

EXPOSITION OF HEBREWS

Message #27

Hebrews 11:8-16

We are, of course, in the famous faith chapter of the Bible and we are seeing examples of sinful people who had heroic faith. Certain qualities about their faith seem to jump out to us:

- 1) Abel had a faith that believed in the blood sacrifice;
- 2) Enoch had a faith that walked with God;
- 3) Noah had a faith that reverently worked and witnessed for God.

But we come now to the one who has been called “the greatest example of faith in the Bible,” Abraham. Abraham’s story is an amazing story of faith. Abraham is honored in the O.T. for his faith. Nehemiah said God found Abraham’s heart “faithful before Thee” (Nehemiah 9:8). Abraham is honored in the N.T. for his faith; Paul said “Abraham believed God and it was reckoned to him as righteousness” (Romans 4:3). James said the faith of Abraham made him “the friend of God” (James 2:23). Abraham and Sarah are the only married couple in this faith chapter. The primary quality of their faith is this:

FAITH THAT PLEASES GOD IS A FAITH THAT FOLLOWS GOD’S WORD AND WAITS ON GOD TO FULFILL HIS PROMISES EVEN WHEN THE FULFILLMENT OF THOSE PROMISES IS ONLY POSSIBLE WITH GOD.

All the people mentioned in this chapter are people who walked by faith, not by sight. They were not perfect people but they believed God. When God said something, they believed His Word literally and they followed His Word.

Now in this text there are two main illustrations that are given:

ILLUSTRATION #1 – The illustration of Abraham. **Hebrews 11:8-10**

There are four faith actions that make Abraham’s faith heroic:

Faith Action #1 - Abraham obeyed God after he was called by God. **Hebrews 11:8a**

The call of God concerning Abraham is found in Genesis 12:1-3, and there is no question that God wants to make certain that all know that God gets full credit for this call. Abraham did not seek the Lord; he was called by God. When Isaiah referred to the call of Abraham, God said “for I called him alone and blessed him and increased him.” There are three features of God’s call found in Genesis 12:1-3:

(Feature #1) - God’s call was completely unconditional. Genesis 12:1a

The last couple of verses of Genesis 11 indicate that there was nothing initially about Abram worth calling - he was from an idolatrous country and an idolatrous home. Abraham was from Ur (Genesis 15:7; Nehemiah 9:7), which was an idolatrous, immoral city and Abraham was raised in an idolatrous family and had been an idolater (Joshua 24:2).

Ur was located in southern Iraq, 160 miles from the head of the Persian Gulf and about 220 miles southeast of Baghdad. In Abraham's day, Ur was a highly developed, progressive city. Dr. S. Lewis Johnson said he knew of one evangelical scholar who wrote a book on Abraham who visited ancient Ur, which today is a dirty little town with one little mud hotel. He said that when he checked out, he signed the registry book with this comment: "No wonder Abraham left! Even Job would have left" (*Hebrews 11:8-19*, p. 4). Truth is, in Abraham's day Ur was a great city. There was nothing initially about Abraham or his family that deserved or merited this call; it was God's call and it was one of pure grace.

(Feature #2) - God's call demanded total separation. Genesis 12:1b

God's call demanded that Abraham leave everything - his country, his friends, his relatives, and even his own father's house. This was a major move. Abraham has no idea where God specifically wanted him to go, but by faith he was willing to step out into the great unknown.

(Feature #3) - God's call promised wonderful blessings. Genesis 12:2-3

Many have observed that when God demands some major personal sacrifice in His calling on a person's life, that person will always receive greater compensation and blessing if he follows it.

(Blessing #1) - God promised to lead Abraham to a new land. 12:1c

(Blessing #2) - God promised to make Abraham a great nation. 12:2a

(Blessing #3) - God promised to give Abraham His Personal blessings. 12:2b

(Blessing #4) - God promised to make Abraham a great name. 12:2c (even kings - Gen. 17:6)

(Blessing #5) - God promised to cause Abraham to be a blessing. 12:2d

(Blessing #6) - God promised to give Abraham special protection. 12:3a

(Blessing #7) - God promised to honor Abraham universally. 12:3b

Faith Action #2 - Abraham believed God would keep His Word and give him an inheritance.
Hebrews 11:8b

Abraham had no idea where he was going when he left Ur. He crossed the Euphrates and headed out believing God would do everything He said. When all of this happened he was 75 years old, and by faith, not having a clue where he was going, he set out to follow God. **Abraham's faith was a faith that looked forward to the future believing God. Faith that pleases God today looks backward to the cross and also looks forward to the future.**

Faith Action #3 - Abraham believed God would give him the Promised Land to the point that he lived in the Promised Land as a foreigner. **Hebrews 11:9**

He could have lived in a nice home in Ur, but instead he lived in the Promised Land he didn't possess yet and he lived in tents. As one writer observed, we could sum up Abraham's life in that he "went out and camped out." This was no overnight weekend camping trip either. He lived in the Promised Land in tents for years with Isaac and Jacob, who were also fellow heirs of the same promise that one day this would be Israel's land.

Think of this, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob are living by faith in a Promised Land in tents when, as Stephen said, they did not own “even a foot of ground” (Acts 7:5). Why did they stay there? Because they believed what God said He would do, He would do.

Kent Hughes gives an interesting illustration, which I want to borrow and develop. Imagine God calls you to leave the U.S. and has promised you and your descendants specific land in Guatemala. So you obey God. You pack up and you take a couple of Cabela’s tents or a camper and you take your children and off you go.

You leave your home, your friends, and your family. You travel to Guatemala and you move from one spot to another for the rest of your life. Then after you are gone your children do the same thing, never getting one foot of land you can call your own. You did this simply because you believe God. You and your children live the rest of your lives as an alien in a foreign country because you believe God and then you die before you get to see any of this happen. That is faith and that is exactly the faith of Abraham (Kent Hughes, *Hebrews*, Vol. 2, p. 97).

It has been observed that it is much harder to wait for something than to work for something. When I worked in the beater room in a paper company, you had to sit there and wait until the engineer asked for the beater of pulp. It was much easier to work and do things than just sit there and wait.

Once Abraham got to the Promised Land there was a lot of waiting on God. He lived in a tent, his son lived in a tent, and so did his grandson. One would think the assignment would be, take over a major city and make it yours. But God’s assignment was “you just wait.” By faith Abraham did just that. He stayed hunkered down in the Promised Land because he believed this was the land God would give him.

Faith Action #4 - Abraham believed God would build a glorious city. **Hebrews 11:10**

Abraham believed that one day God would construct a glorious city where he could live and could call home. As we study Genesis, we do not see mention of this city, but obviously Abraham knew something about a New Jerusalem that God would build and he believed it. This is amazing faith because every other city is built by men. Abraham believed that one day there would be a city in existence built by God.

ILLUSTRATION #2 – The illustration of Sarah. **11:11-12**

By faith Sarah eventually believed that God could make her conceive a baby even though well beyond childbearing years. Sarah’s faith was not a perfect faith. We may remember that she is the one who gave Hagar to Abraham when he was 86 years old and he has a son Ishmael. This was actually due to Sarah’s lack of faith. Yet here she is in the faith hero chapter. This shows us you do not have to be a perfect person to be a great person of faith.

The story of this episode with Sarah comes from Genesis 18:9-15 / 21:1-3. God came to Abraham and Sarah when he was 99 years old and Sarah was 89 years old and told them that in one year Sarah would have a baby. Abraham would be 100 and she would be 90 (Gen. 21:5).

Sarah listened as God revealed this to Abraham and she laughed “to herself” (Gen. 18:12). She did not laugh out loud. She thought she was in a tent all by herself, out of sight from everyone and she internally chuckled (Gen. 18:9-10).

Obviously for the next several months, Sarah had faith that God could do the impossible, which would be to cause a 90 year old woman to have a baby. She believed that God could do what He promised He would do, and through Abraham came a nation of descendants as innumerable as the stars of heaven.

Now in **verses 13-16** we learn some key facts about the patriarchs of Abraham, Sarah, Isaac, and Jacob.

Fact #1 - All of these faith heroes died in faith. **11:13a**

The final test of our faith is really what we believe when we face our own death. All of these people died full of faith believing God and His Word. They all passed the faith test and are eternally honored.

Fact #2 - None of these faith heroes actually received all of God’s promises fulfilled. **11:13b**

There is no question that their lives were blessed by God, but none of them received all the things God promised. Abraham was not a pauper; he was a very rich man by blessing of God, but he still did not live to see his family owning and living in the Promised Land.

Fact #3 - All of these faith heroes believed God would be true to His Word. **11:13c**

They believed the promises “at a distance.” What this means is that they believed God’s Word was true even though the fulfillment of some things was still a long way off.

Fact #4 - All of these faith heroes viewed themselves as exiles on earth. **11:13d-14**

By saying this, they were acknowledging that they were seeking a country of their own, a place for believers. They lived their lives as aliens on earth. They focused on God’s Word and governed their lives accordingly. They embraced the life of a pilgrim.

Fact #5 - All of these faith heroes did not return to their old country. **11:15**

None listed in this chapter turned back to the old homeland; they stayed focused on the future. Anyone can turn around and go back to the old world, but it takes a God-honoring faith to keep marching forward with sights fixed on the eternal.

Fact #6 - All of these faith heroes desired a heavenly country. **11:16**

Do you really believe that you are a stranger and pilgrim here on this earth? Are you so in love with your house on this earth that you have lost sight of the fact that this is not your home?

Now here is an amazing statement - God is not ashamed of people who have faith like this. He is not ashamed to be called their God. People who totally believe in Jesus Christ and God's grace are people God is not ashamed to call His people.

God has prepared a heavenly city for them. When God's people believe God He is proud of them.

Sometimes it is almost as if we are ashamed of God; but those, who in the big scheme of things stay focused on Him in their faith, can know that God is never ashamed to call them His own.

Paul says in Philippians 3:20 that our citizenship is in heaven. This earth is not our home. Do you know that tonight? Do you sense that tonight? Are you, like me, getting tired of the struggles with our flesh and the depravity of this world?

Do you believe the Word of God? Do you believe that soon Jesus Christ will take us out of here? Do you believe the Word of God *is* the Word of God? Do you believe that the only way you can have any relationship with God is through faith in Jesus Christ looking back to what He did on that cross? Do you believe that God will literally do what He says He will do in the Word of God in the future?

One thing I find very interesting about those listed in this faith chapter is that God chooses not to remember the bad moments of faith lapse and failure, but chooses to remember the good. If you have faith in Jesus Christ and you will keep your faith focused on Jesus Christ from earth to glory, you too will be honored by God.