

Title: When God doesn't seem to make sense
Text: Hebrews 11.17-19
Theme: Pressing on through the deepest crisis
Series: Hebrews #41
Prop Stmt. Persevering faith believes what is revealed even when it does not make sense.
Aim I aim to instruct my people of the smiling pleasures of God that can hide behind a frowning providence so that they will hold on to his promises, regardless of the God ordained circumstances.

Read Text: Genesis 22.1-14; Hebrews 11.17-19

Jim was a promising student at Wheaton College. He was focused on education that would prepare him for missions to unreached people groups. To that end he studied and because of that, he was at times frustrated with some of the course requirements for a bachelor's degree, believing that courses like philosophy, politics and anthropology to be a waste of time. He took up NT Greek believing that he would one day need to know how to do translation work. He studied the Scriptures and worked with a Student Missions organization, all of which was only preparing him for his life's passion: taking the gospel to a people who had never heard of Christ.

He was so focused on this goal, that even though he met and was attracted to a delightful gal in his Greek class, named Elisabeth and she to him, he did not want marriage to slow him down from missions. He graduated from college, and began linguistic studies, where he learned about the Waodani people from a former missionary to the Quichua people in Central America. Up until that point, Jim was not sure where he was going to go, and his parents really wanted him to stay in the states, thinking that he would be an excellent youth pastor. But, after hearing about the Waodani people (known as the Auca people – Auca is the Quechua word for “savage”) Jim was convinced that this is where he should go and readied himself for that and convinced a buddy of his named Bill to go with him but two months before they were to leave, Bill decided to get married. Jim knew that this was dangerous work, and at the time he thought it best to not get married and only take someone else who was not married. But another potential teammate named Ed, got married. Eventually, Jim and a guy named Pete made it to Ecuador, and began the long process of learning mission work and seeking to establish contact with the Auca tribe. His contact with and interest in Elisabeth had never stopped, eventually they decided to get married, which they did in Ecuador.

So, 11 years after he enrolled in college, after all of his studies, meetings, dreaming, planning, marriage, the birth of a child, language studies, team-building, and vision-casting, Jim and his colleagues were finally ready to do what they had dreamed of. Remember Ed who got married? Ed and his wife were there too now. They were going to establish contact with a group of people who had never, ever heard of Jesus Christ.

It is one thing to climb a mountain that no one has ever been on, or to explore a cave that no one has ever seen. It would be thrilling to discover land that no one had ever visited,

but can you imagine the thrill of being able to tell someone the truth about God, who has created all things, and his Son, who is our Redeemer? Really, what else in this life could compare with that? This desire was so palpable for Jim and the team that they lived this, breathed this and invested their lives into this single, God-honoring purpose. Seven years earlier, while a student at Wheaton, Jim wrote in his diary a statement, paraphrased from the English preacher Philip Henry, “*He is no fool who gives what he cannot keep to gain that which he cannot lose.*”

Jim knew that this is what God had called him to do. Their first attempts to contact these people by regularly dropping gifts from an airplane looked promising. They eventually built a small camp some distance from the Auca village. A small group of the tribesmen contacted them and one of the tribesmen was friendly enough to actually go for a ride in their airplane. He was going to be the key man to establishing contact with the rest of the tribe. He was a key person alright. He lied to his tribe about the intentions of the missionaries and set them up for death. On January 8, 55 years ago (yesterday) Jim Elliot, Ed McCully, Roger Youderian, Pete Fleming and their pilot Nate Saint were murdered by a band of Auca Indians who lived up to the reputation of their name. Jim’s body lay along the Curary River and there it seemed like such a waste. All that training. All that preparation. All the work. All the resources, time, money, prayers, study, linguistic training – for what end? This?

What happens when events appear to contradict God’s promises? What do you do, when God ordains circumstances that appear to violently collide with what you thought were the promises of God? That, beloved, is exactly what this text is about. And as much as I need to preach this, and as much as you need to hear this, I am convinced that many of you, if not most of you are prepared for this. What this text speaks of, is a faith that to us appears to be radical and crazy. After all, we live in America, where we all know that it’s God’s job to bless us with a house, cars, jobs, 401k’s, cabins, boats, health and long, trouble-free lives. Sacrifice? Adversity? Martyrdom? C’mon – it’s not practical. Really now, what good was Jim Elliot, now that he was dead? Great! He died at 28 years of age trying to give someone the gospel, when he could have lived for another 50 years at least doing that here. What a waste!

No, the waste is how most of us live. You want to play it safe? Don’t follow Christ. The people of God are people of faith. “*Faith is that which securely fastens the believer to the reality of the promise of God that has not yet been seen because it has not yet been fulfilled.*” This chapter is all about the people whose shoulders we stand on. This chapter is a record of their footprints in which we are called to walk and these verses focus our attention upon one incredible event in the life of Abraham. Now, I just took two ideas and put them together in one sentence. Did you make that connection in your understanding? Did your heart feel the weight and the intensity of what I just said? This chapter is a record of their footprints in which we are called to walk and these verses (17-19) speak to us of the type of faith that we are called to have. We are called to believe God, no matter what. We are called to believe God even though the actions of God as in Abraham’s case, the clear and explicit command of God appear to mock the promises of God. How do you speak of the love of God when your 28-year old husband and father of your infant

daughter has just been murdered by the men, God called him to reach? How do you worship this God who promises you that you are going to be the father of a nation, and then he commands you to take your son, the promised son, the son of your old age, the son that you never thought that you would have, the son that God had said would be the one from whom the promise of the nation would come, and offer him as a sacrifice to God?

1. **The life of faith is a life of testing.** (17a)

“when he was tested” – Who did the testing? God. And did Abraham not already believe God and leave Ur and Haran and go to Canaan? Did Abraham not already believe God’s promise that he would inherit the land and be the father of a nation? Did Abraham not already believe God for a son, even in his old age? How many tests are there? The answer is, “at least one more.”

What was God trying to teach Abraham? Did you ever stop to consider the fact that this test may have been more for our benefit than just Abraham’s? God gives 2 chapters of attention to creation and 12 chapters of attention to Abraham, much of that focused on how God tests his children. This testing is part of the discipline that God does for our good (12.3-11). Oh, at the time, we fear it, we so desperately want to avoid it, and think that if we go through one trial that we have served our time and are done. Abraham’s life is a testimony to the reality that we go from test to test so that we can go from faith to faith and from grace to grace.

Note this. Abraham’s life was characterized as being a life of faith. Three times, in this chapter the AH uses the phrase, “by faith” to describe Abraham and once it is used of Sarah. Abraham and Sarah were not perfect people, but they were people who God commends as being people who lived “by faith” and yet, they went through a long period of barrenness, which was a particular grief considering the fact that God changed his name from Abram (exalted father) to Abraham which means “Father of a multitude.” Finally, they had a son and now God tells him to offer the son as a sacrifice. Do you get the point? Contrary to what some would have you believe, living a life of faith does not exempt you from trials and difficulties. Living a life of faith does not mean that you get to avoid tough times and will never face challenges. Living a life of faith means that you have registered for them.

Imagine that in your Adult Bible Class this morning a sign-up sheet went around for you to volunteer to take a meal to a family that needed some extra help this week. From what I know of our classes, and what I know of you, that sign-up sheet would fill up because you understand that love is best expressed by being inconvenienced for the sake of another. Now, imagine that your class leader said that we are sending around a sign-up sheet for trials for this week. If you sign-up, you can count on being seriously tested – but don’t worry, we’ll sign up next Sunday to bring you meals. How many of you would say, “Hey, put me down for Tuesday. I’ve got a particularly challenging event on that day and could use some more testing to increase my dependence on God.”? But guess what? You already signed up. When you come to faith in Christ, you become part of the people of God. We all signed up for testing because the life of faith is a life of testing.

2. **The life of faith is a life of worship.** (17b)

“and he who had received the promises was in the act of offering up his only son” In the Genesis account, Abraham told his servant to watch over the animal while he and Isaac went to worship. This offering, on the part of Abraham was an act of worship. In fact, in Genesis 22.5, when Abraham said that he was going with Isaac to worship, this was the first time in the Scriptures that the word “worship” appears.

Now, you ought to know that whenever something is mentioned for the very first time in the Scriptures it is often done in such a way that it sets the table for this particular concept from this point on. Do you want to know what worship is? Do not look at the contemporary church that is trying to accommodate the particular tastes and sensitivities of every one who comes. I say this in all love, but also with a deep sense of sorrow that after all of these years, I have yet to be able to get this across to many of you. If you are still quibbling over whether a song is too old, or we use too many hymns, or whether a song is too new and we do not use the same instruments and arrangements that you grew up with, if you whine about standing too long, or it not being loud enough, then you need to see this foundational, elementary, basic example of worship. Worship is not you and me being a grumpy judge. Worship is the heart-engaged, faith-driven, gospel-based and Christ-focused activity of sacrifice. We bring and offer the sacrifice of praise. We bring and offer the sacrifice of ourselves. We bring and offer the sacrifice of what we own. We bring and offer the sacrifice of our treasures for the One who is the ultimate treasure. Worship is offering to God that which I dearly love because I consider Him to be more precious than anything else in life. Worship is action. Worship is a verb. Worship demands my heart, my affections, my hopes, my dreams, my very all. Worship is not giving God the leftovers of my time, or the leftovers of my money, or the leftovers of my energy. Worship is giving to God the very best of what I have because He is worth it. We have done a terrible disservice to people in trying to build a worship service around the particular tastes that people have. Worship is not about you!! Worship is not about what makes you feel good. Worship is considering who God is, and responding to what he has said and done. Which is why...

3. **The life of faith is a life of sacrificial worship** (18)

What did Abraham do when he left Ur in obedience to God? He was turning his back on his past and pursuing this God who promised him a land and a people. Now, here he is in the land, not having yet received it, and with his boy, the down payment from God through whom the nation that God promised would come. He does not yet own even a morsel of ground, but he at least has a boy. Then God says, “give the boy to me.” “Offer the boy to me.” And in that moment Abraham had to make a decision. Did he love God because of the things that he was going to get from God, or did He love God because God is at once the most glorious and most splendid of all beings? Did he love the gift (his son) more than the giver (God)? And when Abraham loaded up the donkey and got the wood and headed to Moriah to worship, he, who had already turned his back on his past, was now offering up to God his future as well.

Is God worth you offering up to him your future? Is knowing God, trusting God, leaning on God, banking on God worth everything?

4. **The life of faith takes God at his Word no matter what.** (19)

“He considered” There were three things that Abraham had. 1) He had the promises of God. 2) He had the command of God. 3) He had some history with God. In the past he had some promises of God that did not seem to make sense in light of the commands of God and yet they worked out. So, here he is once more in a situation where God’s actions (command) appear to contradict God’s promises. Abraham considered. He was not stupid. The best that he could come up with was that God was going to raise Isaac back from the dead. He did not know how. But he had the promise of God and the command of God that did not seem to go together very well, but Abraham did not seem to be all that worked up about how it was going to be resolved. He did not know how it would work out, but he had no doubt that it would.

In fact, when you simply read the text here and the original account in Genesis 22, there is a noticeable absence of crisis and angst. Just a few chapters before, God reveals his intention to destroy Sodom and Gomorrah to Abraham. Abraham responds by pleading with God and interceding for the city because of his nephew Lot. But, here he does not intercede. I remember years ago, preaching on Genesis 22 when my son was about 6 years old and was sitting on the front row. I could only imagine the grief of Abraham, but when I read the text, I have to wonder if that is something that I am assuming and reading into it. Abraham is so convinced of the faithfulness of God that the very next morning after hearing from God, he goes. And beloved, it is not merely a coincidence that the Genesis 22 text says, that on the morning of the 3rd day, they saw the mountain. Look at Hebrews 11.19. Abraham already knew, it was the place of resurrection.

5. **The life of faith is based upon the gospel.**

If you are looking for a god who will accommodate you and go along with your self-centeredness, never challenge you, provoke you or demand anything of value from you, don’t follow Christ. Find some cheap, plastic religion. Do some yoga, burn some incense, meditate on your navel and imagine peace. But, if your soul refuses to be satisfied with anything less than being stretched beyond your imagination, and your heart longs to be terrified and thrilled all at the same time, and you have been to the bars, and to the clubs, and you have burned through people and things, and you have come to end in realizing that there is no satisfaction in any of that, then you are ready to see that you have to have Christ. But know this! He will not settle for second place. He will not take a back seat to your boyfriend, or girlfriend, career, retirement, children or grandchildren. He demands that you worship with him all of your heart and all of your soul, and all of your mind, and all of your body, and all of your will, because he is worth it. And what is more – He has more than proved that he his worth it. Abraham acted in faith based upon what he thought God was going to do. We get to act on faith based upon what God has already done.

Here is what we can see that Abraham did not see. Abraham was the father who loved his Son. All of those dynamics of the bond between this father and his boy are what makes this story so riveting and gripping to us. If Abraham, as an earthly father loved his Son of promise, how much more is the love that the Father has for His Son Jesus Christ. When Abraham lifted up the knife over his boy, in obedience to God, God stopped him. But God did not stop the death of his own boy. God spared the life of Isaac, but God did not spare the life of his Son. Why would God spare Isaac and not his Son? Because, the only way for God to spare you, was if he did not spare his Son. What Abraham did not know was that on that day, he was acting out a drama that God had scripted to teach us about how much God loves us. Isaac was the innocent sacrifice, whose offering appeared to be completely irrational. Isaac did not know that he was acting out a drama that God had scripted so that we could get a taste of how absurd it would seem that Christ would be offered up to die. Christ, Jesus Christ, dying – what for? What did he do? This is not right!! This is not fair!! This makes no sense!! Do you see that the offering of Isaac allows us to get a taste of the cost of the sacrifice offered up for you? This is how far God went to redeem you. This is how radical and extreme his love is for you. But there is another aspect of this that would not have been immediately clear to Abraham and that is that of the apparent contradiction with God. How can you reconcile a God who gives you a Son and takes him away? How can you reconcile a God who says he loves you and demands you to kill your boy? All of that leads to a greater question. How can you reconcile God? How can God be what he claims to be? How can God be merciful to sinners and righteous in his judgments? How can God judge sin without destroying every sinner? How can God keep his promise to make a people for himself when every single person that he has made has rebelled against him?

God asked Abraham to do something that God was already committed to doing. God asked Abraham to do something that would give Abraham an opportunity to enter into the heart of God. Offer up your son, for someone that you love, because that is exactly what God did for you. In the end, we realize that God did not want Isaac to die, he did want Abraham to love him without question. Do you? Why wouldn't you, when...

“He who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all, how will not also with him graciously give us all things?” (Romans 8.32)

The news of the death of Jim Elliot and the others shocked the world. Time magazine did a 10 page article on the story, bible colleges and churches alike were stunned. But then, like a stone dropped into a still pond, the ripples of this event began to ripple out to many shores. In Ecuador, the Auca Indians were eventually reached with the gospel and some of the men who committed murder became leaders for Christ. In churches, scores of young men and women left the perceived safety of careers in order to take the gospel around the world and a tremendous surge in missions was launched.

This past week, 20,000 college students invaded Atlanta in order to worship God and hear preaching that called them to wake up from the nightmare of the American Dream. They and thousands of others who listened in on-line pledged and gave obscene amounts of money for gospel causes around the world. This same thing happened 50 years ago,

but the churches were not on board. The surge in missions was launched by Para-church organizations who cannot sustain the momentum. Today, I believe that God is raising up another missions movement. I believe that there are college students raised by yuppies in boring suburbia who have seen the emptiness of the American dream and the shallowness of much of contemporary Christianity. They are not sure what they want, but they know what they don't want. They don't want a watered down gospel or a faith that makes no demands. What they need are churches who show them how it is done. You in?