

“A Better Country”
(Hebrews 11:8-16)

I. Introduction.

A. Orientation. Today, we finish our Reformation Series.

1. We've seen some encouraging things:
 - a. We've been reminded of our Lord's promise that though sometimes He must bring us through some hard times for our good, yet He won't forsake us – He will bring us to heaven.
 - b. We've been encouraged to be content in our circumstances, knowing that God has brought them about sovereignly and that He intends them for some good purpose.
 - c. We've been warned about Satan's schemes and been shown how to avoid falling into his traps.
 - d. And we've been exhorted to put out the kind of holy violence to ourselves – our sin nature – to Satan and to the world, that is necessary finally to enter into the kingdom of heaven and to be useful Christians while we're on our way there.
2. All these things are to remind us that the Christian life is more than just going to church on Sundays or reading a chapter or two of the Bible each day or praying before we eat.
 - a. There is a race to run, a battle to fight, difficulties to overcome, a prize to win.
 - b. If we're not putting our sins off and putting obedience on, we're either caught in one of Satan's snares or we are yet in need of the new birth.
 - c. Either way, our hearts needs to be set free from sin and enslaved to Christ: we need to leave the world behind and set our eyes on heaven.

B. Preview.

1. Our final topic should help us to do this as we consider that we are to be pilgrims travelling through this world towards heaven.
 - a. This isn't something that is to be true of a certain select group of believers, but of all of us.
 - b. Abraham was called out from the world and from his family to go to a place he had never before seen to receive an inheritance he had only heard about from God.
 - c. We too have been called out of this world, and very often to separate from our families, to go to a place we've haven't seen, to receive an inheritance we have only heard about in God's Word.
2. This morning, let's consider three things as we orient ourselves to what we'll see this evening of John Bunyan and *Pilgrim's Progress*:
 - a. First, what our calling is from God.
 - b. Second, what our incentive is to pursue this calling.
 - c. And third, what our purpose should then be in life.

II. Sermon.

- A.** First, let's consider what our calling is from God. It is this: God calls us to leave this world and to begin a journey towards heaven – “By faith Abraham, when he was called,

obeyed by going out to a place which he was to receive for an inheritance; and he went out, not knowing where he was going” (v. 8).

1. Abraham received this call, and when he did, he obeyed.
 - a. At first, the Lord moved Abraham from Ur of the Chaldeans with his father’s household (Gen. 11:31; 15:7).
 - b. But after Terah died in Haran, and the Lord called Abraham to separate from his family to go to a place He would give him, Abraham obeyed (12:1).
 - (i) He left his own land.
 - (ii) He left his own family.
 - (iii) He left for a land he had never seen.
 - (iv) And he did it all on the basis of God’s promise.
2. This is very much a picture of what the Lord calls us to do in the Christian life.
 - a. The call of the Gospel is not only a call to repentance and faith, it is a call to leave this world and to journey towards heaven.
 - (i) Not to leave the world physically, but to leave the world system that is controlled by the devil and our sins behind: to be in the world, but not of the world.
 - (ii) To leave what we might have wanted from this world before – if what we wanted was wrong – to begin a journey that will ultimately end in heaven.
 - b. It’s also a call to leave our own family.
 - (i) We may not, with Abraham, need to separate ourselves physically from our families, though sometimes we may.
 - (ii) But when holding onto those emotional and relational ties becomes inconsistent with the life Christ calls us to live, we must withdraw our hearts: Jesus said, “Do not think that I came to bring peace on the earth; I did not come to bring peace, but a sword. For I came to set a man against his father, and a daughter against her mother, and a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law; and a man’s enemies will be the members of his household. He who loves father or mother more than Me is not worthy of Me; and he who loves son or daughter more than Me is not worthy of Me. And he who does not take his cross and follow after Me is not worthy of Me” (Matt. 10:34-38).
 - (iii) This includes old friends or new that get in our way, that stand between us and heaven: Paul writes, “Do not be bound together with unbelievers; for what partnership have righteousness and lawlessness, or what fellowship has light with darkness? Or what harmony has Christ with Belial, or what has a believer in common with an unbeliever? Or what agreement has the temple of God with idols? For we are the temple of the living God; just as God said, ‘I will dwell in them and walk among them; and I will be their God, and they shall be My people. Therefore, come out from their midst and be separate,’ says the Lord. ‘And do not touch what is unclean; and I will welcome you. And I will be a father to you, and you shall be sons and daughters to Me,’ Says the Lord Almighty” (2 Cor. 6:14-18).
 - c. In leaving these things behind, we also begin a journey towards a land we have never seen.
 - (i) We have only read about heaven.

- (ii) But we have never seen it with our eyes.
- d. And we do this on the same basis as Abraham: God's promise.
 - (i) How do we know there's anything out there? How do we know we're not giving up the only thing we can ever possess finally to go into nothingness as we cease to exist?
 - (ii) We know there is because God said it in His Word, and His Word is true.
- B. Second, let's consider the incentive He has given us to pursue this calling. The incentive is an inheritance: heaven. "By faith he lived as an alien in the land of promise, as in a foreign *land*, dwelling in tents with Isaac and Jacob, fellow heirs of the same promise; for he was looking for the city which has foundations, whose architect and builder is God. . . . All these died in faith, without receiving the promises, but having seen them and having welcomed them from a distance, and having confessed that they were strangers and exiles on the earth" (vv. 9, 10, 13).
 - 1. We might think Abraham reached what he was after when he entered the Promised Land. But it appears that even he knew it was only a picture of something better.
 - a. While he was living there, he lived as an alien – someone from another country who didn't own the land – as a stranger – someone who didn't belong there – as an exile – a temporary resident.
 - b. This was partly true because though he owned the land by way of God's promise, he didn't yet possess it.
 - c. But it was also true because he was looking for something better, for the city that God built, for heaven.
 - 2. There is a sense in which we are living in the land God has promised us and a sense in which we are strangers in it.
 - a. Heaven isn't our final destination, but the New Earth is.
 - (i) The New Earth is going to come from the old earth, on the day the Lord renovates it and purges it from all of its sin.
 - (ii) In a certain sense then, we are already living in the land God has promised to us, just as Abraham did, though like Abraham, we do not yet possess it.
 - (iii) Jesus said, "Blessed are the gentle, for they shall inherit the earth" (Matt. 5:5).
 - b. But in another sense, we're not living in that Promised Land.
 - (i) Abraham lived in the land while the wicked still possessed it – so we are living in a world possessed by the evil one and his children.
 - (ii) That's why though we are in the Land of Promise, we must live as aliens, strangers and exiles:
 - (a) The land we're looking for hasn't come yet, because it isn't yet God's time.
 - (b) Now we live in a world of people who love darkness, estranged from them because we are the children of light.
 - (c) But the Lord will come again and take the earth back; He will purge this world will fire; He will recreate it as a paradise; and then He will give it to His Son and those who are His heirs – the sons of the Kingdom, to us, if we are trusting in Christ – and there we will live with Him forever in perfect happiness and eternal bliss.

- (d) This is our motivation; this is our incentive. By faith, we are looking to the world the Lord will create, the city which has everlasting foundations, the place God will prepare.
- C. Finally, let's consider what our purpose should then be in life. We are to be on a spiritual journey, seeking the heavenly country which is before us, forgetting what is behind us. "For those who say such things make it clear that they are seeking a country of their own. And indeed if they had been thinking of that *country* from which they went out, they would have had opportunity to return" (vv. 14-15).
1. When Abraham left his country and his people, he left them for good.
 - a. He didn't begin on a trial basis, thinking that if things didn't work out there, he would return home.
 - b. As far as he was concerned, those bridges were permanently burned.
 - c. He would go to the place God had called him to go, to the place God had promised, and that is where he would live.
 2. That is what the Lord calls us to do as well.
 - a. We are not to live the Christian life on a trial basis: we must be willing to go the distance.
 - b. We must forget what is behind us and press forward:
 - (i) Like those running a race, who don't give up until they finish.
 - (ii) Like those trying to take a city, who press forward in the battle until they take that city and enter it.
 - (iii) Paul writes, "One thing *I do*: forgetting what *lies* behind and reaching forward to what *lies* ahead, I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus" (Phil. 3:13-14).
 - (iv) Jesus tells us, "No one, after putting his hand to the plow and looking back, is fit for the kingdom of God" (Luke 9:62).
 - (v) We must press forward and not look back if we are finally to enter into heaven.
 3. How can we do this? How can we make this journey? Only by faith. "By faith Abraham . . ."
 - a. We must believe God's Word strongly enough to see that world ahead, to journey towards it.
 - b. We must want to be with God strongly enough to desire heaven no matter what we might have to face on earth.
 - c. It is for people like this that God has prepared heaven: "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 a city for them" (v. 16).
 - d. The only way you will want heaven strongly is if you're trusting in Christ. His Spirit alone can and will give you the desire and the endurance to enter. If you haven't trusted in Him, do so now.
 - e. Tonight, Bunyan will show us in his Pilgrim's Progress what is involved in this journey and give us some good counsel on how to run this race. Amen.