

Stepping Out In Faith

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Preacher: Rev James Maciver

- [0 : 0 0] Will you turn with me now to the New Testament and to the letter to the Hebrews and chapter 11. The letter to the Hebrews, chapter 11, towards the end of the Bible.
- The letter to the Hebrews, chapter 11, and we'll read at verse 8. Let's read.
- The letter to the Hebrews, chapter 11, and builder is God. Which, of course, fits with the passage that we read in Genesis, especially from the beginning of chapter 12, which tells us about God calling Abraham to go out from where he belonged to and to go on to the land that God was going to show him.
- This chapter in Hebrews is a catalogue or a list or a roll, you might say, or a register of people who lived by faith, faith in God.
- And it shows us that faith is not merely a matter of intellect, a matter of the mind. It is that. But more than that, faith works itself through in our daily lifestyle.
- [1 : 3 5] Every one of these examples or instances of faith, these people that are mentioned, such as Abraham, that we're looking at this morning, we can see from that that faith is not merely a matter of what you think, what you believe, it's how you live.
- It's how you live out your life. That's the way in which these people are mentioned, the things that they did, as well as what they believed, or from what they believed, they acted in these ways.
- And you can see their faith, therefore, in the acts or in the ways in which they lived, in which they showed that they were believers, which is an important point for ourselves, of course, to remember as well.
- And it helps us to understand what faith is and why faith is important in our own experience. Two things we're going to take from these verses this morning.
- First of all, in verse 8 here, how faith is said, in the case of Abraham, that he obeyed when he was called to go out to a place, that he was to receive as an inheritance.
- [2 : 4 3] In other words, stepping out in faith is a response to God's call. Paul, stepping out in faith, Abraham's response to God's call.
- And then in verses 9 and 10, sojourning by faith, or living as a traveler by faith, living by God's promises. So, stepping out in faith, a response to God's call, and sojourning by faith, living by God's promises.
- Abraham belonged to Ur of the Caldeas. It was a place that was associated with pagan religion, particularly, we're told by those historians who know these things, that they were a people who were involved in moon worship.
- That was the kind of paganism that they were involved with in that particular region of Ur of the Caldeas. And as God came to Abraham, he called Abraham, as you see here, Abraham obeyed when he was called to go out of that place, towards a place that he was going to receive as an inheritance.

God came to address him in such a way that he heard God's voice. Of course, in those days, Abraham didn't have a book like we have a book of the Bible, where God, having revealed himself by stages down through the years, the Bible has come to be put together over these generations.

[4 : 12] Abraham didn't have that. A lot of the time, God spoke to them inwardly, in their thoughts and their minds, and that was then kept and passed on from one family to the next, or one generation to the next, until matters were confined to writing.

Here is Abraham. We're told here that he was called by God to go out to a place. And that call had two elements to it. And God's call that comes to us through the gospel today, the call that comes through his word, through the gospel, has these same two elements by which God addressed Abraham.

The first of these is a command, because he came to Abraham and said, Go, leave this place, and go to a place that I'm going to show you, a place that you will receive as an inheritance.

By faith, Abraham obeyed when he was called. He was commanded by God. The command, the call of God, included God's command, God's stipulation, God's imperative, if you like, for him to leave.

And you notice here, By faith, Abraham obeyed. And it's very important that we see that the word obeyed is placed very close to the word faith, and also the words he was called.

[5 : 30] The command was a very definite and a very sharp command. He needed to leave where he had been living, all of that time where he'd been brought up, and he obeyed.

In other words, this verse is really saying to us something important about Abraham's obedience, and that was that he obeyed without delay. He didn't say to God, I'll do it when I'm older.

He didn't say to God, I'll do it when I'm disgusted with my wife or with my family, until I get a better appreciation of what you're asking me to do. It doesn't mean he didn't do that. It doesn't mean he didn't say anything to his family, to his relatives, or to his household.

It doesn't mean that at all. But it does say to us quite categorically, by placing these words the way they are in the text, By faith, Abraham obeyed when he was called. By faith, Abraham being called, obeyed.

The obedience is placed instantly, as an instant thing, beside the call of God. He didn't wait, or linger with his family, or question what God was actually asking him to do.

[6 : 41] That is important for ourselves, obviously, as well. Through the call of the gospel, God is actually calling to us to actually respond to that call, which calls us to actually make sure that we're on this journey that we were talking to the children about earlier, and to actually leave the lifestyle that we know ourselves, even if it hasn't been very openly sinful, it's still a lifestyle that requires God's forgiveness.

We need God's acceptance of us. We need God to actually receive us and to fellowship with himself. We need the Lord Jesus Christ to be our savior. We need to be born again, as Jesus himself put it.

We need to have a radical change from within that then affects our lifestyle outwardly. All of that is part of what God is calling us to, and calling us away from life without him, life attached to this world only, life attached to our sinfulness, or our own preferences, our own choices.

And so when Abraham was called by God, he obeyed. And that's what we have to be careful that we're actually doing as well. Maybe you're here, have been addressed by the gospel previously.

Maybe you've never been used to the gospel before, but it doesn't really matter. The gospel is addressed to everyone, of every kind, in every circumstance, all the variety of circumstances and personalities that are represented here in this audience today, in this congregation today, myself included.

[8 : 19] God is calling us today from the gospel into fellowship with himself, to walk in this way of faith, to walk in the way that trusts in him, that places our life in his hands, that actually prepares for leaving this world and going to eternity.

Because that's really what we don't want ourselves naturally to believe, that that's what's ahead of us, that we are going to meet with God. And that God is not going to approve of us unless we have actually come to have the Lord Jesus Christ as our Savior, by faith, by trusting in him, we come to have his righteousness put onto our account.

That's what the Bible teaches us. And this is what God is calling us to. So don't delay in this matter. Please don't think of it as something that you can do at some future stage in your life, because for one thing, that's not guaranteed to any of us.

Young folks here have to remember that not everybody, sadly, leaves the time of their youth and goes on into old age. Remember that young people die young too.

We all have to die at some point. We don't know when. But we know that when it takes place, we'll have to move from this world to meet with God.

[9 : 41] And God is calling us to prepare for that and to do it his way, to follow this path, by faith, as Abraham did. By faith, Abraham obeyed.

So are you lingering today over your salvation? Are you lingering over your relationship with God? Is it the case with you that you know what God is saying, that you have heard this before, you know what the gospel is saying, but you haven't yet responded?

Well, look at the case of Abraham and what this is telling us. By faith, Abraham obeyed when he was called. He responded to God's call, and out he went from the place where he had been brought up.

So there's the command of God. But then God is kind. Not that his commands are not kind. It's kindness to us, really, that God is showing when he gives us commands, when he gives us laws that are designed for our good and for our development.

But he doesn't just leave it at a bare command, because the second element in God's call is his promise. He was called to go to a place that he was after to receive as an inheritance.

[10 : 52] In other words, faith, as you put your faith and your trust in God, not only do you respond by obeying the command of God, you accept the promise of God.

You take God at his word. You believe what he's saying. You accept that that is the truth. Some people misuse this verse that really accuses those of us who are believers, those of us as Christians, as we try to commend the Christian life to people.

They'll say to you, well, you actually just don't really know what you're doing. Because the Bible tells you in this verse, for example, Abraham went out not knowing where he was going. So certain people of an atheistic, humanistic persuasion will actually say to you, look, that's what faith is.

It's a leap in the dark. You're just like jumping over the edge of a cliff. You don't know where you're going to land. Yes, you're accepting the word of God that somehow or other it will work out safely for you, but it's really a leap in the dark, isn't it?

No, it's not. Faith is not a leap in the dark. Yes, Abraham had still to receive information from God in addition to what he was given here.

[11 : 58] But he believed that as well and he believed that what God had given him was reliable at that moment. Now, he didn't have a Bible the way we have. So you have an advantage and I have an advantage over Abraham that you have the complete word of God in its written form.

That you have this Bible, this instruction book of God, this guidance book from God, where these promises of God are set out for us and where the command of God is accompanied in God's great kindness by explanations along with the command.

He never just leaves it at a bare command. Not that we shouldn't obey even if it were that. But he then revealed to Abraham as you read in Genesis, as Abraham set out on his journey, God met him at certain stages and he added more information and he added more promises and he made the thing clearer for him as time went on.

Well, God is like that. As you come to this Bible, as you begin the journey of faith, it's not a leap in the dark. You are acting on the basis of what this word is saying to you and you know that as this is God's word and it is reliable and it is truthful, what you're receiving is not something that keeps you in the dark but it's a very clear light.

Of course, there are things in the Bible that are difficult to understand. Of course, it's true that God has not revealed absolutely everything about himself to us and God doesn't explain every single thing that happens in our lives to us.

[13 : 31] Of course, that's true. But what he has set out for us is a clear set of guidelines, of rules, of instructions, of promises so that we can see because he is reliable and faithful, here is something that we can truly build our lives upon.

Something reliable, something that's not going to change from one day to the next because God doesn't change his word. He doesn't change his mind. He doesn't say, well, that's what I thought yesterday but I've made up my mind to do something else or say something else today.

Abraham believed what God said. He obeyed because it was a command. He received it because it was a promise along with a command that he would give him the land that he was going to take him to as an inheritance.

That's the first thing then, stepping out in faith. As you have God's command accompanied by God's promise. So you have everything you need and I have everything I need to take that step in faith today if we haven't done it already.

To accept what God is saying about ourselves, about our need, about himself and to act then believingly and trustingly upon that word of God.

[14 : 57] The second thing you find, as we said, is a sojourning by faith. Faith, verses 9 and 10, living by God's promises. He set out in response to God's call, believing what God had said and obeying God's command.

He then continued sojourning by faith. 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.

I'm using the word sojourn. It doesn't appear in the text. It's in the older translations and it's rather a better word, I think, than what you have here by faith. He went to live in the land of promise because that's not quite precise enough.

What it's really saying to us is that he actually lived in the land of promise as a traveler or as a sojourner, one who was passing through, one who was a pilgrim or a sojourner.

These are the words you find elsewhere in the Bible. And as he went towards this land, he came to that land eventually and he lived in that land as in a foreign land.

[16 : 03] He lived in it as a traveler. He lived in it as someone passing through. Now, how could it be the land that God had promised him on the one hand and yet, how does it mean that he was actually living there as in a foreign land?

If this was the land that God had indeed promised him, the land of Canaan, which it was, how was it a foreign land? Why does it say he was living there as if it wasn't the land that God had promised him?

Well, the answer to that, of course, is that Canaan, which is this land of promise, literally, this geographical Canaan, was to Abraham and to those who were with him, Isaac, Jacob, and the people of those days, it was, in fact, something that represented another type of land, another type of inheritance.

inheritance. So, although this inheritance was indeed the land of Canaan, that itself was, for them, symbolic or a representation of what is said in verse 10, the city that has foundations, whose designer and builder is God.

What the Bible elsewhere calls our spiritual inheritance in Christ, the life and the state of heaven, in other words. That is the inheritance, as we'll see in a moment, that's mentioned, that's meant by what's in verse 10 of the chapter.

[17 : 24] He was looking forward to that city that has foundations. So, he lived here in this land of Canaan. He lived there as in a foreign land. He was looking for something permanent, something lasting, something eternal.

And, that's why sojourning is such a significant and relevant way of describing it. Because, it fits in with what's said there, he went to live there and living in tents with Isaac and Jacob, heirs with him of the same promise.

When you live in a tent, I don't know some of you possibly have been living in tents during the festival time, as you know, it's something that's not permanent, it's something you can take up with you, you carry it and you just set it down wherever next you're going to stop for a while.

But, it's not a sign of permanence, it's the opposite, isn't it? It's a sign of living in temporary accommodation. It's not something that has foundations, if you like, or you want to tie it down properly, especially in Lewis.

But, it's not something that's there lastingly. That's what he's saying here, they lived in tents with Isaac and Jacob heirs with him of the same promise and that's not just telling us that they had tents and they moved about from place to place because they had cattle and they had goats and animals like that.

[18 : 50] This is a spiritual reference. What he's really saying to us is that Abraham and Isaac and Jacob, these heirs of the spiritual inheritance that God had promised, of which Canaan was a type or a representation, what he's saying to us is that they knew this world and this land of Canaan literally was not permanently their home, wasn't their home spiritually.

And so, that's applied throughout the Bible to our spiritual journey as well. We were speaking, I was speaking to the children earlier, to the little ones about the 5K yesterday and Roscoe doing the 5K and following him on that journey until we reached the end.

Well, of course, that's what the Bible uses very often to illustrate the Christian life. You've only got to turn to the next chapter to see at the beginning there, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, that's these people that he's just been mentioning, and other Christians that we know of in the world in our day, well, he says, let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, looking to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith.

And then he mentions Jesus himself as our great example of running a race in this world in dependence on God, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God.

In other words, as we are running this Christian journey, we're looking to Jesus, he's saying, and the emphasis there is on persevering in this race. It's not just faith at the beginning, it's faith to sojourn, faith as you go through your life in this world as a traveler.

[20 : 37] You're following a certain path that God has marked out for us with all the rich and varied experiences, some bitter, some joyous, that God gives us as part of the journey, but is leading towards the tape, towards the finish, towards the end.

And God is encouraging us to sojourn by faith, to continue, to persevere, to press on. It's important to begin well, to make sure that our life is one of faith, of trust in God.

It's equally important to persevere, to not give up, to not lose heart, to listen to those who are with us, who are giving us the encouragement, who are pointing out the way ahead.

We're saying, I'm traveling with you. All of that's so important to those who are sojourners by faith. And that's what he's saying about Abraham as an example to us.

He sojourned in this land of promise as in a foreign land, living in tents with Isaac and Jacob, heirs with him of the same promise. Where is your life anchored today?

[21 : 55] Is it as if, spiritually, you're just depending on living in a tent, as if that was going to last forever? Where is your life anchored?

Where is it grounded? Is it in Jesus? Is it in Christ's righteousness? Is it the life of faith that realizes this world, important as it is, is but a preparing for the world to come?

It's a preliminary to eternity which lasts forever. Are we treating this world? Are we living in it? Do we feel at home in it? Is our life one that is anchored in time in this world rather than in eternity where Jesus is?

Because the two things that's mentioned there in chapter 12 where Jesus is now at the right hand of God, he's already in heaven, he's finished his race, he's waiting to welcome those who are traveling the race now and to the end of time will be traveling until time is no more.

What a great prospect it is to be in anticipation of meeting Jesus himself when you're a Christian, when you're thrusting in and when you're running this race by faith, you know that you're going to meet with your best friend when this race is over.

[23 : 22] On the other hand, if you're not, if your life is not that of a Christian trusting in Jesus, well, that same Jesus will also be the Jesus you meet with at the end of the journey and it'll be no small thing to tell them why you're lost instead of saved, why you didn't accept him in the gospel, why you didn't run this race with faith, why you didn't obey the command and accept the promise and join the Lord's people on their sojourn through this life.

Because he says he was looking forward to the city that has foundations whose designer and builder is God. He was living here in this world not as if it was his home spiritually because he knew he was on the way home.

He was traveling through this world and he was on the way to the city that has foundations and the word that's used here he was looking forward, these words looking forward, it really means literally he was eagerly expecting or living in eager expectation of the city that has foundations.

It wasn't just that he knew it in his mind and not thinking about it much. It wasn't just a theory to him. It wasn't just something that he was thinking of because others were doing the same.

His heart was in it. His mind was set upon this. He was in eager anticipation all through his life amongst all his different experiences.

[25 : 09] This was really what he was seeing at the end of his journey. This is what his mind was set upon. He was looking forward to the city that has foundations whose designer and builder is God.

He saw beyond this world something similar to what Paul did when he was writing to the Corinthian church. 2 Corinthians chapter 4 when he was saying at verse 13 there talking about how he was anticipating the world to come as well where he says since we have the same spirit of faith according to what has been written I believed and so I spoke we also believe and so we also speak knowing that he who raised the Lord Jesus will raise us also with Jesus and bring us with you into his presence and then as you go on and he's been talking to the Corinthians as well he's been telling him about the many incredible testings and trials that he had to endure but he says so we do not lose heart verse 16 of chapter 4 though our outer nature is wasting away our inner nature is being renewed day by day for this slight momentary affliction is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison as we look not to the things that are seen but to the things that are unseen for the things that are seen are transient but the things that are unseen are eternal that's how chapter 11 of Hebrews begins faith is the assurance of things hoped for the conviction of things not seen you see people will tell you what's the point of believing things you can't see what's the point of believing a God you've never actually seen now do you know he exists what's the point in believing in such a way towards an inheritance that you've never seen and you will never see in this life well look at how chapter 11 goes on verse 3 by faith we understand that the universe was created by the word of God people will tell you you have never seen God how do you believe in a being that you've never seen how do you believe the things you believe about the creation about the universe well you see what it's saying it's not saying we understand and then we come to believe it's saying by faith we understand you see faith opens up for you a whole different world it doesn't narrow your mind it actually opens up your mind as it was for Abraham he sojourned by faith in this land as a foreign land living in tents for he was looking forward to the city that has foundations this designer and builder is God there is no architect like this architect no designer like this this designer this is God himself who has built heaven for his people he is created through Jesus Christ through his death and resurrection that's what Abraham was looking forward to when you go to areas where prone to earthquakes you'll find of course especially in countries that can afford it that buildings are actually specially built to withstand the shock of earthquakes

I remember I remember being in Wellington and New Zealand some years ago and being taken down by those in charge of the hotel there just to look in under the main floors of the hotel to the foundation area and that hotel that we were in actually sat on gigantic rubber dampers or shock absorbers massive massive things so that when an earthquake came and the earth began to shake the building the shock was actually absorbed by these massive big dampers or shock absorbers but even the best of these cannot withstand the gigantic earthquakes that sometimes take place and even specially designed buildings will actually topple but this city city of heaven it will not move see if you go to chapter 12 I'm just about finished chapter 12 verses 26 to 28 where God is through the writer here saying at that time that's when they were on the mount of

Sinai at that time his voice shook the earth but now he has promised yet once more I shake not only the earth but also the heavens and this phrase yet once more indicates the removal of things that are shaken that is things that have been made that's the present order the present creation in order that the things which cannot be shaken may remain what is it that can't be shaken well he tells us the kingdom that can't be shaken or the city of foundations as it is in chapter 11 that's what Abraham was looking forward to because that's friends all that's going to last forever even the very very best things in this world and even the very best and closest of relationships in this world they have an end at some time they cease at some point or other but not this he was looking to the city that has foundations indestructible permanent the inheritance of heaven

I asked earlier where is your life anchored and we finish by asking another question are you safe for eternity not only where is your life anchored now but where will it be throughout eternity when we've left this world are you secure in Jesus Christ well to be secure all that God is asking of us is that we trust in him that we believe in the Lord Jesus Christ and we will be saved and we will be safe for all eternity let's pray help us to believe oh Lord help us to believe your word and that your word is true and reliable enable us we pray to proceed to live by faith through all the testings that come to us a long life's journey help us to cling to your promises and enable us to be faithful to you at every step of our journey receive our worship our thanks now we pray for

[32 : 14] Jesus sake amen we're singing now in conclusion in psalm number 25 psalm 25 that's in the scottish psalter this time sorry psalm 107 my mistake psalm 107 on page 382 beginning beginning at verse 1 through to verse 7 praise god for he is good for still his mercy's lasting be that god's redeemed say so whom he from the enemy's hand did free and it's talking about them being led by god and verse 7 them also in a way to walk that right as he did guide that they might to a city go wherein they might abide psalm 107 these verses we stand to sing great good but he is good for still his mercy his love gave me let what we gave this love whom he from the enemy sanded free and gathered them out of the land from the

Lord south east and west they strayed in deserts of blessed way no city found to rest for for first and hunger in them paid their soul when straits them breast they cry out to the Lord and he them frees from their distress rest them also in our way to walk that righteous needed guide guide that may my tooth that let me go wherein they might abide just a reminder that visitors are welcome to join us for a cup of tea and coffee in the hall immediately after the service and I'll go to the main door after the benediction now may the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ the love of God the Father and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with you now and evermore amen