

Hebrews 11:8-28

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[0:00] Hebrews 11, and we're going to look this morning at verse 8 to 28. Some time ago, a bank in New York arranged for some flowers to be sent to a competitor.

A competitor at the bank had moved into a nearby building, but there was a mix-up of the florist, and the card read, with our deepest sympathy. The florist was greatly embarrassed when it was pointed out, and apologised profusely.

The florist was even more embarrassed when she realised that the card intended for the bank was actually attached to a wreath that was sent to a funeral. And the card read, congratulations on your new location.

That's a pretty awful story, isn't it? I don't know if you ever think about what your new location is. I think if it was a Christian funeral, people's reaction would have been very different, wouldn't it? I think we would have applauded the card on those flowers as a worthy sentiment. Because Christians know where they're going, don't they? As I was trying to prepare this talk this week, I heard of a 92-year-old woman who was in hospital.

[1:10] She caught one of those superbugs in hospital, and she became very, very unwell. And when she recovered, though, she had a visit from the hospital consultant, who asked, if this situation were to happen again, would you wish us to resuscitate you?

Oh no, she said. Imagine getting to the gates of heaven, only to find myself back here again. I don't think that's a good choice, is it, for a Christian. Do you agree with that?

That lady was confident. And all the people that we read of in Hebrews 11, and there's an awful lot of them there, they are confident. Every single one of them, there's too many to choose from.

That's my problem this morning, which verses to pick out from and which not. We could be in Hebrews 11 for a whole year. But the thing is, about this chapter, all these people, they are certain of their eternal future.

They're certain of their destination. It's the bit in between, isn't it? That's uncertain. It's the bit in between that is difficult for you and I.

[2:15] How do you face the uncertainties of life? How do we navigate our way to the better country, that is talked about in Hebrews 11? How do we navigate the twists and the turns of prominence, and as we make our way to the eternal city?

And do you know what the answer to that is? Well, you can't miss it, I can hear in this chapter. It is very, very obvious. It is by faith, by faith, by faith, by faith, by faith, by faith, by faith.

I could go on. That is the strapline of the chapter. That is the drumbeat, isn't it, of the chapter. That is the baseline. By faith, by faith, by faith. And last week we saw faith finding fever with God, and that theme runs right the way through the chapter.

All these people, they were commended for their faith. Not that faith is anything in and of itself, people sometimes say, don't they, well I wish I had your faith. That's just stupid.

Faith is nothing. You might have faith in a trust fairy. What is faith? Faith is nothing. What matters is where your faith is placed. And what your faith is responding to.

[3:26] Faith never exists in a vacuum. It is always a response to the word of God. Whether it's believing at a promise, or it's heeding a warning, or it's obeying a commandment.

Faith is taking God at his word and trusting him. And that's what these folk did. And they are commended for it. Faith is also looking forward.

That's the theme this morning. Being sure of what we hope for, and certain of what we do not see. And that's beautifully demonstrated in the two examples I want us to look at this morning.

In the example of Abraham and Moses. Two of the great figures in the Old Testament. And what you see here is that faith is facing the future. Faith looking forward.

Even when, humanly speaking, there doesn't seem to be anything to look forward to. Faith is future orientated. Now let me show you that in the life of Abraham and Moses. Let me give you three things so you know where we're going.

[4 : 25] Number one, the promise of a place. Number two, the promise of a people. And number three, the promise of an exceedingly great reward. First of all, the promise of a place. Look with me at verse 8.

At verse 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. Now next to Jesus, Abraham is probably the most important person in the Bible. He's given 12 verses here in this chapter.

And Moses gets five verses. And all the others just get one verse each. He gets 12. Moses gets five. And the others just get one verse each. So it shouldn't surprise you that Abraham figures so prominently.

Because he is the granddaddy of faith, says Paul in Romans. He is the father of all who believe. So if we were to ask Paul or Peter or James or John.

[5 : 25] What does it mean to have faith in God? To believe in the Lord Jesus Christ? Do you know what they would do? They would point you to Abraham. So let's look at this. Let me tell you a little bit about Abraham. Let's walk through his journey of faith.

It starts in verse 8, doesn't it? With the call of God. My faith, Abraham, when called. I don't know what that was like. How did God call Abraham?

Was it an audible voice that he heard? I don't know. Was it simply a kind of restlessness in his spirit? Like birds getting ready to migrate? Was it like that?

Well, we don't know. We're not told. Stephen, in his speech in Acts chapter 7, tells us that the glory of God appears to him. And that is what unsettled him.

Changed his life. That's what caused him to have this huge change of direction in his life. The glory of God appeared to him. And God came into Abraham's life in a very significant way.

[6 : 21] And he was never the same again. He didn't know where it was going to lead him. But he just knew that the invisible God was not just an idea. But the invisible God was real.

God became real to him. And faith is seeing what cannot be seen. The invisible God. The God of glory appeared to him.

And I wonder if anything like that has happened in your life. It's called conversion. I preached on it last month. Are you converted? Whether it happens suddenly.

Like a blinded flashing light. Like it did for Saul on the road to Damascus. That's very, very, very unusual.

Or whether it was a gradual process. Like it has been for many of us. Have you turned around? And so what direction are you facing? Have you been turned around?

[7 : 23] And put in a different direction by the grace and kindness of God? It's ironic, isn't it? That sometimes in our calling, the idea of calling has been used to justify the status quo.

The rich man at his castle. The poor man at his gate. He made them high or lowly. And ordered their estate. Well that's saying, if whatever your calling is in life, just stay where you are.

But that is a mishandling and it's a misunderstanding of what Paul says in 1 Corinthians 7. When God called Abraham, he didn't say to him, stay where you are. When God called Abraham, he told him to get up and to go.

And he got up and he went. Even though he wasn't quite sure where he was going. And when he arrived in this place called Canaan, he lived, we're told, in a tent. He was extremely rich.

He was the Richard Branson or the Bill Gates or the Elon Musk, is that what he said? Of his day. He lived in the cradle of civilization.

[8 : 27] Ur of the colonies was the most impressive city. The archaeologists have shown us that. Abraham was a very wealthy man. He had camels and donkeys and sheep and servants.

And yet he chose to live in a tent. It was not that he had to. There were plenty of cities around he could have chosen. Why did he live in a drafty old tent? When you can afford them, plus his hotel in Canaan.

Why live in a tent? Well, it tells us in verse 10, doesn't it? Because Canaan was not his final destination. He was still on the move. He was looking forward to the city that had foundations.

Whose architect and builder is God. Do you see, living in a tent was his choice. It was his lifestyle choice. And living in a tent was his testimony. Because I'm going to a better city, he said. But I'm looking forward to something in the future. He was saying, isn't he, there's something more important in life than wealth and career. There's something more important in life than where you live.

[9 : 27] There is something promised to him by God. And if we are Abraham's children and people of faith. And our faith is forward looking. Then it will show in our lifestyle choices.

That we as Christians will be people who sit lightly to the things of this world. Because of the world to come. And yet too often, we just settle down here as if it was the only world that there is.

But you and I, we were made for something different. We were made for a better world. You and I as human beings, we were made for something better.

We were not meant to live in this world. In a world like this with hearts like ours. Under these sorts of conditions. We were and are meant for something else. Something better. A better country.

And this chapter suggests to you, it is a heavenly country that you were made for. Well, who's going to live in this brave new world that God promises us a new world?

[10 : 29] This brave new world that God promises to Abraham. Notice the second thing is the promise of a place. Not only the promise of a place, but the promise of a people. The promise of a people. And God promised to make Abraham the father of a great nation.

With so many descendants that you wouldn't even be able to count them. There's only one problem, isn't there? Abraham is 100 years old. And his wife is in her late 90s.

Abraham is impotent. And Sarah is sterile. But that doesn't stop him, does it? Making love to his wife. Believing that God would do the impossible. And he does that. Look at verses 11 and 12.

By faith, Sarah herself received power to conceive. Even when she was past the age. Since she considered him faithful. Who had promised.

Therefore from one man, and him as good as dead. Were born descendants as many as the stars of heaven. And as many as the innumerable grains of sand by the seashore. And you say, how is that possible?

[11 : 30] But you open your eyes today. And all around the world there are these people. In a Mexican wave of worship.

All around the world. From every tribe and every language group under heaven. And these are Abraham's descendants. We meet here this morning as Abraham's descendants. And he has done it.

And God is doing it. He is the God of the impossible. And he has prepared a place for those who trust him. A glorious city with unshakable foundations.

And he will people that place. Through the preaching of his word and the gospel. He is calling out men and women and boys and girls. From every tribe and nation and tongue.

Do you believe that? Do we believe that? It's a prepared place. For prepared people. Jesus went to the cross didn't he?

[12 : 28] To prepare this place for you. He said to his disciples. I am going to prepare a place for you. He's not saying I'm going to die sooner or later. And you won't see me anymore. This is the night before the cross.

And he says I'm going to the cross to prepare a place for you. That is what it's going to take me. To prepare a place and a future for you. For you people. I'm going to have to die.

I'm going to have to take your sin upon my shoulders. And I will bear the wrath of God for you. And I'm going to the cross. To prepare a place for you. And I'll come again. And I will take you to myself. Where I am. And in my father's house there's plenty of room. And there you will be also. And where is that? Well what kind of place will it be? What is the kind of place that Jesus prepares for those who love him?

It is a city with foundations. Whose builder and maker is God. It's not is it? It's not some ethereal airy fairy place.

[13 : 31] Where people sit on clouds and twang harps. And all wear white. It's a city with foundations. Whose architect and builder is God. Architects and builders don't get on very well.

I think I can tell you this. But on a church building project. Which is nearly finished. Our architects and builders are not getting on. And haven't got on for quite a while. When I went round.

I said this is going to be such a beautiful building. Is it? And the builder said. Yeah but you don't have to build it. And because architects. Don't they? Architects. They design something which is very very creative.

And very very imaginative. But it's not easy to build. And so imagine living in a community. Living in a world where God is both the architect and the builder. Sometimes I feel sorry for politicians. I think we give them a rough ride. Don't we? Some of them definitely deserve it. But my experience in the politicians I've met. Is the politicians that I know are sincerely trying to make the world a better place. That's why they go into it.

[14 : 39] It's not that they're in it to fathom their own nest. Or to boost their own ego. And I don't know about you. But sometimes I find myself feeling really sorry for them. Because it's a hopeless task. Isn't it? It is a hopeless task.

To make this world a better place. We shouldn't blame them. We shouldn't blame them when they fail to deliver. And so you see the gospel is not about making this world a better place.

The gospel is about desiring a better country. And our faith is not in politicians. Our faith is not in improving society. Our faith is in the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ.

The promise. The promise of a heavenly country. A world which is to come. A new world. Which is being populated by people who are made new in the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

And what Abraham looked for. And what John actually saw coming down from heaven in the book of Revelation. Was the new heavens and the new earth.

[15 : 45] And that is the vision that is put into Abraham's heart. On the day that God called him. And that is why he kept moving forwards. And that is what he was living for.

That is the vision. He passed on to his kids and to his grandchildren. What vision do you pass on to your grandchildren? Look at what it says in verse 13.

It says this. It says all these people. These all died in faith. Who are these people? They are Abraham's descendants.

All these people. They were still living by faith when they died. They didn't receive the things promised. They only saw them. And they welcomed them from a distance. Admitting that they were foreigners and strangers on earth.

And people who say such things show that they are looking for a country not their own. If they had been thinking of the country that they had just left. They could have gone back and returned.

[16 : 47] They were longing for a better country. A heavenly one. That is not escapism. Listen to me. Do you know anything of it? There is a word in Welsh called hirais.

There are Welsh people here this morning. I am not a Welsh speaker. But there is a word called hirais. Is that right? It is a longing for home. Isn't it? And Abraham.

Had a longing for home. And the descendants of Abraham had a longing for home. And for Christians and believers. Our longing for home is not a home that we come from.

But it is a home that we are going to. It is a place you have never been. Longing for home. To a place you have never been.

Do you know any of that longing in your heart? Do you know what it is like? C.S. Lewis describes it. In this most amazing way. C.S. Lewis says.

[17 : 48] It is the scent of a flower. We have not yet found. It is the echo of a tune. We have not yet heard. It is news from a country.

We have not yet visited. How can we even imagine. That such a place exists. A baby feels hunger. Says Lewis. When there is such a thing as food. That is why a baby feels hunger.

A duckling wants to swim. When there is such a thing as water. We feel sexual desires. There is such a thing as sex. And if I find in myself.

A desire. Which no experience in this world can satisfy. The most probable explanation. Says C.S. Lewis. Is I was made for another world. I think that is so encouraging.

Isn't it? It is so encouraging to those of us who are Christians. It is so encouraging. For those of us who will be in the workplace tomorrow. And will be at the school gate. And in college. And in school. That the longings that your colleagues.

[18 : 46] And your school friends have. Can only be found. In the Lord Jesus Christ. And the longing for another world. Have you understood that.

About yourself. Have you understood that. About the world around you. There is a verse in the Bible. That says. That God has placed eternity. In our hearts. That atheist in your office.

God has put eternity in their hearts. They just suppress it. Augustine says. We are restless. Until we find our rest. In thee. There is a rest.

The writer of the Hebrew says. That remains for the people of God. And it's in the future. That Sabbath rest. And we are restless. Until we reach that. There's that longing. That hiriith.

So by faith. Abraham. Left home. And he lived in tents. And he sat loose to this world. And he refused. To make his home here. By faith. Sarah made love. To her. Nanogenarian husband.

[19 : 45] Believing that God. Was faithful. To her husband. To his promise. And would produce a people. And Isaac was born. And then look at her son. Abraham's faith. Is severely tested. He leaves.

Fear of the colonies. At God's call. He shuts the door. On his past. That is part of. Conversion experience. When the glory. And the grace. Of God appears.

There is a radical. Break with our past. And when Abraham. Left. Irv the colonies. He shuts the door. On his past. And now it looks like. Doesn't it. That God is shutting the door.

On his future. Because God tells. Abraham to sacrifice. His one. And only son. Even though. God had said. It is through. Abraham. That your offspring. Will be reckoned. What is happening here?

How will God. Bring about his plan. And his purpose. How can Abraham. Trust God. When it seems. That God is slamming. The door. On his future. On everything. That he's promised. But look what it says. In verse 19. It says that Abraham.

[20 : 42] Reasons. Abraham considered. That God was able. To raise him. From the dead. And so. In a manner of speaking. Abraham. Did receive.

Isaac back from death. So Abraham. Quite unbelievably. Lays his teenage son. On the altar. Ready to sacrifice. And he trusts. That God. Could somehow.

Bring him back. From the dead. In order to keep his promise. To people the land. That's what real faith is. Charles Wesley says. Faith. Mighty faith.

The promise sees. And looks to that alone. Laughs at impossibilities. And cries. It shall be done. Because he is the God. Of the impossible. Who raised from the dead.

His own son. His only begotten son. Jesus. Who he loved. And he gave him up. To death on a cross. And he gave him up. To be a sacrifice. For our sin.

[21 : 39] Who did not spare. His own son. As Abraham. Was able to spare. His own son. God did not spare. His own son. But gave him up. Even to death.

On a cross. And on the third day. Raised him from the dead. And so he is the first fruit. Isn't he? He is the beginning. Of the harvest. Of those who fell asleep. He is the forerunner.

Of those. Who are going to be. In the new heavens. And the new earth. He's the God of the impossible. And he will do it. So the promise of a place. The promise of a people. And you see the same kind of.

Forward looking faith in Moses. Do you see what it says? Thirdly. He was looking ahead. To his reward. Verse 26. The promise of an exceedingly.

Great reward. There's one phrase. That describes the career of Moses. It's that. It was a forward looking. Forward looking faith. He was looking ahead. To his reward. Like Abraham.

[22 : 34] Moses. When he was born. The circumstances. Are pretty horrific. Aren't they? Are you? You've seen the film. Have you? The Prince of Egypt. The book. The book is far better. Moses' family.

Did not have much. To look forward to. It was genocide. Moses. Was born. To Hebrew slaves. In Egypt. And it didn't look like. He had much of a future.

Did it? But his parents. Moses' parents. His mum and dad. They thought differently. They believed. In God's promise. And so they committed. God's. They committed.

Their baby son. To God's care. It's a time. When Jewish babies. Are being thrown. Into the river Nile. And they commit. Their baby. To the all seeing.

And ever present God. Like we do. With our children. You know the story. Don't you? I have not the time to go. Not the war. But Moses is rescued. From the Nile. And he becomes a prince.

[23 : 31] In Egypt. He has this midlife crisis. He grows up. And it says there. In verse 24. It says that he refused. To be known. He refused.

To be called. The son. Of Pharaoh's daughter. He chose. Rather to be mistreated. With the people of God. Than to enjoy. The fleeting pleasures. Of sin. He considered. The reproach of Christ.

Greater wealth. Than the treasures of Egypt. How about you? How about. When people say. How was your weekend? How up front are you?

What. What did you do. On the weekend? Are you embarrassed. That you went to church? Church? Why would anyone go to church? Well Moses.

Can you see that? He regarded. The disgrace. For the sake of Christ. The reproach. For the sake of Christ. Of greater value. Than all the treasures of Egypt. How did a man like Moses.

[24 : 29] In. The prime of his life. At the pinnacle. Of his worldly power. With pleasure. And riches. How did he. Turn his back on all that? How did someone do that?

By faith. Because he was looking ahead. To his reward. He believed. He learned. On his mother's knee. I love that. Don't you?

I love that. That they put him. On the Nile. Trusting God. To see what happens. And it's gone all over. Isn't it? Pharaoh's daughter. Finds him. Miriam.

Moses' sister. Is watching. As he goes up. And she says. Would you like me. To find a Hebrew woman. To look after. To help you. Look after this child. And so. Courtesy of Pharaoh. Pharaoh pays.

For the education. Of Moses. When he grows up. Cared for. By his own mother. Who taught him. The faith of Abraham. Isn't that wonderful? And when he grows up.

[25 : 25] It was his faith. That made him. Choose his lifestyle. And for. Moses. He thought it was better. Better to suffer. And die. With God's people. Than live forever. In Pharaoh's kingdom.

Better to suffer. And die. With God's people. Than to die in Egypt. And be buried. Under a pyramid. He decided. To turn his back. On everything. That he'd been taught.

And grown up. As a prince. The experts tell us. He might well have grown up. As a Pharaoh. But who's ever heard. Of the 19th dynasty. Some archaeology. Archaeologists perhaps.

But everyone is here to Moses. Why are they here to Moses? They are here to Moses. Because of this faith decision. That he made. He believed. That there were greater riches.

From being amongst God's people. And being God's people. Under God's word. Under God's protection. There were greater riches.

[26 : 22] In that. Than in all the material benefits. The Pharaoh could offer him. And that is faith. Isn't it? Faith in the future. That is faith. Laying hold of unseen reality.

So it says. He left Egypt. He lived the first 40 years. Of his life. In a palace. He lived the second 40 years. Of his life. In a wilderness. Why? Well look what it says. In verse 27. Because.

He saw him. Who is invisible. It's a magnificent verse. Isn't it? By faith. He left Egypt. Not being afraid. Of the anger of the king. The king who is visible.

For he and do it. Are seeing him. Who is invisible. The God of glory. Who would appear to Abraham. Is the same God of glory. Who appeared to Moses. And the invisible God.

Was more real to Moses. Than the very visible Pharaoh. And the smiles. And the frowns. Of the invisible God. Had more of an impact. On Moses' life. And decision making.

[27 : 25] Than the very visible. Smiles and frowns. Of Egypt's Pharaoh. And so he turns his back. On fame and fortune. And he identifies himself.

With the people of God. And eventually. Of course. He becomes their champion. Doesn't he? He leads them. Out of slavery. Into the promised land. To become God's people. In God's place. Under God's protection.

C.T. Studd. Charlie Studd. He lived. At the end of. The 19th century.

He was a very famous. Cricketer. He played in. The cricket test. At the oval. That spawned. The term. The ashes. C.T. Studd. Charlie Studd.

Played in that match. Australia. Beat England. In that match. By eight runs. To claim. The ashes. C.T. Studd. Was born. Without silver spoon.

[28 : 18] In his mouth. He was a Cambridge. Scholar. He was. A test. Cricketer. That he was a believer. In the Lord Jesus Christ. He was a believer.

In the promises. Of God. He was a believer. In God's promise. And purpose. To populate. Heaven. With believers. And he took. The decision. In the prime. Of his cricket career.

To take the gospel. Overseas. To be a missionary. And before he went. They had a public meeting. In London. You can imagine it today. Can't you? Sky News. Sky Sports.

BBC. They'd all be there. Wouldn't they? With their cameras. And in a public meeting. In London. C.T. Studd said this. How can I spend. The hours of my life. In working for myself.

And the honours. And pleasures. Of this world. When thousands. And thousands. Are perishing. Every day. Without ever. Having heard. Of Jesus. Going down.

[29 : 13] To Christless. And hopeless. Graves. Charlie Studd. And seven. Other Cambridge graduates. Headed off. To China. His mates.

And friends. Said. It's such a waste. But you. You would never. Have heard. Of Charlie Studd. If he'd not done that. He didn't do it. So that his name.

Would go down. In the history books. But he became. A pioneer. Missionary. And hundreds. Of thousands. Of people. Have entered. Into heaven. Because of. See. He's.

That's decision. I love the testimony. Of Moses. We looked at it. A little while ago. In Numbers 10. Verse 31. He turns.

To some kind of. Relative. Hobab. I've still not been able. To work out. How on earth. Hobab is related to him. Through his wife. I think. And he says to Hobab. We are setting out. To the place. That the Lord has promised. To give us.

[30 : 08] Come with us. Come with us. Come with us. Let me. Conclude with this.

There's an American philosopher. Who's called. Henry David Thoreau. And he says. That if a man. Does not keep pace. With his companions. Perhaps. It's because. He hears. A different drummer. If a man. Does not keep pace. With his companions. Perhaps. It is because. He hears. A different drummer. And when people. Make decisions like that.

When people. Make life decisions. When they make. Sacrificial decisions. When they make. Career diverting decisions. When they decide. Actually. I'm going to. Free myself. From the idol.

Materialism. And I'm going to. Give money away. I'm going to move. To a place. And support a church. Where there is. Such a great. Gospel need. When they make.

[31 : 08] Those decisions. Why do they do that? Well. It's because. They're marching. To the beat. Of a different. Different drummer. And the 20 or more. People mentioned.

In Hebrews chapter 11. They are all of them. Marching. To a different. Drum beat. And you can hear it. Very very distinctly. All the way through. The chapter. By faith. By faith. By faith.

By faith. By faith. And every single one of them. Was out of tune. With their times. And every single one. Of them. Was unstuck. With their contemporaries.

Because they believed. In God. And they'd taken on board. God's promise. Of a better resurrection. Most people. Live and die.

As if this world. Is all that there is. But this people. God's people. Are looking. And longing. And longing. For a better country. A heavenly one. And the great cloud.

[32 : 05] Of witnesses. Says to you. This morning. Won't you join us? Won't you join us? And if you've never.

Taken that step. Why don't you. This morning. Join the people. Of God. Won't you become. One of us. As we head to that. Heavenly future. Let's pray.