

The Gospel Witness

PUBLISHED WEEKLY

IN THE INTEREST OF JARVIS STREET BAPTIST
CHURCH, TORONTO, AND OF EVANGELICAL TRUTH.

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PASTOR AND EDITOR

"I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ."—Romans 1:16.

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The Jarvis Street Pulpit

ABRAHAM'S FAITH.

A Sermon by the Pastor, preached in Jarvis Street Baptist Church, Sunday Morning, August 13th, 1922, and stenographically reported.

"Abraham believed God." Romans 4:3.

OUR text brings before us a character to whom history ascribes a most unusual distinction. It is, I think, evident from the record that Abraham was a man of great natural qualities; he was a man of great personal force; a commanding personality, who would be sure to be influential in any sphere in which he chose to move. He was a man of initiative—a pioneer, a pathfinder; a man who did not hesitate to adventure great enterprises; a man, indeed, of outstanding natural ability. Wherever he went he was accorded a position of prominence, as a prince among men; he was a man of great patience, of perseverance, and of a benevolent spirit.

And yet, it is not for these things he was distinguished. His outstanding characteristic was this: that he believed God. It is that fact which gave to Abraham an abiding place in history. He is the supreme example to all believers; he believed God. Volumes are wrapped up in that simple statement. He was enabled to go to the very Centre and Source of things and find rest for his soul, in the only place where rest is permanently obtainable: he believed God.

If I were able this morning to say nothing else, but so to emphasize the text as to impress it upon your mind, and send its message ringing through your hearts through all the week, it would be worth your while to spend a little time just listening to the text itself. "What saith the scripture?"—the inspired record of God's unfolding of his purposes? "What saith the scripture" of the man whom God chose to be the builder of a nation, to whom he should commit the Divine oracles? Just this: "Abraham believed God." An that, my dear friends is still the distinctive feature of the children of God. Faith is the grace which differentiates the Christian from all others. He

has found his way to the Spring; he has discovered the path to Throne. To him it has been given to appreciate that which is abiding and he has staked his interests for time and for eternity upon the word of "God who cannot lie." "We brethren," said the Apostle, "as Israel was, are the children of promise." "Know ye therefore that they who are of faith, the same are the children of Abraham."

I.—I want, therefore, this morning to subject this statement to a little examination, that we may discover **What The Characteristics of Abraham's Faith Really Were.** In what sense did Abraham believe in God as his contemporaries did not? What was the inherent quality of Abraham's faith, which made him different from all others, and which put upon him this signal honour of making him the father of faithful?

In the first place, Abraham's faith was a **faith which was not discouraged by human impotence.** Such a man as Abraham must have had an introspective habit of mind. He was not the sort of man who would blindly walk in any way. He must have turned his thoughts often upon himself. I do not think that it was left to the great men of our day to begin to ask questions. Abraham must have learned how to enquire about things; and when the great promise was received from the Lord, which predicted the coming into his life of a blessing which was humanly impossible, Abraham must instantly have turned his thought upon himself, and must have begun to enquire how the things could be. But no sooner had he done so than his mind was instantly directed back toward God. Abraham would have said, "I have here no ground for confidence: no human resource; no promise of whatever of blessing within the realm of my own power." But instantly, his heart went back to God, and "Abraham believed God"; and he said, "If God says so, the thing shall be."

And, that is the first step in the direction of true faith. Whatever be the content of the promise; whatever the great desideratum upon which our hearts are set; whatever the character of our spiritual expectation, we have not learned the alphabet of true faith until we have learned to turn our thought entirely away from ourselves to God. It is God who is to be believed. In spite of our poverty; in spite of our weakness; in spite of the moral and spiritual impotence of the natures of ours, we are to believe God, simply because "He is God, beside Him there is none else."

Then further, Abraham's faith found **no circumstantial encouragement.** There was nothing in his surroundings to confirm his faith. There was no probability of the promise being fulfilled, circumstantially. His faith lifted him out of, and beyond, his circumstances into another realm. He lived up there with God. Down here there is no single circumstance to lend probability to the realization of desire; the thing is utterly beyond all possibility of fulfilment. We need to learn that lesson. Our faith needs frequently to be tried; for often in that which we are pleased to call faith, there is a large element of circumstantial trust. It is easy to pray for rain on a cloudy day; it is easy to believe the Lord will provide when already we hear the sound of the reapers, and we know the crops are good; it is easy to believe that somebody will be converted when we hear the news already the man has begun to pray. When there are certain circumstantial encouragements, some of us say, "Ah! I have great faith." It is not faith at all. Faith that is faith indeed, is independent of

circumstances, absolutely. Faith that is faith indeed, relies upon God, and upon God alone. Such was the faith of Abraham: he believed God.

Another thing to be said about Abraham's faith is that it found no inspiration in precedent. There was nothing in Abraham's own experience to justify his own expectation. Nor was there anything in the whole field of observation; nor was there anything in the records of history. God, if you please, proposed to do a "new thing,"—something that had never been done "under the sun." And yet, although there never had been such a blessing, "Abraham believed God." He anticipated the word of prophecy: "Behold, I will do a new thing."

Why should not God do new things? Perhaps there is a man or woman here this morning who finds himself, or herself, in an unique situation, utterly peculiar. You have conferred with all your friends; but you say, "I cannot find anybody who has been exactly where I am." It would be surprising if you could not find some precedent in scripture. But even if you cannot, my point this morning is, that we are to look to God as the Author of things; as the great Originator; as the One who can do what nobody else can do, and what nobody else ever has done; as the One who can do, if He will, what even He Himself has never done before. "Abraham believed God." But what precedents we have; what inspiration ought we to find for faith! It seems to me it would be scarcely possible for us to find ourselves in an absolutely new situation. Read the eleventh chapter of Hebrews, where the roll is called of the outstanding believers of antiquity. Consider the variety of their experience; and I think most of us will find there some food for faith. But I remind you that even if you cannot; or if your mind be so clouded that you cannot understand and interpret your own circumstances; when you cannot see for all the fogs and mists of earth, still dare to believe God, whether there be any precedent or not; for God can come into your life and do the thing that never was done before—if so be, you have a promise from Him that thus it shall be.

Then, I would remind you further that Abraham believed in the possibility of a blessing coming to him, which was contrary to the course of nature. If the men of science of that day—such as they were—had been consulted, I feel sure they would have called Abraham a fool for his pains. They would have said, "Abraham, we are here to tell you that such a thing never was done in the history of the world. And furthermore, we, who have read the laws of God in the works of God; who have the wisdom to discern in what directions God works, and His methods of accomplishing His purposes—we affirm, not only that the thing has not been, but that it cannot be; that all nature is against you, and that the laws of nature are fixed and inexorable, and that it is useless to pray against them." Abraham would have said, "I know all that; I have taken account of all these impossibilities on the natural plane, but my faith does not rest there; I believe in the supernatural; I believe in a God who is above nature. I believe God, and if God says it shall be, He is the source of all law—"In Him we live, and move, and have our being,"—and if He so orders, then the laws of nature must be suspended; but God will have His way."

And, there is no true faith that does not believe in the supernatural. The conception of the universe as a great machine in which God has imprisoned Himself; whose laws inexorably operate in such a way that God Himself cannot suspend them—that is not the Biblical conception, that conception of God is not found in Divine revelation.

It is a man's dream of God; but it is not God's revelation of Himself. We are to believe God.

What then was Abraham's faith? It was simply based on divine revelation. Abraham would never have imagined such a thing for himself; would never for a moment have dreamed of the possibility of his having a son—but "he believed God," because God had said it. And his faith was simply the result of a spiritual illumination enabling him to apprehend that God really is, and what He is. And while Abraham would give all glory to God for the world about him and the stars above him; yet, to him, God was a transcendent personality Who was something more than all His works, and Who was sovereign over all the works of His hands—so that if God promised it must be so.

God give us then the faith of Abraham—no one else can! "Canst thou by searching find out God? Canst thou find out the Almighty unto perfection?" Canst thou by the exercise of thine own reason and imagination sketch a picture of God? He infinitely transcends our human understanding; and only when in the greatness of His grace, He condescends to unfold His purposes to His children, can we see Him, and believe Him, and trust in Him.

II.—I now desire to point out **Some Directions in which a Similar Faith May be Exercised in This Present Day.** The faith of Abraham is the faith we all need. We need above all things to be taught to believe God.

I venture to say that the Christian revelation, the Scripture itself requires just such faith as this, in order to its true understanding. I shall not quarrel with the man who depends upon his scholarship for the understanding of this Book. I am not at all surprised that he should discover in it difficulties that not only challenge his reason but which so transcend his reason that he is bound to reject it; not that it is against reason, but because it is above reason. This Bible is a supernatural Book from beginning to end; and no man can believe the Scripture unless he has, elementarily, at least, the very faith of Abraham.

I remember that in a certain discussion we had in a great meeting not very many years ago about this Book, some man rose and said in effect: "Do those who profess to believe in the Divine inspiration and authority of the Scriptures, really consider the difficulties involved? How is the Infinite Spirit really to speak to men?" And he thought he had propounded a great question. There came to my mind instantly a Scripture, "Who hath made man's mouth? or who maketh the dumb or deaf, or the seeing, or the blind? have not I the Lord?" As though God should say, "Can I make a man to speak, and yet be unable to speak Myself? Can I make a man to write, and yet be unable to write Myself? Can I make a man who is able to communicate his thoughts to another mind, and be unable Myself to communicate My thoughts to the creatures I have made?" If God be but a Law, as say the Wise if He is but an impersonal Force, then there is great difficulty; but we believe God, there is no difficulty in believing that He has written a letter to His children, is there? The difficulty would be to believe that He would not do it. "Like as a father pitieth his children, so the Lord pitieth them that fear Him."

And this Book in the very first verse challenges us to believe. you can believe the first verse of the Bible, you can believe eve

word in it to the last word in Revelation. Listen! "In the beginning"—Were you there? Who was there? Who knows anything about "the beginning"? "In the beginning, God created the heaven and the earth." The first verse of Genesis implicitly claims Divine inspiration for itself, by whatever hand it was written; for only God could speak of "the beginning." Yield yourselves to the challenge of that first verse and like Abraham say, "Amen,—God has spoken; I believe God!" If you believe that, you will have no difficulty with the rest. I do not mean at once; but in the process of the discipline of life, and by the teaching of the Spirit of God, you will come to understand. You will have no difficulty, for instance, with the doctrine of the Virgin Birth, if you believe God. There is nothing more difficult there than that which was involved in Abraham's faith. The fact is, the difficulty that is inseparable from the supernatural character of the Scripture, and the supernatural character of the birth of Christ—the supernatural character of His birth and mission—that difficulty always stands in the way of human reason, and we can never surmount it until we believe God—but when we believe God, it is gone.

Very well then, is there an unconverted man here this morning? Can I find a bankrupt soul here this morning? Can I find a man whose past is but a desolate wilderness? Can I find a man this morning who has no power of will; no strength of purpose; no hope of ever recovering himself from the ashes of the past in which sin has destroyed and buried all his holiest expectations? Is there a man here who says, "It is no use, sir; I have been to church, I used to go to church regularly, but because I found no help in the church I abandoned it." We are glad to have people coming here who have not been to church for years. It is not unusual now for us to have people in the congregation who say they have not been in any church for years. Possibly there are some here this morning. You have turned your back upon the church, and say you have found no help in organized Christianity at all; and you are disposed to raise all kinds of objections. I want to tell you, my dear friends, that your hope is in God. Can you believe God? Can you believe God as revealed in Jesus Christ? "Let not your heart be troubled," said Jesus, "ye believe in God"—in some vague infinite Spirit yonder—"Ye believe in God, believe also in me. Let the faith which you have reposed in a God who is sovereign in distant realms, infinitely remote from human experience; which you have reposed in an infinite Omnipotence somewhere—let that faith now be transferred to Me. Ye believe in God, believe also in me, for I am God, manifest in the flesh."

If that be so, let us go back to the first verse of our Book again: "In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth. And the earth was without form, and void; and darkness was upon the face of the deep." Are you any more hopeless than that, my brother? Is life any blacker; more destitute than that? "without form, and void,"—no plan or purpose; simply a human wreck—that is all that is left. Very well, then, believe God! For "If any man be in Christ, he is a new creation; old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new." He can make you over again; He can give you a new heart; He can enfranchise your will; and clarify your judgment; and purify your conscience; and cleanse your memory; and make you a new man in Himself—if you believe God. That is what it is to be saved—just to believe that Jesus died to pay our debt; and that by the power of His own grace, He can effect a complete transformation

of our lives, at last "presenting us faultless before the presence of His glory with exceeding joy."

Let me now say this further word to you who are believers: **We should exercise this faith of Abraham in behalf of others**, because that is what Abraham did. He believed that contrary to the course of nature; in defiance of circumstances; in spite of the unprecedented character of the promise, Abraham believed that God would put in his home a son; that He would create a new personality; that out of death life should come. The challenge—I do not like that word, let me say the call of the word of God to all believers is to give God His proper place, and believe that He can bless the church with spiritual children that He can bring His sons from far to sit down at "the marriage supper of the Lamb."

I know how indifferent people are to religious appeals. I am quite aware that we are living in a day when men seem to be "lovers of pleasure more than lovers of God." I do not ignore the fact that the word of God is held by many in contempt. I am prepared to acknowledge that there are multitudes of the Lord's children who are at their wits' end to know what to do; and that the history of this Old Testament is being repeated when you say that the people of God have fallen upon evil times: for when political foes were multiplied; and the prestige of the kingdom was diminishing, and things were growing from bad to worse,—what did God's people do? They did everything but the right thing—they went down to Egypt for help; they sought by organized political methods to postpone the inevitable disaster due to their unbelief. And yet there was but one way out of their difficulties, and that was to turn their hearts back to God; to believe God.

And I confess that in our day, I despair of making things better by the laying out of tennis courts, and the introduction of all sorts of allurements into the church. I have no expectation that men will be saved by the pulpit accommodating itself—if I may say it without offence—to the carnal standards of the unbelieving in the pew; by seeking to please and to persuade; I have no hope whatever that by that means souls are going to be saved. For when a soul is saved, there is a new creation; when a soul is really converted, God touches that soul with His own Almighty finger, and breathes into that soul "the breath of life"—and there is no substitute for that.

"And, behold, there were very many in the open valley," said Ezekiel when he went into the valley of dry bones—"and, lo, they were very dry. And he said unto me, Son of man, can these bones live?" That is the supreme question. Can a soul dead in trespasses and sins be made to live? We must answer, "No," unless we believe God. But if we believe God, then we may believe that the worst sinners in Toronto may become the best of saints; that the most indifferent people may become the most zealous for the Lord.

Our only hope is in God; and therefore, let us honour Him with our faith, and patiently wait for our Isaacs. Abraham had to wait a long time. Very likely every day Abraham spread the promise of the Lord before Him, saying to Him, "I am waiting; I am waiting; I am still waiting for the fulfilment of the promise." And at last God answered him, and the child of the promise was born. I quote it again, "We then, brethren, as Isaac was, are the children of promise. We are here because God promised we should be here; and others will be here because God has promised. That is why we are meeting Mon

day, Wednesday and Saturday—and I trust every day bowing our knees before God, saying to the Lord God Almighty, "Do as thou hast said."

I shall carry it just this one step further, and I have done. **Our outlook should be wider than our own church, and our own family, and our own city, and our own country.**

I shall never forget—I may perhaps have told you before, but if I have, I repeat it—I shall never forget some years ago driving through the country with the late Dr. John G. Paton. We were alone together talking about the things of God; and as we passed a certain house I pointed to it, and told him of a young lady who had been recently converted in that home, and baptized; although her father was a professed infidel. She had had no help at home, but she had been really converted. I told Dr. Paton about it in a few words. He turned to me full of interest. And he said, "She really believed on the Lord Jesus, did she?" I said, "Yes." "She was really converted, was she?" I said, "Yes." He said, "Praise God"—and, literally tears of joy rolled down his cheeks. He did not know her, and never expected to see her; but, like his Master, he had a heart big enough to love all the fallen sons of men, and shared the gladness of the angels over a sinner repenting.

So ought our thought and interest to extend to China, where our Brother Barham is going, and where Brother Cecil-Smith and others whom we love have gone; to India, where we have members of this church labouring for the Lord; to South America; to Africa; and Europe; to the Islands of the sea; and to all parts of our own country. Can we not vicariously exercise the faith of Abraham? Can we not believingly pray for a world-wide revival?

Indeed, looking upon this old and war-scourged, sin-cursed earth of ours, is there any hope for it? Yes; I believe there is in "that blessed hope and the glorious appearing of the great God and our Saviour Jesus Christ." But may there not be some great spiritual visitation before then? May we not see religious revivals here, there, yonder, even to the uttermost parts of the earth? Can you believe in a religious revival in the heart of Europe, for instance; in Russia; in rationalistic Germany? Can we believe? Is there any chance of it? Absolutely none; unless we believe God. God can bring it about—nothing is impossible to Him.

Therefore, I call you in the name of the Lord, as you pray, thanking God for the resurrection of which we ourselves have been the subjects, for the new creation which we ourselves have experienced; and looking out upon our own families, and upon our own neighbours and friends—our fellow-citizens in this country, and then even to the uttermost parts of the earth—let us pray with a new faith such as Abraham had!

What was Abraham's faith? "In thee"—and as yet he had no son—"shall all nations of the earth be blessed." And faith of the quality of Abraham's will pray and believe for the blessing of God to come upon all nations. How sad to hear men talk of God as though He were no more than man. What was Abraham's conception of God? He thought of God as one who could and would bless all nations of the earth; Who was over all, blessed forever! And O the wonder of it, that the blessing should come upon the whole world through him, through his seed—a lonely man, without a son! And God said, "Abraham, I will make you a channel of blessing to all nations of the earth." And Abraham

ABOUT THE GOSPEL WITNESS.

Our announcement of last Saturday in the newspapers met with a great response. Applications for this number of The Witness have come from over the country, and, at the time of going to press, letters are still pouring in. This is to answer the many inquiries contained in these letters.

First: We are having an extra supply of this number printed, and additional copies can be obtained at six cents each. It costs five cents a copy to print them, and one cent to mail them, not counting the cost of envelope and labor. But we have supplied the first issue at five cents each "under cost" to introduce The Gospel Witness. If the message of this number is of value to you, invite those who send for additional copies to co-operate with us, where possible, by sending a small contribution; but in any event all orders for copies at six cents each will be filled.

Secondly: Many have enquired the cost of The Witness per year. Our readers will understand that we carry no advertisements, and have as yet no subscription list. The cost of publication is met by special contribution. We hesitate to assume an obligation. But the actual cost of printing and mailing would be a little over \$3.00 a year per copy. This seems a high price when compared with the price of established periodicals, but we cannot, as yet, produce it for less. The Witness has received such a welcome that we feel its future is assured; and on consideration we have decided to offer The Gospel Witness from now until the end of February for \$1.50. The message of this week is unusually long. The sermon in the regular issue, and which is mentioned stenographically reported, will occupy the first six pages.

To the ministers to whom this Witness comes we intend to send The Witness weekly until the middle of September as sample copies, by which time they will be able to judge of the paper's usefulness.

We hereby express our great appreciation of the hosts of correspondents who, in sending their applications for this number, have expressed a keen interest in the work of Jarvis Street Church, and their endorsement of the things we stand for. God bless you, every one!

If this message is used to bring blessing to any, and if its teaching meets the need of those who read it, a note to the church office informing us of the fact would greatly encourage us in our work.

Note: The length of the message of this number has made it necessary to hold over other important material until next week.

The Church Calendar

For the week beginning Sunday, Aug. 20th, 1922.

SUNDAY

- 10.00—Prayer Service in the Church Parlor, Mr. George Greenway.
- 10.30—Communion Service.
- 11.00—Public Worship. The Pastor will preach.
- 3.00—The Bible School will meet.
- 2.30—Open-Air Work with the Gospel Car, starting from Jarvis Street Church.
- 5.30—Open-Air Service on Gerrard Street.
- 6.00—Prayer Meeting in Church Parlor.
- 7.00—Public Worship. The Pastor will preach.

MONDAY, WEDNESDAY and SATURDAY—8.00—Prayer Service.
**THURSDAY—8.00—Open Air Service, Gerrard St. gate of
Gardens.**

The Parliament St. Branch, 250 Parliament St. Sunday: Bible School, conducted by Mr. W. I. McKay, 7.00: The