

Stephen Weale, 11 April 2021

Longing for our heavenly home: Hebrews 11:13-16

What are you longing to do once the lockdown is over? We all have a sense of longing, and very often our longings are unfulfilled. Disappointment is an inevitable part of longing. Even Jacob, who had seen many blessings in his 130 years of life, such as being reunited with Joseph, described the 'days of his pilgrimage' as 'few and evil' (Genesis 47). There are many expressions of, and references to, longing in the Bible, for example:

- Psalm 42 "As the deer pants for the water"
- Ps 107: "He satisfies the longing soul"
- Ps 119:20 "My soul breaks with longing for your judgments at all times" (longing for God's justice)
- Prov 13:12 "Hope deferred makes the heart sick".

This passage of Hebrews speaks of the fulfilment of a longing. It comes in the middle of the list of people of faith; the author makes this aside to clarify the nature of their hope. These verses describe three aspects of Biblical faith that should be true of us.

Biblical faith is an assurance of something we don't yet have

Life is full of endings - not only death, but also the ending of chapters in our lives, such as when we retire. With the passing of each year, our opportunities diminish. We will never be able to do all the things we want to. Ecclesiastes 1:8 "The eye is not satisfied with seeing" - just as the eye can never get enough of seeing, we are never content but always want to do more.

Christians should not be looking for a paradise in this world. If you are, you will be disappointed! Joel Osteen (a preacher of the "Prosperity Gospel") wrote a book called *Your best life now*. John MacArthur commented that if your best life is now, you're on the way to hell! Life has always been disappointing: Ecclesiastes 1:14 "All is vanity and grasping after the wind".

It was no different for Abraham. He could see that this world couldn't give him fulfilment and furthermore, he hadn't received all of God's promises when he died. But Biblical faith is not faith in an unfulfilled promise! Abraham could see something afar off, something completely different from this world.

Christians, like Abraham, are strangers in this world and sometimes even in our own family. Our faith makes no sense to the people around us. They sideline God and dispense with the idea of sin. Robert Aitken, a retired BBC journalist, recently commented how Christian morality has given way to an ever-changing 'media morality'. How can our best life be in a world like this?

Biblical faith involves a longing for a better country

The pilgrims of Hebrews 11 were assured that they had a homeland. People think of home as the place they come from, a place they can return to: but our heavenly home is a place we have not yet set foot in! When we come to faith a great change occurs: our compass shifts, changing what we think of as home.

So what is our heavenly home like?

- There is no more curse (Rev. 22:3)
- There is no more death, sorrow, crying or pain (Rev. 21:4), or ageing
- We have eternal life, in union with Christ (1 John 2:25)
- There is no more sin: we will never again be lied to or betrayed.

Biblical faith is faith in a heavenly Father

It is God who has prepared this country for His people. In verse 16 the Greek word used for God is Theos, which points to his infinite, eternal, unchangeable and wise nature. To people of faith, this almighty God is also a perfect Father. Hebrews 12: 5-9 describes how he treats us as his children - just like an earthly father, he disciplines us because wants to see us grow and cares about how we behave.

Christians have been adopted as God's children. Just as Philemon set his slave Onesimus free and accepted him as a son, we have been set free from slavery to sin and are now free to live as heirs. We have not been set free from sin to enter a new bondage to rules! In verse 16 we learn that "God is not ashamed to be called their God". We would feel uncomfortable to read that "God is proud of us", conscious as we are of our sins, so the writer uses this phrase 'not ashamed' to bring out this truth.

Abraham's home wasn't Ur or even Canaan, but his heavenly country. What about you? Are looking for 'your best life now", which will bring only disappointment tempered with some temporary satisfaction? Or are you longing for God's heavenly country?