**His Faith Was Made Complete by His Actions**

**The Word**

Read together James 2:14-26

**The Big Idea**

Abraham’s life epitomizes the journey of faith. Sometimes God called him to a faith that carried no possible accompanying action, and sometimes God called him to exercise his faith through radical action.

**Questions for Discussion**

1. The story of Abraham is familiar to many of us. What about his story struck you in a fresh way this week?

2. How would you respond if someone said to you, “I could never believe in a God who would ask someone to sacrifice their own son to him?”

3. Where are you currently being (or where have you recently been) called to a Genesis 15 – type faith where there are no specific actions to offer God other than simply clinging to him and his promises?

4. Where are you currently being (or where have you recently been) called to a Genesis 22 -type faith that requires you to make a concrete act of surrender or requires you to take a concrete step that feels risky, challenging, or unknown?

**Neighborhood Question of the Week**

Consider the “Canning Hunger” challenge presented on Sunday. What do you think of that idea, and do you intend to try that in your own neighborhood?

**Sermon Outline**

I. Introduction

 A. This passage gets to the heart of James’s letter: Faith in Action

B. Both James (James 2) and Paul (Romans 4) draw on the story of Abraham and Genesis 15:6 specifically, but they do so in different ways, and in doing so, they present us with complementary pictures of the essence of faith and our relationship with God.

II. Abraham’s early journeys

 A. The radical call and extravagant promise of God (Genesis 12:1-3)

 B. Abraham steps out in faith and becomes a nomadic dweller in Canaan

 C. God brings famine (12:10) and Abraham heads down to Egypt

 D. God brings war (ch. 14) and Abraham rescues lot

 E. Years go by, and still no son.

III. Genesis 15

 A. God comforts Abraham (v. 1), but Abraham voices his complaint (v. 2-3)

B. God shows Abraham the night sky and confirms his miracle promise of countless descendants (v. 4-5). It’s a staggering promise but the one who makes it is the one who made the stars.

 C. KEY VERSE: Abraham believed and God credited that to him as righteousness (v. 6)

1. Abraham’s faith in this moment didn’t require him to do anything. In fact, he was confronted with the reality that he brought nothing to the table with God and was completely powerless to bring about God’s promise.

2. That kind of bring-nothing faith was exactly what God wanted.

 D. Paul’s point in Romans 4 is to bring out this kind of faith

1. He points out the fact that Abraham wasn’t a law-abiding, circumcised Jew in Genesis 15. He was just a guy standing before God trusting him. He was justified by faith before he observed works of the law (circumcision)

2. His point is that all of us, therefore, (Jews and Gentiles) are similarly justified by faith apart from any works

3. The heart of the gospel is that God has made a promise that all can be forgiven based on God’s actions through Jesus on the cross, and we receive salvation and justification by trusting in that promise alone.

IV. Abraham’s later journeys

 A. Abraham and Sarah’s faith wavers (Genesis 16)

1. They consider that maybe God never intended to bring the promised child through Sarah but only Abraham.

2. They take matters into their own hands and produce a child (Ishmael) by human means (Abraham and Hagar)

B. Time passes (another 13 years!)

C. God reaffirms the promise 24 years after originally making it (Chapter 17)

1. He forms a covenant with Abraham (v. 1-6)

2. He clarifies that, yes, the promise will come through Sarah’s womb (v. 15-16)

3. Abraham laughs in disbelief (v. 17) and God tells him the child will be named Isaac (=”laughter”) as a testimony to the unbelievability of the promise

 D. Isaac is born (chapter 21)

 The laughter of unbelief turns to the laughter of joy

V. Genesis 22

 A. God tests Abraham’s faith (v. 1)

 B. “Take your son, your only son, Isaac, whom you love”

1. Isaac represented a possible idol for Abraham

2. The temptation would be to put all his joy and pride and hope in the boy rather than in God himself and his promises alone.

 C. Abraham exercises his faith through a concrete act of surrender and obedience

 1. “We will return to you” (v. 5)

2. Hebrews 11:19 says, “Abraham reasoned that God could raise the dead.” That’s how he reconciled the promise (“through Isaac shall your offspring come”) with the command (“sacrifice your son, Isaac”).

D. The test shows that Abraham “fears God” (v. 12)

1. The fear of the Lord is closely connected to faith in the Lord (Psalm 147:11: “The Lord delights in those who fear him, who trust in his unfailing love.”)

2. Abraham and God now both “know” that God is first in his heart, and he trusts God no matter what

 E. God provides a substitute sacrifice (v. 13) which is a beautiful foreshadow of Jesus

F. James’ point is that this act in Genesis 22 actually fulfills the statement in 15:6 made 15 years earlier.

1. James 2:22: “Abraham’s faith (shown in Genesis 15) was made complete by what he did” (Genesis 22)

 2. His actions in Genesis 22 show that his faith in Genesis 15 was real and living

VI. Conclusion

A. Sometimes we are called to exhibit Genesis 15 - type faith

1. When we are in really tough times, sometimes there’s nothing to do and absolutely nothing we bring to the table. We are called to simply cling to God and his promises. God delights in that impoverished, open-handed trust and waiting on him.

2. That kind of bring-nothing-to-the-table faith glorifies God and highlights his all-sufficiency

B. Sometimes we are called to a Genesis 22 – type faith

1. God may be calling us to trust him through an act of surrender (surrendering a relationship, a job, a possession, your reputation, control, etc)

2. God may be calling us to trust him by actively stepping into something that feels scary or unknown (a conversation, a change, an action)

C. Jesus is glorified in both cases

 1. Jesus is glorified when we have nothing and simply fall on him in trust

2. Jesus is glorified when that trust leads us to acts of love and obedience.