



BELIEVERS CHAPEL

6420 Churchill Way | Dallas, Texas | 75230 | t 972.239.5371 | believerschapeldallas.org

Sermons of S. Lewis Johnson

Hebrews 11:8–19; Genesis 6:1–4, 22

“Abraham: A Life Shaped by Hope”

TRANSCRIPT

[Prayer] Father, we thank Thee for the word of God and we thank Thee for the Epistle to the Hebrews. We thank Thee for the privilege of studying, we ask Thy blessing upon each one here, that the things that are concerns for each of us spiritually, may find some help in the reading and pondering of the word of God this evening. We thank Thee for the great truths of this epistle, not only of the High Priesthood of the Lord Jesus Christ and of his atoning work, but also things that have to do with the personal life of faith, which just as the Old Testament believers had to know those principles in order to live a life that was pleasing to Thee, so we too should know them. Enable us, Lord, to learn the things that will enable us to walk by faith, just as Enoch and Noah and Abraham and others did. Enable us, Lord, in our day, with our trials and our temptations and our opportunities, to truly represent Thee and the truth of the word of God. Deliver us from any kind of activity that may bring dishonor upon our Lord Jesus Christ and upon the word of God. Lord, we ask that Thou will be with us as we study now,

In Jesus' name. Amen.

[Message] Well, our subject this evening is “Abraham: A Life Shaped by Hope” and our text is chapter 11, of the Epistle to the Hebrews, verse 8 through verse 19, and I hope you will follow along as I read these verses now, for our Scripture reading. We’re reading verse 8.

“By faith Abraham obeyed when he was called to go out to the place, which he would receive as an inheritance. And he went out, not knowing where he was going. By faith he dwelt in the land of promise as in a foreign country, dwelling in tents with Isaac and Jacob, the heirs with him of the same promise; for he waited for the city which has foundations, whose builder and maker is God. By faith Sarah herself also received strength to conceive seed, and she bore a child when she was past the age, because she judged Him faithful who had promised.”

I'd like to say something about that verse and just say something very briefly about it; but the text that I just read for you attributes the faith to Sara. “By faith Sarah herself also received strength to conceive seed.” Unfortunately, at least unfortunately for that interpretation, the terms that are used for “conceiving seed” are terms that refer only to men and their deposition of seed in the act of conception. And so the chances are that we should understand Sarah herself, also, as a kind of parenthesis, and follow along and attribute the statement to Abraham, because you'll notice that before the text has to do with Abraham and then in verse 12, it has to do with Abraham, and so, that's the way we're going to be taking it. But, fortunately, it doesn't make a great deal of difference here, at least with regard to what I'm going to say, because I'm going to concentrate on Abraham and three statements that are made concerning him. But, nevertheless, that is probably the sense, the reference being to Abraham rather than Sarah. As a matter of fact, the fact that Sarah conceived seed, in the sense that she did that by faith, some have objected to just on the grounds of the Old Testament, because Sarah had more difficulty it would seem believing the promise than Abraham did, because she burst out laughing at the idea that she would be conceiving seed at her age. But, aside from that, it's more likely that the text is a reference to Abraham. So we're going to take it that way.

“Therefore from one man, and him as good as dead, were born as many as the stars of the sky in multitude, innumerable as the sand which is by the seashore. These all died in faith, not

having received the promises, but having seen them afar off were assured of them, embraced them and confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth. For those who say such things declare plainly that they seek a homeland. And truly if they had called to mind that country from which they had come out, they would have had opportunity to return. But now they desire a better, that is, a heavenly country. Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God, for He has prepared a city for them. 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,” concluding that God was able to raise him up, even from the dead, from which he also [my text has] he also received him in a figurative sense.”

So “Abraham: A Life Shaped by Hope.” One of our finest Bible teachers has called Abraham, “The greatest human character in the Bible.” Now, whether he’s the greatest human character in the Bible or not, I don’t know that any one of us can certainly answer that question. I surely cannot. We do know that God calls him great, and that in itself is enough for us to say he was a great man; and he is also called “The Friend of God,” both in the Old Testament and in the New Testament.

You might ask the question, does God need a friend? Well, aside from the answer to that question, Abraham was the friend of God. Three times he’s said to be the friend of God. And so, at least, we can say without any contradiction that Abram is a great biblical character, a great human character, possibly, the greatest human character in the Bible.

One thing about Abram that’s very interesting is that he’s great in all the greatest religions of the earth. He’s great in Mohammedanism, a hundred and eighty-eight times Abram’s name appears in the Koran. And, of course, he’s great in Judaism. In fact, he was regarded as something of the father of Judaism. John the Baptist, you remember, I know, in Matthew chapter 3 in verse 9, has a statement that would seem to support that, because he says in chapter 3 in verse 9, speaking to the

Jews of the day, “And do not think to yourselves, ‘We have Abraham as our father.’ For I say to you that God is able to raise up children to Abraham from these stones.”

Now, in Christianity he is also great. In fact, we, if we are believers in Christ, are called children of Abraham. So he is great in Christianity, he’s great in Islam, he’s great in Judaism. He surely is a great man.

I’ve often said this, it didn’t originate with me, but I’ve said it a number of times. And some of you, I know, will remember the statement. If we are going to get salvation, we are going to have to get it through Abraham, because it’s through the Abrahamic promises that we come to the position of justification. So we, too, are highly related to this great Abraham, this great Old Testament saint.

Now, you will notice here, that we have three texts that mention specifically his faith. Verse 8, “By faith, Abraham obeyed.” Verse 9, “By faith, he dwelled in the land of promise.” And then, verse 17, “By faith, Abraham when he was tested, offered up Isaac.”

Now, we’re going to concentrate on those three things because we wouldn’t be able to cover this much if we talked about everything that’s found in these verses. But we ask the question, What is the secret of the man who left the worship of Nanar, the Sun God, and Ur, of the Chaldees, and came into the Promised Land for Jehovah? We know his family were worshipers of the false gods. That’s stated in the Old Testament. So what was it that brought Abraham from the worship of the Moon god and brought him to the confidence faith in Yahweh that is represented by his life of faith? What is the unifying center of Abraham? What is the *raison d’être*, of this eminent Bedouin chief? Who, four thousand years ago, approximately, wandered from pasture to pasture on the plains of the Near East, finally came into the land and became the heir of the promises that ultimately relate to the Lord Jesus Christ?

I think these three verses are a very succinct summary; and what they tell us is that it is through faith, through faith he obeyed, through faith he dwelled in the land of promise, as in a foreign country, and through faith he offered up Isaac, his son.

So we're just going to take those particularly significant three texts, and weave in some of the rest of the context, in dealing with them. Talking about Abraham's faith. What characterizes his faith? And, incidentally, it's my feeling that the writer of the Epistle to the Hebrews wrote this, in order that his readers might profit in this way; that they, too, would learn what it is to live by faith in their day, centuries after the time of Abraham. Or in other words, it was written for you and for me.

So let's look at the faith of youth, first, which may be characterized as simply obeying. “By faith, Abraham obeyed when he was called to go out to the place, which he would receive as an inheritance. And he went out, not knowing where he was going.”

Now, leading up to this particular incident here, I'll just remind you of the fact that Abel was the first person that our author has set his attention upon, and we said that Abel suggests the worship of faith, for he brought a more excellent sacrifice than Cain. Enoch follows, and we laid stress upon the fact that he walked with God, illustrating that after a person has come to the knowledge of the true God, has worshiped him, acknowledging that the approach to Him is through sacrifice, in our case, through Jesus Christ, who is the sacrifice then the next step of the life of faith is to walk by faith, as Enoch did.

But, we are not in the Bible taught that we just are saved in order to worship. We are told in the New Testament, as well throughout the Bible, that we are saved in order to be instruments for the work that God would have us do. And so Noah follows and he illustrates the fact that the life of faith involves work. So we have the worship of faith in Abel, the walk of faith in Enoch, the work of faith in Noah, and what they seem to climax in is in Abraham, who illustrates the whole life of faith, from the beginning to the climax of his worshiping life when he offered up Isaac, this man is the man who lives a life of faith.

I think there is another thing we need to bear in mind, too, that when we talk about faith here in Hebrews chapter 11, we are talking generally about a term that means in Hebrews chapter 11, primarily, something very close to hope. In other words, faith in this chapter is a confidence in God with regard to the future, generally. Verse 1, “Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the

evidence of things not seen.” “Verse 7, “By faith, Noah being divinely warned of things not yet seen.” Verse 27, “By faith, Moses forsook Egypt, not fearing the wrath of the king.” And then, I believe, in verse 35, we have the statement, “Women receive their dead, raised to life again. Others were tortured, not accepting deliverance that they might obtain a better resurrection.”

So the sense of faith, I don’t want to deny the idea that faith rests upon a past accomplishment of God, that obviously is true, but here the note that is particularly significant is trusting in God with reference to the life that lies before us.

Now, most of us, of course, in our daily lives, we not only look back to the cross and trace to that, of course, our salvation, by the shedding of the blood by the Lord Jesus Christ. But in the light of that, we live our lives looking also to the consummation of this life in the glories that are said in Scripture to belong to us in the future. Both of those aspects are true of faith. But here in chapter 11, it’s generally been thought that hope is probably the largest aspect of faith in the chapter.

Now, first of all then in verse 8, we read these words. “By faith Abraham obeyed when he was called.” Now, don’t overlook that word “called.” Abram didn’t seek the Lord. Abram was living with a family that was an idolatrous family. It was God, who so characteristically of the Bible initiated the salvation of Abraham. He was called by God. It was God who appeared to him and called him out of the situation in which he found himself.

Stephen thought so much of that that in his great sermon in chapter 7 of the book of Acts, he begins with that. Luke writes, “Then the high priest said,” as he turned to him in the light of the accusations made against Stephen, “Are these things so?” And Stephen began his message this way, “Brethren and fathers, listen, The God of glory appeared to our father Abraham when he was in Mesopotamia, before he dwelt in Haran, and said to him, ‘Get out of your country and from your relatives, and come to a land that I will show you.’”

So first of all, in the life of Abraham is the divine call. The work of the Holy Spirit in bringing regenerated life to him. Now, it’s possible of course that Abraham was already converted. I don’t know all the facts about him, previous to this, but here we have clearly the Lord God

beginning the work in him that led to him ultimately coming to the Promised Land. So by faith Abram obeyed when he was called. The request then is a request for Abram to leave the circumstances in which he found himself in Mesopotamia. Idolatrous people were worshipers of the moon god, but God appeared to him and calls him out of that situation.

That’s really what the Lord does for you and me, isn’t it? He does that precisely here in the United States of America. He, when he speaks to us, and when he brings us to the knowledge of the Lord Jesus as our Savior and gives us new life, we may still be here in body, but he has called us out of the society of which we are a part. We are different! We are very different if we have been born again. We have a source of life that is different from the world around us. The world doesn’t understand us, if we are true to our testimony, and we, ourselves, are no longer friends of the world. If we are friends of the world, we are enemies of God, so the apostles tell us.

You know, it is impossible for a Christian, a true, genuine believing Christian, who lives his faith to get along with this world. You just cannot do it. Now, that doesn’t mean you’ll not have a testimony in their midst. And, sometimes, even against their own convictions they may say, well, whatever you can say about him, he’s a good man. That, of course, is what we would like for others to say about us, even when they don’t agree with us, about our faith.

But, nevertheless, when Abram was called out, he, himself, became a stranger. We are strangers and sojourners in this world. You may think your roots are deep in Dallas. I’ve been here for fifty years. But my roots are not in Dallas. My citizenship, according to Paul, is in heaven. I wish I really had more of that in my personal life but, nevertheless, that’s true. And I’ve found a few instances where I’ve been encouraged to realize that I am not of the city of Dallas.

But, think what Abraham was called to do, now. He was called to leave his family, his friends, his society and so far as we know he was not told where he was going. He was told, simply, that he was going to a land that God was going to give him. So we could say, he was told to march, but he wasn’t given a map. He was told to make progress, but he was not given any program. But, nevertheless, he had the confidence that he would be going with God.

Now, Ur was a highly developed city at that time. Today, it's a dirty little place. I haven't been there, but I've seen some descriptions of it. There's a little mud hotel there. In fact, you can go there and stay there, if you think you want to stay there. But, one of the fellows, an evangelical, has written a book on Abraham, said that when he was there, in the hotel, in the register, where people sign their name, there was a tourist who had been there and had spent the night, and who had put by the side of his name, after he'd signed it, and paid his bill, he said, “No wonder Abraham left!” [Laughter] “Even Job would have left.” But in Abraham's day it was a great city. We know that from archaeological discovery. It was a great city and so to leave Ur would have been leaving from a highly developed civilization. That civilization was highly developed.

So he is given a call by God that, in a sense, embarrasses him, because it presents him with sealed orders, urges him to a vast venture, but it's into the unknown. That is precisely what you as a Christian experience when you come to believe in the Lord Jesus Christ. You become associated with the Triune God, especially the Lord Jesus Christ. You are associated with other Christians. Your life has changed dramatically. If you are like I am, you were in a business and you suddenly find you are in a different kind of business. In my case, it was a little different. I was in the insurance business, well settled, I thought, in my father's business, and had every reason to believe that I would have that business one day and thus would be able to make a living. But God moved into my life and then I found myself leaving Birmingham, Alabama with a wife, one child and another child on the way, with nine hundred dollars in my pocket.

Dallas Seminary was a very nice seminary in those days. They charged no tuition. In fact, as you know, in those days, they didn't ask for money. They didn't charge any tuition at all. You paid an activities fee; I think it was \$25. They had a limited number of married student's apartments. And if you were able to get into them, and I was able to get into them after I had been here six or eight months, there was no rent in the apartments. You had to pay the utilities. And so you could live on \$75 a month, which I made working part-time. You never thought that I worked, I know.

[Laughter] But I did work! You thought I'd been a preacher all these years and that I never worked

at all. Well, there was a time when I had to be at the office at 8:30 and leave at 4:30 and even had to work on Saturday, every other week. So I understand how you slaves have to get along during the week, at least, partially.

But, anyway, when Abram was called out of Ur of the Chaldees, it was the presentation to him of sealed orders urging him to a vast venture that was unknown. In my case, it was only similar to that. It was nothing like Abraham, of course. But, nevertheless, in essence it's the same. And when anyone believes in Jesus Christ, turning from his trust before then and turns to Christ, essentially, that's what it is. A new life, a life you don't know anything about, a future that you have no certainty about has become yours. The best thing about it is, it's so much fun to trust the Lord, even in the midst of difficulties.

I think it's so interesting, that so far as we know, Abraham didn't even ask for explanations. Now, later on he did, when he was a believing man, he said, “How am I going to have any descendants when this Eliezer, my steward, is the only one in the house?” But, so far as the text said, he simply responded to the appearance of the Lord and the message to him and he left.

Jesus Christ followed the same principle. He said to the apostles, “Follow me!” He did not say, “Follow me to Jerusalem.” He did not say, “Follow me to Saida. But he said, simply, “Follow me!” It's a personal attachment and it in essence, it is an attachment to an unknown in the immediate future. Of course, in the future far away, we know, precisely, where we are going. And this author will point it out to us, in this very passage, because he will talk about us and how we are a heavenly people looking for a heavenly country and a heavenly city.

But, nevertheless, “Follow me,” was the way in which Abram was messaged by the Lord God. Now, his response is the response that I would always like to make to God's calls to me. By faith, Abraham obeyed. By faith, he obeyed.

If we turn back to Genesis chapter 12 in verse 4 and 5, you will see essentially the same thing. There's some little questions here, we don't have time to talk about Abram's age and some problems like that. But, notice chapter 12 in verse 1 of Genesis. “Now the Lord had said to Abram,

“Get out of your country, from your family and from your father’s house, to a land that I will show you. I will make you a great nation; I will bless you and make your name great; and you shall be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and I will curse him who curses you; and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed.” So Abram departed as the Lord had spoken to him.” How simple it is. So the Lord said to Abram, “Get out of your country, from your family, from your father’s house.” So Abram departed as the Lord had spoken to him.

It has been said that crisis never makes character. What a crisis does is to reveal character. There’s a humorous story in connection with this that I’ve told before. Some of you older people may remember it. But it’s the story of a young man who was engaged to a young lady, and they decided they would go to the movie. And while they were in the movie someone jumped up and said, “Fire!” And the young man ran before he realized that his bride-to-be was not with him. So he slunk back in, sat down by her in the movie, because it was a false alarm, and said, “Excuse me!” And so she did. That was the last time they were together.

Now, you think that’s just a story, but I’m going to tell you a true story. I have a friend. He’s a preacher and he got married to a beautiful young girl, just a beautiful girl, I got to know them real well. And they’re still in Mississippi. But he was a youth worker, and so when he got married, there were lots of high school and college kids that came to the wedding. Of course, they wanted to do something that would be funny and a bit embarrassing, if they could. Many of them had been converted through this man and his preaching. And so they put a bomb in his car, under the hood, one of those smoke bombs. And so when he and Sarah, his wife, got in the car and were ready to go off, it exploded when he started the car, and the smoke just billowed up out of it. And he was out of the car and off about twenty-five feet, with his bride still sitting in the car. [Laughter] He never lived that down. Well, it is true that a crisis does not make character; it reveals it. And Abram is either a fool, or a faithful servant of the Lord God; or a faithful soul. And history proves that Abram was a faithful soul.

One of the commentators said that, “I’m sure there were people who said, ‘Rather quixotic for him to act as he did. To get off and to leave like that on a goose chase. He’ll come back sadder and wiser.’” And all of the other kinds of things that people say when someone seems to do something that’s Christian that appears to be foolish. But he went and as this person goes on to say, “The children of Abraham still sing, ‘One step I see before me, ‘tis all I need to see, the light of Heaven more brightly shines when Earth’s illusions flee. And sweetly through the silence comes, His loving ‘Follow me?’ So, on I go, not knowing, I would not if I might, I’d rather walk in the dark with God, than go alone in the light. I’d rather walk by faith, with Him, than go alone by sight.” That’s Brainerd’s marvelous stanzas.

Now, the second of the texts is found in verse 9, and here we read of the faith of manhood, that is, when Abraham has been in the land, and we read in verse 9, “By faith he dwelt in the land of promise as in a foreign country, dwelling in tents with Isaac and Jacob, the heirs with him of the same promise.” It’s paradoxical, but nevertheless, it’s true that Abram even though he was told by God that he should go to a land that God was giving to him, should lead a wandering, unsettled life. In fact, when Abram died; I believe it’s true to say he had only one small piece of property. And when you go to the land of Palestine today, I did not see it when I was in Palestine or in Israel or as my Jewish friends want me to say when I was in Judah, but there you can look at the cave of Machpelah. That was his property, you remember, that he bought from the sons of Heth, for a burying grounds. And Sarah was buried there and others were buried there, too. That’s all that he possessed when he died—title-wise. So with these great promises that he would have the land, that’s all that he had. So it’s all going to come, ultimately, to him and to his family.

At any rate, we read of the characteristics of his faith here in these verses. And I’m just going to pick them out. They’re well known. I’m sure you already know these things. What the text says, in verse 9, is that he “dwelt in tents with Isaac and Jacob.” And the characteristics of his faith then are first of all, well, the tent. Well, really the promise or the word. In verse 9, “By faith he dwelled in the land of promise.” And then in verse 13, “These all died in faith, not having received

the promises, but having seen them afar off were assured of them, embraced them and confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims in the earth.”

So first of all, characteristic of Abram’s faith is his faith in the promise. What does that mean? Well, that means simply his confidence in the word of God. This was the thing that characterized his life. He believed the word of God. He believed it was truly the word of God and thus, the divine word.

Do you believe the word is the word of God? I imagine that everyone in this room, maybe there is someone who’s slipped in here who has no contact with Christianity, but practically everyone in this room would say, if I asked you, “Do you believe in the word of God?” You would say, yes. But do you know what that means as a testimony? That these Scriptures that we have before us are truly the word of the eternal God. Does not that mean that those promises shall come true? Does not that mean if we rely upon those promises, we may expect those promises to come to fruition in our lives.

We know, of course, that they will come to fruition in our lives in God’s own way, but we know that they will come to fruition in our lives. The promises are promises that we can believe.

So first of all, he believed the word of God. There is a marvelously funny and yet true chapter in Donald Grey Barnhouse’s *Exposition of the Epistle to the Romans*. I’d like to sum it up in two, three minutes.

When Abram came into the land, he was about seventy years of age. His name was Abram. Abram means “high father of” *Ab*, pronounced ob, father. “Ram” means high or exalted. So his name means “exalted father” “high father.” He’s not a father at all. He doesn’t have any children at all. He’s barren. Now, Barnhouse points out a truth, I think, that we can appreciate. In the Orient, people there like to talk. A lot of my friends are Orientals.

I tell Martha, “All my friends love to talk.” Because we do have a lot of friends that love to talk. They’re not Orientals. I was kidding when I said that. I may have some Oriental friends. But I meant, simply, the Orientals, in the way they talk.

And in those days, as those people were traveling back and forth through the land of Palestine, and if you wanted to get to the North, you had to go, from Egypt, you had to go through Palestine. If you wanted to get to the East down to where Iraq is now, you had to go through Palestine. So there were constantly caravans going through and they were on the route. And Abram was a very wealthy man. After a time there, he had great cattle and great properties. And so they were very apt to minister to one another because all people would at one time or another be traveling. And so you can just imagine, one of the characteristic Orientals is asking questions. And so they would come and Abram would say, come on in. He would say, my name is Abram, Exalted Father.

Yes, how wonderful that is. How many children do you have? Don't have any children. Oh. That's strange. Dr. Barnhouse says he knew a man named Mr. Wrench, and every one of his friends, to whom he was introduced would always comment, “Are you Mr. Monkey Wrench?” I guess now, “Are you Mr. Good Wrench?” [Laughter] Or, whatever you say with wrench. And he said, another man named Meek. There used to be a fellow named Meek, who coached the SMU football team, who said, this man told him that he had been told, literally scores of times, “Are you the man who is going to inherit the earth?” The Meek Man.

So you can just imagine what people would say. And soon, Abram wouldn't want to give his name. But he would always be asked his name and they would ask each other about everything about them.

Dr. Barnhouse said he went to China once, to the Northwestern part of the land, and he was asked those same kinds of questions because they are the types of questions we ask in China. He sat down at one place; they didn't know each other, but he was going to stay there. And he was asked questions like, do you have a wife? Yes. Is she pretty? Yes. How many children do you have? How big a house do you have? Does it have windows? Do you have, and all the little things to make up conversation and very many, many questions.

Well, Abram must have had all of those questions and then behind it all was, who is sterile? Is it you? Or Sarah? And the servants would be wondering about that constantly. There may even have been a lottery over the matter. But, nevertheless, that question was there. Was it Abram was sterile? Or was it Sarah?

And so, finally, of course, Sarah couldn't stand it much longer and so she brought Hagar to Abram and Abram it turns out was not the one that was sterile. It was Sarah. And so Ishmael was born, when he was eighty-six years of age.

Well, that caused some difficulties. We don't have time to talk about that. But in the 17th chapter of the book of Genesis, God told Abram that the child that he would have would be his own child, and not simply be his child, but would also be Sarah's child. And he's ninety-nine years of age. No wonder she laughed. That is, as a human being, no wonder.

So what did Abram do? He came down one morning, so Dr. Barnhouse suggested. He said, “By the way,” as all the people are about, his family and all the servants,” because they lived in tents, you know. You could hear everything. You might not see everything but you could hear everything. And so he came down one morning and he said, “By the way, I've changed my name.” Everybody wondered, what does this mean? “My name is no longer Exalted Father. My name is Abraham, Father of a Multitude. Father of a Multitude!” He doesn't even have one child and now he's talking not about exalted fatherhood, but father of a multitude. Well, you can hear the conversation now. “Did you hear what the old man just said back there? He's no longer playing with a full deck.” I don't know how that would translate into Hebrew, [Laughter] but that's precisely what was meant.

But, actually, what was lying back of it was the power of God. And just as God said, “Let there be light!” and there was light; so, now, at the proper time, at the time appointed, as Genesis 17, talks about, and Genesis 18, at the time appointed, He said, “Let there be Isaac,” and out of this dead womb, out of this old man, Isaac, the son comes, the Promised Seed. Well, if Abraham believed through that, that is believing in the word of God.

Another characteristic of his faith is the tent, dwelling in tents, what does that mean? Well, that means that they had no certain dwelling place. A tent is not a house. And so the tents were constantly being changed, moved, dwelling in tents characterizes the children of God. They always are subject to move. We're not tied to anything down here. What we are is as the Bible says, sojourners. We're on the way to heaven. And so, these dwelt in tents. Many of us, in the family of God, have had very interesting experiences.

Livingston? Livingston wound up in central Africa, a great man of faith. And when I went to Blantyre to see where David Livingstone grew up, they have one of the texts there was the text that says, “Those that honor me, I will honor.” And here is a man who left Scotland, went out, lost his life in Africa, after serving there many years. And now, for many years, a national hero. Other men? The same kind of experience.

And then, the third is the altar. In Genesis chapter 12, you'll notice, that when Abraham went from place to place, he built an altar. He's going to build an altar here, to offer up Isaac, but he built altars. When he moved to a new place, it was characteristic to set up an altar because the altar was the means by which the sacrificial offerings were killed in worship of the Lord God in heaven. So, the tent, the promise, the altar; these are the things that really characterize the faith of the believing men.

Now, the altar, of course, is something that suggests the fact that we only approach the Lord God through sacrifice. And that, I think, is certainly, absolutely true. We approach the Lord only through the Lord Jesus Christ. But, now, we must hurry on because of time. Notice the motive, in verse 10, “For he waited for the city which has foundations, whose builder and maker is God.” Verse 13, “These all died in faith, not having received the promises, but having seen them afar off were assured of them, embraced them and confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth. For those who say such things declare plainly that they seek a homeland. And truly if they had called to mind that country from which they had come out, they would have had opportunity to

return. But now they desire a better, that is, a heavenly country. Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God, for He has prepared a city for them.”

In a sense, the achievement of faith is described in verse 12, where we read, “Therefore, from one man, and him as good as dead, were born as many as the stars of the sky in multitude innumerable as the sand which is by the seashore.” Abram in effect walked upon water. He did not within himself have the power to conceive seed, nor did Sarah, and yet God brought them the promised seed. Isn't it interesting how God's things are the permanent things. Ur, one of the great cities of the past, what is it today? Why, just a little ruin. You could see it in a few minutes, all that's left. Or, some of the other places. Egypt? Egypt today is not what it was originally. But Jerusalem? They're still fighting over Jerusalem. It's still a vital place on the place of this earth, maybe the most vital place, so far as world peace is concerned. And there it is; that's the city.

So I wonder if you'd had an imaginary conversation with Abram and Lot, what you would have gotten out of them? Or, just say, you went to Lot, and you talked to Lot and asked Lot about his experience, since he had made the choice to go down to Sodom and Gomorrah. You could have asked Lot the question. Lot, did you make the right decision? And Lot would have to say, no, I didn't make the right decision. When I looked out and saw all of that beautiful valley, all of that marvelous landscape, I could think of only one thing and that was being prominent and making money. And Abram let me choose first. I should have known better. I had been in Sodom and Gomorrah once. I knew that was a violent, wicked place. But I was anxious to do something and to make something, money, particularly, and he did become an important man; a judge in Sodom and a man of faith. Lot? Did you enjoy it when you were there? No, I did not enjoy it. I must say, I did not enjoy it. The Bible says, “He vexed his spirit,” when he was there. Or his spirit was vexed. In other words, his decision was the decision that he made was the wrong decision but he was a believing man and there he suffered for it.

If you had asked Lot, you went down there, were you able to communicate the faith that you have? So many people make bad decision and excuse themselves by saying, it's an opportunity to

witness. So Lot, you had a chance to witness; how many did you win for the Lord? Well, actually, I won very few. In fact, when Sodom was destroyed, all that were able to escape were his family and his two children became problems to him, not only because of the relationship they had to their father, but when Moab and Ammon were their children, they were troubled. Israel was troubled by Moab and Ammon from that time on. So the decision of the believing man, the worldly decision, was the decision that cost so much.

But Abram? He dwelt in the hills. He was the man of faith and God blessed him. And not only did God bless him, but he has the countless followers who were brought to the knowledge of the Lord and have been down through the years, by the testimony of that godly man.

Well, the final exhibition of faith, we all know about. We don't have to belabor this point. In verse 17, we read, “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.”

Abraham was tested at Ur of the Chaldees. He was tested as he and Lot had to make their decisions after their employees were having difficulty. He was tested with reference to Hagar. And now, he was tested with reference to Isaac. This is the supreme test. It's not surprising that so many people name the cemeteries, over the land, when the land was a biblical land, Moriah. Have you noticed that? How many cemeteries are named Moriah. Mount Moriah? That's a reference to the “loss of the dear one.” And here, on Mount Moriah.

One day, Abram was there with Isaac, and the Lord spoke to him and said, “Abraham, I want you to get up. I want you to saddle your vehicles, your horses, your whatever they are that he rode on, and I want you to make a journey.” And so he led him to Moriah.

It's so interesting, because Moriah in the view of Calvary. Moriah is very prominent, later on, in David's life. And so there he went, with Isaac his son. He had all of his material with him. He brought the wood. He brought the stones for the altar. He brought the wood. He brought the fire. He brought whatever was necessary to have the fire for the sacrifice. And can you not imagine

Isaac, along the way, because he was a young boy by this time. He’s even been said to be in his middle teens or maybe even late teens.

And, incidentally, when we’re talking about Abram’s faith, we should not leave out Isaac, too, because he did not rebel at all, so beautifully illustrative of the Lord Jesus Christ. But, finally, when everything is there, and they are starting up the mountain, Isaac said, “My Father, we have all of the equipment for the sacrifice, but where is the lamb?” “Isaac, God will provide the lamb.” You know that three day trip, from where he was in the South to Mount Moriah, must have been the most trying of all of Abram’s tests. But he had the word of God.

And, furthermore, he knew that the command could be fulfilled in only one way. The promise that he had before could be fulfilled in many ways. There are many ways in which God may have fulfilled that promise; but now, when he is told that he’s to sacrifice Isaac, there’s only one way to do that. So now, it has come down to this. And so there, as you know, he bound Isaac on the top. Isaac having asked, “My Father, where is the lamb.” God will provide the lamb. And, of course, just as he took the knife which was ordinarily to slay the sacrifice, as he raised it and was ready to strike it, God stopped him and said, “Abraham, now I know that you love me.” And they heard a ram over in the bushes that was caught in the bushes, and went over. And the ram was substituted for Isaac, the son, in a beautiful illustration itself of our Lord Jesus Christ.

As Luther once said, “If you would believe, you must crucify the question, how.” So often we debate with God about how he is to fulfill his promises. We don’t ask the question how. We must, as Luther said, “crucify the question how.” We just simply believe the word of God and we’ll find that it’s true.

Let me say just one or two last things. There is a real peril in opposing the faith that we see in the lives of others. So often, we pronounce verdicts on others lives of faith. But we should beware, as Oswald Chambers said somewhere, “Pronouncing any verdict on the life of faith, if you are not living it.” If you are not living the life of faith, you do not know what the life of faith is. It’s not within your right to criticize the life that a person who is living the life of faith is living.

Abraham’s secret is faith. He had a whole lot less to feed on than we have today. He had the promise that God had given him, which was repeated, and was narrowed down to him and to Sarah. But think of the promises that we have today. We have seen now thousands of years of the fulfillment of the word of God. We have preeminently seen the Lord Jesus Christ as the one who has come, has brought God into full revelation, has offered the atoning sacrifice. We know from the Scriptures that he’s at the right hand of the Father and there he is continuing his ministry for us as our great High Priest. Oh, how full is God’s word to us! We have no excuse for not responding in faith to the word of God.

May God, in his marvelous grace, enable us, truly, to respond in faith to the promises of the word of God. If you are here and you have never believed in our Lord Jesus Christ, we remind you of those promises. What Christ has accomplished, as Abraham’s Seed, of David’s Seed, who has offered the sacrifice by which you may be saved. Believe! Trust in Him and receive as a free gift, eternal life.

Let’s bow in prayer.

[Prayer] Father, we give Thee thanks for Thy word and we thank Thee for the illustration of Abram’s life. And we know, Lord, it was not simply the illustration of a book but it was a life that was lived in this world of which we are a part. Enable us, Lord, in the experiences of life to give ourselves to Thee in a full and wholehearted way that will honor Him, who sacrifice Himself for us. This we pray.

In Jesus’ name. Amen.