

# 2.25.2024 Sermon

## Coming Home | Hebrews 11:8-10

### SUMMARY KEYWORDS

faith, abraham, god, lived, home, promised, place, called, hebrews, giving, people, leave, verse, trusting, life, city, comfort, move, idea, broken

### SPEAKERS

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Hi, my name is Matt Kistler. It is a joy to be with you here today. As James said, we are continuing our Hebrews 11 sermon series about faith, looking at a new character, Abraham, and thinking about how his story can reveal how we can walk in faith today.

To start, let's remember some of the things that we've learned already. There we go, we got a clicker. What stuck out to me is how each character that we've looked at in Hebrews 11 has been celebrated for a different aspect of faith. I had always kind of thought of this chapter as celebrating different people because they were cool and had a cool story. But what I'm seeing now is that the author seems to be painting a portrait of faith, using the stories of God's people to describe what faith is not just encouraging us by talking about faithful people but describing faith and its different elements through their stories. To know faith is to understand how it is expressed.

Hebrews 11 highlights these different stories to show different facets of faith. I think that's an important lesson for ourselves, too. There's no perfect faith that we're aspiring toward, but rather, God's love. God's Spirit shines through us and reveals faith uniquely through us. And you know, there are patterns there are consistent pieces of what that faith looks like. But we each have a faith story to tell whether we're in Hebrews 11 or not. So, for example, faith helps us to answer the questions in our lives that are beyond our comprehension.

By trusting that God created the world, we reveal our faith. That was some of the first verses in the chapter. Faith includes doing things that please God, Abel made a sacrifice. We're not quite sure why he did it or how he knew what to do. But it was in that action that his faith was revealed. Faith looks like walking with God, being in a relationship. Compared to Abel, Enoch, we don't know anything he did. We didn't know any of his actions or deeds. Only that he

walked with God. And that that was faith. And faith looks like trusting God when the evidence we have leaves us short of certainty.

We have to jump from what we know for sure to be able to get where we need to go, just as Noah did, even when rationality tells us that we don't have enough data. So, faith is like this gem that we can look at from different angles. And today's verse brings a different facet of faith because it's being projected through a different life, which is Abraham's. So, our passage today is Hebrews 11, eight through 10. By faith, Abraham, when called to go to a place he would later receive as his inheritance, obeyed and went, even though he did not know where he was going.

Let's just stop there. I just love that phrase. He obeyed. And when he had no idea where he was going, I think that is very relatable. We often have no idea where we're going. By faith, he made his home in the Promised Land like a stranger in a foreign country. He lived in tents, as did Isaac and Jacob, who were heirs with him have the same promise. So, he was given a promised land, but he was a stranger in it. That's an interesting promise. Even his children, his grandchildren, who had that promise, still were strangers. Why would he do this?

For he was looking forward to the city with foundations whose architect and builder is God. So, what elements of faith do we see here? Some of these things they kind of are familiar. We have the trusting in uncertainty. He was willing to go, even though he had no idea where he was going. But the thing that I think sticks out that's kind of Abraham's unique piece of the faith puzzle is how he redefines his sense of home. That's what I want to think about today.

Home is the core concept I just hear in this passage. And so, for me, I wanted to start with what home is to me because it's very meaningful. So, I want to tell you a bit about my home. At the age of two and a half, my family moved to what I call my home. It is in the northwest corner of Lehigh County, about an hour and a half north of here, in a town called New Tripoli, and it is mainly farmland. We moved next to my father's parents and lived on their farm. This farm is about 10 miles from where our ancestor Johannes Jorge or John George Kistler was buried in 1767.

Haven't moved far. We lived on Kistler Road, which you can kind of see there. It's above Ridge, but it's I don't know. It looks better on the screen I was looking at. On the back you can see we lived on Kistler road. It was named for my grandfather, Willard Kistler, who was on the founding School Board of our school district and was respected wherever he went. We lived on top of a hill with rolling fields falling away in every direction. In the distance, you could see the Appalachian Mountains framed in our large living room window.

In the summer, we could sit in the rockers watching rain storms slowly move toward us. Lightning dancing in the sky. Home was the farm mostly potatoes, pigs, and apples with hay and field corn mixed in from time to time. My home was not prone to floods or droughts, tornadoes, hurricanes, earthquakes, volcanoes, tsunamis, or blizzards. It was safe. My parents raising us in faith with love sitting in the backyard or on the top of the barn roof, watching the sunset. And the wind flows through the right wheat.

It's about as close to Shalom as you're gonna see. I remember when I was in high school and I was having my high school graduation party. I invited a couple of teachers because I'm a nerd. It is just what it is. And I was inviting my favorite economics teacher, Mr. Kleiner, who was the best economics teacher I've ever had. And you know, he's a little skeptical about coming but I said you should just come. It's a beautiful place. You'll like it. While Mr. Kleiner did show up for the party, and it was a gorgeous tonight.

And he got out of his car as the sun was dipping behind the mountain. And he said Kistler, you're right? This is God's country. God's country, is a place where all is right. Where the Kingdom of Heaven breaks through and all that is broken and hurting the world finds healing and peace. Guys called me away from this home. First for school and then later with Stephanie to serve others as strangers living in a place that could never fully be our home. God calls us to discover our home, our eternal home.

God's country has deeper foundations. Abraham started his life in one place called Earth. I don't know how that got named, but the marketers could maybe work on that or where you are. Sorry. This is what goes on in my mind. There's a preacher who moved with his father and his nephew to a second place called Hearin when he was 75, God asked him to move again, leaving permanently to live in a place that would be promised to his descendants.

Abraham never was promised a home in the Promised Land, he moved from place to place living among other peoples and tribes for the rest of his days. And as much as it is difficult for us to leave home, my hunch is that it was much more difficult for Abraham. For us, as Americans, we value our independence, our individualism, personal freedom getting out from under our parents. In Abraham's time being amongst your own people was your only security being with your family and the relationships you had built, was the only thing that you could trust in to survive.

Moving to a new place meant leaving not just the familiarity of home, but the protection and the opportunities it provided. So, while we might imagine Abraham being maybe a little relieved, I mean, heck, you might just feel ready to jump on the caravan with him and say, let's go. I feel like there's such a sense of loss in this passage giving up your home. This place where you grew up, where your family is your sense of shalom, giving up, you're standing in civil society,

the relationships you've built, the familiar friends, the places that bring you a smile, giving up your opportunities, your turn to make good on all the financial promises, herds finally ready to grow investments ready to mature.

This is what he's giving up. And all this can be summarized in this verse nine that that just really struck me by faith, he made his home in the Promised Land, like a stranger in a foreign country. He lived in tents. He had lived in houses, and now he lived in tents. He replaced the idea in life of permanence, for life of wondering, why would you do that? What would spur on Abraham, and not only him, but millions of others, over time to give up their place of security, and home.

When we look back at the long history of God's people over and over again, we see people making this choice to leave a stable, secure situation and put themselves intentionally into a place that is new and uncomfortable. We can call this walking by faith, but what's going on in their hearts and their minds as they weigh these decisions. For Abraham, maybe you could say there is some lore or promise to greatness. In Genesis chapter 12. When God calls Abraham who later became known as Abraham, God says, I will make you into a great nation and I will bless you, I will make your name great, and you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, oh curse those who curse you and all people on earth will be blessed through you.

So, you know, maybe Abraham some had some idea, some earthly incentive here. In Genesis 15, when he had acquired lots of stuff, he got rich, he realized that all of it would go away when he died. He had no children and no legacy. And God promised him a nation of offspring. And Abraham believed him. So again, Abraham might have had some incentive to trust God. But what we've seen in the lives of so many people who have followed in Abraham's footsteps, in big ways, or small ways, is that we aren't guaranteed that success when we give up our home for God's sake, we do lose something. There's a bigger picture in mind.

And that's what verse 10 of Hebrews 11 reminds us, it says, Hebrews, Abraham lived in tents, not because it would be to his benefit, because he was looking forward to the city of God. He had a picture of something that was coming. And that was near. That was what his faith was in. And so, what is the city of God? What is this idea that drives us to act not only today, but to look to the future? I think of Revelation 22 immediately, which kind of describes this future wholeness.

Verses one to five say Then the angel showed me the river of the water of life as clear as crystal flowing from the throne of God and of the land down the middle of the great street of the city. And picture that. On each side of the river stood a tree of life bearing 12 crops of fruit yielding its fruit every month. And the leaves of the tree are for the healing of the nations. No

longer will there be any curse, the throne of God and of the Lamb will be in the city in his servants will serve him they will see his face and his name will be on their foreheads.

There will be no more night they will not need the light of a lamp with a light of the sun. For the Lord God will give them light, and they will reign forever and ever. Amen, Abraham had this vision of God's City of heaven, he had a picture of it, which was vivid enough to encourage him to act. Throughout history, the people of God have grasped this vision, a vision of things made right, which encourages us for the future and causes us to act today. When Christ taught us to pray, "Thy kingdom come," it's not just for the future, it's what we want, we have a picture of your kingdom of heaven in our lives today, and that's what we desire.

So, one of the trademark signs of God's people, is a willingness to release our place of comfort, and to move into the world. As bringers of God's kingdom, our call isn't to hide in our homes, building ever taller walls to keep the evil out. But rather to ride out into the broken world, healing the broken-hearted, proclaiming justice to broken systems declaring God's love and redemption over all the earth. The challenge of Hebrews 11, especially verses eight to 10, is to join Abraham in leaving home, living a life intense, guided by God's Spirit.

That's faith. That's what the author is saying is faith doesn't mean we have to travel overseas or change our address. It's the same kind of faith that we see when a teacher decides to take less money, less prestige, and fewer resources to serve their community and its children. It's the type of faith that causes us to demand justice, for those who are mistreated even if they aren't part of our people. It's the type of faith that puts others first rather than me first. It's the type of faith that emboldened a child to sit with the lonely kid. When popularity beckons. It's the type of faith comprised of hundreds of daily choices both big and small, that affirm that the comfort, the way it's always done the dreams of success as defined by those around us. Those aren't our own. It's the type of faith that emboldened us to make radical decisions, which otherwise diminish our net worth our popularity, our comfort, our security, our upward mobility. I believe God challenges each of us with these sorts of opportunities, God is always calling us deeper and higher into relationship.

Let it come with risk and uncertainty. Abraham not did not get to build a city, or conquer the land promised to him. He lived in tents all his life, and was promised that it would be hundreds of years before the land would be possessed by his people. In the same way, we may never again, regain what we let go of when we choose to redefine our home. We may never have the same safety, we may never have the same comfort, we may never earn back the wealth that we relinquish, or be thanked for our service or sacrifice.

But ultimately, redefining home means changing our metrics for success in life. It means making our life our idea of success, about chasing after the whispers of Christ, pursuing the

mystery of a future that we can't prove, or ensure. So, you may ask, is it worth it? It's a good question. Is it worth trading? The tangible, the natural, now for a hope of the night yet I can't answer for you. But I can tell you that I've made my choice. I've decided to follow Jesus. Even growing up in a home like mine, a place as close to heaven, as you will find. I've seen a better city.

I've seen a life fueled by love of others, instead of a life of love for self is richer. I've seen how pursuing experiences with God rather than my own pleasure, leaves me more fulfilled. I have seen how giving up control and self-sufficiency and self-definition definition have helped me see the world through a lens of freedom and abundance and identity in Christ. Each day of my life, I'm thankful for the faith that God has planted intended within me. I don't know how I could live without it. My home will always be the one built by God.

So, the question that I leave you with is simple. Where is your home? Are you looking forward to a city built by God? Amen.