

**August 15, 2010**  
**Pentecost 12**

*"Faith Is Trusting What We Cannot See"*

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**HEBREWS 11:1-3, 8-16**

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**N**ow faith is being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see. <sup>2</sup> This is what the ancients were commended for. <sup>3</sup> By faith we understand that the universe was formed at God's command, so that what is seen was not made out of what was visible.. <sup>8</sup> 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. <sup>9</sup> 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. <sup>10</sup> For he was looking forward to the city with foundations, whose architect and builder is God. <sup>11</sup> By faith Abraham, even though he was past age-- and Sarah herself was barren-- was enabled to become a father because he considered him faithful who had made the promise. <sup>12</sup> 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. <sup>13</sup> 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. And they admitted that they were aliens and strangers on earth. <sup>14</sup> People who say such things show that they are looking for a country of their own. <sup>15</sup> If they had been thinking of the country they had left, they would have had opportunity to return. <sup>16</sup> 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.

I am holding between my fingers a tiny mustard seed. If I drop it into my hand, you will probably not be able to see it fall from my fingers to my hand because it is so small. Our Lord Jesus said that we if have faith like this small mustard seed, we could move a mountain from the land to the sea providing that is what the Lord told us we could do. Remember how Peter asked Jesus if he could walk out on the water toward Jesus during a storm on the Sea of Galilee. Jesus told Peter to come to him. Peter was able to walk on water because he put his faith in the words of Jesus. When his faith became weak, he sank down into the water.

This eleventh chapter of Hebrews holds before our eyes the great heroes of faith, examples of people who put their trust in the Lord. Step into this great hall or museum of faith. The person that stands out the most is Abraham. It was the Lord who gave him the faith to trust in things he could not see. In fact, the things that he could not see were more real to him than the things he could see.

Here you are, sitting in this church, on August 15, 2010. You share something special with Abraham. You believe that things you see with you faith eyes, things that God has shown you in his Word, are more real to you than things you can see with your physical eyes. Hebrews 11:1 tells us that faith is "being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see."

## **Here are some examples of faith from the life of Abraham**

When Abraham stepped out of his tent and looked up at the stars at night, his God-given faith led him to believe that God had created the stars and placed them into the sky, even though he was not there to observe how the world was made by the hand of God. Something similar happens to you when you become a Christian. You read in the Bible how the world was created, and you are led to believe that it was created in six days of time by the power of God's Word. We are told, "By faith we understand that the universe was formed at God's command, so that what was seen, was not made out of what is visible." Genesis 1 begins with the well known words, "In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth." God tells us that he created all matter in the universe in a split second of time. He is the one who also creates in us the faith to believe that this is true.

Here is another example of faith in the life of Abraham. "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." It says that God called Abraham to go to a place even though he did not know specifically where he was going. That call of God was so powerful it changed Abraham's life. He packed his bags, left his home and family in Haran and traveled to Canaan to wait for further directions from the Lord.

Imagine if your boss did that. The corporate office calls you on the phone and tells you to pack up all your belongings in a U-Haul truck, start driving east of here, and wait for further directions as you go down the road. If you had a good boss who always did what was best for you, you have the faith he would have something good waiting for you as you drive down the road wondering where to go. Abraham was confident the Lord had something special waiting for him in the Promised Land.

When the Lord calls us to follow Jesus, he calls us to believe in some amazing things that we have not seen with our physical eyes. He creates the faith to believe that because Jesus died and rose again, the past is all forgiven. He creates faith to believe the present is exciting because Jesus our risen Lord is with us. He creates faith to believe the future is guaranteed because our risen Lord is going to prepare a place for us. Jesus tells us in John 20, "Blessed are they who have not seen me and yet have believed." Maybe you have seen the bumper sticker on the back of a construction worker's pick up truck, "My boss is a Jewish carpenter."

Abraham provides us with another example of faith in the way he made his home in the Promised Land, even though he was living in tents. "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. For he was looking forward to the city with foundations, whose architect and builder is God." Abraham saw himself living in a permanent city, a permanent place, a permanent kingdom, because he was a child of God. This city of God to which he belonged was more real to him than the tent in which he lived.

So it is with us, my dear Christians who have been brought out of the kingdom of darkness and brought into the light of God's kingdom. We live in homes that we can see with our physical eyes, and a city and country that we can see with our physical eyes. Yet, we are part of something far more lasting and durable. We are the city of God, the people

of God, the children of God through Jesus. We share this permanent, lasting city built on God's love with Christians all over the world. Here is how this permanent city is described in Ephesians 2, "Consequently, you are no longer foreigners and aliens, but fellow citizens with God's people and members of God's household, built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets with Christ Jesus as the chief cornerstone." Faith allows me to see other Christians as members of the body of Christ with Jesus being our head. I can see everything falling apart around me. I can lose my job, lose my health, lose my friends, lose my country, lose my home, but with faith eyes I can wake up every morning and say with Abraham, "I am part of the city of God."

Here is another example of faith from the life of Abraham. God had promised Abraham that his aged wife Sarah would bear him a son even though her womb was shriveled like a dead leaf and she was past the age when a woman can bear a child. "By faith Abraham, even though he was past age- and Sarah herself was barren-was enabled to become a father because he considered him faithful who had made the promise." Abraham did have his doubts that God would come through. But then the Lord came to him and said, "Do not be afraid, Abram, I am your shield, your very great reward." The Lord showed him the stars of the sky and told him that is how many descendants would come from him. The Lord even changed Abram's name to Abraham, from "father of people" to "father of many people." The Lord, who called Abraham and created faith to believe, also strengthened that faith when it became weak. Abraham never saw all those descendants who would be more numerous than the stars, but he knew in his heart of hearts that someday they would be there, including all those spiritual sons and daughters who believed in the Savior who would bless all nations as Abraham did.

Here is yet another example of faith from the life of Abraham. Abraham knew and believed that beyond this world in which we live is a far better country, a far better place that has been prepared for us. He considered himself a stranger in this world, an alien, with his real country in heaven. "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. And they admitted that they were aliens and strangers on earth." These people, these amazing people of faith, such as Abraham and you and me, we are looking for a better country, a heavenly one.

We know by faith that God is not ashamed to call us his children, and that some day our brother Jesus will joyfully say to us, "Come, inherit the place I have prepared for you." Remember the tear jerking scene from the movie "E.T." when E.T. looks out into space and says, "E.T., go home?" Our real home is in the place Jesus prepared for us. In 2 Corinthians 4 we are told, "For our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all. So we fix our eyes not on what is seen, but what is unseen. For what is seen is temporary, but what is seen is eternal."

### **Here is the object of Abraham's faith**

This faith we share with Abraham is truly amazing, not just because of how we believe in things we do not see, but because of what we believe in. Abraham believed that the Lord would give him a son in his old age, and a future descendant who would bless the whole world. Here is how Galatians describes this amazing faith of Abraham and applies it also to us. "The Scripture foresaw that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, and announced

the gospel in advance to Abraham; 'All nations will be blessed through you.' So those who have faith are blessed with Abraham the many of faith."

Today, this morning, you and I share something special with Abraham. We have been led by God to place our hope of being justified or forgiven for our past sin through a blessing that comes to us from God. It is the blessing of God's Son who spoke from a blood stained cross and announced to us that our sins were forgiven by with a loud cry that said "It is finished." When Jesus died, he cried out from the cross, "Father into your hands I commit my spirit." The heavenly Father raised his only begotten Son from all eternity, a descendant of Abraham, a Jewish carpenter, back to life again. This was the heavenly Father's way of assuring Abraham and you and me that the blessing he gives us through Jesus of being justified or forgiven or declared righteous is real.

I can see with my physical eyes, evidence of sin that condemns me and declares me guilty before God. With eyes of faith, I look at Jesus blood being poured out on the cross, and with a heart of faith I accept God's Word that says, "The blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanses me from all sin." With my physical eyes I can see that my righteousness is like these dirty rags, but faith eyes I can see Jesus putting his righteousness on me. With my physical eyes I can see the world fall apart and decaying around me, but with my faith I eyes I see the place Jesus has prepared for me, and it is such a beautiful place. With physical eyes I see bread and wine, but with the eyes of faith I see the Body of Jesus given for me, and the blood of Jesus shed for me. Faith is the being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see. Amen.