When we walk with the Lord… A study of the Lives of Abraham and Paul

Let me welcome everyone to the first night of our VBS series. This year our theme is "When we walk with the Lord". In our adult classes for the next three nights we are going to focus on the lives of six of the great figures of the biblical record. Those characters will be Noah, Abraham, David, Daniel, Peter and Paul. Over this series we hope to show you the richness of their lives, and what defined their success as godly men in the Lord's sight, as well as what the collective characteristics were that all of them displayed in their lives… that showed without a doubt that they walked with the Lord.

Tonight we will begin with Abraham, the Hebrew, and the apostle Paul.

The direction that I want to take with this study is pulled from a song that most of us are very familiar with. It is entitled "Trust and Obey", and the first stanza goes like this:

"When we walk with the Lord, in the light of His word, what a glory He sheds on our way, while we do His good will, He abides with us still, and with all who will trust and obey."

Abraham, whose name means "father of many", became the father of the physical nation of Israel and also of the spiritual Israel, the church of the living God. Paul became the great apostle to the Gentiles, carrying the gospel message all over the Roman world… these two men trusted in the Lord and obeyed Him, didn't they? Absolutely they did, and God shed His glory on their way through this life… but in different ways.

Abraham, first called Abram, was a man of the type of character that God, Who sees all of us as we really are, knew was capable of being the physical ancestor of the Savior of mankind, Jesus Christ. While God is the eternal Father of all, Abraham is the spiritual father of all of those who have believed and will believe in the Lord, and is recognized as such in the scriptures.

The apostle Paul, went from being Saul the zealous Pharisee and persecutor of God's people, to preaching the message of the gospel with the courage of a lion to the greatest kings of the earth and to the rest of the civilized world outside of Judea, to both those of high station in life, and to those of low station. He probably had the privilege of leading more souls to Christ, of having more sons and daughters in the gospel… than any other man who has lived.

Both of these men had God's glory shed on them in astounding ways in these things… but both of them had very different lives on the earth, and both had burdens to bear for the Lord.

Abraham was very wealthy and probably never was in physical want for anything he desired, except for an heir. He had to wait until he was very old to realize this need in his life, and he had to trust God to see it done in more ways than just one. Abraham was also blessed with great wealth materially by the Lord simply because he had a great reservoir of spiritual wealth to match it.

Paul, on the other hand, went through many hardships and trials, and was probably more in physical want than in plenty, throughout most of his ministry upon the earth... and it was through this life of hardship that he displayed Jesus Christ and the message of the gospel to the world. Paul lost all he had materially for his faith, including the standing in the Jewish community that he previously had put so much emphasis on, and considered it great gain. He had a physical infirmity that plagued him all of his ministry, and he asked God to take it away three times, and the Lord refused… God told Paul that he had to trust in His grace, which God then shed upon him abundantly in order to see him through every one of the many hardships in his life.

Both of these great men, who led such different lives, had many things in common with one another… They both had great faith, and trusted God's providence in their lives. They were

focused on the eternal promises God had given to them, and not on earthly things, both went through many wanderings in their lives, Paul on missionary journeys and Abraham traveling and living in tents all of his life. Many times neither one had no permanent place to call home. But that did not matter to them… they were pilgrims and servants in this life… this world was not their true home.

When we walk with the Lord it requires great faith and great focus… and it leads to great rewards. Let's look now at some of the details of their lives that displayed these traits of great faith and great focus.

In **Genesis 12**, Abraham then called Abram (his original name meant "exalted father"), was given the promise for the first time. Here he was spoken to by the Lord for the first time at the age of 75. There was a catch though in what the Lord was offering… in order to receive this promise he had to get up and take all that he had and leave his home in Haran, and follow where the Lord would take him… and where that would be, he hadn't a clue. Let's look now at **Genesis 12:1-7** and read the Lord's words to Abram…

Now the Lord had said to Abram: "Get out of your country, from your family And from your father's house, To a land that I will show you. I will make you a great nation; I will bless you And make your name great; And you shall be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, And I will curse him who curses you; And in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed."
So Abram departed as the Lord had spoken to him, and Lot went with him. And Abram was seventy-five years old when he departed from Haran. Then Abram took Sarai his wife and Lot his brother's son, and all their possessions that they had gathered, and the people whom they had acquired in Haran, and they departed to go to the land of Canaan. So they came to the land of Canaan.
Abram passed through the land to the place of Shechem, as far as the terebinth tree of Moreh. And the Canaanites were then in the land. Then the Lord appeared to Abram and said, "To your descendants I will give this land." And there he built an altar to the Lord, who had appeared to him.

Now Abram had been a godly man all of his life, showing a relationship with the Lord previously just by the fact that God picked him out of all the other men available for the promise and we see that he lived up to his character and did as Lord asked him to do. God then led him to the land of Canaan and showed him the land of the promise that would figure so greatly in the future for the nation of Israel… his physical descendants.

In **Genesis 15:1-6** we see the Lord talking further with Abram… and here Abram then begins telling the Lord what troubles him about this promise he is being given…

After these things the word of the Lord came to Abram in a vision, saying, "Do not be afraid, Abram. I am your shield, your exceedingly great reward."
But Abram said, "Lord God, what will You give me, seeing I go childless, and the heir of my house is Eliezer of Damascus?" Then Abram said, "Look, You have given me no offspring; indeed one born in my house is my heir!" And behold, the word of the Lord came to him, saying, "This one shall not be your heir, but one who will come from your own body shall be your heir." Then He brought him outside and said, "Look now toward heaven, and count the stars if you are able to number them." And He said to him, "So shall your descendants be." And he believed in the Lord, and He accounted it to him for righteousness.

Verse 6 tells the whole story for us here… would that this could be written in scripture about all of us when we have a grave concern in our lives. What trust Abram displayed!

Let's begin looking now at Paul. At first he is still known as Saul, and he received his first

calling from the Lord in a much different way. He was in the process of traveling to Damascus with papers from the Jewish High Priest written to the synagogues there. His desire was to imprison any Christians that he found in the city, and to bring them in chains back to Jerusalem. In the book of Acts we see this played out. Let's turn to **Acts 9:1-9** and read how the Lord first called Saul to His following…

Then Saul, still breathing threats and murder against the disciples of the Lord, went to the high priest and asked letters from him to the synagogues of Damascus, so that if he found any who were of the Way, whether men or women, he might bring them bound to Jerusalem. As he journeyed he came near Damascus, and suddenly a light shone around him from heaven. Then he fell to the ground, and heard a voice saying to him, "Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me?" And he said, "Who are You, Lord?" Then the Lord said, "I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting. It is hard for you to kick against the goads." So he, trembling and astonished, said, "Lord, what do You want me to do?" Then the Lord said to him, "Arise and go into the city, and you will be told what you must do." And the men who journeyed with him stood speechless, hearing a voice but seeing no one. Then Saul arose from the ground, and when his eyes were opened he saw no one. But they led him by the hand and brought him into Damascus. And he was three days without sight, and neither ate nor drank.

In the following scriptures we see that Saul spent these three days not only fasting, but also praying, and you know he must have been doing it fervently, having discovered how far out of bounds he was with the Lord… to have the Lord appear to you and accuse you of persecuting Him… that must have shaken Saul to the very foundation of his soul. In **verses 10-22**, we hear the Lord's instructions to a disciple named Ananias about how to deal with Saul. Ananias speaks to the Lord in **verses 13-14** and shows through his comments to the Lord how effective Saul was with his persecutions… he was as zealous for persecuting Christians then, as he was for spreading the gospel later. Saul was the kind of man who did nothing in half measures... and perhaps that was why he was perfect for the Lord's purposes in this particular ministry. In **verses 18-20** we are told what Saul's immediate response was to the Lord upon discovering the truth and being instructed what to do with it…

Acts 9:15-22… " But the Lord said to him, "Go, for he is a chosen vessel of Mine to bear My name before Gentiles, kings, and the children of Israel. For I will show him how many things he must suffer for My name's sake." And Ananias went his way and entered the house; and laying his hands on him he said, "Brother Saul, the Lord Jesus, who appeared to you on the road as you came, has sent me that you may receive your sight and be filled with the Holy Spirit." Immediately there fell from his eyes something like scales, and he received his sight at once; and he arose and was baptized. So when he had received food, he was strengthened. Then Saul spent some days with the disciples at Damascus. Immediately he preached the Christ in the synagogues, that He is the Son of God. Then all who heard were amazed, and said, "Is this not he who destroyed those who called on this name in Jerusalem, and has come here for that purpose, so that he might bring them bound to the chief priests?" But Saul increased all the more in strength, and confounded the Jews who dwelt in Damascus, proving that this Jesus is the Christ.

We see from **verse 18** and also learn later in **Acts 22:16** that part of Ananias' instructions to Saul included him immediately arising and going to be baptized in order to wash away his sins, thus initiating him into the New Covenant of Jesus Christ. Interestingly, God required the same type of obedience from Abram, and in **Genesis 17:24** we see that Abraham (whose name was now changed from Abram in **Genesis 17:5**) was circumcised as was the entire male portion of his household as a sign of the covenant between God and himself. He did this at the age of 99.

It is tragic how simple acts of obedience out of faithfulness like these, baptism for Paul, which is required now for all under the New Covenant of Christ for the cleansing of our sins, and circumcision for Abraham, which was required under the Old Covenant but is no longer required

for us now by God, which are so important to God, are often ignored by the people of our day... as though we can pick and choose how we obey God.

When we walk with the Lord we will comply with His will in all things, not just those of our choosing.

Looking at the initial calling of these two men we see them in two different states. Abraham enjoyed great favor in the sight of the Lord. Paul needed to be changed drastically in order to be of service to God. As a side point I find the name changes for both quite interesting. However different their beginning circumstances were, both of these men did exactly as they were told to do by God and both did so without questioning, complaining and with godliness and humility in their demeanors.

Their great faith was displayed in the manner in which they did what they were commanded to do, even though they did not know what the end of it would be. Abraham had the promise to him, but that was far off, he had no heir and was getting older by the day. Paul had been chosen by the Lord for the work he was to do, but that would also include a life of unbelievable hardship in front of him that would be difficult for even the sturdiest soul to contemplate. However both of them showed their trust in the Lord to the fullest measure, by obeying him and focusing on the ultimate outcome… eternity with the Lord and the rewards he has promised to us there.

Let's look now at the great tests of faith that these two men faced as the lived their lives…

Paul's great test actually was a long sequence of harrowing events leading up to a second imprisonment in Rome eventually execution. Throughout all of the collective events Paul (whose name was eventually changed from Saul in **Acts 13:9**) evidenced the same zeal, devotion, and faithfulness that we spoke of earlier. Starting with **Acts 9** and going forward through the book let's look at some of the scriptures surrounding the initial events in his ministerial life as an apostle of Christ…

The Jews sought to kill him in Damascus.
Acts 9:23-25… "**Now after many days were past, the Jews plotted to kill him. But their plot became known to Saul. And they watched the gates day and night, to kill him. Then the disciples took him by night and let him down through the wall in a large basket."**

Then the disciples don't accept him in Jerusalem.
Acts 9:26… **"And when Saul had come to Jerusalem, he tried to join the disciples; but they were all afraid of him, and did not believe that he was a disciple."**

Next, the Hellenistic Jews seek to kill him in Jerusalem.
Acts 9:29-30… **"And he spoke boldly in the name of the Lord Jesus and disputed against the Hellenists, but they attempted to kill him. When the brethren found out, they brought him down to Caesarea and sent him out to Tarsus."**

All of this goes on and on and these scriptures that we have looked were just in Acts chapter 9!!!

Let's listen to Paul's own words as he describes for us… and defends to the Corinthians… his credentials as a Jew and as an apostle, and goes into the trials he has suffered for the sake of Christ…

2 Corinthians 11:22-28… "Are they Hebrews? So am I. Are they Israelites? So am I. Are they the seed of Abraham? So am I. Are they ministers of Christ?--I speak as a fool--I am more: in labors more abundant, in stripes above measure, in prisons more frequently, in deaths often. From the Jews five times I received forty stripes minus one. Three times I was beaten with rods; once I was stoned; three times I was shipwrecked; a night and a day I have been in the deep; in journeys often, in perils of waters, in perils of robbers, in perils

of my own countrymen, in perils of the Gentiles, in perils in the city, in perils in the wilderness, in perils in the sea, in perils among false brethren; in weariness and toil, in sleeplessness often, in hunger and thirst, in fastings often, in cold and nakedness-- besides the other things, what comes upon me daily: my deep concern for all the churches."

Paul, with this account, vividly in his own words describes the trials that he had encountered to this point. This second letter to the Corinthians was written somewhere around 56 A.D., and we know that he suffered many trials after this time as well. His first Roman imprisonment was around 60 A.D. We know that he was martyred sometime around 67 A.D. during a second imprisonment in Rome.

Notice the last line… after the litany of threatening events he lists… what concerns him daily is not the hardships he is going through or will go through… but the spiritual health and well being of the churches of Jesus Christ… showing truly amazing faith and selflessness. He states elsewhere quite eloquently in the same letter his mindset regarding his circumstances and his faith…

2 Corinthians 4:7-11… "But we have this treasure in earthen vessels, that the excellence of the power may be of God and not of us. We are hard pressed on every side, yet not crushed; we are perplexed, but not in despair; persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed-- always carrying about in the body the dying of the Lord Jesus, that the life of Jesus also may be manifested in our body. For we who live are always delivered to death for Jesus' sake, that the life of Jesus also may be manifested in our mortal flesh."

Paul viewed the gospel as his treasure and it was his duty to share it, no matter what the seeming consequences would be. Throughout every trial he showed his faith in the promises of the Lord. What an amazing man.

Now let's turn our attention again to Abraham… when we left him his greatest trial to that time had been the desire for an heir and his growing older and not seeing it coming about, even though God told him it would.

After demonstrating a certain level of impatience with the situation and trying to help God out by producing a son through Sarah's handmaiden Hagar in **Genesis 16**, we see Isaac born to Abraham in **Genesis 21**. **Genesis 21:5** states, **"Now Abraham was one hundred years old when his son Isaac was born to him."** What a thrill this must have been for both Abraham and Sarah… God's promise was finally manifesting itself to them! That trial for them was over… and it must have been quite hard on them with all those long years of waiting coupled with their age considerations, but a new trial would surpass even that one, in way I am sure Abraham never anticipated.

In **Genesis 22:1-2** we see that God spoke to Abraham and asked him to do something that would rip the heart out of any parent… **"Now it came to pass after these things that God tested Abraham, and said to him, "Abraham!" And he said, "Here I am." Then He said, "Take now your son, your only son Isaac, whom you love, and go to the land of Moriah, and offer him there as a burnt offering on one of the mountains of which I shall tell you."**

I am not sure how anyone would react to instructions like this, even coming from the Lord. We all would like to think that we would automatically do anything that God told us to do, especially if He chose to do so by speaking directly to us. But something like this… I am a parent and I love my son… and he is my only child. This would almost kill me to even have to contemplate it.

But look at Abraham's reaction in **verse 3**… "**So Abraham rose early in the morning and saddled his donkey, and took two of his young men with him, and Isaac his son; and he split the wood for the burnt offering, and arose and went to the place of which God had**

told him."

Now let's look at **<u>verses 9-10</u>… "Then they came to the place of which God had told him. And Abraham built an altar there and placed the wood in order; and he bound Isaac his son and laid him on the altar, upon the wood. And Abraham stretched out his hand and took the knife to slay his son."**

Here is Abraham with his only son stretched out to die, the son he had waited so long for, the son of the promise… his heir… and he really is about to do what God has told him to do. His faith must have been incredible. God certainly knew that it was so… and he stopped Abraham's hand from completing the act by instructing "**the Angel of the Lord**" to intervene by speaking to Abraham in **verses 11&12**.

The "**Angel of the Lord**" then in **<u>verses 15-18</u>** tells us what God had to say to Abraham about this incredible display of faith by his servant… **"Then the Angel of the Lord called to Abraham a second time out of heaven, and said: "By Myself I have sworn, says the Lord, because you have done this thing, and have not withheld your son, your only son-- blessing I will bless you, and multiplying I will multiply your descendants as the stars of the heaven and as the sand which is on the seashore; and your descendants shall possess the gate of their enemies. In your seed all the nations of the earth shall be blessed, because you have obeyed My voice."**

Abraham offered Isaac willingly; he did not seeking to withhold anything from the Lord his God… just as God would later offer up Jesus for all of us.

Abraham's faithfulness is described in the great biblical chapter on the subject of faith, **Hebrews 11**. In **<u>Hebrews 11:17-19</u>** through the inspiration of the Holy Spirit some 2,000 years later the mind of Abraham on this occasion is shown to us with these words… "**By faith Abraham, when he was tested, offered up Isaac, and he who had received the promises offered up his only begotten son, of whom it was said, "In Isaac your seed shall be called," concluding that God was able to raise him up, even from the dead, from which he also received him in a figurative sense."** This an amazing display of faith in God, at a time when Abraham had no idea what God had in mind. How faithful, how loyal, how trusting… it truly boggles our minds. No wonder God made him the spiritual father of all who would believe on Him.

As we conclude looking at the trials faced by these two men, we see again the different circumstances of each… and the same response from both… but then what else could you expect but that kind of consistency by two men devoted to walking with the Lord? When we walk with the Lord it takes consistency such as evidenced by Abraham and Paul to do so

Now that we have seen the faith of these two great souls through the lens of their trials, let's study for the last few moments the rewards of walking with the Lord that they both have shared in and will share in.

Turning back to **<u>Hebrews 11:13-16</u>** we read these words given to us by inspiration about Abraham and those of his age that showed the faith that he did… **"These all died in faith, not having received the promises, but having seen them afar off were assured of them, embraced them and confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth. For those who say such things declare plainly that they seek a homeland. And truly if they had called to mind that country from which they had come out, they would have had opportunity to return. But now they desire a better, that is, a heavenly country. Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God, for He has prepared a city for them."**

The reception of a city made by God is to be Abraham's… and belongs also to all of those who walked in the kind of faith that he displayed… in the age that was before the establishment of the kingdom of God. In **Hebrews 12** we see that Abraham is included as one of the many in the

"**great cloud of witnesses**" held up to us… so as to encourage us to faithfulness in our time. No greater compliment could be given to a servant of the Lord than to be recognized by Him as a pattern for others to follow.

In **Luke 16:22,** we see our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ refer to the station that Abraham now holds in Paradise through the story He relates to us of The Rich Man and Lazarus. Jesus again in **John 8:39**, held Abraham up to the Jews as a pattern for them, which they ultimately rejected. What an honor is bestowed by the Son of Man upon the spiritual father of His people.

Now for the last time we turn to the apostle Paul, whom I know is sitting right now in Paradise, waiting for the Great Day of Judgment when the Lord Jesus will return to claim those who claimed Him. He will have many accolades waiting for him on that day… think of all the souls who have been influenced by Paul for the furtherance of the gospel and the kingdom of Christ… and think on how many are still being influenced by him today through his example to us and his writings!

We have preserved for us in Paul's own words, what his thoughts were shortly before his death. We read in **2 Timothy 4:6-8** this statement… **"For I am already being poured out as a drink offering, and the time of my departure is at hand. I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. Finally, there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will give to me on that Day, and not to me only but also to all who have loved His appearing."**

How beautiful these words are, how touching, and how encouraging they should be for us. We know that Paul, whose life was so hard, looked forward to his death. In **Philippians 1:21-23** we see that he thought of death as "**gain**" and his departure to be with Christ as "**far better**" than life on the earth.

His life and his mindset towards his reward, and the guiding principles behind his faithfulness are best summed up in a passage from **2 Corinthians 4** where Paul makes the most amazing statement in **verses 17-18**, "**For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, is working for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory, while we do not look at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen. For the things which are seen are temporary, but the things which are not seen are eternal."**

And there we have it… the gist of this entire study rolled into that one passage of scripture. When we walk with the Lord, we keep our eyes focused on the eternal… on the heavenly country as it is put in **Hebrews 11:16**… not on the things of this earth. We walk with the Lord by complete faith and trust in Him. And as we have seen… what a glory He sheds on our way… all the way to our home with Him. Amen.

Thank you for your attendance tonight… it is my sincere hope that this has lifted you up in your walk with the Lord.