

**August 19, 2007**

Preaching: Rev. Eunbae Doh

Hebrew 11:8-16



## "NOMAD"

My son, Joshua was begging me to go to the cinema for the movie "Transformer". So we went to the cinema at the Charlestown mall. Unfortunately, the movie was not showing anymore. He was very upset. I had to find words of consolation. So, I said, "Joshua, we don't have to go to the cinema to see transformers. I can show you the real transformer." He said "really daddy? Wow! Great! Where? I said, "You will find so many transformers at our church?" He said "Does our church have transformers? "Yes, the people, they are transformers. They come to church to be transformed by the word of God." Oh, daddy, you are a big liar. They are not transformer!!!"

Do you think I am a big liar? Aren't you coming to church to be transformed?  
Please help me not to be a big liar.

Today, I'm going to tell you something about a man who was transformed into a nomad. I think that Christianity is a nomadic religion. Christians are nomadic people. Don't you think that?

Let me explain what I mean by the title-Nomad

Nomadic people are communities of people that move from place to place rather than settling down in one location. Many cultures have been traditionally nomadic, but traditional nomadic behavior is increasingly rare in industrialized countries. There are three kinds of nomads, hunter-gatherers, pastoral nomads, and peripatetic nomads.

When I say that our Christianity is a nomadic religion, what does that mean? What kind of nomads are Christian? We are not hunting animals. We are not traveling to trade something. We don't have any sheep and cattle. But I believe that we are nomadic people as a spiritual descendents of Abraham who did not hesitate to be a nomad following God's call.

Let's think about what kind of nomad he was, Abraham, through his life according to the scripture.

**The first characteristic of his nomadic life is Uncertainty:** Verse 8, Abraham obeyed when he was called to set out for a place that he was to receive as an inheritance, and he set out, not knowing where he was going.

He left his native place when he was called by God. We can find a more detail story of this in Genesis.

*Genesis 12:1 Now, the Lord said to Abraham, "Go from your country and your kindred and your father's house to the land that I will show you. So Abraham went, as the Lord had told him.*

He went from his country, his relatives, and his father's home. It is not hard to imagine how difficult a decision it was. It might be a risky journey. And what does the bible say? He did not know where he was going. Was he foolish to do such a thing, setting out, not knowing where his destination was?

Originally, Abraham was not a nomad. Probably he had a job in his home country. But He chose a nomadic life to obey God's call - unpredictable, lonely, and unsafe journey.

**The second characteristic of his nomadic life is Instability: Temporariness**  
Verse 9 He stayed for a time in the land he had been promised, as in a foreign land, living in tents.

The land God had promised to Abraham was a foreign land. He was not the first comer. There were already so many tribes and nations who had lived there. They had already settled down. They built their cities and castles. They were strong. Abraham might have been very disappointed when he realized that the land was already occupied by others. He lived in tents, a moving house, a temporary home not just during a vacation but during his entire life.

He was struggling with many other problems. He was driven out by his enemies. He had to move to find a better place to live, moving place to place. Even he was robbed of his wife.

As God's nomad, his life was totally unstable and uncertain. There was nothing guaranteed.

**The third characteristic of his nomadic life is unfulfilled dreams:** In verse 13, we read; *All of these died without having received the promises, but from a distance they saw and greeted them.*

What a tragedy! He came to the foreign land following God's promise. But he died without having received the promise. He didn't get what he expected. His dream never came true. Broken promise, broken dream!!

I believe that you might have heard about the term "Midlife crisis". Some of you might be experiencing "midlife crisis" including me. There are several characteristics of the midlife crisis. The most obvious is the condition of our body. We are no longer at our physical peak. We are not able to do the things we did at twenty or thirty without help of steroids. Relationships change too. For parents, it is the time when children are leaving home and the "empty-nest syndrome" is settling in. Perhaps the most unsettling characteristic of the midlife is a fear that some cherished dreams will never come true. We realize that some of our dreams are now utterly impossible. The unfulfilled dreams leave deep wounds in our heart.

Abraham came to the land following the promise and the dream given by God. And he died without having the promise.

Can you imagine how his nomadic life was? It was not positive but instead painful, sad, and tragic.

But do you think that his life was totally messed up, the life of failure? No, he was not a loser. He was a great winner even though he had struggled with so many problems, poverty, uncertainty, unstableness, broken dreams. He became a great father of all believers for all centuries.

How could that be possible? How could he become a great winner in spite of all those difficult situations?

If you are perceptive, you might have noticed as I read each scripture verse that I intentionally left out two very important words. Do you know what they are?

## **BY FAITH!!**

All the verses in chapter 12 were begun with the same word "by faith". That's right! This chapter can not be understood without the word "By faith". We can not figure out Abrahams' life unless we put this word in front of his life story.

Verse 10, He looked forward to the city that has foundations, whose architect and builder is God.

By faith, he was hoping that God would build a city for his people and his glory. He was looking forward to the city that would not be built by any human but only God.

There are so many people from all around the world who still are coming to this country like your father, grand father, or great grand father. Why did they come? Why are they still coming? It is the American dream, a better life, a better job, a better education, and more opportunities. But Abraham was not following these kinds of dreams. By faith, he was following God's promise even though his life was uncertain and unstable. He even died with an unfulfilled promise.

He was a nomad, following God's promise in faith, by faith. This is the life, nomadic life, we have to live. I believe that Christianity should recover this spirit, the nomadic spirit, moving place to place following God's calling, not staying in our comfort zone.

Are we nomadic? Is our spirituality nomadic, the spirit of wilderness?

I want to introduce a provocative voice from the book "Barbarian Way" by Erwin Raphael McManus. He serves as lead pastor of Mosaic Church in Los Angeles. He is a very spiritually radical man.

"Two thousand years later the call to follow Christ has been repackaged to be smooth and trouble free, filled with opportunity and promise but lacking risk, passion, and sacrifice. Is this really what Jesus died for? Jesus never made a pristine call to a proper or safe religion. Jesus beckons his follower to a path that is far from the easy road. It is a path filled with adventure and uncertainty. This is the barbarian way."

The barbarian way filled with adventure and uncertainty can be called nomadic way.

I want to finish my sermon with the verse 15-16 in this chapter and then reflection on it.

If they had been thinking of the land that they had left behind, they would have had opportunity to return. But as it is, they desire a better country, that is, a heavenly one. Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God; indeed, he has prepared a city for them.

When I traveled to Korea last month, I was very confused. I met the people whom I wanted see. I visited some places that I wanted to go. But everything had changed, the people, buildings, relationships, culture, even language. Decisively, the undeniable worst fact is that I have been changed. I am not the same Korean like them. I realize that Korea is not a place I now belong. I find that I am asking this question of myself.

“Who am I?” “Where should I go?”

Now, this Bible passage comforts me.

*Verse 15-16 If they had been thinking of the land that they had left behind, they would have had opportunity to return. But as it is, they desire a better country, that is, a heavenly one.*

Frankly, I have always complained my situation here. When I have faced any difficult moments in my life, I would grumble.

“Is this the right place for me? “Why do I have to stay here in this foreign place as stranger?” “Is this worth giving up my home, my friends, and my family in Korea?”

That’s right. Korea was my refuge when I tried to get away from any difficult situations. Now, I realize that there is no refuge in this world. There is no specific place I should go – America, Korea, Africa.

But instead, I will look forward to the city, a heavenly one that has foundations, whose architect and builder is God. That is the place I desire.

This world? I love this world which God has created. But this world is not my home but my mission field where I have been called to serve God and his people, not stay forever. By faith I will chose this way, a spiritual nomadic life.

Brothers and sisters, I want to invite you to this great journey, nomadic life. Would you join?