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Introduction

Every generation has its heroes, the people that it considers legends. Whether they are cricket players, rock musicians, soapie stars, parents, or even cartoon characters. We all seem to need heroes - someone to look up to and to inspire us. Someone whose footsteps we would like to travel in.

For many guys a bit older than me, their hero was a boxer, a boxer named Muhammed Ali. He would taunt his opponents by saying "I am the Greatest!", and in the history of heavy weight boxing he probably was. He is the only person ever to win the heavy weight crown three times. He held the title for over a decade. And he finally lost it in his forties....

In the process he became a symbol, a pin up, a larger than life hero, one which our society could hang on to. He gave us the dream of fighting our way to the top, despite all the odds. Of making it. Of succeeding. But yesterday's heroes are often forgotten, and Muhammed Ali is no different. No one has Ali as their hero any more.

Sportswriter Gary Smith went to visit Ali a couple of years back, to see where he was now. Ali escorted Smith to a barn where he kept all his mementos. There he saw pictures of Ali in his prime - the champ fighting and punching, lifting up World Championship Belts. Yet on these photos were white streaks - bird droppings. Pigeons had made his barn their home. Ali went over the pictures and turned them around one by one, so that they now faced the wall. And then he went to the door of the barn and mumbled, "I had the world and it was nuthin. Just look at me now."

When we think about heroes it is important that our heroes lead us somewhere that isn't nuthin. That they inspire us to something that is worth while, and still will be worthwhile in a few years time. For few heroes do that. Few heroes are still remembered a couple of years later. So who is your hero? Where are they leading you, and will they be forgotten in a few years time? These are the questions we need to ask ourselves.

One guy who has remained a hero for many in the Christian Church for 4000 years is Abraham. A hero. A legend. A man to look up to and learn from. But what did he do to make himself a hero to so many? For we see that he was far from perfect. We see him betray his wife, deceive his friends. Why is he considered such a hero?

1. Abraham - full of faith

Let us turn our mind to the reading from Genesis 12, for here we will begin to see why. Why he was called a friend of God. Why he is someone to be admired. We first meet Abraham in the city of Ur of the Chaldees. Great name for a city heh? Urrr. But despite its name, this city was the centre

of the civilised world. A bit like what Chinderah/ Tweed Heads is today. Well maybe not Chinderah/Tweed, but maybe New York or Paris.

But for someone like Abraham and his family, it was a place of comfort, of riches, of security. And it was out of a place like this that God appeared to Abraham and said "Leave your country, and your family, and go to a place I will show you."

Just imagine that. In the days before cars, before mobile phones, and faxes, to pick up and leave all that you own, for no other reason but that God tells you so. Can you imagine, God speaking to you and saying, leave everything and buy a plane ticket and I'll see you in Alaska. It would be tough wouldn't it? But along with this order, God also gives some promises-

- * your descendants will become a great nation
- * your name will become great
- * and through you the whole world will be blessed.

So Abraham is asked to exchange the known for the unknown, to find his reward in what he would not live to see (a great nation), in what he could not touch (a great name) and in what would happen to others (being blessed). But faced with this enormous decision, Abraham decided to go, to trust God. To trust him even though he couldn't see him or touch him, nor could he see or touch or taste any of God's promises.

For Abraham is a man of faith. And faith is trusting, trusting in God's promises. Not just with your head, but with your feet, your hands, your very life. It's more than just a belief that God exists, it's actually doing something about it.

The course Christianity Explained tells us about a great tightrope walker whose name was Blondin. One day he set up his rope right across Niagara Falls, tested it to see if it was tight, and started across. A huge crowd had assembled and they stood amazed. Realising that every step could be his last, if it was the wrong step. An hour past, and he was still going. Two hours and he was near the end. Just under 2.5 hours went by, when the crowd went wild. He had reached the other side in one piece.

Blondin motioned to the crowd, and when they were silent , he yelled out "I am the Great Blondin", the crowd yelled back "You are indeed." "Do you believe I can now walk back across?" He yelled. "Yes" replied the crowd with just one voice. "Do you believe I could carry someone across on my back?" "Yes" they yelled at the top of their voices.

He pointed to one young man, "Then get on my back." "No way" said the man a little shakily, as he withdrew as far away from Blondin as he could. And so it continued, every one believed he could do it, but no one wanted to be the one on his back.

Until one person stepped forward. "I have faith in you," he said to Blondin. He got on his back and they inched back across the falls. One hour, two hours, three hours and the crowd had hardly said a word. Finally they got safely to the other side. Blondin was indeed worthy of that man's faith.

You see faith is more than just belief that God is there, or that he can do something. For the people in the crowd that day really didn't have faith. For faith is trusting him, getting onto his shoulders so to speak. And that's what Abraham did. He left everything and followed God. He got on his shoulders - he was full of faith.

And that's why he is a hero. Because of his obedience to God, God made his name great. Abraham trusted in God's promises and God's promises came true. For God keeps his word, he is worthy of our trust. Faith doesn't come to those who sit and wait for it. Instead faith comes when we sit up and take God at his word. When we trust him; and follow him.

So let me ask you, where has your faith taken you recently? What have you done, say this year that you wouldn't have done if God's word hadn't asked you to do it? Have you given up something? Given something away to someone? Gone and befriended someone? Not because you are a mum or a family member or a friend or a member of a service organisation but just because you're a Christian?

For faith is never ever passive, it's active. It gets onto God's shoulders so to speak. And when we look at Abraham we see that he is full of faith and that faith leads him to action.

2. Abraham - Full of doubts

Yet why did God appear to Abraham in the first place? Why choose him over all the others that lived at that time? Well we don't really know the answer to that question. It certainly wasn't because he was any better than anyone else. Because in the second half of Genesis 12 we see that it didn't take Abraham long for him to let God down.

For soon a famine occurs throughout the whole land. A famine that is quite severe. And despite the fact that God has promised Abraham this land, he doesn't stick around in it for long. At the first touch of hunger, of pain, Abraham gets right out of there. We are not told why, but it doesn't seem like he enquires of God, he just makes his own decision.

But what's more, once he gets out of the land and into the land of Egypt, he lies about his wife, by calling her his sister. Thus he puts his marriage at risk, by allowing the Pharaoh to take Sarai as part of his harem. He ignores God's promises that it will be through Sarai that he will receive his blessings. He does all these things to save his own skin.

Not much of a hero eh? Not much faith either. For we see in Abraham doubts appearing. Can God really look after me? Is he able to save me from this situation? Can I really trust him?

One of the things I really like about the Bible is that it shows people warts and all. It shows their good points and their bad points. And it shows us that the great ones, the heroes, had their doubts as well. Which I find really comforting, because I have my doubts at times as well.

Sometimes I lie on my bed at night and think is it all worth it? What is God trying to do? Why? Why are these things happening? Why do people not seem to get it? If the good news is so great, why do so many people not respond to it? Why does it go in one ear and out the other? We, like

Abraham have our doubts. And God knows that, and he understands.

Yet Abraham is still a hero for when he has his doubts, when he lets God down, when he does something that he knows is wrong, he does something really important. He seeks out his God. He's far from perfect, he's not always strong, at times his faith borders on disbelief. Yet at the crucial times in his life, he takes God at his word, and he believes in God's promises to him. For it is not the strength or perfection of Abraham's faith that is important, it is the strength and perfection of the one he trusts in, that is important. And God is strong enough and able enough to look after all who put their trust in him.

That's why he was a hero and is still a hero. Abraham wasn't perfect, but neither are we. Abraham lets God down, but so do we. Yet he knew that God was still worthy of his trust, so he continues to go where God wanted him to go. He starts again, and we see that in our passage he goes back to that altar and again calls on the name of the Lord. He asks God to forgive his doubts, to forgive his lack of faith.

The way God deals with people hasn't changed from the way he dealt with Abraham. He knows we are far from perfect, he knows that we will continually let him down, but amazingly he still asks us to be part of his people, to go where he wants us to go, to do the things that he says we should do.

For God is calling to himself a people, a people who are willing to be part of his family. Abraham was the first of many. Yet all who want to be part of God's family must have one characteristic that Abraham has. Faith. Faith that God can be trusted. Faith enough to go to God no matter what you have done. Faith that God accepts you as you are. That when we ask for forgiveness it is granted to us. For no matter who you are, or what you have done, what you are like, if you come to him in repentance and ask for a new start you will receive it.

When I was still at school, I didn't think I needed to ask for forgiveness. I was an average kid, hadn't done too many things wrong. I hadn't got horribly drunk, or taken drugs, or stolen money from anyone, apart from Mum's purse, but that didn't really count, does it? But as I grew older I realised that I wasn't following God, I wasn't really trusting him at all. I was just doing what I wanted to do. I had no faith. And so one day I realised that even though I hadn't lived a bad life, I still needed God's forgiveness. That day I started the life of faith.

Have you been where I was? Have you been where Abraham was? Hearing God speak. Listening to him say "Trust me, trust me with your life. Be willing to start again." For God may not be asking you to leave your country or your family like he did with Abraham, but he still wants you to get moving. Moving in your life of faith. And it is important that if God says that to you, that you listen.

Faith. Its more than just believing that God exists. It is doing something about it. It is trusting in God's promises. And the Bible says that we can't know God without faith. And it is ultimately that we know God because of the life of faith of one man, Jesus Christ. For although Abraham is a hero, Jesus is the ultimate hero for the Christian. The one who trusted God every second of every day. And so when God told him to die, for the sake of the world, he was willing to. And that death meant that all our sins, all our doubts could be forgiven. And we could start again with God.

Yet when Abraham was alive, he struggled with something that I struggle with, and maybe something that you struggle with. That is he couldn't see God. And because he couldn't see God, he would have doubts, he would forget about God, he would forget about his promises.

Do you ever have doubts about God? Do you ever doubt that God will do what he promised to do? For that's when Jesus comes in. Because if you doubt that God is real, I want you to go to the cross, for there you find God in human flesh.

And if you doubt that God cares, I want you to think again about Jesus dying on that cross. And if you think that God maybe can't do what you need him to do, then go to the empty tomb. There you will see that God raised Jesus from dead. That God is so much in control that even life, life itself is all in the palm of His hand.

We may not be able to see God, but that is where faith comes in. The writer of the book of Hebrews says, "Now faith is being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see." You see if you could see God, you wouldn't need faith. If I could prove to you 100% certain of the truths about Jesus, you wouldn't need faith. And if you didn't have faith, you wouldn't know God. Because the Bible says "that without faith you can't see God."

Abraham is a man of faith, a hero. Better than any modern day heroes whether they be sports stars or movie stars, for he is a great man of faith. But even men and women of faith have their doubts. But God doesn't reject us for this, instead he commits himself to shield us, he gives his word to us and he gives us the sign of the Cross and the Empty Tomb to remind us.

So how should you respond to such a God? What will the men and women of faith do in thanks for all that God has done for us. The missionary C.T. Studd was a man who turned his back on an inheritance worth millions and millions of dollars in order to go to the other side of the world to tell people about Jesus. He said "*If Jesus died for me, there is no sacrifice too great for me to give to him*" (Repeat)

Has Jesus died for you? Well if he has, it's important that you become a Studd, a real studd, a CT Studd. And realise that there is no sacrifice that I can make to God that's not worth it. For if you are willing to respond to God's love in that way, if you are willing to trust in God's promises, if you are willing to throw your lot in with Jesus, then you too will be a man or woman of faith. And even a small amount of faith, in a big God will have a powerful effect! Just you wait and see!