

## Hebrews 12:1-3

Sunday, 19<sup>th</sup> September, 2010

One of the main stories that goes through the Bible is the story of Abraham.

He was a pagan priest in Ur, which is modern day Nasiriyah in southern Iraq and then one day God spoke to him and said "Leave your home and go to the place I will show you."

And so Abram left his home and relatives and he and his wife Sarai left, not knowing where they were going to.

And the Bible says that says that Abraham believed God and God credited it to him as righteousness. And because of this Abraham is called the father of those who have faith:

Consider Abraham: "He believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness." Understand, then, that those who believe are children of Abraham. (Galatians 3:6-7)

He keeps this name "righteous; father of those who have faith" despite the fact that along the way he made many mistakes; he lied several times – he didn't believe and laughed when God said that he would have a child in his old age; he took things into his own hands, having a son with his servant Hagar.

But through this all he kept walking the way that God had told him to – even through difficulties;

- Where are you going? "I don't know"
- Abram → Abraham (even though no children)
- "Sacrifice Isaac"
- Never owned any of his inheritance

And it was this continuing to walk the way God had showed him, resisting the temptation to turn around and go home, that earned him the name.

So how did he do it?

By faith Abraham, when called to go to a place he would later receive as his inheritance, obeyed and went, even though he did not know where he was

going. By faith he made his home in the promised land like a stranger in a foreign country; he lived in tents, as did Isaac and Jacob, who were heirs with him of the same promise. For he was looking forward to the city with foundations, whose architect and builder is God. (Hebrews 11:8-10)

The key was that when God called him, Abraham *saw* something that was worth going through all the trials and difficulties he would face. And this vision filled his eyes and gripped him.

The chapter I have just quoted from is the famous chapter about faith and the heroes of faith in the Bible – Noah, Jacob, Joseph, Moses, Rahab, Gideon, Samson, David. And actually all of them, it says, pressed on through all the hard times they went through, because they were looking forward to what was ahead – God answering them and bringing them to be with him – and although they didn't all see the full answer to their faith, they all lived and died with God, His Kingdom and Heaven in their sights.

It says this:

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. People who say such things show that they are looking for a country of their own. If they had been thinking of the country they had left, they would have had opportunity to return. 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. (Hebrews 11:13-16)

I know many of us are going through difficulties – and if you're not, my desire is to prepare you for when you do!

And even if things are going well, the temptation is that we get so busy with what's around us that we take our eyes off the vision and hope Jesus called us to.

And one of the dangers of this is that we can end up doing things we have done before, serving, giving, making godly choices, turning up, being different to your workmates, praying; but without the same vision and passion that we once had, and so we get weary and can easily lose heart and forget why we are doing what we are doing.

I want to talk about two things that are important for us to remember as we go through difficult times that will keep us full of faith and will answer the question “Why am I doing this?”

Hebrews chapter 11 is a famous chapter about heroes of the faith, who endured and acted in faith because of the vision that gripped them.

The next chapter goes on to talk about Jesus as our example and inspiration in persevering; and what it says about Jesus is that in the same way as Abraham set his eyes on the City, Jesus set His eyes on something too.

Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles, and let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us. Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith, **who for the joy set before him endured the cross, scorning its shame**, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. Consider him who endured such opposition from sinful men, so that you will not grow weary and lose heart. (Hebrews 12:1-3)

It says that the motivation for Jesus to go to the Cross was that He was looking beyond it to “The joy set before Him”

So what was it that Jesus has in His eyes as He faced and then endured all the agony and shame and separation and curse of the Cross?

What was the joy that Jesus counted worth suffering all that for?

Part of it was the joy of being perfectly obedient to His Father – suffering the separation, knowing that there would be the joy of vindication, resurrection and reconciliation.

After the suffering of his soul,  
he will see the light of life and be satisfied;  
by his knowledge my righteous servant will justify many,  
and he will bear their iniquities. (Isaiah 53:11)

But part of the joy was to see what His Sacrifice accomplished – the Church and all the individuals that have made up the Church through the centuries.

Morris says: “He looked right through the Cross to the coming joy, the joy of bringing salvation to those he loves” <http://www.christiancourier.com/articles/361-for-the-joy-that-lay-before-him>

Part of what helped Jesus to endure the Cross, hanging under a curse; carrying the weight of sin; separated from His Father; rejected and shamed, hanging naked and humiliated, was seeing what it would accomplish.

This was the way salvation would come to His disciples, His friends, His countrymen in Jerusalem and Judea; and also different cultures – the Samaritans – and to the ends of the earth – from then on through history.

When I was in Central Asia the other week we gathered together for a time of worship in the flat I was staying in, in a town with no church and probably no other Believers; and we lifted up the Name of Jesus.

And I had an overwhelming sense of His Joy – seeing His Church grow, His Kingdom advance. A small part of the joy set before Him that had helped Him scorn the shame of the Cross.

It was just a really small group of people in a place no-one has really heard of, but I had such a strong sense of how precious it is to Him.

And then later I thought about Birmingham and the Crown. And what we are doing here is no less part of His Joy than what I saw in Asia. Jesus has His eyes on how His Kingdom would spread and serve the community in Birmingham, and how His Church would be built and grow and mature.

I know many of us work hard in the Church:

- We give up evenings to prepare Kidswork
- We arrive early to set up the meeting
- We visit people when we're tired
- We give when we can barely afford it
- We open up our homes
- We study hard and dig into the Bible to prepare talks for community groups
- We forgive each other when we don't really want to
- We turn up to prayer meetings and give ourselves to praying

- We volunteer at Contact (probably some of us have given up better jobs to do it)
- We say things that are godly, but that we know will make us unpopular

And all of this can be really hard and September comes and we think “Why am I doing this again?”

But we need to look at the joy set before us – we go through some light and momentary trials, but they are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all! (2 Corinthians 4:17)

If some of us have lost sight of that, I want to **pray now**

And finally, we need to understand that what we are doing really does matter to Jesus – there’s no difference to Him between being up at the front leading amazing times of worship and washing up the coffee cups. It was all in His mind, and was His Joy, as He carried the Cross to Calvary.

You are His Joy – Your Salvation is His Joy. Seeing His Church – His Bride growing and being made ready is His Joy; Seeing His Kingdom extended person by person, good deed by good deed in Handsworth and Erdington and Aston and West Bromwich; that’s His Joy.

Thank you for how much you all serve and give – but let’s not just do it out of duty – Jesus want us to be caught up in the joy and purpose of it – Just as He is.

**Pray**