

REFLECTIONS ON FAITH

Steve Magill, November 2017

THE CURRICULUM FOR TRAINING ETERNAL KINGS CONSISTS OF ONE SUBJECT: FAITH IN GOD.

It seems simple enough, but the difficulty is that we become emotionally or mentally attached to the things life offers to us, those things that can be seen, felt, and taken pleasure in. Future kings discipline themselves to find their hope and pleasure in the promises given to them by God. These promises include receiving an eternal inheritance, being joint heirs with Christ, receiving eternal life, and living in the very physical presence of God.

Scripture is clear that everything of earth is not of God and belongs to the world.¹ The things of God are not in or of this world. Our hope and life are in God's future promises and of an eternal home of far more value than anything this world might offer. This is such a treasure that once we discern its value and reality, we will gladly give up all this world has to offer to receive it, including our life if necessary.²

One of the reasons we detach ourselves from the things of this world is because all that can be seen is developed after the Devil's nature. The Devil is the god of this world. His goal is to create a world after his image, which is to focus on possessions, beauty, riches, music, and pride in what one has.³ In the negative, his focus is greed, pride, and power. It was this focus that caused Lucifer to sin to the point that he desired and thought he could take God's place.⁴ It is this focus that God is training His future kings not to hold onto or trust in—even if it is the physical necessities to sustain life.⁵ Our goal is to use the things of this world to get through life, but without the attachment to or pride or greed for them.⁶ The Devil uses all things in the world—even Christian things—to detour us from being single minded toward the great inheritance that will be ours.

FAITH TRAINING

To train us in faith and detachment from the world, God raised up Abraham to be our example. Through Abraham, God laid the foundation for faith and showed what faith looks like. What faith looked like was a continual giving up of the things of this world for a promise that many times did not look as if it were going to happen. In the following paragraphs, I have outlined six faith teachings that strengthened Abraham's faith and that would be the foundation stones for our own faith.

FAITH TEACHING ONE: Abraham Believed God Before God Spoke to Him⁷

Abraham would have heard the stories about Adam and Eve and Noah and the Flood directly from Shem, the son of Noah, who was alive for 150 years of Abraham's life. To Abraham, these stories were not far distant stories of people in a faraway land that he didn't know; they were his story...his family history, and would have been the spark for Abraham wanting to please this God that he heard about, but never knew in the same way

¹ 1 John 2:16

² Matthew 13:44-46

³ Ezekiel 28:14-19 See also Appendix B

⁴ Isaiah 14:13-14

⁵ Matthew 6:24-34

⁶ 1 Corinthians 7:31

⁷ A big thanks goes out to Steve Teets for his insights into this first faith teaching. I originally had five until Steve shared his insights with our Bible Study group. Now I have six.

that Adam or Noah had. Before God revealed himself personally to Abraham, Abraham's desire was to please this God by living righteously.

Before God reveals Himself to us, we also must have the desire to want to know God and to please Him. There must be something within us that reaches out to God in such a strong way that we are willing to give up everything we have and are just to have God with us.⁸ We must be like the woman who searches her entire house, sweeping every nook and cranny until she finds her lost coin.⁹ If there is no desire for God, there will be no finding of God. If we do not find God, we cannot put our faith and trust in the One we do not know.

FAITH TEACHING TWO: Abraham heard God's voice

If this teaching is not grasped, embraced, and entered into, none of the faith teachings we look at will matter. Abraham's faith was not based only upon intellect, decisiveness, or impressions of what he thought was God's direction or will. Abraham's faith was based upon actually hearing the voice of God. It was this "voice"¹⁰ that he obeyed,¹¹ not an impression, not an "I think God wants me to...", not an indecisiveness between "two" wills. There was an audible voice that Abraham heard, followed, and communicated with. When Jesus came, He also relates that those who belong to Him also "hear" his voice.¹²

We don't have to wonder if we hear God, we can know without a doubt because God is actual—He is real. What about those statements many make about "God told me to..." or "God wanted me to...."? Did God really speak? Did you really obey?

FAITH TEACHING THREE: Abraham packed up all that he owned, to travel to a land he did not know... only because God told him to do it.¹³

Abraham was seventy-five years old and had lived in Haran most of his life since moving there with his father after God confused the languages at the tower of Babel.¹⁴ No doubt Abraham was settled and content to remain here until his death. Yet, when he heard God asking him to leave, he packed it all up and made the long, and what would become an uncertain journey toward the land God instructed him to go.

FAITH TEACHING FOUR: Abraham was told that he and his wife would have a baby, even though they were old, past the age of having children.¹⁵

This is the first physical sign to Abraham that God would do what He had promised, though it would be impossible through any means that the world could offer. So unlikely did such a promise seem that Abraham and his wife took it into their own hands to bring forth a child through other means. Ishmael was the result of this action, yet he did not fulfill God's promise that Abraham's wife would have the child. Abraham was one hundred years of age and Sarah ninety when Isaac was born from her womb. Seeing the impossible would prepare Abraham for his greatest test of faith.

⁸ Matthew 13:45, 46 The Pearl of Great Price

⁹ Luke 5:8-10

¹⁰ Genesis 12:1, 7; 13:14; 15:1,4,7,13; 17:1,3,9,15,19; 18:11,13,17,26,28-32; 21:12; 22:1-2

¹¹ Genesis 12:4,8; 13:18; 15:10; 17:23; 22:3, 18

¹² John 10:4,16,27; Hebrews 3:7; Revelation 3:20

¹³ Genesis 12:1-5

¹⁴ Genesis 11:7-8, 31; 10:32.

¹⁵ Genesis 15:1-7

FAITH TEACHING FIVE

Abraham was told to sacrifice Isaac,
his son of promise.¹⁶

The greatest treasure of any parent is their sons and daughters; that treasure increases in value when it is the fulfillment of a promise from God and given against all odds. At such a request to kill his own son, the stress Abraham felt mentally and emotionally must have been almost too much to bear. “Give up my own son? Sacrifice him with my own hands?” Yet, God spoke in an audible voice, and there was no question it was God who spoke.

No doubt Abraham weighed God’s previous promise to him that his seed would be as numberless as the stars in the sky against this new request to sacrifice his son. He reasoned that God was able to raise Isaac even from the dead.¹⁷ Abraham obeyed God, yet when the sacrificial knife was raised, ready to end Isaac’s life, God intervened, sending His angel to stop him, providing a ram in Isaac’s place.

Wow! What a reunion and tear-flowing event this must have been. What an establishment of faith this would be. Even God and all the angels of heaven realized the immensity of the task when the angel stated, “Now I know that you fear God, seeing you have not withheld your son, your only son from me.”¹⁸ It was no doubt this final test which made strong and unmovable the faith that would earmark Israel’s history and the faith of Christians.

FAITH TEACHING SIX

Abraham obeyed

None of the other faith teachings would matter, even hearing God’s voice, if this one was not followed through with. Abraham heard. Abraham considered. Abraham obeyed.¹⁹ In our age of walking with the actual presence of God, we are encouraged to “Take heed to the ministry which you have received in the Lord, that you fulfill it.”²⁰ We are also warned, “Nevertheless when the Son of man comes, shall he find faith on the earth?”²¹ Are you taking heed to what God has given you to do? Do you truly have faith? Do you know what faith’s essential quality is? Read Luke 18:1-8 to find out.²²

Abraham’s faith may be summed up in this: the detachment from even the most cherished treasures the world can offer in favor of an inheritance that, at times, seems uncertain and even impossible to achieve.

FAITH’S GREATEST ALLY

Wouldn’t it be great if faith was as easy as understanding that God is real, understanding His Word, and knowing without a doubt that He is going to fulfill what He promised? Sounds simple enough; so simple, in fact, that we’ve developed phrases such as “God said it, I believe it, that settles it.” However, the reality is not so simple. When we look at the history of Israel and the miracles God performed for them—even the generation that witnessed the miraculous deliverance out of Egypt and God’s provision in the wilderness—they still grumbled against God when things were not going as they wanted. It is obvious that seeing does not produce belief for the long haul. Seeing believes for the moment, but faith believes for an eternity.

¹⁶ Genesis 22:1-14

¹⁷ Hebrews 11:17-19

¹⁸ Genesis 22:12

¹⁹ Genesis 12:4,8; 13:18; 15:10; 17:23; 22:3, 18

²⁰ Colossians 4:17

²¹ Luke 18:8

²² If you did not find faith’s essential quality, go to Appendix D—but don’t cheat; read the Scripture and discover it for yourself.

My mother tells of the time when my grandmother lived in the “boondocks,” referring to her isolated country home. At this time in her life, she had no phone, no vehicle, and lived too far from town or neighbors to walk for any needs she might have. So, when she ran out of food, she had no way of taking care of her need. It was three days later that one of her daughters visited, noticed the lack of food, and asked what she had been eating...my grandmother’s response? “I had nothing. God wanted me to fast these three days.”

This is quite a contrast to the highly stressed, burden-filled lady who asked for prayer from her denomination because of losing her job. She admitted that she *only* had enough food and resources for a month and didn’t know what she was going to do. It is a good thing to exercise our faith by asking the church to pray, but is it faith when we allow stress and burdens to overshadow our prayers? Do we truly trust God when we lose the peace of God?

I heard a speaker say that “You never know whether you are truly living by faith, until you are in a situation where faith is all you have.” The lady above was obviously not living according to the faith outlined in Matthew 6:34:

“So do not worry or be anxious about tomorrow, for tomorrow will have worries and anxieties of its own. Sufficient for each day is its own trouble.”²³

All of her needs were being taken care of for that day and many days after. There was no need to let worry and stress destroy her peace with God. Obviously, she lost her peace, not because she did not have what she needed for the day, but because she was concerned about what she might not have in the following month. In contrast, my grandmother knew that, whether she had her necessities or not, God permitted what He felt was for her highest good. She chose to rest in Him instead of her physical need.

The training ground for faith is the stresses placed upon it. Most of us have no doubt heard how a body builder receives his chiseled, perfect looking physique by applying stress to his various muscles. In a similar way, we build a strong, chiseled faith through the stresses applied to it. You never know how much patience you really have until you are in a position where you must exercise patience. Neither will you understand God’s provision for you until you are in a position when you have no available resources. Nor will you truly experience the peace of God until your little world has been turned upside down. James 1:1-3 is clear on this when the apostle wrote:

“My brothers, count it all joy when ye fall into many temptations; Knowing this, that the trying of your faith works patience. But let patience have her perfect work, that ye may be perfect and entire, wanting nothing.”

Amazing, isn’t it? Stress develops patience and patience leads to great faith and perfection.

To train the stubborn, stiff-necked, rebellious Israel to be His people, God gave to them the example of Abraham, the father of faith, and then began to develop faith in them. The Israelites training ground for faith was through four hundred years of suffering in Egypt,²⁴ forty years of wanderings in the wilderness,²⁵ twenty-five hundred years controlled by other nations, over two thousand years without a nation, and through various wars and trials. In our present age, the Israelites still do not trust God. This will not change until the great tribulation by the Antichrist brings great destruction to her in the last of the last days. During her greatest trial, Israel will return to God, never to depart from Him again.

²³ Taken from the Amplified Version of the Bible

²⁴ Genesis 15:12-14

²⁵ Exodus 16:35; Deuteronomy 8:2

Did you notice the timeframe it takes to develop a people worthy to receive God's promised inheritance? We are looking at over four thousand years. For you and me it is a lifetime. Hang tight! Hold on! Don't let go! Keep moving forward.

The greatness of what God has for His people is so great that the training program is extremely intense. The overall concept is that the greater the reward, the greater the discipline and training that is required. To teach someone to dig a ditch may take fifteen minutes, while training to be a doctor may take six years and longer. To become a joint heir with Jesus Christ and a true son of God requires thousands of years of development, and for you and me, a lifetime of detaching ourselves from the things of this world and attaching our mind, body, and spirit to the things of God.

God has a wonderful inheritance waiting for you and me. Hold on a little while longer, it won't be long.