

“Seeing Without ‘Seeing’ Yet”

Hebrews 11:8-16

It's been awhile since we talked about aliens in the Bible. Of course by aliens we mean the people of God, not strange creatures from other worlds. The Bible describes the people of God as aliens and strangers. Previously we looked at 1 Peter 2:11-12,

Dear friends, I urge you, as aliens and strangers in the world, to abstain from sinful desires, which war against your soul. ¹² Live such good lives among the pagans that, though they accuse you of doing wrong, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day he visits us.

The Greek word for 'alien' refers to the place you live. That you live in a foreign country of which you have no citizenship. If you have trust in Jesus Christ as your Saviour/King, you are a citizen of His home, heaven (Phil. 3:20). The place of your citizenship is your true home. We live on earth now but our citizenship is with the Lord.

The Greek word for 'stranger' refers to the people you live around. That you don't belong to the people you live around. So citizens of heaven are a small minority who live temporarily on earth among millions of people who don't belong to God. But how do they know we don't belong here? Especially when we do almost all the same things. We have homes, we drive cars, our kids go to the same groups and events and we dress relatively the same. Is there a difference? How do they know we don't belong here? What sets us apart?

Vision. We see what they don't see, even though we can't visually see it yet. Say what??

Here in Hebrews 11 the author wants us to know what sets the citizens of heaven apart from the citizens of earth. It's called faith. Faith, he defines in 11:1

Now faith is confidence in what we hope for and assurance about what we do not see. ² This is what the ancients were commended for.

And before he gives us some examples of how these 'ancient' men and women of God showed faith, he gives a good example of seeing something even though we haven't seen it.

³ *By faith we understand that the universe was formed at God's command, so that what is seen was not made out of what was visible.*

We look back in faith believing that our world and universe was made from that which wasn't here. Now, we believe that what is being made that we can't see yet (the new creation) will come one day. And so this is what we live for; what we can see with the eyes of faith but can't see visibly yet.

However, the Hebrews author wants to talk about the day to day examples of seeing by faith, and lists many but one man gets more space than the rest; Abraham. And how does Abraham help us live as aliens knowing our true home is being made for us by Jesus as we speak? By how Abraham lived his 175 earthly years with a futuristic focus. Not perfect like any of us, but a gradual growth in a heavenly focus that impacted his earthly decisions.

In vv.8-10, the writer wants his audience – mostly Hebrew Christians struggling to identify with Jesus in a world surrounded by Jesus haters – to follow the example of their spiritual father Abraham and ...

Live Your Life as a Pilgrimage **(11:8-10)**

This is his focus on Abraham.

⁸ By faith Abraham, when called to go to a place he would later receive as his inheritance, obeyed and went, even though he did not know where he was going. ⁹ By faith he made his home in the promised land like a stranger in a foreign country; he lived in tents, as did Isaac and Jacob, who were heirs with him of the same promise. ¹⁰ For he was looking forward to the city with foundations, whose architect and builder is God.

In Acts 7:3 Stephen tells us that God appeared to Abraham in Ur when he told him to leave his country, his family and come to a land God would show Him. Did Abraham know God at that time? Probably not. He probably worshipped idols like his family. Ur was known for its worship of the moon. In Gen. 11:27-32 tells us Abraham's father Terah had two other sons, Nahor and Haran and that Haran died in Ur. Haran had a son named Lot. Abraham and Sarah had no children. It would seem that Abraham was responsible for Lot. We also read that Abraham and his father Terah and their family left for Canaan but settled in Haran. I suggest they named that place Haran after Terah's deceased son. And there Terah died.

God asked Abraham to do hard things. Leave your home, your familiar settings, the place where you knew how to live your life and meet your needs – and go to a place I'll show you. And Abraham obeyed God ultimately. The reason I say ultimately is because they stopped in Haran. They may have stopped because Terah was dying or because they thought it was a good enough land. Nahor will stay and settle there.

But God said leave your family, which he eventually did. Why ask him to leave home and family? Because family is our security and our resources. To live as a pilgrim and not as a resident means

Be secure in God, not your resources (vv.8-9)

When did Abraham obey? When God called. It was a clear call to leave where he was and who he lived with to go somewhere; rather unclear. We don't like that do we? When we sense God is redirecting us or we're trying to make a decision about moving, school, dating, etc., we want signs, clear indicators. Which is understandable. But sometimes we're like Gideon where we know what we're supposed to do but we hesitate and want reaffirmation. Because if we're honest, we're looking for excuses not to obey God. Especially when it comes to family.

Go from your country, your people and your father's household to the land I will show you (Gen. 12:1-2).

Notice how specific that is? While Abraham's family were nice people I'm sure, they were godless people. Idolaters. What do you do when the people you care most about are keeping you from God? You should be putting God first and not them.

Jesus Himself said this:

Matt. 10:37 "Anyone who loves their father or mother more than me is not worthy of me; anyone who loves their son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me. ³⁸ Whoever does not take up their cross and follow me is not worthy of me. ³⁹ Whoever finds their life will lose it, and whoever loses their life for my sake will find it.

Jesus knows we are tempted to put family ahead of Him. We have to remember 'children are a heritage from the Lord; offspring a reward from Him' (Ps. 127:3). They are His more than ours. We cannot allow family to hinder us from our relationship with God, and yet so often we do.

No doubt it was a very difficult choice he made. He knew he had to obey God and believe God could provide more than his family could. So he trusted in the resources of God. And to do so he also,

Focused on the certain future rather than the unsatisfying present (v.10)

'By faith' he lived in the promised land even though it wasn't his yet. He lived in tents; temporary shelters. Moved it many times I'm sure. As did his son and his son (Isaac and Jacob). None of them lived to see the promise fulfilled yet lived as if it was a done deal. A tent has no foundation. Abraham kept the future in focus; the eternal city of God that Jesus said He is building our rooms in His Father's house as we speak (John 14:1-3).

We like watching 'Hometown', a reno show in Laurel Mississippi. When Ben and Erin show people home options to buy they always say this is the 'Jones' home. They built it or lived in it for 40 years. And then at the end of the show Erin often paints a picture of the outside of renovated house and says now it's the 'Smith's' home. Everything is temporal. Your house will not always be your house but that's okay. God is building a new place for us to live in perfection for all eternity. From that we will never move.

Abraham knew his life was a journey, a pilgrimage that wouldn't completely satisfy him. God's promises for Abraham and for us include a great future of blessing but in the meantime look for things that God is already doing. People, His church. Thanks to social media, cell phones, online games and good old television, we are constantly being distracted from real people and real relationships. People are eternal, but many of them don't know they that. They don't know a horrible eternity awaits them. We need to help them know that, but we're too distracted to share the gospel.

All believers need to grow spiritually and we need other to help us grow. But we are too distracted by the foundationless trinkets all around us to care about each other even. We need to focus on the eternal because the temporal sure doesn't satisfy.

In v.11 the author talks about Sarah's faith. There's a footnote in some of our Bible's that some translations say 'By faith Abraham, even though he was past age – and Sarah herself was barren – was enabled to become a father ...' But Abraham's name actually isn't mentioned here, yet Sarah's is. Both translations say essentially the same thing but the verse that focuses on Sarah is more accurate.

¹¹ And by faith even Sarah, who was past childbearing age, was enabled to bear children because she considered him faithful who had made the promise. ¹² And so from this one man, and he as good as dead, came descendants as numerous as the stars in the sky and as countless as the sand on the seashore.

We also learn here that to see what we can't see yet through the eyes of faith we must

Believe God Can Do What We Can't

(11:11-12; 10:23)

When we read Gen. 18 when Sarah first heard she would be a mother (at the age of 90), she laughed in unbelief. What the author of Hebrews is saying here isn't contradictory because faith needs time to grow. God used the natural intimacy between husband and wife to produce a child. So I'm guessing Sarah's body started doing things her body hadn't done since she was younger. Just feeling that would have been a sign to her that what God said was true. How could this be?

God overrules our limitations (v.11)

Isn't it sad how we don't think God can work through us because I can't do this or that. I'm not gifted in this area, etc. Or we don't have the resources to meet this need. God specializes in the impossible. God often waits for us to stop trying to do His work in our strength so He can do what we can't. We need to get out of His way sometimes!

God can

Accomplish far more than we can imagine (v.12)

from this one man, and he as good as dead, came descendants as numerous as the stars in the sky and as countless as the sand on the seashore.

Abraham had limitations too. I'm sure they had their doubts at times. How could God make from us nations when we don't even have one child? But it all starts with one; one child, one step, one hand, one word ... and from there God will work. Every time God shows us He is working, every time He answers a prayer, these are the reminders that He can do greater things. And that ultimately, a great future awaits us in a new eternal home. The author of Hebrews comes back to this theme in v.13 when he writes,

¹³ *All these people were still living by faith when they died. They did not receive the things promised; they only saw them and welcomed them from a distance, admitting that they were foreigners and strangers on earth.*

¹⁴ *People who say such things show that they are looking for a country of their own. ¹⁵ If they had been thinking of the country they had left, they would have had opportunity to return. ¹⁶ Instead, they were longing for a better country—a heavenly one. Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God, for he has prepared a city for them*

You and I will see with eyes of faith what we can't see yet that,

Our Forever Home isn't Here **(11:13-16)**

None of Abraham's immediate family ever saw the land of Canaan as Israel's land. That wouldn't happen until Joshua led the Israelites into the land. But it happened. And Israel is still in their land today, a modern day miracle that officially happened in May 1948. They knew it would happen based on God's work in their own lives. That's why they tented all over the land, by faith, believing God was going to fulfil His promise. And then one day Abraham took it one step further.

In Gen. 23 we read that Sarah died in the land of Canaan. Abraham approached the Hittites and bought a piece of land in Canaan where he made a tomb for his wife and himself. A burial place was very important. It signified home. Isaac would be buried there (Gen. 36) and Jacob (Gen 50).

Joseph's remains were brought back to Canaan too, buried in Shechem which Jacob purchased. They bought land there and buried their dead there because they believed this was the land God would promise them.

When you believe something to be true, you tell people about it. When Abraham approached the Hittites to buy the piece of land in Canaan he said,

“I am a foreigner and stranger among you. Sell me some property for a burial site here so I can bury my dead.”

Notice Abraham admitted he wasn't one of them, that this wasn't his home at that time.

they only saw them and welcomed them from a distance, admitting that they were foreigners and strangers on earth. ¹⁴ *People who say such things show that they are looking for a country of their own.*

By saying that he didn't belong with the Hittites Abraham inferred he belonged somewhere else and with others. People like himself who believed in God's promises that this would be theirs' one day. When we tell people we believe there's a future home waiting for us we are sharing the gospel.

Let's not be afraid to tell others (vv.13-14)

That this world isn't our forever home. That we're looking forward to the new Jerusalem coming down on the renewed earth one day. Jesus died for us and left us so He could prepare a place for us. He prayed for us to look forward to seeing His glory with his Father one day. If Jesus prayed that for us it must mean that's better for us than what we have here. And when we live by faith showing we don't live for the things the world lives for, we're reminding ourselves and telling others,

God has something better planned for us (v.16, 39-40)

¹⁶ *Instead, they were longing for a better country—a heavenly one. Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God, for he has prepared a city for them.*

God identified Himself often as the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. Imperfect people who ultimately chose God over what the world offered. Did you know later in Heb. 11 God (because its His Spirit directed words) tells us that He doesn't have time to tell us about Jephthah, Gideon, and Samson? These are not the greatest examples of faith yet God is not ashamed to identify Himself as their God either. Nor is He ashamed to identify Himself with you and me. Imperfect people who have made a decision to follow Jesus yet often get distracted by the shiny things the world has to offer. Or get caught up in the hamster wheel of keeping pace with the world's activities with our family and interests, forgetting we're not really pursuing eternal values.

Your job is not your focus in life. The people who you work with where God has placed you is why you work there. To point them to God or encourage them in their walk with God. Your kids athletic career isn't your focus in life; it's the people who you get to know through those activities who need to be reached for the Lord. Our temporary homes are wonderful places of rest and enjoyment but they're also beside the neighbours who need Jesus that He wants us to talk to.

It's easy to forget all this when we focus only on what we see that doesn't last and not on what lasts that awaits us. God tells us Abraham had the right focus; an alien and stranger making a

pilgrimage during his lifetime, modeling a life of faithfulness and obedience to God because he knew God has something better for His people.

¹ Pet. 2:11 Dear friends, I urge you, as foreigners and exiles, to abstain from sinful desires, which wage war against your soul. ¹² Live such good lives among the pagans that, though they accuse you of doing wrong, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day he visits us.

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If you have any comments or questions about this message please
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