

## The man who didn't know where he was going — Hebrews 11:8-12, 17-19

*James Muldoon - Carey Baptist Church – 18 November 2007*

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Hebrews 11 is a bit like a portrait gallery which shows us pen pictures of some of the greatest men and women of faith in the Old Testament. This morning we are going to see four portraits of Abraham and his faith.

### i Faith's commencement

The first portrait is in **v8**. It points us to **Genesis 12:1**. There God called Abraham to leave his country, his people, and his wider family. But as he began to stride away from Ur, he didn't even know where he was going! All he knew is that when he arrived, God would give him the land as an inheritance. And Abraham had faith: he trusted God and he obeyed him immediately. This is faith's commencement, faith's starting-out.

Maybe you're in similar circumstances to Abraham at the moment.

Maybe you're not a Christian. You know how important it is to confess your sin to God, to trust in the Lord Jesus Christ, and to live for him. But there's something holding you back. There are certain things in your life which you really don't want to give up. And as you think about becoming a Christian, all you can see is uncertainties. If that's where you are, look at this portrait of Abraham. Lay aside your reservations. Repent of your sin. Trust in the Lord Jesus Christ. And follow him. He will save you if you do.

Sometimes Christians face situations like Abraham too. Maybe you can feel the call of God upon your life to go and to serve him somewhere else, but it scares you. The idea of leaving all you're familiar with to go somewhere unfamiliar is scary. If you're in that sort of dilemma, look at Abraham. If the Lord is calling you, won't you say, "Yes!" to him in the quietness of your heart? Won't you trust him? Won't you obey him? That's what Abraham, a man dead for 4000 years, tells you to do.

### ii Faith's commitment

**v9-10** give us a second portrait of Abraham. By now, he has discovered the land which God has promised to give him. It's the land of Canaan. A few years have gone by. But Abraham still does not possess the land. He lives there in tents like a stranger in a foreign land. All he can do is wait – and he waits for year after year after year. Nevertheless, his faith does not waver. He goes on living by faith.

That's the sort of attitude which you need. You need faith's commitment. Just as Abraham's faith did not give way despite waiting for years, so you need to keep on living by faith all the way through your Christian life. And it's the quiet years which can be the hardest. It's the years when you get settled in life, when you have the mortgage, when you've reached a decent position at work, when the children are progressing through school and then university. Little by little, faith can lose its grip. Suddenly you realise that you've settled into a kind of Christian mediocrity. You're still going to church etc. But all the energy, all the enthusiasm, all the liveliness, which you used to show has all gone. You still have faith. But there's a sense in which you're no longer really living by faith.

Is that true of you? If it is, then look at Abraham's example. Look to Christ who died for you. Look to the Holy Spirit who indwells you. And start truly to live by faith once

more. **v10** tells you one thing in particular which will help you to do that. Abraham looked forward to heaven. Doing so will help you. But there'll be more on that next week!

### iii Faith's cultivation

The third portrait is a family portrait of Abraham and Sarah holding their baby son, Isaac. **v11** probably refers to Sarah's faith, not Abraham's, but it doesn't matter too much. **v12** certainly refers to Abraham. So what we have here is Abraham and Sarah's faith in the Lord in their home-life together. They both had faith. They believed that God would be faithful to his promise to give them a son. And he was!

But perhaps Sarah does not seem such a good example of faith. In **Genesis 18:9-14**, when the promise of Isaac's coming is delivered, she doubts it all and laughs. However, the Lord does not cast her off. Instead he nurtures her faith. This is faith's cultivation. By **Genesis 21:6**, she laughs with faith and joy

That's just how the Lord Jesus Christ deals with us today. **Matthew 12:20** tells us that, **“A bruised reed he will not break, and a smouldering wick he will not snuff out...”** And that's great! When our faith is weak, he deals with us patiently, kindly, gently. He's always ready to cultivate, to nurture, our faith. He's always ready to help our faith to grow. He's always ready to help our weak faith to become strong. If your faith is weak at the moment, look up to the Lord. Ask him to help you. And you can be sure that he will be there, holding out his hand to you, ready to cultivate your faith.

### iv Faith's check-up

The fourth portrait of Abraham, in **v17-19**, points us back to **Genesis 22:1-19**. There God calls Abraham to sacrifice Isaac, but stops him at the last minute. This is faith's check-up, faith's time of testing. And Abraham passes the test. He concludes that God will raise Isaac from the dead after the sacrifice has taken place. That must have taken massive faith because nobody had ever been raised from the dead before.

Sooner or later every Christian's faith will be tested. You will be faced with faith's check-up. That test may take many forms: illness, redundancy, bereavement, persecution, temptation. It will challenge you and ask you, “Will you hold on to your faith now?” Maybe it will be a situation which threatens to unleash your worst nightmare if you remain faithful to the Lord.

So what are you to do when faith's check-up comes? It's easy to say! Do like Abraham. Hold on to your faith. Do what is right. Do God's will. And you leave the consequences to him. It's easy to say. But may God give us the strength to do it.

And there's one thing which will help you to do it. In **v19**, Abraham reasons. He reasons about God. Doing that will help you to stand firm in your faith. Think about God. Read what the Bible teaches about him. Hear his word preached as often as you can. See his greatness. See his love. See all you can about him. And then think about him. When you next have an idle moment, don't use it to think about “I'm a Celebrity: Get Me out of Here!” Think about the Lord. It could do wonders!