

*“Now the LORD said to Abram, “Go from your country and your kindred and your father’s house to the land that I will show you. And I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and him who dishonors you I will curse, and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed.” So Abram went, as the LORD had told him, and Lot went with him. Abram was seventy-five years old when he departed from Haran. And Abram took Sarai his wife, and Lot his brother’s son, and all their possessions that they had gathered, and the people that they had acquired in Haran, and they set out to go to the land of Canaan. When they came to the land of Canaan, Abram passed through the land to the place at Shechem, to the oak of Moreh. At that time the Canaanites were in the land. Then the LORD appeared to Abram and said, “To your offspring I will give this land.” So he built there an altar to the LORD, who had appeared to him. From there he moved to the hill country on the east of Bethel and pitched his tent, with Bethel on the west and Ai on the east. And there he built an altar to the LORD and called upon the name of the LORD.”*

Dear Friends in Christ, and fellow redeemed:

In the book of Hebrews, chapter 11 is often called the “heroes of the faith” chapter. The writer, through the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, speaks of faith and then cites many examples of the great people of faith—like Abel, whose faith led him to offer God his very best, which unfortunately brought forth the jealousy of his brother. Enoch was a man of faith—in fact, a man of such great faith that God did not allow him to see death. We are simply told: *“Enoch walked with God, and he was not, for God took him.”* (Genesis 5:24, ESV)

We are told that Noah, by faith, built the ark and *“became an heir of the righteousness that comes by faith.”* (Hebrews 11:7, ESV) Right after Noah, we hear of that hero of faith who is also mentioned in our Epistle lesson today—Father Abraham.

Abraham, or Abram as he was still known in our text, is important to the Jews, as the first and greatest of the patriarchs of the chosen people. Abraham is honoured by the Muslims, who trace their lineage through Abraham’s son, Ishmael, and believe that it was Ishmael, not Isaac, whom Abraham was going to sacrifice on the mountain. Of course, Abraham stands out for us as God’s people. In our Epistle lesson, Paul points to Abraham and calls him *“the father of us all”* (Romans 4:16, ESV), but he is not our father according to the flesh, but Paul speaks of those *“who shares the faith of Abraham”* (Romans 4:16, ESV) as the true children of Abraham.

God had promised that He had a plan to bless the world, and He chose Abraham to accomplish that plan. There is a direct connection between the beloved words that Jesus spoke to Nicodemus in our Gospel lesson today and the words that God spoke to Abram in our text. We hear Jesus speak those words we know so well, that *“God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life.”* (John 3:16, ESV) Those words are the fulfilment of God’s promise to Abraham that *in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed*. Abraham was blessed by God to bring a blessing, the blessing of life and forgiveness for all who believe with the faith of Abraham, because the Eternal Son, who comes to bring that life and salvation through His death and resurrection is, in His true humanity, the greatest descendent of Abraham.

There are two words that stand out in our lessons today: the words, ‘faith’ and ‘blessing’. We see how these two words come together in the life of Abraham. God promises great blessings to Abraham, but also asks some heavy things of Abraham: *Go from your country and your kindred and your father’s house to the land that I will show you. And I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing*. Even as we hear God’s promises, can you imagine the conversation between Abraham and Sarah? At this time the family had moved from Ur to Haran. Everything suggests that Abraham had a house and that he was doing well, one of the wealthier men of his community. He had flocks and herds that he took with him on the journey. He had hired men and

servants, who also were brought along on this journey. Yet that didn't make it any easier when he told his wife, "Honey, we're moving!" "Where are we moving to?" "Oh, I don't really know." "Where will our home be?" "I'm not sure." "What will our home look like?" "Well, we don't have one yet, but God says he'll look after us and give our children the land of Canaan as an inheritance. More than that, he says that all the people of the earth will be blessed through me." "Wait. He is going to give our children the land as an inheritance? What children are you talking about, old man? We don't have children, in case you forgot." Abraham had to be a man of great faith, because it takes faith for a husband to go home and tell his wife a story like this! Who, in their right mind, would leave the comfort and ease of the city life to go live in tents, waiting for some blessing to be revealed? Think of what you are throwing away! Use some common sense, man!

God said "Go!" Abraham believed God and he went. Did he have any second thoughts? We know he did. His weaknesses and sins are set forth in Scripture just as much as his faith. Like us, Abraham had his challenges, and like us, there were times when he failed. But God doesn't fail. He keeps His promises. Abraham had to wait twenty-five years for the promised son, but God kept His promise. Abraham went to the land that was to be his inheritance, but he lived and died as a stranger in that land, dwelling in a tent rather than a house. The hardest moment of his life must have come when God said to him: ***"Take your son, your only son Isaac, whom you love, and go to the land of Moriah, and offer him there as a burnt offering on one of the mountains of which I shall tell you."*** (Genesis 22:2, ESV) But God kept His promise. Isaac is spared, because God provided a substitute. He provided His own Son, who died to buy back lost Abraham, Isaac, Jacob and all their descendants. He provided His Son for you and for me and for all people. Yes, ***"God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life."*** (John 3:16, ESV)

My dear people, loved by God, faith and blessing go together. Faith brings blessing, but not the way some people think they will be blessed. There are those how are convinced that God will give us whatever we ask, if only we believe enough. God's blessings aren't always evident in the ways we want. Yet His blessings are there for those who believe. He blesses us with hope in the midst of the uncertainty of this life. He blesses us with the peace that fills us when confusion and fear overwhelm so many. He blesses us with the assurance that is ours, for even in the face of death we know that God can heal all things, deliver us from all evil and will bring us to perfect joy and life of His heavenly Kingdom. Best of all, we have the blessing of forgiveness, life and salvation that comes because Jesus died on the cross, and because He defeated death, hell and the devil as He rises again from the dead.

Abraham believed, and in that faith He was blessed. But he was blessed to bring a blessing to all, to be God's way of working His plan of salvation in Christ. In the same way we are called by the Gospel to believe and, by faith, we are blessed with forgiveness and eternal life in Christ. Now God uses us to bring a blessing to others, too. We do that as we share with others all that Christ has done for us. We help them to see the blessings of faith, as we cling in hope to all God's promises, no matter how dark the days may seem. As God's hand of blessing has been extended to us, so we extend a hand of blessing to others. Paul reminds us that: ***"in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting to us the message of reconciliation."*** (2 Corinthians 5:19, ESV) There is no greater blessing than that blessing of forgiveness in Christ, but almost equal to it is the blessing we have when we bring that blessing to others, sharing with them all that Christ has done for us and for all people! Lord, use us to bring that blessing to a world so in need of this hope, peace and life! Amen.