

8AUG10 Text: Hebrews 11:13,16 ***“These all died in faith, not having received the things promised, but having seen them...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 for them a city.”***

The state of Arizona is currently at the center of a national debate about illegal immigration and what rights, if any, such immigrants have. We are a nation of immigrants. At one time, New York City was the chief destination for thousands of European immigrants who came to America seeking a better life. My own forebears came through Ellis Island as perhaps yours did as well. But nowadays cities like Miami or Los Angeles or other major cities or sanctuary cities are the destinations for Hispanic, Caribbean, and Asian immigrants. The truth of the matter is that we are all descendants of immigrants...somewhere in our personal family background a parent or grandparent or great grandparent came to America because they were **LONGING FOR A BETTER COUNTRY** and searching for a better life.

This desire for something **better**, for a **better country** and for a **better life** is a common theme that runs through much of politics and social philosophy. Every election season, like this one again in 2010, candidates for political offices promise voters something better if they vote for them. Philosophies like Marxism, failed as it has now in many places in our world, falsely promised people a better **future** through the hardships of communism in the *present*.

While political ideas and social agendas might make things better for a short period of time, such ideas and agendas are not able to deliver what people are really looking for: a sense of **lasting goodness**, a feeling of **unshakable stability** and the confidence of **eternal security**. This present world can't provide such things. Apart from God, people remain **frustrated** in finding the goodness, the stability and the security for which they search. They look for **goodness** in this world and are confronted with evil, like terrorism. People yearn for **stability** in this world and yet their lives are often thrown into turmoil by a sudden change of events...people long for **security** and only find uncertainty. The truth of the matter is this: *you and I will only find a place of **lasting goodness, unshakable stability and eternal security** in heaven.* It is God the Holy Spirit who places within the heart of each believer that deeply-rooted **LONGING FOR A BETTER COUNTRY**

1. Such was Abraham's **faith** and the **faith** of the Old Testament believers.

2. Such is **our** faith, which looks to **Jesus Christ** and God's sure promises found in Him.

Chapter 11 of Hebrews is often called the great "Faith Chapter" of the Bible. In this chapter, the writer lists a number of Old Testament men and women whose lives exemplified faith. In the opening verse of today's epistle lesson we are given a definition of faith: *"Faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen."* **The faith described for us in Holy Scripture is the firm conviction that the things God has promised for the future are as real as if they had already happened!** As one reads through the eleventh chapter of Hebrews, one quickly discovers that many of the things those men and women of faith were promised, they themselves never lived to see. Afterwards the events came to pass and were seen and enjoyed by others. And yet the faith of Abraham and others listed in Hebrews 11 was a confident trust in the promises of God, a trust which caused a person to persevere in the face of sorrow, tribulation and even death. Such confident trust we see in the life and faith of Abraham.

In His grace, God chose Abraham out of all the people of the world, God called him to be His very own and to be the father of a great nation and the father of all who will believe. God told Abraham to leave his home of Ur and to travel to a land which God would show him. There God would make of Abraham a great nation and through Abraham's descendants, all the people of the world would be blessed. Abraham responded to God's words of promise with faith, he left Ur without a road map or GPS device, he just obeyed and went. **Faith follows where God leads, even if it is a way that has not been traveled by anyone you know.** Abraham left behind his familiar world in Ur and launched on a journey whose end was an unseen inheritance promised by God. Abraham's faith reflects one of my favorite prayers in our hymnal: *"Lord God, You have called Your servants to ventures of which we cannot see the ending, by paths as yet untrodden, through perils unknown. Give us faith to go out with good courage, not knowing where we go but only that Your hand is leading us and Your love supporting us, through Jesus Christ, our Lord."* Yes indeed, **faith follows where God leads each and every day, hearing and heeding the word of God.**

Another thing we can notice about the faith of Abraham was his willingness to live as a **stranger** and **alien** in the foreign country to which God had led him. In other words, not only did he have faith to leave Ur, Abraham also had faith to live as an alien in the land of Canaan. He lived in this "Promised Land" centuries before Joshua would finally lead the Children of Israel to possess it. Abraham lived in tents looking forward to something better that had been promised by God. Abraham was still living by faith when he died. This greatest of the Old

Testament patriarchs, who had been LONGING FOR A BETTER COUNTRY, received a share in something far better than he could have imagined when God received him into heaven, that **eternal** city with **everlasting** foundations, whose architect and builder is God.

The good news is that the God of Abraham is **our** God too!! We have a great advantage over Abraham...the promise God gave Abraham of blessing all the world through one of his descendants has now been fulfilled! Two thousand years ago, God sent His only Son into our world to take on our human flesh and to redeem us from sin, death and hell!! **Jesus Christ removed the barrier of sin which stood between us and God.** God now offers the blessings of salvation to all people through His Son, Jesus Christ. It is the voice of Jesus we heard in our Gospel lesson today when He said, *“Fear not, little flock, for it is your Father’s good pleasure to **give** you the kingdom.”* It is the voice of our Lord who encouraged you and me to seek a *“treasure in the heavens that does not fail, where no thief approaches and no moth destroys.”* **Faith looks to Jesus Christ for the better things, the eternal things.** All human LONGINGS FOR SOMETHING BETTER are fulfilled in Jesus Christ and in Him alone.

In this life too, we, like Abraham, have a faith that grasps the promise of heaven as if it were already ours. Faith is our firm conviction that our **God, who loved us enough to sacrifice His Son to save us, is the same God who loves us enough in Christ to bring us safely through all the earthly tribulations of this life to our life with Him in heaven.** We, like Abraham, are LONGING FOR A BETTER COUNTRY: a heavenly one. We are looking forward to the place which God has promised, a place where tears and sadness are not known, where sickness and disease and tragedy and death are no more. We are looking forward to that place of **lasting goodness, unshakable stability** and **eternal security** which God has promised to His children, that city with everlasting foundations whose architect and builder is God!

Just like Abraham lived the life of a pilgrim and an alien in a foreign land, looking in faith to a time when God would fulfill His promises to him, so also we too live a **pilgrim life, the life of an alien in a foreign land**. For the Christian, this world ought never feel too comfortable of a place...he or she ought never feel completely at home in the world. The created things that seem **so** unshakable are not nearly as stable or sure as they appear as each news report of a terrorist attack or natural disaster graphically remind us. We dare never trust earthly things for our security because they are so easily shaken and so easily destroyed.

Yes, **we** LONG FOR A BETTER COUNTRY, a heavenly one. Abraham saw and welcomed the promises of God from a distance...**living** by faith in a foreign land and **dying** by faith in the promises of God. For you and me again this morning, may our faith have the quality of seeing stability not in material things but in the **eternal** things God has prepared for us in heaven. May we continue to **walk** by faith and **live** by faith, seeing the things promised to us in Christ and welcoming them from a distance. Although we are indeed aliens and strangers on earth, God is not ashamed to be called our God and He has a **better** country prepared for us, a **heavenly** one, one that is ours by grace through faith in Jesus Christ. Amen.

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