

Hebrews 11:8-16

I have heard about soldiers who used to carry a stick around with them. Not as a weapon, but as a wonderful reminder. As a soldier's tour of duty was coming to an end, he would cut notches in that stick. The notches showing how many days he had left before he would go home.

Now Abraham may have carried a stick, perhaps a walking stick, but I doubt if he cut notches in it. He did not know how many days he had left. But he did know that at the end of his tour of duty, he would go home. Yet not to the States - Vermont, Alabama, Missouri, or wherever home was for the soldiers. Abraham's home was in a much different place, and he longed for it just as soldiers longed to go back to their homes. For Abraham, heaven was his home.

Think of it...for as long as he lived in the land of Canaan, Abraham never had a place he could call home. He pitched his tent here and there. Hebrews 11 calls him a stranger here on earth. Abraham never owned a piece of land. He never built a permanent structure in which to live. He was, as our text calls him, an exile. And this is how God wanted it.

I suppose that in some ways I feel a little like Abraham. I, like many pastors, are strangers and exiles here on earth because we have no home. Oh yes, a home is provided for us. And how wonderful this is. And we make it our home during our tour of duty. But when a pastor like me retires, he no longer has a home. He must go somewhere else, and like Abraham, pitch his tent and make a home in that place. And perhaps God wants it this way. He wants His pastors to be like Abraham. Because if a pastor keeps his eyes, like Abraham did, on heaven, it might just help his congregation do the same.

You see everyone of us is like Abraham, having no real permanence here. We are in the world but not of the world. When you go on a vacation trip, and after a long day of driving get a room in a Holiday Inn, you may bring in a number of suitcases with you, but not every piece of furniture you own, along with all your other possessions. You're only there for a short time, maybe even for just one night. You appreciate your hotel room, but you don't put down any roots there. It's not your home.

And neither is this world. Do you have a home here? Think of it as a hotel room. You're only here for a short time. Your real home is heaven. Perhaps we need to carry a stick around with us like soldiers did. It may remind us that our tour of duty will come to an end; that what we truly long for is to go home.

Abraham's stick may have been a walking stick. When we get older, and our legs need a bit of help, we carry such a stick...a cane. Not only does the cane help us to walk, it can serve to remind us that as our tour of duty here draws to a close, our true home awaits us.

Now Abraham, though similar to soldiers fighting overseas, was different in a significant way. They both longed for home, but soldiers knew their homes well. They could describe their homes in great detail. Abraham, however, had never laid eyes on his home. He longed for heaven, but he had never seen it. He lived, therefore, by faith.

“Faith,” says Hebrews 11, *“is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen.”* We don’t need faith to navigate this world. Just common sense. We do need faith to please God. All the nations of the world, says Jesus in our Luke reading, seek after material things. We are to be different from the world...to seek God’s kingdom, which is the living Word of God. It doesn’t take faith to seek a good life here on earth. It does take faith to seek our real home in heaven, and know that God will provide us with what we need while we are here.

Abraham is our example in this. He did not withdraw from the world. But even as he lived in it, he was looking, says our text, for that place which *“has foundations, whose architect and builder is God.”* He desired, it says, a *“heavenly country.”*

This same heavenly country is your home. It’s your inheritance says Hebrews 11. You don’t earn a place there. It’s yours by virtue of your spiritual birth; your baptism into Christ Jesus. And no one can take it from you. What God gives you as an inheritance belongs to you always.

This does not mean that we can live like the nations of the world. For then we will lose sight of our home. We will stop walking by faith. For who needs faith whose eyes are set only on this world?

There was a man some years ago who was baptized into Christ, but who had stopped living by faith, and was in grave danger of losing his inheritance in heaven. But God gave this man a stick to carry around with him to turn his eyes heavenward and seek His kingdom. And He did it in this way... God gave his daughter a serious illness. She was not going to get better. But she was a trusting Christian girl and she knew that heaven was her home in Jesus. Her dad often sat at her bedside. And then the day came. It was mid-day, but she said, “Daddy, it’s getting dark, very dark. It’s time for me to go to sleep now, isn’t it?” “Yes,” he replied, and he laid his hand on her head. “Goodnight Daddy,” she said, “I’ll see you in the morning.” And Jesus took His little Christian to heaven. Her father told this story and then said, “I can hardly wait for morning.”

This is how God changed this man, giving him a stick to carry with him always. For this father, from then on, put God’s kingdom first in his life. Friend, you do have such a stick. It’s a wooden cross upon which Jesus died for you. This stick is your reminder that you always belong to Jesus. This stick was drawn upon your forehead and heart in your baptism, and it speaks to you today, as it did then, that your sins are forgiven. Let no one tell you otherwise. You are God’s forgiven one. This is why heaven is your home, for your sins cannot prevent you from entering into your home above.

Jesus did this for you. And that’s why you love Him. That’s why you long to be with Him in heaven. But until your tour of duty is over, He is here with you. And He will help you to walk by faith. He will help you to seek first His kingdom. It’s His stick that you carry, and so His home is your home. Amen.