

Hebrews Chapter 11C

One of the hot button issues in this year's presidential elections is the refugee crisis. The New York Times published an article in Dec. of 2015 in which they reviewed the refugee problem as it developed over the past 75 years. Here is what they reported:

- 1940 – 1960: There were 81.6 million people displaced (20 years)
- 1960 – 2000: There were 46.5 million people displaced (40 Years)
- 2000 – Present there have been 22.9 million people displaced. (15 years)

The conflict in Syria alone displaced 12 million people, creating the largest wave of refugees to hit Europe since World War II.

I am thankful that I have never been forced to flee my home. I have never been separated from the family that I so dearly love

- Sharon and I were introduced to the global refugee crisis when our daughter met a young man from Laos while she was serving on the mission field in Thailand.

At the age of 2 this young man and his mother fled communist oppression in Laos and for the next 12 years he lived in a refugee camp in Thailand. His story is one of intense poverty and hunger living with thousands of other families in deplorable conditions. Unable to enter Thai society, and unable to return to their homeland they were stuck in their hopeless condition among an idolatrous people.

- Over those 12 years a handful of the people in the refugee camp were rescued by American churches but Kookie and his mother remained in exile.
- Finally at the age of 14 Kookie and his mother acquired a sponsor who brought them to the great state of Texas where he was thrust into High School without formal education and without knowing the English language.
- He made it to the promised land, America but he did not find real freedom until the day that he heard the Gospel of Jesus Christ.
- In 2006 Kookie returned to Thailand but this time he was leading a mission team, proclaiming the glorious freedom that he had found in Christ.
- It just so happened that my daughter was also leading a mission team into Thailand at the same time. The rest is history.

In our Study of the book of Hebrews this morning we are going to look at the life of a refugee. A man who lived as a stranger, a Pilgrim in the land of promise. This morning we will study the life of Abraham.

- I don't think I am exaggerating when I describe Abraham as "The Poster Child of Faith." The sheer volume of scripture dedicated to describing his life of faith should capture our attention.

Here in Hebrews Ch 11 more attention is given to Abraham than to any of the other “Heroes of Faith.” In similar fashion the story of Abraham’s life takes up 14 whole chapters in the book of Genesis.

So we see that Abraham’s significance as a man of faith and his importance in the history of redemption simply cannot be overestimated.

- It was through Abraham that God gave the covenant of grace and that is the same covenant of grace by which WE ourselves are saved. SO OUR Salvation at least in part rests on God’s faithfulness and his promise to Father Abraham.

It is through Abraham that God clearly demonstrates the biblical doctrine of Justification by Faith in the Old Testament.

Genesis 15: 5 **And he (God) brought him (Abraham) outside and said, "Look toward heaven, and number the stars, if you are able to number them." Then he said to him, "So shall your offspring be. 6 And he (Abraham) believed the LORD, and he (God) counted (Credited his faith) it to him as righteousness.**

- In light of THIS the Apostle Paul calls Abraham “**the Father of all who believe.**” (Romans 4:11)
- Time and time again in our studies throughout the New Testament we see that Abraham is used as an example of one who was saved by and lived by faith.

Galatians 3:6 **just as Abraham "believed God, and it was counted to him as righteousness"? 7 Know then that it is those of faith who are the sons of Abraham.**

- So when God took Abraham outside and told him to look at the “Stars,” and said **so shall your descendants be.**
- God was not referring to Abraham’s physical descendants but rather to all of those who would be saved by the grace of God through the gift of saving faith that was first seen in Father Abraham.

8 And the Scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, preached the gospel beforehand to Abraham, saying, "In you shall all the nations be blessed."

9 So then, those who are of faith are blessed along with Abraham, the man of faith.

- By faith Abraham believed the Gospel that God graciously revealed while he was living in the land of UR.

How does the writer of Hebrews describe this great man of faith and what can we apply to our own lives from his life of faith?

Three things that the writer of Hebrews wants us to see from Abraham’s life:

1. Faith Obeys God’s Call
2. Faith Believes God’s Promise
3. Faith Sees God’s City.

1 Faith obeys God's Call.

Hebrews 11: 8 **By faith Abraham obeyed when he was called to go out to a place that he was to receive as an inheritance. And he went out, not knowing where he was going.**

The first question is this, "Where exactly was Abraham when God called Him?"

In Genesis 11 we learn that Abram's family dwelt in the Land of Ur of the Chaldees.

- Studies have shown that Ur was a godless community, a pagan society not very far from where civilization actually began. It was little more than 100 miles from where the Tower of Babel had been built.
- Ur of the Chaldees was about 220 miles southeast of what we know today as Bagdad Iraq.
- Excavations in the region have uncovered evidence of great wealth and the worship of many Gods, the greatest of which was the Moon God, Nanna who's sign (*interestingly*) was the crescent moon.

Now I would ask: Where were YOU when God called YOU?

If you were like me, you were living in the pagan world. Worshipping the unholy trinity of Me, Myself and I, enjoying this world's wealth and living for the pleasures of the flesh. (*We were not so different from Abram.*)

In the sovereignty of God as recorded for us in Genesis 12 the Lord called Abraham to leave his family and his home and go to the place that He would show him.

Genesis 12:1 **Now the LORD said to Abram, "Go from your country and your kindred and your father's house to the land that I will show you.**

- The call of God is the starting place of Abraham's Faith, it is the origin of Abraham's salvation and a key moment in the history of God's redeeming work.
- Genesis records Abram's response to the call of God in the obedience that comes from faith.

4 **So Abram went, as the LORD had told him, and Lot went with him. Abram was seventy-five years old when he departed from Haran.**

- One very important point we see illustrated for us here in the life of Abraham is that the gift of Saving Faith enabled Him to respond to the Call of God.
- Friends it is God's initiative, God's sovereign Grace, His divine intervention that should be emphasized in God's calling of Abraham.
- The context clearly shows that there was nothing in Abraham's life that would merit or elicit God's call.
- Joshua actually describes Abraham's life prior to God's call.

Joshua 24: 2 **And Joshua said to all the people, "Thus says the LORD, the God of Israel, 'Long ago, your fathers lived beyond the Euphrates, Terah, the father of Abraham and of Nahor; and they served other gods.**

3 Then I took your father Abraham from beyond the River and led him through all the land of Canaan, and made his offspring many. I gave him Isaac.

- Abram was not seeking God; God came seeking Abram, sovereignly, graciously, savingly.
- God TOOK Abraham an idol worshipper from beyond the River and led him through a pilgrimage of promise.
 - *(God is the Active one in the narrative)*
- When God calls a man to himself, that call is FIRST a call to depart, to leave behind one's former lifestyle and the relationships with which he identified.
- Abraham was called to abandon his roots, his wealth, his stability, his family and friends.

In a similar way, the Lord Jesus called his Disciples to make a radical departure from their old lives. As He walked by the Sea of Galilee He called Peter and Andrew:

Mark 1: 17 And Jesus said to them, "Follow me, and I will make you become fishers of men." 18 And immediately they left their nets and followed him.

- He called James and John in the same way.

Later on, in the course of his ministry Jesus described the radical nature of God's CALL in this way:

Matthew 10: 37 Whoever loves father or mother more than me is not worthy of me, and whoever loves son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me. 38 And whoever does not take his cross and follow me is not worthy of me. 39 Whoever finds his life will lose it, and whoever loses his life for my sake will find it.

- Do you see the similarities between God's call to Abraham and Jesus Call to his disciples? Before we move on let me ask you this:

Have you responded to the radical call of the Gospel to repent and believe? Have you left behind your old life of flesh (*taking up your cross and following Jesus?*)

- Have you begun YOUR pilgrimage of faith that leads to the Promised Land?

The life of faith begins when God graciously, sovereignly, savingly reveals himself to us.

- He appeared to Abram when he was in Mesopotamia.
- He came to Peter, Andrew, James and John by the Sea of Galilee.
- He appeared to the Apostle Paul on the road to Damascus.
- My confrontation with God, like many of you took place through the proclamation of the Gospel.
- For me it was at a youth meeting when I was 16 years old. It may not have been as dramatic as Abram or Paul but it was just as effective.
- In a storefront in Souderton God imparted the gift of saving faith enabling me to obey his call to repent and believe.

LISTEN: The grace of God that is manifest in repentance LITERALLY drives us AWAY from our old life pushing us out into a new life of pilgrimage.

Leaving the old life behind we follow Abraham into the Pilgrimage of Faith: The principle that we see here in the next point is that saving faith enables the one who is called to hold fast to the promise of God even when there is no physical evidence.

2, Faith Believes God's Promise

Hebrews 11:9 **By faith he went to live in the land of promise, as in a foreign land, living in tents with Isaac and Jacob, heirs with him of the same promise.**

- Like many of us Abram's obedience had a less than perfect start. It was like an old car in dire need of a tune up. It ran a bit rough when it first started.
- From the end of chapter 11 we see that rather than leave behind his Family and his Father's house he took Terah, his father with him and that caused a delay landing him in Haran until Terah died.
- But eventually Abram entered the land of promise. Take note of how the writer of Hebrews describes Abram's life in the land:

he went to live in the land of promise, as in a foreign land, living in tents with Isaac and Jacob, heirs with him of the same promise

- When Abram arrived in the land of Canaan he found that it was inhabited by an idolatrous people who were equally as lost as those he left behind in Ur of the Chaldees.
- And although God promised the land to Abram and his descendants as an eternal possession at this point he possessed neither land nor descendants. He lived in the land of promise as a nomad, a sojourner an alien all the days of his life.

Abraham's experience presents us with a classic picture of the life of faith.

- God's Chosen People, those he has called and separated to Himself have received many great and precious promises from God, and all of these promises are **"Yes and Amen"** in Christ.
- EVEN though they don't presently experience the full manifestation of those promises they live their lives with the assurance of hope that is based upon the unchangeable character of God.

What Abram experienced is what many preachers call the "Already – not yet" character of the life of faith.

- Those who are born of God ALREADY possess the promises of God even though those same promises are NOT-YET fully realized in their lifetime.
- Luke elaborates on Abraham's Already – No Yet experience in Acts 7.

Acts 7: 5 Yet he (God) gave him (Abram) no inheritance in it, (the land of promise) not even a foot's length, but promised to give it to him as a possession and to his offspring after him, though he had no child.

- In spite of God's promise, Abraham never took possession of the Land and the great majority of his life he had NO children.
- Years later when Sarah died Abraham had to purchase a plot of land in which to bury her. That fact from Genesis proves that Abraham still toward the end of his life did not actually possess the land that God promised.

Quote: Dr. Richard Phillips

“Abraham's experience informs us that the life of faith is NOT one of receiving all God's promises in tangible form, but rather of believing them in the face of hardship, receiving them by faith, living as Abraham did out of confidence in and reliance on God. From beginning to end, the Christian life is one of faith and not sight.”

- DO you remember when we were going through the definition of faith recorded for us in Hebrews 11:1, (NKJV) **Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen.**
- I told you that the word “Substance” in some Greek Texts is rendered “Title Deed.” SO Abraham held the title deed to a land that he never actually possessed. What's with that?

If we are honest with ourselves we have to admit that the “Already Not Yet” reality of the life of faith is something that we all share in common with Father Abraham.

Case in Point:

- How well did you overcome sin this past week? Really, let's be honest. (*thought, word and deed??*)
- How many of you had to take some form of pain relief this week? The knees, the back, the __ Fill in the blank. (*the grass withers, flowers fade and only the Word of God endures forever*)
- Finally, how many of you at some point throughout the week felt as if God was far away from you? You weren't experiencing the intimacy with God that you hoped for.

When you read about the great salvation that Christ has obtained for us and the glories of the Kingdom of God, you have to say to yourself: “Lord I believe that all of these things are true but in reality there are times when doubt creeps into my mind because I actually experience very little of the wonderful blessings that are promised.

Friends, In light of Abraham's example I believe that God would exhort us to walk by faith and not by sight, to cling whole-heartedly to His promises. He would call us to persevere in the faith despite the trials and hardships that we face in this world.

Because our faith holds great reward.

Some of the convoluted thinking that has permeated Evangelicalism today promotes the false idea that we should literally possess all of the realities of the Kingdom in this present corrupt world. (*But that's not Faith!*)

- False teachers promote what theologians call an over realized eschatology. In layman's terms - They teach that the realities of the future Kingdom of God can and should be perfectly experienced here and now in this life of flesh.
- They teach that the perfect body, (*free from infirmity*) the limitless resources and uninterrupted peace of the Kingdom Age should be your present reality!
- And if you are not experiencing them it is because you don't have enough faith. NONSENSE! They reject the biblical truth that *Faith is the substance of things hoped for the evidence of things that are not seen!*
- This life in the FLESH was never designed to be "Your Best Life Now." Mr Osteen
- On the contrary, for those who possess true saving faith, this present life is our worst life and the best life is a reality that will be fully experienced when we put off this flesh and move into our eternal dwelling.

SO from verse 9 we see that Abraham, the great Father of the Faith was content to live in tents, dwelling as a foreigner in the land of promise.

- WHY was he content to live that way? What was the secret to his perseverance and the endurance by which he was able to overcome the difficulties he faced?
- By Faith He saw a city (Last Point)

3, By Faith Sees a City.

Hebrews 11: 10 (Abraham) *waited for the city which has foundations, whose builder and maker is God.*

- Abraham knew that the land itself, that dry and dusty plot of ground that we know today as the land of Palestine, the Land of Israel, that was NOT ultimately the Land that Abraham was seeking.
- BUT He would be satisfied to dwell there in a temporary abode because He knew, by faith that God had something greater, much more majestic, something that was lasting in store for him.

He endured, waiting patiently in faith for a city which has foundations.

- That is a permanent city, an abiding city and unshakable, eternal city that was not designed or constructed by the hands of man but by God himself.
- Abraham understood and so should we that the promises of God to his chosen people go beyond this earth and HE lifts our eyes to the eternal city.
- For Abraham the Land served as a shadow a type of something that was much greater and much more enduring.

Those who live in this present life by faith, confessing that they are strangers and aliens, exiles on this earth have their eyes fixed on the city of God.

Hebrews 11: 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 for them a city.
Hebrews 13: 14 For here we have no lasting city, but we seek the city that is to come.

Isaiah saw the city:

Isaiah 65: 17 "For behold, I create new heavens and a new earth, and the former things shall not be remembered or come into mind. 18 But be glad and rejoice forever in that which I create; for behold, I create Jerusalem to be a joy, and her people to be a gladness.

Ezekiel saw the same city:

Ezekiel 48: 35 The circumference of the city shall be 18,000 cubits. And the name of the city from that time on shall be, The LORD Is There."

The Apostle John saw the city with great clarity:

Revelation 21:2 And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. 3 And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, "Behold, the dwelling place of God is with man. He will dwell with them, and they will be his people, and God himself will be with them as their God.

This eternal city is the HOME of all who believe, all who through repentance of sin and faith in Christ leave behind the idols of this present world, pick up their cross and follow Abraham, Isaac and Jacob into the celestial city.

- The Psalmist also wrote of this Pilgrim journey and rejoiced:

Psalm 84: 5 (NKJV) Blessed is the man whose strength is in You, Whose heart is set on pilgrimage. 6 As they pass through the Valley of Baca, They make it a spring; The rain also covers it with pools. 7 They go from strength to strength; Each one appears before God in Zion.

- Are You that blessed man? Is your heart set on Pilgrimage?
- You will find that the "Valley of Weeping" (Baca) becomes a spring of water leading you from strength to strength until you see the Lover of Your Soul with your own eyes.