

24. In God's time, in God's way

June 7, 2015

There are not many wonderful stories that would flabbergast our minds when it comes to exercising one's faith like George Mueller. He had read his Bible from cover to cover almost 200 times in his lifetime. He had prayed in millions of dollars – in today's currency – for the orphans and never asked anyone directly for money. He never took a salary in the last 68 years of his ministry, but trusted God to put in people's hearts to send him what he needed. He never took out a loan or went into debt. And neither he, nor more than 10,000 children lived in the orphanage over the years have ever been hungry.

George Mueller, this great man of faith and prayer from the 19th century, was once asked what was the most important part of prayer. He replied: "The 15 minutes after I have said, 'Amen.'" Do you know why? It is because that is when doubt can start to form in our hearts unless we hold on to our Lord in our faith.

Our last memory verse says that it is impossible to please the Lord without faith. It doesn't say that we have to bring a bunch of sacrifices or use fancy words in our prayers. A simple faith in Him will do the job.

The first step of faith is acknowledging who God is just as the Bible teaches us; the second step of faith is admitting that we are helpless without Him; the third step is trusting the Lord to keep His Word, because He never breaks His promises.

Every faith must go through three procedures: risking, resting, and relying on God. The Scripture we are going to study this morning shows us a great example of these procedures.

A. RISKING IN GOD

Hebrews 11:8 By faith Abraham obeyed when he was called to go out to the place which he would receive as an inheritance. And he went out, not knowing where he was going.

The nation of Israel didn't start from Adam and Eve, rather Abraham and Sarah. When the Lord called Abraham from the land of Ur of the Chaldeans, he didn't do what the Lord told him from the beginning. It took awhile for him to learn to trust the Lord completely. Yet, the Lord didn't hold his delayed obedience against him.

Abraham did not have a gigantic neon arrow flashing in the middle of the sky to show him the direction he should follow, nor did he have a repeated lightning pointing toward the certain distant horizon, rather God plainly spoke to him to "GO."

Some of you may say, "Hey, if I was told by God in an audible voice to do something, I won't have a problem in obeying Him." Seriously, that cannot be an excuse for our disobedience. Because we have the written voice of God – the Bible.

We, Americans are very efficient in traveling. Last week Karen and I were in Sandusky, Ohio for a business trip. We flew there in a Southwest airplane. Long before we were actually on the trip, we knew how long it would take; when the plane would take off and land. But not Abraham. The Lord precisely left out two very important things for Abraham's departure from his homeland – where to go and how long it will take.

Put yourself in Abraham's sandals. At this time, he was 75 years old, married, and had a lifetime of accumulated possessions. No known destination, other than "Go" from the Lord. This would not settle well with the most of us.

Listen, true faith in God is able to wait for the fulfillment of God's purpose in God's time and in God's way. And while we are waiting, we must also be obedient to His command in all the other things.

B. RESTING IN GOD

Hebrews 11:9-10 By faith he dwelt in the land of promise as in a foreign country, dwelling in tents with Isaac and Jacob, the heirs with him of the same promise; 10 for he waited for the city which has foundations, whose builder and maker is God.

Abraham and Sarah lived in a foreign country as "sojourners", not as "settlers." They'd never owned any of the land except the plots that he and Sarah were buried on. They lived in tents because they were ready to move whenever God spoke.

If someone says, "I have faith in God," but that person does not rest in Him, that person really does not have faith in the Lord. If a person has faith in God, there is nothing he needs to do in his own way, because he knows that God has everything under control.

When we face trials and tests of the Lord in our life, does it mean that the Lord is displeased with us because of our sins? The answers can be 'Yes,' and 'No.' Yes, we can bring His chastisement to us by disobeying Him; No, we sometimes go through these trials because the Lord wants to shape and mold us into the image of His Son Jesus; No, we sometimes go through these difficulties because we merely live in this sinful world and the Lord allows them to happen to us so that He can train us.

The important part we have to remember in the middle of the trial we go through is not that we are experiencing just another difficulty in our lives, rather resting in God who loves us and wants to bring the best out of us and wants to give His best to us.

The main reason that we have a hard time resting in the Lord in the midst of our trials is that we choose to focus on the trial itself rather than to remember how faithful our God was in the past and what He will do in the future.

With our natural tendencies to fear, worry and ask "Why," it was not always simple to assume that God really did know what He was doing. There were times we were tempted to panic, to bolt and to leave His care. Somehow we had this strange and pure stupid notion we could do better on our own without trusting God. Most men and women do.

Our Lord Jesus promises to us that there is no ground for fear. It has been said that in the Bible there are 365 places where it says, "Fear not," or "Do not be afraid." Can you ever wonder why that number?

The favorite TV show of my wife Karen is "Fixer Upper" from HGTV. Its hosts, Chip and Joanna Gaines own and operate a remodeling and design business in Waco, Texas. At the beginning of the show, their clients wonder what this 'builder and designer' team can do with their very much rundown home they just bought. But since these two people have an excellent reputation to make great fixer uppers, they put their faith in them and hope that they will have a great place to live in the end.

Putting faith in God who promised that we will be in heaven is much more surely than a promise from a human builder. Jesus said to His disciples in John 14:

John 14:2-3 In My Father's house are many mansions; if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. 3 And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you to Myself; that where I am, there you may be also.

C. RELYING ON GOD

Hebrews 11:11-12 By faith Sarah herself also received strength to conceive seed, and she bore a child when she was past the age, because she judged Him faithful who had promised. 12 Therefore from one man, and him as good as dead, were born as many as the stars of the sky in multitude--innumerable as the sand which is by the seashore.

OK, Abraham was a man of faith, but what about his wife Sarah? Was she frustrated, fuming about her husband's distant look in his eyes and his comment, "Honey, pack it up. It's on the road again." Was she kicking and screaming as she packed her bags and got on her camel for the long and hot caravan ride through the desert? We don't know. But from what we see in the Book of Genesis, Sarah was right there along the side of Abraham in trusting and obeying the Lord.

When she was told that she was going to bear a son, she initially laughed, because she and her husband both were well beyond the childbearing ages. But just as the Lord promised, she had a son and she laughed again and she was 90.

Unbelief asks, "How can this be possible?" while faith claims, "So shall it be!" May we always claim the same comment as the Lord moves in our lives.

D. THE LESSONS WE CAN LEARN FROM ABRAHAM AND SARAH

Hebrews 11:13-16 These all died in faith, not having received the promises, but having seen them afar off were assured of them, embraced them and confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth. 14 For those who say such things declare plainly that they seek a homeland. 15 And truly if they had called to mind that country from which they had come out, they would have had opportunity to return. 16 But now they desire a better, that is, a heavenly country. Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God, for He has prepared a city for them.

We find 3 lessons we can learn from these two faithful believers of God:

1) Not limiting the fulfillment of God's promises to this world – v13-14

The promise of the Messiah, the countless future generation in their own land was made to Abraham and Sarah, and they believed the promise of God, not because the promise sounded good, but they believed in the promise Maker's faithful attributes. Yet they died without seeing any of the promises coming true. They saw it in faith.

Some Bible teachers tell their congregation to have faith to escape their death. They can claim their faith all they want, but when the time is up, they'll go no matter what they believe. Because of their twisted and self-centered theologies, many believers think that all of God's promises must be fulfilled in this earth, in their lifetime, preferably the sooner, the better. There is a Greek word for that – HOGWASH.

The Lord has never promised that He would heal all the infirmities in this earth and in our lifetime. I know that some believers would quote the verse from the Book of Isaiah 53:

Isaiah 53:5 But He was wounded for our transgressions, He was bruised for our iniquities; The chastisement for our peace was upon Him, And by His stripes we are healed.

They obviously took this verse out of context and made it fit into their heresy. This verse is speaking the spiritual healing in context, not physical healing. Does this mean that I don't believe in physical healing? Of course, I do believe it and I pray for healing for those who are sick in our congregation.

It's not just about physical healing, but other promises of God as well. While we tend to interpret His promises in our timeline, the Lord fulfills them without the limitation of our timeline.

2) Not relying on what we have or what we can do – v15

Does this mean that God would not use what we can do and what we have? Yes, He does. But it is His choice to use whatever means and how, not our choice. When David ran out to fight against Goliath, the Israelis thought that the little boy was so dead. But in David's heart that was filled with the faith in his God, the giant was so dead. Yes, the Lord used one smooth stone from a brook and the sling skill of David to take out the main warrior of the Philistines.

As you step out in faith, are you timidly feeling around with your spiritual toes, testing the ground to make sure it will support your weight? Or are you burning bridges and blazing a trail of faith like David did?

3) Not making ourselves too comfortable in this world – v16

When my family – I, Karen, and our infant daughter Michelle came to the US in May 16, 1981, I chose to be an American. The only thing I kept was my Korean name. Since so many people butcher it, I should have changed it to "John Smith." I didn't mingle with the people from the Korean community, rather I tried to learn English, the American custom, and culture as much as possible, because this is my country.

But spiritually speaking, as born-again Christians, this is not our home. Our home is in heaven where Jesus is. The Bible says that God has placed eternity in our hearts. We shouldn't be too comfortable with this world and what it offers to us.

2 Corinthians 4:17 For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, is working for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory

I am so glad that our God is not ashamed to be called our God in spite of all the shortcomings we cause, because He doesn't see us who we are now, but He sees us what we will be like in heaven – Jesus.

E. APPLICATIONS

I am going to quote a couple of well-known phrases from the late Jim Elliot, the missionary who gave his life for the glory of God long ago.

1) He is no fool who gives what he cannot keep to gain what he cannot lose.

2) God always gives His best to those who leave the choice with him.