

The following sermon was preached at Redemption Baptist Church on Sunday, 27 February 2022. We encourage you to look up the Scriptures that are referenced, and see the context for yourself. May the Lord speak to your heart as you study His Word.

The Wayfaring Stranger

Hebrews 11:8-10

There is a dangerous spiritual attitude that prevails among many believers today. This attitude is causing churches to become weak and ineffective. It is causing a severe lack of volunteers for missions and evangelism, both at home and abroad. It is causing Christian homes to be spiritually weak, and open to attack from the enemy. What is this attitude? It is an attitude of unbelief. It is an attitude that says, “There are Christians who are ‘*exceptional*’ individuals. They are the ‘super-Christians.’ *They* have the ability to exercise great faith; but I’m just an average Christian. That’s just my lot.” Folks, this is not an attitude of humility: it is an attitude of unbelief. **There are no *exceptional* individuals in God’s army.**

God has given *every* believer the command, and the ability, to live by faith! The same God who calls us to have faith in Him also *imparts* to us the very faith that we need. Furthermore, He Himself performs *through us* the acts that He calls us to do, as we allow Him to do so. None of it is truly *our* doing: it is all *His* doing. All we have to do is surrender to Him, and take Him at His Word! **First Thessalonians 5:24** says, “***Faithful is he that calleth you, who also will do it.***” We all have the same “riches of His grace” at our disposal. What it comes down to is: “*Will you believe it? Will you simply take God at His Word?*”

As we examine God’s “Hall of Faith” this morning, we will learn about yet another man who took God at His Word. His name was **Abraham**. Abraham was not an “exceptional” individual, with an inherent ability to do great things for God. He was a sinner, just like you and me. He was a man of like passions and frailties as we have: yet, he chose to surrender his whole heart, soul, mind, and strength to God; and as the result, God used Him. In some respects, Abraham was, by man’s standard, a man who didn’t “live up to his full potential.” For the greater part of his life, he was a “wayfaring stranger” with no permanent home, and with no real acceptance in “society.” However, in God’s eyes, he was a tremendous success. This morning, we will learn *why* he was a success. The title of this message is ***The Wayfaring Stranger***.

Read Hebrews 11:8-10.

From this Scripture, I would like to point out the nature of Abraham’s call, and the nature of his faith.

I. The nature of Abraham’s call (v. 8)

There are several important aspects of Abraham’s faith that I wish to point out. First, though, I would like to focus on the word “***called.***” God had a specific “calling” for Abraham.

Unfortunately, many Christians misunderstand the word “calling.” Many Christians think that a “calling” is something that only pastors and missionaries experience. The thinking is that pastors are “called” to the ministry, because they are exceptional people. Folks, this doesn’t square with Scripture! The Bible stresses, again and again, that *all* Christians have a “holy calling.” For one thing, we *all* are “called” to salvation. However, **the call to salvation is inseparable from the call to service.** God saved us so that we *could* serve Him. The service

that follows our salvation is the *fruit* of our salvation. It's all part of the "salvation package" that God so freely offers. The whole point of His saving us was that we might serve Him! In **Ephesians 2:10**, Paul says that we who are saved "***are his workmanship.***" That word "***workmanship***" is translated from the word *poema*, from which we get our word "poem." *Poema* refers to a beautiful piece of art, expertly made by the hands of a craftsman. This is what *you* are to God, Christian. He wants to mould you according to His purpose, to bring glory and honour to Himself. You are His "***workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them***" (**Ephesians 2:10**).

There are ways in which *every* Christian should serve God. We should all be holy in our character and conduct. We all should be filled with the Spirit. We should all be in the Lord's House on His day, to worship Him. We should all be reading His Word, so that He can reveal Himself to us. We should all be witnessing, and giving our tithes and offerings, and doing many other acts of service. However, there are also *specific* tasks that God has for every believer. In God's eyes, no one's task is more "important" than another. God rewards us according to *faithfulness*, not according to the seeming "greatness" of our given task.

Read Luke 16:10.

Read 1 Corinthians 7:20-22.

The world of Christ's and the Apostles' day was a "three tier" world. There were freemen, who had Roman citizenship, and privilege (and often, material wealth); there were the common plebes, who had few rights, if any, and were downtrodden; and there were the bondmen (slaves) who were nothing but property, and who had no rights at all. In man's eyes, the bondman was a "nothing." Yet, God didn't see it that way. In God's eyes, His servants' tasks are of equal value! The freeman may have greater education, resources, and privileges at his disposal; yet, God's calling for the bondman is just as important as His calling for the freeman. It doesn't matter what your station in life is, or how much "privilege" you have, or don't have. God wants to use your life: and He wants you to use whatever talents you have to serve Him. Paul was a freeman, with Roman citizenship; and he used his freedom for the furthering of the Gospel. Every believer, regardless of how "big" his task may be, or what talents or resources he has, is called to carry out his task "***by faith,***" and to do it faithfully.

As for Abraham's station in life, he was a "freeman." God entrusted Abraham with much wealth and power; and he had many servants. However, before you start thinking that Abraham had a spiritual *advantage* that you and I don't have, let's take a closer look at the circumstances in Abraham's life, and the way in which he reacted to his circumstances.

II. The nature of Abraham's faith (vv. 8-10)

I wish I had a euro for every time I've heard Christians offering excuses for why they can't exercise faith in God. (For that matter, I wish I had a euro for every time *I* have offered such excuses in *my* heart!) We tend to think that if only our circumstances were different, it would be a lot easier to exercise faith. Brethren, that kind of faith is not true faith: it's *sight*! If you must have a *certain set of circumstances* in order to trust God, then you are trusting in what you are able to *see and perceive*, instead of trusting in God's promises.

The very nature of faith is that no matter *what* the circumstances are around me—whether I come from a Christian home, or a non-Christian home; whether my income is meagre, or comfortable; whether I’m educated, or poorly educated; whether I suffer great persecution for being a Christian, or minimal persecution; whether I am in good health, or in poor health; whether I’m married, or single; whether I am a child, or an adult; whether the people dearest to me are supporting me in my service to God, or are utterly despising me—*I will serve the Lord!* As we shall see, there were many reasons why Abraham *could have* doubted God. The first reason he could have doubted God was that when God first called him, **he had no idea where he was to go!** Paul says that Abraham “*went out*” from his home country, “*not knowing whither he went.*” Let’s examine the Old Testament account of God’s call to Abraham.

Read Genesis 11:27-32.

At this point in Abraham’s life, Abraham had no idea where God wanted him to go. God had not revealed it to him yet. **Verse 31** tells us that Abraham and his family set out from Ur “*to go into the land of Canaan*”; but in the following chapter, we are told that Abraham did not actually *know*, when he left Ur, that Canaan would be his final destination. Only God knew.

Now, modern archaeology has revealed that Ur (which is located in southern Iraq) was an important and prosperous city in ancient Mesopotamia. Undoubtedly, Abraham and his extended family were well-established there, with permanent dwellings. (There is no reason why Abraham wouldn’t have had a permanent dwelling, since he had much wealth.) Yet, at God’s beckoning call, he got up and left Ur, and set off toward an unknown destination. Abraham had a family and large household to provide for; and there was no telling how this move would affect their future. Nevertheless, he pulled up stakes and started moving, “*not knowing whither he went.*”

It may seem incredible that someone could have that kind of faith; but the reality is that God *constantly* calls believers to set out in directions they know not—whether they be geographical moves, or economic moves, or even theological moves (for example, abandoning long-held false doctrines). Sometimes God has an area of service that He wants you to embark upon, of which you have no previous knowledge or experience; and it is scary. It may be teaching a Sunday School class, or helping with Holiday Bible Club, or knocking on doors, or handing out tracts, or simply witnessing to your neighbour. It may be as radical as leaving your comfortable home and culture, and going to another country to take the Gospel to people who have never even heard Jesus’ name. Sometimes He calls us to take steps of faith that seem crazy to unbelievers, and even to other believers. Yet, in Christ, believers *can* find the faith, and the wherewithal, to do what God commands them.

Now, why else could Abraham have doubted God? He could have doubted God because **he was going against the opinion of most of his family.** Let’s take a closer look at the events that surrounded God’s call to Abraham, as related to us by Stephen, in his last sermon before his death. As we will see, there were definitely some *family issues* which *could* have caused Abraham to hesitate about obeying God’s call—if he had allowed them to do so.

Read Acts 7:1-5.

We often forget that when Abraham left Ur, he was not “going it alone,” with only himself and his wife. His father Terah, his brother Nahor, and his nephew Lot, all went with him, too. In fact, the Bible says that *Abraham* went *with his father*. Terah, as the patriarch of his family, was the one who was leading in this expedition. However, in their travels, they stopped at a place in Syria, which they later named Haran. Evidently, they were there for a good while. We don’t know how long they were there; but apparently, they dug their roots deep. In fact, this place eventually became a notable city, which was named after Abraham’s brother, Haran. The city of Nahor, which was in that same region of Syria, was named after Abraham’s other brother Nahor, as well. This shows that Abraham and his family were *not* mere “passers-by”; they became well-established in the region. However, after they had been there for a while, God “tapped Abraham on the shoulder,” so to speak, and let him know that Haran was *not* the land to which He was calling him. So, at age 75, Abraham got up and left his father and brother and their families, and travelled south to Canaan; and when he arrived there, God finally revealed to him that this was the land that He had promised him.

Now, I want to point out an important statement in **verse 5**. Stephen says that after the death of Abraham’s father, Abraham left Haran and moved on to Canaan, as God had originally commanded him to do when he was still living in Ur. For sake of time, I won’t get into the minutia of all this: but when you look carefully at the history of Abraham’s life, you find that Abraham was born when his father was 130 years old; *and*, Abraham was the *youngest*, not the oldest, of his three brothers (even though his name is listed first in **Genesis 11**). Like many other of the patriarchs, Abraham was the *youngest* son, yet was given the blessing and birth right that would normally be given to the eldest. What this shows is that Terah regarded Abraham as spiritually qualified to be the next leader of their family, even though he was the youngest. The very fact that God called *Abraham*, and that Terah uprooted their *whole family* to go with Abraham, shows that Terah really believed that God had spoken to his son; and he was “on board” with it. He wanted their whole family to partake of the blessing.

Yet, somewhere along the line, something changed in Terah’s heart. As they were travelling northward through Mesopotamia, Terah found that he liked the area of Padan-Aram (Syria); and he decided to stay there, and build a city--even though God had not indicated to Abraham that this was the land that He was giving them. In fact, Terah and his family liked this area so well, that when Abraham finally left Haran, the whole family (except for his nephew, Lot) stayed behind in Haran. Somehow, Abraham’s father lost his passion for doing God’s will; and he became comfortable in Haran. Even worse, Terah got involved in some level of *idolatry* after he settled down in Haran! Not only did *he* get into idolatry, but his other living son, Nahor, got into some level of idolatry, as well. Joshua reminded the children of Israel of this fact shortly before his death.

Read Joshua 24:1-3.

Were Terah and Nahor really saved? Maybe not. But, then again, maybe they were backslidden believers, who superficially gave a nod to the idolatrous practices of Padan-Aram, for the sake of sealing trade and business deals. However, what we do know for sure is that Terah and his other son, Nahor, did *not* travel on to Canaan with Abraham, even though they knew that this it was God’s will. They stayed in Haran, and blended in with the culture; and a couple generations later, Laban (Nahor’s grandson), no longer even pretended to be a worshipper of Jehovah. He gave lip-service to Jehovah earlier in life; but the reality is that he

was a lying, covetous idolator, who spoke of Jehovah only when a believer was around. Terah paid a great price for deciding to “park” in the world for a little while, didn’t he? He eventually lost his family spiritually (except for Abraham and Sarah, and his nephew Lot). He lost interest in doing God’s will; and his family followed him.

It is easy to see how easily Abraham, amid these circumstances, could have begun to doubt God’s will. After all, things were going well for their family in Haran. They were prosperous, and business was flourishing. Wasn’t that a sign of God’s blessing? And surely God wouldn’t want him to leave his father and other family members, and be separated from them! Shouldn’t family come first? And, after all, might not *Haran* be the Promised Land?

Are you beginning to see some parallels to *our* lives today? Tragically, many Christians abandon God’s will, yet somehow convince themselves that it’s O.K. Family opposition is often something that Satan uses to turn Christians aside from God’s will. It is especially difficult when family members are *saved*, yet carnal, and do not understand that doing God’s revealed will *must* come first in our lives. Sometimes the things that we embrace in place of God’s will are seemingly *good things*. Yet, there is always a great price to be paid for not trusting God, and for getting out of His will. Terah paid that price. Nahor paid that price. Lot (although he did go to Canaan with his uncle Abram) paid that price, as well, when he began to covet the business prospects in the wicked city of Sodom, and moved his family there. However, Abraham never lost his desire to do God’s will. He was willing to follow the Lord, no matter where the path led. This is the kind of faith that is required to be Christ’s disciple.

Read Luke 9:57-60.

What did the man mean when he said, “*Lord, suffer me first to go and bury my father*”? And what did Jesus mean when He replied, “*Let the dead bury their dead: but go thou and preach the kingdom of God*”? Was this man’s father really dead? And was Christ really demanding that he skip his father’s funeral that day, and follow Him instead? No, that is not the meaning. (Obviously, Jesus Himself attended funerals!) You see, the man’s request to “Suffer me to bury my father” does not literally refer to burying one’s father. This is an old Oriental expression, which is still used in the Middle East today; and it means, “I’m tied up with family obligations at this time in my life, and I must fulfil them first.” The man’s father was very much alive; and he was telling Jesus, “I’ll follow you, Jesus--but not just yet. Maybe in a few years I’ll follow you full-time.” However, Jesus did not accept this man’s excuse. The Light of the world would not be with them for long; and those who wished to learn from Him couldn’t be “part time” disciples! The same is still true today. Christ *never* accepts half-hearted devotion. Christ still does not accept “part-time” discipleship, or delayed discipleship. Those who would learn of Him must follow Him *now*, wherever He may lead.

Many Christians’ lives are in shambles today because they have chosen to put what they think are *good* things ahead of God’s will. Christian parents are losing their kids to the world, because they got too comfortable in the world. They stopped believing that doing God’s perfect will is of paramount necessity. Lot made that mistake, too: and he paid a heavy price! He thought he would provide a better life for his family; but in the end, he lost *everything*—not only spiritually, but even materially! Christian, **are you resolved to believe and do God’s will, regardless of opposition—even if it be from your own family?**

Now, is there any other reason why Abraham *could* have doubted God? Yes, there is. The biggest reason that Abraham could have doubted is that **he never saw the fulfilment of most of God's promises.** (And the one part of the promise that he *did* see fulfilled took 25 years to materialise!) Remember, there were four basic components of God's covenant with Abraham. **First, God promised that he would have a son.** Abraham did see this promise fulfilled; but it was with great delay. Abraham had to wait for 25 years to see the birth of his son of promise, Isaac! The second part of the promise was that **from that son of promise there would spring a great nation.** Abraham never saw that part of the promise at all. The third part of the **promise that he and his seed would be given the land of Canaan for an inheritance.** Again, Abraham *never* saw this part of the promise fulfilled; and neither did his son Isaac, or of his grandson Jacob. In fact, his descendants didn't see the fulfilment of this promise for 470 years! The last part of the promise was that **through Abraham's seed all the earth would be blessed.** Abraham's Seed, the Lord Jesus Christ, was not born for 1,920 more years; so Abraham definitely never saw this promised fulfilled. Yet, he believed God's word.

In man's eyes, it may have seemed that Abraham didn't live up to his potential. He had great wealth; yet, he never settled down anywhere. Men of his wealth could have founded a powerful city-state, and have conquered other lands, and have made themselves very rich and powerful. When God gave Abraham supernatural victory over the five kings of Mesopotamia with a mere 300 armed servants, and he rescued the citizens of Sodom and Gomorrah, he *could* have made great demands of them, and required tribute. He was even in a position to make himself a king! Yet, he took nothing from them. Why? Because *God* was His portion.

Abraham never even owned a parcel of land in Canaan, except for the cave of Machpelah, which he purchased to bury his wife after she had died. He never became a citizen of any city-state in Canaan. He never integrated into Canaanite society. He never had a house—even though he certainly *could* have built a nice house. He lived in “tabernacles” (tents) all his life. He moved to at least four locations in Canaan (that we know of): Shechem, Bethel, Hebron, and Beersheba. His son Isaac and his grandson Jacob, though they also were the “sons of promise,” lived this same nomadic lifestyle—always moving, always living in tents, owning little land, and always considered to be strangers, no matter where they went.

Abraham could easily have doubted God in these circumstances. After all, if this land was supposed to be his, why wasn't that promise materialising? Why couldn't he have the land *now*? Why hadn't God led him to take into possession at least a *portion* of the land? I don't know how much the Canaanites knew about this covenant that God had made with Abraham; but those who knew about it undoubtedly laughed and snickered. “This old man, who doesn't even have a son, is going to inherit *this* land for his descendants? This man, who owns only a small parcel of ground, is going to inherit *this* land? This man, who won't make any political alliances with anyone, or make any kind of move to take possession of the land, is going to be great? He's a nice guy; but, let's face it—he's a little ‘touched in the head.’”

Do *you* doubt God when things that He has promised just don't seem to be materialising? What if there are great things that God wants to accomplish through you that you will never see in your lifetime? Will you stop serving God because things don't seem to be working out the way *you* think they should be working out? Abraham didn't. All outward appearances seemed to indicate that Abraham was a sweet, but delusional old man who was building “castles in the air.” However, Abraham had surrendered all his heart, soul, mind, strength, and

body to the Lord; and he didn't care what others thought. God had said that this land would belong to his descendants; and he knew that somehow, some way, God would make it happen.

We've examined the reasons why Abraham *could have* doubted God. In closing, I'd like to look at the reason why he *didn't* doubt God. Let's read **verse 10** again. (**Read Hebrews 11:10.**) Why did Abraham not doubt God's leading? Paul says that it was because he "***looked for a city which hath foundations, whose builder and maker is God.***" The reason Abraham didn't doubt God was that he had **his eyes set on Heaven!**

You know, many Christians almost suppress the thought of Heaven—as though it were a bad thing to think *too much* about our heavenly home. "After all," they say, "we don't want to be 'too heavenly minded to be of any earthly good.'" Folks, that's not what the Bible says! **Philippians 3:20** says that "***our conversation*** (or "citizenship") ***is in heaven, from whence we look for our Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ.***" When your eyes are on Heaven, your thoughts will be established, because you will have everything in the right perspective.

By the way, there are *U.S. military* documents that have come out in recent years, in which it is stated that Bible-believing Christians are a "threat to world peace," because they are not interested in advancing political solutions to world peace, but rather look forward to Heaven as an "escape" from earthly problems! Even the *world* understands the implications of our belief that "this world is not our home"! If we really believe that this world is not our home, then we will not put stock in human, earthly solutions to the world's problems. Politics certainly isn't the answer! Politics, at its very best, is a dirty, compromising business. The *only* hope for this fallen world is the Gospel of Jesus Christ. As Christians, we should be looking to the Saviour, Jesus Christ, as our only Hope. We should look at this life as a fleeting thing, and not as the "end-all" of our existence. I'm not talking about selling your house and possessions, and going out to a mountaintop to wait for the Rapture. What I *am* talking about is holding very loosely to things of this earth. I'm talking about not loving the world, neither the things that are in the world. I'm talking about looking at everything in light of eternity.

Before we close this morning, let's take a quick peek at that "***city which hath foundations, whose builder and maker is God.***"

Read Revelation 21:9 - 22:7.

Imagine if God were to allow you to see this beautiful city for even a few seconds. Do you think your perspective would ever be the same again? I don't think so! When your eyes are fixed on Heaven, it doesn't cause you to become "fatalistic," or to seek for an "escape hatch" out of this life. It's just the opposite! When your eyes are fixed on Heaven, you are compelled to exert all your heart, will, and mind to serving God in this short lifetime. Unlike unsaved people, who spend their lives in pursuit of things that will not last, Spirit-filled Christians are *not* "chasing rainbows." Our service to God will bring us everlasting reward!

Conclusion: Just as Abraham left for Canaan, and brought with him "***the souls he had gotten in Haran,***" so we should labour for souls in this short lifetime, and keep our eyes on the time when we will all be at home with the Lord. When your eyes are fixed on Heaven, earthly problems, which seem gargantuan, suddenly look small. When your eyes are fixed on Heaven, doing God's will no longer looks impossible. God has promised to meet all our needs. The question is: "How much do you believe it?"

In closing, I would also ask: “**Are you saved?**” Are you on your way to that city? No question is more important than that one! The only way you can be brought into God’s family, and be set on the path to Heaven, is to trust in Christ alone to save you. Believe on Him today, and you will be saved! Jesus said, *“I am the way, the truth, and the life; no man cometh unto the Father but by me.”*