

“Abraham: Home is Where the Lord Is”

Hebrews 11:8-10

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July 2, 2023

This fall Jordan Love is projected to be the starting quarterback for my beloved Green Bay Packers. Numerous folks have asked, “How do you think he will do?” My response is, “No one knows. However, since the last two Packers’ quarterbacks, Brett Favre and Aaron Rodgers, won seven NFL MVP awards over the past 30 year, I suspect I may be a little disappointed.”

MVP, most valuable player. Here is a question: Who do you think is the MVP of the Old Testament? Who had the greatest faith of all the men and women whose stories are recorded in the first 39 books of our Bibles? I am not sure, but it seems the writer of the book of Hebrews sees one man as the greatest faith superstar. At least he spends over twice as much time talking about the faith of Abraham than he does any other faith hero.

Today as we continue our tour of the faith hall of fame in Hebrews 11, we come to the Abraham exhibit. During the next few weeks, we will explore how this man put his faith into practice and see how he is an important model for us. Let’s pause and pray that this morning the Lord would use His word to help our faith to grow.

**Hebrews 11:8-10 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. 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. For he was looking forward to the city that has foundations, whose designer and builder is God.**

These verses are a commentary on Genesis 11 and 12, where we are told how Abraham, in response to God’s command, left his hometown, Ur of the Chaldeans, and moved to the land Canaan, modern Israel. We cannot be sure where Ur was, but the best guess is that it was a city located along the Euphrates River, south of Babylon in what is now Iraq.

In about 2000 years BC, before Christ, Abraham, who was then called “Abram,” left Ur with his wife

Sarah, his father Terah, and , and nephew Lot. They moved to a city called Haran, located in what is now southern Turkey, about 600 miles from Ur.

Now, obviously, Abraham could not rent a U-Haul for this move, so it would have taken a number of months to make this journey by caravan, a camel and donkey caravan. We don’t know how long Abraham stayed in Haran. We know he acquired considerable wealth while he was there and that his father died in this city. Yet, Haran was not where the Lord had called him to go, so he and his family pack up again and make a 400-mile journey to Canaan.

Two things are important to remember about Abraham’s move. First his faith in the Lord gives him the courage to move to a new home that is far away, where he had never been, and that he knew nothing about. **Hebrews 11:8b he went out, not knowing where he was going.**

There are really not parallels in our day. Let’s say God called me to move to Mongolia. That is a long way from here, and I have never been there, but with a few clicks on my phone I can learn all sorts of things about Mongolia. And I have talked to missionaries who have lived there. Abraham is more like Star Trek, “to boldly go where no man has gone before.” Or no man he knows have ever gone before. We don’t know exactly how God guided Abraham to his new home, but it is clear” wherever the Lord leads, Abraham follows.

There are significant parallels between Abraham’s faith and Noah’s faith that we explored last week. Noah didn’t know what a flood even was when the Lord told him to build an ark, but he did it anyway. Abraham doesn’t know where he is going, but when God tells him to move, that is what he does.

And, like Noah, Abraham’s faith is not a blind faith. If anyone else would have told Abraham to move 1000 miles away, he would have said, “No way, forget it.” But, when the Lord tells him to go, he does. Like Noah, Abraham had walked with God enough to know the Lord was worthy of his trust and obedience. Like Noah, Abraham puts his faith into action. There is a difference between saying, “Yes, God, I believe you. this is what I

should do,” and actually doing it. Abraham’s faith caused him to take bold action.

And my guess is, just like Noah, Abraham had to suffer ridicule because of his faith. Imagine a conversation Abraham might have had with his neighbor, Joe. “So, Abraham, I see you are packing up? Are you going somewhere?” “Yes, Joe, we are moving to Canaan.” “Oh yah. Where is that?” “Well, I don’t really know?” “You don’t know? How can you move there if you don’t know where it is?” “Well Joe, ummm, God is leading me there.” “Yah, right. Where are you really going Abraham?” “I told you, to a place called Canaan, that I really know nothing about.” “Abraham, I think maybe you have been working too hard. When was the last time you were to the doctor?”

Okay, you get the picture. The important point is that Abraham is trusting God enough to obey God, even when it seemed to go against common sense, even if others scoffed at him.

Second, when Abraham does arrive at his new home, he never really “settles” there. Now, I would think, if the Lord called Abraham to leave his home and travel 1000 miles across the desert, that when he arrives in Canaan, it would be a very special place for him. Maybe it would be a lush green valley where Abraham could build a magnificent palace. But remember what we read in **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.**

When we read the book of Genesis, we see that is indeed the case. Abraham keeps moving from village to village. Though he is a wealthy man, the only piece of land he ever owns is the field he buys as a place to bury his wife. In Acts 7:5 Stephen says that Abraham does not even have a foot of ground as his inheritance. Though Canaan was clearly the place God had called him to go, instead **Hebrews 11:10a He was looking forward to the city that has foundations**, a permanent place of safety, peace and joy, **Hebrews 11:10b whose designer and builder is God.**

Some see this as a reference to the city of Jerusalem, which would be built as the holy city and become the site of the temple and the capital of the nation of Israel. However, I think the verse speaks not of the earthly Jerusalem, but of the

heavenly Jerusalem, the city of God, what we often refer to as heaven. This is the only true permanent place of safety, peace, and joy. Because he was a man who trusted in the Lord, this would be Abraham’s home for all eternity.

Okay, even though Abraham lived over 4000 years ago, I believe he is still an important model for Christians today. Here are three ways that our faith should often be more like Abraham’s .

Number 1, Like Abraham, we should have faith that gives us the courage to take risks. We should be willing to step out into uncharted territory if that is what the Lord calls us to do. I sometimes hear “It takes guts to leave ruts.” In other words, it takes courage to go places you have never been to try things you have never done and talk to people you don’t know. But sometimes those are things God calls us to do.

Now, I need to be careful here because some people fall into the ditch on the other side of the road. These folks never seem satisfied with where they are at and seem addicted to change. Every other week they are checking out a new job opportunity or thinking about moving to a new town.

The root problem is likely a lack of contentment. From a Biblical perspective contentment is a very good thing. In **1 Timothy 6:6** the apostle Paul reminds us **But godliness with contentment is great gain.** Now, this doesn’t mean we should just sit and watch the world go by. There are things the Lord calls each of us to do every day. So, we should never be complacent, but we should always be content.

Along with that, the Lord calls each of us to “bloom where we are planted.” Yes, perhaps He does desire that you move to another city and take another job tomorrow, but today, He wants you to focus on what He is calling you to do today, not tomorrow. In other words, you need to bloom where you are planted. But if the Lord calls you to go somewhere else tomorrow, you better go and bloom there.

For those who enjoy stability and try to avoid changes, we need to remember that sometimes the Lord will transplant us, like He did Abraham. Even if it is not a change in location or vocation, I suspect the Lord will call each of us in this room

to do or say something this week that we are not used to doing or saying, and for that reason we will be uncomfortable. That is when we need the Lord to give us the guts to leave the ruts we may be in.

Number 2, Like Abraham, we should have faith that enables us to avoid hanging on too tightly to things here on earth. When Abraham moved from Ur, he left behind family, friends, his house and probably most of his possessions. That is not an easy thing to do. When he arrives in Canaan, he doesn't attach himself to his new home either. He remains like a stranger in a foreign land, an alien, a temporary visitor, which is, of course, what he was, and what we all are. Most of us will not be here 50 years from now and none of us will be here in 100 years. We are just visiting this planet. Our visa only allows us to stay for a few short decades.

Yet, most people I know, even most Christians, do not really live that way. We often act as if we are permanent residents, almost like we think we will be around for a trillion years or so. We try so hard to obtain all the things and build the relationships that will make us "happy." When we feel we are beginning to taste that, we tend to get very attached to those things and those relationships. Sometimes we get stuck. We think we need a particular thing or relationship in order to be truly happy.

Years ago, I had a couple of friends, Brian and Elaine, who believed the Lord was calling them to go to England and serve as missionaries. They decided, "As soon as we sell our house here in Minneapolis, we will move to England." They put their house on the market and were asking the same price as they had paid three years earlier.

Yet, as the weeks and months went by, the house didn't sell. They were convinced the Lord wanted them to go to England, but they were stuck here. Finally, they cut their asking price and took a \$10,000 loss on their house, which 40 years ago was a significant amount of money. I have always remembered Brian saying, "Never again will I buy something that I cannot afford to just give away, if that is what the Lord calls me to do."

Now, friends, I am not suggesting you give away your house and go be a missionary in England, Ethiopia or anywhere else. Yet, I do know that if God is really God, if Christianity is really true, none of us should hold on to something or

someone so tightly that it prevents us from obeying the Lord. It might be a good idea to ask yourself this question: "Is there anything I have that is so important to me that I would be angry with God for a long time if it were destroyed in a fire tonight?"

If there is anything like that, I think you might be hanging on to it too tightly. It could be a house, car, or boat. It may be a job, or it might be a relationship. It is something that if you lost it tomorrow, you would be angry with the Lord, because you think you need that thing to be happy.

Oh friends, enjoy the gifts God has given you! He wants you to do that. But you need to remember that all the material and earthly blessings you have are only temporary. Someday God may ask you to give them up. And if He does, like Abraham, you better be ready to let go.

In this room today, we have some folks who have a faith that has enabled them to lose the thing in the world most precious to them, and still follow the Lord. These include the widows and widowers who have lost a beloved spouse, but rather than become bitter, they have found the Lord to be a source of light and joy in the mist of their darkness.

It may include someone who has had a child die, an experience that can be even more painful than being widowed, but who has been able to say, even in the midst of deep grief, "The Lord has giving, the Lord has taken away, blessed be the name of the Lord."

Oh friends, the Lord calls us to love our families and love each other with fervent love. Yet, these are still all temporary relationships. Though we many not always like to hear it, the Bible is clear. Our love for the triune God should be greater than our love for any human being.

We must strive to make sure that we don't allow another person to prevent us from obeying the Lord. We need a faith that will enable us to not hang on too tightly to anything or anyone on this earth.

Number 3, Like Abraham, we need a faith that does not lose sight of our eternal home. Abraham's true home was the city with eternal

foundations, designed and built by God Himself. It is also called the New Jerusalem. We often refer to it as Heaven.

Folks, that is the true home of all believers in Jesus Christ. In Philippians 3:20, the apostle Paul reminds us that our “citizenship is in heaven.” Though we are aliens and strangers in this world, we are not homeless refugees. We are pilgrims on our way home. And one day, we will arrive.

When that happens, **Revelation 21:4 He will wipe away every tear from (our) eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning, not crying, more pain anymore, for the former things have passed away.**” Now, remember, the Bible teaches that only those trusting in Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord will enter heaven. Being a nice person, going to church, giving money to good causes, does not do it. Heaven is not always the place where nice, religious people end up, because those folks can be self-righteous. Heaven is the eternal home, not of those trusting in their own righteousness, their own goodness, but of those trusting in the righteousness of Jesus, who by faith have received that righteousness as their own.

Most of us in this room believe in heaven and most of you are confident you will be there someday. Yet, I suspect some of you don’t think about that very much. Oh, I know some of you older folks do. Some of you are ready and raring to go. But many of us are too preoccupied with the busyness of life here and now. We don’t spend much time thinking about an eternal home.

It seems strange. I think many African American slaves understood heaven better than many modern Christians, even those with scores of theology books on their shelves. Those slaves knew that “some glad morning when this life is over, they would fly away, to their home of God’s celestial shore.”

Their belief in heaven gave many of those slaves a strong faith that enabled them to follow the Lord in some very, very difficult circumstances. It would be good if we all could catch a little better, little clearer glimpse of our heavenly home. We should keep that picture at least in back of our minds as we live our busy lives. This will better equip us to follow and obey Jesus, even when it is not the easy thing to do.

So, we should want to have a faith like Abraham’s that is not afraid to take risks, that doesn’t hang on too tightly to the things of earth, and that doesn’t lose sight of our eternal home. How do we develop that kind of faith?

Well, because faith is a gift of God, start by asking Him to grant you that type of faith. Also make sure you are utilizing the means of grace the Lord provided to help us to strengthen our faith. Personal Bible study and prayer, small group Bible studies, and corporate worship are all important.

But one thing that can be very helpful in growing in our faith is taking time to encourage and challenge each other. When a friend says, “I know I should talk to him about Jesus, but I’m just too scared to do it.” You can say, “Hey, go for it. I will pray for you. And I will even go with you if you want.”

If someone in your family is upset because she didn’t get the job she was counting on, you can say, “Hey, it’s okay. God has a good plan for you and apparently it doesn’t include this job. And you have Jesus, that is better than any job!”

When someone you love gets bad news from the doctor and learns she may have only six months to live, you can gently, very gently, remind her and yourself, “Our home here is only temporary. Heaven is very real and that is our permanent home. And since that is where the Lord Jesus is, there is no better place to be.”

Friends, by the grace of God you can have a faith that takes risks, doesn’t hang on too tightly to things on earth, and doesn’t lose sight of our eternal home. May the Lord help us, and may we help others, to have that type of faith.