

Please note: The following daily readings allow you to study other passages that speak to the place of scripture in our lives. The Study Guide readings allow you to dig deeper.. This week's we continue reading from the book of James. This book is often misunderstood as emphasizing works over faith. Martin Luther in the 16th century referred to James as the "epistle of straw". Luther believed that the focus of "salvation by faith" is lost in James as he teaches his reader about the importance of works as a person of faith in Christ.

James' message is for the person who has lost touch with the high call of Christ in their behavior. It is far more than an "epistle of straw". As the apostle Paul says, "By your fruit you shall be known." Likewise, James knows that our life with Christ begins in faith, and then leads to a new way to live.

Monday – Read James 2:1-8. James reminds us that there is no social distinction in God's family. All believers are one in Christ. Christians should never show favoritism based on position, power, race, color, wealth, or popularity. Are you tempted to show favoritism in your life and faith? Do you expect to be treated better than others because of your station in life? Examine your attitude and motivations today. Pray that God will give you a pure and open heart to all persons.

Tuesday – Read James 2:8-13. James now starts to really meddle in our lives setting a high standard for our life with Christ. He calls us to mercy over judgment and love over all. I am reminded by these hard words of James, we truly are saved by faith and not by work. It is only by the sacrifice and forgiveness of Christ that any of us find atonement from God. Start your day by giving thanks to God for the gift of Jesus Christ. End your day by confessing where you have faltered and pray again the same prayer of thanksgiving for Christ.

Wednesday – Read James 2:14-26. This is the most misunderstood passage in the letter of James. It is here that it seems James is promoting a work's righteousness. "Faith by itself, if it has no works, is dead." (James 2:17) James is not advocating that we earn our salvation by works alone. Instead, James is emphasizing the importance of **faith** and **works**. Our greatest temptation as a follower of Jesus Christ is to think our salvation by faith is a free ride. Instead, God calls us to an even higher life of service out of love. What one thing can you do for Christ today?

Thursday – Read 2 Corinthians 8:1-4. This reading is the daily scripture from the "Lenten Study Guide: Transforming Lives, Transforming Africa". In 2 Corinthians, Paul writes to the most wealthy, educated church of the day. He reprimands them for their lack of generosity. In this passage, he uses the poorest church of the day as an example of true generosity and faith. Read the devotional in the study guide. What generous gift is God calling you to make? What is keeping you from following God's call to radical generosity through tithing and sacrificial giving?

Friday – Read John 9:1-7. This reading is the daily scripture from the "Lenten Study Guide: Transforming Lives, Transforming Africa". John tells us this story of Jesus healing a man born blind. Jesus' disciples are concerned with why the man was born blind. "Who sinned," they asked. Jesus tells his disciples that no one is to blame. Instead, this is an opportunity for the glory of God to be shone. Read the devotion for the day. Where is God working in your life to give glory? Does God need to open your eyes to see the light of the world? God is waiting to do a great work in you.

Have a great week!

See you next Sunday, February 17, for **Heroes: Isaac – Miracles**

Chapter 2: Abraham - Faith

(2nd in the series on *Heroes of Faith*)

February 10, 2008

The next five sermons will deal with familiar characters from the Old Testament. These stories are about ancient ordinary individuals who through faith become extra-ordinary followers of God. Some modern reader might say these characters have no real relevance to our situation today. Not True. These stories have stood the test of time as again and again they are sited for their heroic faith. In many ways their struggles are our struggles. Their stories are our stories. They are ordinary people with extra-ordinary challenges bringing together life and faith with amazing results.

Each week we will look at the story of a character and how we can learn about our own experience with God. In each case, we will attempt to tie these timeless lessons back to the New Testament and our understanding of Jesus as the Christ. We will be asking the questions: "What does this story tell me about God? What does this story tell me about the relationship between God and humanity? And, how is this story my story?"

Genesis 17: 1-8 - The story of Abraham begins with a promise and a call.

The Promise

First, God promises Abram a new identity. God gives "Abram" a new name. The name of a person represented a person's identity. Abram means, "exalted father". This is a rather strange name for a man with no children. We can assume Abram was well respected in the community and probably good with children. At this particular time in history couples with no children were thought to have no future. Since there was no "social security", an elderly person depended on family to care for their physical and emotional needs. Further, family traditions were very important in the ancient culture. Without children, these traditions would die. In spite of having no children, God has a different plan for Abram and the plan starts with a new name – a new identity. Now "Abram" will be called "Abraham", "father of a multitude".

Second, God promises Abraham a future. Obviously, you cannot be the father of a multitude if you have no children. God promises Abraham a son. This is an incredible promise for a ninety-nine year old man with a barren wife beyond her years of childbearing. But God is in the business of doing incredible things. A son would represent a future for Abraham.

Finally, God promises Abraham security. We know little about Abraham's life in Ur. Surely, he was respected, but how did he make his living and what was the value of his wealth. Wealth and property represented security. God promises Abraham a far off land called Canaan. The land of Canaan was known to the people of Ur. It was thought to be vast and rich, but inhabited by a violent, nomadic tribal people. This extravagant promise was wrought with risk and challenge, yet full of promise and hope. How would God accomplish this?

The Call

God follows this promise with a call to Abraham to leave the land of Ur and travel to the land that God had promised. There are no details to the call or the journey that Abraham was to take. Abraham was simply to act in faith and follow. The word covenant is used to describe this new relationship between God and Abraham - a covenant where God provides and Abraham follows.

Ephesians 1: 3-10 - Our promise and call

As followers of Jesus Christ we are heirs to the same promises given to Abraham. In Christ we have been promised a new identity and secure future. Our **new identity** is found in Jesus Christ who claims us. We are the adopted sons and daughters of God. Our **future** is sheltered under the presence and guidance of God. No longer should we worry about the things of this world, for our existence is not dependent on the things of this world, but rather the things of God. Our **security** is based on a new order. No longer shall the strong and powerful prevail. Love will be the new way of God's people as all creation moves toward completion in Christ.