

Text: Heb 6.12-15

Our thesis for the “occasion” of Hebrews is that the Jewish believers receiving the book were fearful because of intense persecution for their faith. They had come to consider that they would be able to still worship God, but be freed from trouble by lapsing back into Judaism.

Our author is strenuously warning them from such a decision: it would be disastrous for them.

After the most recent strong warning, he gives an assurance (6.9) that he is convinced of better things of them. He is convinced:

1. Of the evidence of salvation in their lives
2. Of the continuance of faithfulness in their lives

He is convinced of this despite his warnings.

He reassures them because God is just and will remember the evidences of their salvation (10).

He urges them to show the same diligence so as to produce the same evidence in going forward.

And in urging them to do this, he calls them to imitate those who went before them in lives of faith.

I mentioned last week that this anticipates chapter 11, it is one of the great arguments of the book.

“Look to your forbears, see how they believed, see how they behaved, follow them.”

Today, we return to our text and see him offering up a single example at this time, Abraham. Abraham’s faithfulness is intended to inspire their faithfulness.

Read Heb 6.13-15

Let’s put this in our context.

We might not be pressured to go back to Judaism, but there is constant pressure to keep quiet about Jesus. There is pressure to keep quiet about Christian morals, and the Christian way of life. There is pressure to conform and “say the right things” about the moral madness of our culture.

It might seem easier to at least simply be quiet.

We might be tempted to limit our Christianity to Sunday morning, when we come together to worship God.

I'm going to suggest that God wants us to worship him every day, and everywhere: at home, at church, and in the public square.

Proposition: God calls us to faithfulness even if we may not see any tangible fruit of his promises in our earthly lifetimes.

I. Called to imitate Abraham (12-13)

- A. The call involves v. 12 “imitators” using Abraham (13) as an illustration
 1. You will recall my emphasis in v. 11 of getting the “full assurance” — *i.e.* an earthly life full of experiential assurance to the end (11)
 2. This full assurance comes not by a sluggish spiritual life, but an active imitation of “those who through faith” are our examples
 3. The author emphasizes this as a calling to follow
- B. Abraham is raised as our concrete example
 1. In Heb 11, Abel, Enoch, Noah, Sarah, Moses, etc. are raised as concrete examples as well: here the focus is on Abraham
 2. The example isn't Abraham generically, but Abraham at a specific moment of his personal history: Genesis 22
- C. The specific incident clear from the “oath” language

since He could swear by no one greater, He swore by Himself

1. Compare Gen 22.16-17

Gn 22.16-17 and said, “By Myself I have sworn, declares the LORD, because you have done this thing and have not withheld your son, your only son,¹⁷ indeed I will greatly bless you, and I will greatly multiply your seed as the stars of the heavens and as the sand which is on the seashore; and your seed shall possess the gate of their enemies.

2. It is important to note that in all the repetitions of the Abrahamic covenant (beginning Gen 12) this is the only one that uses “oath language”

We will think more of the “swearing by himself” next week. Today, it ties us in to a definite passage in Genesis, Gen 22

II. Called to consider Abraham’s promise (14)

A. The Gen 22 background of this promise

1. God called Abraham to test him (Gen 22.1-2)

“This was the supreme test of Abraham’s faith since the fulfillment of God’s covenant depended upon Isaac’s progeny.”¹

2. The test occurs some years after Isaac’s birth

- a. He is old enough to carry the wood for the offering on his back
- b. He has experience enough to know how an offering is conducted (Gen 22.7)

3. Abraham is filling up his assurance of hope (Heb 6.11) by obedient faith (Gen 22.8)

4. The young lad must have heard an explanation at the mountain top, and acquiesced (Gen 22.9)

5. The Lord delivered the lad and provided a lamb (Gen 22.10-14)

B. The specificities of the Hebrews version of the promise:

1. Compare the Genesis version:

Hebrews: I will surely bless you and I will surely multiply **you**

Genesis: I will greatly bless you, and I will greatly multiply **your seed**

2. The focus of Hebrews is on Abraham — “sharply focused”²

- a. The promise is repeated to Isaac and Jacob
- b. The promise is fulfilled in the many sons of Jacob who follow

¹ David Allen, *Hebrews*, The New American Commentary 35 (Nashville, Tenn: B & H Publ. Group, 2010), 397.

² Lane, *Hebrews 1-8*, 151.

c. Yet Hebrews draws our focus not on Abraham's seed, but on Abraham

C. Now, how did Abraham see fulfillment of the promise?

1. Promise given first of all when Abraham is 75 yrs old (Gen 12)
2. The promise is repeated in Gen 15 (Abram believed God and he counted it for righteousness)
3. Abram and Sarai concoct the Hagar option (Gen 16)
4. Fourteen years later, God gives the promise again (Gen 17)
 - a. Abram is 99
 - b. The promise is not yet, he and Sarah are to have a son (She is 89)
 - c. The next year they have a son

Has Abram received the promise yet? In a very minor sense: one son

D. What is the significance of offering Isaac, where the "oath-promise" comes from?

1. Hebrews 11 tells us Abraham believed God could raise Isaac from the dead (11.17-19)

Heb 11.17-19 ¶ 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.

2. What happened to Abraham when he "received him back as a type"?
 - a. Consider Heb 6.11 again:

show the same diligence so as to realize the full assurance of hope until the end

- b. How much more full was Abraham's assurance after receiving Isaac back again?

III. Called to adopt Abraham's patience (15)

A. Now, look at Abraham's patience

1. The same *long-suffering* patience we saw in v. 12

be ... imitators of those who through faith and **patience** inherit the promises

2. Abraham walked with God for years (175 years)

a. "I will multiply you," God said

b. How did Abraham get multiplied?

1) Ishmael: "doesn't count" God says

2) Isaac: "does count" God says

3) Sons of Abraham through Keturah (Gen 25)

a) "Zimran and Jokshan and Medan and Midian and Ishbak and Shuah" (6 more sons)

b) God: "doesn't count, doesn't count, doesn't count, doesn't count, doesn't count, doesn't count"

c. How much was Abraham's faith multiplied, do you think, the day he received Isaac back from the altar?

B. Our text says: "having patiently waited, he obtained the promise"

1. I don't think that means that Abraham waited God out, and watched in heaven as his family expanded from Isaac

a. To Jacob

b. To Jacob's twelve sons

c. To the couple of million at the Exodus (est.)

2. No, I think Abraham obtained the promise when he got Isaac down off the altar: he "in a type" received the promise

C. Here is the point:

1. The pressures of life attack Christians and attempt to force them to "go silent" on God, to fall away alongside the path

2. The falling away will put them in the wilderness, and make them miserable
3. But the ongoing walk of faith —
 - a. There might be pressures
 - b. There might be beatings, figurative and literal, coming from outside
 - c. There might be long years of quiet faithful service
 - d. But there will be “full assurance of hope until the end”
 - e. You will enter with joy into his presence, if you remain faithful

Conclusion:

Proposition: God calls us to faithfulness even if we may not see any tangible fruit of his promises in our earthly lifetimes.

When I called on the name of the Lord, the Bible promises that God gave me eternal life.

If I went silent, abandoned the walk of faith, sank into oblivion spiritually, how much assurance and hope would I feel? How well would I do? What strength would I have over other temptations to sin?

But the walk of faith gives me: “full assurance of hope until the end”

Do you have that assurance?

Do you have that faith?