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Pastor Rains

Living with your feet already planted on heaven's shores

Notes on Heb. 11

Again, as I was reading along in this chapter and preparing for some for our time here this morning, I couldn't think of this as a good title. Living with your feet already planted on heaven's shores. Living with your feet already planted on heaven's shore. Hebrews chapter 11, verse 13. Speaking of all those that have been mentioned in the verses before, you know, going all the way back to Abel, Enoch, Noah, Abraham, and Sarah. It says, verse 13, "These all died in faith, not having received the promises, but having seen them afar off, were assured of them, embraced them, and confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth. Those who say such things declare plainly that they seek a homeland, and truly, if they'd called to mind that country from which they had come out, they would have had the opportunity to return. But now they desire a better, that is, a heavenly country. For God is not ashamed to be called their God, for he has prepared a city for them."

Wonderful, wonderful. Father, thank you for your word, how it directs us forward, not backward, and how you've prepared for what's ahead. Perfect preparation. Lord, help us set our eyes on you and what you have for us in the future, in your hands, in Jesus' name, amen.

### **We Can't Go Back in Time**

So back there, we're in verse 13, which says, "They all died in faith, and they were assured of the things that they looked forward to. They embraced them and confessed they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth." You see, what it basically says is that these people were not interested in going back.

A lot of sci-fi movies are built around time travel. Sometimes, they even have ideas that people can go back in time. And it's kind of a fantasy. We think about it. In some moments of reflection, we might think, "Oh, if I could only go back. Yeah, I'd like to go back." Some of us wisely say, "No, I don't need to go back. I messed up the first time." But really, going back in time, you want to daydream about it. You might do that, but it's not possible. These things have occurred. They're over. It isn't a matter of a time warp, a hole in time, or whatever science fiction tries to conjure up to get back there. There is no way back. Time passes forward but doesn't go back.

Why would we even want to go back? One of the best reasons that I've ever heard was so that we could change things. If I could go back, I wouldn't do this, or I wouldn't do that, or I'd make a better decision, and I could change things. Well, in time, you can't do that.

And so many of us have settled for another way of returning. I've done this. We can't go back in time, so we go back in space. In other words, we return to a place in our past. Have you ever tried to go back to where you used to live, maybe as a child, a certain house, street, or a certain place?

Well, several years ago, I did that. I was down in Arkansas for an event, and several of my family members were with me. Susan was with me, and I said, "You know, it wouldn't be a real long trip for us to go back and see the old farm where I used to live. I'd like to see that old farm, see how things are, just bring back the memories."

So we traveled there, and I found my way back to that old farm. And believe me, life had gone on. It wasn't in any sense what my memories were like. The quarter-mile road from the house to the mailbox used to be thick with dust, but now it is a paved road, you know? This fellow had paved this quarter mile. Not only that but down there where the mailbox was, he also had this rather substantial gate system. I mean, only the gate system that a rich man could afford. And a very substantial gate could be radio-controlled, opened and closed, and whatnot. I couldn't even get in there to look at the old farm. Then a very high, well-built fence, you know, on down across the property. And I thought, "Man, when we were here, we were so dirt poor, the idea of putting a gate up was a crazy idea, and certainly this beautiful fence, we never saw a fence like this."

We were lucky to cut down some trees, stick them in the ground, and stretch some barbed wire across from one to the other. No, no, life had gone on. Things had changed. And I looked to see if I could see the old farmhouse. It was gone. See if I could see the old barn. It was gone. He tore those down and built beautiful buildings in their place. He just turned all the fields we used to raise strawberries on, watermelon, cantaloupes, peanuts, and anything we could get to grow into pasture, and he had beautiful cattle on those hills. And I thought, "Man, we didn't have anything like this. This was a rich man's farm now. It had been some poor folks' farm before, but it was now a rich man's farm. It wasn't anything like it was before." And my memories were having a hard time getting an anchor to that place. And I had to leave there that day. And I have to tell you, I've never been back.

It just can't conjure up all the fine thinking, all the wonderful thinking, all the fun, all the hardships, all the pain, and all that went into those years living in that area. And it really taught me a lesson that you can't go back. You can't go back. I have to tell you about another time when I visited the past. But this time, it wasn't intended. I didn't plan it. I didn't take a trip to see this past event. I want to tell you it just happened. It kind of forced itself on me, as sometimes these things do. But I'm going to give you a little bit of background.

In seventh grade, there was this smiley, sweet little girl with curly hair that I thought was just about the most beautiful thing God made on the earth. And every time she came in in the morning, my emotions just leaped. I thought, "Oh, oh." And part of the sadness was she didn't think very much of me. So I went through those days thinking inside and dreaming. And when graduation happened in eighth grade, she went wherever she went. I don't know where she went. I went to the high school I was attending, and I never saw her again. I never saw her again. Until one day, I was in law school and working at a bookstore where I worked at that time. And she popped into the bookstore. And I couldn't believe it. I recognized her when she came in. I thought, "After all those years, could I recognize her?" I did. I recognized her. And she recognized me. That was part of the surprise also. And we had a little bit of talk, and I invited her. I said, "Let's go to lunch and just kind of come up on how things have been and what you've been doing, and I'll share my story with you." And she said, "No, no,

no, I can't do that," which is pretty much in line with how she used to treat me anyway. I can't do that. I have to go. I'm with my... And then she paused, and she said, "My..." And she paused again, and then she said, "My uncle." Oh, she's with her uncle. And I thought, "Well, okay." And out she went.

I have to admit, she just had loads of makeup on. She had her hair done up. She was in what I'd call a short skirt, high heels, and all that. And she went out to the curb, and there was a big, long, white kind of car, a very luxury-type car, out there. And she got in this car in the front seat, and I looked, and I said, "Oh, man, that guy's at least 30 or 40 years older than she is." And off she went, and I thought, "Wow, she has chosen a way to go. Perhaps that was her decision to make something of her life, whatever that was, that meant she would go down that road with that kind of person." She was living for whatever she could get out of that kind of life with such an "uncle." And I tell you, I could come up with many ideas about what that kind of person could be, but I shoved them away.

But I had to ask this question. Why was I trying to think of her as a sweet little girl in seventh grade? Those days were gone. I had made a choice in eighth grade to trust in Christ as my Savior. My life was His. My future ahead was His. Whatever He had for me, I wanted it and nothing more. That was my choice here on earth and then forever with Him in heaven. And it obviously didn't in any sense agree with whatever her choice was.

So again, I learned to look forward to whatever God had ahead for me, to look forward to whatever wonderful woman He might have for me in my life and whenever, to the places, God would send me, to the places He would use me, and to the day that He would take me home to be with Him. To look forward, to look forward, not back. It asks the question, doesn't it, how completely should you trust in God for what's ahead? For that, it's fitting.

### **Trusting God for Our Future**

We can go on to this chapter in verse 17 and take a look at that question: how much can we trust God for what's ahead? Because it says here in verse 17, "By faith, Abraham, when he was tested, offered up Isaac. And he who had received the promises offered up his only begotten son." I don't know if you recall the Old Testament account, but God asked Abraham to take his son and go on a little journey, and He would show him a place to go to and offer up his son to the Lord. Abraham having received Isaac is a miracle really. He was about 100 years old; Sarah, amazing, was able to have that baby, and now God was asking him to sacrifice him.

But he loaded up the donkey, took wood along with him, and off they went on that little journey. They came to what we have in Scripture as Mount Moriah. That is probably the same place where the temple in Jerusalem was built later. Could be. Some say no, it's the same place where Christ died at Mount Calvary. Well, we don't know for sure, but it seems it could be the place where God later would have the Hebrew children offer up their sacrifices at what we call Mount Zion today.

He went up that hill. He laid some stones for an altar. He put the wood on the altar, and then he took his son, and he bound him with cords, laid him on that altar, and bound him to the altar. And the next step was that he had to drive a knife through his

chest. And he raised the knife to do that because he was going to be obedient to God. He raised the knife, and that's when God entered the story and stopped his hand. And you know the rest of the story, how God provided a ram that was caught in a bush, and Abraham offered the ram as a substitute sacrifice. In the scriptures, you see God does not permit human sacrifice, but he wanted people to offer substitute sacrifices that would look forward to the one human sacrifice that he would offer his own son.

And so Abraham offered that ram and thanked God that he would because, but here it says, of whom it was said in Isaac, your seed shall be called. God had promised him that he would give him a son, Isaac. And that through Isaac, Abraham's generations would come. They would become a people as numerous as the stars of the sky and the sands on the seashore. But now God was telling him to sacrifice his son. How could, on the one hand, God promise that through this boy, we're going to come many generations to populate the land and still, at the same time, ask him to kill him? You see it on the surface; it's a contradiction. He can't kill him and then expect him to raise up children. You come into those times and say, well, looks like a contradiction. Which way do I go? And Abraham decided he was going to trust God. He's going to believe God because this next verse says concluding. This is the conclusion of his reasoning, concluding that God was able to raise him up even from the dead. From which he also received him in a figurative sense.

Let me explain that figurative sense. The figurative sense was, yes, Abraham and Sarah had received Isaac in a sense from the dead because their bodies were both dead. Abraham was long, long past being able to father a child. Sarah was long, long past being able to mother a child. Their bodies were dead. In a sense, from that death, God raised up Isaac. They did have a son. And that's how, I mean, that was a miracle. And if God could do that, why couldn't he raise him from the dead? It made perfect sense to Abraham. He said, okay, if God wants me to kill him, since he proved that he could give him to us from the dead, our bodies, surely he will give us back our son from the death of my having killed him. You see, that kind of reasoning only makes sense in the Lord.

It makes no sense in this world. It doesn't go along with any of the laws in operation in this world, and it doesn't go along with the reasoning of this world. It only goes with what God can do when we put our faith in him. Abraham put his faith in God and was willing to offer up his son, concluding that God could raise him from the dead. That was a statement of his faith.

That's what you did when you received Christ as your Savior. It's absolutely, to the world, it's a fairy tale. To those who think that by their philosophies and their education, they have risen above such infantile kind of thinking, they're amazed that people by large numbers would believe a fairy tale like the idea that you can talk to a God someplace, have him forgive you, make you his child, and take you to be with him after you die. And they feel sorry for those of us who put our trust in God. They think of us as mere children, children in understanding, children in thought, children in wisdom, children in education, children in philosophy. Fools, not wise like them, who know there's no God, there's no hope, there's nothing after life.

They can live on their own terms, live it, enjoy its miseries, and call it quits. We're the fools. Abraham was a fool that day in the world's eyes. But God said he recognized his faith and his trust in him. Abraham was looking forward. He believed God would do

a miracle if need be if that's what God required of him. Down the road, God would work whatever miracle the Lord had to make things come out right. But what he had to do was obey the Lord. So Abraham sought to do that. God had made the promise, and he believed God wasn't a liar. God would raise up generations from Isaac, and he didn't understand how God would do it.

You don't have to know how God is going to do something. I often pray and ask for something, but I have no idea in the world how God will do it. Sometimes, I suggest some way to God. You could do this, God, or you could do that. This is a convenient way to do such, Lord. And send somebody to the door with a check. That would work. Make this car that stopped in the middle of the road suddenly start. You could have some suggestions like that. I don't say you shouldn't send them up to heaven. I don't know all the time that we always have the right answers. But well, I do know that we usually don't have the right answer. But this I know. He does want you to trust him, regardless of what happens.

### **God Works Out His Will**

Well, looking forward, look at verse 20. "By faith, Isaac blessed Jacob and Esau concerning things to come." Things to come. That's the future. Isaac was coming to the end of his life. He had these two boys. I mean, the man was practically totally blind. His hearing wasn't too bad, but his eyesight was terrible.

Jacob and his mother got together, pulled a trick on him, and passed him off as Esau. And he wanted to bless Esau with the greater blessing. And with his goat skin on his arms, it makes him feel hairy. And with the smell of Esau on him from the field, he fooled his father. I want you to know that Isaac was not necessarily interested in doing things God's way. Isaac had it in his mind to bless Esau with the greatest blessing and give Jacob the lesser blessing. But God's intention was to do the reverse. And it's interesting in scripture that God actually used the conniving, the trickery, the lying, the deceit of Rebecca and her son, Jacob, to pull this ruse on Isaac. And you say, does God sanction such things? Well, truthfully, no. No, what they did was wrong. What I want to tell you, though, is God used it.

One day, I was driving down a street coming to Larkin Avenue, and the light turned green. And I usually, you know, go right away. I just sat there for a second. I don't know. I just thought, no rush. And then I decided to go. And just as I decided to go, a lady drove through on Larkin at least a couple of seconds after it had turned green for me. And she just blew that red light like nobody's business. And I thought, you know, if I had gone ahead, when I perfectly, you know, it would have been perfectly legitimate for me to do it, I could very well have been dead. And the person with me could have been dead. Right, Debbie? Debbie saw the whole thing. She was there, oh. It could have been both of us. We could have been creamed right there. And what did we do? Well, I'll tell you what that caused me to do. It caused me to say, praise the Lord. Thank you, Lord.

So if God wanted to do something in my life to cause me, to make me have to praise him, I'll tell you, he got through that morning. Both of us started praising God. We were kind of just going along numb-headed before that, but now we were praising God. It does teach you that God can use things around you, not necessarily even good

things sometimes, but he can use them for a good purpose. If you're yielded to him, of course, and if you're walking with him, and he was good to us that morning, and we praised him for it. So Isaac gave Jacob the greater blessing and the lesser blessing to Esau, just the way God wanted to do it. And if you want to read the story, you can go back to their birth and find out that the birth order and everything about it is exactly, prophetically, according to what God said he was going to do. Jacob was going to be the leader, not Esau.

### **Our Eternity is not in the World but Heaven**

And then, of course, as Jacob came to the end of his life, in verse 21, "By faith, God, when he was dying, blessed each of the sons of Joseph and worshiped leaning on the top of his staff. So it came time for him to die, and he gave blessings." What is that? He's looking forward. He's looking forward to what God would do through those boys, through the promise of the land, the promised land, and to the blessings of the promised land. He was looking forward. These are all telling you that these people, by faith, were looking forward to what God would do.

And then it says, "By faith, Joseph, when he was dying." The fearful section here, you know, everybody's dying. "Joseph, when he was dying, made mention of the departure of the children of Israel and gave instructions concerning his bones." Those are two things that relate prophetic to what lies ahead. Number one, he was saying, "Israel is going to be gotten out, God's going to take Israel out of Egypt." And that prophecy did come true. Four hundred and thirty years later, sometimes we say, "Wow, God, why haven't you worked? You know, I've been waiting and waiting and waiting." You don't want to wait four hundred and thirty years, do you? Well, they had to wait four hundred and thirty years to have that prayer answered. But Israel did leave Egypt.

The second thing Joseph said was, "Take my bones with you when you leave." Why? Because he wanted to be buried back in the promised land. And he didn't want to be buried in Egypt—though he was buried in Egypt—he didn't want to stay buried in Egypt. He wanted his bones to rest in the promised land.

Every Christian should look forward to the hope that we have to be with the Lord Jesus. And while we may have to be buried in Egypt for a while to set our hearts on this, what I really want is to be forever with the Lord in the promised place. A promised land is a picture or a symbol, not a picture, but a symbol of heaven. I want to look forward to eternity with my Lord. That's my attitude, not to look at this world as though it's something final. It isn't. I have in my mindset that I have a future, and I want to look forward to my future with the Lord.

### **Faith Takes a Stand**

By faith, Moses, when he was born, was hidden for three months by his parents. Now, this is not Moses' faith; it is the faith of his parents. He was hidden for three months by his parents because they saw he was a beautiful child. Well, that wasn't going to work for very long. His mother and father knew that. Even though they were not afraid of the king's command that such a little baby boy should be killed, they

weren't afraid of that; they weren't going to do that, even with the threat of their own death.

There is a time when you have to stand up against the world's ways. Even though they would have you do something, if it's wrong, and God tells you it's wrong, listen and obey the Lord, not the world. Obey the Lord, not your emotions. Obey the Lord, not the standard you see around you. Obey the Lord. They did. And so they hid him in a little basket and let his sister Miriam watch over it in the Nile. You know the story of how the princess of Egypt saw the little basket and had the baby brought to her. She saw that it was a beautiful baby and decided to take it to the palace and raise it as her son. And she did. And Moses was raised in the palace of Egypt as the son of Pharaoh's daughter. He enjoyed all the wonders of Egypt's riches, education, and society.

And verse 24 says, "By faith, Moses, when he became of age, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter, choosing rather to suffer affliction with the people of God than to enjoy the passing pleasures of sin. Esteeming the reproach of Christ." It's interesting to put that name, Christ, in this story about Moses. The reproach of Christ. Greater riches than the treasures of Egypt, for he looked to the reward. What does that mean? He looked to the future. He looked to the promise. He looked to what was ahead. He looked to what God said he would have if he would trust him. Instead of looking back at the wealth of the palace, he identified with God's people. Was there any wealth in that? No. They were slaves. They were slaves. There was no wealth to be classed with them. They were dealt with harshly by the Pharaoh. But he chose to identify with them rather than with the palace, the Pharaoh, and even his daughter, who had mothered him through those years. And by the way, if you don't remember, Moses was 40 years old by this time when all of this came about. I mean, he was not a child anymore. Moses had lived into his adult years. He was now a fully adult reasoning person. He was making a very mature, deliberate decision, and he chose not the palace but God's people. And God considered that faith because it was nothing, nothing in identifying with God's people that was attractive to this world. All that was attractive to this world was at the palace. What was attractive to Moses, however, was to be where God was, to be with God's people. And so he chose that. And he looked to the reward.

It says in verse 27, "By faith he forsook Egypt, not fearing the wrath of the king, for he endured as seeing him who is invisible." That says how Christians should live their life. We look to the future and must consider the reproach of Christ's greater riches. In other words, in this world, no matter what it costs us, being associated with our Savior, even if the world hates him, even if the world persecutes those that identify with him, there's more to be gained in association with him than denying him and getting, you know, taking up the ways of the world. No, we are called on to let our Savior be the center of our lives, and we look forward to the reward he promised us.

Do you think most Christians have died as rich people or poor people? Most Christians, you think, have been killed as successful in this world or not so successful? For the most part, most of them are not so successful. I thank God for the few that have been wealthy, the few that have made great successes in different fields, but they're the exception, aren't they? Really?

And the reason is that it takes work to deal with when you get elevated in those areas. It's hard not to be tempted to use the things of the world according to the values of the world. It's very hard. Some can do it, but Jesus was very clear: scarcely, you know, would a rich man enter the kingdom. Why? They love their riches. Thank the Lord to those who have received him and realize that their lives don't consist of their riches, and they have used them wisely. And some have used their other talents wisely. When you see a Christian with a talent or ability or some training that has advanced them in some way, but use it in a way that agrees with the word of God and gives glory to God, thank him for them.

You may have read the life of, well, I shouldn't get into some political things, but I was thinking of Ben Carson. Carson, I think, yeah. And his testimony of his faith in the Lord Jesus, but he's very consistent in his witness. And I, you know, being put in the places where he's been put and called on, even I think of that year or so back when he was called to be the speaker at the presidential prayer breakfast, and he spoke so clearly, so plainly of the Lord and of our trust in him and not our dependence on the government or on this world. He didn't win any points with the people seated at the table but showed his integrity and love for the Lord.

### **We have a Hope**

I think of Bob Simonson, and I am looking forward to it. I have a few copies of this obituary that Bob wrote. And just a couple of things that he says on this page: "My 91-year-old body is wearing out." Well, he doesn't go into telling these people how terribly ill he really was. And, of course, he was at the point of death. He says, "I don't know what I can do to soften the blow of this developing news," that means about the fact that he's dying, "except to say I'm ready for whatever happens and to sleep the sleep of death until the resurrection doesn't seem so bad at this point." He's happy, saying, "Go ahead and die and just wait for what comes next in the Lord Jesus." And then he says, "My prayer is that you have the same assurance." Then he quotes from 1 John, chapter 5, "He that hath the Son hath life." He that hath the Son hath life. And then, "These things I've written unto you that believe in the name of the Son of God that you may know that you have eternal life." And he says, "Blessings on your heads and your hearts until we meet again on paper, by phone, on the net, or in the air." He writes, "Bob Simonson, Sr., '91, of Rice Lake, Wisconsin, went to sleep with his Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ."

If you'd like a copy of that, I have some—a few anyway, not many—to see that not only should we look forward to all that the Lord has for us, but many have been around us who did just that. They lived out this life and looked forward to the glory of what was coming. And listen, they will not be disappointed. The Lord has sealed that with a promise.

A week ago Saturday, we had that funeral for Flora. Donna told me afterward, "Thank you for giving the gospel out. You realize that many of the relatives here today were not saved." I said, "Well, I didn't know what the situation was, but I know that Flora wanted the gospel to be given out at her funeral, so we did have that there." And I trust that God used it in the hearts of those who didn't know him. But I can tell you this for sure: there wouldn't be anyone among those relatives who filled this room.



None of them, and I don't care whether they were believers or non-believers, would have said that Flora wasn't looking forward to being with the Lord. They knew she was. And Abraham was. And Isaac, Jacob, and Moses.

And I trust you. Father, thank you for your word. Keep our eyes on you, Lord Jesus, not on this world. And on your promises and on the sureness of your word because you do not lie. And what we have, Lord, will not pass away, although this world will pass away. Your promises are true. They're "Yea, men, and yea." You are faithful. We love you today, Lord Jesus. Amen.