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Sermon Notes

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The Eternal Rewards of Living as an Alien

Hebrews 11:13-16

Context: Jewish people who had made a profession of faith in Christ, but were under extreme pressure to renounce their faith in Christ and go back to Old Covenant Judaism. This was possible because the Temple was still standing and the animal sacrifices were still being made by Jewish priests day after day. The destruction of the Temple would make it clear that God was finished forever with Old Covenant Judaism... that the unbelieving Jewish nation was under God's judgment for rejecting the New Covenant of Jesus Christ. That would come in A.D. 70 when the Roman legions destroyed Jerusalem and burned the temple to the ground.

So, Divine grace had called them out of Judaism into Christian faith, but Divine judgment had not yet fallen upon Judaism.

In a very similar way, Divine grace has called us out of the worldly system that Satan has erected in defiance of God... but God's judgment has not yet fallen upon this world.

And in a very similar way, we Christians are tempted DAILY to shrink back into the world from which grace has called us.

Hebrews 11:13-16 are some of the most majestic and soul-stirring verses in this entire epistle... they speak of the buoyant faith of the patriarchs... how they lived as aliens and strangers on earth right up until the day of their death... and how their hearts were set totally on a heavenly city and a heavenly country to which they were going... and how God is greatly glorified by such a mentality... and how God will reward their faith with the total and perfect fulfillment of all His promises.

So we have before us today the life of faith in this world... a life that flourishes when we don't know where we're going, and when we have not yet received the promised things from God... a life that will end in death in this world and in eternity in a heavenly city and a heavenly country... the only kind of life that God esteems and that God honors... the only kind of life by which God will not be ashamed of us

THE LIFE OF FAITH!!!

Hebrews 11:13-16 All these people were still living by faith when they died. They did not receive the things promised; they only saw them and welcomed them from a distance. And they admitted that they were aliens and strangers on earth. ¹⁴ People who say such things show that they are looking for a country of their

own. ¹⁵ *If they had been thinking of the country they had left, they would have had opportunity to return.* ¹⁶ *Instead, they were longing for a better country-- a heavenly one. Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God, for he has prepared a city for them.*

I. Living by Faith When Dying: Not Receiving the Promises

vs.13 All these people were still living by faith when they died.

A. "All These People"

1. Speaking of the patriarchs, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob... those who lived in tents and who were wandering about in the promised land; there is a strong "travel metaphor" for those three in particular
2. Not directly so much of Abel, Enoch, and Noah... BUT
3. In some sense this "living as an alien and a stranger" theme is appropriate for every true believer
 - a. Abel died without receiving any promise... this world was not his home; he lived as an alien and a stranger, hated by his ungodly brother Cain
 - b. Enoch walked with God as an other-worldly person; he lamented over the wickedness and ungodliness of the world before the flood, longing for the day when the Lord would come with his angels and destroy all the ungodly people; and God snatched Enoch out of this world that was not his
 - c. Noah also knew that this world was not his home when God totally destroyed the world by the flood; he lived as an alien and a stranger as did all the other men and women of faith
4. Vss. 13-16: Universal, transferable principle: the true life of faith is one in which the man or woman knows that he/she is an ALIEN and a STRANGER here on earth, no true, lasting home; the true home is a HEAVENLY one

B. "Living by Faith when they died"

1. The key issue here is DEATH
2. A genuine faith in Christ prepares us for DEATH
 - a. Notice: "Left Behind" series prepares so many people for the Second Coming of Christ, or the secret rapture; that mysterious generation that will not sleep the sleep of death but will be instantaneously transformed and glorified at the Second Coming

- b. FINE... but we should far more avidly prepare for death; if you are prepared for death, you will most certainly be prepared for the Rapture
- c. Picture yourself dying... picture yourself in the ICU, in the final stages of life, struggling for breath... prepare yourself for death

3. Deathbed faith the focus: vs. 21-22

Hebrews 11:21-22 By faith Jacob, when he was dying, blessed each of Joseph's sons, and worshiped as he leaned on the top of his staff. ²² By faith Joseph, when his end was near, spoke about the exodus of the Israelites from Egypt and gave instructions about his bones.

- 4. Genuine faith endures through every trial right to the end of life... in fact, every trial our faith endures while we live prepares us to believe while we're dying; deathbed faith is mere completion of a WHOLE LIFESTYLE of faith
- 5. To die by faith, you have to live by faith moment by moment

C. The Trial: Not Receiving the Promised Goods

Hebrews 11:13 They did not receive the things promised; they only saw them and welcomed them from a distance.

- 1. The Author is giving us a HEAVENLY focus... HEAVENLY rewards, and a faith that looks forward to those things
- 2. The trial of faith is to get to the end of the Christian life NOT HAVING RECEIVED anything of those glorious things promised
 - a. You spent your whole life living for something you don't receive in this life
 - b. If an unbelieving relative was standing by your bedside, they would say you wasted your life on something you never enjoyed, never tasted, never experienced
 - c. Paul described their way of thinking:

1 Corinthians 15:32 "Let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we die."

- d. And again:

1 Corinthians 15:19 If only for this life we have hope in Christ, we are to be pitied more than all men.

- e. When an unbeliever dies, everything they hoped for, lived for, loved, yearned for, were ambitious for dies with them

3. Living by faith even when you KNOW you're dying and that you NEVER RECEIVED what you were promised means you know it was all for the next life

D. How to Die by Faith: See and Welcome the Promises from a Distance

1. These people "SAW" the things promised from a distance... like Moses up on Mt. Pisgah seeing the Promised Land from afar

Deuteronomy 34:1 Then Moses climbed Mount Nebo from the plains of Moab to the top of Pisgah, across from Jericho. There the LORD showed him the whole land-- from Gilead to Dan

2. Like Christian and Hopeful in *Pilgrim's Progress*, able to see the Celestial City from the Delectable Mountains through a telescope
3. This is the "eyesight of the soul"... their eyes enlightened by faith in the word of God
4. They WELCOMED these promises from a distance as well: it means they took these promises to heart and cherished them
5. In order to die well, by faith, the following four things are necessary
 - a. Firm belief in the existence of life after death
 - b. Entrusting of their departing souls into the hands of God
 - c. Firm belief in their own future blessedness and rest in the heavenly country to which they are going
 - d. Faith in the resurrection of the physical body which they are leaving behind

E. The Importance of Dying Well by Faith

1. Dying well gives glory to God (more on that in a moment... but God is not ashamed to be called the God of those who die well)
2. Dying well is a great encouragement to loved ones, family members and friends who cluster around the bedside
3. Dying well gives a testimony to believers around them, so that their own faith may be strengthened
4. Dying well is a clear testimony to unbelievers of something they do not have

II. Living as Aliens and Strangers on Earth

Vs. 13 And they admitted (confessed) that they were aliens and strangers on earth.

A. Strong Assertion by Faith

1. Original language = “confessed”
2. God has said it, they now make the same confession
3. They seal God’s assessment with their lips AND with their lives
4. This confession was made multiple times in the OT

[Abraham, trying to bury Sarah] *Genesis 23:4 "I am an alien and a stranger among you. Sell me some property for a burial site here so I can bury my dead."*

Genesis 47:9 And Jacob said to Pharaoh, "The years of my pilgrimage are a hundred and thirty. My years have been few and difficult, and they do not equal the years of the pilgrimage of my fathers."

5. NOTE: it does not directly relate to taking possession of the Promised Land under Joshua, for David made this confession:

Psalms 39:12 Hear my prayer, O LORD, listen to my cry for help; be not deaf to my weeping. For I dwell with you as an alien, a stranger, as all my fathers were.

1 Chronicles 29:15 We are aliens and strangers in your sight, as were all our forefathers. Our days on earth are like a shadow, without hope.

Psalms 119:19 I am a stranger on earth; do not hide your commands from me.

6. Furthermore, the NT commands Christians to think like this

1 Peter 2:11 Dear friends, I urge you, as aliens and strangers in the world, to abstain from sinful desires, which war against your soul.

B. Aliens and Strangers

1. Alien = one who has no citizenship in that country... no legal standing
2. Strangers = pilgrims = sojourners... someone in one sense “just passing through”

C. Living as Aliens and Strangers on Earth

1. Total renunciation of the world as our home

Romans 12:2 Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind.

2. Embracing by faith that our citizenship is in the heavenly country that is to come

Philippians 3:20 But our citizenship is in heaven. And we eagerly await a Savior from there, the Lord Jesus Christ

3. Rejection of the worldliness characterized in 1 John 2

1 John 2:15-17 Do not love the world or anything in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. ¹⁶ For everything in the world-- the cravings of sinful man, the lust of his eyes and the boasting of what he has and does-- comes not from the Father but from the world. ¹⁷ The world and its desires pass away, but the man who does the will of God lives forever.

4. Living as those who are dead to the world and the world to them

Galatians 6:14 May I never boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, through which the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world.

5. Living as if using the things of this world, but not engrossed by them

1 Corinthians 7:29-31 What I mean, brothers, is that the time is short. From now on those who have wives should live as if they had none; ³⁰ those who mourn, as if they did not; those who are happy, as if they were not; those who buy something, as if it were not theirs to keep; ³¹ those who use the things of the world, as if not engrossed in them. For this world in its present form is passing away.

6. Seeing the world and its ways as strange to us, foreign, odd

7. Being willing to be marked out as different, foreign

Illus. Living in Japan for two years; little children would stop and stare and point at me and say “Gaijin da!!!”... people refused to sit next to me on the train; even Japanese friends were merely tolerant of my feeble attempts to speak their language and fit into their culture

D. Are YOU Living as an Alien and Stranger Here???

1. Are you accumulating the things of this world as you are passing through?

a. An “alien and a stranger” who lives in a tent can’t carry any excess with him

b. Illus. Trekking in Nepal... stripped my backpack of all but the most basic necessities

2. Do you live for earthly experiences, fun times, etc. or for the world that is to come

3. Are you laying aside every weight that hinders so you can run this race with endurance?

III. Faith's Progression: Seeing, Seeking, Yearning, Confessing, Receiving

A. Seeing Heaven from a Distance...

Hebrews 11:13 they only saw them and welcomed them from a distance.

This leads to...

B. Seeking Heaven as a Life Goal... leads to

Hebrews 11:14 People who say such things show that they are looking for a country of their own.

[the word "seek" has an intensive aspect in the original... an EARNEST SEEKING of a country of their own... their own possession...]

This leads to...

C. Yearning for Heaven... homesick and desirous to be there...

Hebrews 11:16 Instead, they were longing for a better country-- a heavenly one.

The word means to stretch one's whole body out for something... to make it the focus of your existence...

This leads to...

D. Clear Confession by mouth and by lifestyle that this world is not your home... leads to

E. Receiving heaven as your portion by God

To seek after heaven means to make Heaven your chief aim and supreme task of every day of your life; it means to make full use of all the means God has appointed for getting there; it means you dream of it and derive your pleasure from the day you will receive it

IV. Constantly Resisting Returning

Hebrews 11:15 If they had been thinking of the country they had left, they would have had opportunity to return.

A. Constant Resisting of the Temptation to Shrink Back

1. Shrinking back is the danger the author is addressing here

Hebrews 10:38-39 But my righteous one will live by faith. And if he shrinks back, I will not be pleased with him." ³⁹ ¶ But we are not of those who shrink back and are destroyed, but of those who believe and are saved.

2. These Jewish professors of faith in Christ were constantly tempted with the idea of going back to their old way of life
3. So also the Patriarchs—Abraham, Isaac, Jacob—were tempted to turn back to their old life in Chaldea when they saw their new life was as merely aliens and strangers in a Promised Land
 - a. BUT Abraham was so adamant that they not go back that he refused to allow his servant to bring Isaac back even to find a WIFE!!!

Genesis 24:5-6 The servant asked him, "What if the woman is unwilling to come back with me to this land? Shall I then take your son back to the country you came from?" ⁶ **"Make sure that you do not take my son back there," Abraham said.**

4. The text says the opportunity to go back was CONSTANTLY there!!!

B. Apostates in Every Generation Turn Back to the Country they Had Left

- 1.

C. So Christians Are Constantly Tempted to Turn Back to the Old Life

1. During the Roman persecution, Christians were offered advantages and benefits if they would renounce their faith in Christ
2. John Bunyan, called to preach but not licensed by the corrupt state church, obeyed God and preached anyway... he was arrested and charged with preaching without a license; he was imprisoned, but was told he could be released if he would merely vow never to preach again... BUT he refused... he voluntarily stayed in prison so he could be faithful

Bunyan: The separation from my wife and blind daughter has been like the pulling of the flesh from my bones

3. So now we Christians are tempted to go back to the old way of life and forget earnestly following Christ

Luke 9:62 Jesus replied, "No one who puts his hand to the plow and looks back is fit for service in the kingdom of God."

Luke 17:32 Remember Lot's wife!

D. Christian Life: Constant battle against these fleshly temptations!!

1. Worldly lusts that wage war against our souls
2. ALSO even called to subjugate natural, good affections to this higher call

John Owen: "It is in the nature of faith to mortify not only corrupt and sinful lusts, but our natural affections... though in themselves innocent, if they are in any way uncompliant with duties of obedience to the commands of God.... Our lives, parents, wives, children, houses, possessions, our country, are the principal, proper, lawful objects of our natural affections. But when they stand in the way of God's commands, if they are hindrances to the doing or suffering of anything according to His will, faith mortifies weakens them, even to the point of comparatively hating them."

V. Faith's Reward #1: Esteem from God

Hebrews 11:16 Instead, they were longing for a better country-- a heavenly one.

Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God, for he has prepared a city for them.

A. God is NOT ASHAMED to be called OUR GOD!!!

1. Negative statement, making a positive assertion
2. God had no reason to be embarrassed about the association of His name with them
3. God went so far as to link His holy name with their lowly names!!!

Exodus 3:6 Then he said, "I am the God of your father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob."

4. Aa

B. The Opposite of Jesus' Assertion... But It Teaches the Same Thing

Mark 8:38 If anyone is ashamed of me and my words in this adulterous and sinful generation, the Son of Man will be ashamed of him when he comes in his Father's glory with the holy angels."

C. God is PLEASED with those who live openly for their heavenly reward

1. God will be called "their God"...
2. The eternal link between God and such people is established
 - a. Our name on his hand

Isaiah 49:15-16 "Can a mother forget the baby at her breast and have no compassion on the child she has borne? Though she may forget, I will not forget you! ¹⁶ See, I have engraved you on the palms of my hands

- b. His name on our foreheads

Revelation 22:3-4 No longer will there be any curse. The throne of God and of the Lamb will be in the city, and his servants will serve him. ⁴ They will see his face, and his name will be on their foreheads.

VI. Faith's Reward #2: A Heavenly City

Hebrews 11:16 Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God, for he has prepared a city for them.

A. City Already Described Earlier

Hebrews 11:10 For he was looking forward to the city with foundations, whose architect and builder is God.

1. The city has foundations... it is eternal and permanent, not transient like earthly cities
2. It is safe, secure, stable
3. It is designed by God... He is the ARCHITECT of the glorious city
4. It is built by God as well... He has crafted it step by step

B. Cities Not Generally Blessed or Beautiful

1. City of Babylon the symbol of human rebellion against God
2. City after city has been the focus of God's judgment in human history
3. Many cities today are dirty, crime-ridden, ugly, concrete places
4. Cities do contain the largest percentage of people to reach with the gospel... but it's hard to see a city as an appealing reward, a ravishing destination
5. Most beautiful city I've ever seen... Prague, Czech Republic
6. The City with Foundations, whose architect and builder is God will be staggeringly beautiful

C. City Described Much More Fully Later

Revelation 21:9-19 One of the seven angels who had the seven bowls full of the seven last plagues came and said to me, "Come, I will show you the bride, the wife of the Lamb." ¹⁰ And he carried me away in the Spirit to a mountain great and high, and showed me the Holy City, Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God. ¹¹ It shone with the glory of God, and its brilliance was like that of a very precious jewel, like a jasper, clear as crystal. ¹² It had a great, high wall with twelve gates, and with twelve angels at the gates. On the gates were written the names of the twelve tribes of Israel. ¹³ There were three gates on the east,

three on the north, three on the south and three on the west. ¹⁴ The wall of the city had twelve foundations, and on them were the names of the twelve apostles of the Lamb. ¹⁵ ¶ The angel who talked with me had a measuring rod of gold to measure the city, its gates and its walls. ¹⁶ The city was laid out like a square, as long as it was wide. He measured the city with the rod and found it to be 12,000 stadia in length, and as wide and high as it is long. ¹⁷ He measured its wall and it was 144 cubits thick, by man's measurement, which the angel was using. ¹⁸ The wall was made of jasper, and the city of pure gold, as pure as glass. ¹⁹ The foundations of the city walls were decorated with every kind of precious stone.

D. "Prepared" for them By God: *He has PREPARED a city for them*

1. Word means a careful crafting of the city

Revelation 21:2 I saw the Holy City, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband.

2. Same promise Jesus makes

John 14:2-3 In my Father's house are many rooms; if it were not so, I would have told you. I am going there to prepare a place for you. ³ And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with me that you also may be where I am.

Matthew 25:34 "Then the King will say to those on his right, 'Come, you who are blessed by my Father; take your inheritance, the kingdom prepared for you since the creation of the world.

3. Prepared for 2000 years through evangelism and discipleship

Ephesians 2:10 For we are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.

4. Hardly imaginable how beautiful it will be

1 Corinthians 2:9 However, as it is written: "No eye has seen, no ear has heard, no mind has conceived what God has prepared for those who love him"

5. Specific places prepared as well

Matthew 20:23 Jesus said to them, "You will indeed drink from my cup, but to sit at my right or left is not for me to grant. These places belong to those for whom they have been prepared by my Father."

6. Wedding banquet prepared

Matthew 22:4 "Then he sent some more servants and said, 'Tell those who have been invited that I have prepared my dinner: My oxen and fattened cattle have been butchered, and everything is ready. Come to the wedding banquet.'

7. The Bride ALSO is preparing herself for that glorious day... the city and the people are one

Revelation 19:7 Let us rejoice and be glad and give him glory! For the wedding of the Lamb has come, and his bride has prepared herself.

VII. Faith's Reward #3: A Heavenly Country

Hebrews 11:14-16 People who say such things show that they are looking for a country of their own. ¹⁵ If they had been thinking of the country they had left, they would have had opportunity to return. ¹⁶ Instead, they were longing for a better country-- a heavenly one.

A. Heaven is BOTH a City AND a Country

B. The Word "Country" = Homeland

1. Like native land... more than just the "city of your birth"
2. It involves perhaps the rolling hills, the forests, the seashore, the river, the specific contour of the land; the feel of the place, the climate, the specific sights and sounds and culture and aromas of their native land
3. Living overseas greatly heightens the yearning for HOME...
4. One of the central themes of great literature... a drive to get home
 - a. Homer's *Odyssey*
 - b. Tolkien's *Lord of the Rings*
 - c. Apollo 13
5. ... but here we have no home of our own

C. A Country "of their own" = inheritance

1. Here we have no lasting city
2. Here we have no lasting possessions... everything is temporary
3. The "homeland" aspect of this verse is absolutely linked to the concept of an inheritance

D. The Country = the New Heaven and New Earth as a WHOLE; the Promise to Abraham FULFILLED

1. Abraham was promised land that he never received... God will give him something linked and far better: a resurrected earth

Genesis 13:14-18 The LORD said to Abram after Lot had parted from him, "Lift up your eyes from where you are and look north and south, east and west. ¹⁵ All the land that you see I will give to you and your offspring forever. ¹⁶ I will make your offspring like the dust of the earth, so that if anyone could count the dust, then your offspring could be counted. ¹⁷ Go, walk through the length and breadth of the land, for I am giving it to you." ¹⁸ So Abram moved his tents and went to live near the great trees of Mamre at Hebron, where he built an altar to the LORD

2. Abraham died not receiving the promise

Hebrews 11:13 ¶ All these people were still living by faith when they died. They did not receive the things promised; they only saw them and welcomed them from a distance.

Acts 7:5 [God] gave [Abraham] no inheritance here, not even a foot of ground. But God promised him that he and his descendants after him would possess the land, even though at that time Abraham had no child.

3. God did not do a "bait and switch"... He was intending to give Abraham the same land now resurrected and enhanced: he is declared HEIR OF THE WORLD!!!

Romans 4:13 It was not through law that Abraham and his offspring received the promise that he would be heir of the world, but through the righteousness that comes by faith.

4. We are Abraham's seed... and the New Earth will be ours

Matthew 5:5 Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth.

VIII. Application

- A. Come to Christ: No Inheritance without Him!
- B. Live by Faith so you can Die in Faith
- C. Don't Expect Your Inheritance Now... Live for Heaven
- D. Live as an Alien and Stranger on Earth... Develop a Distaste for Worldly Things and a Love for Heavenly Things

E. Meditate Much on the City and the Country to Come

F. Build the City with Evangelism and Discipleship