

## Ninth Sunday after Pentecost

OLD TESTAMENT – Genesis 15:1-6

**After this, the word of the LORD came to Abram in a vision: “Do not be afraid, Abram. I am your shield, your very great reward.”<sup>2</sup> But Abram said, “O Sovereign LORD, what can you give me since I remain childless and the one who will inherit my estate is Eliezer of Damascus?”<sup>3</sup> And Abram said, “You have given me no children; so a servant in my household will be my heir.”<sup>4</sup> Then the word of the LORD came to him: “This man will not be your heir, but a son coming from your own body will be your heir.”<sup>5</sup> He took him outside and said, “Look up at the heavens and count the stars—if indeed you can count them.” Then he said to him, “So shall your offspring be.”<sup>6</sup> Abram believed the LORD, and he credited it to him as righteousness.**

**15:1 IN A VISION** – Earlier, the Lord “said to Abram” (12:1). After that, “He appeared to Abram” (12:7). Luther: (Abram not only heard the word; but the word was represented by a certain likeness of the Speaker” (AE 3:12). Cf Num. 12:6-8). (TLSB)

**DO NOT BE AFRIAD** – This is repeated in the Gospel in Luke 12:32. In Scripture, the opposite of faith is fear. We see this fear in even the greatest of God’s people, including Abram. Like us he needed God’s reassuring promises. (Concordia Pulpit Resources – Volume 5, Part 3)

*I am your shield.* Whether “shield” or “sovereign” is meant (see NIV text note), the reference is to the Lord as Abram’s King. As elsewhere, “shield” stands for king (e.g., Dt 33:29; 2Sa 22:3; Ps 7:10; 84:9). (CSB)

Comforting word to calm Abram’s fears, for he will soon express his worries over remaining childless, without a proper heir (v. 2). Luther: “A Mighty Fortress is our God, A Trusty Shield and Weapon” (LSB 656:1). (TLSB)

In other parts of Scripture “shield” takes the meaning of king. A good king took care of all the needs of those who served and provided protection in time of trouble. God was not only a good king but the perfect king and so he provided Abram as he does us with all that we need, especially the righteousness earned for us by Christ. (Concordia Pulpit Resources – Volume 5, Part 3)

*your very great reward.* Though Abram was quite rich (13:2), God himself was Abram’s greatest treasure (cf. Dt 10:9). (CSB)

A reward is paid, not only because it is earned, but also because it is promised, and the Lord had promised Abram richly. (TLSB)

**15:2 WHAT CAN YOU GIVE ME** – Abram did not respond with a passive acceptance of God’s promise to be his shield and reward. Rather, his questions betrays the anguish of his heart. (Concordia Pulpit Resources – Volume 5, Part 3)

REMAIN – ESV has “continue.” Hebrew means “to go or walk,” and may carry the sense of departure, even death, as in Simeon’s song: “Lord, now You are letting Your servant depart in peace” (Lk. 2:29). (TLSB)

ESTATE – ESV has house which is used to broadly encompass Abram’s entire estate. (TLSB)

*Eliezer of Damascus.* A servant probably acquired by Abram on his journey southward from Haran (see 12:5). He may also be the unnamed “chief servant” of 24:2. (CSB)

A servant born and raised in Abram’s household (v. 3); may be the loyal servant in chapter 24. Despite his qualifications as someone Abram might adopt as heir, Eliezer is by no means preferable to the natural-born son God had promised. (Babylonian documents describe laws regulating adoption of heirs.) (TLSB)

**15:3–4** Ancient documents uncovered at Nuzi (see chart on “Ancient Texts Relating to the OT”) near Kirkuk on a branch of the Tigris River, as well as at other places, demonstrate that a childless man could adopt one of his own male servants to be heir and guardian of his estate. Abram apparently contemplated doing this with Eliezer, or perhaps had already done so.

**15:3** SERVANT...HOUSEHOLD – ESV has “member.” Literally, a “son of the house,” a servant-born and raised in Abram’s household, but not of blood descent. (TLSB)

**15:4** VERY OWN BODY – Literally, “out of your inward parts,” out of Abram’s body, his natural-born son. (TLSB)

**15:5** *count the stars—if indeed you can.* See 22:17. More than 8,000 stars are clearly visible in the darkness of a Near Eastern night. (CSB)

That Abram is able to walk outside indicates this is a waking vision. (TLSB)

*So shall your offspring be.* The promise was initially fulfilled in Egypt (see Ex 1; see also Dt 1:10; Heb 11:12). Ultimately, all who belong to Christ are Abram’s offspring (see Gal 3:29). (CSB)

Hebrew is singular sometimes translated “seed.” Christ is ultimately the promised Seed (Gal. 3:16), who points to the abundance He produces by His death and resurrection (cf John 12:24). (TLSB)

God’s patience has a wonderful sustaining and strengthening power. In order to impress upon His servant the exact meaning of His promise, the Lord brought him outside and had him look closely at the starry heavens, whether he felt able to count the stars. So great, in brief, would be the number of his descendants. This promise, in the last

analysis, is Messianic. Through the one Seed, Christ, all nations on earth were to be blessed, and all men of all nations that have accepted the only salvation, that in Jesus Christ, are the descendants of Abraham in truth; they are the people of God, the spiritual Israel, Rom. 4, 18. (Kretzmann)

**15:6†** Abram is the “father of all who believe” (Ro 4:11), and this verse teaches that God graciously responds to a man’s faith by crediting righteousness to him (see Heb 11:7). (CSB)

BELIEVED – Hebrew ’aman, “to be faithful,” “to trust.” St. Bernard of Clairvaux: “(The elect) had...been set free by their faith in a future Deliverer, as of Abraham is written” (SLSB, p 285). (TLSB)

Abram placed his trust in the promise of the Lord with all it implied, and therefore the Lord accepted him into the covenant of His grace. That is the way of salvation for all sinners, the way of obtaining that true righteousness by which we are justified before God. Christ has earned blessing, salvation, righteousness for all men, and all that accept this promise in faith have these wonderful gifts, are pure, holy, and righteous before God, because the righteousness of Christ is imputed to them. (Kretzmann)

COUNTED – To think, reckon, or account. Because God’s mercy and grace, for Jesus’ sake, He considers our sins forgiven. (TLSB)

RIGHTEOUSNESS – Luther: “Righteousness is nothing else than believing God when He makes a promise” (AE 3:20). “Abraham was justified before God through faith alone, for the sake of the Mediator, without the cooperation of his works. This was true not only when Abraham was first converted from idolatry and had no good works, but also afterward, when he had been renewed by the Holy Spirit and adorned with many excellent good works” (FC SD III 33). (TLSB)

#### EPISTLE – Hebrews 11:1-16

**Now faith is being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see. <sup>2</sup> This is what the ancients were commended for. <sup>3</sup> By faith we understand that the universe was formed at God’s command, so that what is seen was not made out of what was visible. <sup>4</sup> By faith Abel offered God a better sacrifice than Cain did. By faith he was commended as a righteous man, when God spoke well of his offerings. And by faith he still speaks, even though he is dead. <sup>5</sup> By faith Enoch was taken from this life, so that he did not experience death; he could not be found, because God had taken him away. For before he was taken, he was commended as one who pleased God. <sup>6</sup> And without faith it is impossible to please God, because anyone who comes to him must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who earnestly seek him. <sup>7</sup> By faith Noah, when warned about things not yet seen, in holy fear built an ark to save his family. By his faith he condemned the world and became heir of the righteousness that comes by faith. <sup>8</sup> 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. <sup>9</sup> 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. <sup>10</sup> For he was looking forward to the city with foundations, whose architect and builder is God. <sup>11</sup> By faith Abraham, even though he was past age—and Sarah herself was barren—was enabled to become a father because he considered him faithful who had made the promise. <sup>12</sup> And so from this one man, and he as good as dead, came descendants as numerous as the stars in the sky and as countless as the sand on the seashore. <sup>13</sup> 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. <sup>14</sup> People who say such things show that they are looking for a country of their own. <sup>15</sup> If they had been thinking of the country they had left, they would have had opportunity to return. <sup>16</sup> 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.

**11:1–12:29** Exhortations based on the preceding expositions of OT passages. (CSB)

**11:1-2** The sacred writer here states the fundamental thought of this chapter, the most impressive section on the power of faith in his entire letter, if not in the whole Bible. He begins with a definition of faith: But faith is a conviction of mind concerning things hoped for, a certainty of things which are not seen. Faith, saving faith, that has accepted Jesus and His righteousness, is always and without exception a definite firmness of mind, a certain persuasion concerning the things which God has promised us in His Word for the purpose of having us place our hope upon them; it is an unalterable conviction of the heart regarding those things which we cannot see, which it is impossible for our eyes and for our reason and for our understanding to fathom and to know. Faith thus concerns things which are future, though they may have their beginning in this life; it is not an expectation of dreadful happenings, but a hope of blessed, glorious gifts; it keeps its peculiar form and characteristics, even when it is weak, a mere glowing taper; it is opposed to doubt and unbelief. Faith stands firm in all afflictions. Faith overcomes all weakness, for it is in the midst of tribulation and persecution that faith proves itself a persuasion of the heart that clings to God's promises. These qualities, or attributes, of faith the author now intends to bring out by referring to a number of examples of men and women of the Old Testament: For in this lay the commendation of the men of old. It was on the ground of their possessing faith that the leading men of the Old Testament received the commendation of God, their deeds being recorded for the benefit of ages to come, of the generations of the New Testament. (Kretzmann)

**11:1 FAITH – Pistis** – It is the confident trust in the unseen reality of God's present help. It occurs 24 times in this chapter. Only by faith are we in a right relationship with God. Only by faith can man live according to the invisible realities of God. (Concordia Pulpit Resources – Volume 11, Part 3)

This verse says that faith gives a person the conviction that future, promised things are as real as if they had already happened. Faith causes a person to see things as they really are, though mere human senses cannot perceive them. This verse says nothing about the origin of faith. Lutherans distinguish themselves from others by insisting that faith is a work of God (John 6:29), a gift of God (Ephesians 2:80, produced by God (Colossians 2:12). Faith is never a mere decision. Even mere human faith is caused by an outside force. (Exegetical Notes – Buls)

BEING SURE – hpostasis – Substance, assurance, having the sense of something foundational, something you can build on. (Concordia Pulpit Resources – Volume 11, Part 3)

St Bernard of Clairvaux states, “The substance, he says, of things hoped for, not a fantasy of empty conjectures. You hear, that is a substance; and therefore it is not allowed you in our faith, to suppose or oppose at your pleasure, nor to wander hither and thither amongst empty opinions, through devious errors. Under the name of substance something certain and fixed is put before you. You are enclosed in known bounds, shut in within fixed limits. For faith is not an opinion but a certitude.” (TLSB)

HOPE FOR – elpisomenon – Not wishful longings or selfish desires, but things God promises in his Word. God’s promises are the basis for our firm conviction. (Concordia Pulpit Resources – Volume 11, Part 3)

“If anyone wants a distinction between faith and hope, we say that the object of hope is properly a future event, but that faith is concerned with future and present things. Faith receives the forgiveness of sins offered in the promise in the present. (Apology of the Augsburg Confession) (TLSB)

CERTAIN – elegchos – Proof or evidence like that which would be needed in a court of law. (Concordia Pulpit Resources – Volume 11, Part 3)

**11:2** *the ancients*. Heroes of faith in the pre-Christian era, such as those listed in this chapter. (CSB)

Scripture testifies that the OT saints are righteous and pleasing to God. (TLSB)

WERE COMMENDED FOR – presbuteroi – They received God’s commendation. (Concordia Journal – July 2001)

Many things, which they hoped for and did not see, afterwards occurred and were seen, the event confirming faith. This is true though very little is said, as such, about faith in the OT. (Exegetical Notes – Bult)

**11:3** BY FAITH – pistei – faith that shows itself by taking God at his word. (Concordia Pulpit Resources – Volume 11, Part 3)

The sacred writer begins his recital with a general reference, purposely ascribed, not to Adam or any individual believer, but to the believers of all times: By faith we perceive that the worlds have been framed by the word of God, that what is seen has not come into being out of things which appear. The existence of the world, its creation and preservation, is not a matter of conjecture, of idle guesswork, with the Christians, as it is with the heathen and with the unbelievers in general, who have astonished the world with theories that challenge the belief even of the credulous. We hold no such vain theories, the products of speculation based upon false assumptions. Had the visible universe really been formed out of materials which were

subject to our inspection, or to the observation of any human beings, then our standpoint would bear the marks of foolish speculation. But the entire manner in which the world came into existence, all parts being adapted to one another and the whole to its purpose, is not a matter of reasonable consideration, but of faith. Faith is the knowledge which tells us that it was the almighty word of God which called things into being out of nothing, created something which was not there before. And the result of this creative act on the part of Almighty God is the existence and preservation of all things which make up the visible universe. Note: It is a matter of comfort to us to know that the same almighty God rules the universe today, and that His promise concerning the preservation of the world still stands, Gen. 8, 22. (Kretzmann)

**11:4** See Ge 4:2–5. (CSB)

BY FAITH ABEL – In taking up specific instances, the writer now mentions that of Abel first: By faith Abel offered to God a more adequate sacrifice than Cain, through which he was attested to as being righteous, God testifying upon his gifts; and through the same he, though dead, yet speaks. The better, the more excellent, the more adequate sacrifice of Abel, the peculiar value of his offering, was not due to the choice of the materials, but to the fact that he had faith, that he believed in the coming Messiah. It was on account of this faith, also, that God testified of him that he was righteous, Gen. 4, 3-5; Matt. 23, 35. God accepted the offering of Abel, indicating His complete satisfaction with the gift and the prayer which accompanied it; He had respect unto him and his offering, as the text in Genesis has it. Thus the faith of Abel was the reason why God imputed to him the righteousness of the coming Messiah, in whom he placed his hope. Just in what way God showed His acceptance of Abel's sacrifice, whether by having the smoke of its burning arise directly toward the sky, or by having fire fall down from heaven to devour his offering, or by revealing His attitude to Adam, as the priest of the family, we do not know. Of one thing we are sure, namely, that his offering was accepted because of his faith. And another fact is to be noted, namely, that the murder of Abel was not the end of his activity or influence. Though he is dead, yet he is ever speaking to us. His faith is a shining example to all men as to the manner of obtaining justification, as well as to the necessity of being faithful to the Lord, even if hatred and enmity on the part of the nearest relatives is the result, Gen. 4, 10; Heb. 12, 24. (Kretzmann)

*commended as a righteous man.* Both brothers brought offerings to the Lord: Cain from the fruits of the soil, and Abel from the firstborn of his flock. The chief reason for the acceptance of Abel's sacrifice was that he offered it "by faith." It is implied that Cain's sacrifice was rejected because he offered it without faith, as a mere formality (see note on Ge 4:3–4). (CSB)

**11:5** *Enoch.* See Ge 5:18–24. (CSB)

Next is cited the example of Enoch: By faith Enoch was translated so that he did not see death, and he was not found because God had translated him; for before his translation he had had this testimony, that he was well pleasing to God. Of Enoch very little is said in Scriptures, Cp. Gen. 5, 22-24; Jude, vv. 14. 15. Since the earliest days the children of God, the descendants of Adam that trusted in the mercy of the coming Messiah, had caused the proclamation of this Gospel-truth to be made in their midst, and had taught it to their children. Thus Enoch had learned the truth and the way of salvation, thus had he come to faith; and therefore he was well-pleasing to

God. In his case, therefore, the Lord determined to manifest His good pleasure in a particularly extraordinary way. He removed him from the earth, in order that he might not see death; in some form or manner the Lord took his body away, up to the abode of the blessed. And all this because he believed and led a godly life in agreement with his faith, because he walked with God, as the Hebrew text has it, Gen. 5, 22. 24. He was translated, he was removed, he was no longer found. It may well be that his relatives searched for him, as the children of the prophets did for Elijah, 2 Kings 2, 16, and that they eventually received information from the Lord as to the method of their relative's removal from the earth. All this was the result of his faith: For without faith it is impossible to please God well; for he that comes to God must believe that He exists, and that He becomes a rewarder to those that diligently seek Him. The author again uses the picture of a priest's or a worshiper's drawing nigh to God, chap. 7, 25; 10, 22. Such a person that worships God in truth will not only believe in the existence of God, but will know also that God will in mercy reward those that seek Him, that His gift to them is eternal life through Jesus Christ the Savior. It is he whose Christianity is not a matter of mere form and of outward ceremonies, but a true matter of the heart, he whose faith is of the kind that does not grow weary in seeking the Lord and His holy will, that will become a partaker of the Lord's merciful reward. (Kretzmann)

*taken him away.* To God's presence (see note on Ge 5:24; cf. Ps 49:15; 73:24). (CSB)

**11:6** *without faith it is impossible to please God.* That Enoch pleased God is proof of his faith. (CSB)

*believe that he exists.* Faith must have an object, and the proper object of genuine faith is God. (CSB)

*who earnestly seek him.* See Jer 29:13. (CSB)

**11:7** *Noah.* See Ge 5:28–9:29. (CSB)

The example of Noah teaches the same lesson: By faith Noah, after being informed by God concerning that which was as yet not seen, with pious reverence constructed an ark for the saving of his household; by which he condemned the world and became heir of the righteousness which is by faith. Gen. 6, 8-9, 29. Noah was perfect in his generations, in the midst of a world which blasphemed the Lord and scorned His Word: he walked with God and found grace in the sight of the Lord. For this reason the Lord gave him information, issued a warning to him concerning the plans which he had with regard to the world and its punishment. While Noah, at God's command, constructed the ark, it was always with trust in things which had as yet not come to pass. It is very probable that he had to endure the scorn and derision of the unbelievers on all sides for his act of building a ship on dry ground. But Noah continued his work in pious reverence, combined with cautious forethought, knowing that this ark would serve for the saving of his household, or family, for since the Lord had first spoken with him, he had married, and his three sons had grown up and taken wives also. By this exhibition of his faith, Noah condemned the unbelieving children of the world, for by this time the congregation of believers had dwindled down to include only his family. The faith of Noah made the unbelief of the scoffers stand out all the more strongly. Incidentally it made him an heir of the righteousness which is given to men by faith. He became the possessor, the owner of its spiritual blessings, the

righteousness of the coming Savior was imputed to him by God, not being earned by the act of his faith, but being accepted by this faith. It is the very same process which obtains today in bringing salvation to men. (Kretzmann)

*By his faith.* When the flood came, God's word was proved to be true, Noah's faith was vindicated, and the world's unbelief was judged. (CSB)

*righteousness that comes by faith.* Noah expressed complete trust in God and his word, even when it related to "things not yet seen" (v. 1), namely, the coming flood. Thus Noah also fitted the description of God's righteous ones who live by faith (10:38). His faith in God's word moved him to build the ark in a dry, landlocked region where it was inconceivable that there would ever be enough water to float the vessel. (CSB)

**11:8-12** Since he was the father of the Old Testament believers, the example of Abraham is treated at length, no fewer than five points in which his faith stood out prominently being given in this chapter: By faith Abraham, being called to go forth to a place which he was destined to receive as an inheritance, obeyed, and he went out, not knowing where he was going. Gen. 12, 1-4. When the Lord issued His special call to Abraham, the latter was living with his father Terah at Haran. The call of God influenced his heart and mind to such an extent that he was no longer identified in any manner with the idolatry practiced in his father's house, and that his faith wrought in him a strong obedience to the call of the Lord. It may not have been an easy matter for Abraham, who at that time was already seventy-five years old and possessed great wealth, to leave the home of his father for an unknown country, where, moreover, idolatry was practiced just as badly as in Mesopotamia. But his faith in the promise of the Messiah gave him power to believe also the promise concerning the land of his inheritance on earth. (Kretzmann)

Abraham's faith was put to a severe test at this time: By faith he sojourned in the Land of Promise as in a foreign country, living in tents, with Isaac and Jacob, the heirs with him of the same promise; for he was waiting for the city having foundations, whose architect and builder is God. All these facts are recorded in the Book of Genesis. Having come into the Land of Promise, the land of Canaan, Abraham, instead of being given the country for his possession as he might have expected from the words of the Lord, did not get so much as a foot of land to call his own, being even obliged, at the death of Sarah, to buy a place of burial for her from the children of Seth. He lived the life of a nomad, dwelling in tents, and moving from one place to another as occasion offered. This was the lot also of his son Isaac and of his grandson Jacob. They lived in the land which God had promised to them as their inheritance, and yet it was a strange land to them, a country in which they were merely suffered as sojourners. This surely was a strong test for the faith of the patriarchs. But Abraham was equal to the test. Although possessing not a foot of soil in Canaan for more than fifty years and then only a small cave with the adjoining land, he looked upon this country as his possession and would not permit Eliezer to suggest taking Isaac back to Mesopotamia. In this faith Abraham was sustained by his firm hope of the future glory, which he knew to be his by virtue of the Messiah's merits. He might be obliged, as long as he lived here on earth, to live the life of a nomad, but this did not shake his firm hope of entering the heavenly Jerusalem, the city which was designed and built by God for those that love Him. That is the hope of the believers of all times; for they have here no continuing city, but they seek the one to come. (Kretzmann)



The faith of Abraham was shared also by his wife Sarah, though not in the same measure: By faith also Sarah received strength to conceive and was delivered of a son though past the usual age, since she counted Him faithful that had promised. Gen. 18, 12. 15. When Abraham came to Canaan, Sarah was about sixty-five years old and had not only been barren, but was now past the age when she might expect to bear a child in agreement with the course of nature, Gen. 18, 11. For twenty-four years she waited for the promise of God to be fulfilled, and her faith was sometimes not equal to the strain, as when she gave Abraham her maid Hagar as a second wife, and when she laughed at the final definite announcement of the Lord, Gen. 18, 12. 13. But the Lord's gentle rebuke upon this last occasion seems to have had the beneficial effect of banishing all doubts from her heart, simply because she relied upon God's promise. It was this faith, growing, as it did, out of the true faith in the promised Messiah, which was ever connected with God's announcement to Abraham, that gave her strength to become a mother at the age of eighty-nine, against the course of nature. (Kretzmann)

The result of this unwavering reliance upon God's word and promise was truly remarkable: Wherefore also there were begotten of one, and of one as good as dead, these (descendants) as the stars of the heaven for multitude, and as the sand which is by the seashore innumerable. In such a miraculous manner there was founded through Sarah, herself by nature doubly incapable for that purpose, a family. And another strange point is this, that Abraham at that time also was beyond the age when a man is ordinarily able to beget children; his generative power, according to the usual course of nature, had waned. Because God's promise, however, was so certain, the result was that the descendants of Abraham, through Isaac, the children of Israel, finally were like the stars of the sky or the sand at the seashore for multitude. Gen. 21, 2; 22, 17; 32, 12. Thus was the faith of both Abraham and Sarah vindicated most wonderfully. (Kretzmann)

**11:8 Abraham.** Presented in the NT as the outstanding example of those who live "by faith" and as the "father of all who believe" (Ro 4:11–12, 16; Gal 3:7, 9, 29). (CSB)

*called.* See Ge 12:1–3. His faith expressed itself in obedience (see note on Ge 12:4). (CSB)

kaloumenos – called out by the voice of God addressing him. Noah had the same call to build an ark. (Concordia Journal – July 2001)

TO GO – exerchomai – To go out. By faith Abraham went out from earthly security. (Concordia Pulpit Resources – Volume 11, Part 3)

*a place he would later receive.* Canaan. (CSB)

OBEYED AND WENT – hpakousen – By leaving his homeland and traveling to an unknown destination. (Concordia Pulpit Resources – Volume 11, Part 3)

His immediate obedience is proof of his faith. Bruce remarks: "He (Abraham) would not have obeyed the divine call had he not taken God at His word: his obedience was the outward evidence of his inward faith. (Exegetical Notes – Buls)

*did not know where he was going.* He did not go in blind faith, but in complete confidence in God's trustworthiness. (CSB)

ma epistamuenos tou erchetai – No map. No pre-determined plan. No written destination. No attractive travel brochure promising “green pastures.” (Concordia Journal – July 2001)

Guthrie remarks: “He left behind the ‘seen’ world of his former days and launched into a project involving an unseen inheritance.” Westcott says: “The future was safe in God's counsel.” Lenski: “He went wholly and completely on trust.” (Exegetical Notes – Buls)

**11:9 PROMISED LAND** – epaggelias – Land of promise. (Concordia Journal – July 2001)

**LIKE A STRANGER IN A FOREIGN COUNTRY; HE LIVED IN TENTS** – allotrian – He never owns a bit of it (Acts 7:5), except a field near Hebron which he bought from Ephron the Hittite for the purpose of his family's cemetery (Gen. 23). He moved around in his tent from place to place. (Concordia Journal – July 2001)

Bengel remarks: “Nowhere else are sons called joint-heirs with their parents but merely heirs.” Guthrie: “Faith made a reality of what was not even apparent.” Westcott: “Abraham dwelt throughout the time of his sojourn in tents, so declaring that that which was to be permanent was not yet attained.” Lenski: “He remained a foreigner, who was permitted to remain in the land as an alien by those who as citizens owned and controlled it.” Bruce: “To Abraham the promise of God was as substantial as its realization.” (Exegetical Notes – Buls)

**11:10 city with foundations.** Speaks of permanence in contrast to the tents in which the patriarch lived (v. 9). This city is “the heavenly Jerusalem” (12:22), “the city that is to come” (13:14) and “the new Jerusalem” (Rev 21:2–4, 9–27). (CSB)

polin tous themelious – He was given to see, by faith, something far greater, far more lasting than the real estate of Canaan. No more portable habitats of skins stretched over poles with all the security of stakes driven into whatever soil was available. The city Abraham saw by faith was anchored to stay (12:22; 13:14). (Concordia Journal – July 2001)

Here and Revelation 21:14 and 19, the new Jerusalem has permanent foundations. The tents of life are temporary. By faith everlasting life was as real to Abraham as if he were already there. Westcott remarks: “There is something particularly attractive about the quality of faith which sees stability in other than material things.” Correct. Sinful human nature is ever so materialistic. Also that of Christians. They need to be reminded often of their eternal inheritance which does not fade away. Bruce: “Abraham kept his eyes fixed on the well-established city of God which was to be revealed in the time of fulfillment.” (Exegetical Notes – Buls)

*builder.* Cf. Ps 147:2 and NIV text note on Isa 62:5. (CSB)

**11:11 BY FAITH** – Faith enabled Abraham to become a father even though he was old and Sarah had never been able to have children. Abraham trusted that God would keep his promise. (Concordia Journal – July 2001)

*Sarah ... was barren.* Probably referring to the fact that she was far past childbearing (Ge 18:11–12; see note on Ge 11:30). (CSB)

Guthrie says: “It is perhaps surprising to find Sarah spoken of as an example of faith, for according to Genesis she was more conspicuous as an example of doubt... Her mockery must have turned to faith long before Isaac was born.” Westcott: “Sarah, who was at first unbelieving, was at last inspired with her husband’s faith by his example and influence. (Exegetical Notes – Buls)

**11:12** *as good as dead.* Because he was 100 years old (see Ge 21:5; Ro 4:19). (CSB)

nenekromenou – having died. Here is impossibility compounded. (Concordia Journal – July 2001)

Guthrie: “Teeming life was to come from apparent death, a superb example of God’s ways differing from men’s estimate of what is possible.” (Exegetical Notes – Buls)

*stars in the sky ... sand on the seashore.* See Ge 13:16 and note; 15:5; 22:17; 26:4; 1Ki 4:20. (CSB)

**11:13-16** These verses might be considered a sort of parenthesis because verses 17-19 return to the theme of Abraham. These verses might be used as a text on the occasion of the death of a Christian. OT saints looked forward to the fulfillment of promises in time and therefore looked forward to everlasting life. NT Christians look forward to the fulfillment of promises after death and therefore look forward to everlasting life. (Exegetical Notes – Buls)

**11:13** ALL THESE – Refers to the people mentioned in verse 4. They did not see the fulfillment of heaven in their lifetime but in faith were assured of the promise. (Concordia Pulpit Resources – Volume 11, Part 3)

The word “all” means all OT believers. (Exegetical Notes – Buls)

The sacred writer here shows that his definition of faith applies well in the case of Abraham, Sarah, Isaac, and Jacob: These all died in keeping with their faith, although they had not become partakers of the promises, but had seen them from afar and hailed them, and confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth. As the patriarchs had believed during their lives, so they died in their faith, as it behooved men that had seen the day of the Lord, the coming salvation, from afar, through the promises of the Lord, John 8, 56. They were so firmly persuaded that God would fulfill His word in every particular that they actually saw the fulfillment. They hailed the promises from afar, as people on board of a ship may wave recognition to a group of friends on shore. The fact that the Gospel-promises were not fulfilled while they lived, and that they did not see the Messiah in person, did not influence their faith. They cheerfully confessed and called themselves strangers and pilgrims here on earth, a fact for which their being sojourners in the Land of Promise was a type. Cp. Gen. 23, 4; 47, 9; Ps. 39, 12; 1 Pet. 1, 1; 2, 11. (Kretzmann)

THINGS PROMISED – *Tas epaggelias* – This takes into account not just the promises, but also the very content, the substance, of the those promises. (Concordia Journal – July 2001)

*saw them and welcomed them from a distance.* By faith they saw—dimly—these heavenly realities and were sure that what they hoped for would ultimately be theirs (see v. 1). (CSB)

*aliens and strangers on earth.* Their true home was in heaven. (CSB)

Bengel remarks: “The worldly cleave to the world; believers scarcely cling to it in any part.” He observes that this verse plainly refers to John 8:56. Guthrie says: “It is all of a piece with the underlying principle of the epistle that it is the heavenly and not the earthly things which are of most importance.” (Exegetical Notes – Buls)

**11:14 ARE LOOKING FOR** - This remains the confession of God’s people while on earth. They are never completely at home in the surroundings of this present world. (Concordia Journal – July 2001)

*country of their own.* That better, heavenly country (v. 16). (CSB)

*patris* – It is the fatherland or one’s native county to which one belongs. (Concordia Pulpit Resources – Volume 11, Part 3)

*Patris*, which occurs only here in the epistles, means “fatherland.” Under ordinary circumstances people speak of a fatherland as a country from which they have come. These people set their hearts on (that’s the meaning of *epizateo*) a fatherland to which they were going. RSV and NKJV translate “a homeland.” Bengel says: “Citizens of the world do not call themselves strangers in the world.” Guthrie says of *patris*: “It means a fatherland where the nation can find its roots.” Westcott observes: “As strangers’ they acknowledge that they were in a foreign lands; as sojourners’ that they had no permanent possession, no rights of citizenship. (Exegetical Notes – Buls)

**11:15 TO RETURN** – Bruce aptly points out: “When Abraham’s servant suggested to his master that Isaac might go to Mesopotamia in person to persuade his bride to come to Canaan, Abraham said: ‘Beware that thou bring not my son thither again’ (Gen 24:6).” Bengel reminds us that the patriarchs had this opportunity for many years. Guthrie observes: “This is all the more remarkable when it is recognized that the land they left behind had reached a more advanced stage of civilization than the land of Canaan to which they went. (Exegetical Notes – Buls)

**11:16 WERE LONGING** - *oregontai* – continual, ongoing striving or desire. It was a vision of something better than where they were. (Concordia Pulpit Resources – Volume 11, Part 3)

**GOD IS NOT ASHAMED TO BE CALLED THEIR GOD** – *Dio ouk epaischunetai autos o Theos* – God is not ashamed of them. In grace, God gives his name to us, putting it on in Baptism, bringing us to faith in Christ and making us members of Christ and of his family. (Concordia Journal – July 2001)

Bengel observes: “Not only is he not ashamed, but glories in it.” We agree with those who consider epikaleisthai epexegetical: “God is not ashamed of them, namely, to be called their God.” How often did not God identify Himself as “the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob.” The person who trusts God’s promises can put his own name there. (Exegetical Notes – Bult)

*prepared a city for them.* City (v. 10) and country are interchangeable in the concluding chapters of this letter (vv. 9–10, 14–16; 13:14). The ultimate reality is represented by the new Jerusalem in John’s vision of the believer’s eternal state (see Rev 21:2). (CSB)

A tent is living place but only temporary. A city is a dwelling place, but permanent, in comparison. (Exegetical Notes – Bult)

#### GOSPEL – Luke 12:22-34

**22 Then Jesus said to his disciples: “Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat; or about your body, what you will wear. 23 Life is more than food, and the body more than clothes. 24 Consider the ravens: They do not sow or reap, they have no storeroom or barn; yet God feeds them. And how much more valuable you are than birds! 25 Who of you by worrying can add a single hour to his life? 26 Since you cannot do this very little thing, why do you worry about the rest? 27 “Consider how the lilies grow. They do not labor or spin. Yet I tell you, not even Solomon in all his splendor was dressed like one of these. 28 If that is how God clothes the grass of the field, which is here today, and tomorrow is thrown into the fire, how much more will he clothe you, O you of little faith! 29 And do not set your heart on what you will eat or drink; do not worry about it. 30 For the pagan world runs after all such things, and your Father knows that you need them. 31 But seek his kingdom, and these things will be given to you as well. 32 “Do not be afraid, little flock, for your Father has been pleased to give you the kingdom. 33 Sell your possessions and give to the poor. Provide purses for yourselves that will not wear out, a treasure in heaven that will not be exhausted, where no thief comes near and no moth destroys. 34 For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.**

**12:22** Though God provides for all, even unbelievers (Mt 5:45), Jesus esp urges His followers to trust Him for life’s necessities. (TLSB)

I TELL YOU – This passage about possessions and the kingdom is catechesis specifically for the disciples (catechumens) and not for the crowds (12:22). The disciples here include the Twelve and the seventy (-two) as well as the larger group of followers for whom God is “Father” (12:30, 32) and to whom the Father has given his kingdom (12:32). Since the journey to Jerusalem began at 9:51 and Jesus called the seventy (-two) at 10:1–24, much of his teaching has been to prepare his disciples for their future proclamation after he has ascended into the heavens. Jesus used imperatives to instruct the disciples in the Sermon on the Plain. He used more imperatives when he taught them how to pray to the Father and showed them how the gifts from the Father are connected to the kingdom (11:2–4). (CC p. 510)

The ten imperatives here in 12:22–34 are urgent for those who are journeying with Jesus to Jerusalem since they soon will be heralds of the kingdom that comes through Jesus’ death and resurrection. They *must* be prepared to proclaim that kingdom in Acts. Of these ten imperatives, eight have to do with material possessions (the two in 12:29–30 deal with possessions in relation to the kingdom), and the remaining two are solely about the kingdom (12:31–32). Since possessions can become a significant distraction for the disciples, Jesus addresses their attitude toward them directly in relation to the kingdom. “Life,” Jesus says, “is more than food and the body more than clothing” (12:23). Using two imperatives from the language of catechesis (12:24, 27; κατανοήσατε, “consider”), Jesus instructs the disciples to study and ponder how God cares for the ravens and the lilies. He notes, “By how much are you more valuable than birds” (12:24; similarly 12:28). (CC p. 510)

**DO NOT WORRY** – Worry, dread, and fear. (TLSB)

**12:23** Physical needs are an important part of life, but they should not dominate a Christian’s thinking. (TLSB)

**12:24 CONSIDER** – κατανοήσατε—This word suggests careful study so that one might learn something. This compound intensifies the simple *νοέο*; it means ‘to immerse oneself in. This may be in the field of sensory perception, but critical examination is also denoted, and in literary Greek the idea is that of apprehension by pondering or studying. This is part of the catechetical vocabulary of the gospel and is a characteristically Lukan word, since it is used only one other time in the other gospels (Mt 7:3). Careful observation of nature in order to glean natural theology or in order to illustrate revealed theology is characteristic of biblical wisdom literature such as Proverbs and the Song of Songs, both of which are by Solomon, a student of creation’s wonders (1 Ki 4:33). The Song of Songs takes notice of the raven (5:11) and lilies, as does Jesus here. Solomon himself is likened to a lily in Song 5:13, and Jesus could be alluding to that passage in Lk 12:27. (CC p. 508)

**12:25** Undue worry subtracts from life. (TLSB)

**ADD A SINGLE HOUR** – ἡλικίαν ... πῆχυν—ἡλικία can refer to stature (as at 2:52) or age (probably here), depending on the context. To preserve some of the ambiguity, πῆχυν is translated “cubit,” which could refer to height or (metaphorically) to time. A cubit is about eighteen inches long, and to add this much to one’s height would not be a “little thing” (ἐλάχιστον), as 12:26 requires. If the reference were to age and not stature, one might have expected an unambiguous, short measure of time, such as ὥρα, “hour, moment, instant.” (CC pp. 508-509)

**12:26 REST** – Other things over which we have no control. (TLSB)

**12:27 SPIN** – Turn fiber into thread or yarn. (TLSB)

SOLOMON GLORY – Cf 1Ki 10:14–25. Solomon’s splendor could not compare to the beauty of a simple flower. (TLSB)

**12:28 CLOTHES** – An argument from the lesser to the greater. If God adorns common plants with such beauty, how much more will He lavish good things on the crown of His creation? (TLSB)

GRASS – ἐν ἀγρῷ τὸν χόρτον—Wood was often scarce in ancient Israel, and thus grass would be used in place of wood in the fire of the ovens. (CC p. 509)

THROWN INTO OVEN – Burned as fuel for heating and cooking. (TLSB)

O YOU OF LITTLE FAITH – Calling the distracted disciples “you of little faith” (12:28), Jesus makes the transition to his teaching about the kingdom. Anxiety over possessions is a sign that one lacks faith. Jesus is so concerned about keeping faith strong that he reiterates his directive about food and clothing (“do not seek what you will eat and what you will drink” [12:29; cf. 12:22]) and employs a synonym of “worry,” which is the “catchword” of this section: “Do not be upset” (12:29). The disciples are not to waver between hope and fear over “all these things” (12:30), for then they would be like the Gentiles, anxious about mere survival and indifferent to the kingdom. Has not the Father shown that he knows the disciples need these things (12:30)? Did not Jesus teach the disciples in the Lord’s Prayer to petition the Father for the things that are truly necessary (11:1–4)? The real question here pertains to the disciples’ attitude: is what they “seek” food and clothing or the kingdom of God? Jesus directs them with a strong command to “seek [the Father’s] kingdom, and all these things will be added to you” (12:31). This may not always be obvious to them, and so in another command, this one intensely pastoral and appearing only in Luke, Jesus speaks as a shepherd to his sheep: “Do not fear, little flock, because your Father graciously willed to give to you the kingdom” (12:32). As Jesus’ “flock,” the disciples (12:22), beginning with the Twelve and the seventy (-two), will form the foundation for a reconstituted Israel, where, in the proclamation of the kingdom, Jesus will be present as their shepherd. (CC pp. 510-511)

This criticism typically comes after people underestimate God or His Son. (TLSB)

**12:29 DO NOT SET YOUR HEART ON** – Do not make this your priority. (TLSB)

DO NOT WORRY ABOUT IT – μετεωρίζεσθε—BAGD gives appropriate references (Josephus, *Antiquities* 16.135 [16.4.6]; Thucydides 2.8.1) to support “worry,” “hover between hope and fear.” “Worry” is preferable to the alternative possibility, “rise up with pride.” (CC p. 509)

To the extent that worry manifests a lack of trust in God, it is a serious failing. (TLSB)

**12:30 ALL SUCH THINGS** –The disciples are not to waver between hope and fear over “all these things” (12:30), for then they would be like the Gentiles, anxious about mere

survival and indifferent to the kingdom. Has not the Father shown that he knows the disciples need these things?

God, who created us, understands our needs better than we ourselves do. (TLSB)

**12:31 BUT – πλήν**—This word signals a change in direction of the argument. (CC p. 509)

*seek his kingdom.* Since v. 32 suggests that Jesus is speaking to believers, who already possess the kingdom, this command probably means that Christians should seek the spiritual benefits of the kingdom rather than the material goods of the world (cf. Mt 6:33). (CSB)

God’s kingdom exists wherever He rules hearts and minds. We “seek” it by having Him and His ways hold sway in our lives. (TLSB)

GIVEN – Provided in abundance. (TLSB)

**12:32 LITTLE FLOCK** – While a crowd of thousands had gathered their number was small in comparison with the entire nation of Israel.

Affectionate term indicating ownership and tender care. (TLSB)

PLEASED TO GIVE YOU – Synonymous with “resolve, determination, choice.” (TLSB)

GIVE YOU THE KINGDOM – We are included in that realm ruled by God’s grace. This comes through faith in Jesus and results in abundant life both here and in heaven. (TLSB)

εὐδόκησεν ... δοῦναι— It is the gracious good pleasure of the Father, willed from all eternity, to *give* the kingdom as a gift. The giving has begun; the kingdom is already a present reality. The same verb denotes the Father’s good pleasure in his Son in 3:22, and the noun εὐδοκία denotes the Father’s good will in Christ toward humanity in 2:14; 10:21. The Father’s good pleasure rests upon his Son and upon those who are in his Son, and 3:22 suggests a baptismal connection. (CC p. 509)

**12:33 SELL YOUR POSSESSIONS** – Throughout the ages Christians have asked just how literally these words of Jesus are to be understood. St. Francis of Assisi gave away all possessions including his clothing and lived a life of total poverty. Is this what Jesus wants every Christian to do? Hardly. We need to read these words of Jesus in the context of God’s total revelation. Jesus is saying something here which every disciple must hear and hear often. Jesus says it in a way which bold, which catches our attention. Disciples of Jesus need to distance themselves from the attitude of the world which glorifies this earthly life and its possession. (PBC)

*give to the poor.* The danger of riches and the need for giving are characteristic themes in Luke (3:11; 6:30; 11:41; 14:13–14; 16:9; 18:22; 19:8). (CSB)



A radical call to use our goods not only for ourselves but also to help other people. (TLSB)

Giving alms is described as an act of mercy. It comes from the same word family. (CC p. 509)

**TREASURE IN HEAVEN** – The best treasure comes from living as God directs. His ways involve generously helping others. (TLSB)

**NO MOTH DESTROYS** – οὐδὲ σῆς διαφθείρει—In the ancient world, expensive clothing was an expression of wealth; hence the fear of moths destroying one's highly valued possessions. (CC p. 509)

Thus Jesus' final imperatives to “sell [πωλήσατε] your possessions and give [δότε] alms” (12:33) are simply ways in which the disciples/catechumens may show that they are servants of the one whose treasures are in the heavens, yet who also gives his flock the abundant treasures of the kingdom while they are journeying on earth. Get rid of earthly possessions; serve the kingdom by giving to others as a response of faith. Store up heavenly treasure! “Make for yourselves purses that do not wear out” (12:33). The purses that contain the unfailing heavenly treasure do not grow old or fall apart. (CC p. 512)

Now, what is this heavenly treasure, and what does Jesus mean when he concludes “for where your treasure is, there also your heart will be”? “Treasure,” θησαυρός, and “store up treasure,” θησαυρίζω, are more common in Matthew (Mt 2:11; 6:19, 20, 21; 12:35; 13:44, 52; 19:21) than in Luke. The first occurrence in Luke is in the Sermon on the Plain (6:45), where “the good treasure of the heart” consists of Christological treasure that flows from a heart that is filled with Christ. The treasure “brings forth the good” (6:45) of confessing Christ with the mouth. The next use of “treasure” is in the parable of the rich fool where “the one who treasures for himself ... is not rich toward God” (12:21). Now in 12:33–34, Jesus fills in the picture of that metaphor by describing the opposite of the treasure for oneself: it is heavenly treasure. In light of the parable of the rich fool, this section on possessions (12:22–34) shows what it means to be “rich toward God” (12:21). The catechumen already knows from the Sermon on the Plain that this heavenly treasure is Christ, and the heavenly treasures are Christ's gifts that bring the catechumen into and keep him in Christ's kingdom (catechesis, Baptism, the Lord's Supper). To be rich toward God, then, is to be a recipient of Christ and his gifts, a member of his kingdom through catechesis, Baptism, and the Lord's Supper. There are two alternatives: fleeting treasure on earth (12:21) or eternal treasure in heaven (12:33–34). The two-fold Gospel message of this pericope (12:22–34) is this: For those seeking the treasure of the kingdom, the Father will provide adequate earthly treasure as well to sustain them in their journey from earth to heaven, and even more precious, along the way while still on earth the “little flock” (12:32) will be graced with eternal heavenly treasures through Christ, the Shepherd who washes his flock in Baptism, feeds his sheep with the new Passover Lamb—his body and blood in the Supper (Lk 22:14–20; 1 Cor 5:7)—and tends them with the guidance of his Word. (CC p. 512)

**12:34** THERE YOUR HEART WILL BE ALSO – In the Bible the heart is the center of our being which includes our personality and priorities. We will treasure what has the highest priority for us.

If one wants to see what is most important to another (where the heart is), it is most telling to look at where that person spends most of his money (where the treasure is). (TLSB)

**12:22–34** Jesus encourages His disciples to trust in God, their heavenly Father, since He will provide for all their needs. We need to take this exhortation to heart, because our fallen nature makes it difficult to look past ourselves and depend on another. But God's faithfulness far exceeds our needs. He provides as He sees fit, giving us an abundance that we may share with others. • "Grant us hearts, dear Lord, to give You Gladly, freely of Your own. With the sunshine of Your goodness Melt our thankless hearts of stone Till our cold and selfish natures, Warmed by You, at length believe That more happy and more blessed 'Tis to give than to receive." Amen. (LSB 851:2) (TLSB)