

Chapter Eleven

THE CONFESSION OF FAITH

Hebrews 11:13 - 16

"All these died in FAITH not having received what was promised, but having seen it and greeted it from afar, and having acknowledged that they were strangers and exiles on the earth. For people who speak this way make it clear that they are seeking a homeland. If they had been thinking of that land from which they had gone out, they would have had opportunity to return . But as it is, they desire a better country, that is an heavenly one. Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God, for He has prepared for them a city."

It would appear that the writer of this book, is referring to the 'many' of verse 12, the descendants of Abraham and Sarah who died before the coming of Jesus, their Messiah. In their times of faith and trust in Yahweh, they acknowledged their need of Him , 'confessing that they were strangers and exiles on the earth'. Whether in Egypt, the wilderness or Babylon, the Children of Israel would know a deep longing in their hearts for home, that place promised them in God's words to Abraham. Few of them could ever put down roots anywhere other than in Canaan or Palestine.

*By the waters of Babylon, there we sat down and wept, when we remembered Zion
On the willows there we hung up our harps, for there our captors required of us songs
and our tormentors, mirth, saying 'Sing us one of the songs of Zion'.
How shall we sing the Lord's song in a foreign land? (Psalm 137:1-4)*

They could have stayed in the country of their birth but the heart of a sojourner was in them. This is characteristic of all true descendants of Abraham, that they do not feel at home in this world. There has been birthed within them a hunger for higher things, a heavenly city whose builder and maker is God. It is God who has placed this longing in them by His initiating act of faith. People of faith will always respond to that yearning.

In his teaching on FAITH found in Romans 4: 1-12, the apostle Paul says, "What shall we say about Abraham?" He believed God and it was reckoned to him for righteousness. To one who does not work but trusts Him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is reckoned as righteousness. At that time Abraham was not a circumcised Jew so he was reckoned as righteous even before he became a child of the (Jewish) covenant. This was so that he might be the Father, not only of the circumcised (Jew) but also of all those who are declared righteous outside the (Jewish) covenant. It is not the keeping of the Law (or any good works) that makes one righteous; it is only by FAITH. Abraham is therefore considered as the Father of all those justified by FAITH. So, even to us who are Gentiles walking by faith, God's promise based on grace, is sure. We shall inherit the earth!

"Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God; for He has prepared a city for them".

How attached to this world are you? Do you find your value in how much of its wealth or fame you can amass? Do you need its popularity and affirmation to give you self esteem? Or are you one whom Jesus would call the 'greatest' in **His** kingdom?

On one occasion the disciples of Jesus were doing what many of us enjoy. They were having an interesting discussion. One would like to think it was about something important such as *eternal security* or *pre-tribulation rapture* but that would be to give more credit than is due. They were, in fact, arguing about which of them was the greatest!! (see Mark 9:33-34). Then Jesus began to teach them what it means to be great in His kingdom, here on earth and in the city He has prepared for them.

- a) They are to be servants, even slaves. (Mark 10:42-45)
- b) They must be willing to be last and least (Mark 9:35 and Luke 9:48)
- c) They must become humble like a little child.(Matt 18:4)
- d) They must have the attitude of the younger (Luke 22:26)

How contrary this is to the power structures of this world and, sadly, to much of what we see in church leadership today. Where are the *servant leaders*, who seek no prominence and honour for themselves but who delight to be the *last and least* when others receive the fame and acclaim? Where are the believers who, *like a little child*, are transparent, cannot long deceive, hold no grudges and take no offense? Where are the *younger* in whom the world has no attachments, and who has little interest in demanding his rights or maintaining his power base? Where are the people who walk by faith, those of whom He is **not ashamed**?

Though these people were considered as sojourners in this world, they did know three things:
They knew that God had made a promise to their father, Abraham.
They knew that He would fulfill that promise.
They knew that they had a glorious **destiny**, to dwell in the City of God.

I am reminded of the verse in John 13:3 where Jesus, *knowing the Father had given all things into His hands, and that He had come from God and was going to God* ...got up and washed His disciples feet! It only becomes easy to be a servant when one knows his standing before God. Can you look back to a place where God began His work of faith in you as He brought you to the cross? Do you look forward knowing that He will bring you into a glorious destiny He has planned for you? Are you now walking the walk of faith that leads to that destiny, a walk not in your own power but by His prompting within you? Faith demands that we have a vision of God's promises and a desire for God's presence.

Summary

- 1. People of faith will never feel at home in this world. They are pilgrims and therefore live accordingly.**
- 2. They never want to return to the ways of the world, its scheming and politics, its methods and prizes, its pleasures and promises.**
- 3. The King declares as great those who have the attitude of the servant, the child, the last, the least and the younger.**

- 4. As spiritual descendants of Abraham, the Father of the children of Faith, we have a great destiny. We shall 'inherit the earth'.**
- 5. The great promises of God only come to those who have died to themselves.**
- 6. God is not ashamed of us!**