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Go and make disciples!

E-votional 68

Moving Forward

Hebrews 11:13-16 (ESV)

These all died in faith, not having received the things promised, but having seen them and greeted them from afar, and having acknowledged that they were strangers and exiles on the earth. For people who speak thus make it clear that they are seeking a homeland. If they had been thinking of that land from which they had gone out, they would have had opportunity to return. 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 for them a city.

A couple of amazing thoughts occurred to me when reading this passage of scripture. The first one being the idea of seeing something from afar and the next greeting what was seen from afar. To see something is rather obvious, as this relates to the spiritual eyes gazing upon a promise of God. But what about greeting it? Greeting in this reference means to welcome it and to pay respects to or to salute it. In this context, it is referring to a promise.

First, the idea of seeing something from afar as it relates to the context of this passage is again directly referring to the eyes of faith and the subject being a promise. In short, the writer of Hebrews was writing about the patriarchs and the ability they had to see a promise from a distance as it had first been revealed by God and the ability also to follow it. Notice the patriarch Abraham who was called out of Ur of the Chaldeans to a place he did not know and a place that would be shown him as he went (Genesis 12:1-3). It is interesting to think of the longevity of a faith like Abraham's. I share this in this way because of the beginning of Hebrews 11:13 that says, "*These all died in faith, not having received the things promised.*"

Not to divert, but in my last teaching we talked about the need for endurance, here I am building in a way upon that and even elaborating a bit more but in another light. Again in the case of Abraham being called out of Ur by God, we must realize that God had spoken to Abraham. When God speaks to us it births vision and

promise. But to think that Abraham never fully received his promise and yet maintained his walk all those years is a firm miracle. Now, we do know that God promised him a son, and that promise was fulfilled. However, as for being able to see the promised land and also his descendants being as the sand on the seashore, this did not happen in his day. How did he do this?

Well, he was able to see the promise from afar. That is to say that Abraham had a good vision for the future events that were yet to unfold. This vision again was birthed in him by the word of the Lord and how the Lord continued to affirm and reaffirm this to him later in Abraham's story. Abraham could see clearly because God gave him clarity and discernment in his walk by the continual manifestation of His will to him. Therefore, when Abraham heard from God or was affirmed, he was able to see.

Next, he greeted the promise from afar. That is that the one who was given the promise also welcomed the promise as reality or in other words Gospel truth. As mentioned earlier we spoke of greeting as also paying respects or saluting. When we salute something, we are effectively agreeing with whoever or whatever we are saluting. So, standing in complete agreement is a necessary attribute to staying the course, even if nothing is fully achieved by it in our day. As it is we hasten the day of the Lord because we know that Jesus Christ is coming back for us. Maybe it won't happen in our exact lifetime but we still stand in agreement as if it will. When reading the above mentioned Hebrews passage, I see this common theme throughout. To think that the patriarchs died before receiving the promise yet remained faithful is a testimony for us to relish and recall often. I say this because the patriarchs did not even come to the point of the promise that we are in. In other words, Christ had not yet been revealed from heaven and had not yet appeared in the flesh to atone for our sins and yet the patriarchs still looked on with welcoming anticipation for the promise and as such aligned their lives to the One who promised.

Another amazing testimony of their faith is written later in Hebrews 11:13 where it says, "*having acknowledged that they were strangers and exiles on the earth.*" While seeing and greeting the promise from afar they knew that where they were at the moment was indeed not their home for God had prepared something better for them and they eagerly looked forward to that time. And again the patriarchs never got to see even the promised land of Canaan much less what we have received and are also waiting for today, yet they kept their eyes and lives toward the promise. The idea mentioned here in this later part of the last verse speaks of them being strangers and pilgrims in the earth. This is interesting because it means that their eyes were only towards the home to come and not the one they left to move toward the one God had promised. Look at Hebrews 11:15,

"If they had been thinking of that land from which they had gone out, they would have had opportunity to return."

This testimony here is important mainly because it shows that we cannot look at the old and expect the new. To all those new creations in the Lord, you know what I mean. Praise God! If Abraham, for example, left when God had called him to leave and then instead of keeping his eye on the promise and saluting it from afar, as the Scripture has said, "they would have had opportunity to return." The best illustration of this that we have is of Lot's wife in Genesis 19:26 who, when after the Lord told the people not to look back on Sodom and Gomorrah after their deliverance she did and because of this she turns into a pillar of salt. Jesus makes another illustration in Luke 9:62 (ESV),

"Jesus said to him, No one who puts his hand to the plow and looks back is fit for the Kingdom of God."

The importance of looking at what God has said is serious stuff. The reason being is that when we focus too much on what is behind us, we have the temptation to go back there. I am not saying we should forget how the Lord delivered us from sin. However, I am saying that we cannot live back there in our thinking any longer. If we do the temptation to go back will certainly arise.

Now moving forward to Hebrews 11:16,

"As it is they desire a better country, that is heavenly one. Therefore, God is not ashamed to be called their God, for He has prepared for them a city."

Hallelujah Jesus!

When we keep our eyes on the promise and refuse to be ensnared in our old ways God is not ashamed to be called our God. I actually like to think that God rejoices over those who wholeheartedly see and greet His promises from afar. I am reminded of a song, titled, 'Moving forward,' by Israel Houghton, that says,

"I'm not going back. I'm moving ahead. Here to declare to You my past is over in You, all things are made new. Surrendered my life to Christ. I'm moving, moving forward."

Praise You Lord! Thank You, Lord Jesus! We just declare to You Lord that our past is over in You. You alone have made all things new so we fully surrender our lives to You. Father, grant us eyes to see and hearts to greet from afar all that You have promised so we can press on to the prize of the high calling of Yours, in Jesus name. Amen

In Christ's Love,
Chris and Jeanne
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