

A Better Place

6/15/2024

I think we have all heard the expression 'they are in a better place now'. So where exactly is this better place some may ask.

Hebrews 11:13-16

"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. People who say such things show that they are looking for a country of their own. If they had been thinking of the country they had left, they would have had opportunity to return. 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."

Hebrews chapter 11 is often referred to as the chapter of faith. This chapter opens by describing what faith is - *"Now faith is confidence in what we hope for and assurance about what we do not see."*

The next verse in Hebrews chapter 11 tells us who the people are that this writer is speaking of. It says - *"This is what the ancients were commended for."* (NIV). The KJV calls them elders and the ESV calls them people of old.

One of those people was a man named Abram. In his case it was God who called him literally to a new home on this earth as we read in Scripture -

"Now the Lord said to Abram, "Go from your country and your kindred and your father's house to the land that I will show you. And I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and him who dishonors you I will curse, and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed." So Abram went, as the Lord had told him..." (Genesis 12:1-4)

So Abram went, as the Lord had told him. A great example of faith!

1. Go from your country
2. And your kindred
3. And your fathers house

That is a lot to leave behind. But Abram did so having faith in what God had promised.

That is a lot to leave behind particularly not knowing where you are headed. But Abram did take some people and some things with him as we read in the continuation of verse 4 in Genesis 12 - *"So Abram went, as the Lord had told him, and Lot went with him. Abram was seventy-five years old when he departed from Haran. And Abram took Sarai his wife, and Lot his brother's son, and all their possessions that they had gathered, and the people that they had acquired in Haran, and they set out to go to the land of Canaan."*

Seventy-five is not a particularly young age by today's standard. But in Abram's day it very well might have been for we read this a little earlier in Genesis chapter 11, filling in some of the details of Abram's journey from Ur to Canaan - *"When Terah had lived 70*

years, he fathered Abram, Nahor, and Haran. Now these are the generations of Terah. Terah fathered Abram, Nahor, and Haran; and Haran fathered Lot. Haran died in the presence of his father Terah in the land of his kindred, in Ur of the Chaldeans. And Abram and Nahor took wives. The name of Abram's wife was Sarai, and the name of Nahor's wife, Milcah, the daughter of Haran the father of Milcah and Iscah. Now Sarai was barren; she had no child. Terah took Abram his son and Lot the son of Haran, his grandson, and Sarai his daughter-in-law, his son Abram's wife, and they went forth together from Ur of the Chaldeans to go into the land of Canaan, but when they came to Haran, they settled there. The days of Terah were 205 years, and Terah died in Haran."

So Abram being 75 at that time appears to be somewhere between young and middle aged for his day.

We often sing a song in worship that goes like this -

To Canaan's Land I'm on my way,
Where the soul of man never dies;
My darkest night will turn to day,
Where the soul of man never dies.

Refrain

Dear friends, there'll be no sad farewells,
There'll be no tear dimmed eyes,
Where all is peace and joy and love,
And the soul of man never dies.
A rose is blooming there for me,
Where the soul of man never dies;
And I will spend eternity,
Where the soul of man never dies.

Refrain

A Love Light beams across the foam,
Where the soul of man never dies;
It shines to light the shores of home,
Where the soul of man never dies.

Refrain

My life will end in deathless sleep,
Where the soul of man never dies;
And everlasting joys I'll reap,
Where the soul of man never dies.

Refrain

I'm on my way to that fair land,
Where the soul of man never dies;
Where there will be no parting hand,
Where the soul of man never dies.

But the Canaan that Abram was headed to was not quite like the one we sing about. It was a land controlled by the Canaanites, a pagan society. And as we read in Genesis 12:10 there was also a famine in that land. So after being told by God "*To your offspring I will give this land.*" Abram left it and headed South to Egypt where as we read he ran into more trouble because of his wife's beauty. And Abram was eventually kicked out of that country by its leader Pharaoh.

So Abram headed North once again towards the land of Canaan. Passing through the Negeb or Negev and settling somewhere between Bethel and Ai where He attained land and wealth. So wealthy and prosperous that Abram and Lot's herdsman began to quarrel with each other so Abram and Lot went their separate ways. And this led to the account we read of concerning Sodom and Gomorrah. So this Canaan land was not what one might call paradise.

Which makes me think of another song we often sing in worship that goes something like this -

This world is not my home I'm just passing through
my treasures are laid up somewhere beyond the blue
the angels beckon me from Heaven's open door
and I can't feel at home in this world anymore

O Lord you know I have no friend like you
if Heaven's not my home then Lord what will I do?
the angels beckon me from Heaven's open door
and I can't feel at home in this world anymore

They're all expecting me and that's one thing I know
my savior pardoned me and now I onward go
I know He'll take me through though I am weak and poor
and I can't feel at home in this world anymore

O Lord you know I have no friend like you
if Heaven's not my home then Lord what will I do?
the angels beckon me from Heaven's open door

and I can't feel at home in this world anymore

Just up in Glory Land we'll live eternally
the Saints on every hand are shouting victory
their song of sweetest praise drifts back from Heaven's shore
and I can't feel at home in this world anymore

O Lord you know I have no friend like you
if Heaven's not my home then Lord what will I do?
the angels beckon me from Heaven's open door
and I can't feel at home in this world anymore

As we sing this song what are our expectations? Can we really say this world is not our home and that we are just passing through it! But that is the reality of things. As James writes -

"Now listen, you who say, 'Today or tomorrow we will go to this or that city, spend a year there, carry on business and make money.' Why, you do not even know what will happen tomorrow. What is your life? You are a mist that appears for a little while and then vanishes."

In a park near the Illinois river there is a series of six stones in dedication to the late singer and songwriter Dan Fogelberg. Each stone has written on it lyrics to one of his songs. This one I think fits today's lesson -

"To every man the mystery
sings a different song,
He fills his page of history,
dreams his dreams, and is gone."

If this is not our home, and temporary at best, then where is our home? In last weeks lesson we looked at a few scenes describing things in Heaven. Scenes we can read about in God's Word.

Or as we often sing -

"We read of a place that's called heaven
It's made for the pure and the free
These truths in God's word he has given
How beautiful heaven must be

The angels so sweetly are singing
Betrayals and failures destroyed
All pain and all suffering forgotten
And all tears will be turned into joy
How beautiful heaven must be
Sweet home of the happy and free
Fair haven of rest for the weary
How beautiful heaven must be
The children were playing without sadness
The women will dance without fear
The men will walk tall with honour
Only light, peace, and love will be there
How beautiful heaven must be
Sweet home of the happy and free
Fair haven of rest for the weary
How beautiful heaven must be
Fair haven of rest for the weary
How beautiful heaven must be"

But during the course of our day do we think more about this world and all of the things in it or do we take time to think and read of a place called Heaven. We sing songs in worship in praise of God and to encourage one another about such a place. You may have noticed in last week's lesson that in the visions spoken of there about Heaven that there was a lot of singing going on. So might we say we are just tuning our voices here for songs to be sung there! - because this is not our permanent dwelling place.

Peter reminds us of this in 1st Peter 2:11-12

*"Beloved, I urge you as **sojourners and exiles** to abstain from the passions of the flesh, which wage war against your soul. Keep your conduct among the Gentiles honorable, so that when they speak against you as evildoers, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day of visitation."*

But God has prepared a dwelling place for us while we are here on this earth. Paul speaks of it in his letter to the Ephesians - "So then you are no longer strangers and

aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God, built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus himself being the cornerstone, in whom the whole structure, being joined together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord. In him you also are being built together into a dwelling place for God by the Spirit.” (Ephesians 2:19-22)

This household of God is the church. Are you a part of it this morning? If not we are here to welcome you in. God's Word tells us how to enter it. We invite you on God's behalf to come, come in as we sing.

And if you are reading this this morning and have wandered away from this home God has prepared for you, then God and we invite you back. To come home. Sometimes we sing about that as well.

Softly and tenderly Jesus is calling
Calling for you and for me
See on the portals He's waiting and watching
Watching for you and for me
Come home, come home
Ye who are weary come home
Earnestly, tenderly Jesus is calling
Calling, "O sinner come home"
O for the wonderful Love He has promised
Promised for you and for me
Though we have sinned He has mercy and pardon
Pardon for you and for me
Come home, come home
Ye who are weary come home
Earnestly, tenderly Jesus is calling
Calling, "O sinner come home"
Come home, come home (come home)
Ye who are weary come home
Earnestly, tenderly Jesus is calling
Calling, "O sinner come home"

Come as we sing - for God is calling you to a better place.