

Read also Genesis 12:1-4, 15:1-6, 17:11, 24

Sigmund Freud, father of psychoanalysis, says there are two types of people. Even though he was a psychiatrist he did not define people in psychological categories. He classified people in two categories: believers in God and unbelievers.

Unbelievers, he said, believe in a materialistic world. That means they believe in what the eye can see and no more. Freud, who was in that category, called himself a realist and here is how he put it: "The need for God is just wishful thinking; it's wishing for an "idealized Superman" in the sky who will protect and defend you as a father cares for a child. People need to grow up and accept the fact that we are alone in this world."¹

Quite opposite that are those people who believe that God created us, not that we invent Him. They believe that "wishing" for God does not rule out the possibility that God actually exists. In fact, they think that perhaps the desire for the Creator was actually put in us, though we might not always recognize it.

Today's discussion is about those people who are defined as "believers" in our summertime series, "Belonging, Believing, and Behaving." What defines belief? How does it affect our lives?

Faith is not a theory that we master. Faith is praxis. Faith is defined by the stories of people's lives.

To get to the church, I drive down Highway 114, go through an interchange where old Texas Stadium used to be, and connect to Loop 12 traveling south. A new interchange is being built. It has high bridges and walls covered with artwork. One picture, which you can see here (on the power point) is of a cowboy. He is driving cattle. Close to that you see this next picture of a covered wagon.

People early on in our history as a nation, in faith, basically followed cattle trails west. They had great hope of religious freedom or land or adventure. Life was rough – those wagons had no a/c, electric windows, or Cirrus XM (satellite radio stations. Some people died on the trip. Possessions were often left along the road.

But because they moved out in faith, today we have a super highway where they once trod.

Abraham was the first to move out in the Judeo-Christian faith. He heard God's voice and followed. Paul explains the essence of faith through Abraham's story. He asks the question, *what does it mean to believe?* Do it mean following a bunch of rules? Does it mean keeping the Ten Commandments? What is faith exactly?

Let's read what Paul said. READ Romans 4:1-5

¹Dr. Armand Nicholi, Jr., *The Question of God, C. S. Lewis and Sigmund Freud Debate God, Love, Sex, and the Meaning of Life*, (New York: The Free Press, 2002), 5-6.

Abraham heard God's voice. Ever been outside on a dark, clear night away from city lights? Looking up at the sky, you sense God's presence. Or, you wake up in the night and feel the draw to pray. One of your elders told us how he was moved by the song, "Oh Lord, be thou near to me;" there is no greater desire for him.

That what Abraham experienced. Abraham sensed God's presence. And, he sensed a call; and a God-given purpose in life.

Abraham cared nothing about "wish fulfillment." He did not feel he was making God up out of his own need for protection or he would not have left the security of home to go live in tents in a foreign land. Rather, he heard God's voice.

Jews, as you heard from the Genesis passage, were distinguished by circumcision. In Paul's day, circumcision represented being a believer, like baptism does for us. It's like saying you are a believer because you were baptized into the church.

Let's say you were baptized. Does baptism make you believe? No baptism is a result of faith. We believe first; then we are baptized. So let's hear what Paul says about circumcision. READ Ro 4:9-12, 14, 16.

So how do you have that faith?

Take a look at this picture. The artist, G. F. Watts, was a man of profound faith. The vision of the man on the horse is there. But not everyone sees it. Three out of four do not. The first man on the left buries his nose in his text, candle nearly burnt out. The next man counts his money, intent on his assets. The third, whose arm you and white shirt you can see sleeps through the vision. But one man turns, looks up, and catches the vision which the others cannot see.

What occupies your mind and focus? Are you looking up? Listening for God's voice, or preoccupied? The person of faith seeks what cannot be seen or heard by everyone.

Some, like Freud, think it foolish to look up; to seek God.

Perhaps some of the relatives of those who went west in covered wagons were very unhappy about their risk-taking. People ridicule those who are driven by an unseen vision, like Christopher Columbus.

He approached several governments with his ideas about sailing west to reach India in the east, but was laughed at. He was even turned down in 1491 by King Ferdinand and Queen Isabella. Poverty stricken, he stopped at the Convent of La Rabida to beg bread and water for his young son. A Prior heard his accent and stopped to talk to him. It just so happened he had been the Confessor to Queen Isabella. He was so impressed with Columbus's ideas that he wrote the Queen, urging her to reconsider. And she did

God was at work, you see. God plants these visions. Faith in God always opens the possibility for the impossible to happen. Listen to Abraham's case. READ Romans 4:18-24.

God is gloried by faith. Why?

Through faith, the cow trail becomes a freeway;
A scary, unknown ocean leads to the birth of a new nation.

The candle does not burn out when the eyes are lifted to God for vision. God initiates the vision.

And faith is the response.

Abraham's example of faith was followed by folks like Moses, Esther, and Paul. Each one spoke as led, before Pharaohs and kings, and Abraham's children grew and grew.

"For I know the plans I have for you," says the LORD. "They are plans for good and not for disaster, to give you a future and a hope . . ." (Jer 29:11)

How are you living out your faith? Are you preoccupied with just keeping the status quo? Focused on making and preserving money? Or, sleeping through life? Where do you need to have faith in your life?

". . . when you pray," God says, "I will listen. If you look for me wholeheartedly, you will find me" (Jer 29:12-13).

Grasp the baton of faith from these folks who have gone before us. And many of you have done just that. (Example, Rev. Ed Bayless) Take a look at these pictures. (Show pictures of members of the congregation.)

1. The man in the center, a war hero from WWII, has shaped his life around his faith and extended his baton of faith to his daughter, who is also pictured up there. She has picked up the baton. Others in these pictures have gone to foreign countries to share the good news about Jesus. That man with the weed-eater is married to a woman who was teaching a women's Bible study at her church and she did not feel adequately trained so she went to seminary to "take a few classes." He held down the fort, worked and paid the bills, and God paid him back every cent that she spent on her classes. It is AWESOME to live by faith.
2. Those people have passed the baton on to the next generation. Here is the next generation, picking up the baton of faith. Do you think they want to think of faith as a list of rules to keep? Or, do you think they are here because they are excited about walking by faith, taking risks at God's leading, experiencing the miraculous call of God? What do you want to offer them?
3. Babies are born every day. Adults stand in these pictures who say, "No matter what the hardship life brings, faith is WORTH IT." I know these people – I can confidently say, "that is why they are here."

There are many others which are not up here simply because we do not have your picture!

Is it really true that God is simply a “wish fulfillment,” someone we make up to make us feel secure, as Freud says? The more you learn to live by faith, the more you know the reality of God.

Faith is the greatest privilege. Faith is required by God. How is your faith? May it be the defining story of your life.

AMEN