

THE VENTURE OF FAITH

"He went out, not knowing whither he went." Hebrews 11:8.

A true man or woman is never left unmoved by the story of a great adventure. A Columbus sails into unknown seas, in search of the unknown land; a Livingstone or a Stanley seeks to pierce some unexplored dark Continent; then, years afterward we cannot read about them without our hearts being thrilled within us. As long as human nature remains this will continue to be true. That thrill is the response of the human heart to one of the finest elements in human conduct, namely, the taking of great risks for the sake of a great idea.

It is from this point of view that we can best discern Abraham's title to honor. He is the father of all who greatly venture. In a moment big with destiny, both for himself and for the human race, the searching challenge reached him: "And the Lord said unto him, Get thee out of thy country, and from thy kindred, and from thy father's house, to the land that I will show thee." Few men have had to face so hard a choice. It was a choice between the security of that which was settled and familiar, and the uncertainty of the great unknown. On the one side there stood a thousand safeguards for his life and happiness -- the old home, the old possessions, the old ties of kinship and the old circle of friends. On the other side there stood a thousand risks -- and God. And because God called him, Abraham resolved to make the venture. "He went out, not knowing whither he went."

Others of Abraham's time may have dreamed of venturing forth into regions beyond, but he did not merely dream or talk about it. When he started on his famous journey, he was all uncertainty, not knowing his destination. He went out, leaving the land of his birth, the people whom he knew, the comforts of his home and the polytheistic religion of his fathers. He went into an unknown country in pursuit of a new and beautiful ideal, "looking for a city which hath foundations, whose builder and maker is God."

Abraham made of life an illustrious adventure, and the verdict of the age is that he was gloriously right. "He went out, not knowing whither he went." That was Abraham's fascinating adventure. It was a risky business. What a word that is -- adventure! What a tang in the very sound of it. The lure of the distant in it. The thrill of the mysterious in it. Adventure! Who does not love it? Somebody has said that the greatest line in English literature is a line on adventure which we all learned at school -- "Over the hills and far away." Anyway those words are full of magic and romance. No more so, however, than our text.

In a sense, all of life is a perpetual adventure. Abraham's story is not exceptional. What a stupendous adventure is birth into this world! Why shouldn't there be that look of wild-eyed wonder in baby's face? Every birth is the beginning of untold possibilities. And then learning to walk. The father supporting the baby, and the mother a few feet off beckoning the little one to come. A moment of fear and hesitation. Then it starts forth, toddling its few steps, until caught in the mother's arms. What an adventure!

So life goes on -- just one round of adventure. School an adventure. College a tremendous adventure. Falling in love an adventure. Then there is the great adventure of getting married. Life is a series of adventures. No man can predict what will befall him or what severe test tomorrow may present. Wherever there is human relationship and activity, there is surprise. We come into this world and we depart from it not

knowing what the future holds. And all that lies between the cradle and the grave is an adventure. Every voyage of discovery, every friendship, every advance in industry, every experiment in political freedom, every movement for reform, every investigation of science, and every approach to an ideal of truth and justice has its unpredictable elements. Every enterprise, whether of pleasure or business, has its excitement. Each new day is a bundle of unexplored potentialities. Who knows what a day or a year will bring forth? Who knows just where he is going? Who can draw up a schedule from which no deviation will be made?

Whether we like it or not, we are compelled to deal with the future. Life may sometimes seem dull and hard. But after all, there is no adventure like that of a human life. Is it not an adventure just to live, to go through the mysterious years, to meet life's tests and trials, its branching roads, its opening and closing doors?

Undoubtedly youth is the supreme time for the reign of the adventurous spirit. Whenever the trumpets call to adventure the feet of youth begin to move, and the heart begins to throb. It is hazard that appeals to youth. When we say farewell to that spirit we are old, no matter what our age.

What a gorgeous adventure the Christian life is! It is the adventure of adventures. It is an adventure at the beginning. Faith is a great venture of the soul. All the way through, the Christian life is an adventure. Think of the Bible stories, the adventure stories of the followers of God! Why, the Old Testament is a succession of romances. Think of Abraham, something tugging at his heart, pulling him out in search of final and ultimate truth, now battling triumphantly with giants of temptation, now overcome and beginning again, becoming in the end the founder of a new faith and the religious teacher of mankind. Think of Moses there in Pharaoh's palace, ministered to by servants, bowed down to by the multitudes, bidding goodbye to all that and venturing out into the unknown to lead a horde of slaves to a land of freedom. Think of him going on for forty years in the face of their murmurs and complaints, bringing them at last to the border of the promised land. He views it himself from the mountain height, and is seen no more.

"He went out, not knowing whither he went." That is faith. Perhaps no virtue is more often misconceived. At one extreme we find religious men who claim to live by faith, and yet begin to doubt God immediately when they suffer some disappointment or sorrow which they cannot fully understand. That sort of thing is to confuse faith with clear sight. At the other extreme we find those who regard faith as mere blind credulity. That is to misread the very rudiments of faith. Faith stands midway between these two extremes. To act on faith does not mean to take risks, but it means to take risks with God. The man of faith does not insist, before he obeys, on understanding just where he is being led. He is like Abraham who "went out, not knowing whither he went."

That is faith which consists of two elements. It is not knowledge alone, which would make it sight. Nor is it ignorance alone, which would make it credulity. There are some things which the man of faith knows, and there are some things which he does not know. He knows God, and, for action, that knowledge suffices. If God calls, he will obey. But he does not know where his obedience will lead him. That issue he leaves with God. So long as God leads he is content to venture. It is expressed beautifully in our noble hymn:

"I do not ask to see the distant scene!
One step enough for me."

Perhaps you have been treading the path of ordinary experience for years. Then, in a moment, everything is changed. There arises a crisis and a challenge. Some new duty

becomes plain, the end of which is hidden from your eyes. On the one side there are the old familiar safeguards, and apparent security. On the other side there is uncertainty, and God. That brings the real test. How will you act then?

The Christian life is based upon faith. The Christian is one who, when God's call is plainly heard, is pledged to venture along a path the end of which is hidden from his eyes. All that he can discern clearly is the first step: everything beyond he has to leave with God. To act on faith is to take risks with God. To say that a certain course of action is right is another way of saying that God calls us to take it. We cannot see just where it will lead us, but all faith is a venture. Only remember that it is a venture with God.

The man of faith does not demand to understand everything before he will obey. His attitude is that he knows enough, and will venture. First, he knows God. Secondly, he knows that God is calling him. Thirdly, he knows that God will never lead him astray. That knowledge is enough for action. Kingsley put it beautifully, "I do not see my way; I do not care too: but I know that He sees the way, and that I see Him." Go anywhere with God. Do the right thing, and face the consequences. When God calls us to take any step, let us take it and leave the results with Him. Where it will lead us is not our concern, but His.

God's call frequently guides us to a task quite different from that for which we had hoped. We see what we would have preferred to do, but the way was closed. The work which we would have chosen has been entrusted to another, and, in its place, we find ourselves responsible for something far less romantic and less congenial.

Faith declares this open path to be God's choice for us. Experience justifies the contention. Thus Livingstone, who as a youth had centered his hopes on missionary work in China, found at the last that the way to China was barred. At the same moment there came a call to Africa. To respond to it seemed, to his limited thoughts, like turning aside from his life-mission and going out into the unknown. Yet, he accepted this one path open and went. He could not see where it would lead him. He took the "one step" that was clear and left "the distant scene" with God. In Africa he found his great life-work awaiting him.

Faith is a venture with God. There can be no risks in obedience to God. The risks lie in disobedience to Him. There are no real risks in following the divine call; it is only to our limited vision that they look like risks. A man is never so safe as when he is in the path of duty, no matter where it may lead him. Stake everything upon God and He will see you through.