

“No U-Turns on the Road of Faith”

Hebrews 11:13-16

INTRO:

When Kathy and I were a part of the Galilean Baptist Mission we were connected with Fort Faith Baptist Youth Camp. I will never forget the first time I drove up the long winding dirt road that led to camp. Chuck Hewlett, the director of the camp, put up a series of road signs like the old Burma Shave signs along the road. One that stuck to the sticky side of my mind was the one that read, **“NO U-TURNS ON THE ROAD OF FAITH.”** I must confess when I saw that sign for the first time, I didn’t really grasp the significance of what it said. But as I have matured, I learned to understand this truth.

In a real sense, we could put Chuck’s sign over the verses that we are going to study today. This is the very point that the writer of Hebrews is making in **vs. 13-16**. The writer will take up Abraham’s story again in **v. 17**. Before he does, he paused to apply the material he gave us thus far in **chapter 11**. Remember the reason for the hall of faith is to remind the Hebrews to wait in faith for God to bless their obedience. Here in **vs. 13-16**, the writer pointed out three things the Patriarch’s faith did in their lives.

- I. Their Faith Allowed Them To See And Embrace The Promise (v. 13)*
- II. Their Faith Changed Their Whole Life (v. 13b-16a)*
- III. Their Faith Brought Them The Highest Blessings (v. 16b)*

I. Their Faith Allowed Them To See And Embrace The Promise (v. 13)

A. “These all died in faith, not having received the promises, but having seen them afar off were assured of them, embraced them and confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth.”

Does this mean that they were failures? Did God let them down? Was their faith in vain? The answer to all of these questions is no.

1. How can the answer be no? First, it is no because they were looking for a promise that they knew was not going to be fulfilled in this present life. God had been clear to Abraham that it was His grandchildren and great grandchildren who were going to inherit the Promised Land. (**Genesis 15:13, 15-16**)

“And God said to Abram, ‘Know for certain that your descendants will be strangers in a land that is not theirs, where they will be enslaved and oppressed four hundred years. And as for you, you shall go to your fathers in peace; you shall be buried at a good old age. Then in the fourth generation they shall return here, for the iniquity of the Amorite is not yet complete.’”

2. We know that they were not failures, and God did not let them down because the promise that they sought was more than the land of promise. We catch a glimpse of this in **v. 10**.

“For [Abraham] looked for a city which hath foundations, whose builder and maker is God.”

Abraham looked for more than the Promised Land. He looked for the fulfillment of God’s plan of redemption and the benefits of salvation. He was looking for heaven.

3. We know that their faith was not in vain because it allowed them to embrace a promise that was not yet a reality in the world.

B. Faith allowed them to ***“see the promises from afar.”*** Remember the definition of faith that the writer gave us in the first verse of **Hebrews 11**? ***“Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence [the proof] of things not seen.”*** What cannot be seen with the physical eye can be seen with the eye of faith.

1. After Lot left in **Genesis 13**, God made an amazing promise to Abraham. (**Genesis 13:14-16**).

“And the LORD said to Abram, after Lot had separated from him, now lift up your eyes and look from the place where you are, northward and southward and eastward and westward; for all the land which you see, I will give it to you and to your descendants forever. And I will make your descendants as the dust of the earth; so that if anyone can number the dust of the earth, then your descendants can also be numbered.”

Now, if Abraham had looked with his physical eyes all he would have seen was a land teeming with Hittites, Jebusites, Canaanites, and all the other “ites” who were in the land. But Abraham looked with the eyes of faith. He saw not what was there, but what would be there when the promise of God was realized.

2. We read an equally amazing statement in **John 8:56**. These words are from the lips of the Lord Jesus Christ Himself.

“Your father Abraham rejoiced to see my day: and he saw it, and was glad.”

By faith, the promise that Abraham saw was not just the Promised Land, but the Son of Promise. He saw from afar that God would send His Son into the world to be “the Lamb of God that takes away the sin of the world.”

C. Not only did their faith allow them to see these promises, it also allowed Abraham and Sarah to embrace them. The Greek word translated ***“embrace”*** means ***“to salute, greet, welcome, to treat with affection.”*** Some see this as folks waving from a ship as they pass by the shore. I think the idea is more embracing as welcoming into their thoughts and hearts. They reached out to these promises and embraced them, making them their own.

II. Their Faith Changed Their Whole Life (v. 13b-16a)

Abraham’s and Sarah’s faith was decidedly not in vain. It allowed them to take hold of promises that were yet far off and make them a part of their lives, and strengthened them so that they could face death without fear. Faith in these promises did not just affect their outlook; it also transformed their whole lives.

A. It changed their view of their present lives. We read in the end of **Hebrews 11:13**, ***“and confessed that they were pilgrims and strangers on the earth.”*** Their view was not ***“You only go around once in life, go for all the gusto you can get.”*** Nor was it, ***“Life is a game, drink it up.”*** Sarah and Abraham did not buy into the popular snippets of philosophy that pervade our lives through the media. They saw their lives in terms of the popular gospel song, ***“This world is not my home, I’m just a passin’ through/ my treasures are laid up, somewhere beyond the blue.”*** Abraham and Sarah recognized that this world was not their home and they confessed willingly that they were strangers, and sojourners in this present world. Do we remind ourselves every day that this world is passing away?

B. Not only did it change their view of their present, it also transformed their perspective of the life they lived before; (v. 15).

“And truly if they had called to mind that country from which they had come out, they would have had opportunity to return.”

They did not look at their lives in Ur as something to which they should return. The children of Israel wandering in the wilderness are a stark contrast to this attitude.

C. Finally, their faith changed their view of their future (v. 16). ***“But now they desire a better, that is, a heavenly country.”*** In a sense this is a repeat of what we said before. But they went through life without fearing the future because they were confident that God had prepared a better country for them. Paul wrote about this too. **(Titus 2:13)**

“Looking for that blessed hope, and the glorious appearing of the great God and our Savior Jesus Christ;”

III. Their Faith Brought Them The Highest Blessings (v. 16b)

A. Their faith allowed them to see and embrace the promises that God made to them. It also completely changed their lives. But even more than this there is one more thing that their faith did, and this is the major point that the writer wants to make here. Their faith brought them the highest of blessings

B. Because of their faith, God was not ashamed to be called their God. Think of it; the infinite, sovereign, righteous, holy God of the Universe willingly identified Himself as their God. He let them claim Him as their friend. We read in **Exodus 3:6**;

“He said also, I am the God of your father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob. Then Moses hid his face, for he was afraid to look at God.”

I always am amazed that God identifies Himself as the God of Jacob. Jacob was a cheat, a swindler, and a grasper. Yet, God in His grace saved him and changed him. Then, He willingly identifies with Him. ***“His forever only His, who the Lord and me shall part?/ Ah with what a rest of bliss, Christ can fill the loving heart!/ Heaven and Earth may fade and flee, First born light in gloom decline;/ But while God and I shall be, I am His and He is mine!”***

C. Because of their faith, God prepared for them a city. The future promise that they saw afar off and they embraced by faith, will be a reality because God made it so. He prepared for them a city. My mind races to another scene where the Lord Jesus in the shadow of the cross is speaking to His disciples. He said in **John 14:1-6**;

“Let not your heart be troubled: ye believe in God, believe also in me. In my Father's house are many mansions: if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you unto myself; that where I am, there ye may be also. And whither I go ye know, and the way ye know. Thomas said to him, Lord, we know not whither thou goest; and how can we know the way? Jesus saith unto him, I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me.”

How about our faith? Does it allow us to see and embrace the promises of God? Did it transform our lives? Does it bring us the greatest of blessings? It can if it is Biblical faith. Let us ask God to give us this kind of faith.