

Hebrews 11C (2014)

- Let's continue our tour through the Hall of Faith
 - The writer of Hebrews is our tour guide
 - And his focus is on helping us draw lessons of application from the examples of Old Testament saints
 - Men and women who allowed their faith to inform their choices and decisions in life
 - And in every case, we find a familiar pattern
 - These saints lived according to a hope in God's promises concerning future events
 - And that hope caused them to live in ways that were vastly different than the world around them
 - They adopted these contrary lives to serve as testimony to what they believed
 - Just as we avoid stepping off of tall buildings because we believe in the Law of Gravity
 - So did they live under convictions concerning things yet to be seen
- We ended last week in the middle of an example drawn from the lives of the patriarchs of Israel, beginning with Abraham and Sarah
 - This couple was able to bear children long after the natural time, because they trusted in a promise of God to bring forth a child
 - In Abraham's case, his faith was evidenced by moments of decision that few of us could imagine making ourselves
 - Including a decision to leave his entire life behind to start something new, merely on the basis of a promise that God would provide something better
 - Abraham's wife, Sarah, took a different route to faith, but demonstrated it in the end nonetheless
 - She scoffed at the notion that her body would produce a child

- But in time the Lord convinced her heart of the trustworthiness of His Word
- And in faith she conceived, having considered Him faithful Who promised
- Now the writer summarizes how the story of Abraham and Sarah turned out, with a surprising outcome

Heb. 11:13 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.

Heb. 11:14 For those who say such things make it clear that they are seeking a country of their own.

Heb. 11:15 And indeed if they had been thinking of that country from which they went out, they would have had opportunity to return.

Heb. 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 a city for them.

- The writer describes “all these” in referring to Abraham and Sarah
 - But in reality, what he’s about to teach applies equally to everyone in this chapter in one way or another
 - All those who died in faith in the Old Testament, died without having received the fullness of God’s promises
 - In fact, all saints who have come and gone to this point have yet to receive the fullness of the promises of God
 - In the case of Abraham and Sarah, they died without having received the promise of the land or having seen the world filled with their descendants
 - They certainly received a small measure of God’s promises in their lifetimes
 - They received a son, Isaac
 - And they were given a life of sojourning in the land
 - But they never received all that God promised to them...not even close
 - The promises of God included a land mass that stretched from the Mediterranean Sea to present-day Iraq

- And Abraham was promised a permanent inheritance in that land, not a temporary sojourning
- In the end of v.13, the writer confirms that they welcomed the promises from a distance, meaning from a distance in time
 - They trusted these things would be brought about for their sake, just as God promised
 - But they also recognized that the fulfillment would not happen in their lifetimes
- So while Abraham and Sarah lived long enough to see the beginning of the promises fulfilled, still they died without receiving what was promised
 - What does this say about God's faithfulness?
 - Did God promise something and then fail to deliver?
 - The key to answering that question is to be clear on what God promised
 - Did God promise that Abraham would receive all of these things in his first earthly lifetime?
 - Or did God have a different timeline in mind?
 - The writer says that Abraham and Sarah lived in as strangers and exiles on the earth precisely because they understood God's promise of land would not be fulfilled in their earthly lifetime
 - This can mean only one thing
 - They expected to receive these things in another life, in the resurrected life
 - The writer points in vs.14-15, that their willingness to remain wanderers in a land that wasn't their own was proof that they knew their reward couldn't be found on earth
 - If there had been some part of the earth, some "country", that was to be their inheritance during their lives, then they could have simply journeyed to that place and claimed it
 - Instead, they were willing to wait for a better country, the one God had promised
 - A country that descends from Heaven in a future day

- The Kingdom of the Messiah, which will be inaugurated at the coming of our Lord
- Abraham and Sarah were expecting to be resurrected into new bodies to live in a Heavenly Kingdom
 - And in that future day and place, they would receive the inheritance they were promised
 - They knew they would die first
 - And they understood they must wait for the Kingdom to appear in its appointed day
 - And they recognized they would receive a new physical body before the Kingdom arrives, as Daniel 12 reveals
 - And only then would they receive the promises of God
 - Jesus refers to reality of resurrection as evidence of God's faithfulness in an exchange with the Sadducees
 - The Sadducees rejected the concept that a person is raised into a new body after death
 - They believed that the soul continued on into eternity without a body
 - So at one point, they try to trick Christ by asking Him a question about a woman who had been widowed seven times
 - And Jesus explained the reality of resurrection this way

Luke 20:37 "But that the dead are raised, even Moses showed, in the passage about the burning bush, where he calls the Lord **THE GOD OF ABRAHAM, AND THE GOD OF ISAAC, AND THE GOD OF JACOB.**

Luke 20:38 "Now He is not the God of the dead but of the living; for all live to Him."

- Jesus points to the Lord's description of Himself spoken to Moses
 - God called Himself the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob
 - That phrase refers to the Abrahamic Covenant, which was spoken personally to each of these three men
 - It was that Covenant that promised the land in Canaan as an inheritance

- And yet as we mentioned, these three men never received the promises in their lifetime
- So Jesus points to these men and to the Covenant given to them as proof of resurrection
 - For the only way the Lord could be counted faithful to these three men, is if they return to live on earth again
 - They must inhabit physical bodies, because only by living physically on earth, can they have the things promised to them
- So consider the faithfulness of these examples, who forfeited an entire life of ease and comfort, in order to demonstrate their confidence in Heavenly rewards
 - They knew they wouldn't see a return on their investment of faith until after they died and received their resurrected bodies
 - That's the example the writer holds out to us
 - Can we live like that? Sacrificing a lifetime of earthly rewards, if need be, to demonstrate our trust in God's promises?
 - We see it every day around us
 - Families that sacrifice a life of soccer games, country clubs, vacation homes and the like to live as missionaries in difficult circumstances
 - Or even individuals who forsake marriage altogether to serve Christ
 - Believers slandered, persecuted and martyred around the world for standing firm in their faith
 - All these are welcoming the promises of God from a distance
- Remember, the definition of faith is always trusting in something unseen by living with a confidence that a promise of God will come to pass in the future
 - And now we understand that our waiting will extend beyond our lifetime
 - This isn't just trusting in God to fulfill His promises in a few days or weeks or even years

- It's living your entire earthly life knowing that the things in God's promises that you and I await aren't coming until after we receive new bodies
- Such was the faith of the patriarchs
- Now we see all the more clearly the heresy in teaching that God desires to grant us blessings here and now
- The Bible declares that true faith looks for reward after the resurrection
- In fact, the more we look at examples in the Bible, the more we come to realize that a mindfulness of the resurrection is essential to living in faith
 - The writer continues to emphasize the resurrection, looking at the Patriarchs

Heb. 11:17 By faith Abraham, when he was tested, offered up Isaac, and he who had received the promises was offering up his only begotten son;

Heb. 11:18 it was he to whom it was said, "IN ISAAC YOUR DESCENDANTS SHALL BE CALLED."

Heb. 11:19 He considered that God is able to raise people even from the dead, from which he also received him back as a type.

Heb. 11:20 By faith Isaac blessed Jacob and Esau, even regarding things to come.

Heb. 11:21 By faith Jacob, as he was dying, blessed each of the sons of Joseph, and worshiped, leaning on the top of his staff.

- Perhaps Abraham's greatest moment of faith in action was his obedience in offering his son Isaac as a sacrifice to God
 - He made this offering by faith, but it was faith in something very specific
 - The writer says Abraham had been told by God that he would have many decedents through the offspring of Isaac
 - And yet, here was God telling Abraham that he must kill his son to please God
 - How could Abraham sacrifice the son through whom he was to receive the blessings God promised?
 - And how could God remain faithful to His promises while also seeking Isaac's life?
 - The writer says the answer was resurrection

- Remember, we already established that Abraham lived his life knowing that he wouldn't receive his blessings until after his own resurrection
- So clearly, Abraham was a man who lived with an understanding and confidence in God's ability to raise dead men into new living bodies
- Because of his confidence in resurrection, Abraham saw nothing contradictory in taking the life of the son who would also produce Abraham's grandchildren
 - The writer says that Abraham considered (or trusted) in the Lord's ability to raise men from the dead
 - As Abraham raised the knife, he wasn't worried that Isaac's death would be the end of him
 - He expected to see him again
- Of course, the Lord never intended to see Isaac killed, though he did expect Isaac to die one day
 - Nevertheless, the Lord orchestrated this event to test Abraham's faith and to create a powerful example of Christ
 - Abraham's test was whether he truly lived with an understanding of God's power to keep His promises, even past the point of death
 - We know he demonstrated faith in resurrection in how he lived as a wanderer in the land
 - But Genesis also records moments in Abraham's life when he lived contrary to faith
 - As when he wandered down to Egypt to find food during times of famine
 - Lied about his wife being his sister
 - And took Hagar as his concubine, making his own way for a child
 - Given those episodes, one might argue that Abraham wasn't a man of faith after all
 - So, the Lord constructed this test to remove any possibility of doubt

- Once Abraham raised that knife over Isaac, it became clear Whom Abraham trusted
- As the writer says, Abraham trusted the Lord to raise Isaac from the dead
- And because of his belief in God's power to resurrect, Abraham had no reason to hold back his son
- In the process, Abraham was used by God to produce a picture of the Messiah
 - The writer says that Abraham received his son Isaac "back as a type"
 - What the writer means is that Abraham took Isaac to the mountain with the expectation to kill him at the Lord's request
 - And Isaac, who was a grown man at the time, willingly submitted to his father's plan, even though it required his own death
 - Isaac willingly placed himself on the wood (like a cross)
 - All the while, Abraham expected to leave the mountain with his son, because he anticipated that the Lord would resurrect Isaac
 - In the end, though Isaac didn't die, it can be said Abraham received his son back, because the Lord issued a reprieve
 - Abraham and his son combine in that moment to create a type, or picture, of God the Father and His Son, Christ
 - The Bible says it was the Father's desire to put His Son to death for the sins of the world

**Is. 53:10 But the LORD was pleased
 To crush Him, putting Him to grief;
 If He would render Himself as a guilt offering,
 He will see His offspring,
 He will prolong His days,
 And the **good pleasure** of the LORD will prosper in His hand.**

- This one verse says everything about the type
 - The Lord the Father was pleased to crush Him, just as Abraham was pleased to kill his son because the Lord asked him to do it

- And it was the Son who willingly endured the cross for the sake of His sheep, just as Isaac willingly laid himself on the wood

[John 10:17](#) “For this reason the Father loves Me, because I lay down My life so that I may take it again.

[John 10:18](#) “No one has taken it away from Me, but I lay it down on My own initiative. I have authority to lay it down, and I have authority to take it up again. This commandment I received from My Father.”

- And of course, we know that after He died, Jesus rose from the grave, the First Fruits of the Resurrection
- So Abraham’s journey up the mountain to sacrifice his son was like God the Father sending His Son to die on Calvary
 - And the Son’s death and resurrection was pictured by Abraham expecting to see his son die and return
 - We can say that Abraham’s faith and obedience resulted in a beautiful testimony to Christ
- That’s the power of a life of faith
 - When we live according to our trust in God’s promises, we are inevitably going to produce a testimony to the Lord and His work in us
 - But if we are going to fulfill that mission, we first must allow our faith to inform our choices and decisions
 - Imagine if Abraham had refused to sacrifice Isaac?
 - At the very least, he would have forfeited the opportunity to testify to the coming Messiah
 - Who knows what else he would have placed at risk in eternity?
 - That’s why we’re called to live by faith as well
 - We have a mission to represent the Living God to a lost and dying world
 - We know that means telling people about Jesus at every opportunity
 - But there is no better way to preach the Gospel than by how we live our lives in faith

- And when I say live by faith, I mean faith in the way it's defined in this chapter
 - Live with an expectation that the Lord "is"
 - Live knowing He is alive and active in the world
 - Show people that you talk to Him in your prayer life
 - And that you hear from Him in your study of Scripture
 - Finally, live with an expectation that He is a rewarder of those who seek Him
 - Don't set your focus on world and its rewards – let your faith set your priorities
 - Invest in the Kingdom
 - Live with the expectation that the Lord's promises await our resurrection and don't get caught up trying to gain them for yourself now
 - Look at the promises from a distance, with eyes for eternity
 - Live with an expectation that He is a rewarder of those who seek Him
 - Don't set your focus on reward in this world
 - Let your faith set your priorities
 - Set aside the rewards the world offers for investing in it
 - And choose instead to invest in the Kingdom
 - Most of all, live with an expectation that the Lord's promises await our resurrection
 - Don't see death as an end but a beginning
 - It's not a tragedy to be mourned, at least not among those who have placed their trust in Christ
 - It's a victory to be celebrated
 - And look forward to the inheritance you have waiting for obedience and service to the Lord
 - When we live in these ways, we are imitating those enshrined in the Hall of Faith

- We are setting our eyes on the eternal
- And we're giving evidence of the faith that lives in our hearts
- And God will not be ashamed to be called our God