

Hebrews 11:1-16

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Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen. ² For by it the people of old received their commendation. ³ By faith we understand that the universe was created by the word of God, so that what is seen was not made out of things that are visible. ⁴ By faith Abel offered to God a more acceptable sacrifice than Cain, through which he was commended as righteous, God commending him by accepting his gifts. And through his faith, though he died, he still speaks. ⁵ By faith Enoch was taken up so that he should not see death, and he was not found, because God had taken him. Now before he was taken he was commended as having pleased God. ⁶ And without faith it is impossible to please him, for whoever would draw near to God must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who seek him. ⁷ By faith Noah, being warned by God concerning events as yet unseen, in reverent fear constructed an ark for the saving of his household. By this he condemned the world and became an heir of the righteousness that comes by faith. ⁸ By faith Abraham obeyed when he was called to go out to a place that he was to receive as an inheritance. And he went out, not knowing where he was going. ⁹ By faith he went to live in the land of promise, as in a foreign land, living in tents with Isaac and Jacob, heirs with him of the same promise. ¹⁰ For he was looking forward to the city that has foundations, whose designer and builder is God. ¹¹ By faith Sarah herself received power to conceive, even when she was past the age, since she considered him faithful who had promised. ¹² Therefore from one man, and him as good as dead, were born descendants as many as the stars of heaven and as many as the innumerable grains of sand by the seashore. 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. ¹⁴ For people who speak thus make it clear that they are seeking a homeland. ¹⁵ 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.

When you sat down after the creed a moment ago, did you hesitate first? Or did you wonder whether the pew would hold up under the weight of everyone in your row? When you walked through the entrance of church this morning, did you stop first to pray that the roof wouldn't collapse when you entered? Or when you climbed into your car to drive here, did you pause before turning the keys in the ignition, wondering if the car would possibly explode? I'm sure your answer to all of those questions is, "No." We tend to trust certain things, trust that they're going to do what they're *supposed* to do. And that trust comes from experience—usually pews hold up, usually roofs do not collapse, usually cars do not blow up—so we don't even think about the possibilities.

This type of trust when applied to objects around us is considered commonplace and reasonable. But when this type of trust is applied to a God who has likewise never failed us and who has never forsaken us and who always keeps His promises, it is called "blind faith." Well, in our text this morning, we read about five Christians who *did not* have *blind* faith. No, rather, they had a *seeing* faith, faith which could see the promises of God which could not be seen with the eyes. They had a *bold* faith, faith built solely upon the firm rock of God's Word. And they had an *active* faith, faith which was evidenced as they followed God's Word. Reading about these "heroes of faith," today we pray, in the words of our theme: "**Lord, Give Us Such a Faith as This!**" **I. Not based upon our experiences, II. But based upon Your promises.**

There are certain chapters in the Bible which stand out. **Genesis 1**—the Creation account. **Psalms 23**—the Good Shepherd Psalm. **Luke 2**—the events of Christ's birth. **1 Corinthians 13**—the love chapter. Well, Hebrews 11 is one of those chapters that stand out, often thought of as the faith chapter. Or, if

your personal Bible has headers for each section, it might title these verses “The Heroes of Faith”—it’s the “Hall of Fame” of sorts for believers. Now, if you’ve ever been to a pro sports hall of fame, you tend to stand in awe of the accomplishments of the athletes that have been immortalized there. Especially if you played sports, you see what these sports heroes accomplished at the highest level of sport, and you start to feel pretty inferior. They’re so much better than you could even imagine! And as a Christian, you can really get that sort of feeling as you read through Hebrews chapter 11.

I mean, listen to what some of these heroes of faith did: Enoch was so pleasing to God that God didn’t even let him die; instead, God took him straight up to heaven. Could that happen to me? Or Noah—for hundreds of years he built a giant boat, just because God told him to, thereby saving the human race. Would I have done the same? Abraham left his home country and wandered on earth not knowing where God was leading him, but he did so *because* God led him. His wife Sarah gave birth to a child in her old age all because she believed. It’s incredible to consider the great things these people did through faith, but then when you compare it to your own faith life, it’s very easy to feel pretty inferior in the realm of faith! I can’t do those things, can I? If my name were written into this chapter, what would it say? “By faith he went to church most Sundays and even invited a couple people to church on occasion”? I’m hardly an Abraham or Noah or Sarah or an Enoch.

But the point of this chapter is not to hold up these Christians as our heroes, and it’s not meant for you to compare yourself to them so that you start to feel inferior. When we pray, “**Lord, Give Us Such a Faith as This,**” we aren’t looking at *their* accomplishments and asking God to help us do the same. Because the point of this chapter is not about what certain Christians have been able to do, but what *God* is able to do. The focus is not on these Christians’ faith, but on *Whom their faith is placed*.

I think that in our modern culture, we often get misled and confused when we think about faith. You hear people say, “You just gotta have faith,” or “You just gotta believe.” And we’re often left with this impression that as long as we have some sort of strong belief that things will work out for us, that the universe will bend a little bit and things will work out in our favor. It’s like in Star Wars: The Empire Strikes Back, there’s that scene where Luke Skywalker is on Dagobah and Yoda uses the force to lift Luke’s X-Wing spaceship out of the swamp, and Luke says, “I don’t believe it!” And Yoda replies, “That is why you fail.” The idea is that Luke can do the impossible simply by believing that he can.

So many Christians today think of faith in this Star Wars/force sort of way. That as long as you believe hard enough, you can overcome your sickness. That if you *truly* believe and have a *strong enough* faith, then you will be able to do great things like speaking in tongues or casting out demons. Or that if you have a *truly* strong faith, then you will be moved to tears by the Holy Spirit. We need to get ourselves out of the picture when we think about faith, because the more we think about ourselves and faith itself, the more we will start to doubt our faith, and the more we will be led away from the true foundation of our faith. You see, if we are sincere Christians, there will be times when we question the strength of our faith. Those times when it looks like everyone else has such a strong unwavering faith, and then here we are. When we see other people that seem to really be moved emotionally by the Word of God, then I look at myself, and even though I believe God’s Word and appreciate it, I wouldn’t say I feel like crying because of it most of the time. Other Christians have the faith to go through life so happy and so blessed, and me, well, I seem to be left out of that.

The temptation is then to focus entirely on ourselves and our faith itself, and to try to think and wrestle with how you can make your faith stronger, how *you* could be moved emotionally by the Word, and how *you* could become more pleasing to God through your faith. And that's not just how faith works. Remember when the disciples asked Jesus to increase their faith, and Jesus said, ***"If you had faith like a grain of mustard seed, you could say to this mulberry tree, 'Be uprooted and planted in the sea,' and it would obey you."*** (Luke 17:6) His point was that when it comes to faith, the strength doesn't come from the faith itself or in how great the faith is, the strength comes from the God in Whom that faith rests!

Notice the note about Abraham in verse 12 of our text: ***"Therefore from one man, and him as good as dead, were born descendants as many as the stars of heaven and as many as the innumerable grains of sand by the seashore."*** ***"Him as good as dead,"*** God says. He was old, he had no power within himself, and yet in Abraham and his wife Sarah we see the creating power of God who gives life. And the same is true for all of these "Heroes of Faith." Through them all we see a God who is actively at work, creating faith in their heart and then working through that faith.

So, rather than looking at ourselves and what we are able to do and how we feel, even rather than looking at our faith, our focus is to be on God and what God has done. In *Him* our faith finds strength. In verse 1, we are given this definition of faith: ***"Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen."*** Throughout this text we see a dichotomy between physical things of this world that you can see and the promises of God which are not physically seen.

We see Abel offering a sacrifice to God—what cannot be seen was that he offered this sacrifice simply because he believed that God accepted him by grace; God loved him though he did not deserve it. We see Noah building a large ark—what we can't see is that Noah built that ark as He knew that the God who had told him to do it was faithful; He had already promised salvation for mankind, and the world would not be ending with a flood. We see Abraham wandering about without a permanent home—what we cannot see is that Abraham lived a nomadic life because he believed that a better home was awaiting him in heaven. We see Sarah who conceived in her old age as the angels had said—what we cannot see is that she and her husband knew that regardless of what their eyes told them about their age, they *would* have a child, because God had promised a Savior would come through them.

Again and again and again, these people acted in faith because they based all of their hope upon the God who keeps His promises. And this same God has given *you* so many blessed promises. In verse 6, we read, ***"And without faith it is impossible to please Him."*** But through faith, the opposite is true! Through your faith, you *are* pleasing to God. Simply because your hope for salvation rests in what God has done for you—because of that—God has rich rewards for you! His reward is that He considers you righteous! The same determination He made about Abel and Enoch and Noah and Abraham and Sarah, He makes concerning *you*, all because Jesus died for you.

In verse 4, our text describes Abel, ***"And through his faith, though he died, he still speaks."*** In verse 16, our text reads, ***"But as it is, they desire a better country, that is, a heavenly one."*** Though the text speaks about people who have long been dead, yet it speaks about them as if they are still alive! And that's because they are. As Jesus says in Mark 12, ***"As for the dead being raised, have you not***

read in the book of Moses, in the passage about the bush, how God spoke to him, saying, ‘I am the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob’? He is not the God of the dead, but of the living.” (Mark 12:26-27) And so, another promise that God has made to you is that, as a believer, you will never die. Yes, your body will pass away, but *you* will live on in eternal bliss with the Lord.

That’s another of God’s promises in this text. It says that these people ***“acknowledged that they were strangers and exiles on the earth. For people who speak thus 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, a heavenly one.”*** They knew that their stay on this earth was only a short visit but that their real home was in heaven. And Jesus promises that you have the same home. He says, ***“In my Father’s house are many rooms. If it were not so, would I have told you that I go to prepare a place for you? And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and will take you to myself, that where I am you may be also.”*** (John 14:2-3) You also are a stranger here, a foreigner even in your own country, because you have something far better awaiting you that your Savior has prepared *for* you.

And my favorite promise is tucked into the last verse. It uses heaven as the proof that this is true. It says, ***“Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God, for He has prepared for them a city.”*** Essentially, God is saying, the fact that He has prepared a place in heaven for you is proof that *He is not ashamed* to be called *your* God. It is truly a wonderful thing for God to give us His name by bringing us into the family of faith. To be called a Christian, or a child of God, that’s an incredible privilege. But what makes you catch your breath and stand in wonder at His grace is that not only are *you* called by God’s name, but that God refers to Himself by *your* name.

As we read just a little bit ago, He called Himself ***“The God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob.”*** He was not ashamed of these men. He didn’t try to distance Himself from them, instead, He says, *“Abraham? Yes, I’m HIS God. Isaac, Jacob, I’m theirs too.”* And through faith, your name has been added to that list. God has declared you to be righteous, He has added *you* to this Hall of the Faithful, and so your God is not ashamed of you. Not ashamed to be called *your* God.

Now speaking of faith, there’s one last verse I wanted to look at. Verse 3: ***“By faith we understand that the universe was created by the Word of God.”*** We live in an age where it is widely accepted that God had no hand in the world’s origins, and, of course, this is nothing more than an attempt to remove God from the picture. I remember a few years ago during our evening devotions when there was a picture of the earth on the page of our devotion book, and I asked the boys what it was, and my boys answered, “The planet.” Which wasn’t what I expected them to say. But then I asked them who made the planet, and they looked at me like I should have known the answer and said, “God made the planets, daddy.” By faith, they understood how the universe was created; they could see the truths that so many are blind to. And we can learn from the youngest Christians, who believe that God is real, that God creates, that God loves them, and that God died for them. They don’t wrestle with their human reason, they simply believe because if God says it, it is reliable.

As adults, we can look at that and say, ***“Lord, Give Us Such a Faith as This.”*** A seeing faith that sees the things which are not seen. A bold faith which firmly rests on God’s Word. An active faith that lives out what we believe. Lord, give us such a faith as this that looks away from ourselves and finds strength and hope in Your promises. May God grant it, in Jesus’ name. Amen.