

The Pilgrimage of Faith

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Preacher: Rev RJ Campbell

- [0 : 0 0] Seeking the Lord's help and looking to his blessing, let us turn back to the portion of Scripture that we read together in Hebrews chapter 11, and we'll read from verse 13.
- These all died in faith, not having received the promises, but having seen them afar off, and were persuaded of them, and embraced them, and confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth.
- For they that say such things declare plainly that they seek a country, and truly, if they had been mindful of that country from whence they came out, they might have had opportunity to have returned.
- But now they desire a better country, that is, heavenly, wherefore God is not ashamed to be called their God, for he hath prepared for them a city.
- The 11th chapter of Hebrews brings before us the variety of things that faith does or that faith accomplishes.
- [1 : 1 0] It is often labelled as the heroes of the faith, but such a label can be misleading. Although the writer draws upon Old Testament personalities such as Abel, Enoch, Noah, Abraham, and so on.
- Nevertheless, the writer's focus is ultimately not upon those personalities, but upon the one faith that displays itself in its various facets in their lives.
- Through them we come to see all the things that faith does and the benefits that faith conveys.
- Faith makes present and real things that are future and unseen. Faith sees the creator behind the creation.
- By faith we understand who made and sustains the universe. This 11th chapter of Hebrews shows us more of the many things that faith does.
- [2 : 2 3] Faith pleases God. Faith does good works. Faith looks upon a heavenly city. Faith trusts God's promises and it conquers over every obstacle.
- The Apostle John reminds us at the end of his first epistle, For whatsoever is born of God, overcometh the world. And this is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith.
- This is the victory that overcometh the world, our faith. The passage that we have taken today from this epistle looks upon faith as a pilgrimage.
- In verse 13 we read, These all died in faith, Not having received the promises, But having seen them afar off and were persuaded of them and embraced them and confessed That there were strangers and pilgrims on the earth.
- It is not certain if the words at the beginning of verse 13, These all died in faith, Whether that compasses all those spoken of from the beginning of the chapter Or just simply Abraham and his family.
- [3 : 4 5] The context would probably suggest that it is Abraham and his immediate family. Although the sentiments of the verse can be applied to all believers that we find in the Bible.

They all died still believing, But not having all the things that their faith set itself upon,
Realised in this world or in their life.

The promises which we should trust it were not fulfilled in their present earthly life. They saw them and were persuaded of them, But it was afar off.

Abraham was promised children, And although he did not live to see that being fulfilled,
Though he did live to see the promised son from the womb of Sarah, But God had promised him to have offspring like the stars in the sky, And with them to take possession of the land.

That did not occur in his earthly life. He died still hoping for all that he had longed for and journeyed towards in this life.

[5 : 05] Abraham, Isaac and Jacob spent their whole lives longing for things that they were promised, Longing to have a land of their own. They trusted God for this and believed the promises he gave them, Yet they died without having received them.

And looking upon these bare facts, One would be justified to conclude what a gloomy and depressing story that is. It was all that their faith was about.

Well, if that was all that our faith and their faith is about, Dying with only unfulfilled hopes, Then we are, as Paul reminds us, If in this life only we have hope in Christ, We are of all men most miserable.

However, our faith takes us beyond this earth. Our faith takes us beyond this present life. Our blessings, to which faith looks, Are spiritual rather than material.

Since their lives were regulated by faith, They saw the things promised from a distance. And they were persuaded of them.

[6 : 35] And they were convinced that the things that were promised were sure and certain. They had become a reality for them by faith.

And they embraced them from a distance. Remember what Jesus said to the Jews regarding Abraham. Your father Abraham rejoiced to see my day. And he saw it and was glad.

There were many years between Abraham and Christ. And yet, Abraham saw that day by faith. He saw the day of Christ, although at a distance.

Faith having a promise looks out for the blessing. It brings along with it an actual expectation for the blessing.

Faith is fully persuaded of the certainty of the blessing which it beholds in the promise.

[7 : 39] There is a decisiveness or certainty of acceptance and persuasion in faith.

Paul writes, Been confident of this very thing, that he which hath begun a good work anew will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ.

Writing to young Timothy, he says, For the which cares I also suffer these things. Nevertheless, I am not ashamed, for I know whom I have believed, and am persuaded that he is able to keep that which I have committed unto him against that day.

Secondly, this persuasion of the certainty of the promised blessing stands upon two truths. First of all, God is true in keeping his promises.

And secondly, it stands on God's power to bring it to pass. By faith, they saw these promises afar off, and were persuaded of them, and embraced them.

[9 : 03] And what effect did this have on their life? Well, here we are told that they confessed that there were strangers and pilgrims on the earth.

There is a sense in which this is true of all mankind. Every person, whether good or bad, is on a journey travelling to their long home.

On a journey travelling to their eternal destiny. And the difference is in the way that they take. Some take the broad road that leads to destruction.

But others take the narrow road that leads to life. But for the believer, he confesses that he or she is a stranger and pilgrim on the earth, because by faith, they are able to look at the inheritance that has been prepared for them.

Paul says, in writing to the Ephesians, The eyes of your understanding been enlightened, that ye may know what is the hope of his calling, and what the riches of the glory of his inheritance in the saints.

[10 : 29] Unless the eyes of our understanding are opened or enlightened, we cannot look into these things. But if our eyes have been, the eyes of our understanding has been enlightened, then faith gives us a knowledge of what is waiting for us.

The eyes of our understanding have been enlightened by faith. We receive a knowledge of what is waiting for us.

Here in this world, we know that while we are at home in a body, we are absent from the Lord. Faith sees God in this world, but it sees that there is another manner of enjoying God.

A way where there is no sin. A manner of enjoying God without sin and without sorrow.

Where there is no absence or clouding of God's presence, although we faith sees God in this world, we know that in our experience, that we are still in this body of sin, in this body of sorrow.

[11 : 56] We know that at times, God can hide his presence from us. We know that there can be the clouding of God's presence. That is our experience in this world.

But by faith, we know that there is another way of enjoying God that we are looking forward to, and that is where we enjoy God without sin, without sorrow, where there is no absence or clouding of God's presence.

Faith does not only see that heaven is better than earth, but faith sees that it is ours. It is yours.

It is yours. And it is mine. It is your inheritance. My inheritance. It is preserved for us.

And therefore, we expect it as an inheritance. Paul exhorts us. Set your affection on things above, not on the things on the earth.

[13 : 03] Christ says, where the treasure is, there will the heart be also. Believers to whom heaven is their home, there will be a desire and longing to be with Christ and his church.

For to be with Christ is far better. And the amazing thing is this, that the same longing is with Jesus himself.

He intercedes, Father, I will that they also whom thou hast given me be with me where I am, that they may behold my glory, which thou hast given me, for thou lovest me before the foundation of the world.

It brings before us, that when a believer dies, the delight of Christ, in receiving that soul, to be with himself.

It's an answer, to his intercession, as the mediator of the church, to the Father, Father, I will, that they also whom thou hast given me be with me where I am.

[14 : 21] And therefore, although we grieve and mourn and feel the loss of God's people when they die, nevertheless, there is a sense in which we are also joyous in the fact that they have been received by Jesus and that he delights in receiving them, for they are the ones whom he redeemed in the world.

So, having seen the promises afar off and were persuaded of them and embraced them and confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth, as their faith focused upon their heavenly goal, the end of faith's journey to be received by Jesus Christ into heaven.

and with their eyes focused upon the end of faith's journey, they confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on earth.

believers are strangers and pilgrims here because their rest and their treasure lies beyond the grave.

and by faith they embrace and enjoy the things promised for that life beyond the grave. This means that the believer's perspective on death is very different to that of the non-believer.

[16 : 08] One can see how Paul's view on the life to come shaped his view upon death. For Paul, this life was but a journey to what lies beyond death.

Paul wrote to Timothy from prison and sure that death loomed near, he said, I have fought a good fight. I have finished my course. I have kept the faith.

Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness which the Lord, the righteous judge shall give me at that day and not to me only but unto all them also at love his appearing.

Their life was only a preparation. It was the groundwork of what was yet to come.

Paul's view of death was centred on the cross of Jesus Christ. It was because of the finished work of Jesus Christ on the cross that Paul could cry out death is swallowed up in victory.

[17 : 20] Oh death, where is thy sting? Oh grave, where is thy victory? This does not mean that we don't fear death. It is natural for us to fear death.

It is the last enemy and it is an enemy. enemy. It is the last enemy. But we have the victory over our last enemy in Jesus Christ.

Spurgeon in one of his sermons he asks death, what is it? What is the death of the believer?

What is it? he says, it is the waiting room where we robe ourselves for immortality. Then the writer goes on to say, for they that say such things declare plainly that they seek a country and truly if they had been mindful of that country from which they came out they may have had opportunity to have returned.

You will recall what the Lord said to Abraham, get thee out of thy country and from thy kindred and from thy father's house into a land that I will show thee.

[18 : 46] And earlier in this chapter we are told that he obeyed and that he went out not knowing whether he went. By faith he sojourned in the land of promise as in a strange country dwelling in tabernacles with Isaac and Jacob the heirs with him of the same promise.

By leaving the place where he dwelt he was declaring very plainly that he was seeking another homeland.

Paul says to the Christian come ye out from among them and be ye separate. when Abraham left earth he had set his heart upon the country that is to come to which God had called him and which God promised him.

For us it does not mean that we have to physically change our place of residence but we will have to exchange our former lifestyle in the world and our affection which was placed upon the things of the world to a new lifestyle and a new affection upon Christ.

Abraham willingly left all and in this he shows what faith requires. Faith leaves one home for another. For he looked for a city which hath foundations whose builder and maker is God.

[20 : 21] They seek a country that decide a better country that is a heavenly. the true homeland was not on earth at all.

Their heart was set on a better country a heavenly one. They desire a better country. The word desire could be translated to aspire or to strive to eagerly desire a better country that is unheavenly.

A.W.P. brings our attention to the descriptions that we have of the patriots and the exercise of their faith. They looked. They were seeking.

They were desiring. And they declared. Abraham looked for a city. That is faith expectations of the blessedness to come.

They seek a country. They make it the great aim and business of their lives to avoid every hindrance and obstacle that may keep them from obtaining that country.

[21 : 37] They press forward along and are away. They decide a better country. They long to be forever with the Lord. And they declare plainly that they seek a country.

Their daily walk makes it manifest that they belong not to this world but that they are the citizens of heaven. The writer to the Hebrews commends Abraham for his faith in that he made no attempt to go back.

Nothing stood between Abraham and his former home except his faith. faith. The fact that he made no attempt to go back shows the strength and reality of his faith.

And truly if he had been mindful of that country from whence they came out they might have had opportunity to have returned. The worst and the most devastated thing that can be said of someone who once professed faith in Christ is that he or she has gone back to the home or the place that they had left.

Recently we spoke of Lot's wife who was turned into a pillar of salt simply because she looked back on Sodom. Her heart went back with her eyes and God judged her for her unbelief.

[23 : 06] The strongest charge laid against the Israelites in the exodus was that they complained about the hardships of their journey and longed to return to their former slavery in Egypt.

In the book of Numbers we read and the mixed multitude that was among them fell a lusting and the children of Israel also wept again and said who shall give us flesh to eat we remember the fish which we did eat in Egypt freely the cucumbers and the melons and the leeks and the onions and the garlic but now our soul is dried away there is nothing at all besides this manner before our eyes now notice two or three things there notice it was the mixed multitude that was among them fell a lusting and what do we find that soon Israel followed the mixed multitude we must discipline ourselves we must not give ourselves over to the lifestyle of the world and they long to go back to slavery there were slaves in

Egypt task masters over them and they came in their experience a moment when they wished to go back to that and they have been set for us as the Bible tells us as a warning they came to despise the provision of God in his love mercy and grace they said we remember when we had fish and when we had the cucumbers and the melons and the leaves and the onions and the garlic in Egypt but now we just left with this manna they despised God's provision and they wished for the things that were back in Egypt what a sight that is when a person comes to despise the provision of God and looks back and desires the things that they had left and wishes to be back among that

Paul sadly reported the apostasy of one of his diselpers he says for demons have forsaken me having loved this present world Jesus spoke of the stony ground hearers and the thorny ground hearers when they hear they receive the word with joy and these have no root which for a while believe and in time of temptation fall away and that which fell among thorns are they which when they have heard go forth and are choked with cares and riches and pleasures of this life and bring no fruit to perfection whether or not we have really left this world and become strangers and pilgrims is determined not just by what we say but how we live where is our allegiance have you or

I turned back to our old allegiances Paul speaks of those having a form of godliness but denying the power thereof and he warns us and he says from such turn away solemn warning that we must take to heart if they had been mindful of that country from whence they came out they might have had opportunity to have returned but Abraham's allegiance and identity were not with the country that he left or with the people that lived in the earth of the cold days but was also looked for a heavenly country he could say like Ruth said to Naomi entreat me not to leave thee or return from following after thee for whether thou goest I will go and where thou lodgest I will lodge thy people shall be my people and thy

[27 : 34] God my God her allegiance was to God and to his covenant people and so she identified herself with them let my allegiance and yours be to God and to his covenant people and let us identify ourselves with them in John in John Bunyan's one of Christians from leaving his home and was puzzled by Christians eagerness to be apart from a comfortable worldly life asks Christians what are the things you seek since you leave all the world to find them and Christian answered and said I seek an inheritance incorruptible and defiled that does not fade away it is reserved and safe in heaven to be given at the time appointed to them that diligently seek it Abraham was such a man but what about you wherefore

God is not ashamed to be called their God for he hath prepared for them a city what could be more assuring than the fact that God is not ashamed to be called their God that he is not to be ashamed of those who put their trust in him for those who put their trust in him through Jesus Christ God is not ashamed of them he is not ashamed of those who are strangers and pilgrims in this world those who are longing for the home that he has prepared for them often when we feel alone isolated defeated and unworthy we sometimes retreat to that great promise that we studied together recently the words of Jesus to his troubled disciples in the upper room in my father's house and many mansions if it were not so

I would have told you I go to prepare a place for you and if I go and prepare a place for you I will come again and receive you unto myself that where I am there ye may be also oh how true for the person who has put his trust in Christ he is a stranger and pilgrim in this world because heaven is his home Jesus talks of heaven as a single glorious home with enough dwelling places to take the complete family of God Jesus urges upon us not to confine our attention to the visible and to the temporal but to think of heaven in the midst of all our troubles and testings from a troubled world we are to be heavenly centred in the midst of all the upheaval and turmoil of our present day the believer should not be alarmed for he knows that

God is working out his own purpose and part of that purpose that God is working out is to bring his children home to himself he is longing and looking forward to that day when he will be unable to say to the father behold I and the children that you gave to me those children for whom I went to the cross of Golgotha those children for whom I died and was buried those children for whom I rose again here they are and I have lost none of them I have fulfilled your purpose I have brought them home how often the Bible exhorts us to be heavenly mindedness if ye then be risen with Christ seek those things which are above where

Christ sitteth on the right hand of God set your affection on things above and not on the things of the earth and again for our conversation is in heaven from whence also we look for the saviour the Lord Jesus Christ to be heavenly minded is to be spiritually minded for to be kindly minded is death but to be spiritually minded is life and peace well do you have a home are you one for whom Jesus has gone to prepare a place in heaven is it certain that you will leave this world for it is appointed into man once to die but what then we are all on our journey to our home but where will that be in a place of blessing or in a place of weeping apart from trusting in the finished work of Jesus on the cross no one can get into heaven for he says that he has gone there to prepare a place in heaven for all those who will trust in him are you among them are you today rejoicing in the hope of the glory of

[32 : 58] God do you know the joy of possessing a place reserved for you at your journey's end well these all died in faith not having received the promises but having seen them afar off they were persuaded of them they were real to them they embraced them and by embracing them they were confessing that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth for they were seeking a country that is an heavenly country if they had been mindful of that country from which they came there was an opportunity to return but their faith kept them from returning to the country that they had left because of the promises of God's word God's word is a promise and faith lays hold of that promise and so they desired a better country that is in heaven where

God is not ashamed to be called their God for he had prepared for them a city well is that city prepared for yourself is it prepared for you let the Lord bless these thoughts to us let us pray