

Old Testament Lessons

OT Stories That Teach Us About God and Faith

September 27, 2020

I. Introduction

- A. I gave serious consideration to making this our last Sunday of looking at OT stories. But I would like to spend a Sunday looking at what we might call God's extreme responses to sinful behavior. And my purpose for doing that is to reinforce a high and noble view of God and an unwavering faith in the goodness of God in spite of our first impressions or the world's perspective of what God is or isn't doing.
- B. Today, we are going to take a short OT survey of the wisdom and benefits of living by faith in God, and the foolishness and cost of distrust of God. I know you have heard this kinds of things before, but my goal is to reinforce the importance of implicit faith in God – be it to your own life or the lives of those effected by your choices and behavior. And I want to remind you that when it comes to Christian living, trust of God and obeying God are one and the same – for as James wrote, faith without works is dead. In other words, to have a living faith you must live according to what you claim to believe – otherwise, your faith is dead and worthless.
- C. Prayer

II. OT examples of faith and distrust, and the outcome of each

- A. The story of Adam and Eve provides our first example of distrust of God. And because of the extent of the consequences of their distrust, we might say they are the foremost example of not trusting God implicitly.
 - 1. The essence of Eve's story goes like this. Once Eve got to the point of seriously questioning God's goodness, she concluded He was at least partly dishonest, somewhat unjust, and definitely selfish. And from that perspective of God, distrust of God became reasonable. Then, from a mindset of distrust, Eve justified disobeying God and ate the forbidden fruit in order to gain what she believed God owed her but was not allowing her to have.
 - 2. Though we know Adam ate the forbidden fruit too, we are not told why. Yet regardless of the reason, it was an act of distrust of God's word, His essential goodness, His justice, and His love. In other words, for some reason God lost value in Adam's sight – for in eating the forbidden fruit, Adam demonstrated he valued something more than God.

3. I see Adam and Eve as our foremost example of distrust because the harmful, destructive, and deadly consequences of their distrust are still felt today. As is most often the case, the consequences of our distrust and subsequent disobedience do not end with us. The results and effects of our distrust and resulting sin continue to harm and influence others for days, weeks, and even years to come. You may be able to hide specific areas of distrust of God and its subsequent sin from those around you, but you cannot hide the effects that distrust and sin have on your character, your desires, your fears, and your way of dealing with life. For certain, distrust of God will show up in your words and deeds.
- B. Based on our best understanding, it is reasonable to conclude that Abel believed God's word concerning a worthy sacrifice, while Cain chose to disregard God's word and bring what he believed should be a worthy sacrifice. Abel's faith and obedience brought about two primary outcomes. **First**, God was pleased with his sacrifice. And **second**, his brother murdered him out of jealous anger.
1. I am pointing this out because between God and us, trust in God always brings God's approval and results in His being pleased with us. In fact, the scripture says that without faith it is impossible to please God (**Hebrews 11:6**).
 2. However, trusting and obeying God isn't always pleasing to the people around us. And when it isn't, it can result in lengths of time or momentary situations that are personally costly – just as it was with Abel.
 3. But Cain's unbelief was costly, too. It resulted in him becoming a murderer, in being driven away from his parents, and in his losing the privilege of being in the presence of God (**Genesis 4:13-16**).
 4. If we look **only** at the immediate outcome of Abel's death and Cain continuing to live, we might be inclined to think Cain's unbelief worked better than Abel's faith.
 - a. However, when we more carefully examine the long-term consequences, we can see that it is best to trust and obey God – which might displease some people, then to distrust God – even if it pleases many people.
 - b. I say this because you cannot trust God and disobey God – and therefore sin or act selfishly – at the same time. Obedient faith in God may cause you to lose standing with the people around

you, but it will ensure good standing with God – and that is a position money cannot buy and power cannot obtain.

- C. The practice of evil had become so wide spread (*pervasive*) on the earth that God could find only one righteous man, and his name was Noah. God confirmed Noah's righteousness in **Genesis 6:9**, "Noah was a righteous man, blameless in his time; Noah walked with God."
1. I believe such a godly life can only come from trusting God enough to obey Him. Or as I have said many times in your hearing – from living up to what you know. And we only persevere in living such a life when we trust God enough to continue obeying Him – even when it is hard or personally costly or requires doing what doesn't make sense at the moment – which is what Noah did.
 2. In telling Noah's story, God confirmed the inseparable link between faith and obedience. And He did this in **Genesis 6:22**, "Thus Noah did according to all that God had commanded him."
 3. We see the cost of Noah's faith in the length of time and hard work it took to build the ark. Yet he persevered – even though it is probable he had never seen rain or anything approximating a flood.
 4. Yet Noah's faith and obedience saved the human race from total extinction – which made it possible for you and me to be born, and in being born, to have the opportunity to repent, be reconciled to God, and enter into an eternally loving relationship with God.
 5. One more lesson from Noah. Trusting God requires perseverance:
 - a. be it perseverance in doing what is right in the moment even though powerfully tempted to do otherwise,
 - b. or be it perseverance over many years in doing what is right in a recurring situation or with a specific person.
 - c. The challenge with this second kind of perseverance is that though you exercise faithful obedience over an extended period of time, you may not see the desired results in this lifetime.
 - d. However, you will see godly, life-transforming changes in yourself that will be of such value that you will never regret having persevered in trusting and obeying God.
- D. We read in **Genesis 12:1-3**, that God said to Abraham, "Go forth from your country, and from your relatives and from your father's house, to the land which I will show you; [2] and I will make you a great nation, and I will bless you, and make your name great; and so you shall be a blessing; [3] and I will bless those who bless you, and the one who

curses you I will curse. And in you all the families of the earth will be blessed.”

1. The writer of Hebrews says this about Abraham’s response to God’s call, “By faith Abraham, when he was called, obeyed by going out to a place which he was to receive for an inheritance; and he went out, not knowing where he was going” (**Hebrews 11:8**).
2. In spite of Abraham’s great faith, he still had some moments of distrust – which resulted in choosing ungodly solutions to life’s problems and challenges.
3. Twice he trusted the self-preserving wisdom of the world over trusting God to protect him. Both times he asked Sarah to say she was his sister instead of telling the full truth that she was his wife (**Genesis 12 & 20**).
 - a. Both times Sarah was taken in as a wife by the ruler of the land. And both times God stepped in to protect her from being forced into adultery and to return her to Abraham.
 - b. Though the scripture only hints at the damaging consequences of Abraham’s distrust on these two occasions, it does hold up Sarah as the premier example of a wife who did what her husband asked her to do, and in the doing experienced God’s protection (**1 Peter 3:1-5**).
 - c. However, Sarah’s faith in God and obedience to her husband did not prevent her from enduring two times of being taken into another man’s home as if she were his wife. But it did protect her from breaking her vow of faithfulness to Abraham and it did bring her home where she belonged.
 - d. The important truth here is that faith and obedience to God are not a means to a trouble free life, but they are the means to a godly life wherein God is our provider and protector, and in many cases our restorer of what ought to be or once was ours.
4. Another example of distrust on Abraham’s part is when Sarah offered her hand-maid to him as a means of having children, and because he agreed, Ishmael was born. We see the lingering consequences of this act of distrust in our world today.
5. Yet in spite of these examples of distrust, Abraham primarily lived a life of faith in God that was expressed by his obedience to God. Two of the most challenging tests of his faith revolved around having a son to carry on his lineage and fulfill God’s promise that he would become a great nation.

6. The first major challenge came in having to wait **25 years** from the time God promised to make him a great nation until his son, Isaac, was born. With the one exception of Ishmael, Abraham faithfully and patiently waited for God to fulfill His promise.
 7. The second big challenge came when God told Abraham to offer Isaac as a sacrifice to Him. Yet Abraham's faith was such that he obeyed God to the point of placing Isaac on the alter and raising the knife to slay him – should God not provide a substitute.
 8. But God did provide a substitute, though not until Abraham had bound Isaac and placed him on the alter. This last minute provision and protection of God may seem to some of us as unnecessarily harrowing, frightening, or maybe even cruel on God's part.
 - a. Yet it is a common method God uses to test our faith, build our faith, and strengthen our faith – all of which leads us further down the path of the abundant, Christ-like life God has for us.
 - b. It is for this reason that James writes, "Consider it all joy, my brethren, when you encounter various trials, [3] knowing that the testing of your faith produces endurance. [4] And let endurance have its perfect result, so that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing" (**James 1:2-4**).
 - c. And Paul added this perspective in **Romans 5:3-4**, "We also exult in our tribulations, knowing that tribulation brings about perseverance; [4] and perseverance, proven character; and proven character, hope (*or confident trust that what God said is true*)."
 9. From the time of God's first call to the end of his life, Abraham primarily lived a life of faith and obedience. And though he had some willful failures along the way, his life of faith was such that he is spoken of as the Father of faith, and those who trust and obey God are spoken of as his children. Therefore, may we be like Abraham and persevere in choosing the way of faith in God, for that is the way that pleases God, transforms us, rewards us, and blesses those around us.
- E. We will pick up just a part of Lot's story in **Genesis 13:8-12**, "So Abraham said to Lot, 'Please let there be no strife between you and me, nor between my herdsmen and your herdsmen, for we are brothers. [9] Is not the whole land before you? Please separate from me; if to the left, then I will go to the right; or if to the right, then I will go to the left.' [10] Lot lifted up his eyes and saw all the valley of the Jordan, that

it was well watered everywhere (*this was before the LORD destroyed Sodom and Gomorrah*) like the garden of the LORD, like the land of Egypt as you go to Zoar. [11] So **Lot chose for himself all the valley of the Jordan**, and Lot journeyed eastward. Thus they separated from each other. [12] Abraham settled in the land of Canaan, while Lot settled in the cities of the valley, and moved his tents as far as Sodom.

1. Lot was Abraham's nephew, and as such should have shown respect for Uncle Abraham – by either giving him the first choice or making sure Abraham got the best land. But Lot didn't do that. Instead, he revealed a self-centeredness and a distrust that God would take care of him – regardless of what area he got.
 2. And so Lot chose what he believed would improve his life the most – yet what he chose made his life far worse. You see, because of his self-centered choice, Lot ended up living in Sodom. And when God destroyed the city because the people were so evil, Lot lost his wife, his two sons-in-law, and all the possessions he had accumulated in the city. Seeking to enrich and enjoy himself, Lot's choice resulted in poverty and suffering.
 3. No doubt, Lot enjoyed a good life for a time, but his self-centeredness and distrust of God brought about a loss that wiped out whatever he had gained.
 4. Once again, we see the cost of not trusting God to be your provider and protector. In contrast, Abraham was so confident in God's goodness, provision, and protection that he allowed Lot to pick whatever area he wanted – trusting God to take care of him with what was left over. And God did.
 5. On the front side, Abraham's choice to trust in God likely looks foolish to those who don't trust God, while Lot's choice would look wise. Yet when the fuller story is told, it becomes apparent that Abraham made the wiser choice.
 6. The reality is, there is no better security of any kind than the security we have in God. And that security is ours when we trust Him to be our primary source of provision and protection, and live according to what He says.
- F. The story of Esau and Jacob begins in **Genesis 25:21-26**, "Isaac prayed to the LORD on behalf of his wife, because she was barren; and the LORD answered him and Rebekah his wife conceived. [22] But the children struggled together within her; and she said, 'If it is so, why then am I this way?' So she went to inquire of the LORD. [23] The

LORD said to her, ‘Two nations are in your womb; and two peoples will be separated from your body; and one people shall be stronger than the other; and the older shall serve the younger.’ [24] When her days to be delivered were fulfilled, behold, there were twins in her womb. [25] Now the first came forth red, all over like a hairy garment; and they named him Esau. [26] Afterward his brother came forth with his hand holding on to Esau's heel, so his name was called Jacob.

1. At the beginning of this story we learn that Isaac turned to God to heal Rachel’s inability to have a child. And we learn that Rachel, after conceiving, sensed something was wrong within her. And she too, turned to the Lord.
2. This demonstrates that both Isaac and Rachel knew who to turn to when life was going contrary to the way it ought to go.
3. In response to Rachel turning to Him, God told her **why** there was turmoil in her womb and the **status** of the relationship between the two children she would bear – one would be stronger, and the older one would serve the younger.
4. However, when Isaac was old and blind, and asked Esau to prepare his favorite meal so he could eat and bless Esau, Rebekah took matters into her own hands and set up a deception so Isaac would bless Jacob – for as God said, the older would serve the younger.
5. As you probably know, this deception set into motion a number of circumstances that brought needless pain and suffering into the lives of Isaac, Esau, Jacob, and Rebekah – and all because Rebekah would not trust God to work out **His word in His own time and in His own way**.

III. Conclusion

- A. Is the way of faith and obedience hard? Yes, at times it is. In fact, there will be occasions when it is very hard. Yet the way of unbelief, though almost always easier in the beginning, in time becomes far harder than the life of faith.
- B. Distrust of God in any area or in any situation is always a failure on our part, though we ought never be surprised if it happens – for such is the weakness of our humanity. However, if your goal is to trust God implicitly and obey Him explicitly, you will not perpetuate any area of distrust, and you will keep your moments of distrust to a minimum.
- C. Faith, though sometimes hard, works to everyone’s good. Unbelief, though very appealing and easy at first, always makes life worse for everyone involved.