

Abraham—Faith Obeys God’s Call

Hebrews 11:8-10

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Introduction:

Today we are continuing our sermon series in the book of Hebrews.

- Presently, we are in Hebrews 11 which presents to us what faith does in the lives of God’s people.
- This chapter shows us what happens when we believe that God is and that He is a rewarder of them that diligently seek Him. It gives us real life examples of men in the Old Testament who had faith.
 - First there was Abel. With him we saw that by faith we are made righteous in God’s sight—we trust Him and His saving work to justify us, and He does!
 - Next, there was Enoch. With him we saw how faith give us the hope of eternal glory. All who believe will be raised to immortality to live with God forever.
 - Then there was Noah. With him we saw how faith responds to God’s warnings and escapes condemnation.
 - Today we come to Abraham where we shall see how faith obeys God’s call.
 - This is actually the first of three parts that we will look at about Abraham here in Hebrews 11.

The passage for today is Hebrews 11:8-10.

- Please listen attentively as I read it to you, remembering that when we hear God’s Word, we hear Him.

Hebrews 11:8-10: By faith Abraham obeyed when he was called to go out to the place which he would receive as an inheritance. And he went out, not knowing where he was going. 9 By faith he dwelt in the land of promise as *in* a foreign country, dwelling in tents with Isaac and Jacob, the heirs with him of the same promise; 10 for he waited for the city which has foundations, whose builder and maker is God.

Thanks be to God for His precious Word. May He add His blessing to it.

As I already mentioned, three different aspects of faith’s benefits are given to us regarding Abraham.

- Abraham was a man of great faith that is a shining example to us all.
 - But don’t miss the main point about his greatness.
 - He was not naturally a man of great faith. He was the son of an idol worshipper.
 - He was great because God made him great.
 - When God called him, one of the things He promised was that “I will make your name (reputation) great!”
 - The men at Babel had sought to make a great name for themselves, the way the world so often does, and the great name they got was *Babel* or *Confusion*.
 - It is far better to have God make your name great.
- That is something we need to remember about all of these great men of faith.
 - The whole point about faith is that it depends on God for blessing.

- You will end up with nothing but disappointment if you try to make yourself great.

The three examples about Abraham's faith pertain to different times in his life.

- The one we are looking at today has to do with his initial call, and how by faith he obeyed that call.
 - The initial call of God in our lives is a call to turn from our sin, leaving our old life behind, and entrust our lives to God that we might henceforth live for Him under His promised salvation and blessing.
- The first thing we see about Abraham is that:

I. **By faith, Abraham obeyed God's call.**

- You can see that in verse 8: **By faith, Abraham obeyed when he was called to go out to the place which he would receive as an inheritance. He went out, not knowing where he was going.**

A. It is a tremendous thing when God calls a sinner to Himself.

1. That is what happened with Abraham—God called him when he was a sinner, living in the beautiful city of Ur.
 - Ur was a city that excelled in culture and prosperity in the ancient world. We are told that they even had running water.
 - But we are told that like many people in that place, Abram worshipped idols.
 - The Jews say that his father was a manufacturer of idols.
 - Yet, it was while living there that God called him. God's grace reached him!
 - When Stephen mentions Abram's call as recorded in Acts 7, he says, "The God of glory appeared to our father Abraham when he was in Mesopotamia."
 - The Jews say that when Abram was converted, he destroyed all the idols in his father's shop except one. His father saw the destruction and said, "Who destroyed my idols?" Abram replied, "It must have been that one that is still standing who destroyed the others," to which his father replied in anger, "That idol can do nothing!" Abram responded with an "Exactly!" smile.
2. Whether that story is true or not, when God called him, as Stephen says, He appeared to him as "the God of glory."
 - In other words, God revealed Himself to him as He is...
 - His glorious majesty, His holiness, His power, His grace, His wisdom, His kindness, His wrath and judgment, His mercy, His justice—we could go on.
 - Part of the way that revelation of Himself was done was through His covenant promise—which at this time was not technically in the form of a covenant. It was His gracious promise to bless a sinner.
 - We read about this in Genesis chapter 12:1-3: **Now the LORD had said to Abram: "Get out of your country, from your family and from your father's house, to a land that I will show you. ² I will make you a great nation; I will bless you and make your name great; and you shall be a blessing. ³ I will bless those who bless you, and I will curse him who curses you; and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed."**

- Nothing reveals God's glory so wonderfully as the gospel in which He promises to bless us as sinners!
- B. This is where faith comes into the picture: when a sinner has seen God revealed and heard God's call to come to Him to be blessed.
1. Abraham believed what God revealed.
 - He believed what God had said.
 - He could never be the same. From then on, he had communion with God, forgiveness of sin, and new life by the Holy Spirit with everlasting hope.
 - He saw that the God of glory had promised to bless him.
 - For this great God to bless him meant everything.
 - A blessing from the true eternal God could only mean eternal life in glory.
 2. So it is with you who believe.
 - Once you saw Him graciously revealed (as one promising to bless you), you had to have Him as your God! You had to have His salvation.
 - You must have His blessing. Nothing else matters.
 - You must be with Him and have Him with you forever.
 - Nothing else is acceptable to set your heart upon.
 - By His grace and saving power, you know that and you come back to that even though you sometimes drift away.
- C. And this is where faith brings about obedience to His call.
1. Our text says that "by faith Abraham obeyed."
 - He could not do otherwise because now he had seen who God is and he has seen His promise of salvation with faith.
 - By God's grace, this faith is in him. It cannot be destroyed. It cannot utterly fail even though it may be weakened and assailed at times.
 - It always revives to say, "I will go on with God!"
 2. Faith always brings about obedience to God's call.
 - We are told plainly in God's word that if it does not, it is not true faith.
 - James says that faith without works is dead.
 - Paul asked how we who have died to sin by faith in Jesus can live any longer in sin. We cannot.
 - We are a new creation in Christ Jesus and the life that we now live we live by faith in the Son of God who loved us and gave Himself for us.

II. God's call is to leave all and follow Him.

A. This is what Abraham did.

1. He was called (v. 8) to **"go out to the place which he would receive as an inheritance."**
 - He had to leave the celebrated, advanced, idolatrous city of Ur.
 - He had to leave the security and familiarity of his homeland and his kindred.
 - He had to leave all the pleasantries that were there.

2. What's more, he did not know quite what God was going to give him—
 - He knew that He was going to bless him, but God did not describe the place or even tell him just where it was at first.
 - Look at the rest of verse 8: **“He went out, not knowing where he was going.”**
 3. There was no dissenting, no questioning, no need for weighing it out because God had spoken.
 - He is God. He knows what He is doing. He knows what is right for you to do.
 - When the great God commands, He must be obeyed.
 - Furthermore, that great God promised to bless—faith believes that—faith makes you secure. He is God Almighty and He is true to His promise.
- B. You do the same when you have faith.
1. You leave father and mother, your property, your very own life.
 - You give yourself entirely to Him and there are no competitors.
 - Did Jesus not say, Luke 9:23-25: **“If anyone desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow Me. ²⁴ For whoever desires to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake will save it. ²⁵ For what profit is it to a man if he gains the whole world, and is himself destroyed or lost?”**
 - He is God. He has appeared to you and you must forsake all to follow Him.
 - The point is that nothing else trumps God's authority.
 - Not that we are consistent—but this is what we come back to when we do drift away—by faith this obedience is in our roots.
 - From henceforth, you are here for God. Your business is to please Him.
 - He is the one you give yourself to.
 - You say to Him, “I am not my own. I have been bought with a price. You are my Lord and my God.”
 2. Like Abraham, you do not know where He will bring you next.
 - You do not know just what following Him will entail.
 - There may be sickness, there may be poverty, there may be failure, there will be persecution, but you do not know what form it might take!
 - There may be times of great refreshing and prosperity and blessing too.
 - You are the bride of Christ and you will have Him as your LORD from this day forward, for better, for worse, for richer, for poorer, in sickness and in health—until glory, and then you will have Him in glory where there will be **“no more death, nor sorrow, nor crying. There shall be no more pain, for the former things [will have] have passed away.”**
 - Just as the LORD told Abraham to go to the land, so He has called you to come into His church—
 - You don't know what life in the church will look like either.

- There may be sweet fellowship, brotherly concord, support, encouragement, sound preaching, and unity.
- But there may also be division, slander, abuse, hypocrisy, and discouragement—you don't know any of that,
 - But whatever that may be, you know that the LORD has called you to live as a vital part of the congregation of His people—to love them and serve them and pray for them and work with them—to submit to the elders and learn from them—to support the church and to seek its peace, purity, and prosperity.
 - Going to a faithful church may also mean rejection by the world, even by people you love—Jesus told us so—but God has spoken and go you will.
 - There you will worship and there you will serve with those who call upon His name. With them you will rejoice and with them you will weep until Jesus comes.

TRANS> God must be served before the promised blessing has been received.

- There is justification, forgiveness, acceptance in Christ, communion with God, new birth by the Spirit, communion with the saints, new life and hope, adoption and sanctification, assurance of God's love, but not the promised glory of heaven.

III. With Abraham, we see how faith enabled him to dwell in the land before he received the blessed inheritance that God promised.

A. It says that he lived there as a foreigner.

- Look at verse 9: **“By faith he dwelt in the land of promise as *in* a foreign country, dwelling in tents with Isaac and Jacob, the heirs with him of the same promise...”**
 1. He faced all kinds of trouble in the land.
 - a. When he first arrived, as we read in Gen 12, he was faced with a famine that he went down to Egypt to escape.
 - He might have said, “Where is the blessing I was promised?” but he did not.
 - I am not sure that he should have gone down to Egypt, but he continued to believe what God had promised and came back to the land.
 - b. After that, he had a quarrel with his nephew Lot because there was not enough room for them as nomads in the land because of all the other inhabitants.
 - He and Lot had to separate.
 - Abraham did not say, “But I thought this was my land where I would be blessed! How is it that I don't even have room for my nephew here?”
 - c. And as far as ownership,
 - Abraham was there with his son and grandson—three generations—without gaining any property besides a burial spot that he paid dearly for.
 - Stephen summarises this in Acts 7:5-7: **“And God gave him no inheritance in it, not even *enough* to set his foot on. But even when**

Abraham had no child, He promised to give it to him for a possession, and to his descendants after him. 6 But God spoke in this way: that his descendants would dwell in a foreign land, and that they would bring them into bondage and oppress them four hundred years. 7 ‘And the nation to whom they will be in bondage I will judge,’ said God, ‘and after that they shall come out and serve Me in this place.’ ”

- What kind of inheritance is that for Abraham? He would be long gone before the land came to his heirs.
 - He had left the city of Ur where he had all the modern conveniences of the day, but now he is living in tents with no home to call his own.
 - This is the inheritance that God gave to him at this time.
 - He was a foreigner and stranger there for the rest of his long life.
 - What kind of inheritance was this I say? Where is the blessing? Where is the glory?
2. And what about us? We have come to Jesus Christ. He has promised glory to us and we have continued in His church, but what do we have? What do you have?
- a. Just this week, one of our dear brothers had to go to the emergency room multiple times—even by ambulance.
 - He has had ongoing debilitating illness for years now.
 - b. Many others among us are dealing with chronic illnesses that go on for years and years.
 - Some couples have been barren—unable to bring forth children.
 - Some of you have had ongoing problems in your family—relatives who are very hard to deal with.
 - Some of you have lost loved ones—either to the devil or to death.
 - Some are struggling financially—with set-backs, with problems at work.
 - Maybe you are a new believer who is being persecuted by your old friends and by your relatives.
 - Perhaps you are lonely and see no end in sight.
 - Maybe you lack social skills or talents or skills.
 - Perhaps you are physically unattractive,
 - or maybe people just don’t seem to like you and you are not sure why.
 - c. And then there are the spiritual struggles. We struggle with sin.
 - You set out to lay down your life for your spouse, but then you fail again—with anger, bitterness, selfishness, impatience...
 - You want to be more diligent in serving others—you start out, but then you are hindered by sickness or discouragement—and by your own flesh.
 - Perhaps you are struggling with lust—or some kind of addiction... you pray and you fight, but it keeps coming back on you.
 - Maybe God has exposed sin in your life that has been there for years, but that you never even noticed—you feel beat down and discouraged.

- Perhaps you find that you don't love the Lord very much, that you have little zeal and little hunger for His word—that you daydream whenever you try to pray or read the word.
 - Maybe you lack assurance of faith, or continually struggle with doubts about God and His promises.
 - Maybe your efforts at ministry and evangelism have produced little fruit.
- Where is the blessing that God has promised?
- Oh my brothers and sisters, we need to pray for God to bless us.
 - Especially we need to seek His blessing in growing in our service and obedience to Him. Yes, we should plead that He will pour out His Spirit in us.
- B. But the blessed inheritance is yet to come. It has not yet been fully given.
1. Abraham believed this.
 - Verse 10 explains why he was content to live as a sojourner in the land of promise.
 - It was because **“He waited for the city which has foundations, whose builder and maker is God.”**
 - a. He waited because He knew that God was not a God to make empty promises.
 - He believed that God would establish a glorious city for him and his people.
 - He believed that it would be a city with foundations that could not be moved.
 - He believed that it would be built and made by God Himself—a city like no other..
 - b. This sounds like what has been described in Hebrews as the temple that Jesus entered as our priest and king...
 - A temple not made with hands, eternal in the heavens—a building of God.
 - This is the house of God that Jesus has entered and that He has secured for His inheritance for Himself and His bride, the church.
 - c. Whatever God provided now for the gathering and maintaining of His people in the world was fine for Abraham as far as it went.
 - But he knew that it was nothing in comparison with the eternal city that God was preparing for His people.
 - The secret of Abraham's patience was his certainty that what he had in this world was not nearly all that God had promised to him.
 - If there had been no resurrection, he would have been (like Paul) most miserable.
 2. Christian, take heart!
 - a. This glorious city that has foundations whose builder and maker is God has been more fully revealed to you than it ever was to Abraham.
 - He knew that what God had given him while he was here was not yet the blessing that He had promised, but you have seen much more.
 - You have more reason to know of the glory to come because God has told you about it more directly and fully in His word.

- Jesus told us that we would suffer much tribulation in the world, but that His kingdom will come.
 - He has gone there Himself.
- b. Not only that, but now Jesus Himself has been revealed.
- In Him, that which is perfect has come down to us and we have seen His glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth.
 - We have seen Him, though clothed with humility, radiating the image of God in His character while He was among us.
 - When you know Him as your Saviour, you yearn for the city of which He is the eternal prince, and where we, the church, are His bride, adorned for Him.
 - Abraham longed to see what you have already seen.
- c. Do not grow weary with your present lot in life.
- Do you have great sorrows and losses here?
 - They are all to prepare you for the glory that is there!
 - Are you disappointed with what you have now?
 - Lift up your heart to the LORD.
 - I mean that—lift it up!
 - See what kind of God He is who told Abraham so simply, “I will bless you and give you an inheritance, and you shall be a blessing.”
 - When He says that, it means a God-sized eternal blessing!
 - That is what He has prepared for all of His people who trust in Him.
3. Will you have a place in that glorious city?
- You have two options.
 - If you rely on yourself to bring you the good life, you will have nothing.
 - If you will rely on God to bring you blessing, you will have everything.
 - That is all.
 - Believe on the LORD Jesus Christ and you will be saved.
 - By faith, you will obey God’s call to come and receive His promised blessing.
 - You will immediately be reconciled with God and afterward brought to glory.