

The Cost of Faith

By Faith: Pt. 7

Some say there are only really two truly great literary geniuses in the history of Western civilization, William Shakespeare...and Mel Brooks. And they both said the same thing, but in slightly different ways. Shakespeare put it this way, "Each new morn new widows howl, new orphans cry, new sorrows strike heaven on the face." And Mel Brooks said, "Life stinks." Basically the same message. "Each new morn..." tragedy arises.

You ever get a 4 am phone call? It's never good news is it? My phone rang last Tuesday at 4:48 AM. It was the fitness instructor that meets here in the church parking lot. Now, the group Deanna and I are a part of doesn't start until 6:20 AM, so it's not like we were late! But no, she was calling to tell me she'd just gotten here and there was water flowing out from inside the building onto the sidewalk. So we got dressed real quick and drove in and sure enough, when we walked into the women's restrooms this is what we found.

A pipe broke leading to the water heater in the ceiling. Thankfully we caught it quick, but there was standing water in the foyer and the back of the auditorium and Todd Moore – who came up and helped me find where the water shut off was! - he and I were sweeping water into the women's drain for the better

part of an hour. That glamorous life of a pastor! But we got good people working on it right away and insurance will cover it and we shouldn't be a mess for too long.

But you never want those 4 AM phone calls. "Each new morn sorrows strike heaven on the face..." We've been looking at one particular chapter of the New Testament book of Hebrews each week this summer. And we've picked that book because it's all about how to find the power to deal with those 4 am phone calls and all the mess that life throws our way. I realize that because we've just jumped into the middle of the book, that I haven't really given you much context for Hebrews.

We don't know it's author, but we do know it's audience. Hebrews was written to a group of Christians who are beginning to question just how great it is to *be* Christians; because they had embraced Christianity, but their lives were going very *badly*. Many of them had been persecuted. Some of them had suffered the confiscation of their homes and property. Some of them were facing imprisonment and death, and they were beginning to ask the question, "Where's all the peace and joy and safety I signed up for when I became a Christian? *How* can I live my life in the face of an uncertain future? What do I do when life stinks?"

And you can just imagine these new Christians saying, “I don’t know why I have to face these troubles. It seems like when I read the old Bible stories it was different. In the Bible God always came through. Look at Noah; his enemies were wiped out by a flood. Look at Moses; his enemies were miraculously wiped out as they walked through the Red Sea. Look at Daniel; the lions’ mouths were shut. But that’s not the way it is anymore. It seems like all kinds of bad things happen to us. How in the world, *knowing* that bad things can happen to us, can we live life in the face of an uncertain future?” And of course, the writer to the Hebrews brings you chapter 11, and in chapter 11 he’s going through all the great men and women of God in the past, the ancients.

He says to them, “You don’t understand. The great men and women of God have *never* had designer lives. They’ve *always* been in situations in which there was tremendous uncertainty around them, and they *never* knew what was coming in the future. And yet they lived great lives. They weren’t mastered by life; they mastered life. And you can too if you live a life of faith.”

And of course, the beauty of the Bible is that the stories from 3,000 years ago, that comforted the Hebrews readers 2,000 years ago, still comfort us today because we face the same challenges...and have the same solution “by faith”. So we’re examining these case studies of great men and women of faith. And we’ve been looking at Abraham - this week, last week, and next week - because Abraham is certainly, in this “hall of faith,” the biggest case study. Abraham is given the most press, the most verses.

And I want to read you those verses this morning before we begin to analyze this great life of faith. **Hebrews 11:8–16**, “*By faith Abraham, when called to go to a place he would later receive as his inheritance, obeyed and went, even though he did not know where he was going. 9 By faith he made his home in the promised land like a stranger in a foreign country; he lived in tents, as did Isaac and Jacob, who were heirs with him of the same promise. 10 For he was looking forward to the city with foundations, whose architect and builder is God.*”

“*11 By faith Abraham, even though he was past age—and Sarah herself was barren—was enabled to become a father because he considered him faithful who had made the promise. 12 And so from this one man, and he as good as dead, came descendants as numerous as the stars in the sky and as countless as the sand on the seashore.*”

“13 All these people were still living by faith when they died. They did not receive the things promised; they only saw them and welcomed them from a distance. And they admitted that they were aliens and strangers on earth. 14 People who say such things show that they are looking for a country of their own. 15 If they had been thinking of the country they had left, they would have had opportunity to return. 16 Instead, they were longing for a better country—a heavenly one. Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God, for he has prepared a city for them.”

Now last week we looked mainly at the first part of verse 8 where it says, “He went out.” God came to him in Genesis 12. Abraham was comfortable. Abraham had what *he thought* was a very, very certain and comfortable and secure future, and God said, “Get out. Get out! Get out of your security. Get out of your safety. There is no security there anyway.”

Now we looked at that last week, and in a sense what we’re looking at this week is the last half of that verse. Because it doesn’t just say that Abraham went out, it says he went out “not knowing where he went.” He went out *even though* he didn’t know where he was going. Abraham had greatness in the face of a completely uncertain future. He had no idea what was coming, and yet he lived a life of greatness, a *big* life. How can we?

There are three principles embedded in this case that will show us not only how we can do it, but how we can *grow* and become greater and greater at this. How we can live life with greatness, with stability, with confidence. Mastering life, not being mastered by life, *in the face* of a completely uncertain future. I’ll call those three principles **the negative principle, the positive principle, and the ultimate principle**. Hang with me. When we get to the end, I’ll summarize them in a sentence. The negative principle, the positive principle, and the ultimate principle.

First, The negative principle. Now the negative principle is actually something we’ve already touched on here in our introductory words. He went out *not knowing where he was going*. We’re told in Genesis 12 he went out. God told him to get out, but He didn’t tell him where he was going. It took him years to find out even where he was going. He wandered. His father died in the midst of his wandering, and then God told him where he was going. So Abraham went out not even knowing where he went. And this is the negative principle.

Let me put it to you a couple of ways. He went out not *caring* where he was going. He went out not *needing* to know where he was going. Abraham had understood the negative principle, and that is you cannot trust circumstances. You can put no trust in circumstances. You must take all of your heart *off* of the circumstances. Or put it another way, Abraham knew it is not what happens to you in life that matters; it's what you bring to it that matters. It's not the events of life that make or break you; it's what you bring *to* those events that make or break you. This is the negative principle.

Let's spend a minute or two on it, even though in some ways you don't have to be a Christian to understand this at all. You don't have to know the Bible to understand this. What Abraham realized was if he decided he would only do things if it looked practical...he would only do things if he was sure that what would happen in the future would be good...if he based his life on circumstances, his life would be ruined, because circumstances never turn out the way you want.

See the way *most* people operate is they say, "Whether my life is going to be successful or not depends on what I possess, what happens to me, the events of my life, the circumstances of my life."

And *because* you believe that...Because you say, "Things will work out well if I can get *this*. If I can get this career, if I can get into this school, if I can get a particular kind of spouse, if this and that, then I'll have a great life." But because you are basing your life on circumstances, you are *so* anxious.

When we do that, we're so anxious. We're always straining and striving to see the future. We're always hedging our bets. We're always afraid to commit. We're afraid to do *anything* because we want to know where we're going. We will *not* go out unless we know where it'll take us. But you see, Abraham realized if you base your life on the circumstances, your life is ruined already. You don't even have to wait for the circumstances to ruin it. You're an accident waiting to happen, because circumstances will *not* treat you well. They will abuse you, and you won't be ready for them – nobody is ready for the 4 AM phone call.

In other words, Abraham knew it was the *going* that mattered. It was his response to God that mattered. Now I know there are a lot of people who will not find this to be good news, because I have discovered, certainly in Austin, the typical person who thinks of Christianity, who comes and looks at Christianity – there likely are plenty of you in this room now.

You are coming, and your *first* question, your primary question is, “Will Christianity work? Will it *work* for me? Will it do what I need it to do?” In fact, I find that some people actually get offended. Not only aren’t they interested in, but they actually get offended by the idea of argument. If you try to argue for Christianity and you talk about the evidence for Christianity, they very often get offended.

They say, “Oh, that doesn’t matter. I don’t really care about those things. I think it’s a little offensive for you to say Christianity is ‘true’ and none of these other religions are true in the same way. I think it’s very bad. I don’t even care whether these things are true for other people. I can’t answer for other people. I want to know, ‘Will it work for *me*? Will it *help* me? Will it help me get the things I need? Will it help me get the inner strength I need? Will it help me get to my goals? Will it bring me into a position where God will answer my prayers? Will it *work*?’”

See, that’s the AA approach to spirituality. The “higher power” can be anything. Now, I’m a fan of AA. Because it works for a lot of people. It helps people. I’m just trying to point out that AA is very different than Christianity. I think even the atheists who have gotten sober through AA would cheer that point. Christianity is a very different sort of thing.

Because here’s the irony; when you come to Christianity and *start* with that question and make that your primary question, “Will it work? Will it change my circumstances? Will it help me gain control over my circumstances?” you’re twisting Christianity into something it’s *not*, and it *can’t* work for you. If you start by asking, “Will it work?” it will never work. But if you start by asking, “Is it *true*? Is God *there*? Is it *real*?” Unless you start with that...

Unless you say, “I have to find out whether He’s really there, whether the God the Bible talks about really is there, whether the Jesus the Bible talks about really is there. And if he’s there, and if he’s real, and if he’s true, it doesn’t *matter* whether or not it’s practical. It doesn’t matter whether or not it’s going to make me happy, whether I’m going to get answers to prayers, or whether I’m going to find the man or woman of my dreams. It won’t matter. I must come to him because he’s *there*.” Unless you start with that question, Christianity, ironically, will never work.

If you come to Christianity so it will work, it will never work. That’s the whole idea behind “seek first his kingdom and his righteousness and all these other things will be added unto you.” That’s the same principle behind “you must lose your life to find your life.” You have to say, “My life doesn’t matter,” if you’re ever going to have a life. You have to say, “His loving kindness is *better* than life,” if you’re ever going to find a life.

In other words, when people say, “I want to know if Christianity will work for me. I want to know whether God will answer my prayers...” - or people very often start dabbling in Christianity, and their prayers don’t get answered. And they say, “What good is it?” What you’re really saying is, “I will *not* go out until I know *exactly* where I’m going. I will not go. I will not obey. I will not give my life to Christ unless I know exactly where I’m going.”

And God says, “In that case, you can’t have Me at all, because I am not the thing you’re worshipping; you’re worshipping circumstances.” And you know, here’s the irony of the thing. This is the very problem you have. This is the *base* of your problem. You have such instability and anxiety, and that’s why you’re even coming and looking at Christianity.

And yet, you are twisting Christianity into your own image, and you won’t see this is the very basis of the problem. This is the very thing Christianity is trying to get you *away* from. It’s trying to say, “Make *God* the only thing that matters, not your circumstances.” Look at Jesus. What made him great? That his life went so well? If you want to understand Jesus’ life even a little you know that’s just not true.

He is arrested after being betrayed by one of his closest followers. He endures an illegal trial on trumped-up charges, and then is brutally tortured and shamefully executed. And on the way down to this unbelievable defeat, Jesus comes to God with the greatest request of his life, the biggest thing he ever asked for in prayer. He says, “Lord, I’m about to be tortured and killed. I don’t think I can bear it. Would you please save me from it? Would you let this cup pass from me?” The greatest request of his entire life, and Father God turned him down flat.

What made Jesus great? That the circumstances of his life went well? What made Jesus great was how he concluded that request, “...yet not my will, but yours, be done.” What made Jesus great was *not* that his life went well. As a matter of fact, it was that he faced a life *not* going well...with courage and integrity and obedience. And here’s what’s so wonderful. He didn’t just master *life* when he did that, he mastered *death*. And because he died, he changed the universe. He changed the universe, not because circumstances treated him well, but because life *mistreated* him. And he answered it. He responded. He was obedient.

It's not the circumstances of your life that matter; it's what you bring to it. It's not the circumstances of your life that will make you or break you; it's how you respond to them that will make you or break you. Abraham went *out*. That's the negative principle. Get your heart *off* of those circumstances. *Recognize* that they are not the thing that will make or break you. I read a book this year after I turned 50 called "The Happiness Curve: Why Life Gets Better After 50". It's a secular book, but it points out that young people, you start off with this high optimism envisioning what's going to make your life great – career, family, achievement, etc.

And then you spend the next 20 years arranging your circumstances to get those things. And then around the middle of your life, you realize the circumstances will *never* come together the way you want – or worse, they do come together and you discover they didn't make you happy after all! And what you really need is the kind of heart that enables you to deal with fears and to deal with problems *no matter what*.

And you spent all of your time arranging your circumstances and not enough time cultivating the kind of heart that Abraham had...that Jesus had. So first principle, the negative principle. Don't trust circumstances. Don't trust them a bit. Don't make them the point. Don't consider them that important. Don't make them the thing you know is going to make you a successful person.

Secondly, the positive principle. You see, many people actually do nothing but deal with life with only the negative principle. And I must tell you, that if you get *just* the negative principle and that's all, you'll be a lot less of a nuisance to society. It's not terrible. That's the thesis of the book – after middle age you just start to go, "Ah to hell with it." And then you relax. You don't have to be a Christian... You don't have to believe the Bible to figure out that people who put all their hope in circumstances are in for a real disaster.

I have children. I'm seeing them grow up. This week we start our last year of high school. I see a lot of people around me who would just desperately love to have children, and I can see it in their eyes, "If I had children, it'd be so different." Your children leave. Your children grow up and go. Your children have to have their own lives. Your children move away, and eventually you're by yourself again. You don't have to know the Bible to know this.

You look out there, and you begin to say, "If I bank on all these circumstances happening, I know they're either not going to come true anyway – or if they *do* come true - they don't satisfy anyway." And so you become a Stoic. And it's possible to live on just the negative principle, and the negative principle alone goes like this, "Life stinks. And my worrying about it and my crying over it is not going to change it, so I'm just not going to let it get to me."

Now that's okay, and it's true in a sense. But Christianity does not say you get to become a big, great man or woman simply by *refusing* to put your heart anywhere. You see the Stoics know that if you put your heart in circumstances, you are not going to be a great man or woman. You're going to be jerked about by everything that happens, and you're going to end up a ruin. So a Stoic pulls it away, and says, "I won't give my heart to anything. I'll put my hope in nothing."

And Christianity says the answer to that, of course, is that doesn't make you great; that makes you cynical, it makes you hard. You know people like that. They're making it in life, but nobody is going to call them great. Oh no. The Bible says you were built to look forward. You *need* to look forward. You *have* to travel hopefully. You have to have an overarching goal. To just simply give your heart to nothing or live only for the moment won't work. Even living for the moment - seize the day, *carpe diem* - but tomorrow's Monday. See, these things don't work.

You need to look forward. What're you going to look forward to? We're told the positive principle. Abraham yearned for his true country. Do you see what it says there? He's not just talking about Abraham. This is a principle. It's not just something Abraham did; it's what all these heroes of faith did. It says, **(v.15-16)**, "*If they had been thinking of the country they had left, they would have had*

opportunity to return. Instead they were longing for a better country—a heavenly one. Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God, for he has prepared a city for them." A city with foundations.

In other words, what Christians do...This is a discipline, and it's very deliberate. Christians know that your heavenly citizenship, and only your heavenly citizenship, will empower you for earthly citizenship. Only your heavenly citizenship will empower you for earthly citizenship. Only if you know where you're going *ultimately*, not immediately, but ultimately. See the negative principle is you must go out not knowing where you're going immediately. You don't know what's going to happen to you in history, and you don't *need* to know what's happening to you in history if you know what's going to happen to you *ultimately*.

You don't need to know what's happening to you historically *if* you know what's going to happen to you ultimately. "Ah yes," somebody says, "there we go. I knew it. Christians. Fantasyland. Pie in the sky in the great bye and bye. All this talk about heaven doesn't really empower you to live a life here. You're just so heavenly minded you're no earthly good." "The opiate of the masses," Marx called it, because thinking about heaven just makes you really good for nothing here. You've heard the argument.

Now listen, any great teaching of Christianity can be twisted and can be misused. They *all* can be misused, but that's libelous to say. It's libel. Look and see what the people here in Hebrews 11 *did*. None of these were mere passive dead-heads. But here's the way it works. Where do you get the rational *and* emotional wherewithal to do the right thing even though it's going to cost you? To speak out against injustice in your neighborhood, to speak out against dishonesty in your professional field, and to speak out against abuse in the family... Think about what it *takes* to be good earthly citizens. It takes the willingness to lose: to lose reputation, to lose status, to lose money. Many of you know this.

Many of you are in jobs that pay well, and even though there's another job that would be more fulfilling and more useful to people, but you can't bear the idea of leaving your current situation. Why not? The loss of comfort and security. What will give you both the rational and the emotional ability to bear losses, to bear the kind of losses that always come if you stand up for right, if you stand up for justice, if you're compassionate, if you make sacrifices, if you're generous? What can possibly do it? It's very simple.

You have to learn to look at the reputation you have here...to look at the money you have here...to look at the health you have here...and to look at the achievements you have here...like loose change in your pocket when all your gold is stored in a Swiss bank. You may have \$500 bucks in your pocket and somebody steals it, and you know you have \$5 billion in a Swiss bank. How upset can you get? Indignation, sure. Somebody took advantage of you. That's wrong, of course, but do you get *devastated*? But if that \$500 is all you have in the world, your attitude is completely different.

The same action, the same thievery, the same \$500. One person, destroyed. The other person, "Oh, well." What's the difference? *What you have in the bank*. And Abraham longed for a better country, and this is what he said. Abraham says, "I will not treat this country, I will not treat my family, I will not treat my culture, I will not treat my ethnicity, I will not treat my money, I will not treat my success, I will not treat my career, I will not put the *pressure* on them that would come to them if I say, '*This is my life. This is my identity. This is my whole being.*'"

You know, city parks are wonderful. They're wonderful if you visit them, but when people start to try to *live* in them, they get crappy. Why? Because they're not built to bear the weight of a person's whole life. Have you noticed that? This is a very Austin reality. If people start to live in them, they get pretty wretched. Abraham knew it's the same thing with this life.

He says, "You know what? As long as I understand this life as a park, a beautiful park, I can enjoy it...but it isn't *home*. Money is great. Marriage is great. Children are great. Work is great. Politics is great. Culture is great. It's not home! If I try to make this bear the whole weight of all of my life, I'll *ruin* it. I'll squeeze the life out of life. But I will not. I'll look ahead to my true country."

And in a disciplined way, when Abraham did lose something, he says, "Yeah I know, but this is just change in my pocket. This isn't my gold." He thought that way. He thought that way all the time, and as a result...It didn't mean he never wept. It didn't mean he never struggled, but it meant he *went through*. That's the positive principle. Not stoicism. Not the high Greek goal of "philosophical ataraxia" – just total emotional detachment. "I don't care about anything." Spock was an alien species remember – but that wasn't even true of him.

Abraham began to look at this life as the foyer, the entry way, of his real home, but it's not the living room. "I don't sit down here. I don't expect it to be that comfortable. It's *part* of my home, but the living room, heaven, the bosom of God..." Now that's the second principle, and up to now it's pretty abstract. But there's a third principle. There's a final principle for enabling you to live life in the face of uncertain future. To live a full life even when life stinks.

Third and last, The ultimate principle. And you see it in **verse 11**. This is where we have to let our hearts rest. "*By faith Abraham, even though he was past age—and Sarah herself was barren—was enabled to become a father ...*" Why? "... because he **considered him faithful** who had made the promise." He considered him faithful. Oh my friends listen. How many people have you heard say, "Well, it doesn't matter what you believe as long as you're sincere"? That's the utter opposite of what we're talking about here.

"It doesn't matter what you believe as long as you're sincere." Which means, it's not the *object* of your faith that matters but just having faith. That's faith in faith. That's a little bit like saying it doesn't matter whether the windshield is clear or not, let's just look at the windshield. The windshield, if you look at it, you'll crash the car. Why? Because the windshield is not meant to be looked *at*. It's meant to be looked *through*. What matters, frankly, if you're going to have a safe trip is what you see *through* the windshield, not the windshield.

And in the same way, Abraham did *not* get strong by looking at his faith and by considering his faith and saying, “The important thing is just to believe.” No. He looked at the one who *was* faithful. Faith is grasping the faithfulness of God, and here’s how he did it. The romantic poets of the eighteenth century were on the verge of understanding this. They said, “How do you face life? All you need is love. That’s all you need. Love is an anchor.” The romantics said, “It doesn’t matter what your circumstances are if you have love. It doesn’t matter whether you live in a hovel and a shack. Love in a shack is better than no love in a palace.” John Lennon didn’t have anything on Byron, Shelley and Keats!

And they were right...mostly. What they were saying was, “Love is the anchor, an anchor for the soul. If you put your heart’s anchor down in someone who loves you, let circumstances come. Let the waves come, let the wind come; you have an anchor. You can face anything if you have love.” Now, I said “mostly”, they’re halfway there. And the reason they’re halfway there is because here’s the problem. If you put your anchor down into any *human* love, it won’t hold, not fully. Why? Every human being is both mortal and sinful. Because they’re sinful they’ll sometimes let you down, and many of them will completely let you down.

Because they’re mortal, someday they will be swept away with the wind and the waves. But here’s what Abraham discovered. A few chapters earlier we’re told, **Hebrews 6:13**, “*When God made his promise to Abraham, since there was no one greater for him to swear by, he swore by himself...*” And then the writer applies that promise to us in **v. 19**, “*We have this hope as an anchor for the soul, firm and secure.*” An anchor. What is the anchor? It’s God’s love.

Now, there’s an interesting dynamic in that original story of God’s promise to Abraham – this promise that he would be come the father of a great nation. In **Genesis 15:6** it says, “*Abram believed the Lord, and he credited it to him as righteousness.*” When Paul described Abraham as the “father of faith”, that’s the verse he quotes. But then just two verses later it says, **v.8**, “*Abram said, ‘Sovereign Lord, how can I know that I will gain possession of it?’*”

Does that seem out of order to you? He believed God, but then he almost immediately asked for proof. Is this like Ronald Reagan’s “trust but verify” policy? Why was Abraham doubtful? I’ll tell you why he was doubtful. Because he didn’t trust God? Partially, but that’s just because all sinful hearts don’t trust God. But I think it’s because he didn’t trust himself. Abraham knew that *he* wouldn’t be faithful, so how could he be sure he’d get the reward when God says, “I’ll give you this reward if you’re faithful to me. I’ve made a covenant with you. And if you obey your part of the covenant, I will obey my part; I will bless you.”

“How do I know?” Abraham says in v.8. And then the strangest thing – to us anyway – **V. 9-10**, “*So the Lord said to him, “Bring me a heifer, a goat and a ram, each three years old, along with a dove and a young pigeon.” Abram brought all these to him, cut them in two and arranged the halves opposite each other...*” He did *what* now? Nobody tell PETA. By the way, if you think cutting *animals* in two is bad...next week’s Abraham story is going to be a hard one for you.

But Abraham understood completely what was going on. And this is a good reminder that the past is a foreign country – we have to be humble about cultural elements that don’t seem to make sense to us. We have discovered from other historical works from this era that this was what was called a “Suzerain-Vassal” treaty. The Suzerain is the ruler and the vassal is the servant. And when they would make a contract, the king or lord would say, “I promise to give you land to farm and protection from enemy raiders and you promise to pay a tax to me of your produce and serve in the army if I call one up.”

Now, in those pre-literate days you didn’t *sign* a covenant, you *cut* it. Today we sign a piece of paper that says if we don’t pay what we owe you can sue us. They were much more visual. The way in which you would make a contract in those days was you cut an

animal in half and you’d walk between the pieces. How come? You were acting out the curse of disobedience. What you were saying when you walked through the pieces was, “If I fail to maintain my end of the bargain, may I become like these animals. May I be cut off.” To be cut off is, always has been, the ultimate curse. Banishment. Exile. It’s a relational thing. To lose love, to lose community, to be cut off.

So Abraham sets up the Suzerain-Vassal treaty and he figured that God would then instruct him to walk between the pieces – after all, he was clearly the servant in this transaction. But then we’re told that Abraham went into a kind of trance and the sky darkened and blazing torch appeared and that - the fire, not Abraham – passed between the pieces. It was God. We call that a “theophany” – the visible manifestation of the divine.

Here’s how the great Presbyterian pastor, R.C. Sproul, explains it. “The meaning of the drama is clear: as God passed between the pieces his message was, ‘Abraham, if I fail to keep my promise to you, may I be cut asunder just as those animals have been torn apart.’ God put His eternal being on the line. It was as if He were saying, ‘May My immutable deity suffer mutation if I break My promise. May My infinite character become finite, My immortal essence suffer mortality. May the impossible become possible if I lie.’” (*Discovering Who God Is*, 189)

This is one of the most amazing stories in the Bible. “Because He could swear by no one greater, God swore by himself.” And in that moment, Abraham began to realize - though he couldn’t completely understand - what God was saying is, “Even if *you* fail, even if your heirs fail, even if Isaac and Jacob fail, *I* will pay the cost so that you can have the blessing.” Abraham had no real idea what it was going to cost God, but we know because in **Isaiah 53:8** it prophesies about Jesus, “*By oppression and judgment he was taken away. Yet who of his generation protested? For he was cut off from the land of the living; for the transgression of my people he was punished.*”

“Cut off.” My friends, when Jesus Christ went to the cross, the Father and the Son lost each other. And though this may sound strange, I know this is true after thinking about it for many years. Yes, Jesus is God, but when he came in the form of a human, he self-limited some of his divine attributes. And so if Jesus was really suffering everything that we were going to suffer...if he took our penalty on the cross...that means he must have been cut off from the Father, *not knowing whether he’d ever come back*. He had to. That’s what hell is. He was cut off. And here’s the most incredible thing. Jesus Christ went out not knowing where he was going, and he said, “I’ll do it.” He went willingly.

Here is the summation for the morning. The three principles: the negative principle, the positive principle, the ultimate principle. I told you I’d put it all in one sentence. You can go out regardless of immediate circumstances if you know where you’re ultimately going and if you grow in the knowledge of the one who went out not knowing where he went for you. The way you become a person of greatness is you study the love of what Jesus did. Anchor your heart in *that* love. The gospel is the love that is all you need. Study it until you weep. Pray – talk to him - until you feel it, and then act as if it’s true.

And in ever-greater cycles, the more you study, the more you pray, the more you obey, the more you’ll study, the more you’ll pray, the more you’ll obey. And in time you’ll become like Abraham. You see, Abraham *considered* Him faithful. He went out not knowing *where* he went, but he knew *with whom* he went. That’s why he went out not knowing where he was going! Because you never do know when that 4 AM phone call is coming...but you can know who is always with you at every hour of the day. Abraham went out not knowing *where* he went, because he knew *with whom* he went. That’s all that mattered for him. And it can be all that matters for you.

Let’s pray...