**Long for a Better Country**

Hebrews 11:8-22.

Key Verse 16a

“Instead, they were longing for a better country—a heavenly one.”

**Introduction**

 This passage focuses on Abraham and his descendants. Abraham left his hometown and went to the promised land by faith. He lived as a stranger in this land by faith, with the hope of kingdom of God. Abraham’s descendants followed in his footsteps. Verse 13 indicates that they were not able to see God’s promise come true during their lifetimes. But while they lived their lives here on earth, they believed and lived confidently, not weakening in their faith. May God help us to follow in the footsteps of their faith and have the same, concrete hope in our own times.

1. Read verses 8-10. How did Abraham respond when he was called to go to an unknown place? (8) Why did Abraham live in tents like a stranger in the promised land? (9a, 10) What can we learn from Abraham who helped his heirs to live in the same way? (9b)

1-1, Read verses 8-10.

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.

1-2, How did Abraham respond when he was called to go to an unknown place? (8)

 ***when called to go to a place he would later receive as his inheritance, obeyed and went,***

- Abraham was called by God at the age of 75. By this time, his life might have been well established in his hometown.

- It must have been a hard decision for him to go to a foreign land where he had never been before, especially at his age. He could have made many excuses as to why it was not practical to go.

- Also, to go to a new place required great risk. He could lose everything. It was like uprooting his stable life to start his life newly.

- People might have labeled him as crazy. Sometimes our personal decision based on faith sounds crazy to people who don’t understand our life of faith.

- Abraham ‘obeyed and went.’ He obeyed God’s command and went where God commanded him to go. He obeyed God’s word by listening to what God told him to do and putting it into action. By doing what God commanded, he showed his trust in God even though he didn’t know about the destination in detail.

- Our faith can be proven through practical obedience. By obeying God’s word, Abraham was able to live a new life in the Lord Almighty.

· By faith - The author explained why Abraham did such thing even though it looked risky and unreasonable.

- Abraham obeyed God not through his own understanding, calculation, or sense of obligation, but by faith.

- He obeyed God even though to many, it might have looked crazy. By faith he was able to make a crucial and life changing decision.

- When we have faith we can obey God. True obedience stems from faith.

· Abraham obeyed God even though he didn’t know where he was going.

- He didn’t have any clear idea about his future life. He didn’t know what kind of land it would be.

- He relied on God’s word only. He made a long journey by relying only on the promise of God.

- He moved step by step just as God led him.

- He entrusted his whole life in God’s word fully. He believed that God would lead him in the best way even though he didn’t know the place well.

- It was a great adventure to him.

- The journey of our spiritual life is like an adventure in which we are moving toward a new world by holding God’s word and putting our deep trust in him.

- It is said that “faith” is abbreviation of “fantastic adventure in trusting Him.”

1-3. Why did Abraham live in tents like a stranger in the promised land? (9a, 10)

 ***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.***

· He made his home in the promised land like a stranger in a foreign country; he lived in tents.

- Even if he came to the promised land, he didn’t build a permanent structure.

- He lived in tents and he built temporary lodging place(tent) instead of a permanent house. He was ready to leave at any time, if God were to ask him to do so.

- He felt as if he didn’t belong to the land and its people. He identified himself as a stranger. Strangers feel that they don’t belong to the land.

- Tent life is very uncomfortable. Just a couple of days may be ok but it is hard to live in a tent continually. But he lived in tents because he was looking forward to returning to his real home, that is, the kingdom of Heaven.

· For he was looking forward to the city with foundations, whose architect and builder is God.

- Abraham lived as a stranger because he looked forward to the city with foundations, whose builder is God. Ultimately his hope was for the kingdom of heaven.

- The heavenly kingdom has strong foundations.

- The architect and builder is God. He is the perfect architect and builder who can build the best buildings. What he builds and establishes will never wear out or collapse.

1-4, What can we learn from Abraham who helped his heirs to live in the same way? (9b)

* Usually we desire a better and more comfortable life for our children than what we experienced. We don’t want our children to suffer as we did.
* Usually when we begin to follow God’s call, we are full of vision and spirit and willing to live a tent life.
* But as time passes, and God blesses us, it’s tempting to settle down and enjoy life in this world.
* Some people are willing to follow God’s calling in their own generation, saying, “I can endure every kind of sacrifice and hardship, but I don’t want my children to have to live like this.”
* But Abraham didn’t share this kind of sentiment. He himself lived in tents throughout his lifetime, and taught Isaac and Jacob to do the same. *He had a clear value system and sense of history.*  He knew the importance of passing on the right value system and blessing to his children and all their descendants after them.

* We need to teach our future generations about the meaning and the purpose of suffering for God. Then our children would know the value of the kingdom of God and become co-workers together with us in God’s work..

* We also have to teach them through practical examples besides just our teachings.
* Our person and practical lives should reflect a genuine faith and hope in the Kingdom of God.

* Faith that believes the kingdom of God: When we truly believe in the kingdom of God, we can live as foreigners in the world and adopt a ‘tent life’.
* If we are still bound to the things of this world, we don’t truly believe in the kingdom of God and we still belong to this world.
* Only when we truly believe in the kingdom of God, can we live our lives for the kingdom of God.

2. Read verses 11-13. How was Sarah able to bear children? (11) What was the outcome of Abraham’s life of faith? (12) What can we learn from Abraham and other servants of God mentioned in this chapter, who lived by faith to the end? (13a) How did they respond when they did not receive the things promised? (13b)

2-1, Read verses 11-13.

And by faith even Sarah, who was past childbearing age, was enabled to bear children because she[b] 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. **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.

2-2, How was Sarah able to bear children? (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.***

* It was impossible for Sarah to bear children but she believed that God is faithful.
* She believed that God is the one keeping his promise absolutely. We should believe in the faithfulness of our God. If we believe that God is faithful, we can believe all his promises, even though they look impossible in our situation.
* It’s not easy to go out fishing and raise disciples as we get older and busier with many obligations.
* But by faith we can overcome all challenges and difficulties, including the generation gap, and bear spiritual children.
* Jesus is the Way. So in Jesus there is always a way for anyone who seeks him by faith. Praise Jesus!

2-3, What was the outcome of Abraham’s life of faith? (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.***

* Abraham was as good as dead. It was impossible to expect any children from him. But from him came descendants as numerous as the stars in the sky.
* Spiritually speaking, we are as good as dead like Abraham due to our sins. But with God’s Almighty power numerous descendants (as numerous as the stars in the sky) are certainly possible through God.
* Abraham believed in God despite the most hopeless or impossible looking situation. When there is no possibility, we should believe in God whose name is El Shaddai (Almighty One).
* We can have absolute hope in the Lord that our descendants will be like the stars in the heavens at His due time.

2-4, What can we learn from Abraham and other servants of God mentioned in this chapter, who lived by faith to the end? (13a)

  ***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.***

* They believed to the end. They believed not only at the beginning, or halfway through the middle, but also to the end.

* Our faith should be the same. We must believe God from the beginning to the end. They believed until their last breath. This is the real faith.
* Abraham also believed in God’s promise to the end.
* He believed when he didn’t receive the things promised.
* Abraham and his descendants believed that God’s promises would be fulfilled.
* Even until we die we may or may not see what God promised. But we have to believe even if we don’t see.
* God gave us the hope of kingdom of God. We will receive all things that God promised in our true home, the kingdom of God. When we have true hope of the kingdom of God by faith we can be free from this world.

2-5, How did they respond when they did not receive the things promised? (13b)

 ***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.***

* They only saw them and welcomed them from a distance.
* Even though they didn’t receive the promised things, they believed that all things would come true in the future and welcomed them with assurance.

* ‘Admitting that they were foreigners and strangers on earth’- They didn’t insist that they needed to have the promised things on earth. Rather they longed to see these things realized fully in eternity, in the Kingdom of Heaven.
* The word, “promise” is repeated many times.
* They have something in common in verses **1, 2, 13, 39** in terms of how our faith is being approved by God Almighty.
* Although we may not see tangible things with our eyes, God is working through men and women of faith.
* When we have genuine faith in serving the eternal will of God, we are able to have God’s presence tangibly.
* It’s not merely a matter of claiming God’s visible or physical blessing, but a matter of keeping God’s clear vision in our hearts.
* For instance when we give priority to fishing and one to one Bible study, it’s a great spiritual battle to rescue lost souls from the power of darkness. When we do this, we can experience God’s power tangibly.
* We experience the blessing of being used as history makers in God’s redemptive work.
* We are in the line of duty as God’s good soldiers and His Kingdom builders.
* Where else can we find a more noble and meaningful kind of work to dedicate ourselves to in this transient world?
* We can expect great things from our God whose name is Almighty.
* We are not confined to local time or local place for we are looking forward to our real home in heaven, guaranteed by our Creator God.

3. Read verses 14-16. If they had lived as strangers looking for their own country on earth, what might they have done? (14, 15) What were they longing for instead? (16a) Why is God not ashamed to be called their God? (16b) What can we learn about God who has prepared a city for them? (16c)

3-1, Read verses 14-16.

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.

3-2, If they had lived as strangers looking for their own country on earth, what might they have done? (14, 15)

 ***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.***

· Someone could say that they wanted to go back to their hometown on earth.

· If they had been thinking of the country they had left, they would have had opportunity to return.

. But they did not long for their past life or country on here on earth for they were looking for a country of their own. It means that they were looking forward to their real home in heaven.

. They didn’t consider the country on earth as their own country.

3-3, What were they longing for instead? (16a)

***16 Instead, they were longing for a better country—a heavenly one.***

· They were longing for a better country, a heavenly one.

· It means they didn’t put their hope on earth anymore. Rather they put their real hope in heaven.

· A better country- a heavenly one: The heavenly kingdom is far better than any wonderful country here on earth. No matter which country you belong to as a citizen, each place has a problem of its own.

· All countries and kingdoms on earth will perish.

· The heavenly one, the kingdom of heaven is the perfect and eternal country where people can have true peace and joy without any pain and suffering.

· That is why we long for the heavenly one.

3-4, Why is God not ashamed to be called their God? (16b)

***Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God, for he has prepared a city for them.***

· God was not ashamed to be called their God for he has prepared a city for them.

- If they didn’t long for the city that God prepared for them, it would be great dishonor to God for they end up ignoring God’s hard working and invitation for us.

- We can honor God by living for a better country, the Heaney one.

- God sacrificed his one and only son to invite us to the better country.

- If we live for the things of this world only, God would not want to be called our God.

- The kingdom of heaven will be given to those who live for the kingdom of God. Those who live for the things of this world are unable to enter the kingdom of God.

- Our life on earth is the time of preparation to go to our true home, the kingdom of God.

- May God help us to live by faith and for the kingdom of God so that God would be pleased to be called Our God.

3-5, What can we learn about God who has prepared a city for them? (16c)

. God prepared an eternal city for his people.

- God wants to give us a true home.

- God doesn’t want his people to live in the earthly city suffering all kinds of pains forever.

- God so loved his people and prepared a city where they can enjoy eternal life, joy and peace, and dwell with Him forever.

4. Read verses 17-22. What did Abraham do when God tested him? (17, 18) What kind of faith did Abraham have? (19) By what faith do you think Isaac blessed Jacob and Esau? (20) What can we learn from Jacob who blessed each of Joseph’s sons? (21) What instructions did Joseph give when his end was near? (22)

4-1. Read verses 17-22.

**17** By faith Abraham, when God tested him, offered Isaac as a sacrifice. He who had embraced the promises was about to sacrifice his one and only son, **18** even though God had said to him, “It is through Isaac that your offspring will be reckoned.” **19** Abraham reasoned that God could even raise the dead, and so in a manner of speaking he did receive Isaac back from death. **20** By faith Isaac blessed Jacob and Esau in regard to their future. **21** By faith Jacob, when he was dying, blessed each of Joseph’s sons, and worshiped as he leaned on the top of his staff.

**22** By faith Joseph, when his end was near, spoke about the exodus of the Israelites from Egypt and gave instructions concerning the burial of his bones.

4-2, What did Abraham do when God tested him? (17, 18)

 ***By faith Abraham, when God tested him, offered Isaac as a sacrifice. He who had embraced the promises was about to sacrifice his one and only son, 18 even though God had said to him, “It is through Isaac that your offspring will be reckoned.”***

· He offered Isaac as a sacrifice – He decided to offer Isaac as a sacrifice even though God promised that his offspring would be reckoned through him.

· He obeyed God, overcoming all challenges by faith.

4-3. What kind of faith did Abraham have? (19)

***19 Abraham reasoned that God could even raise the dead, and so in a manner of speaking he did receive Isaac back from death***

· Abraham had resurrection faith.

- He believed that God could even raise the dead.

- The faith of resurrection could be the highest or most mature level of faith. It was considered to the climax of Abraham’s growing faith.

- He believed in God Almighty. His obedience came from his deep faith in God.

- He received Isaac back from death by faith. Even though Isaac wasn’t offered as a burnt offering, Abraham procured resurrection faith.

4-4. By what faith do you think Isaac blessed Jacob and Esau? (20)

 ***By faith Isaac blessed Jacob and Esau in regard to their future***

- He believed in God’s sovereignty

- He believed in God’s covenant and handed over the covenant to the next generation by faith.

- He believed the fact that God is faithful

- We have to hand over God’s promise and covenant to our children and our Bible students by faith.

4-5. What can we learn from Jacob who blessed each of Joseph’s sons? (21)

 ***By faith Jacob, when he was dying, blessed each of Joseph’s sons, and worshiped as he leaned on the top of his staff.***

- Jacob gave pronounced God’s blessings according to God’s sovereignty.

- He blessed each one by faith, believing that God would bless them according to his blessing. Our blessing for others will be fulfilled if we bless them by faith.

- He entrusted them into God’s hand by faith

- He worshiped God to the end even though he didn’t have any physical strength.

- Throughout his whole life, Jacob learned how to worship God. At first, he had lived for his earthly desire. But pursuing his desires in the world led to much grief and suffering. But later, he learned how to worship God and ended his life by worshipping God with his whole heart and strength.

- We can help people who are similar with Jacob to worship God.

4-6. What instructions did Joseph give when his end was near? (22)

**22** By faith Joseph, when his end was near, spoke about the exodus of the Israelites from Egypt and gave instructions concerning the burial of his bones.

· He wanted to be buried in the land of promise.

· He wanted to go back home. He lived as a foreigner in Egypt although he lived in the palace.

· He also longed for his true home, in God’s eternal kingdom.

· Four hundreds years later, his bones were taken to the Promised Land.

· He truly believed God’s promise and lived as foreigner in Egypt. When he longed for the promised land and died without seeing it with his own eyes, his hope came true at God’s designated time.

**Conclusion**

 Abraham and his descendants lived by faith. They lived by faith in the Almighty and sovereign God and longed for a better country, a heavenly one. As Abraham’s descendants, we received the same blessing as Abraham. We have the same hope concerning the Kingdom of God. May God help us to live by faith so that we may please God during our lives here on earth.

**One word, “A better country”**