

From the pulpit of



Invested Sojourners

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Hebrews 11:13-16

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At EBF we have a series of five Ethos statements that guide our structures, commitments and priorities. These Ethos Statements describe who we are and who we want to be as we follow Jesus Christ. This summer, as we have taken occasional breaks from the book of Ezra, which we finished last week. We are in the process of covering these Ethos Statements to root ourselves a bit further into God's calling. So far we have seen "Humble Orthodoxy" which means that we hold to the truth of God's Word, but without the attitude. In humility we stay anchored in the truth no matter the cultural storms that blow against us. Then we moved on to "Abiding Worship" which means that we aim to abide in Christ with our whole selves and live a life of obedience and worship in everything we do. It's the image of staying connected to the vine and bearing fruit in all of our endeavors for the glory of God. We seek to worship and obey God alone both individually and corporately.

This morning we are going to look at the Ethos statement "Invested Sojourner." As you sojourn through the Evanston area onto your next phase in life, you are encouraged to invest and make the most of every opportunity to the glory of God. The Bible describes believers as sojourners whose citizenship is in Heaven. This world is not our home; we are sojourners looking toward home. Since our citizenship is in Heaven, we live now as sojourners. This means that whether you are here in the Evanston area for 7 months, for 7 years or for 70 years, God would have you live as a sojourner. Your ultimate home is not your next move unless you die, because your ultimate home is with God in heaven.

This morning I want to talk about having the mindset of a sojourner. You live here on this earth, but this earth is not your home because you are destined for another home. There are three parts to this mindset: 1. Settled and Unsettled. 2. Looking Toward Home. 3. Never Going Back.

Let's look at this concept of an Invested Sojourner in Hebrews 11:13-16. Chapter 11 of Hebrews contains the 'Great Faith Hall of Fame.' It lists several believers from the Old Testament who did not give up, but pressed on in the Lord by faith. The reason this chapter was given was to encourage the Hebrews to press on in doing the will of God. Don't abandon the faith in the midst of troubles, but remain firm in the commitment to Jesus Christ. The chapter lists people of faith such as Abel who 'by faith offered to God a more acceptable sacrifice than Cain' (Hebrews 11:4). Enoch was 'taken up' before death because he pleased the Lord by faith (11:5). Noah built an ark, saved his family, condemned the world and 'became an heir of righteousness that comes by faith' (11:7). Abraham set out from his home to the Promise Land, even though he did not know 'where he was going.' When he arrived, he lived in 'tents' like he was in a foreign land, but through the eyes of faith he saw God's eternal city (11:8-10). Even his wife Sarah lived by faith as she was old and

past child bearing age, but she ‘received power to conceive’ and through her and Abraham their ‘descendants are as many as the stars of heaven and as many as the innumerable grains of sand by the seashore’ (11:11-12).

It’s the summary of the faith of these individuals that I want to focus on this morning in Hebrews 11:13-16. Let me go ahead and read these verses. All those previously mentioned ‘died in faith.’ Look at verse 13: “These all died in faith, not having received the things promised, but having seen them and greeted them from afar, and having acknowledged that they were strangers and exiles on the earth.” Think of Abraham and Sarah. They died living in the promised land with only one promised son they had together (not many descendants, but one son). But while they were there they lived as if in a foreign land as ‘strangers and exiles on the earth.’ Abraham had to live a nomadic life in the promised land with movable tents. Hebrews 11:9: “By faith he went to live in the land of promise; as in a foreign land, living in tents...” God called him to the land of promise where his descendants would occupy and fill the land, but in the meantime he lived in a tent. The reason why Abraham did not settle down permanently was probably because he refused to integrate his life and his family with a group of people who did not follow his God and share His same faith.¹ The land was full of those who worshipped idols and other gods.² Perhaps they encouraged Abraham to build a sweet setup and settle down with them. But he didn’t settle down and join the ways of the worldly culture. So, in a sense he was settled and unsettled. He settled down in the Promised Land, yet he was unsettled because he lived like a sojourner in a foreign country.³ In a similar way the Hebrews were to walk in the footsteps of Abraham as they lived as aliens and strangers on this earth among a people who not only did not share their same faith⁴, but persecuted them as well.

We are people who are to be settled and unsettled. You are in your body on this earth and you have to live here but you must remain unsettled with the ways of the world. I often give a three-point approach to investing in our world that goes something like this: Settle, Grow and Invest. Settle where God has you, Grow in the Lord and Invest in Others. At the same time we could say Don’t Settle, Don’t Grow and Don’t Invest. Don’t settle into the ways of the world, don’t grow in them and don’t invest in them. You are to be settled and unsettled.

If I could speak in generalities, you could say that there once was a generation of Christians who did a good job of remaining unsettled with the world. They lived distinct lives but they didn’t invest as well as they could have with the Gospel. Now we have a generation of Christians who have settled too much into the world and are not unsettled enough. Here is a little test: What in your life is a tent?⁵ What in your life do people think is crazy? If there is nothing in your life that people of the world take notice of and think is crazy or quite different, then maybe you have settled down too much into worldly ways. The sojourner is settled and unsettled.

How could Abraham live like that? He was looking for something better. Look at verse 13 again: “These all died in faith, not having received the things promised, but having seen them and greeted them from afar...” Abraham and Sarah could live like this because even though they did not receive that which was promised (possession of the land) through the eyes of faith they had ‘seen them and greeted them from afar.’ Through the eyes of faith they could see something better

¹ William Lane, *Word Biblical Commentary Hebrews*, page 350.

² *Ibid.*, page 350.

³ *Ibid.*, page 350.

⁴ Craig Koester, *The Anchor Bible Hebrews*, page 485.

⁵ I heard someone ask this at one time.

and greater.⁶ Look at verse 14: “For people who speak thus make it clear that they are seeking a homeland.” They lived and spoke as ‘aliens’ and ‘strangers’ and ‘exiles’ on this earth because they were ‘seeking a homeland.’ Hebrews 11:10 tells us what specifically was in Abraham’s mind: “For he was looking forward to the city that has foundations, whose designer and builder is God.” This is talking about Heaven. In Galatians 4:26 Paul speaks of ‘the Jerusalem that is above.’ Revelation 21:10 speaks of ‘the Holy City Jerusalem coming down out of heaven from God.’ Abraham was looking toward home. Abraham was looking toward a city that had a solid foundation and was not movable like a tent. He knew that his pagan neighbors did not really live in solid enduring structures because they were built by men. He was looking for a city that was not built by men but by God, who was the architect and builder. This inner certainty of a heavenly city affected the way He lived His life on the earth. He stayed in tents and viewed himself as a sojourner looking toward home.

As believers we are looking toward home. That’s our mindset. Philippians 3:20 says, “But our citizenship is in heaven, and from it we await a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ.” If you are a believer in Jesus you are not a citizen of this earth, but a citizen of Heaven. This world is not your home and you are a sojourner looking toward home. Let me explain. The world is under the domain of the evil one and we once lived dead in our sins in the kingdom of darkness, separated from a Holy God. We could not fix our sin problem, but God sent His perfect Son to die on the cross for our sins. Now all who repent and believe in Jesus find forgiveness and reconciliation with God. When one becomes a Christian there is a transfer of kingdoms and a transfer of citizenship. You are no longer in the Kingdom of darkness but in the Kingdom of light. Though you are now in God’s Kingdom of light, you are still left here on this earth until one day you will be physically with Him in Heaven. You are between two worlds. Since our citizenship is in Heaven we live now as sojourners looking toward home.

Typically when I write emails I sign off as “Looking Toward Home.” Sometimes for me it’s just a good thought or an afterthought. But it should be a reality and affect the way I live down here on this earth. Abraham was looking toward a home and it totally affected the way he lived. We are not just looking toward home in the general sense that we have this inner certainty that Heaven exists, but we are to adjust our lives to the live in line with that heavenly reality.

And part of that adjustment is the mindset, Never Going Back. Verses 15-16: “If they had been thinking of that land from which they had gone out, they would have had opportunity to return. 16 But as it is, they desire a better country, that is, a heavenly one. Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God, for he has prepared for them a city.” Abraham and Sarah were not reflecting back and ‘thinking of that land from which they had gone out.’ Nor were they thinking of ‘opportunities to return’ to it. That land was full of idols and false gods that they had grown up with. They left it all behind and followed the one true God. They were never going back to their land and their old ways. They ‘desired’ a ‘better country’ with the Lord, ‘a heavenly one.’ In turn, God is pleased and is ‘not ashamed to be called their God, for he has prepared for them a city.’ Their mindset of never going back is fueled by their desire for something better and greater with the Lord.

Never go back to your old way of life and the sin that entangled you. Live the settled and unsettled life as a sojourner, because there is a better home that awaits you. A pastor⁷ once said to his congregation that if they see him in Heaven, he doesn’t want them questioning him (me either). I don’t want you to come up to me and say, “Why didn’t you tell me about all of this? Why didn’t you tell me that I was wasting my life, my time and my money on things that were just temporary

⁶ ESV Study Bible, page 2380.

⁷ Francis Chan.

structures?” Let me tell you plainly. Don’t waste your life going back to old ways. Don’t waste your life, time and money on the temporary city of this earth. Focus on the city of God. You have a city that has solid foundations and that is where your citizenship is and you must look forward to it and being with God forever. You will enjoy God forever in your forever home.

Conclusion: I must confess that I have a dream of the next phase of my life. I envision living on land and having my kids come back with their kids and enjoying life. I dream about this and sometimes make it an idol. Be careful of the ‘idolatry of the next,’ making an idol out of the next move or the next phase of life. We often think that the next phase and place will be so much better than now, but that’s not until heaven. Your ultimate home is not your next move unless you die, because your ultimate home is with God in heaven. May you have the mindset of a sojourner who is both settled and unsettled, looking toward home and never going back.

This sermon was addressed originally to the people at Evanston Bible Fellowship, Evanston, Illinois, by Pastor Jason Lancaster on Sunday, August 21, 2016. It is not meant to be a polished essay or substitute for personal Bible study. Evanston Bible Fellowship is a community of sojourners empowering one another to cultivate Gospel transformation.