

The Standard Of Faith

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Job 19:23-27a

CHILDREN'S TIME

When we do something for the very first time it can be a little bit scary, right? When you first got on a bicycle, someone probably walked beside you and helped hold you up. That gave you confidence and soon you were riding on your own. When you went swimming for the first time, you didn't just go out and jump in a pool all by yourself, did you? No, there was someone with you to hold you up until you could swim on your own. It really helps if we have someone we trust with us when we do something for the very first time.

Today, I brought a blindfold. What if I were to ask one of you to put on this blindfold and find your way to the back of the room and bring a hymnal back to me? How do you think you might feel? Would you be worried about bumping into something and hurt yourself? Would you be afraid that others might laugh at you if you went the wrong direction? What if I said that I would go with you every step of the way and hold your hand? You

trust me, don't you? How does would that make you feel? Who would like to try it?

What you did this morning is similar to what Abraham and Sarah did thousands of years ago. God told Abraham to leave everything behind and to move to a new place hundreds of miles away. God didn't even tell him where this place was. God just said, "Go to the land that I will show you."

Abraham and his family didn't know where they were going or what they would find when they got there. It was like they were wearing a blindfold, but trusting God, just like you did to find the hymnal, and like we trust our parents to help us do new things. So, even though they were a bit scared, they left everything and set out on a journey to the place that God took them. It took many years, but God was with them and he led them to their new home.

Just about every day we face things that we have never done before. That can be a bit scary, but we know that God is with us, just like God was with Abraham and Sarah. We just have to trust God and then follow.

SERMON

Dave and I visited Grace Harrison and a few other people this past week. I mentioned to Grace that last Sunday's sermon was about hope and this coming Sunday was about faith, so I asked her why faith was important.

Grace, at nearly 103 years old, replied quickly "Faith allows you to trust God." Perhaps she cut right to the center of faith that is sometimes difficult for us to grasp.

Faith allows you to trust God.

So many things in life distract us from what we have declared to be important. We are constantly bombarded by things that vie for our attention and ask for our time and energy to respond, reply, engage, contribute, react.

There are so many points of input into our minds and hearts. It's not only TV and radio with stories and ads, proposals and philosophies, but we have podcasts, blogs, ringing phones in our pockets that also beep when we receive email, text messages, or comments to our Instagram or Twitter feed, or our Facebook pages.

So many things can distract our focus from that which we really want to be committed that it takes

very intentional effort to maintain our clarity of intention. All of these inputs are not only asking for our attention, they are asking, even pleading with us for our **trust** in their message in the hope of gaining our support, our commitment, our money, and our vote.

But, at the end of the day all of those inputs can leave us empty because so much of it comes without the foundation of a relationship. It leaves us wondering what or who we can trust.

What can we count on? In what do we place our trust when all else has failed us?

Some of us might recall the story of Job. Job was a healthy, righteous man with lots of possessions, land, job, big wonderful family, and more. He was faithful to God and had it all!

Then, he lost everything: his health, his family including wife and children, his financial assets — everything.

Job faced struggles. He questioned his faith and he bounced between belief and disbelief. I can imagine he would have questioned the validity of his sacred scriptures as well, because

they rang hallow for him after losing everything.

Job even got angry with God. Listen to this passage from chapter 10 where he expressed his anger at God ...

“Bold as a lion you hunt me; you repeat your exploits against me. You renew your witnesses against me, and increase your vexation toward me; you bring fresh troops against me. ‘Why did you bring me forth from the womb? Would that I had died before any eye had seen me, and were as though I had not been, carried from the womb to the grave.’” (Job 10:16-19)

In chapter 19 we find all of that pain. Here is a sampling.

“He has put my family far from me, and my acquaintances are wholly estranged from me. My relatives and my close friends have failed me; the guests in my house have forgotten me; my serving girls count me as a stranger; I have become an alien in their eyes. I call to my servant, but he gives me no answer; I must myself plead with him. My breath is repulsive to my wife; I am loathsome to my own family. Even young children despise me; when I rise, they talk against me. All my intimate friends abhor me, and those whom I loved have turned against me. My bones

cling to my skin and to my flesh, and I have escaped by the skin of my teeth. Have pity on me, have pity on me, O you my friends, for the hand of God has touched me! ...” (Job 19:13-21)

Amid all of this, Job confessed his faith in God. Continuing in chapter 19, he said,

“O that my words were written down! O that they were inscribed in a book! O that with an iron pen and with lead they were engraved on a rock forever! For I know that my Redeemer lives, and that at the last he will stand upon the earth; and after my skin has been thus destroyed, then in my flesh I shall see God, whom I shall see on my side, and my eyes shall behold, and not another. (JOB 19:23-27a)

Even after losing everything, Job continued to have faith. His faith told him that his redeemer lived.

The Hebrew word for “redeemer” here refers to the closest blood relative who was expected to and was committed to restore a person’s rights, to look after their interests.

A redeemer would purchase a person back from slavery, or vouch for them, stand for and with them when they did not have a way to stand on their own.

A redeemer was someone who rescued a person who had nobody else, and no resources available.

In Old Testament biblical contexts, a redeemer was the defender of the widow or orphan, or the champion of the oppressed.

This is the term that is used in reference to God as the one who delivered the people out of slavery under Pharaoh in Egypt. It is used by the prophet Isaiah in reference to God as the redeemer of Israel when the people messed things up and turned away from God.

Job was basically out of options on his own. He had nothing left. No resources with which to barter, no reputation, no money. He only had faith, and that faith told him that a redeemer would save him.

Even though all of his relatives were gone or had abandoned him, he trusted that there was a redeemer yet alive who would rescue him.

Job's redeemer was God.

Job's faith was not dependent on correct doctrine, or having the right interpretation of scripture. It was not dependent on belonging to the right church, or being connected with the right people of influence in his community. Job's faith wasn't

even reliant on his own righteousness or following the law.

When he suffered, he kept his faith.

When he was deeply disappointed, he kept his faith.

When he was heart-broken, he kept his faith.

When his heart was hurt at the very deepest level, he kept his faith.

When all of his doctrine and theology was stripped away and no longer made any sense to him, Job's faith remained.

Even when he was in such pain that he wanted to die, he still kept his faith.

Job's faith was not dependent on anything but God's faithfulness.

What is faith, that it has the power to sustain people through the darkest of times?

What is faith that it can remain when all else is stripped away?

Jesus told a story about faith saying that someone who has faith as small as the smallest seed can tell a mountain to move and it will. It isn't about having an extraordinary and rare amount of faith.

Hebrews tells us that faith is the assurance of things we hope for and the conviction of things we cannot see.

You might say that some people have the gift of faith. But faith is also a gift given to all of us by the Spirit of God. It is not something that comes only from within us.

So, when tragedy strikes and life becomes confusing and we cannot see beyond our nose, or when we find our theology challenged and crumbling, our faith can yet remain, and along with Grace Harrison, can trust our lives into the hands of a very capable God.