

Death of the Faithful
Hebrews 11:13-19

Isaiah 43:16-28

1 John 5:1-13

Responsive Romans 8:1-10

This morning we are going to continue our journey through this hall of fame of the faithful here in Hebrews 11. So let us read this morning starting in verse 7 through 19. In the middle of this listing of these faithful individuals, at verse 13, it says, "These all died in faith, not having received the promises." As we talked about last week, Abraham never saw the fulfillment of the promise to inherit that land in which he and his family lived as pilgrims. It wasn't until much later when God led the offspring of Abraham out of captivity in Egypt back into the land in which Abraham lived.

This being the physical fulfillment of this promise, but as we know reading the scriptures that this was only one part, and in fact the lesser part and not the actual fulfillment, but rather a foreshadowing of the true fulfillment. As we know, Christ came through the lineage of Abraham, and it is by this seed that these promises were fulfilled, it is by this seed that all the nations are blessed as Abraham was promised. It is by this seed, that the offspring of Abraham's faith, all of those who have a faith like Abraham will inherit the promised land, which is not the physical land, but is in the very presence of God himself.

Death is the finality of the physical, all things in this world perish in time, there is none who will escape it, But this faith transcends death, it defeats it and the reality is that in death is the reward for this faith, and the fulfillment of these promises. In Christ we are heirs of these promises, we are Son's and Daughters of the Most High, we are his children who will one day inherit the promised land.

But that promised land is not of this world, so that inheritance is not until we pass from this world. The hour of death in this world, is the hour of triumph in our faith. It is then, at that moment the things which were invisible are made visible, the things which are intangible will be made tangible.

As verse 1 says, the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not yet seen. Even though Abraham had been brought into the land of promise, and lived there in tents there was still the expectation that that was not the fulfillment, even when Isaac was born, as was promised by God would happen, Abraham still understood that was not the fulfillment of the promises, and that is noteworthy because as it says in here verse 13, these all died not having received the promises.

In this we know that the promises extended beyond the mere physical nature, and in the account of Abraham with his son Isaac we can see that even Abraham understood that there was still more to these promises. As it says in verse 10, "He waited for the city which has foundations, whose builder and maker is God."

If his hopes were built solely on a physical inheritance then his death would have made a mockery of these promises, for God promised that he would inherit an everlasting kingdom. Abraham's faith, along with the others listed met ever challenge put toward them, and yet they persevered believing God faithful, believing that God would not go against his word. Understanding the eternity of these promises, and that death is not the end, but rather the culmination. We see this as well in the fact that even when in the promised physical land, Abraham and his family still lived as strangers, still lived as foreigners, their hope was instead concentrated on an eternal realm in which they themselves as well as the generations which came after who belonging in this line of promise would eternally blessed.

This is what the Author here means when he says in verse 13, “having seen them afar off were assured of them.” They understood that the fulfillment of these promises was yet to come, but believed them to be so sure as to have already been. Which is why Jesus said, in the book of John “Abraham rejoiced that he was to see my day, he saw it and was glad.” The words of God to Abraham were so real to him that their fulfillment though it was not to happen within his lifetime was as certain to him to as though he had already attained it.

As we know these promises that were given were all tied into Christ, into the messiah to come. It is through him that the faithful receive the true fulfillment of these promises which were given to Abraham. And I think it is important to point out, that these which came before were justified in believing that which was to come. Their justification was not through the law, it was not through the temple, in fact these who have been listed were before the law, and before the temple and God says that they are justified.

There are some who believe that the bible should be split into 2 sections, the old and the new. And that God's plan of salvation changed, first it was offered by the law, and now in these last days it is offered through faith. But we see that is not the case, for we have these men listed here who were before the law in which scripture says, were justified by faith, justified by believing God.

These believers of the ancient world both saw, and greeted this promised consummation, the coming Messiah who would offer intercession for the sin of his people. Their justification is wrapped up in the same person, in the same death and resurrection that is ours who came after. Where we look back to Christ in faith, they were looking ahead in faith.

The cross is the culmination, and the central piece of this salvation, of this justification. We, just as they also confess to be strangers and pilgrims upon this earth. Knowing that our time here is just our journey to our promised land, to our inheritance, to the foundation of the city who's maker and builder is God. This is the perspective of all of those who are of this faith, no matter when in time. For even David, who was king over the land of Israel, the physical promised land could still identify as Abraham as a stranger and exile on this land, for that is the state of all who are of the faith of Abraham.

Verse 14 says, that people who speak this way, who understand and see this life as a journey, and their time here in this world as pilgrims declare plainly that they are seeking a homeland. That is to say they are looking to that which comes after this life, they are looking to that which death will bring them, their eternal inheritance of these promises.

Which sets us up to understand the intention and meaning of the following verse. Which says, “Truly if they had called to mind that country from which they had come out, they would have had opportunity to return.” It is the natural response of an individual who finds themselves in a strange land to have a desire to return that which feels like home. To return to that which is comfortable, and safe. Such it is for each of us in the faith, in an odd turn of events in the renewing of our hearts and minds, and the salvation of our souls we become strangers in the very land which once was our home. Like an immigrant child who grows up learning of his homeland but has never been, so to it is for us. We are born again, to live as strangers and pilgrims in this world looking to one day be able to return to the sacred promised land.

We become strangers to this world, and look to the promises of one better. But there is always the danger, the draw to return to the comforts, or desires of our natural born nature. There is always the temptations and the urge to not focus on that which is ahead, but instead go back to that which was. It is much the same way with the Hebrews here.

They had been given the gospel message, they accepted it, believed, and lived it, but now are in danger of turning back to their old ways, and worshiping the shadows and the figures instead of the substance. They are in danger of putting things as preeminence over Christ, of having the focus of their worship be to the angels, which are servants of God and as scripture says, we are deemed to be more than the angels, for God sent his Son to redeem us, not the fallen angels, but to redeem mankind.

It can be difficult when trials, or persecutions arise, we can be tempted in our hearts to desire the things from before, we can even start down the road of blaming our belief for our troubles. For we have all lost friends and family over our beliefs, it would not be difficult in moments of weakness to at times mourn that loss, and be angry because of it.

Yet, that is not what we are to do, as the Author is telling his readers, as well as us today there is many blessings ahead. The Israelite after having been freed from the captivity and slavery of Egypt began to despise the wilderness they were in, and began to complain that it was better for them as slaves and they desired to return. They had lost faith, they no longer were looking to the promises, but were lost in their own despair and grief. They were not practicing a faith such as Abraham's, instead they were doubting God's word, and God said..”they shall not enter my rest.”

And indeed an entire generation died in that wilderness, never seeing the promised land, But the Author here reminds us, that we are not like those Israelites, if we are Christs, we are not ones prone to doubt, but ones who believe God's word and remain faithful as he said in chapter 10, “we are not of those who draw back to perdition.”

He is encouraging them, as well as us, reminding us all that though it may in our eyes seem bleak, There are blessings ahead, and in the end is the most glorious of blessings which is the eternal inheritance of the promised land of heaven. Christ himself traveled before us, as a pilgrim in this land, suffering great temptation and persecutions, yet in it all remained faithful to the end, even to the death on the cross so that he may become our hope, our redeemer and our high priest who had promised to give us grace in our times of need.

We must determine to be like our Lord, to ever press onward, even when facing death. In the face of death, is when our faith shines all the more, one of the blessings of this faith is to have hope, and peace when by the world standards there should be none. This hope and peace defies worldly logic, and offers peace in the face of death, a peace that is beyond understanding. If Christ were to have turned back we would be left without a redeemer, we would be left without hope. But he who has gone before was faithful, and in doing so has accomplished our redemption and has had all things put in his hands.

If our Lord, who conquered death brings us to face it as well, we can rest that he not only conquered death himself, he has done so for us. For the faithful, death is the culmination of our salvation, it is the finalization of our sanctification, for our souls have been purified by the blood of our savior and the shedding of this body is the final cutting away of the sinful life.

Abraham, and the others listed here provide for us an example of this spirit of faith which perseveres and overcomes this world. Therefore God is not ashamed to be our God and has prepared a city for us as it says in verse 16. The Author here talks in the present tense when speaking of these who have already passed, he says, “even now they desire a better, that is, a heavenly country.” It is interesting to talk in the present tense about those who are in the past, but I think it points out the truth which Christ spoke of when confronting the Sadducees who denied the resurrection. Matthew 22 verse 31, “But concerning the resurrection of the dead, have you not read what was spoken to you by God saying, I am the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob? God is not the God of the dead, but of the living.

The significance here is that these men of faith who have gone before, who in faith awaited that which was unseen in their life, will yet live to witness that which God had promised. And this is our hope is it not? Each and every one of us who are in Christ, that life, is not defined by form and function of this world, but that there is life beyond that which is here. And it is this life that our faith attests to, it is this life that the holy spirit witness's to us, that we remain faithful, that we press on, and continue not losing hope because the God who has created all things has promised to fulfill all which he had said. Infact we know that all that which he has created was exactly for this purpose, all things exist and have been created for the good pleasure of his will.

Look at verse 17-19, even Abraham, not having this word, not having the revelation through scripture that we have understood this truth, his faith was so bound in God's word, and his belief was so sure of God's promises that nothing deterred him from it. Verse 17, "By faith Abraham, when he was tested, offered up Isaac, and he who had received the promises offered up his only begotten son, of whom it was said in Isaac your seed shall be called." And here it is, Abraham's faith, in practice, his belief that God would be faithful to his word, verse 19 "concluding that God was able to raise him up, even from the dead."

Being instructed by God to kill and destroy the very thing which God had promised him he did not falter nor waver, but believed that God would still provide, that even if he were to kill his only Son, that God would still fulfill his promise. As Philip Hughes writes, "Should not this man have asked God to justify such a command? Was it right for God to test his servant with a trial which would involve such anguish?" No doubt facing such questions was part of Abraham's testing. However he enjoyed a proper relationship with God and knew that God altogether is holy, just, and loving and can not be untrue to himself. And he realized that it was not for him, a sinful finite creature to ask and doubt the word of his infinite creator, indeed to query the word of God is to query the goodness of God. This trial, in fact, so far from shaking Abraham's faith, actually served to establish it, for through it the unchangeable character of God's purpose and the impossibility that God should prove false to his promise became more than ever the great motivating reality to him as he pressed forward on his pilgrimage.

God is the God of the impossible, For he is the creator and keeper, the sovereign, mighty and holy Lord, the alpha and omega, the beginning and the end, who was, who is, and who ever will be. We on the other hand are minuscule dust mites whose lives are but a blink and moment in time. Yet mankind in it's rebellion denies, hates, and defies its creator.

Seeks every wicked thing which is a perversion and rebellion against the God who created it. We see God as the merciful loving God that he is, but he is also the vengeful and angry God against those who continue to live in rebellion. To these there is no hope, they are not pilgrims in this world, but are son's and daughters of his world, who are by their very nature, children of wrath, who will on the day of reaping, be tossed into the eternal fire. We can not talk about the death of the faithful without talking about the death of the ungodly, we can not talk about the glories that await God's children and not warn of the fiery damnation that awaits all others.

Those of us in this faith, who have these promises, who are sons and daughters of the most high rest in the hope of our ultimate deliverance, just like those who came before, we rejoice and rest in the fulfillment of the promises that we have yet to see. But the sad and scary reality, is that if you are not of this faith, then all that there is, is despair.

Death then is not a culmination of the promises to the redeemed, but rather is the culmination of the punishment of the lost. There is no hope beyond this life, what is here and now is the best you are ever going to have, all that awaits is eternal suffering. The joys and pleasures that exist now, is nothing more than an overflowing of that which is given to the faithful, for scripture says that God causes it to rain upon the just and unjust.

There is no other way, then that which God has provided by his Son. IT is only the faith that he gives, to believe upon his Son that one may find hope not only in this life, but also in the next. In closing let us read Psalm 116 and rejoice in God with the Psalmist in his power and deliverance, in his mercy and grace that he would deliver us, his faithful which he has chose before the foundation of the world. Let this psalm, be our prayer.