

### *Hebrews 11:13-16*

These [Abraham, Sarah, Isaac, Jacob referenced in **11:8-9**] 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. 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.

Before we jump hard into our text, let's start with a little recap and retrace a few of our steps. Through the examples of these great men and women of old, God has been teaching us how faith is to be practically lived out. He has been showing us that faith is far more than just a religious concept or phrase and far more than just choosing to "believe" the right things about God. Rather, true faith results when we put into action what we know to be true about God as He has revealed Himself both in the Word and through our various experiences and encounters with God—those experiences where we learn, for example, about His faithfulness, about His mercy, about His grace and His blessing.

Faith happens when we learn about God's character and His nature and then become fully convinced, in the depth of our being, that He will be all of that to us—that He will be our God (**8:10**). And if He is truly our God we must be willing to conform every single part of our lives to that truth. We must hold nothing back from Him.

Jesus said that the greatest commandment is to “love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind, and with all your strength” (**Mark 12:30**). Clearly there must be no reservations; no hidden areas within your heart that are reserved for you to act like your own “god.”

Accordingly, in Abel, we saw a man whose faith resulted in the proper worship of the Lord. Unlike his brother Cain, Abel chose to worship the Lord as God desired. Abel came to God on the basis of his need to receive grace, mercy and forgiveness from a gracious, merciful and forgiving God.

In Enoch we saw faith that resulted in a man who walked with His God—arm in arm as friends might walk. The idea is that Enoch never resisted the Lord but was so in tune with God that he never walked in front of the Lord doing his own thing following his own wisdom and he never walked behind the Lord having attitude about the path that the Lord placed him on. Rather, he walked with the Lord doing only what the Lord wanted him to do.

In Noah we saw a faith which patiently worked and worked and worked and did everything exactly as the Lord instructed. The task was monumental; but that did not matter. The burden was tremendous; but that did not matter. The public ridicule had to be overwhelming; but that did not matter. Noah’s faith kept him moving forward day after day believing that the Lord would do everything that He said He would do.

In Abraham and Sarah we have seen the faith that waits. Abraham and Sarah waited and waited for God to fulfill the promise that they would have a son; and it seemed pretty clear after last week’s study why they had to wait for so long. In meditating on this text, I don’t believe that God needed the miracle. It was cool

and all for a really old guy and a really old woman to have a child; but I do not think that was the point. As you study the Bible you will find that miracles are never really the point.

But as we know, without faith it is impossible to please God (**11:6**), so God waited patiently for Abraham and Sarah to become a man and a woman of faith before He fulfilled the promise. You see this child was going to be a child of faith. Faith was going to be their true lineage and this lineage would pass on for generations until it found its way unto you and unto me and all others who would place their faith in Jesus Christ. Look at what Paul said to the Galatians:

### ***Galatians 3:1-9***

Oh, foolish Galatians! Who has cast an evil spell on you? For the meaning of Jesus Christ's death was made as clear to you as if you had seen a picture of his death on the cross. Let me ask you this one question: Did you receive the Holy Spirit by obeying the law of Moses? Of course not! **You received the Spirit because you believed the message you heard about Christ.** How foolish can you be? After starting your Christian lives in the Spirit, why are you now trying to become perfect by your own human effort? Have you experienced so much for nothing? Surely it was not in vain, was it?

I ask you again, does God give you the Holy Spirit and work miracles among you because you obey the law? Of course not! It is because you believe the message you heard about Christ. In the same way, "Abraham believed God, and God counted him as righteous because of his faith." The real children of Abraham, then, are those who put their faith in God.

What's more, the Scriptures looked forward to this time when God would declare the Gentiles to be righteous because of their faith. God proclaimed this good news to Abraham long ago when he said, "All nations will be blessed through you." So all who put their faith in Christ share the same blessing Abraham received because of his faith.

So again, the journeys of Abraham and Sarah were all about building a legacy of faith; building an eternal nation from all those who put their trust in Jesus Christ. As the heads of this nation, Abraham and Sarah had to learn that they could not rely in any way, shape or form upon their own strength, wisdom, or ability. However, because they were so stubborn and self-reliant, this was a long process. They had to wait and wait and wait until they had nothing left within themselves except for the hope that the Lord would be to them, and would do, all that He said.

During this time of waiting, God patiently taught them who He really is and how, among other things, He is faithful. He continually proved to them that He was their God who was loving, kind, gracious, compassionate and merciful; and even when they failed Him over and over again, He never failed them. In fact, He used each of their failures as an opportunity to teach them how useless and senseless it was for them to rely upon their own knowledge and wisdom. He showed them that they needed Him to be their God in order to save them from themselves.

On the one hand I want to give them grief thinking that it did not need to take so long for them to believe; after all, God had proved Himself faithful time and

time again. But then, on the other hand, they are the founders of our faith. According to *Isaiah 51:1-2* they were the quarry from which we were mined, the rock from which we were cut. So the work in their hearts had to be through and through with nothing left wanting.

They had to not just have faith but be a man and woman of faith. Faith had to define them. And, as we advance in the story of Abraham next week we will see that he made a turn away from his fear and from following his own ways and trusted himself completely to the God who loved him. The story is amazing.

So let's pick up in our passage tonight because it really captures the journey that Abraham, Sarah, and even Isaac and Jacob made. It teaches us what they actually learned in terms of themselves, God, and their lives here on this earth. It moves the story inward and focuses us less on their external circumstances and more on their hearts. It reveals to us the underpinnings to their faith.

***Hebrews 11:13-16***

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. 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.

So what is it that they did not receive; after all they got their son? They never saw the establishment of this great promised nation—none of them did. Sarah died when she was 127 years old and although Abraham lived until he was 175 no nation was spawned during his lifetime. He remarried and had 6 more sons through his new wife; but no nation was established. When Abraham died he left everything to Isaac who in turn left everything to his son Jacob. But get this; when Jacob finally died the total number of his direct descendants, not counting his son's wives, were 66 (**Genesis 46:26**). That's hardly a village much less a nation.

In fact, this promise of a nation would not come to fruition in the physical realm for over 530 years after the death of Abraham and not in the spiritual realm until approximately 2000 years after his death. I say the spiritual realm because their promise was first and foremost to be understood as a promise to build a nation according to the legacy of faith from those who follow Jesus. The physical nation of Israel was a type or a picture of what God was going to do in the spiritual realms.

Yet, despite the fact that Abraham did not actually experience the fruition of this promise, he greeted the promise from afar. In **John 8:56** Jesus tells us: "Abraham rejoiced to see my day, and he saw and was glad." In his old age Abraham came to know that the promise of a physical nation was just a shadow of the true nation of God.

This is why you don't see Abraham in his later years acting as if God ripped him off or deceived him. As we have come to know, the Bible is pretty honest about the failings of its heroes. But we don't have a story of Abraham flipping out because he did not have a nation. In fact, if truth be told, according to **Acts 7:5**,

Abraham never even acquired one square foot of land in Canaan—not one square foot.

How do you think his emotions were able to wrap around that reality? Abraham knew he was living not for this world but for the world to come. He knew that the promise would be fulfilled. To him it was a sure thing; he had the faith that waited knowing God would be faithful to His word. And, as a result of all his wanderings and experiences with God, in his later years, Abraham adopted an eternal perspective and did not demand that God fulfill His word in the here and now.

Abraham acknowledged that he was a stranger and exile on the earth. We see that in **Genesis 23:4** when he told the Hittite elders: “Here I am a stranger and a foreigner among you.” As it says, people who speak like this make it clear that they are seeking not a homeland on the earth but a heavenly homeland.

When Abraham said he was a stranger, it meant that he did not belong to this world. Abraham knew that had another home and we know for sure that he was not referring to Ur, the land of his father. When Abraham finally obeyed God and left Haran for Canaan, he renounced his homeland. Abraham never went back to either Haran or Ur, as there was no going back for Abraham; he had made his choice. He had plenty of opportunities to turn and run but he didn't. For example, when the famine came into Canaan, he could have used that as an excuse to go home; but instead he went on that famed troublesome journey to Egypt.

Another reason we know that Abraham thoroughly renounced his homeland (and was therefore speaking of a heavenly home) is because before he died he instructed his servant to never let Isaac return to Haran or Ur. In **Genesis 24**

Abraham instructed his servant to go get a wife for Isaac from his homeland, but he completely forbade his servant from taking Isaac and warned him that the Lord would not take too kindly to such actions. Isaac belonged in the land that God had promised to give to Abraham's descendants—end of story. There was no going back for Abraham.

Now Abraham was only a man, so it would not be too much of a stretch to say that there were probably plenty of times when the waiting got so annoying and heavy that his mind and emotions would go back to the former days in his homeland. I am sure he had fond and warm memories; and in those moments everything about the past probably seemed brighter and better. We all know how that is; we have all done it. But it is clear that regardless of his feelings, regardless of his fears, he was committed. He took the red pill and he was going to stay in wonderland and be shown how deep the rabbit hole of faith really goes.

When he said that he was an exile, it meant that he is only on a temporary assignment in this world. He knew that everything about his physical life was transitory and everything pointed forward to a greater fulfillment. Abraham desired a better country; heavenly one.

Abraham did not try and hold on to this world, he did not try and stake a claim or establish a permanent residency in the land of Canaan. He knew that God was going to do what God said He was going to do when God wanted to do it; and Abraham knew there was nothing he could do to change that. So in his old age, he was able to actually rest in the Lord knowing that God is always faithful.

So let's think about the application of this to our lives. If you think about it, we live in a very unnatural environment. We do not really belong in this broken and



fallen world; and everything in our lives proves this to be true. Just look inside in your own heart and you will find that there is a deep aching, a longing that craves for more and for better. Even the best that this world has to offer never ever satisfies. Once your pleasurable experience is exasperated, the craving continues and quite often even stronger than before. There is never true satisfaction!

The reason this is the case is because the imprint for our soul was made during a time when we dwelt with God in the garden. We were made to be in a world without suffering or death. We were made to be in a world without thorns, without wild and vicious animals, and without the intensity of effort that is required to produce even our daily sustenance.

We were made to be in a world without diseases, without pestilence, where people had no physical defects. We were made to be in a world where the food and water are available in abundance and the beauty of creation is unaltered by the presence of man.

We were made to be in relationships without friction or tension, in fellowship without selfishness and separation, and in partnership without division. We were made to be in a world where we had no reason to worry or live with anxiety; a world where we did not have to hunt, search and grab for our emotional and relational fulfillment; a world where we don't have to self-protect. We were made to live in a world where we did not have to fear anything and we did not have to be consumed with shame over our failures.

We were made to be in relationship where oneness is actually experienced; where we are safe, secure, settled, confident, and at rest. We were made to live in purity notwithstanding our nakedness. We were made to walk in the garden

with God talking to Him as a man talks to his best friend. We were made to be in a world where we did not have to daily deal with this fight between our *old sinful nature* and our ***new nature*** which has been given to us by God. We were made to be in a world without sin and without evil.

That is the imprint of our soul; and the imprint has been passed down to every man, woman, and child. This is why everyone wants more. That is why no one is satisfied. That is why people search out and try everything they can in this world believing that something somewhere must truly and completely satisfy. But people are always left empty and wanting for they are looking to satisfy a hole that only God can truly satisfy.

This is why we have spent a big part of our life trying to pretend things are better than they really are; building fantasies and illusions in our mind trying to pretend they are real. This is why we stay focused on trying to fix the things in this world that cannot be fixed so we don't have to look within and deal with the real consequences of the fall; the real consequences which are manifest in the insatiable thirst we have for more. And if we do ever dare to look within, we just constantly rearrange things hoping it will make it all better; but it doesn't.

Everything about this world is messed up. I believe that if you were to be totally and completely honest, you would have to admit that you don't really belong to this world. It seems we all know it; we all feel a bit like Alice tumbling down the rabbit hole. You know it's true. You may not be able to explain it. But you have felt it your entire life. There is something seriously wrong; it's like a splinter in your mind that is driving you mad. The reality is that you are a slave. Like

everyone else you were born into bondage, born into a prison that you cannot smell, or taste, or touch; a prison for your mind and a prison for your soul.

Do you know what I am talking about? The world as we know it is like a blanket that has been pulled over our eyes to blind us from the truth and that truth is that this world is just passing. This experience is just temporary. This physical matter is not what really matters at all. That humanity is as fragile, weak and as needy as we are all afraid it really is.

The truth is that we belong somewhere else entirely. We belong with God in His very presence; and only then will we be completely satisfied. For now, He has given us a foretaste of that future. He has given us a **new nature** that has been made in His image and seals us, by the Holy Spirit, in Jesus Christ; and guarantees that all that was taken from us at the fall will be restored and then some. In fact, just to set the record straight, we will not be returned to the garden to pick up where Adam left off. No. We have already been lifted up far higher than Adam could ever imagine. We have been made joint heirs with Jesus Christ and will rule and reign with Him throughout all eternity.

***This explains why only Jesus can satisfy the cravings and desires of our hearts. He is the one with whom we were made to be in relationship.***

And we know that; we do. But too many of us still get seduced by what this world claims it can offer to us. But it is all a lie. It never satisfied us before and it will never satisfy us.

I think there are still some who, deep within their heart, wish they would have taken the blue pill thinking that their old way of life was easier; for at least they knew the rules and knew how to survive. They don't care that such thinking is a

delusion; they would rather be blind. This process of having to learn “why” they can trust themselves to Jesus and “how” to trust themselves to Jesus in the depths of their soul, in all those nooks and crannies where they love to play god, is to them just too difficult. They think He asks too much.

Jesus captured this when He said: "And no one, after drinking old wine wishes for new; for he says, 'The old is good enough'" (**Luke 5:39**). They would rather live the lie than be a stranger and exile in this world.

Does God ask too much? All He really asks is to be your God. That is it. Is that too much to ask considering what He has done for us and the future that He has promised to us? Is that really too much considering how weak, fragile, frail, limited, and finite we are? Is that too much to ask considering that we cannot truly control anything in our life, we cannot even make one hair gray or black. We cannot see what is going to happen tomorrow much less the next minute. But He can; He sees the beginning from the end. Therefore, is there any line that we should not cross? Is there any place in our souls that we should reserve for ourselves to play “god” refusing to trust that He is good, that He is loving, or that He is in control?

Abraham decided that there was no such line. Sarah decided that there was no such line. Isaac decided that there was no such line. Jacob decided that there was no such line. What are you going to decide?

This is not your home. Your home is with God. These are not your “glory days.” Your glory will come when you rule and reign over all creation with Christ. **John 17:18** says that we have been sent into this world. We think we were born into

this world to live here and make our mark so we can be remembered for all time. But that is wrong. We were sent here; we did not really originate from here.

God chose us from before the creation of the world to belong to Him (*Ephesians 1:4-5*) in order that we might accomplish the good works He prepared beforehand for each of us to fulfill (*Ephesians 2:10*). He has us here only to accomplish His purposes and to bear His fruit (*John 15:1-17*). He sent us here to wake up others from the dead (*Ephesians 5:15*). He sent us here to do the will of the Father (*Matthew 6:10; Ephesians 5:17*).

We must start to completely disconnect from this world in terms of where we get our validation, self-image and self-worth. We must start to let the Word of God be authoritative over our lives for when we do we will find that this truth is the perfect antidote to all our whining and crying about this life. We spend so much time lamenting what we don't have and the pleasures in this world that we don't get to experience. But the truth is that those things are nice if we get to enjoy them, but none of it really matters; it is all going to pass away. All our outpouring of emotion over our lives, while understandable, is essentially a waste of time and energy.

Just think if we really grasped hold of our purpose for living. What if, like Jesus, we knew and were fully convinced that we were sent into this world to "preach Good News to the poor...to proclaim that captives will be released, that the blind will see, that the downtrodden will be freed from their oppressors, and that the time of the Lord's favor has come (*Luke 4:18-19*).

What if we lived as if this was the fundamental reason we are on this earth? It would revolutionize how we viewed our work, our successes, our goals, our

priorities, our relationships, and change all the practical decisions that we make. Everything would be different. Everything would be new. This, I believe is what Paul meant when he said:

***2 Corinthians 5:17-20***

This means that anyone who belongs to Christ has become a new person. The old life is gone; a new life has begun! And all of this is a gift from God, who brought us back to himself through Christ. And God has given us this task of reconciling people to him. For God was in Christ, reconciling the world to himself, no longer counting people's sins against them. And he gave us this wonderful message of reconciliation. So we are Christ's ambassadors; God is making his appeal through us.

Wow; that totally rocks! We have real purpose and it is found in our new life and not in our old attachments to this rotting and dying world. Our purpose is not to be found in any of the old delusions and fantasies we created about what is good and what is right. We know that only God is good; thus, only He is right. We now must align our truth with His truth.

That is the example which Abraham, Sarah, Isaac, and Jacob set for us. We must live as those who know they belong to a better country, that is, a heavenly one. We are strangers; we don't belong here. We are exiles; we are only here on a temporary assignment.

### ***Hebrews 11:16***

Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God, for he has prepared for them a city.

God is not ashamed. Let that sink in to your heads and your hearts. ***God is not ashamed.*** That is remarkable. Despite all of Abraham's and Sarah's ridiculous and sinful behavior, God is not ashamed to be called their God. God has set all of their sins and transgressions aside and completely relishes in their obedience of faith.

Are you still living in shame over the mistakes you have made, grieving over the people you have hurt and done wrong? Are you still reliving your sin and letting it be tossed around and around in your mind and in your heart? Maybe it is the guilt and shame you carry for the way you have hurt your kids, your friends, your spouse, your parents, your brothers or sisters. Maybe it is just the simple fact that you have made so many mistakes and have been such a failure that practically everyone in your life has been hurt. Maybe you carry the weight of all the immorality to which you exposed yourself.

Whatever it is it is that you hold against yourself, it is wrong. You have to get a Biblical understanding of God's grace in your life and know how deep it goes. God has forgiven you. ***He is not ashamed of you.*** In fact, He has already made preparations for the time when you will join Him and be with Him forever. He has prepared for you a city.

***He is not ashamed of you;*** He really isn't. It's time that you realize this truth and let it penetrate to the depth of your being. It is time to live in the grace that Jesus has poured out over your life. ***He is not ashamed of you.*** In fact, you kind of

insult Him when you live as if His grace was not enough; as if the cross just did not get the job done.

You need to realize that the shame you live in is the shame of the enemy; and it all flows from the lies he speaks over your life. The devil shrouds you in shame and thereby darkens your mind and your soul with failure and disgrace.

Jesus, however, always speaks grace and truth over your life. Sure He knows what you have done; He always deals in truth about our lives. But He has also poured out His grace over you so you can live in the freedom of His love for you. Your failure was dealt with at the cross. Therefore, there is no need to wallow in shame. There is no need to listen to the lies of the enemy. You must choose to let the Word of God be authoritative over your life in this very critical area. ***God is not ashamed of you.*** To me, that is some of the best news I have ever heard.

As you take communion tonight, I want you to remember what He did for you on the cross and realize the depth of His grace toward you. Repent for listening to the lies of the enemy. Repent for not relishing in the truth that ***He is not ashamed of you.*** Live as a freeman cloaked in His grace embracing the fact that you are a stranger and an exile on this earth, for you belong to one and only God.

Let's Pray.