

Introduction:

- A. Turn to **Heb. 10**. For two months the book of Hebrews has challenged us. That challenge is summed up at the end of **Heb 10, vv.36-39**:
- ³⁶You need to persevere so that when you have done the will of God, you will receive what he has promised. ³⁷For,
 "In just a little while,
 he who is coming will come
 and will not delay."
³⁸And,
 "But my righteous one will live by faith.
 And I take no pleasure
 in the one who shrinks back."
³⁹But we do not belong to those who shrink back and are destroyed, but to those who have faith and are saved.
- B. But this challenge has been unsettling for some of us. I visited with a friend here who was trying to wrestle with this. "I have doubts sometimes," she said, "and I wonder if I'm really committed to Christ or if I'll revert back to my old unbelief." Another friend here has often told me that he doubts he is much of a Christian because he is plagued with questions about our faith. What would you say to them? Say you get a bad medical report and in all that turmoil and fear you doubt God's love. Or what if you just don't feel very close to God?. Or what if you aren't "on fire" for Christ? Are you "shrinking back"?
- C. What does it mean to be among "those who have faith and are saved"? That question opens onto one of the great chapters in the Bible—**Heb. 11**. This chapter uses the faith of Old Testament people to help us take the measure of our faith—to help us know if we "*have faith and are saved.*" These aren't stories of trusting God in everyday ups and downs. The writer of Hebrews uses these people to show us the fundamentals of faith. Saving faith is **anchored** by these things. And none of these people knew Jesus Christ! So how much sure can our faith be!

The author begins with a definition: **Heb. 11:1-2...**

FAITH GRIPS ALL GOD HAS PROMISED

- A. This first phrase, “faith is confidence in what we hope for,” has a word picture hidden in it. *Illus.*: Here’s a man who tells me, “I have faith that I’m going to get my dream house by the shores of Lake Gitche Gumee.” “You have faith?” I ask, skeptically. “Yep. Big windows. Hot tub. Huge fireplace.” “And you think this lake home is just going to drop into your hands?” He pauses, “Yes, I guess you could put it that way.” “That’s crazy,” I inform him. “You’re just dreaming.” “Well, not really,” he says. “I already have the deed. My father willed it to me. I just haven’t moved in yet.”

That is the idea of the faith in mind here. In the Bible, faith isn’t a wish. It is a certainty based on the guaranteed promises of God. We have faith that God forgives our sins because Jesus died for us and the Bible says our trust in him lays hold of God’s mercy. Jesus said, “I go to prepare a place for you,” so we take him at his word. We don’t make this stuff up. We don’t conjure some spiritual wish list out of thin air. **Our faith rests in the title deed to what God tells us to hope for**, recorded fully and faithfully in the Bible.

- B. The second phrase, “and assurance of what we do not see,” means we are settled and certain of the things God has made clear to us. When I trusted Christ I became certain of a whole realm of things I couldn’t see. I was assured that my sins are forgiven, that God loves me, that Scripture is true, that heaven is my home. Faith isn’t only me assuring myself of God’s truth, faith means being assured by God’s Spirit in my heart. Our faith in Christ is met by God’s inward assurance that his promises are true.
- C. **V.2**, “*This is what the ancients were commended for.*” In all the stories of the OT, no one is commended unless it is for their faith. Faith is the measure of merit, yet faith is not actually a good deed. It is simply “confidence in what we hope for and assurance of what we do not see.”

Before the author catalogs the faith of “the ancients,” he sets one great, foundational statement of our faith in **v.3...**

FAITH STARTS WITH BELIEVING IN GOD AS CREATOR (11:3)

- A. *“In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.”* God had nothing to work with but his own power, creativity and love. God simply commanded, *“Let there be light’ and there was light... ‘Let there be water,’ and it was so... ‘Let the land produce living creatures.’ And it was so. ‘Let us make mankind in our image,’”* so he did. *“And God saw all that he had made, and it was very good.”* This vast, beautiful, complex, interrelated universe brought into being out of nothing but the command of God, culminating in the creation of the man and woman whom he loved and whom he endowed with the divine capacity to love God and one another.
- B. This is the genesis of faith. All else we believe starts here. *“This is my Father’s world.” “He’s got the whole world in his hands.”* Since God is the Creator of all he is also the Sovereign Ruler over all. There is no other parallel universe. What he says goes.

Illus.: Around the corner from our house there is this sign: SPEED LIMIT 25. Right in the middle of the **2** someone put this sticker that says, “FEAR NO GOD,” which I suspect goes back to some defiant metal band. It’s kind of silly really. “FEAR NO GOD”... except the ones that put the sign up and who have a guy stationed right around the corner with a radar gun, and who can haul you into court and hit you with a fine that will empty your wallet.

The God who created everything must be heard and obeyed. But the wonderful thing is, his word is gospel.

Now it is as if the writer calls one after another OT believer to witness to us about the value of our faith. The next chapter begins, *“Since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses.”* These people witness to us about the outcome of lives anchored to these four fundamentals of faith. To begin, **vv.4-6...**

I. FAITH MEANS WE “EARNESTLY SEEK GOD” ON GOD’S TERMS

- A. Cain and Abel, of course, were the sons of Adam and Eve. Undoubtedly they grew up hearing what it was like when their parents had once walked with God in the Garden of Eden in the cool of the day, before their sin banished them from such a blessing. Gen. 3 tells how both sons brought sacrifices to God, as God commanded, but only Abel’s was acceptable to God. That so angered Cain that he killed his brother. Abel’s sacrifice was better because by it he earnestly sought God. Cain wanted only to appease God. God, in turn, “*spoke well of [Abel’s] offering.*” That’s what fellowship with God is like.
- B. Whereas Abel was murdered Enoch never died! Gen 5:24 says, “*Enoch walked faithfully with God; then he was no more, because God took him away.*” That’s all we know about Enoch’s life except that he lived a very long time—300 years in that age before the flood changed everything. That’s a lot of faithfulness! Nothing particularly heroic about it. I’m sure there were tough days and temptations, ups and downs, a lot of waiting and faith walking. But it was simply that Enoch walked faithfully with God that prompted God to lift him from this life to the next.
- C. Later in **v.28** we’re told how, “*By faith [Moses] kept the Passover and the application of blood, so that the destroyer of the firstborn would not touch the firstborn of Israel.*” **Faith means we “earnestly seek God” on God’s terms.**
- D. *Illus.:* I visited with a friend this week whom I hadn’t seen in a long time. He’s *spiritual* but not Christian. He told me he’d had this experience of God recently—that God was closer. I’m glad to hear that. But I told him, “*You know, Jesus said, ‘I am the way, the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.’*” He messaged me the next day that he is reading the Gospel of John.

For us to earnestly seek God on God’s terms, we must trust Jesus—his is a better sacrifice than Abel’s. He allows us to walk more faithfully than Enoch. His blood shed for us is superior to the blood that guarded Israel from death. **Do you believe that?** It’s the first fundamental of our faith.

Heb. 11:7-16...

II. FAITH REJECTS THIS WORLD IN FAVOR OF THE CITY GOD HAS PROMISED US AS OUR INHERITANCE (11:7-16)

- A. We learn from Noah that by condemning the world we inherit the righteousness that fits us for heaven. Noah believed something *not yet seen*—the flood God promised, and he did what God told him to do to save himself and his family. He believed what he couldn't see and was saved. More important than his salvation from the flood was the everlasting salvation that he inherited because he trusted God. That faith is why Noah awaits us right now in heaven.
- B. Abraham is the quintessential example of leaving his seemingly safe homeland behind for a land God promised, sight unseen. He *“obeyed and went.”* That would be a great epitaph. **He obeyed and went.** Did you notice those wonderful phrases describing our heavenly home: *“the city with foundations, whose architect and builder is God,” “looking for a country of their own... 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.”*
- C. And Noah didn't know Jesus. Abraham and Sarah didn't know Jesus. They'd never heard Jesus promise, *“I go to prepare a place for you.”* They'd never heard Paul's promise, *“The Lord will descend from heaven with a shout.”* They never heard John's vision, *“I saw a new heaven and a new earth.”* And yet they believed in that fundamental of faith: We regard ourselves as aliens and strangers in this world because God has promised us a city with foundations (unlike this house built on sand), whose architect and builder is God. **That anchors our souls.**

The next verses of Heb. 11 focus on God's promise to Abraham and Sarah of becoming a great, innumerable nation. **Vv.17-23...**

III. FAITH KNOWS THAT WE ARE HEIRS, TOGETHER WITH ALL GOD'S PEOPLE, OF THE GOD-BLESSED LIFE (11:17-23)

- A. In **Gen 12** God promised Abraham that he would make of him a great nation and that through him all the nations of

the world would be blessed. That was the birthright passed from one generation to another. *“The Lord bless you and keep you. The Lord make his face shine upon you and be gracious to you. The Lord turn his face toward you and give you peace.”* Israel’s great birthright, passed on by faith. *We may be small now but God has promised that it will not always be so!*

- B. But that great hope was threatened almost before it began when God told Abraham to sacrifice his one and only son. It is such a terrible demand that many people cannot believe God would do such a thing. But did you see why Abraham did not reject God? Did you see what his faith told him? He knew Isaac was the son of promise so **v.19** says, *“Abraham reasoned that God could even raise the dead, and so in a manner of speaking he did receive Isaac back from the dead.”*
- C. The next verses recapture Israel’s greatest story—the exodus from Egypt, their national salvation story. **Vv.24-29...** Christians see in that exodus story a foreshadowing of a far greater deliverance. We see the blood of Christ and our safe passage through deadlier waters than the Red Sea. It is what all believers share in common. It is what makes us the redeemed of the Lord, the bride of Christ, a holy nation and a royal priesthood.
- D. And none of these people knew Jesus! Moses had not seen Jesus’ death on the cross for our sins. Abraham had not heard the angel say, *“He is not here. He is risen.”* They never sang, *“Christ the Lord Is Risen Today.”* They never saw John’s vision of people from every tribe and language, people and tongue, gathered around the throne of God singing, *“Worthy is the Lamb who was slain.”* Yet they believed. How much more sure is our confidence that **we are heirs, together with all God’s people, of an endless God-blessed life!**

The verses that follow—**vv.30-38**—describe both the victories and the suffering of the people of God across the pages of the OT, all tied directly to their faith. The mere mention of names summon up

memories of great stories—Gideon, Barak, Samson, Samuel, David, the prophets (v.33-35a) “*who through faith conquered kingdoms, administered justice, and gained what was promised; who shut the mouths of lions, quenched the fury of the flames, and escaped the edge of the sword; whose weakness was turned to strength; and who became powerful in battle and routed foreign armies. Women received back their dead, raised to life again.*” All that through faith. Those people didn’t necessarily believe that lions wouldn’t eat them or that they’d escape the sword. They didn’t know what God would do, but the point is that they trusted God.

And they trusted God when they suffered. V.35b-38: “*There were others who were tortured, refusing to be released so that they might gain an even better resurrection. Some faced jeers and flogging, and even chains and imprisonment. They were put to death by stoning; they were sawed in two; they were killed by the sword. They went about in sheepskins and goatskins, destitute, persecuted and mistreated—the world was not worthy of them. They wandered in deserts and mountains, living in caves and in holes in the ground.*”

And they didn’t know Jesus! They hadn’t heard him promise, “*Surely, I am with you always.*” They hadn’t heard Paul promise, “*Nothing can separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.*” They hadn’t heard that great heavenly angel promise, “*Never again will they hunger or thirst... for the Lamb at the center of the throne will be their Shepherd... And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes.*”

IV. FAITH WALKS WITH GOD INTO LIFE’S GREATEST RISKS, SOMETIMES TO MIRACLES AND SOMETIMES TO SUFFERING, BUT NEVER TURNING BACK (11:30-38)

- A. You may not feel like some paragon of trust in God but I suspect when you have faced hard things, you did not turn back. You may have been “*hard pressed on every side, perplexed, persecuted, struck down*”—feeling death itself in your body, but you did not forsake God. You may have lost all sense of God’s presence and felt you stood alone, but you didn’t give up Christ. Instead, your frail faith was met by God’s grace and help. Whether you saw some

miracle of God or, even more miraculously, you bore great suffering faithfully, your faith was the anchor for your soul.

Conclusion

- A. Did you notice how many of the names mentioned along the way here were not actually *heroes of faith*. I'll not take time for the details, but faith did not produce perfect—nor even admirable—people. But they did believe these fundamentals, which are far easier for us to believe through Christ than they were for these “ancients.”
1. Faith means we “earnestly seek God” on God’s terms.
 2. Faith rejects this world in favor of the city God has promised us as our inheritance
 3. Faith knows that we are heirs, together with all God’s people, of the God-blessed life
 4. Faith walks with God into life’s greatest risks, sometimes to miracles and sometimes to suffering, but never turning back
- B. The author of Hebrews stresses something else here in **vv.39-40**: *“These were all commended for their faith, yet none of them received what had been promised, since God had planned something better for us so that only together with us would they be made perfect.”* If they could do it, we who have Christ and who have so much greater clarity about God’s promises surely can walk by faith as well.
- C. So that brings us back to the point in 12:1-3, *“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, fixing our eyes on Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of faith.”*