Sunday worship message 9/13/15

Long for A Better Country

Hebrews 11:8-22

Key Verse 11:16

**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.**

When I was young, I admired Winston Churchill so much because of his courage and never-giving-up spirit and wanted to be like him in the future. I liked his cigar smoking because it looked so cool and wanted smoke cigar too. And I learned a surprising thing about Churchill after I met shepherdess Sarah Larsen. Before shepherdess Sarah married Shepherd William, her name was Sarah Churchill. I was so surprised to hear her last name and I asked her if she is related to Churchill’s family. And she said yes. I thought, “Wow, I am seeing one of the Churchills”. And I started to admire shepherd Sarah. Why do we want to have great ancestors? It is because it is great honor for us to be related to great people and we look up to them as role model. Now we have a true ancestor who is our perfect spiritual role model. Who is he? Yes. Abraham! Abraham is father of all believers in Jesus. Galatians 3:28,29 says, **28 There is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, nor is there male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus. 29 If you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham’s seed, and heirs according to the promise.** When Zacchaeus repented and accepted him Jesus said, **“Today salvation has come to this house, because this man, too, is a son of Abraham.**(Lk 19:9) Jesus identified those who believe Jesus as son of Abraham. In today’s passage we can see Abraham and other patriarchs’ faith. God raised Abraham as forefather of all believers so that all his descendants may follow his example. His faith should be our faith. May God help us to learn Abraham and other patriarchs’ faith and their life so that we may also please God through our life of faith.

1. By faith Abraham obeyed and went (8-12)

Look at verse 8. **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.** When God called Abraham, he was 75 and he was living a well-established life in the most civilized area. He was enjoying his retired life even though he didn’t have any children. Then God called him to go to a new place with a promise. For Abraham, moving to new place was like uprooting his whole life and re-establishing it all over again. It was very risky to do that in such old age. Another problem was he didn’t know where he was going. Think about trying to immigrate to other country but you don’t know anything about the country. I still remember how much I was anxious and worried when I came to America as a missionary even though I had some knowledge about this nation. To Abraham God’s calling was like stirring his secure life zone just like throwing a big stone into a calm pond.

How did Abraham respond to God’s calling? He obeyed and went. How could do that? Bible says, ‘By faith, Abraham obeyed and went’. His obedience came from his faith. If he had considered obeying God’s calling based on his human thoughts or calculation, he could have never done it because it didn’t make any sense. But by faith he overcame all human thoughts and fear and anxiety and obeyed. Like Abraham, only by faith we can truly obey God because God’s way is beyond our understanding, reasoning and ability. How can we love our enemies even though it is hard to love our own family members and church members? How can we make disciple of all nations even if it is hard to help one person to believe? Only by faith we can obey his word.

Also Abraham took action to obey God’s calling. He didn’t just agree with God’s calling but he took practical action based on his faith. Many people think they have faith but they don’t obey God’s word in their practical life. The faith without action is not real faith. When we take action according to the faith, our faith can be completed.

Then what faith did Abraham have? He entrusted his whole life in God’s hands and established his life on God’s promise. Why do you think God told him to go to a new land? There might be several reasons such as to let him leave idol worship environment of his home country. But the real reason was to let him establish his life on God’s promise and learn how to live by faith in God alone. Before, Abraham had lived for his own thoughts and desire relying on his own strength and resources. But now by calling Abraham to the new land, God let him rebuild his life based on God’s promise and live by faith in Him alone.

Just as God called Abraham to go to new land, God calls each of us to go to a new land through Jesus Christ. He wants us to rebuild our life based on his word and promise and live by faith in him alone. Peter was a mere fisherman. But one day Jesus called Peter saying, “Don’t be afraid; from now on you will catch men”. Then Peter followed Jesus leaving everything behind. He decided to live for the calling entrusting his whole live in Jesus’ hands. Where are you now? Are you in the new land or still in your hometown? Or in the middle? “Go from your country to the land I will show you, I will make you a blessing” Let’s obey and go to the promise land by faith.

Look at verse 9 and 10. **9 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 of the same promise. 10 For he was looking forward to the city with foundations, whose architect and builder is God**. It is interesting to see how Abraham lived in the promised land. Abraham made his home in the land like a stranger. He lived in tents. Not only him but his descendants Isaac and Jacob also lived in the tents. We use tents when we stay in some place temporarily such as beach or mountain camping. Living in a promise land, Abraham was supposed to build a house with good foundation. But he lived in tents like a stranger. Verse 10 explained the reason. **For he was looking forward to the city with foundations, whose architect and builder is God**. He lived in the tent because he was looking forward to the city with foundations that God built, which is in the kingdom of heaven. When Abraham had arrived to the promise land he realized that the land could not be his permanent place. Even though the land was promised, still it was not that much different from his home land. He and his sons experienced famine several times in the land and the people in the land were so wicked such as people in the Sodom and Gomorra. And there were war among kings in the land. In some sense the land was worse than his home land. And Abraham realized that the land was not ultimate promise land and looked forward to the city with foundations that God built. One difference between a tent and the city is that tent doesn’t have foundation but the city does. The tent shows the nature of things of this world. The thing of this world didn’t have true foundation. So it can collapse any time. But the city that God built has foundations and the foundation is so strong and solid that the city never collapses but stands forever. Also the city with the foundations is perfect place for us to live because it was made by God. Whatever God makes it is perfect. Abraham looked for this perfect place as his real promise land.

Then what is the earthly promise land to Abraham? The promise land on earth was the spiritual training field where God’s people would be trained to grow in faith and become holy and get ready to inherit the true promise land in heaven. Living in the land Abraham was trained to be a man of faith and man of God. Also he established a foundation for his descendants. Also we can learn Abraham lived a life that matched with his faith. With the hope of the city with foundations, he lived in tents. Living in tents is uncomfortable. I love tent camping but my family never had tent camping because my wife Sarah doesn’t like tent with the reason that tent doesn’t have bathroom for shower and bugs can enter into the tent. Just couple of days living in tent would be fun but living in tent for many years is totally different story. Living in tents was the symbol of Abraham’s practical life style and pattern that matched with his hope for the city in heaven.

Our life on earth is just like Abraham’s life in the promise land. This world is our temporary place where we stay for a while until we enter the kingdom of heaven. In this world we could have many trials and hardships. Going through all of these we will be trained to have strong faith in God and become holy people. So when we have any problem instead of complaining or being discouraged we’d better to take it as a chance to learn faith in God. This world is also our mission field where we are commended to make disciples of all nations. We have to carry out the mission until our life on earth ends.

Look at verse 11 and 12. **11 And by faith even Sarah, who was past childbearing age, was enabled to bear children because she considered him faithful who had made the promise. 12 And so from this one man, and he as good as dead, came descendants as numerous as the stars in the sky and as countless as the sand on the seashore.** When God appeared to Abraham again, Sarah was 90 years old. She was past childbearing age. But by faith she was enabled to bear children even with the hopeless condition. What did she believe? It says, ‘because she considered him faithful who had made the promise’ She believed God is faithful. She believed that God would never fail fulfilling his promise because he is faithful God. Yes. We can believe all his word and promise because God is faithful. This faith enabled her to have a child in impossible condition. Same thing happened to Abraham. He was as good as dead in terms of child bearing. Expecting a son from him was like expecting dried bones to join together and walk. But Abraham believed the God almighty, the Elshaddi, then from him came descendants as numerous as stars in the sky and as countless as the sand on the seashore.

Through this we can learn that we should not be discouraged because of our human condition or shortcomings. We try to find thousands of reasons from us why we cannot do something. Yes. We could be as good as dead. We might be pass childbearing age. But our faith in God can enable us to something that looks impossible. Faith in God Almighty can enable a man as good as dead to produce millions descendants. Jesus said, “**If you can? Everything is possible for one who believes.”(Mk 9:23)** Apostle Paul also proclaimed that he could do everything in the Lord who gave him the power. He even boasted about his weakness because the Lord told him that his power was made perfect in his weakness. God’s almighty power can be revealed through our weakness all the more.

Preparing this passage I decided to stop talking about my age thing anymore and decided to remain as young missionary forever. I pray that I may serve campus students even after age 99 if God allows me to live that long. Through their life journey on the promise land God helped Abraham and Sarah to know God is faithful and he is Almighty and learn how serve God’ will beyond all their limitations.

**Long for a Better Country (13-22)**

Look at verse 13-16.**13 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. 14 People who say such things show that they are looking for a country of their own. 15 If they had been thinking of the country they had left, they would have had opportunity to return. 16 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.** When Abraham and other patriarch died they did not receive the things promised. When Abraham died he saw only one true Son Isaac and was buried in Canaan land. When Jacob died the total number of descendants was about 70 and they were still strangers in the land. But all of them still believed God’s promise. How could they do that? **First, they saw the things promised and welcomed them in a distance.** It means by faith they saw the things that would come true in the future and embraced them just as if they had had the things with them. Kids are so excited about Christmas. When Christmas day is over they already start thinking about next year Christmas gift. Even though next Christmas is 12 months far way they are exited about the gift even though they don’t get it yet. Our forefathers didn’t receive the things promised yet but they already saw them by faith and kept their faith to the end.

We stop praying when it seems like there is no progress. But that is not faith. Faith is to pray for something that we don’t see now but that will happen in the future. St. Augustine used to be a terrible prodigal son. He even got a son through his adulterous relationship. But his mother Monica prayed for him over 20 years. Then Augustine repented and became one of the great servants of God. When we pray for our children and bible students we have to pray for them seeing their future picture, 20 or 30 years later pictures. We have to pray for world mission seeing all nations including Muslim nations come back to God and worship him.

**Second, they longed for a better country**. Look at verse 14-16 again.**14 People who say such things show that they are looking for a country of their own. 15 If they had been thinking of the country they had left, they would have had opportunity to return. 16 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.** Abraham and other patriarchs looked for a country of their own. And if the country that they had thought of were the country they had left, they would have returned to the country. But they didn’t return to their own country. Why? Look at verse 16 again. **16 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.** It was because they were longing for a better country- A heavenly one, the kingdom of God. Even though they lived in the promised land, they still wanted to go to a better country. It was because they were not satisfied with the land. Even though they lived in the promised land they suffered a lot in many ways. There were troubles after troubles. When Jacob met Pharaoh, he introduced himself like this. **“The years of my pilgrimage are a hundred and thirty. My years have been few and difficult, and they do not equal the years of the pilgrimage of my fathers”. He confessed that his life was difficult and he and his fathers lived as pilgrims.** Living difficult life in the land, Abraham and the patriarchs realized that the country in this world never could be their true home country. And they longed for the heavenly country, where they could find true rest and happiness.

People want to come to America to live a better life. They even risk their lives to come. Then America is the perfect place to live. We have tons of problems here. We hear the news of gunshot killings almost every day. It seems like there is no safe place. How about our personal life? How many problems do we have now? You can count 5-6 problems quickly. One mother shared one story. Her 5 years old son came to her and said, “Mom, life is so hard”. The mother was shocked thinking how come 5-year-old boy can say that. But I can understand what the boy said. If someone dreams to have a perfect life in this world, he doesn’t have right sense. These days one picture of a three years old boy named, Aylan Krudi made whole world sad. His family tried to escape their country Syria’s civil war and wanted to go to Germany passing through Turkey and Greece.But the boat they were aboard was turn over by big waves. Krudi and his mother and brother were found dead on the seashore in Turkey. Even though they wanted to go to Germany, all European countries didn’t want to accept refugees. There was no country for the little three-year-old boy to go.

Where is the country where we can live without any agony and suffering and take perfect rest?

Where is the country where this little boy can smile again? What is the country? Yes. A heavenly one. The kingdom of heaven! Only kingdom of heaven is the only country where we can take true rest and peace. Abraham and other patriarchs lived as strangers in the land enduring all the hardships and trials with the hope of the better country.

What was the reward for their faith? **Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God, for he has prepared a city for them.** When they lived longing for the kingdom of heaven by faith, God was not ashamed to be called their God. In other word, he loved to be called their God. So God introduced himself as “I am God of Abraham, God of Isaac, God of Jacob” God wants to be called their God for those who live by faith longing for the kingdom of God. And God prepared a city for them.

Since Adam’s fall this world became hard place to live. God knew that men need a better country. And he prepared a better country for sinners through Jesus Christ. God called each of us to take us to the better country. Now we are pilgrims together with our forefather Abraham in this corrupted world. May God help us to live by faith as pilgrims with the hope of kingdom of God so that God may be pleased to be called God of each of us. “I am God of Andrew Cuevas” “I am God of Daniel Tourn” “I am God of David Park”

Look at verse 17-19.**17 By faith Abraham, when God tested him, offered Isaac as a sacrifice. He who had embraced the promises was about to sacrifice his one and only son, 18 even though God had said to him, “It is through Isaac that your offspring will be reckoned.”19 Abraham reasoned that God could even raise the dead, and so in a manner of speaking he did receive Isaac back from death.** When God told Abraham to offered Isaac, he might not understand why God told him to sacrifice Isaac even though God promised that his offspring would be reckoned through Isaac. But Abraham decided to sacrifice Isaac because he reasoned that God could even raise the dead. By faith he received Isaac back from death.

 By this faith, Abraham pioneered the faith of resurrection and bringing hope of resurrection for all believers.

Look at verse 20-22. **20 By faith Isaac blessed Jacob and Esau in regard to their future.21 By faith Jacob, when he was dying, blessed each of Joseph’s sons, and worshiped as he leaned on the top of his staff.22 By faith Joseph, when his end was near, spoke about the exodus of the Israelites from Egypt and gave instructions concerning the burial of his bones.** Here we can see three patriarchs’ faith. Their life of faith was covered in 26 chapters of Genesis. But in today’s passage, each of their lives was covered by just one sentence. Why did the author write in this way? It was because all of these three patriarchs kept the same hope and faith with Abraham even though they lived different lives. Even though many things happened to these three patriarchs, the real meaning of their lives was to live based on the God’s promise Also the author mentioned their life focusing on how they blessed their next generation to pass God’s promise to them.

Look at verse 20 again.**20 By faith Isaac blessed Jacob and Esau in regard to their future.** When Isaac was near to his death, he wanted to bless Esau to pass the promise of God because Esau was first son. But Jacob took the blessing by deceiving Isaac. Later Esau begged Isaac to withdraw the blessing from Jacob and bless him. But Isaac didn’t withdraw the blessing from Jacob even though he realized he made mistake. He said, “I blessed him-and Indeed he will be blessed. So what can I do for you my son?” Why he couldn’t revoke his blessing? It was because Isaac’s blessing for Jacob was so serious. When he blessed Jacob, he didn’t say the word lightly.

When he blessed Jacob he believed that the blessings would come true just as he said and spoke the words before God with the full assurance that God would fulfill all the blessings. The blessing was already downloaded and being fulfilled in Jacob’s life. The blessing couldn’t revocable. We need to pray with this kind of assurance and seriousness especially when we pray for someone’s future.

Look at verse 21.**21 By faith Jacob, when he was dying, blessed each of Joseph’s sons, and worshiped as he leaned on the top of his staff.** When he was about to die, Jacob blessed Joseph’s two sons, Manasseh and Ephraim. Joseph wanted Jacob to give major blessing to his first son Manasseh by putting his right hand on his head. But Jacob put his right hand on Ephraim, the second son’s head and blessed him with God’s promise. It was because Jacob was blessing them seeing what would happen in the future. He blessed them with full assurance according to God’s will. Also Jacob worshiped God leaning on the top of his staff. The staff is symbol of his life of pilgrim on earth. Before, he had zeal to grab things of this world but at his last moment of his life the only thing that he leaned was his staff. Jacob confessed his life was a life of pilgrim and worshipped God who had been his good shepherd throughout his life journey and was ready to enter the city in heaven and finish his life of pilgrim.

**22 By faith Joseph, when his end was near, spoke about the exodus of the Israelites from Egypt and gave instructions concerning the burial of his bones.**

When Joseph was about to die, he spoke about the exodus of the Israelites from Egypt and told his people to carry his bones to Canaan land. Joseph lived a very successful life in Egypt. But still he wanted to come back to the promise land, because he wanted to dwell among his people and inherit a better city, the kingdom of God together with them.

Our spiritual ancestors lived life of pilgrims in the promised land longing for a better country- the kingdom of heaven. They overcame all the challenges and trails on earth by faith in God and continued to serve God’s will with the single hope of kingdom God. And they blessed their next generation to live by God’s promise with the same. Now God wants to see the same faith that our ancestors had from us so that he may be called God of each of us and prepare a city in have for us. Apostle Paul said, “**For while we are in this tent, we groan and are burdened, because we do not wish to be unclothed but to be clothed instead with our heavenly dwelling, so that what is mortal may be swallowed up by life**.(2Co 5:4) He also said, **Therefore, my dear brothers and sisters, stand firm. Let nothing move you. Always give yourselves fully to the work of the Lord, because you know that your labor in the Lord is not in vain.**(1Co 15:58) May God help each of us to live by faith and devoted our life fully to do the work of the Lord with the one single hope for a better city – the heavenly one. Also may God bless our children and bible students to live life of faith with the same hope we have.

One word, ‘A better country’