

Text: Heb. 11:8-10

Title: "By faith Abraham obeyed"

Time: 4/3/2016 am

Place: NBBC

Intro - Eugene Monroe Bartlett was a successful business man who used his fortune to found the Hartford Music Company and Music Institute in Hartford, Arkansas, in 1918. His company produced a number of song books that were sent all over the United States, which contained gospel hymns, many of which Bartlett authored himself. Two years prior to his death in 1941, Bartlett suffered a major stroke that left him paralyzed and no longer able to function normally. While lying sick in bed in this state of incapacitation, Brother Bartlett wrote his last song, the one song that has stood the test of time as a blessing to Christ's church ever since he wrote it. It is one of the songs we sang this morning, "Victory in Jesus."

The faith of this man under those conditions expressed in that song parallels the faith we read about in Abraham's life. Our author tells us that Abraham looked for a city which hath foundations, whose builder and maker is God (v. 10). In his sickness Bartlett wrote - "I heard about a mansion He has built for me in glory, And I heard about the streets of gold beyond the crystal sea, about the angels singing and the old redemption story. And some sweet day I'll sing up there the song of victory."

The faith that caused Abraham to obey is the faith that caused Eugene Bartlett to obey the Lord, and it is the faith we need this morning if we are to obey the Lord. Do we have that faith? As we seek to answer that question this morning in an honest way, we need to notice some things

about the obedience that Abraham's faith produced in his life. We will notice three details together.

I. By faith, Abraham obeyed with voice-obedience (v. 8a, "while being called").

III: The word translated *obeyed* is an instructive word in the original. It is a compound of the word meaning *under* and the word meaning *to hear*. So *obey* in Greek literally means *to listen to someone as though you are under their authority*. I grew up under the authority of a pastor who used to call that voice-obedience. He explains in a book he wrote on the family in a chapter on the obedience of children (*Family Fundamentals*, p. 42):

"What God means by biblical obedience is described with two words here. The first is *obey*. In the previous chapter, when discussing the submission of the wife to her husband, we saw that the Greek word for *submit* was *hupotasso*. I explained that *hupo-* was a Greek preposition meaning *under*, and that the verb meant *to place under in rank*. The Greek word translated *obey* in this passage is a relative. It is *hupakouo*. *Akouo* is the Greek word for *listening*, and the combination means *to listen under*. Obeying, therefore, is placing oneself under the voice of another and to listen from that perspective.

"Dr. Dayton Hobbs, founder and pastor of Grace Bible Church and Santa Rosa Christian School in Milton, Florida, and one of the men who was influential in the modern development of 'Tee Ball,' talked of voice-obedience when speaking on this subject. I used to listen to him speak about that principle and think that he was stretching the concept. I do not think that way anymore. My own study of the Bible convinced me. Voice-obedience is exactly what the Greek word means."

Appl: Abraham's faith produced voice-obedience in his life. The text says he obeyed when he was called. One commentator (Westcott) after studying that phrase concluded that Abraham's response to God's call "was an immediate act of obedience . . . He obeyed the call while (so to say) it was still sounding in his ears" (p. 358).

We all love this when our children do it. But do we love this as one of the expectations our Heavenly Father has for us, His children? This kind of obedience begins with listening. Are we listening to God's Word and the other God-given authorities He has placed in our lives when they are in agreement with God's Word? If not, we know little of this faith that Abraham had.

We can do what we want without having to listen under. If we are committed to doing what we want, who cares what spiritual authority has to say? But that is not faithful obedience. The spirit of faithful obedience always cares what God-given authority has to say, because the spirit of faithful obedience is committed to voice-obedience, to listening under. By faith Abraham obeyed with voice-obedience. Do we have that kind of faith?

II. By faith Abraham obeyed not knowing (vv. 8b-9).

III: I remember after moving here to New Hampshire the trouble that I had at times figuring out how to get from point a to point b. The first time I endeavored to make it to Walmart, Alyssa Beal explained to me that the closest one was in Amherst, and that I needed to take Rt. 13 south to Milford and pick up Rt. 101A east there, which would bring me to Walmart. Sounds simple enough, except that once you get to Milford, you find a sign that directs you to Rt. 101 before you find the sign for Rt. 101A. You guessed

it. I drove to Milford and then to Manchester on Rt. 101 and finally found a Walmart there. It seemed as though Alyssa had underestimated the travel time a bit when we had talked.

Appl: The end of verse 8 tells us that Abraham faithfully obeyed in spite of not knowing where he was going. But there is a sense in which obedience would require Abraham to continue to be unfamiliar with the land that God had called him to. There is a sense in which the world you and I live in here should be unfamiliar to us. Verse 9 explains, “as in a strange country, dwelling in tabernacles.” The word *sojourned* tells us that Abraham never quite felt at home in the place God had called him to be. The phrase *strange country* means literally *a country that belonged to someone else*. The transience of this existence is emphasized by the fact that for generations, Abraham’s family dwelt in tents.

Abraham faithfully obeyed as a pilgrim in a strange land, and we are called to do the same. Here in New Boston, we live in a world that is not our home, one that does not belong to us, but to another. We are pilgrims in this world (v. 13; 1 Pet. 2:11-12). By faith Abraham obeyed not knowing the place that God had called him to be – it would always belong to another – he would always be a stranger and a pilgrim in it.

Remember Lot? He did not dwell in tents, did he? He did not remain a stranger and a pilgrim in the land, did he? No he did not. As a result, Lot lost his testimony and his family. It was Abraham’s legacy that Isaac and Jacob followed him as pilgrims. Lot’s legacy was far different from this. We need to teach our young people by example that we do not want to know well the things that are in the world – the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life. Like

Abraham, we are traveling through this world, not settling down in it.

III. By faith Abraham obeyed anticipating (v. 10).

Ill: The verb translated *looked* in this verse is used in John 5 of what sick people did as they waited by the pool of Bethesda for the waters to move that they might get in and be healed. Can you imagine the anticipation of that? You have cancer, and if you get in the pool when the waters move, you will come out with no cancer. You would be looking at the water and waiting with great anticipation. You would not know how long the water might move, and you would want to be sure not to miss it.

Appl: Abraham looked for a city that would bring great healing. We read about that city, the New Jerusalem, in our Bible reading this morning together from Revelation 21-22. Remember what we read of the tree in the city (22:2-3a)? "In the midst of the street of it, and on either side of the river, was there the tree of life, which bare twelve manner of fruits, and yielded her fruit every month: and the leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations. And there shall be no more curse." This world is sick with sin and sin's consequences. Our lives are weak with a battle against sin and sickness. But some day the heavens will stir, and we will be taken up to our place of healing.

Hebrews tells us that the city has foundations. That is especially comforting to us in the church. The gates have the name of the twelve tribes of Israel, but we need not go back to Judaism as the recipients of Hebrews were tempted to do, because the foundations of the city are the names of the twelve apostles, symbolizing the presence of the church there.

We are also told that the city's builder and maker is God. He designed and constructed the city.

Ill: I was reminded of my days as a painter in Connecticut shortly after Maureen and I were married. I used to work on a lot of new construction sites, and I can remember that there was one builder who was Portuguese, who did all the work on his homes himself. The quality of their design and craftsmanship was noticeably superior to some of the other condominiums and homes we used to work on.

Well, the designer and maker of this city, which the obedient faithful anticipate, is God Himself. We have seen what kind of work He does, haven't we? Ever take a look at a hummingbird? I learned some amazing things about that bird's tongue this past week. Well, the one who build that bird on the same day that He built all the fowl of the air and all the creatures of the sea, is the one who builds this city that Abraham anticipated. By faith Abraham obeyed while anticipating that city. Is that how we live our lives?

At some level, you kind of ask yourself about Abraham, what really was the point? Could not God have just left him in Ur of the Chaldees and still arranged for his descendants to come out of Egypt and take the land? I suppose he could have, and I am not sure I have a complete answer to the question, why did God ask Abraham to obey, except this – that obedience glorified Abraham's God (see v. 16).

Should God be ashamed to be called our God, or do we have Abraham's faith that obeys? Most commands we are called to obey are very simple: be baptized, attend church, discipline your children, love your wife, make disciples, be a witness, obey them that have the rule over you, honor the king. If we do not have the faith that seeks to obey, we need

to ask the Lord for that faith this morning, that we might honor Him with our faithful obedience as Abraham did. It was not Abraham's superior will-power that caused him to obey; it was his faith. This faith is a gift of God's grace. We can ask the Lord for what Abraham had, and it will be ours for the asking.

Conclusion: As we began this morning, I mentioned the Hartford Music Company and the faith of its founder, Eugene Bartlett. In 1941, a man named Albert Brumley purchased that company and moved it to Powell, MO., where it is today as part of the Brumley Music Company. Mr. Brumley wrote a song very similar to the last verse of "Victory in Jesus," which we do not have in our hymnal. It is titled, "This World Is Not My Home," and I want us to sing it as our song of response this morning. For the faithful believer, this world is not our home. We are called to be pilgrims in this world who anticipate a world to come, and so we obey.

This world is not my home, I'm just passing through
My treasures are laid up somewhere beyond the blue
The angels beckon me from Heaven's open door
And I can't feel at home in this world anymore.

Refrain:

O Lord, you know I have no friend like you
If Heaven's not my home, then Lord what will I do?
The angels beckon me from Heaven's open door
And I can't feel at home in this world anymore.

They're all expecting me and that's one thing I know
My Savior pardoned me and now I onward go
I know He'll take me through
Though I am weak and poor.

And I can't feel at home in this world anymore.

Just up in glory land we'll live eternally
The Saints on every hand are shouting victory
Their song of sweetest praise drifts back from Heaven's
shore

And I can't feel at home in this world anymore.

“A man came – I think it was actually in Philadelphia – on one occasion to the great George Whitefield and asked if he might print his sermons. Whitefield gave this reply; he said, ‘Well, I have no inherent objection, if you like, but you will never be able to put on the printed page the lightning and the thunder.’ That is the distinction – the sermon, and the ‘lightning and the thunder.’ To Whitefield this was of very great importance, and it should be of very great importance to all preachers, as I hope to show. You can put the sermon into print, but not the lightning and the thunder. That comes into the act of preaching and cannot be conveyed by cold print. Indeed it almost baffles the descriptive powers of the best reporters.”

– David Martin Lloyd-Jones,

Preachers and Preaching