

Hebrews 11:17-12:3

August 14, 2016

“Traces of a Trusting Heart”



- the process of moving involves getting rid of things you don't want or need any more
 - I was trying to sell some of the reject pile on the internet with no effect ... Kijiji ... Craig's List ... nothing!
 - no one seemed even remotely interested in what I was offering
 - I persisted for a couple months, but still nothing ...
- I was going to give up completely, but then decided to give EBay a try
 - I had bought and sold on EBay before, but not for some time
 - EBay usually works as a auction and you end up getting what you get
 - but you can also set a price and list the item as a “buy it now”
 - I posted the ad and five minutes later, got an email back
- I figured I had done something wrong and the EBay police were after me
 - but no ... someone bought it at full price!
- so I wrapped it up and put it in the mail to my buyer and sent him the Post Office tracking number, so we could both keep track of the process of shipping from here to there
- if you've ever sent something in the mail you know that tracking numbers are great ... they let you know that the parcel you sent got to where it was supposed to go
 - not lost, not damaged ... it might be a little late, but it arrived!
 - happy seller ... happy buyer ... everyone is happy!

-do you know who invented tracking numbers? ... God did

-think about it

-he who watches over Israel slumbers not nor sleeps

-the very hairs of your head are numbered

-the LORD watches over you-- the LORD is your shade at your right hand; the sun will not harm you by day, nor the moon by night

-cast all your anxiety on him because he cares for you

-we could go on and on all day, but you get the idea

-the only thing God doesn't keep track of is your sin

-as far as the east is from the west, so far has he removed our transgressions from us

-the one I want to focus on today is from Isaiah 55:10-11

-God says, *"As the rain and the snow come down from heaven, and do not return to it without watering the earth and making it bud and flourish, so that it yields seed for the sower and bread for the eater, so is my word that goes out from my mouth: It will not return to me empty, but will accomplish what I desire and achieve the purpose for which I sent it."*

-God delights to keep track of what his Redemptive Word can accomplish in the hearts and lives of his children

-within the heart and life of a believer you can find trace evidence that God's Word has been there, and that it has accomplished the purpose for which God sent it

-let's see how this works

- Genesis 22 forms some of the background to our text today
 - “sometime later, God tested Abraham ... take your son, your only son Isaac and sacrifice him on the mountain I will show you”
 - so Abraham set out with Isaac and with two of his most trusted servants
 - their trip would take them to the region of Moriah, to a place that would one day be the site of Jerusalem
 - and the temple
 - and the cross
 - and the empty tomb
 - one day God himself would sacrifice His own Son on that mountain for the sins of the world
- but for now, something else is going on ... God tested Abraham
- so, what’s going on here?
 - it is important to read this and other stories of faith from the right angle
- last week as we looked at the first part of Hebrews 11, we noted the dual dangers that come with this text
 - when you sit down and read about all these people of faith and compare yourself with them, you might become puffed up with pride ... I could do that ... my faith is equal to the task
 - the more you think about it, the more you start to sound like a Pharisee ... I ... me ... my
- Jesus told a parable in Luke 18:10-12 ... *“Two men went up to the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. The Pharisee stood up and prayed about himself: ‘God, I thank you that I am not like other men-- robbers, evildoers, adulterers-- or even like this tax collector. I fast twice a week and give a tenth of all I get.’”*

- or, you might see the example of great men and women of faith and be led to despair because you know deep down in your heart that you could never do what they did

- I'm a failure at living a Christian life
 - the harder I try, the behind-er I get
 - I could never do what Abraham did
 - I could never have such total and complete trust
 - I could never have such surrender to the will of God
 - the words that come to mind are "despair" and "discouraged"

- the good news starts here ... that's the wrong angle and the wrong approach to give to this chapter
- here's the right angle and the right approach ...
 - when God tested Abraham, the purpose was not to see if Abraham had earned a passing grade
 - or to see if Abraham could get it all together
 - or to find out if the son Abraham and Sarah longed after for so long would become an idol
- God wants to see if his package has arrived
 - he wanted to see if the Word of God and the Promise of God had done what God had intended it to do in Abraham's heart
 - or whether God had failed
 - and his Word had failed
- God has poured out grace on Abraham
 - God had gifted him with forgiveness and life and salvation
 - God had given him great and wonderful promises
 - now God wanted to see if his package has arrived
 - did the gift get to where it was going?
 - did it accomplish the purpose for which God sent it?

- it was an important question because the salvation of the world was at stake
 - as Genesis 22 unfolds, we see and hear the wonderful good news
 - God's gift has arrived
 - God's word had not returned empty, it had not simply bounced off Abraham's heart, but had penetrated to the depth of his soul
 - it had accomplished that for which God sent it
 - how do we know?
 - where's the proof?
 - God's grace has changed Abraham's heart
 - Abraham has the heart of God ... he was willing to do what only God himself would be willing to do, to sacrifice his dearly beloved only Son!
- when you or your wife or your mother bakes a cake, how do they tell if the cake is done ... how do they test it?
 - toothpick or spaghetti noodle into the middle of the cake ... if it comes out clean and not covered in undercooked batter, then the cake is done
 - you can't just look at the outside, you have to check the heart
 - God tested Abraham
 - he looked in his heart
 - who or what lives there?
- and what did God find? ... the parcel had arrived
 - God's word of promise had done its work
 - there was faith!
 - there is a changed heart ... the heart of God

- do you see the same miracle, the same change of heart in anyone else's life in Scripture?
- in Exodus, after God's people had doubted God's Word and God's promise, and instead decided to build the Golden Calf, God was ready to destroy them and start over with Moses and create from Moses a new people to bring to Canaan
 - what did Moses do?
 - can I watch?
 - can I help?
 - or ... pray for their forgiveness, and even offer himself as a substitute in their place ... "take my name out of your book of life" ... punish me instead
- Moses wasn't always like that
 - growing up in Pharaoh's palace, Moses was entitled to his entitlements ... self was number one
 - when he was forty and saw the plight of God's people, he was ready to step in and use his own strength to rescue God's people
 - he didn't yet have the heart of God
- it wasn't until much later that the cake was done
 - the parcel had arrived
 - God's Word had not returned empty, but had accomplished the purpose for which God sent it
- as you keep reading in Hebrews 11, you need to keep your focus targeted the right way
 - what are we looking for?
 - what are we trying to see?
- is your focus on all these Olympic stars of faith:

Gideon, Barak, Samson, Jephthah, David, Samuel and the prophets, who through faith conquered kingdoms, administered justice, and gained what was promised; who shut the mouths of lions, quenched the fury of the flames, and escaped the edge of the sword; whose weakness was turned to strength; and who became powerful in battle and routed foreign armies. Women received back their dead, raised to life again. Others were tortured and refused to be released, so that they might gain a better resurrection. Some faced jeers and flogging, while still others were chained and put in prison. They were stoned; they were sawed in two; they were put to death by the sword. They went about in sheepskins and goatskins, destitute, persecuted and mistreated--

- some of those names are familiar from your bedtime stories, others you might not know anything about
 - what do you see ... he's a hero ... he's a hero ... she's a hero too
 - if you focus on the people too much and on God not enough, you miss the point
- look here instead ...
 - here's a sinner who has learned to trust God
 - here's another one who has overcome sin and doubt
 - here's another ... and another ... and another
- time after time we are shown traces of trusting hearts
 - time after time we are shown lives changed forever
- what this is really all about is the faithfulness of God, who says, "*My Word will not return to me empty, but will accomplish what I desire and achieve the purpose for which I sent it.*"

- it is all about the grace of God, who has sent you a gift in the mail, if you like ... the gift of a Saviour
- the gift of Jesus who took all your sins and failures to that holy mountain in the region of Moriah, where your heavenly Father who loves you more than you can imagine, sacrificed his only-begotten Son on a cross
- that grace, that gift, will infect you
- it will change your heart

- one of those on the list today was David
- it's so easy to look at him and see someone who deserved heaven
- he didn't
- like the rest of us, he needed God's gift to arrive and do it's work ... so he prayed ... create in me a clean heart, O God

- one of those not in the list today was Paul
- he spent much of his life as a Pharisee, fully convinced that he could and would earn heaven
- it was only after God's gift arrived at his door and infected his heart that he would say, *"Whatever was to my profit I now consider loss for the sake of Christ. What is more, I consider everything a loss compared to the surpassing greatness of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whose sake I have lost all things. I consider them rubbish, that I may gain Christ and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ-- the righteousness that comes from God and is by faith."*

- why the change of heart?
 - how the change of heart?
 - who changed his heart?
- the same one who did it for David, and Moses, and Abraham
 - “My Word will not return empty ... it will accomplish the purpose for which I sent it”

- so what do we do today?
 - do we focus on these and other great heroes of faith, or do we simply let them remind us of where they looked in their weakness
 - and where we should look
 - and where our attention should always be directed
- dear friends, look here ... *“Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy set before him endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. Consider him who endured such opposition from sinful men, so that you will not grow weary and lose heart.”*