

HEBREWS VERSE BY VERSE - The New and Living Way - Part forty-five

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BIBLICAL FAITH IN AN UNBIBLICAL CULTURE

Hebrews 11:8-16 - "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. [9] 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. [10] For he was looking forward to the city that has foundations, whose designer and builder is God. [11] By faith Sarah herself received power to conceive, even when she was past the age, since she considered him faithful who had promised. [12] 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 by the seashore. [13] 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. [14] For people who speak thus make it clear that they are seeking a homeland. [15] If they had been thinking of that land from which they had gone out, they would have had opportunity to return. [16] 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."

After dealing with the first period of revealed history from the creation of the world to the flood our writer moves on to the second period. Abraham and his immediate offspring form the second link in the chain of examples of God-pleasing faith in our writer's list. This makes sense, not only chronologically, but considering our writer's audience. These converted Hebrew believers were facing the hostility and push-back from their Jewish leaders and family members. In their decision to follow Christ they were - like Abraham - leaving much of their former world behind and this was proving to be an unpopular decision.

So our writer very wisely points them to their spiritual father. Abraham is the first person said to have "**pleased God**" after the flood. And the first thing our writer mentions is the **call** of Abraham. There were features of Abraham's call - something in his example - these Jewish believers needed to emulate as he ventured out in stubborn faith, leaving his former world behind.

1) **BEFORE ABRAHAM WAS CALLED INTO GOD'S FUTURE BLESSING HE WAS CALLED OUT OF ALL HE HAD HELD MOST DEAR**

Hebrews 11:8 - "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."

Our writer doesn't flesh out the details of this **calling out** of Abraham, but the words of Moses in Genesis do - **Genesis 12:1** - "Now the LORD said to Abram, 'Go from **your country** and **your kindred** and **your father's house** to the land that I will show you."

Moses specifies Abraham's **trio of sacrifice - his country - his kindred - his father's house**. Here is the prototype of the call of God. Abraham is constantly held up in the Bible as the model of how God calls people in faith. And there's a reason for that.

God is not a bad God. He's a good God. He has great future joy-producing promises for Abraham. But **He wants to give Abraham something Abraham can't receive where he presently is**. The future God wants to give Abraham - and through Abraham, the world - can't be had by Abraham in his **pre-call position**. Abraham is going to have to **leave behind** in order to **reach into**. And Abraham is going to have to **trust** that this is, in fact, the case. He will have to walk **out of the lesser** if he's going to walk **into the greater**.

Look at that list in **Genesis 12:1** - "**Your country....your kindred....your father's house....**" Those represent the things that **naturally draw out our attention and affection**. Those represent the things that most **naturally draw out our energies and time**. They aren't **wicked things**. But they represent the things that **pre-empt devotion to God in a way that's most justifiable in our eyes**.

It's not the work of Satan to fill your life up with bad things. We can usually spot and resist the really wicked things. No. Satan's primary work is to fill your life with so many **good** things you won't have time for the very **best** things. This is his most successful strategy against professing Christians.

And right at this point we get a clue on how to read the rest of our Bibles. This lesson from Abraham sheds light on

some very confusing words from our Lord in **Matthew 10:34-39** - **“Do not think that I have come to bring peace to the earth. I have not come to bring peace, but a sword. [35] For I have come to set a man against his father, and a daughter against her mother, and a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law. [36] And a person’s enemies will be those of his own household. [37] Whoever loves father or mother more than me is not worthy of me, and whoever loves son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me. [38] And whoever does not take his cross and follow me is not worthy of me. [39] Whoever finds his life will lose it, and whoever loses his life for my sake will find it.”**

My mother is 93. Does Jesus really want me to hate my aging mother? Does He want you to hate your kids? Certainly we know He didn't hate **His own** mother as His dying thoughts were centered on her care around the cross.

And we should know just from the closing words of this Matthew text Jesus' words are not **destructive** words. They are not **life-diminishing** words. He's clearly trying to **deepen** what's best in life, not **destroy it** - **Matthew 10:39** - **“Whoever finds his life will lose it, and whoever loses his life for my sake will find it.”**

So we learn Jesus is out to **enrich every aspect of our lives**. He's out to keep us from **ultimately losing life**. His point in this text - and the lesson of faith from our writer's example of Abraham - is if we give our primary attention just to those things that **naturally insinuate themselves** into our minds we will lose our lives. And we will not ultimately bring divine life to those we hold dear. Our lives - and the lives of our loved ones - are only kept **safe** - are only **found** - when we, like Abraham, have a sense of **leaving all else as we pledge ourselves ultimately to God through Christ**.

One final reminder. This **leaving** of country, kindred, and father's house wasn't just a **metaphor** for Abraham. It wasn't just some kind of **sermon truth**. He felt the reality of his **“going out”** in his blistered, dusty feet. He was reminded of it every time he pitched his tent on a bitterly cold night.

Don't just sing, “All to Jesus, I surrender.” **Verbal self-denial** is cheap and common. Make the leaving **tangible** in specific areas. Let it show in your parting with self-consumption and wealth. Let it creep into time slots in the middle of your busy family routine. Let it stretch you in service to Christ's church. Let it **inconvenience** you over and over again. If you never bump into the actual **cost** of what you've left for Christ it just might be you're still pretending authentic faith. What now comfortably feels like **finding** life might actually mean **losing** it in the end.

2) **FAITH IS ALMOST NEVER AUTOMATIC. IT MUST COMBINE WITH HOPE AND PATIENCE AS IT ATTACHES ITSELF TO GOD'S PROMISED FUTURE BLESSING**

Hebrews 11:9-10 - **“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. [10] For he was looking forward to the city that has foundations, whose designer and builder is God.”**

Notice the word **“promise”** is used twice in these two verses. That's because there were **two combined aspects** to God's covenant with Abraham. **First**, he was promised a **land to inhabit**. Our writer calls this the **“land of promise”**(9). **Second**, he was promised **offspring** - a **“seed.”** And this second part of the promise had an **immediate** fulfillment in **Isaac**, and a **future** aspect in the **“seed”** - the Christ - who would be a blessing to the whole earth.

Moses is very careful to spell out both the **land** aspect of the covenant and the **seed** aspect of the covenant:

Genesis 12:1-3 - **“Now the LORD said to Abram, ‘Go from your country and your kindred and your father’s house to the land that I will show you. [2] And I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing. [3] I will bless those who bless you, and him who dishonors you I will curse, and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed.”**

Genesis 15:5-6 - **“And he brought him outside and said, ‘Look toward heaven, and number the stars, if you are able to number them.’ Then he said to him, ‘So shall your offspring be.’ [6] And he believed the LORD, and he counted it to him as righteousness.”**

Remember, there is **land** promised and there is **offspring** promised. And there is a lesson on Abraham's faith that is easily missed in these texts. Here's the important point. There's a reason these messengers take Abraham outside and lift his eyes to the stars in the sky. Yes, God will provide Abraham and Sarah with a son. Isaac will be a

divine miracle. But right from the beginning Abraham is being pointed *beyond Isaac*. There will be *one* offspring and there will be *many* offspring. Isaac is only the *first stage* of God's covenant with Abraham. He's a *necessary* part, but not the *final* part.

And, though it is almost never talked about, the same is true of the promise of the *land*. Yes, God would bring Abraham's offspring into a "*land of promise*" (Heb. 11:9). But that wasn't the *end* of God's covenant promise.

And our writer of Hebrews is bold enough to *say* these promised land dwellers never *considered* that land the final aspect of God's covenant with them. It's right there in the text:

Hebrews 11:12-16 - "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 by the seashore. [13] 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. [14] For people who speak thus make it clear that they are seeking a homeland. [15] If they had been thinking of that land from which they had gone out, they would have had opportunity to return. [16] 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."

"O, but Pastor Don, that's because Abraham never got to actually *settle* in the promised land. That's why these people were said to still be looking for a "*better, heavenly country*" (16).

I don't think that works very well. Because our writer also says the same eternal hunger was in the heart of people like *David* and *Samuel* (11:32). And these and others on that list definitely *did* dwell in Canaan, the promised land. And our writer says they never saw this as their home - their divinely promised "*heavenly country*" (11:16). And notice they felt this sense of exile and pilgrimage as long as they were "*on the earth*" - **Hebrews 11:13** - "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."

Here's why all this matters. You will have faith struggles *as long as you walk this earth*. There is no present blessing that will remove all the struggles of faith. There never *has* been and there never *will* be. All hopes are *intended* to be dashed outside of Christ. This is Father God's design.

This is God's way of *educating and training the understanding of faith*. We are prone to misplace our trust for both our *joy* and our *security*. Somehow God must strip away what will ultimately disappoint and deceive us.

Our text said Abraham longed for the same thing we *all* long for - **Hebrews 11:10** - "For he was looking forward to the city that has foundations, whose designer and builder is God."

Foundations. Permanence. Something that could never *crumble*. Something that could never be *changed* or *lost*. Relationships that the passing of time couldn't erase. Hopes that couldn't be dashed. Bodies that never wore out. The direct presence of God that felt like home.

This is the kind of hope we are saved into - **Romans 8:23-25** - "And not only the creation, but we ourselves, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies. [24] For in this hope we were saved. Now hope that is seen is not hope. For who hopes for what he sees? [25] But if we hope for what we do not see, we wait for it with patience."

3) **FAITH MUST BE FORMED AND FED BEFORE THE CRISIS MOMENTS ARRIVE**

Hebrews 11:11 - "By faith Sarah herself received power to conceive, even when she was past the age, since she considered him faithful who had promised."

It seems strange Sarah would be included in this list of the great *faith-exercisers*. Here's how she reacted to the promise of God about the birth of her child - **Genesis 18:10-12** - "The LORD said, 'I will surely return to you about this time next year, and Sarah your wife shall have a son.' And Sarah was listening at the tent door behind him. [11] Now Abraham and Sarah were old, advanced in years. The way of women had ceased to be with Sarah. [12] So Sarah laughed to herself, saying, 'After I am worn out, and my lord is old, shall I have pleasure?'"

So God **promises** and Sarah **laughs**. She laughs because she will be close to 100 years of age. All of God's people would laugh.

But then something happens. It's a subtle shift but a very important one. In a moment of divine rebuke Sarah hears these words - **Genesis 18:14** - "**Is anything too hard for the LORD? At the appointed time I will return to you, about this time next year, and Sarah shall have a son.**"

There is more than just scolding in that first question - "**Is there anything too hard for the LORD?**" Here's the closing faith lesson this morning. When faith just looks at **what is promised** it will always struggle. When faith looks at **who made the promise** it will always be nourished.

"Is anything too hard for the LORD?" Forget the promise of the offspring. Is **anything** - it doesn't matter **what** is promised - that's not the relevant issue - is **anything at all** too hard **for the LORD?**

It's knowing God that brings the promises of God into the reach of faith. And you can't get to know God in an instant. It's too late to pretend closeness to God when you find yourself in the jam of faith-trying circumstances.

You're constructing whatever measure of trust in God you will one day possess in the face of trial **right now**. You're doing that this morning as we gather together. Or you're **not** doing it tonight when you stay home to watch TV.

All the little things matter. They all add up. That's why it's called the **walk of faith**. Stay close to the Good Shepherd. There's a dark valley somewhere up the road. And you'll need a table of nourishing faith spread right in the middle of your sternest enemies.