

## God speaks faith into the heart.

Text: Genesis 12:1-8 for Lent 2 by Pastor Bolwerk

*Now the Lord said to Abram, "Get out of your country and away from your relatives and from your father's house and go to the land that I will show you. <sup>2</sup>I will make you a great nation. I will bless you and make your name great. You will be a blessing. <sup>3</sup>I will bless those who bless you, and I will curse anyone who dishonors you. All of the families of the earth will be blessed in you." <sup>4</sup>So Abram went, as the Lord had told him. Lot went with him. Abram was seventy-five years old when he departed from Haran. <sup>5</sup>Abram took Sarai his wife, Lot his brother's son, and all the possessions they had accumulated and the people that they had acquired in Haran, and they set out to travel to the land of Canaan. Eventually they arrived in the land of Canaan. <sup>6</sup>Abram passed through the land until he came to the Oak of Moreh at the place called Shechem. The Canaanites were in the land at that time. <sup>7</sup>The Lord appeared to Abram and said, "I will give this land to your descendants." Abram built an altar there to the Lord, who had appeared to him. <sup>8</sup>He moved on from there to the hill country east of Bethel and pitched his tent there, with Bethel on the west and Ai on the east. There he built an altar to the Lord and proclaimed the name of the Lord.*

If you have a problem with your heart beating properly what could you do to fix that problem? If the problem is that your heart is beating out of rhythm you can have a pacemaker attached to your heart. A pacemaker is a small device that monitors the rhythm of the heart and if it is not beating correctly the pacemaker gives the heart a small shock to make it beat properly. This could certainly save your life. But to get the pacemaker connected to your heart a doctor has to cut you open and physically attach the pacemaker to your heart.

What if God wanted to get something into your heart? How would he do it? Would God have to cut you open? No, because when God wants something done all he has to do is speak and whatever he wants happens. That is exactly what God does to get faith into a person's heart.

Theme: God speaks faith into the heart.

I. Believers listen

II. Believers respond

In our text God is working to create faith in Abram. Abram was the man from whom would come the nation of Israel. It would be through the descendants of Abram that God would bring the Savior into the world. When God spoke to Abram, he spoke to him directly. We are told, **The LORD had said to Abram, "Get out of your country and away from your relatives and from your father's house and go to the land that I will show you"** (v. 1). God did not speak through a prophet or a book, but he spoke directly to Abram and told him what he was going to do. God told Abram, **"I will make you a great nation. I will bless you and make your name great. You will be a blessing"** (v. 2). God used words of promise to speak to Abram's heart. God did not just command Abram saying, "Do this or else!" No, God said, "Do this and here's why: Because I want to bless you!" Through those words of promise God's Holy Spirit was working to create faith in Abram.

At this point Abram had a choice: He could accept what God said, or he could reject it. If Abram accepted what God told him and trusted that God's words were true, then it's only God who gets the credit. It was all God's doing: God gave the promises; God created faith in

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Abram through those promises. But, if Abram rejected what God told him, then it would be all his own fault for missing out on God's blessings. God had given him the promises and the ability to trust what was said. If Abram still rejected God's words, then he has no one to blame but himself.

We know that Abram did trust what God said because Abram did what God asked of him. Scripture simply says, "**So Abram left, as the LORD had told him**" (v 4a). Abram listened to God. He didn't let God's words go in one ear and out the other. Instead, he took God at his word, simply trusting what God said even though it may not have made much sense at the time.

God speaks to us too. He does not speak to us directly as he did with Abram. Instead God speaks to us indirectly, through his word in the Bible and through those who speak God's word to us. Yet, just like Abram, through his word God tells us how he wants to bless us. God has spoken promises to us, and through those promises God speaks faith into our hearts. So, are we listening? Do we *listen* to God? Or do we just *hear* God and listen to other things, like our sinful nature. Did you listen as the scriptures were read earlier, or did what you hear sound more like this:

"What then will we say that Abraham, our forefather, discovered according to ..." I wonder what's for lunch. Is that a bug on the floor? I can't believe she's wearing *that!* I just can't believe he said that to me. I wish this pain in my hip would go away. How am I going to pay that bill? How am I going to get all this homework done by tomorrow? I wonder how my March Madness picks are doing. I can't forget to finish that report! Is the pastor almost done yet? ... As it is written: "I have made you a father of many nations."

Is that how we "listen" to God here in church?

Do you listen to God when you're out in the world, or do you prefer to listen to what the world has to say? When the people around you are tearing someone down do you listen to God when he says, "**You shall not give false testimony against your neighbor**" (Exodus 20:16), or do you listen to the world and join in because what the others are doing is all done in the name of "fun." Do we really listen to God when he says, "**You shall keep my commandments by doing them**" (Leviticus 22:31), or do we prefer to listen to Satan as he whispers, "Did God really say if you break one of his commands it's like breaking them all? That doesn't make any sense does it? Breaking one of something is not the same as breaking all of something." Who are we really listening to? Do we actually listen to God, or do we just hear God's words as they go in one ear and out the other?

God doesn't speak to us just so he can order us around and force us to do something. God speaks to us so he can bless us. Our heavenly Father blesses us with his words by using those words to guide us on that narrow path to heaven. God worked faith in us through his word, and in that faith, we don't just want to hear God, we want to listen to what he says. That listening goes on for more than just one hour on a Sunday morning; it's something we, as believers, want to do every day. We listen to God not just here in church, but out there in the world as well. We listen not just with our ears, but with our mind and our heart.

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Do you know what God says about all those times we failed to listen him? He says, **“I want you to know that through Jesus the forgiveness of sins is proclaimed to you”** (Acts 13:38 NIV). **“For Christ died for sins once for all, the righteous for the unrighteous, to bring you to God”** (1 Peter 3:18 NIV). These are God’s promises, and God is giving you those promises through his words. Through that Word God is sending his Spirit out to work faith in you. That is God speaking faith into your hearts. Listen! Listen to those words and simply accept them for what they are: blessings given to you by your gracious, heavenly Father.

What is your faith doing right now? What is the faith of the person next to you doing? Seems like a strange question, doesn’t it? You cannot see faith in a person’s heart. Only God can see that. But we can see the actions and activities of faith. Faith is a living thing, and like all living things faith has the ability to do things. And faith goes into action when it hears God. When God speaks faith into the heart, believers respond.

We see that with Abram. God spoke, Abram responded. He responded by doing what God asked of him. Abram didn’t question God. He didn’t argue with God or make excuses saying, “I’m too old to make a trip that far!” Abram didn’t bargain with God saying, “Well, how about if I go check it out and if I don’t like it come back?” Abram didn’t do any of those things. He simply responded to God by doing what he was asked because he trusted God was going to bless him.

And Abram response to God went above and beyond what God had asked him to do. **The Lord appeared to Abram and said, “I will give this land to your descendants.” Abram built an altar there to the Lord, who had appeared to him. He moved on from there to the hill country east of Bethel and pitched his tent there, with Bethel on the west and Ai on the east. There he built an altar to the Lord and proclaimed the name of the Lord.** (vs. 7, 8). Abram responded to God by worshiping and praising God. Abram “proclaimed the name of the Lord.” Abram made it clear, publicly, who it was that was blessing him.

As believers, when God speaks to us, we respond. We respond by doing what God has asked us to do. What is that? God has asked us to love him above everyone and everything else, and to love others as ourselves. Like Abram, as we do these things, we don’t want to question God, like the lawyer who asked Jesus, “Who is my neighbor?” Jesus response makes it clear that our neighbor is anyone whom God puts before us at any time in our life, even if that person is an enemy. And like Abram we don’t want to argue with God or make excuses saying, “Well, I don’t think that person deserve my love God!” And we don’t want to bargain with God saying, “I promise I’ll love everyone else as long as I can ignore that person.” No, when God speaks, in faith we simply respond. We simply do. We simply love. In that love we reflect the love God has shown to us in Christ. All we are really doing is just giving to others what we ourselves have been given: God’s unconditional love.

But our response to God is more than simply doing what he says. Like Abram, our faith desires to go above and beyond. We do that when we respond to God’s promises by publicly worshiping and praising him. And our worship is not confined to just one hour a week in church. Like Abram, our worship can take place wherever we happen to be at the time. To worship God does not require an altar, or a special building. We can worship God at anytime

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by simply praying to him. Prayer is a form of worship. It's a believer's response to what God has promised them. Prayer is an expression of our trust in what our God has said to us: **"Whatever you ask for in prayer, as you believe, you will receive"** (Matthew 21:22). God also says, **"Call on me in the day of distress. I will deliver you, and you will honor me"** (Psalm 50:15). This worship is an expression of thanks for all that God has promised us. And our public worship of God gives us the opportunity to speak to people about our God and Savior: to our family, our friends, or whoever may be around us at the time. So as God speaks faith into our hearts, and as he strengthens that faith with his words, let that faith respond because that is what believers do.

We want to keep in mind how all this "doing" came about in the first place. It all started with God. He is the one who spoke the promises. He is the one who gives us the blessings. He is the one who created this faith that is in us. That is why we listen. That is why we respond. Not because of anything we have done, but because our kind, loving, compassionate, gracious, merciful, and forgiving God had spoken saving faith into our hearts. Amen.