reveal His will without directly quoting scripture.
 - 2. *"Now the Lord had said unto Abram, get thee out of thy country... unto a land that I will shew thee."*
 - 3. How did Jehovah get Abram to understand this command?
 - 4. How did he speak? Was there an audible voice? Did He send an angel as He did on a later occasion?
 - 5. On one occasion, *"the word of the Lord came unto Abram in a vision" (Genesis 15:1).*
 - 6. Later *"the Lord appeared unto him in the plains of Mamre"* in a physical way along with a couple of angels.
- B. Could it be that on this first occasion the Holy Spirit simply whispered God's will to the man?
 - 1. Without the prophet Nathan, without the Epistles of Paul, and without the thunder and lightning of Sinai, God might have just put a burden on Abram's heart.
 - 2. Perhaps at first he just dismissed it as a wild idea; *"From where did that come?"*
 - 3. But when he couldn't shake this intense, insane desire, he might have mentioned it to Sari, but she shook her head, remembering some of the other hair-brained things he had mentioned in the past.
 - 4. For example, she probably left her mother back in Ur, going with her silly husband and his family to Haran.
 - 5. When Abram still couldn't shake it, he began to pray, and with each passing day, the burden intensified.

- C. There may not always be some tangible revelation and explanation of God's will, and yet it is still of the Lord.
1. *"It's God's will that we move to Idaho, but I'm not exactly sure why?"*
 2. But then when the move has been made the Lord answers the question *"why?"*
 3. Thirty-two and half years ago, God put a burden on my heart to leave New Mexico and come here.
 - a. That call wasn't written on stone which I read with magic glasses, & it wasn't spelled out in the clouds.
 - b. But I was convinced of it, even if I expected it to evolve into something different than it has.
 4. I came in faith – faith in God, trusting the unseen message which the Lord had given to me.

IV. Abram's faith was in someways **UNRESTRAINED**.

- A. For example, it dictated an obedience which involved various levels of sacrifice.
1. What do you suppose his mother thought about him leaving her & moving to Canaan as God's missionary?
 - a. Were there any tears when he told his parents about God's call and his desire to obey by faith?
 - b. They may have cried out, *"What is to become of our future grandchildren in that far and distant land?"*
 2. As the couple obediently left Haran, I'm sure they traveled by way of camel train, but there were no freight cars on that train. They certainly couldn't take all their possessions. They sacrificed some of their *"stuff."*
 3. They laid aside family relations and perhaps some of their friends, just as Shubal Stearns did when he left Tolland, Connecticut.
 4. *"God has told us to go. Perhaps you didn't hear God's voice, but I did. We must go."*
- B. I know that today, the age of seven-five is the new sixty, and in Abram's day seventy-five may have been that days' thirty.
1. But for some unknown reason, the last words **verse 4** jumped off the page at me.
 2. *"So Abram departed, as the Lord had spoken unto him... and Abram was **seventy and five** years old when he departed out of Haran."*
 3. Age may be important to us as we live in these decaying bodies, but it doesn't mean anything to God.
 - a. The Lord can give a baby to Sarah at the age of ninety, and fatherhood to Abraham at the age of one hundred.
 - b. He doesn't care about the age of people to whom He says, *"trust me; obey me."*
 4. Abram, the septuagenarian, might have thought, *"Lord, I believe, help thou my unbelief."*
- C. As I have said, Abram didn't exactly know where he was going, and he didn't call ahead to make a reservation.
1. What was faith to him? Faith meant obedience and action.
 2. Because God's will was planted in his heart, believing & trusting the Lord, he told his wife to start packing.
 3. Then they mounted their camels and pointed them toward the south.
 4. You might say Abram on the lead animal held the reins rather loosely, letting the Lord direct each step.
 5. He took one step at a time; one step after another.
- D. How much, do you suppose, after hearing God's commission, did Abram consider the promises that were given?
1. *"I will make of thee a great nation, & I will bless thee, & make thy name great; & thou shalt be a blessing: And I will bless them that bless thee, and curse him that curseth thee: and in thee shall all families of the earth be blessed."*
 2. Of course, we know that the man of God should have obeyed God's will without these promises.
 3. And you and I should obey God whether or not there are blessings or chastisements linked to our actions.
- E. But what if we mix something else into the equation?
1. *"Abram"* would never have become *"Abraham,"* if he had not acted upon his faith.
 2. And God's promises of greatness would never have come to fruition if Abraham's obedient and practical faith had not been carried out. There will even be more prerequisites laid out and kept.
 3. But more importantly: if Abraham had not stepped out in faith, all the families of the earth would not have been blessed through him.

F. Don't we want to be a blessing to people?

1. *"And the Lord appeared unto Abram, and said, Unto thy seed will I give this land."*
2. Don't we want to see our children, grandchildren and our neighbors saved?
3. Don't we yearn for a revival of the things of God in the Great Northwest and specifically in the Inland Empire?
4. Don't we pray for God's blessings on the missionaries taking the gospel to *"all the families of the earth?"*
5. Then it is imperative that our faith moves us forward.

G. We have a long way to go. We are not yet residing in the promised land.

1. We are not yet bring our nephews out of bondage through miraculous victories.
2. We are not defeating the kings of Shinar, Elam and Ellasar.
3. *"Who is this King of glory? The LORD strong and mighty, the LORD mighty in battle" – (Psalm 24:8).*
4. We are not producing sons in our old age as Abraham and Sarah did.

H. And what is the reason? What is the explanation for our lack of great victory?

1. Isn't it because we are not living and acting upon unprecedented, unrestrained faith.
2. We have work to do, and we can only do it well, if we become children of faith as Abraham was.
3. And as Paul was who said: *"I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me" – (Phil. 4:13).*
4. Don't limit that verse to the theological side of your faith; apply it to your practical faith.
5. It is a long way from Haran to the Promised land, and we aren't getting any younger.
6. Let's get moving!