

Lasting Faith

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[0:00] By faith, Abraham obeyed when he was called to go out to a place that he was to receive as an inheritance. And he went out not knowing where he was going.

By faith, he went to live in the land of promise, as in a foreign land, living in tents with Isaac and Jacob, heirs with him of the same promise.

For he was looking forward to the city that has foundations, whose designer and builder is God. By faith, Sarah herself received power to conceive, even when she was past the age, since she considered him faithful who had promised.

Therefore, from one man and him as good as dead were born descendants as many as the stars of heaven and as many as the innumerable grains of sand on the seashore.

These all died in faith, not having received the things promised, but having seen them and greeted them from afar, and having acknowledged that they were strangers and exiles on the earth.

[1:22] For people who speak thus make it clear that they are seeking a homeland. If they had been thinking of that land from which they had gone out, they would have had opportunity to return.

But as it is, they desire a better country, that is, a heavenly one. Therefore, God is not ashamed to be called their God, for he has prepared for them a city.

Last week, when Bruce introduced our summer series in Hebrews 11, he explained from verse 3 that by faith we understand that the universe was created by the word of God.

So that what is seen was made out of things that are visible. It was not made out of things that are visible.

He also explained that faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen, something which Barry has already mentioned.

[2:30] And we'll be thinking more about this verse, verse 1, today as we look at the example of Abraham. Now we're going to be leaving Sarah to next week when we pick that up.

Now while people may ridicule the idea of faith, especially Christian faith, we're often accused of having blind faith.

In reality, we all live by faith, especially at this time of year. If we want to go on holiday, or we have been on holiday, we research it.

We find out what's there. Do we think we're going to enjoy it? How much will it cost? We think, can we afford it?

Where is it? How can we get there? And it's most likely that we'll have done this on the internet. We are trusting the website and the reviews are accurate and reliable.

[3:40] And if we haven't been there, we take it all on trust because we want to go on holiday. Well, if we do this in everyday life, such as going on holiday, how much more should we have faith in what God has promised, even though we've not seen it?

As the writer says, faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen. Faith, knowing or believing what God has said, is shown by how we live, our objectives and our actions.

And today we're looking at Abraham, another Old Testament example of faith. He showed his faith by obeying God, as we read in verses 8 and 9.

By faith, Abraham obeyed when he was called to go out to a place he was to receive as an inheritance. He went out not knowing where he was going.

By faith, he went to live in the land of promise, as in a foreign land, living in tents with Isaac and Jacob, heirs with him of the same promise.

[4:55] Now, this is one bit I might get you to look in your Old Testament. That's picking up a story in Genesis chapter 12, which you'll find on page 10 in the Bibles.

So, reading verse 1. Now, the Lord said to Abraham, Go from your country and your kindred and your father's house to the land that I will show you.

And then continues to read from verse 4. So, Abraham went, as the Lord had told him, and Lot went with him. Abraham was 75 years old when he departed from Haran.

And there Abraham took Sarai, his wife, and Lot, his brother's son, and all their possessions that they had gathered, and the people they had acquired in Haran.

And they set out to go to the land of Canaan. When they came to the land of Canaan, Abraham passed through the land to the place of Shechem, to the oak of Moreh.

[6:03] At that time the Canaanites were in the land. Then the Lord appeared to Abraham and said to your offspring, said to your offspring, I will give this land. So he built there an altar to the Lord who had appeared to him.

From there he moved to the hill country on the east of Bethel, and pitched his tent with Bethel on the west and Ai on the east. And there he built an altar to the Lord, and called upon the name of the Lord.

And Abraham journeyed on, still going towards the Negev. Abraham was 75 years old, when God told him to leave his home and go to another country.

He did this in faith because he trusted God. Even though God didn't tell him where he was going, he went, as we see in verse 8, because God had promised him an inheritance.

And it's like one of us oldies being told by God to pack a suitcase, get our freedom pass, get on bus after bus, until we get to the place that God wants to take us.

[7:22] At 75, we expect to be well settled into our retirement. We don't expect to move home, let alone emigrate to another country.

Now, I don't know whether you've seen the programme, A Race Around the World, where the contestants go from one place to another, and when they arrive, they're given an envelope, a sealed envelope, with the next destination in it.

So that's when they find out where they're going to go, and they go on and on, until they reach the end. Well, it's a bit like that for Abraham. At 75, we don't expect someone like, at that age, to be selected as a contestant for Race Around the World, going from place to place with a rucksack.

Yet that's exactly what Abraham did. He packed up, said his goodbyes, and set off with Sarah and Lot on a journey, not knowing where he was going. He went, because God promised him a place, an inheritance.

And he kept moving from place to place, not settling. And why? Well, we see the answer there, in verse 10. For he was looking forward, to the city that has foundations, whose designer and builder is God.

[8:47] God had, so that's our first point. Faith seeks a heavenly home. God had promised him, that's Abraham, a city with foundations.

So something permanent, secure. What a contrast to the tents they were living in. It was a city designed and built by God.

He hadn't seen this city, but he believed God. He believed that what God had promised, God would give him, and it was worth the effort.

He trusted God, each time he moved, to his next destination. As we saw in Genesis 12, started off in Haran, left for the land of Canaan, passed through the land, until he got to Shechem, and then on to Bethel, and then on towards the Negev.

He was constantly moving. He was seeking, a heavenly home. A city designed, built by God. Now, if you're in a growth group, a heavenly home might sound familiar.

[9:56] We finished our Bible overview, looking at Revelation, and no need to turn to it, but I'm going to read a couple of verses, from the beginning of Revelation 21. Revelation gives us a picture, Jerusalem coming down out of heaven, from God, prepared as a bride for her husband.

Revelation gives us a picture, of the new creation, a heavenly city, that will be the eternal home, for all those who trust in Jesus, and live by faith.

And that's what the writer, to the Hebrews, these Hebrew Christians, has been encouraging them, to have faith, and to preserve their souls.

Faith seeks, a heavenly home. And because Abraham, was seeking a heavenly home, he lived as a stranger here. And that brings us, to our second point, faith lives, as a stranger here.

And in verse 9, we read, By faith, he went to live, in the land of promise, as in a foreign land, living in tents, with Isaac and Jacob, heirs with him, of the same promise.

[11:30] For he was looking forward, to the city that has foundations, whose designer, and builder is God. And then carrying on, in verse 13, these all died in faith, not having received, the things promised, but having seen them, and greeted them from afar, having acknowledged, that they were strangers, and exiles, on earth.

For people who speak thus, make it clear, they are seeking a homeland. If they'd been seeking, thinking of that home, from which they'd gone out, they would have had, opportunity to return.

But as it is, they desire, a better country. That is a heavenly one. So they were moving through, constantly moving.

They knew, that this place, was not their own, their own home. They lived in tents, and his children, and grandchildren, did the same, Isaac and Jacob.

They didn't set the land, they didn't buy land, they didn't build a home. And yet, they didn't see, as we see in verse 13, what God had promised.

[12:47] Each successive generations, lived as a stranger on earth. They only saw, by faith, and kept seeking, by faith, what God had promised.

Now the writer, at the end of chapter 10, has been encouraging, the Hebrew Christians, to live by faith, and endure. So they would receive, what God has promised.

And like them, we have to have faith, to preserve our souls. Now how would Abraham, have been an encouragement, to those Hebrew Christians?

Bruce explained last week, from the end of chapter 10, that they had started well, as Christians. They'd endured suffering, and they joyfully accepted, their property being plundered.

So they suffered a lot. Now they were being tempted, to give up, to shrink back. But by pointing them, to Abraham's example, he wants to encourage them.

[13:53] Abraham was wealthy. We saw what he'd acquired, in Haran. But he left his home, and lived as a stranger here, because he was seeking, a heavenly home. And like the Hebrew Christians, it's the same for us.

We need faith, to endure, and not shrink back. Even when we may be ridiculed. That's very common experience, for us as Christians. We need to persevere, as we wait for our heavenly home.

Even when life gets hard, as a Christian. Like Abraham, we need to recognise, this world is not a home. We're living in, we're not living in tents, like Abraham.

But we're strangers, in this world. Because we're seeking, a heavenly home. Abraham's family, kept looking forward, kept going, to get to the end.

A bit like, runners do, in the London Marathon. Why? Because they believed, that what God had promised, was worth, all the effort. By faith, they desired, a better country.

[15:01] A heavenly home. A city designed, and built by God. Prepared for them. By faith, they had seen this, and greeted it from afar.

And the result, quite amazing, if you look at verse 16, therefore, God is not ashamed, to be called their God. Isn't that amazing?

That God, is not ashamed, to be called their God, and our God, if we have faith. Now we find, living as a stranger here, is quite challenging, because we live in a world, that's focused, on the here and now.

We have credit cards, that take the waiting, out of wanting. We have instant deliveries. Today, people don't expect, to wait. But Abraham, had been asked by God, to wait, to have faith, to trust him.

To believe, that what he had promised, would happen, and was far better, than everything, on offer now. The Hebrew Christians, had to wait, and endure suffering. And God asks us, to do the same.

[16:13] If we do that, God doesn't disown us. Even when we mess up, and struggle with faith, as we see, Abraham and Sarah did. God spoke to Abraham, and promised him a city.

Abraham believed God, and sought a heavenly home, living as a stranger, on earth. Today, God speaks to us, through the Bible. We need to believe, and act on what God said.

Jesus promised, his disciples, in John 14, he would prepare, a place for them. So by faith, we know, that our heavenly home, is ready and waiting, because Jesus, has prepared it.

And that's where we're going, if we have faith, and persevere. Faith, seeks a heavenly home, and lives as a stranger here. And just as I draw this, to a close, I want us to think about, some possible implications.

If we believe, God's promise, of a new heaven, and a new earth, an eternal city, as our true home, then we should hold lightly, to the things of this world.

[17:26] Because this is not, our true home. We may, we need to think carefully, about how much we invest, in our career, our education, our family, or our home, because we're only, passing through.

So what might this mean, for us? It might affect, career choices. Not, such as, should I go, should we go, for that new job, or promotion?

I'm not saying, we shouldn't. But if we do, how will it affect, our ability, to make disciples, of Jesus Christ? In a recent, catch up, with Mark Oden, our mission partner, in Naples, Mark shared, with SD and me, that, that one of the men, most likely, to lead the church, in Naples, when he leaves, next year, is someone, who's been, trained theologically.

That sounds, very reasonable. Probably, one of the most, important reasons, is, his cleaning business, enables him, to be available, to lead the church.

He is, the flexibility, to work, in a way, that suits, the church's needs. He's not constrained, by working hours. He can choose. That gives him, flexibility, to lead the church, that others, wouldn't have.

[18:47] We know, of people, who have done, Cornhill, perhaps going, part time, or working, compressed hours, when, or when they retire. They've chosen, to train, to get better equipped, and to make, be able, to make disciples.

Our priority, should be, to seek, God's kingdom, and not, our own welfare. We should be, trusting, our heavenly father, to provide for us.

Do we, and will we, keep believing, that our real home, is in heaven, not this world? If we do, then that will affect, how we live now, our priorities, our choices, how we use our time, money, and resources.

If our home, is in heaven, then we should be, less concerned, with what we have now. But that's challenging, because we're constantly, encouraged, to put our trust in, what we can, we can see, what we have.

We may feel, secure in our homes, our jobs, how much money we have, yet none of these, are permanent. They're a false security. Faith, seeks, a heavenly home, and lives, as a stranger here.

[20:02] So as we finish, let's pray. Our Father, I pray, that you would, strengthen our faith, as we reflect, on what you have promised us, through Jesus, to be with you, for eternity.

Help us, to see everything, in the perspective, that we are passing, through this world, that we may live, for you. and seek first, your kingdom, and your righteousness, for Jesus' sake.

Amen.