Hamish Taylor: By faith Abraham obeyed

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 18 February 2018

Preacher: Guest Preacher

[0:00] Two sections of God's word that we read with which we are familiar, as I said, from childhood.

The account of Abraham, and you'll say a story, but account I prefer. And again, the testimony of those with faith, which is given in the epistle to the Hebrews with which we are familiar also.
And they are both connected because that part of the epistle refers back to the time and to the events of which we read in the Old Testament also.
It was by faith that Abraham obeyed God when he called him to leave home and to go to another land that he would tell them about afterwards.
Now that takes faith, and that needs faith, and that is what Abraham appears to have had. Because he went out and he obeyed God, not knowing where God was going to lead him or where he was going.
[1:18] God called Abraham to leave his home, to leave everything he knew to follow him. And while in no time God may call us through Jesus, at any time, he sometimes asks us to do what Abraham did, but more usually not, but to witness with in our own area.

But he still says, to each and every one of us, without exception, if any man would serve me, let him follow me.
That's in John 12, 26. If any man would serve me, let him follow me. I didn't give a text for this because I don't want to talk as much from a text.
But if we have a verse that will hopefully echo in our minds when we leave and go home, perhaps verse eight in the chapter from Hebrews.
By faith Abraham, when he was called to go out into a place which he should after receive for an inheritance, he went down, not knowing whether he went.
[2:51] If any man would serve me, let him follow me. That is the word of Jesus to us. And that implies, if we think about it, it implies that if we follow him, that implies that he goes before us.

And secondly, it implies that he is ahead of us. And thirdly, it implies that he doesn't take us or send us where he himself is not.
These are three simple, little, maybe realizations that can come to us if we think about it.
If he asks us to follow him, it means that he is going before us. It means that he is ahead of us. But perhaps most importantly, it means that he doesn't ask us to follow him or take us or send us anywhere where he himself is not.
And I think I mentioned in the prayer there, people who go overseas and want to hear who have done, and I'm sure that everyone who goes overseas or anywhere, there's an answer to God's call, that they will, all of them, say that when they arrive wherever, God called them.
[4:29] Then the Holy Spirit was there before them, and he was waiting for them. And we ourselves, we know that even in the simplest of ways, we sometimes procrastinate in going to visit people that we should have done ages ago.

And the more we procrastinate, the more difficult it is to approach that house and to go to that door and to open that door and to go in.
But how often do we find that when we pluck up the courage, hopefully in faith, to go to that house, then the door is already open and the Holy Spirit is there before us?
He doesn't ask us to go anywhere, either in simple things or in deeper things. He doesn't ask us to go anywhere where he himself is not.
Since we are called to follow Christ, we can learn from Abraham's journey some simple truths, and this is a very superficial discourse over this, some truths that will help us along the way.

Downloaded from https://yetanothersermon.host

[5:48] The first thing that we see of Abraham is that, as we said before, he didn't know where he was going, but that didn't stop him from being. He went by faith. Now, I'm not suggesting that we leave here tonight and take off for who knows where and wait for God to tell us when we were out.

God will put it into our hearts if that is what he wants. But the simplicity of our lives, Jesus asked us simply to follow him.
Even now, irrespective of our age, and some of us are a little bit at the top end of age or approaching the top end of age, I should say, but irrespective of that, we are as it were still standing at the beginning of our life.
Everything, every day is new. Every day we open our eyes, every day God opens our eyes, he opens our eyes to something new that we have never seen before.
And in reality, we don't know if our God is going to bring us next, even later on today. I remember somebody from Ness who always used to say in his prayer, Lord, he would say, you have given us this day.
[7:15] You have given us this day and it is a day that we have never seen before. And you have today put us into a place where we have never been before.

And then when we reflect on that, that simple paragraph in his prayer, when we reflect on it, we see how true it is.
God puts us, every single day, he takes us somewhere new that we have never been before.
Because the journey of life is a journey along a path that we don't know.
And it's a longer path also, we must remember, a longer path along which we cannot return. It's a one way street.
We never know and we can never assume what God has for us. And if we look back on our lives with the privilege of hindsight, and as I hinted a minute ago, we have the privilege of plenty of hindsight, then which of us who has travelled any distance along the journey, which of us can honestly say that every step of that journey was planned by ourselves, that we planned every step of that journey ourselves, and that it worked out exactly the way we planned it.
[8:51] When we think about none of us can say that. And maybe we did at the time.

But then when we think the passage of years lends reality to the scene, and we are privileged to see things in a truer perspective.
Like Abraham we must be willing, and like Abraham we must be willing to follow God, for rather God leads. We must determine to follow his plan for us, and to do so in spite of whatever confronts us from day to day.
Our mind being conditioned not by the journey, but by what God promises at its end.
Our mind conditioned not by the journey, but by what God promises at its end. And maybe that awakens in our mind the question, what is heaven like?
[10:02] And we hear views expressed in sometimes amazing detail. At communion time, for example, at communion is next weekend, and we meet in houses in the evenings, and we have discussions, and this is one of the subjects that occasionally comes up.

And we hear opinions of various kinds, some found it on scripture, some found it on opinion.
But is it not true that the reality is that I has not seen, nor has the ear of man heard, nor can the heart of man ever comprehend the wonders of what God has in store for the those who love him.
That is the reality of heaven that we can comprehend in our human minds, and wait with faith and with patience and with prayer for that to be revealed, for that to be proved to us.
We might have heard of the story of the dying man who asked his Christian doctor to tell him what was waiting on the other side.
[11:31] And the doctor was in a bit of a fix. How was he going to answer this? And I got the impression when I heard the story that the man wasn't really a man of faith as we would say.

But while the doctor was trying to work out how he was going to answer this, they had scratching at the door. And here was the man's dog scratching outside the bedroom door.
And the doctor asked what was that, and the man answered him, oh, that's my dog. He said, I never let him in here. He hasn't ever been inside this room.
Then the doctor asked him, why is the dog, why is he wanting into the room? Oh, he's wanting into the room.
He said, because he knows I'm here. And that gave the doctor his answer.

Downloaded from https://yetanothersermon.host

[12:38] He had his answer for the man, because the same is true of heaven. We don't know exactly what is inside that door.

We have descriptions and we have ideas, but our minds aren't even capable of comprehending it. All we know is that we all want to go there.
And when we ask ourselves the question, why we want to go somewhere that we don't know what's inside the door? Well, the answer to that is because we know that Jesus Christ is there.
And if that story rings through, then it is through not only of our final destination in heaven, but of every step along the way.
However, at the beginning, there was a myth that since he called us, he said he was ahead of us, he was going before us, and he wouldn't take his end if he himself was not.
[13:53] So what is true of the destination is also true of every step, every step along the way. No matter what our course in life, be it in storm, be it in calm, be it in peace, or be it in turmoil or trouble, sickness or ill health, no matter what we go through, we can still look forward to tomorrow.

Because we know that Christ himself will be there with us. Why? Because he himself has said, I will never leave you.
And that never word is the one meant that maybe we don't emphasize often enough. We will read it, but our minds will absorb, will absorb, I will be with you.
Or I won't leave you. I will never leave you, not forsake you. It's the word that he has said to us. I will never leave you, not forsake you.
A few years ago, ten maybe more years ago, a man from Leverborough told me about an event that he had read in the fall papers to the West Highland Free Press.
[15:24] I can't remember whether he told me about the event or whether he gave me the cutting, but it was most interesting. The account was of a poor man who lived somewhere in the area of Invernessshire, Beowleys in my mind, that area.

But the man was not only poor, but he had some life-long affliction, which meant that people considered him to be a bit less than worldly wise.
His house was within sight of the manse, and so affected was his man that the minister watched every morning to make sure there was smoke coming from his chimney.
One day at communion time, the poor man said to the minister that he would like to take him in, but he wasn't sure if that was for the likes of him.
The minister assured him that it truly was, and so the man took his place at the Lord's table on the Sunday. I'm not sure if the minister noticed anything, but after the service he spoke to the man, and he asked the man if anything had happened to him during the service.
[16:46] The man replied that yes, he had seen a man dressed in white, the new be the air, who went round all those at the table and laid his hand on the head of some of them.

The minister asked him, did he lay his hand on your head? He said yes. Did he speak to you? He said yes.
He said, a year from today I will come for you. Throughout the year, the minister continued to watch for the smoke from the man's chimney every morning.
One year from that coming on Sunday, he noticed there was no smoke, and when he went over to the house, he found that through to his word, Christ had come for his friend.
When we look at the account and genesis of Abraham leaving his home, we also notice something else. Where Abraham goes, God meets with him.
[18:08] I am sure this was a big part of the reason why Abraham was able to venture into the unknown. We have already touched on it, that every day God takes us somewhere where we have never been before, and every day he is with us in that place where we have never been before.

I am sure this was a big part of the reason that Abraham was able to venture into the unknown, because he knew he wasn't going alone, because God was going with him.
This wasn't just Abraham following God without seeing the fulfilment of the promise. His faith, and that is reflected in the bit in Hebrews, remember Hebrews says collectively of the people of faith, they saw the promises afar off.
They had such faith that they knew that what God had promised was true, for ever God was taking them was good, and they saw these promises afar off.
His son Isaac and his grandson Jacob also followed. And when God reiterates the covenant with Jacob that he made with Abraham, God concludes remember by saying, and that's in Genesis 28,

Downloaded from https://yetanothersermon.host

and behold I am with thee, and will keep thee in all places whither thou goest.
[19:39] And I will bring thee again into this land, for I will not leave thee until I have done that which I have spoken to thee of.

Once also, to that Jacob, Abraham's grandson, to Jacob, Abraham's grandson, God said, I will be with you.
And it was the presence of God that kept these generations all waiting for the moment and for the time when God's promises would be fulfilled.
They didn't always know where they were going, and we can even wonder whether they ever knew where they were going. They didn't always know how they would get there, but they knew one thing, whatever it was and however they went, God would be with them.
And the same is true of us, no matter what God has for us in our lives, no matter what he has for us in our walk on earth, it doesn't matter that we don't know where we'll end up because if we follow him, we can know who we'll end up with.
[21:05] Again what is heaven like? Heaven is where Christ and God are, where God and Christ are.

By faith, in Hebrus 11,9, by faith he sojourned in the land of promise as in a strange country, dwelling in tabernacles, in tents, with Isaac and Jacob, the heirs with him of the same promise, living not in permanent, spatial houses like we have, living in temporary, that was easily moved from and moved on with.
There's a nice wee story of an American tourist who once called an apolish rabbi and when he went into the rabbi's house he was amazed at how basic that house was.
A simple room filled with books, with a table and a bench. And this American tourist asked the rabbi, where's all your furniture?
And the rabbi asked the American tourist, where's yours? The American answered, oh I'm only on a journey, I'm only travelling, I'm only a visitor here, I'm only passing through.
[22:50] Ah, said the rabbi, so am I. We're only passing through. As Christians we must keep that perspective also and we must remember that we are pilgrims passing through this life on our way to the next.

It's not that this life hasn't any significance for us, it does because after all it's our conduct in this life, our faith in this life and the results of our faith in this life that determines why we will spend the next.
However we're not through citizens of this world. We don't really belong to this world.
We are like Abraham, we are also moving along and we're like that Polish rabbi and that American tourist if he only knew it. We're also moving along with a final destination that is not of this world.
There's another story, sorry for all these stories, a once famous king, his name has apparently been forgotten, who asked to be buried sitting on his throne with his royal robes around him.
[24:23] He asked that his crown be placed on his head and his scepter in his hand and that an open book be placed on his lap.

200 years later the king of the time had heard about this and he was curious and he wanted to himself, I wonder if they ever did that.
So he set up a commission to find out whether the first king's request had been carried out.
And the people he sent out to see and to make a report, they reported back that they found the body of the emperor just as he had ordered.
Only then 200 years on the scene was a little bit different. The crown had fallen off the skull, the robes were worn and worn a meeting and the body was nothing but a disfigured skeleton.
[25:35] But open on the skeleton's lap was the book that the emperor had ordered with one bony finger pointing to the page and the verse that he had asked to be left exposed.

And that was Matthew 1626. What good will it be for a man if he gains the whole world and yet loses his soul?
None of us are kings and we may not face the same sort of things that he faced and we may not be tempted by the same temporal things as he might have been.
However there are so many things that we can get caught up in, things that are not of themselves bad but are of little or no spiritual value.
Our spiritual works are the things which really matter in this journey of life.
[26:49] The things that we've done in the name of God, for the kingdom of God, they may seem simple to us and so simple that we might not even realise we've done it.

Downloaded from https://yetanothersermon.host

But these are the things which will last for eternity. And this is what Abraham did because he was confidently, confidently with faith, looking forward to a city with eternal foundations designed and built by God himself.
And here we're introduced to the way in which Abraham was able to hold on, to persevere. The reason that Abraham was willing to live in a tent and not make a permanent home, because he didn't want to settle for this world.
He wouldn't settle for the pleasures and the wealth and the security of this life because he knew there was something better. He knew in faith that there was something better because he believed God and he believed whatever God was taking him would be to something and somewhere better. And he knew that he would be foolish to settle for so little as this world had to offer. Now, sometimes the world seems great and sometimes it is.
[28:29] After all, it is a part of God's handiwork. But it pales in comparison to the destination that God has prepared for each of us.

Talking about making a permanent home or a temporary home, there's another story and I promise this is going to be the last one. It is said that at the time of the great immigration from this another country is over to America.
There was someone on his way to a new world as he saw it and a new life as he saw it. But they had a tough journey across the Atlantic and he never wanted to see another ship or a drop of sea water again.
They landed in New York and they processed through Ellis Island, which was the processing area that they had to go through to be sorted out before going ashore.
He was so glad to get his feet off that ship and for that journey to be over that he decided that he wanted to stay in that dormitory of the processing centre forever.
[29:56] And he unpacked all his clothes, hung up his pictures above his bunk and he just made himself at home as if he was going to be there forever.

A touching little story perhaps, but we are tempted to think that that fellow must have had something wrong with him to want to stay permanently in that place which was only a processing area.
And yet how often do we do the same thing? This earth is a pleasant place which God has given us as a temporary home.
But in reality it is only the processing centre, the Ellis Island of God's preparation. It's only a gateway.
It is the next world that holds everything that we can't possibly think of or comprehend or imagine or visualise. Everything beyond our wildest dreams, but like Abraham that we can think of if not imagine in faith.
[31:20] And that is how God asks us to process our way through this processing centre of this world in which we are, along the path in which he has set us and along which he goes before us.

And remember what we said, he takes us nowhere. When he asks us to follow him, if we follow him, he will take us nowhere where he himself is not.
By faith, Abraham when he was called to go out into a place which he should after receive for our inheritance, he obeyed and went out not knowing whether he went, for he looked for a city which has foundations, whose builder and whose maker is God.
Amen. And may God add his blessing to these few thoughts on his word. And as we go home and think on that, may he open our minds to place ourselves in a place where we can see ourselves in respect of all these things of which he has put through our hearts.
Dear heavenly Father, we thank you for these thoughts which you have passed through our hearts. And again, we ask that if the thoughts have been according to your word, then you bless and you prosper that which we have retained in our memory and in our hearts.
[32:51] But anything that was the thought or the opinion of man that you would erase from our memory. Be with us on the rest of this evening, be with this faithful congregation of your people and their witness and their ministry in this part of the vineyard in which you have sent them.

And for all of us help us to ensure that whoever dim our light may be. Whoever dim we may reflect your light and that we may not enter it from being seen by a needful one.
Be with us to bless us and be with us to guide us through Jesus Christ of Lord. Amen.

Downloaded from https://yetanothersermon.host