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^A John 8:12, 11:10; Psalm 119:105

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A. Introduction

1. Walking in Darkness

- a. how many of you, if you get up in the middle of the night, don't turn on the light so as to disturb anyone
 - (A) if you live in town there is usually enough light to see by anyway
 - (B) the same even in the country, unless it's the darkest night
 - (C) but with all these little electronic gizmos with their pilot lights you can see a bit
 - (D) and anyway, you know where everything is ...
 - (E) until you smack your shins on a chair of coffee table that someone has moved when you weren't looking
 - (F) so it's not a great idea to walk in the darkness – especially when you happen to live with a furniture mover
- b. the Bible agrees with the need for light if we are to walk aright
 - (A) for Jesus said, "But if anyone walks in the night, he stumbles, because the light is not in him." (John 11:10)
 - (B) so God has provided a spiritual light for our spiritual walk in this world beset by darkness, "Your word is a lamp to my feet And a light to my path." (Psalms 119:105)
 - (C) that is true of the God's written word, and even more so of the living Word, for again Jesus said, "I am the Light of the world; he who follows Me will not walk in the darkness, but will have the Light of life." (John 8:12)
 - (D) faith in Christ is, as it were, the light switch in this dark world; turn on that light and we are ready to start ...

2. Walking by Faith

- a. our passage today covers a number of the heroes of faith
 - (A) Abraham, as well as Sarah his wife; Isaac; Jacob; Joseph
 - (B) being the people from whom the nation of Israel eventually emerged they are known as the Patriarchs – the first fathers – of that people of God
 - (C) but there were more than simply early ancestors of a nation
 - (D) we are also told that they are the spiritual ancestors of God's people of the new covenant: Christians – that is why we read that passage from Romans 4 a few minutes ago
 - (E) they are examples given to us of what it means to walk by faith and not by sight
 - (1) how faith can operate in our lives enabling our Christian walk
 - (2) how our faith is exercised so as to be seen by others

- B. Faith Operative 11:8-16
1. In Abraham's Obedience (vv 8-10)
 - a. verses 8: "By faith Abraham, when he was called, obeyed by going out to a place which he was to receive for an inheritance; and he went out, not knowing where he was going." – let us look at some of the ways in which faith operated in Abraham's life:
 - b. Faith enabled him to hear God's call
 - (A) as Genesis 12 opens, Abraham was living in Haran, an ancient and major city in north-west Mesopotamia, now Syria
 - (1) it was here that his father, Terah, died
 - (2) but it wasn't where God wanted Abraham to live
 - (3) so God called Abraham and Abraham heard
 - (4) "1 Now the Lord said to Abram, 'Go forth from your country, And from your relatives And from your father's house, To the land which I will show you; 2 And I will make you a great nation, And I will bless you, And make your name great; And so you shall be a blessing; 3 And I will bless those who bless you, And the one who curses you I will curse. And in you all the families of the earth will be blessed.' 4 So Abram went forth as the Lord had spoken to him; and Lot went with him. Now Abram was seventy-five years old when he departed from Haran." (Genesis 12:1-4)
 - (5) Abraham was called by God to leave this pagan country
 - (B) it was these thoughts that led to choosing to sing that hymn, "Jesus Calls Us O'er the Tumult"^{2}. – God is still calling men and women today out from this pagan world to be His people
 - c. Faith enabled him to obey that call
 - (A) Abraham's obedience then was the first step in a continuing walk of obeying God
 - (B) He left Haran – his brother Nahor, sister-in-law Milcah, and his father's grave – based solely on his faith in God's promise
 - (C) ultimately, as the summary in Genesis 11:31 indicates, it was to lead him to the land of Canaan; another country, and – although this is stated only indirectly in the Scriptures – another language
 - (D) all this, our text tells us, was unknown to him – but he obeyed
 - d. Verse 9: "By faith he lived as an alien in the land of promise, as in a foreign land, dwelling in tents with Isaac and Jacob, fellow heirs of the same promise;"
 - e. Faith enabled him to live as an alien; a foreigner
 - (A) some of you know all that this entails: laws, culture, language

- (B) not merely on the way to the land promised to him
 - (C) but in that very land, yet not possessing any of it, save that portion he purchased as a burial ground from the Hittites
 - (D) there he was, seeing the promised land, living in the promised land; but not yet seeing it as his own possession
 - (E) rather than being settled restfully down in the land, his was a life of wandering; a nomad; a pilgrim; in tents without foundation
 - (F) and in time, there came to join him in that wandering band his son Isaac, and his grandson Jacob
 - (G) as the song said, "and though I find here no permanent dwelling"^{3}. that was the lot of Abraham, as well as Isaac and Jacob
- f. Verse10: "for he was looking for the city which has foundations, whose architect and builder is God."
- g. Faith enabled him to see the ultimate reality
- (A) beyond the current situation of living as an alien
 - (B) beyond a restless, unsettled life
 - (C) to when God would provide a place to dwell – a city – one unlike a tent but a residence with foundations
 - (D) and, oh what foundations and what a city
 - (E) one designed by God, one constructed by God
 - (F) concerning this city, the writer will have more to say in a moment

2. In Sarah's Motherhood (vv 11-12)

- a. verses 11-12: (Note the interpretative rendering of the NIV) "11 By faith even Sarah herself received ability to conceive, even beyond the proper time of life, since she considered Him faithful who had promised. 12 Therefore there was born even of one man, and him as good as dead at that, as many descendants As the stars of heaven in number, and innumerable as the sand which is by the seashore."
- (A) after their many years of waiting for a child, the Lord came giving the promise of a son within a year; Genesis 18:11-14 – "11 Now Abraham and Sarah were old, advanced in age; Sarah was past childbearing. 12 Sarah laughed to herself, saying, 'After I have become old, shall I have pleasure, my lord being old also?' 13 And the Lord said to Abraham, 'Why did Sarah laugh, saying, "Shall I indeed bear a child, when I am so old?" 14 Is anything too difficult for the Lord? At the appointed time I will return to you, at this time next year, and Sarah will have a son.'"
 - (B) well, Sarah may have laughed – and denied it – but she soon came to believe! and I like the name they gave to their son: Yitsak – "Laughter" – there is humour and confession in that name

- b. for both husband and wife were now so old that they had every reason to abandon the thought of having their own child
 - (A) yet faith was there – albeit at times very dimly burning
 - (B) but the fulfilment of the promise depended not upon the strength of Sarah’s faith, but upon the object of her faith
 - (C) ‘Is anything too difficult for the Lord?’

3. In Attitude of Life (13-16)

- a. Verse 13: “All these died in faith, without receiving (better, obtaining) the promises, but having seen them and having welcomed them from a distance, and having confessed that they were strangers and exiles on the earth.”
 - (A) all these – Abraham, Sarah, Isaac, Jacob , heirs to the promise – all these died and the promise not yet fulfilled; was it a lie?
 - (B) no; they lived with the promised land all around them, but that land was only a type, not the essence of the fulfilment
 - (C) in the distance; hazily, as a long way off, they saw the reality
 - (D) so, in their present situation – foreigners, wanderers – they were content and more than content
- b. Jesus said, “Blessed are the gentle, for they shall inherit the earth.” (Matthew 5:5) – here we stand with the earth all around us and the earth is not yet ours: is it a lie? no; take a look by faith further ahead
- c. Verses 14-15: “14 For those who say such things make it clear that they are seeking a country of their own. 15 And indeed if they had been thinking of that country from which they went out, they would have had opportunity to return.”
 - (A) even though they were aliens; foreigners; wanderers; nomads
 - (B) it wasn’t because they didn’t want their own homeland – their native and fatherland as in the Greek says
 - (C) but if it had been merely that, they could have returned to Haran; to brothers and cousins, and taken up residence there
 - (D) rather it was because faith – and God’s promise – had set their sights on a greater and more precious object
- d. Verse 16: “But as it is, they desire a better country, that is, a heavenly one. Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God; for He has prepared a city for them.”
 - (A) it was not the territory of Canaan,
 - (1) running from the brook of Egypt in the south,
 - (2) to the Tigris-Euphrates river system in the north;

- (3) from the Mediterranean desert in the west,
- (4) to the Arabian desert in the east;
- (5) not all this land with all the riches it included
- (6) that constitutes the value of the promise to Abraham
- (B) those are but a type; a sample; a figure of the reality
 - (1) it was the spiritual country that mattered
 - (2) the place where God says, "I will dwell among them; I shall be their God and they shall be my people."
 - (3) the heavenly Jerusalem coming down out of heaven
- (C) these men, patriarchs, the fathers of the nation of Israel, and our spiritual fathers recognized that it was the heavenly city that mattered; not Canaan which symbolised it
- (D) how many of us Christians in our wild rush for material prosperity forget that the same Jesus who said
 - (1) "If I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you to Myself, that where I am, there you may be also." (John 14:3)
 - (2) also said, "If anyone wishes to come after Me, he must deny himself, and take up his cross and follow Me." (Matthew 16:24)
 - (3) and that takes faith; faith like today's example, Abraham

C. Faith Evidenced 11:17-22

1. Abraham's Offering of Isaac (17-19)

- a. "17 By faith Abraham, when he was tested, offered up Isaac, and he who had received the promises was offering up his only begotten son; 18 it was he to whom it was said, 'In Isaac your descendants shall be called.' 19 He considered that God is able to raise people even from the dead, from which he also received him back as a type."
 - (A) God tested Abraham
 - (1) was it so that God could find out if Abraham's faith was real?
 - (2) no; God knew Abraham's obedience: he had the ram ready
 - (3) it was so that Abraham, too, knew his faith was well-founded
 - (B) 'his only begotten son' – literally, 'his only one of a kind son' – the son of promise through whom all of his posterity would come
 - (1) if Isaac died, where would Abraham's posterity be?
 - (2) Abraham's faith stretched far beyond his understanding and his experiences – who had ever come back from the dead?
 - (3) but faith transcends intellectual assent for it relies upon a trust relationship with God; and Abraham had

that in abundance

(4) 'God said I would have innumerable descendants through Isaac; I believe it; so, I will obey him.'

(C) when Abraham took up the knife, that was obedience to God

b. sometimes God tests our faith; stretches it to the limit

(A) 'Consider,' said God to Satan, 'my servant Job.' – and then began a battle of faith; every physical element and force was against Job, and yet at the end of it all, God said to Job's friends, 'You have not spoken of me that which is right as has my servant Job.'

(B) the trying of our faith is spiritual weight-lifting – it strengthens

(C) are you ready for your exercises?

2. Isaac's Blessing of Jacob and Esau

a. Verse 20: "By faith Isaac blessed Jacob and Esau, even regarding things to come."

(A) he had wandered all the years of his life, with never a portion of the ground to call his own possession – the fulfilment of the promise seemingly as far away at his death as at his birth

(B) yet it was this promise to Abraham that Isaac conveyed through the blessing to his two sons

b. by faith Isaac thus declared this promise ever to be precious

3. Jacob's Blessing of Joseph's Sons

a. Verse 21: "By faith Jacob, as he was dying, blessed each of the sons of Joseph, and worshipped, leaning on the top of his staff."

(A) you will find the record of this blessing in Genesis 48:14ff, along with the other sons of Jacob in Genesis 49

(B) it is based fully upon the blessing and promises give to Abraham and later repeated to Isaac

(C) the years of wandering, hardship and waiting had not shaken Jacob's faith – the promises he had received were undiminished by the fact that they had yet to be fulfilled

b. the faith that had brought Jacob thus far would take him home

4. Joseph's Instructions on His Bones

a. Verse 22: "By faith Joseph, when he was dying, made mention of the exodus of the sons of Israel, and gave orders concerning his bones."

(A) as Abraham, Isaac and Jacob were aliens, sojourning in Canaan

(B) Joseph. along with four generations of Israel, as foretold in Genesis 15:16), were aliens, sojourning in the

land of Egypt

- (C) but faith made the promises no less real on that account
- b. for Joseph facing death could confidently

5. faith was evidenced by the steadfast way it was held by these men

D. Conclusion

1. Faith the Ticket

- a. that started Abraham
- b. and that kept him steadfastly continuing

2. On a Pilgrimage

- a. we are all pilgrims through this world: as the poet wrote

Here in the body pent,
Absent from Him I roam,
Yet nightly pitch my moving tent
A day's march nearer home. ^{-{4}}.

{penned or shut up}

- b. so it is well for us to remember in this pilgrimage we are on
- c. that we need the same faith as Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Joseph

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ASV	American Standard Version of 1901
AV	Authorized (King James) Version of 1769
NAS	New American Standard version © 1960, 1995 The Lockman Foundation (usually the 1995 edition)
NIV	New International Version © 1984 by the International Bible Society
NKJV	New King James Version © 1979 Thomas Nelson Inc., Publishers
WEY	The New Testament in Modern Speech © 1902, 1912 R. F. Weymouth

Some of the commentaries and resources used in the preparation of this message are identified as follow:

Barnes	– <i>Notes on the New Testament, et alia</i> , by Rev Albert Barnes, Gall & Inglis, Edinburgh
BM	– <i>Biblical Museum</i> , Editor James Comper Gray, ca 1870
EBC	– <i>The Expositor’s Bible Commentary</i> , © 1986 Zondervan, Grand Rapids, 49530, Michigan <i>Hebrews</i> , by Leon Morris
EGT	– <i>The Expositor’s Greek Testament</i> , Hodder & Stoughton <i>Hebrews</i> , by Marcus Dods
Gill	– <i>Exposition of the Old Testament, Exposition of the New Testament</i> , by John Gill, D.D.
Kerux	– The sermon & illustration data base compiled by Rev. David Holwick at the web-site, www.holwick.com .
NICNT	– <i>The New International Commentary on the New Testament</i> <i>The Epistle to the Hebrew</i> , by F. F. Bruce
RWP	– <i>Robertson’s Word Pictures of the New Testament</i> , by Dr. A. T. Robertson
TYN	– <i>The Tyndale New Testament Commentaries</i> <i>Hebrews</i> , by Donald Guthrie

2. '*Jesus Calls Us O'er the Tumult,*' by Cecil Frances Humphreys Alexander (1818-1895)
3. '*Mansion over the Hilltop,*' by Ira Forest Stanphill (1914-1993)
4. '*At Home in Heaven,*' by James Montgomery (1771-1854)