

The Church, part 15

(Hebrews 11; Ephesians 3)

(preached Pine Grove 10/1/17; Sunday PM)

Introduction

This is a picture of the Armagosa Desert in Nevada..

As people made their way out of the dust bowl of the midwest in the 1930s, many headed west to California...

Well, the state of Nevada was in between them and California and unfortunately much of Nevada was desert...

One particularly dangerous desert was the Armagosa desert in southern Nevada...

It was a hot and dry piece of land that offered little relief to travelers...

Well in the middle of the desert was an old well pump that stood at the halfway point of the road that led through the region...

Attached to the well pump was a tin can...

Inside the tin can was the following note..

***“This pump is all right as of June 1932. I put a new sucker washer into it and it ought to last five years. But the washer dries out and the pump has got to be primed. Under the white rock I buried a bottle of water, out of the sun and cork end up. There’s enough water in it to prime the pump, but not if you drink some first. Pour about one-fourth and let her soak to wet the leather. Then pour in the rest medium fast and pump like crazy. You’ll git water. The well has never run dry. Have faith. When you git watered up, fill the bottle and put it back like you found it for the next feller.
(signed) Desert Pete.
P.S. Don’t go drinking the water first. Prime the pump with it and you’ll git all you can hold***

Man, what a picture of faith, right?

Here you are in the hot and dry desert dying of thirst...

You come upon this well pump, and you find a note that tells you what to do...

The instructions tell you where a bottle of water is buried, but it warns you not to drink the bottle of water but to use it to prime the pump...

And the question then becomes...

It a bird in the hand more really more valuable than 2 in the bush?

Should you just drink the water and get your fill?

Or should you do what Desert Pete suggests and have faith that the water will prime the well and give you enough water to fill all your containers to finish the trip across the desert?

I am sure it would be a difficult choice, yet Desert Pete chose the right phrase when he told the traveler to “have faith.”

That is what faith is...

Faith is being sure of what you hope for and certain of what you do not see...

In this case, faith calls you to be sure of the fact that the well will work and to be certain that there is plenty of water at the bottom of the well...

And faith calls you to risk the water and have faith that it will produce more water...

Well, that is a great illustration of biblical faith...

And we find a biblical definition of faith in Hebrews 11:1...

***Now faith is the [a]assurance of things [b]hoped for,
the [c]conviction of things not seen.***

In other words, faith hopes in things that aren't apparent to the naked eye....

And faith believes beyond what the naked eye can see...

Faith is the foundation of Christianity...

And faith is also a characteristic of an effective church..

Churches that please the Lord are churches of great faith...

They trust the Lord to provide for their needs and plan and act in ways that show their faith is in God and not in man...

Now, we have spent some time on what I have called 9 characteristics of effective churches...

You can see this list on the screen...

We have talked about 6 of these characteristics and tonight we come to characteristic #7 of an effective church...

And that is a courageous faith...

WE often think of great faith on a personal level, but the church of the Lord Jesus Christ must also be a group of people of great faith..

WE must be a people who are assured of things we can't see and we must be a people who have a trust in God that goes beyond what we think is possible..

Listen to what John MacArthur writes, God has not called his church to be "*a bird in the hand is worth two in the bush*" kind of organization. Churches should not be afraid of moving forward with new ideas and ministries. A church can have all sorts of great plans, but if that church can't trust God to supply the manpower and money for those ideas, they are useless. If God is calling your church to do something, do it, -even if you dont have the money yet. God has never had a problem getting money for something that he wants done."

Those are strong words to encourage our faith, but I also listen to the word of God to encourage us to great and courageous faith as well..

So let's look at two passages in the Bible that help us understand some qualities of courageous faith...

And I want us to think about these on a personal level but also as a church...

Pine Grove is called to exercise courageous faith as the body of Christ..

Therefore, let us some keys to courageous faith, and we will begin in Hebrews 11, which not only defines what faith is, but also gives examples of great faith...

Therefore, let us look to this chapter to grab a few keys to courageous faith...

We will begin in Hebrews 11:4..

4 By faith Abel offered to God a better sacrifice than Cain, through which he obtained the testimony that he was righteous, God testifying [f]about his gifts, and through [g]faith, though he is dead, he still speaks. 5 By faith Enoch was taken up so that he would not see death; and he was not found because God took him up; for he obtained the witness that before his being taken up he was pleasing to God. 6 And without faith it is impossible to please Him, for he who comes to God must believe that He is and that He is a rewarder of those who seek Him. 7 By faith Noah, being warned by God about things not yet seen, [h]in reverence prepared an ark for the salvation of his household, by which he condemned the world, and became an heir of the righteousness which is according to faith.

What you see in verse 4-7 are 3 examples of people great faith...

Abel, whose faith was shown in the fact that he brought the best of his flock, while Cain only brought the best of his produce...

Enoch, whose faith was demonstrated in his his incredible trust in God which led him to walk close to God..

Noah, whose faith was demonstrated in building a boat before it had ever rained a drop from heaven...

Then we have a 4th and 5th examples of great faith in verses 8-12...

Verse 8...

8 By faith Abraham, when he was called, obeyed [i]by going out to a place which he was to receive for an inheritance; and he went out, not knowing where he was going. 9 By faith he lived as an alien in the land of promise, as in a foreign land, dwelling in tents with Isaac and Jacob, fellow heirs of the same promise; 10 for he was looking for the city which has foundations, whose architect and builder is God. 11 By faith even Sarah herself received [j]ability to conceive, even beyond the proper time of life, since she considered Him faithful who had promised. 12 Therefore there was born even of one man, and him as good as dead [k]at that, as many descendants as the

stars of heaven in number, and innumerable as the sand which is by the seashore.

Abraham left his home even though he didn't know where God was calling him to go...

Then his wife Sarah demonstrated her faith by believing God's promise that she would have a son even beyond the normal years of giving birth...

Now, what is the common thread so far of these examples of faith that can help us as a church?

Well, I would simply say this...

Courageous faith acts even when it can't see the end result.

Abel didn't know the end result of bringing his offering to God, but he had obviously been told to bring an animal, which he did and God was pleased with his act of faith..

Enoch didn't know the end result of living according to the law of God, but he lived by faith and God was pleased with his life of faith...

Noah didn't know the end result of building a boat, but God was pleased by his act of faith...

Abraham didn't know the end result of leaving his country and following the Lord, but God was pleased with his act of faith...

Sarah didn't know the end result of having a baby in her old age, but God was pleased with the act of her faith...

And sometimes as a church, we don't know the end result of the choices we make here, but we often need to act anyway, begging to be pleased with our act of faith...

Look, I am a results oriented type of person...

I like to know what to expect before I head into a situation, but sometimes that is impossible and sometimes its possible but God doesn't want us to know...

Instead he wants us to obey and act and simply trust him with the end result...

I can assure you that I or Tonya or the two girls had no idea of the end result of selling our home and our car and 5 acres of land...

Then piling up in a 10 year old Suburban and driving out to California..

And that is not an example of great faith because Tonya and I would often look at each other and even say out loud, “What in the world are we doing?”

Yet, guess what?

God was pleased with that act of faith and He rewarded us by not only keeping out there long enough to finish seminary but to even bless us while we were there...

We never went hungry...

We never did without...

We provided well for our kids while we were there and the Lord even saw fit to give us a 3rd child while we were there, along with 6 trips back home on a plane...

And blessing upon blessing...

And I can assure that we had no idea what the future would hold we we packed ourselves in a Suburban and started driving west...

But faith doesn't need to see the end to act...

Courageous faith just takes the first step even wen nit can't see the final one.

A second key to courageous faith is found a little farther down in verses 23-26...

2. Courageous faith is inspired by a heavenly reward and not earthly comfort.

23 By faith Moses, when he was born, was hidden for three months by his parents, because they saw he was a beautiful child; and they were not afraid of the king's edict. 24 By faith Moses, when he had grown up, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter, 25 choosing rather to endure ill-treatment with the people of God than to enjoy the passing pleasures of sin, 26 considering the reproach of [q]Christ greater riches than the treasures of Egypt; for he was looking to the reward.

Moses was an interesting character in the Bible..

God spared his life as an infant..

God put him in Pharaoh's house where he received a great education..

God then put him with the Israelites in their slavery...

If anyone had a right to say that they had a bad childhood, it would have been Moses..

Almost killed as a kid..

Raised by ungodly people in an ungodly society...

Worked as a slave...

Yet, God used those circumstances to mold Moses into a great man of faith...

And the reason that Moses was such a success is what we see at the end of verse 26...

Moses lived his life, not with an eye on the rewards of earth, but rather with an eye on the rewards in eternity...

You see, courageous faith comes when we get our eyes off the world in front of us and on the world that is coming...

Moses could have stayed in the house of Pharaoh forever, where his every need would have been met...

But he chose to give up the comforts of Pharaoh's home for a life of slavery with his people...

Now, most people would call him crazy for making such a decision...

"Moses, you are giving up riches for hard work?"

“You are crazy.”

Yet Moses knew that a life of ease is often filled with sin and lack of dependence upon God...

So he chose the “hard way” because suffering way the way of Christ...

Now what can Moses’ faith teach us as a church?

Sometimes the hard way is the right way...

There are churches that build up large bank accounts as a way of securing their future success...

And though it may create an easy few years for them in terms of finances, it can often lead to a lack of dependence upon the lord to provide...

It can often lead to less faith and more doubt...

Sometimes, the hard decisions...

Sometimes the decisions that make less sense from a human standpoint...

Sometimes the decisions that lead to suffering and hardship...

Sometimes, often times, these decisions are the right ones because Christ chose the hard way in life and God rewarded Him...

And the motivation to choose the road less travelled is because that road leads to heavenly rewards while the easy road only leads to earthly comfort...

Moses' faith was motivated by heavenly rewards, and the road to heaven is narrow and hard and less travelled and often filled with suffering...

And the church's faith must also be driven by heaven's reward and not the comforts of this world...

A third key to courageous faith is also found in the life of Moses and the people of Israel...

3. Courageous faith takes risks..

Let's keep reading in Hebrews 11:27-29...

27 By faith he left Egypt, not fearing the wrath of the king; for he endured, as seeing Him who is unseen.

28 By faith he [r]kept the Passover and the sprinkling of the blood, so that he who destroyed the firstborn would not touch them. 29 By faith they passed through the Red Sea as though they were passing through dry land; and the Egyptians, when they attempted it, were [s]drowned.

Here you have 3 separate acts of faith..

The first is Moses deciding to leave Egypt and lead take the nation of Israel with him..

The second is Moses and the people of Israel killing a lamb and spreading its blood over their doors to prevent the angel of death from taking the lives of their firstborn when God sent him through the land of Egypt...

The third is Moses and the people of Israel walking through the middle of the Red Sea as they were escaping Egypt...

Now let's think about what all of these events have in common...

First and foremost, these events were risky actions...

For Moses to leave Egypt was to sign his own death warrant...

Nobody disobeyed Pharaoh and lived...

And furthermore, nobody was going to take Israel out of Egypt...

They were free labor for Pharaoh and his kingdom..

I am sure some people around Moses were saying,

“What in the world is Moses thinking?”

“How can he possibly think that he could get away with this?”

“Moses, this is worse than risky. It is insane.”

And then you have the people of Israel killing a lamb and smearing its blood on their doorposts...

I mean doesn't it make more sense to just leave town if the angel of death is coming...

Why in the world would anyone hang around and trust in the blood of a lamb to save them?

That is just way to risky...

Runs for your lives...

And then once Israel is out of the land, God tells them that the way of escape is through the middle of the Red Sea...

So, he parts it and tells them to walk right through it...

Now, can you imagine the murmurs in the crowd as the sea is parted with the walls of water on each side and God commanding them to enter into it...

“There is no way I am going in there. It is not going to hold.”

That is way too risky for me..

I will walk around while y'all go in..

Clearly, courageous faith is only courageous is there is a rick involved...

Faith doesn't take the stairs, it rides the squeaky elevator...

Faith doesn't stand on the limb near the trunk of the tree..

Faith goes out on the limb...

Faith doesn't stat in the boat as Jesus walks on water, faith gets out of the boat...

You see, faith is inseparable from risk...

Unfortunately many people of faith dislike the word risk, much less taking risks...

And often times, we stay away from risks in the name of being wise and careful....

I have sit in deacons meeting and other churches and seen church budgets restrained in the name of good stewardship and wise planning...

Now I am not talking about churches that were financially strapped...

I am talking about churches that were trying to keep 6 months of living expenses in the bank..

I am talking about churches that had 6 years worth of budgets in the bank and were figuring out how to save more...

And it seems that so many Christians speak of great faith but like like they have no faith and want to avoid all risk..

Look, I understand the need to use wisdom and being careful, but Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego never make the Bible unless they were willing to step into the fire...

Great faith is known for taking great risks...

All the acts that we see here were acts of great risk, and most of the acts of great faith in the Bible involved great risk...

Now, along these lines, we also see another common thread in all these acts of faith and this gives us our 4th key to courageous faith..

#4 - Courageous faith believes the word of God..

In all these same acts of faith in verses 27-29, and really in others that we have looked at tonight, a common thread is also this...

These acts of faith were carried out based on the word of God...

God told Moses to go out of Egypt and Moses left Egypt...

God commanded the people to kill a lamb and read its blood over the door and the people listened and acted...

God instructed the people to walk through the Red Sea and the people left...

You see faith is not blind faith...

It is not faith without sight or hearing...

Faith sees the word of God and hears the word of God and believes it and trusts it and acts upon it...

Why is the teaching of the word of God a central part of church life?

Well, it sanctifies and helps us grow in Christlikeness..

The Word also helps us to grow in our understanding of who God is..

The Word also helps us grow in our love of Christ...

But the word also expands and grows our faith..

When we see God's faithfulness to His people in the Bible, it grows our faith in Him...

But it also increases our confidence in the word of God to believe and trust it in all aspects of our life...

Now, let me make a comment here that may be helpful to you....

When we decided to head to seminary, I had no verse in the Bible to tell me to go...

I never heard the voice of God telling me to go...

In fact, I have never heard the voice of God telling me anything to do or where to go...

Instead, what I have done is fill my life with the word of God on the pages of Scripture...

I have seen his promises of faithfulness to the people of God in the OT, NT and throughout all of human history...

I didn't need a verse or a word out of heaven telling me to go...

God has said enough and revealed his character enough on the pages of Scripture that he directed my heart to trust his word to provide for my family to go to seminary 3000 miles away from home...

But the only way I would have gone and been able to trust him was by being someone who spent my time in the Bible...

We trust the word of God in the Bible so much that we don't need a specific word from God to act in faith...

God has given us enough of his words in the Scriptures for us to have courageous faith and act upon it...

A final key to courageous faith requires us to go to one more passage in the book of Ephesians tonight.

In Ephesians 3, Paul is writing to the church at Ephesus and he is trying to encourage them to be a church living by the power of Christ...

And to be a church that is filled with faith...

And so he prays for them in verses 14-21...

I want to read this prayer to us to close out our time tonight and look at this last key to courageous faith...

14 For this reason I bow my knees before the Father, 15 from whom [l]every family in heaven and on earth derives its name, 16 that He would grant you, according to the riches of His glory, to be strengthened with power through His Spirit in the inner man, 17 so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith; and that you, being rooted and grounded in love, 18 may be able to comprehend with all the [m]saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth, 19 and to know the love of Christ which surpasses knowledge, that you may be filled up to all the fullness of God. 20 Now to Him who is able to do far more abundantly beyond all that we ask or think, according to the power that works within us, 21 to Him be the glory in the church and in Christ Jesus to all generations [n]forever and ever. Amen.

One final thought for tonight regarding the key to courageous faith is what we see in verse 20...

5. Courageous faith exceeds human limitations.

Paul prays an important truth for the Ephesian church and for us at Pine Grove...

Courageous faith leads to results that exceed all that we could ask for or even imagine...

You see, sin limits our ability to imagine the things that God can do...

Our fallen nature often confines God and limits him to what we think is possible..

However, we must remember that God can do more than we ask or imagine...

Some many people know and recite Matthew 19:26, which says, "With God all things are possible."

I hear it from people all the time, and it is a great verse that is complete true and many people know it but very few live by it...

We may say that God can do anything, but we live in way and have faith that says God can only do what we think he can do...

In other words, most people have a view of God that never exceeds what they think God can do...

Yet, God is not limited by our weak view of Him...

With God, all things are possible...

We simply need the courageous faith to live by that truth and pain by that truth and rest in that truth as a church...

Conclusion

So, what does all of this mean for here at Pine Grove?

I would simply say this..

We need to stretch and exercise our faith at times...

Do your Sunday School class have faith that God can grow your class beyond the size of your room this year?

Do we have the faith as a church to plan for a budget next year that exceeds out giving from this past year?

Do we have the faith to begin to plan for a new building to house our worship services and make this into a true fellowship hall?

Do we have the faith to plan more ministry opportunities and have God supply the people to take part in making them happen?

Do we have the faith to give more of our income to the Lord than we did last year knowing that God will use it in ways beyond our imagination and still keep food on our table and a roof over our head?

As a church, we need to be examples of great faith to the world...

The world is filled with doubt and suspicion and mistrust...

We are people filled with faith, and hope and trust in the Lord...

When the people of God have little faith, the people of the world will never be drawn to us...

May God grow our faith here at Pine Grove and not only grow it but help us to act upon it...

Let us pray...