

***Faith: "This World is Not My Home"***

Hebrews 11:8-22

Brenda and I moved to Manhattan in 1988. We lived on University Drive for 13 years. After we'd been there for about ten years, our next-door neighbor made a comment that has stuck with me ever since. We were standing out in our yard talking with the people who'd just moved into our neighborhood. Our next-door neighbor assured them, "We're good neighbors. You won't hear from us unless you need something."

That comment explained a lot because I grew up in a neighborhood (in Hattiesburg, Mississippi) where a good neighbor was somebody you heard from for no particular reason. Good neighbors were nosey and got into each others' "business." It was enlightening to know that in Manhattan, Kansas good neighbors leave each other alone unless they need something. [In other neighborhoods (even here in Manhattan) a good neighbor might be defined differently.] It's not that one is right and the other is wrong; it's just a difference of cultures. But it illustrates that unless you understand a culture and (to some degree) accept that culture, you'll never fit in; you'll always feel like an outsider; you'll never quite feel at home.

I mention all of this because there is a sense in which those who follow Jesus - those whose deepest loyalty is to Him - will never quite be at home in this world. Even if Manhattan is your favorite city in the world, there will be ways in which you never quite fit in. That's because of the reality about which Paul wrote in Philippians 3:20 which says:

20 For our citizenship is in heaven, from which also we eagerly wait for a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ;

Since our citizenship is in heaven, that's the only place we'll be completely at home. While we are *in* this world, we are *of* another world, another country, another kingdom.

The temptation we all face in this world is to conclude, "It's too hard living by God's values (heaven's values); I'm going to take the path of least resistance and adopt the values of this world. Then maybe I'll fit in and feel at home." But if you are a follower of Christ, eventually the disconnect will become too great; you will come to your senses (like the prodigal son) and you will long for your true home. C.S. Lewis wrote, "If we find ourselves with a desire that nothing in this world can satisfy, the most probable explanation is that we were made for another world."

Today we continue our 4-week study of faith in Hebrews 11. Our passage for today emphasizes that living by faith means admitting straight up, "I don't fit into this world; I belong to another world. Therefore I will live my life in a way that's compatible with its culture - its values, its priorities, its principles." Hebrews 11:8-22 calls this way of life "living by faith."

Last week I encouraged you to identify an area of your life in which you need to learn to live by faith. It could be an area of obedience, a relationship, a decision, or a

circumstance. The idea is that you would apply what you learn from Hebrews 11 these four weeks to this area of your life; at the end of four weeks perhaps you'll have a more intuitive sense of what it means to live by faith in that area. One person may say, "I need to learn to live by faith in the context of my parenting. I tend to be driven by fear; but I need to learn to live by faith." Another person may say, "I need to learn faith in relation to my anger. Instead of trying to control people and situations with my anger, I need to trust God to work in His ways." Hopefully you've identified an area of your life in which you need to learn faith.

***The "assurance of things hoped for and the conviction of things not seen":*** In Hebrews 11:1 the author wrote, "Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for and the conviction of things not seen." If you have faith you are sure/certain about things you haven't yet seen, things that God has promised. We'll first see how this faith is exhibited in the lives of Abraham and Sarah.

***Abraham and Sarah (Hebrews 11:8-12)*** Remember that faith has content; the content of Abraham's faith is given in Genesis 12:

1 Now the Lord said to Abram,  
"Go forth from your country,  
And from your relatives  
And from your father's house,  
To the land which I will show you;  
2 And I will make you a great nation,  
And I will bless you,  
And make your name great;  
And so you shall be a blessing;  
3 And I will bless those who bless you,  
And the one who curses you I will curse.  
And in you all the families of the earth will be blessed."

God promised to give Abraham "land" and to make Abraham a great nation through whom all the families of the earth would be blessed. This promise provided the content of Abraham's faith. The author of Hebrews tells us that Abraham had faith because he was confident that God would deliver what he had promised.

8 By faith Abraham, when he was called, obeyed by going out to a place which he was to receive for an inheritance; and he went out, not knowing where he was going.

Even though Abraham had never seen the promised land he was certain that God would "show him" and give him that land. As an expression of faith, Abraham gave up a life and a land that he **could** see for a life and a land he **couldn't** see; he gave up the known for the unknown, the comfortable for the uncomfortable. Verse 9 tell us that Abraham's faith involved becoming a "foreigner" (or outsider or alien):

9 By faith he lived as an alien in the land of promise, as in a foreign *land*, dwelling in tents with Isaac and Jacob, fellow heirs of the same promise; 10 for he was looking for the city which has foundations, whose architect and builder is God.

Who in their right mind would trade being an insider to become an “alien”? Who would trade living in a house to live in a tent? Someone with faith. Someone who has “the conviction of things not seen” and who therefore concludes, “I am convinced that God will do what He has promised, therefore I will do what He has commanded.”

Ultimately, the author of Hebrews writes in verse 10, Abraham was “looking for the city which has foundations, whose architect and builder is God.” Abraham didn’t merely believe that God was giving him an earthly home; he was also looking beyond this life to the heavenly city/country.

Verses 11 and 12 speak of the faith involved in Abraham and Sarah having a child in their old age (age 100 and 90 respectively). Their inability to conceive a child put the promise of God in jeopardy. It had been 25 years since God had promised to bless them with a son. God’s promise and their circumstances seemed to contradict one another. We sometimes find ourselves in that place, don’t we? When it appears that God has promised one thing (protection, comfort, peace, power, provision, etc.) and our circumstances reflect a different reality, we’re at a crossroads: ***the intersection of faith and sight***. Will we be confident in what God has promised or in what we see with our eyes?

Interestingly, when you read Genesis 16-18, Sarah’s ***unbelief*** - not her faith - is emphasized. For starters, instead of waiting on God, she made arrangements for Abraham to have an “heir” with Hagar, her servant. Years later when Sarah hears once again that she would conceive and bear a child she “laughed” (and then denied it). Reading about Sarah in Genesis, it’s hard to understand how verse 11 could be true.

11 By faith even Sarah herself received ability to conceive, even beyond the proper time of life, since she considered Him faithful who had promised.

Ultimately Sarah shared Abraham’s faith. God had a track record of being faithful, and so Sarah (and Abraham) believed that he could be trusted to deliver what he’d promised.

12 Therefore there was born even of one man, and him as good as dead at that, *as many descendants* as the stars of heaven in number, and innumerable as the sand which is by the seashore.

This is a restatement of the covenant promise that God had made to Abraham. Even though Abraham was “as good as dead” (100 years old) he and Sarah had a son, Isaac. And through Isaac the promise would be fulfilled.

***The Principle: Faith means living as a citizen of heaven (and as strangers and exiles on the earth).*** (Hebrews 11:13-16) These verses articulate a principle that was

at work in Abraham and Sarah (as well as everyone mentioned in this chapter). What we see at work in their lives can be and should be at work in our lives as well.

13 All these died in faith, without receiving the promises, but having seen them and having welcomed them from a distance, and having confessed that they were strangers and exiles on the earth.

Abraham “died in faith, without receiving the promises.” When he died the only piece of land he owned was Sarah’s burial plot (read Genesis 23 for this account). The promised land was still in the future. He didn’t live with the perspective, “This world is all I’ve got, therefore God has failed me if I don’t receive in this lifetime every promise He has made.” No, he lived with the perspective of a “stranger and exile” - as someone who lived on foreign soil. His perspective was, “Since this world is **not** my home, I **don’t** expect everything to be fulfilled in my lifetime.” Abraham readily admitted that he was a “stranger and exile” on the earth. Therefore he sought to live by the culture of heaven.

Lest we get the wrong impression, the author tells us in verses 14 and 15 that when Abraham thought about “home” he didn’t think about Ur of the Chaldeans (the original country he left).

14 For those who say such things make it clear that they are seeking a country of their own. 15 And indeed if they had been thinking of that *country* from which they went out, they would have had opportunity to return.

If their country of origin wasn’t home and the promised land wasn’t home. . . where was home for Abraham and Sarah?

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 a city for them.

P.T. O’Brien says that “Those whose citizenship is in heaven are foreigners on earth.” Abraham understood that he wouldn’t be home until he was home with God in “the heavenly [city]” - the city “[God] has prepared. . . for them.” Because Abraham **desired** this heavenly city/country/kingdom/home - he valued it above all else - God “is not ashamed to be called [his] God.” When asked, God would say, “I’m proud to say that I am the God of Abraham. Look at his life and you’ll see someone who: takes me seriously; someone who believes the things I say; someone who understands that his citizenship is in heaven. Abraham lives by faith and perseveres. I am not ashamed to be called his God.”

Think of the area of your life in which you need faith, the area of your life in which you need to please God. I want you to consider the possibility of God being asked about you and He responds, “I am not ashamed to be called the God of \_\_\_\_\_.” That is actually the case as we live by faith.

Living by faith in this area of your life will involve the perspective that this world is not your home. Like Abraham, you will need to make peace with the fact that living by the word of God is a lot harder than simply following the ways of this world. You will need to conclude that it's okay if the commands of God are difficult, and it's okay if obeying God means that you'll never quite fit in.

For example, if you have decided that you need to trust God in the area of purity, you will need to be **very clear up front that this world is not your home**. This world will encourage you to indulge every desire and fantasy that you have; this world will tell that immorality and impurity is no big deal and that it really doesn't affect the rest of your life. But if you are clear that this world is not your home, you'll listen to your Father in heaven who has a very different take on purity. That's why Peter wrote this in 1 Peter 2:11:

11 Beloved, I urge you as aliens and strangers to abstain from fleshly lusts which wage war against the soul.

If this world is your home, you probably feel very free to indulge every fleshly lust you have. But if our home is in heaven with God, we don't have the freedom to live as a citizen of this world. We abstain from fleshly lusts because they are at war with what God is doing in our souls.

That's just one example. If you are seeking to live by faith in a relationship, you need to conduct yourself according to the culture of heaven, not this world. This world would say that manipulation, selfishness, and revenge are all justified at times. God, on the other hand, urges us to speak the truth in love, patience, and kindness. When you live your life on earth according to the culture of heaven, God takes great personal pleasure and "is not ashamed to be called your God."

**Abraham and Isaac** (*Hebrews 11:17-18*) Verses 17 and 18 make reference to Genesis 22 and God's command that Abraham take Isaac to Mt. Moriah and sacrifice him there. For me this is one of the most troubling passages in the entire Bible because God is telling Abraham to practice child sacrifice - something that is elsewhere condemned. I don't really know any way to make this command reasonable or ethical. Actually I think that's the point of the account: God puts Abraham into a terrible situation in which he has to demonstrate unqualified loyalty/faith in Him.

17 By faith Abraham, when he was tested, offered up Isaac, and he who had received the promises was offering up his only begotten son; 18 *it was he* to whom it was said, "In Isaac your descendants shall be called."

Abraham's faith allowed him to hold in his mind two seemingly contradictory things without denying either. On the one hand Abraham accepted that God's promises would be fulfilled through Isaac, his "only begotten son" with Sarah. On the other hand Abraham accepted that God had commanded him to "offer up Isaac" as a sacrifice. God's promise and God's command were seemingly contradictory. Yet Abraham accepted them both because they both came from the mouth of God.

Verse 19 suggests that Abraham's faith allowed him to consider a scenario that went far beyond anything he'd ever experienced:

19 He considered that God is able to raise *people* even from the dead, from which he also received him back as a type.

In Genesis 22:5 we have a hint that Abraham considered the possibility of God raising Isaac from the dead. When they approached Mt. Moriah (where Isaac would be sacrificed), Abraham told the two young men with him, "Stay here with the donkey, and I and the lad will go over there; and we will worship and return to you." Apparently Abraham believed both that somehow both he and Isaac would both worship **and** return. If you read the rest of Genesis 22, you'll see that God stopped Abraham before he could sacrifice Isaac. In Abraham's heart and mind, he received Isaac back as risen from the dead.

***Isaac, Jacob, and Joseph.*** (*Hebrews 11:20-22*) These verses describe how Abraham's son, grandson, and great-grandson understood that this world isn't the sum total of existence. The dying words of Isaac, Jacob, and Joseph made clear that they believed that God's promises about the future were true.

20 By faith Isaac blessed Jacob and Esau, even regarding things to come.

You can read about this incident in Genesis 27. The author of Hebrews doesn't mention that Jacob deceived his father Isaac and "stole" the blessing that belonged to Esau as the firstborn. (Thanksgiving dinner was never the same after that. . .) He simply mentions that Isaac pronounced blessings on each of his sons, blessings "regarding things to come." These blessings are mentioned because they confirm that Isaac had faith: he was confident about a future he couldn't see because he believed God's word/prophecies.

As you may remember, Jacob was renamed Israel and had twelve sons (from whom came the twelve tribes of Israel). His son Joseph was sold into slavery in Egypt by his brothers. Joseph rose to a place of authority in Egypt; God used Joseph to preserve and protect the rest of the family. Verse 21 tells us that on his deathbed Jacob blessed Joseph's two sons:

21 By faith Jacob, as he was dying, blessed each of the sons of Joseph, and worshiped, *leaning* on the top of his staff.

Genesis 48 records how Jacob intentionally blessed (signified by placing his right hand on his head) Joseph's younger son Ephraim over the older son Manasseh. Jacob restated the covenant promise by saying that Ephraim's descendants "would become a multitude of nations" (48:19).

Finally, Joseph's faith is mentioned in verse 22:

22 By faith Joseph, when he was dying, made mention of the exodus of the sons of Israel, and gave orders concerning his bones.

Even though the twelve tribes (the children of Israel) were in slavery with no prospect of being set free, Joseph believed that God would return them to the land (the “promised land” - the land God had promised to Abraham). This confidence about God’s promise was evident when he made his sons promise to carry his bones with them when they left Egypt and bury them in the promised land. A person’s dying words often speak volumes; in the case of Isaac, Jacob and Joseph, their dying words revealed their faith. They understood that this world was not their home.

When you think about it, the person who truly believes that “this world is not my home” has a different perspective on virtually everything: relationships, obedience, decisions, money, and even death. We’re not talking about lying to yourself and trying to convince yourself of things that aren’t true; we’re not talking about make believe. We’re talking about the real world.

One of my closest friends in college at LSU was Jim Gaulley. Jim and his family live in Kentucky now. Jim’s son Sean was driving home from his first semester college in December and was in a terrible car accident; Sean was on life support for almost a month. He died about a week ago and his funeral was yesterday.

Sometimes expressions of comfort and sympathy sound a bit superficial and cliché - even when they’re well-meaning and from-the-heart. We all have a hard time knowing what to say and what not to say when somebody else is grieving. But when the grieving person expresses an assurance in things hoped for and a conviction of things not seen, it’s a **powerful** thing. That’s what I witnessed in my friend Jim this past week. He is living with the confidence that because of his son’s faith that he is in the very presence of Jesus now. Jim wrote on FB that even though they’re weeping and crying out to God in pain, they “do not grieve as those who have no hope” (1 Thess. 4:13). He lives with the conviction that this world is not his home. And it makes all the difference in the world when it comes to their grieving.

In relation to the area of your life in which you need to exercise faith, this week I’d encourage you to explore the question, “What difference does it make knowing that this world is not my home?”