

Lesson 34
Persevering Faith
Hebrews 11:13-16

Are you a happy Christian? Do you have the joy of the Lord in your life? Have you a radiant countenance that causes others to know you are a citizen of heaven? Christian, if we are not happy but negative, critical and hard, we are not walking by faith. Our minds are not occupied with God and His promises to us, and we are failing to persevere in the Faith. A sourpuss Christian is not living in the reality of his spiritual blessing and his heavenly home.

Hebrews 11 was written to a group of professing Hebrew-Christians who were not persevering in the Christian faith as they should have been doing. They were doubting the reality of their salvation and had lost sight of their heavenly realities in Christ Jesus. The author of the Book of Hebrews turns to the Old Testament saints as an illustration of people who walked the life of faith. These Old Testament saints are used to prove to these New Testament saints the reality of their spiritual blessings in Christ. In Hebrews 11:13-16, the land of Canaan is used as a type or illustration of how the Christian should persevere in his faith and long for his heavenly home.

BELIEVING GOD'S EARTHLY PROMISE - Hebrews 11:13

“All these died in faith, without receiving the promises ...” -- Bible commentators disagree as to who the “all these” refers to, but it seems to me that this refers to the Patriarchs, Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. These great men of faith died as ones who were persevering with a strong belief in God's promise to Abraham and his seed (descendants). They were true believers all through their lives, and they did not apostatize but died in faith. They died believing in God's promise without actually possessing what God had promised. God promised to Abraham and his children that they would be a great nation, have a land forever, and that through the Jews the whole world would be spiritually blessed through the Messiah to come.

“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; 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; 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 shall be blessed’” (Gen. 12:1-3).

These Patriarchs (Abraham, Isaac and Jacob) were promised a land for their own possession and that land was then occupied by the powerful Canaanites. Abraham had left Ur of the Chaldees by faith and had come into the land of Canaan. God said this land belonged to Abraham and his seed, which would include Isaac and Jacob and all the physical seed of Abraham. The Patriarchs possessed the title deed to the land because God had given it to them, but they did not actually possess one square foot of the land because it was occupied by the Canaanites. The land by right was Abraham's, Isaac's and Jacob's, but they never received the land that God had given them.

They died still believing the promise but they never actually possessed the land. They only

possessed the land by faith and not in actuality. It is my opinion that one day God will resurrect Abraham, Isaac and Jacob and all believing Jews to possess this land, and this will take place in the millennium.

Christians have been promised by God that they have eternal life and that they are already seated with Christ in heavenly places.

“... and I give eternal life to them; and they shall never perish ...” (John 10:28).

“But God, being rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, even when we were dead in our transgressions, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved), and raised us up with Him, and seated us with Him in the heavenly places, in Christ Jesus, in order that in the ages to come He might show the surpassing riches of His grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus” (Eph. 2:4-7).

Heaven belongs to the Christian while he is on earth because God has promised it to him, but the Christian does not actually possess it as yet. One day every Christian will literally possess heaven and be with Christ forever. ***“For now we see in a mirror dimly, but then face to face ...”*** (1 Cor. 13:12).

“... but having seen them and having welcomed them from a distance ...” -- The Patriarchs saw the possession of the land by the eye-gate of faith and they knew that one day their seed would actually possess the land God promised to them. They enjoyed many of the blessings of the land even though they never possessed it.

Much of the life of faith consists in laying hold of and enjoying God’s promises before the actual possession of them is attained. Heaven belongs to the Christian, but we do not have to wait until we get to heaven to enjoy spiritual and heavenly realities. By faith we can experience a little bit of heaven now.

How precious are God’s promises to you? Does your heart cling to them with love and delight? Are God’s promises more important to you than earthly riches? ***“I have rejoiced in the way of Thy testimonies, as much as in all riches”*** (Psalm 119:14).

“... and having confessed they were strangers and exiles (pilgrims) on the earth.” -- Abraham, Isaac and Jacob owned none of the land of Canaan. For hundreds of years they lived in the promised land; they lived as nomads with no place to settle down. The land by right was theirs but they did not possess it but lived in it as pilgrims and strangers. To the sons of Heth, Abraham confessed, ***“I am a stranger and sojourner among you ...”*** (Gen. 23:4). As long as Abraham, Isaac and Jacob were in the land occupied by their enemies, they were strangers to it and sojourners in it.

The land occupied by foreigners and the Patriarchs living in it is a type or picture of a Christian’s renunciation of the world system. As heavenly citizens, Christians are commanded not to be conformed to the world.

“For our citizenship is in heaven, from which also we eagerly wait for a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ ...” (Phil. 3:20).

“And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what the will of God is, that which is good and acceptable and perfect” (Rom 12:2).

The Patriarchs demonstrated they were strangers by not taking part in any way with the religious and social life of the Canaanites, and they also demonstrated they were “sojourners” by moving about from place to place so as to never put permanent roots in the promised land until they possessed it.

The figure of a “stranger” applied to the Christian in this age of the Church is quite revealing. The Christian is a stranger in the foreign country of planet earth. He lives here but he does not really belong here, for his home is in heaven. A foreigner is avoided in another country, and the Christian’s spiritual birth is not appreciated by the world. ***“If you were of the world, the world would love its own; but because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, therefore the world hates you”*** (John 15:19). A stranger in a foreign land finds the habits, ways and language strange to him, so the Christian has a life style that does not fit into the unsaved world’s system.

“For the time already past is sufficient for you to have carried out the desire of the Gentiles, having pursued a course of sensuality, lusts, drunkenness, carousals, drinking parties and abominable idolatries. And in all this, they are surprised that you do not run with them into the same excess of dissipation, and they malign you ...” (1 Pet. 3:3-4).

A stranger in another country is easily identified, and a true Christian is easily identified in the world. ***“And a little later the bystanders came up and said to Peter, ‘Surely you too are one of them; for the way you talk gives you away’”*** (Matt. 26:73). A stranger in a foreign country is often overtaken by homesickness, and the true Christian longs for his heavenly home. ***“But I am hard pressed from both directions, having the desire to depart and be with Christ, for that is very much better ...”*** (Phil. 1:23).

The figure of a “pilgrim” or “sojourner” is equally suggestive of the Christian walk. Moving from place to place in this world, a true Christian never really feels at home. At times he finds himself very much alone and meets with very few people who are going his way spiritually. Those he encounters in this world think him odd and a religious fanatic. The true Christian knows that he is not to put his roots down in this world and get engrossed with its lust, materialism and hunger for power, for he realizes he belongs to another world.

“Beloved, I urge you as aliens and strangers to abstain from fleshly lusts, which wage war against the soul. Keep your behavior excellent among the Gentiles, so that in the thing in which they slander you as evil doers, they may on account of your good deeds, as they observe them, glorify God in the day of visitation” (1 Pet. 2: 11-12).

Christians are to use this world but not abuse it. ***“... and those who use the world, as though they did not make full use of it; for the form of this world is passing away”*** (1 Cor. 7:31). It is not wrong to have earthly riches, for Abraham, Isaac and Jacob were all wealthy men, but the lures of the world are not to possess and obsess the Christian, for he is moving on to heavenly glory. We are not to renounce God’s material blessings on us, but we are to renounce all the carnal affections for them. We cannot get out of the world, but we must get the world out of us if we want God’s blessing. King David, a rich man, was not worldly but God-centered. ***“Hear my prayer, O Lord, and give ear to my cry; do not be silent at my tears; for I am a stranger with Thee, a sojourner like all my fathers”*** (Psalm 39:12).

The Epistle to Diognetus of the second century says this about Christians: “They inhabit their own country, but as sojourners; they take part in all things as citizens, and endure all things as aliens; every foreign country is theirs, and every country is foreign.”

SEEKING GOD’S HEAVENLY PROMISE

“For they who say such things make it clear that they are seeking a country of their own.” -- The Patriarchs made it clear when they declared themselves strangers and pilgrims that they had a hope that went beyond just that of an earthly land. They had a heavenly hope; they were seeking a heavenly country and that country was what motivated them to keep on persevering in faith while they were on this earth.

Christians today must continually seek the reality of spiritual things and long for their heavenly home, the New Jerusalem.

“And indeed if they had been thinking of that country from which they came out, they would have had opportunity to return.” -- Abraham, Isaac and Jacob could have gone back to their original homeland in Ur of the Chaldees if they wanted to, but they did not want to go back to that old way of life. God had called them and put new desires in their hearts for the one, true and living God. They put to death those thoughts that they might have had of returning to Ur and pushed on to do God’s will as He had promised.

Christians have been given new desires by God for spiritual realities and those sinful aspects of our lives that are a carryover from our unsaved state must be put to death. ***“Therefore consider the members of our earthly body as dead to immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire, and greed, which amounts to idolatry”*** (Col. 3:5). No true Christian will ever go back into the world system because God has called him to salvation and through the new birth has put new desires in his heart for God and holiness of life. A Christian may flirt with the world for a time but he will come back because he really belongs to God and longs for the things of God. A mere professing Christian, however, can and will go back into the world system because he does not have a changed heart. ***“... for Demas, having loved this present world, has deserted me and gone to Thessalonica ...”*** (2 Tim 4:10). By faith a true Christian perseveres in faith, pushing on towards his heavenly homeland. Once a Christian has truly tasted heavenly realities, he does not want to go back into the world and he knows he can never be happy and satisfied in that world system.

“But as it is, they desire a better country, that is a heavenly one.” -- The Patriarchs by faith

sought a better country than Ur of the Chaldees or even the earthly promised land of Canaan. They sought heaven itself. They sought to avoid every hindrance, overcome every obstacle and press toward the heavenly country, the New Jerusalem.

“And I saw a new heaven and a new earth; for the first heaven and the first earth passed away, and there is no longer any sea. And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, made ready as a bride adorned for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from the throne, saying, ‘Behold the tabernacle of God is among men, and He shall dwell among them, and they shall be his people, and God Himself shall be among them, and He shall wipe away every tear from their eyes; and there shall no longer be any death; there shall no longer be any mourning, or crying, or pain; the first things have passed away’” (Rev. 21:1-4).

Each day the Patriarchs weaned themselves more and more from the world and put their minds towards heaven.

Do you, Christian, seek this better country, the heavenly city of New Jerusalem? Are you motivated by spiritual realities or by carnal things, pleasures and pursuits? The Bible tells us as Christians we are to set our attention on heavenly realities. ***“Set your mind on the things above, not on the things that are on the earth”*** (Col. 3:2).

“Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God; for He has prepared a city for them.” -- Abraham, Isaac and Jacob were not ashamed to renounce the world and seek after the living God and long for their heavenly home. Because of their faith, God was not ashamed to be called their God. They honored God and God honored them.

Each Christian who honors God is honored by God. God places His covenant love upon all who obey Him by faith. God’s true children pant to know the living God, and God is not ashamed of them. ***“Whom have I in heaven but thee? And besides Thee, I desire nothing on earth”*** (Psalm 73:25).

Christian, this verse says that God is our God. If God be our God, how contented we should be. The God of heaven and earth possesses us, and calls Himself our God. This truth should make us confident. ***“The LORD is my shepherd, I shall not want”*** (Psalm 23:1). This truth should make us joyful. ***“Thou wilt make known to me the path of life; in Thy presence is fullness of joy; in Thy right hand there are pleasures forever”*** (Psalm 16:11). This truth should make us happy. ***“Because Thy lovingkindness is better than life, my lips will praise Thee”*** (Psalm 63:3). We Christians should be the most joyful, happy and free people on the earth. If God be for us who can be against us! Sourpuss Christians are not persevering by faith.

A booklet put out by the N.P.C. entitled “An Introduction to the National Presbyterian Church” says,

The fellowship of Christians, which is the Church, should be the happiest and most joyful group of people on earth. A sad, solemn, long-faced Christian is an anomaly, a contradiction in terms. If a person is long-faced, one may almost doubt that he knows

the Lord. Of all people, Christians have the most to rejoice about. God has adopted them as His children and heirs! Jesus is their brother! Their sins are forgiven! Heaven is their home! And nothing on all the earth can take this away from them! No wonder Christians meet together to praise and thank God! The mind cannot imagine the blessedness, peace, and assurance of this fellowship. It is intended to be a foretaste of heaven on earth.

CONCLUSION

For you who do not know Christ as your personal Lord and Savior, God has also given many promises to you. He promises to give the forgiveness of sins and eternal life to any and all who will believe the promises.

“Turn to Me, and be saved, all the ends of the earth; for I am God, and there is no other” (Isa. 45:22).

“For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish, but have eternal life” (John 3:16).

“Jesus said to them, ‘I am the bread of life; he who comes to Me shall not hunger, and he who believes in Me shall never thirst’” (John 6:35).

You can only accept God’s promise of salvation by faith. You must trust in, lean upon and commit to Jesus alone to save you from sin and eternal judgment. What must you do to be saved? ***“Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and you shall be saved”*** (Acts 16:31).