

Last week we focused on perseverance as found at the end of Heb ch 10 [slide]. These Jewish Christians, feeling persecuted, are thinking about severing their ties with Jesus and his “once for all,” New Covenant, sacrifice. They expect life to get easier if they go back to the priesthood, the sacrifices and the law. Big mistake. At the end of ch10 he begs them: Don't throw away your courage. You've gotta be patient to do the will of God and receive God's promises. In just a little while Christ WILL come- and “the righteous will live by faith... but if any of them turns back I will not be pleased with him.” We are not people who turn back and are lost. Instead, we have faith and are saved.

The righteous will live by FAITH. They won't “shrink back”- they won't run from the challenges God lays before them. They won't beat a hasty retreat when things get difficult. God says: **If they do I will be ashamed of them.** But fortunately for US, WE come from better stock than that. **We are not descended from the critical and the cowardly and the comfortable.** We are not people who give up. We are not people who turn back. We are not those who prefer the brick pits of Egypt to God's Promised Land flowing with Milk and Honey. **WE HAVE FAITH AND ARE SAVED.**

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So keep the Faith!! **Faith is the obvious focus of the 40 verses of Hebrews 11.** No surprise, because Faith is indispensable to any sort of relationship with the God of the Universe whom we cannot see! **2Corinthians** tells us “we walk by Faith, not by sight...” Jesus commended the Roman Centurion's Faith in what could not be seen, and Romans says **Faith** is the one thing that puts us right with God.

Conveniently our chapter opens with a definition of Faith. [slide] NIV: 1 Now faith is confidence in what we hope for and assurance about what we do not see. Now, Religious Faith in the modern world is often mocked as something stupid. As if **faith** is the process of [slide] **brainwashing yourself** or some sort of [slide] **mental cheerleading squad** trying to rouse you into believing something no reasonable person would accept.

And I suppose you could get that idea from NIV's translation of v1 [slide], because “**confidence**” and “**assurance**” are both activities of the mind, as if **Faith is just an idea in our mind and no more.** A couple translations state v1 with a different thrust. Listen to this: [slide], NJB Heb. 11:1 Only faith can **guarantee the blessings** that we hope for, or **prove the existence** of realities that are unseen. Here, our hoped-for blessings are **guaranteed by faith** and unseen realities are **proven real.** In some sense- our faith brings unseen hopes and realities into real-time existence. [slide], KJV: Heb. 11:1 Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen. Faith- in some sense- gives substance here and now to our hope in Christ. Bruce: “...things, which, in themselves have no existence as of yet, become real and substantial by the exercise of faith.

Faith is not cheerleading yourself into a rose-colored optimism. Real, robust, Biblical Faith takes God at His word and lives accordingly and that “living” brings into being a type of awareness of those hoped-for things and unseen realities of God. [slide], So this morning – in an overview of Heb 11- we will glance at **The Portrayal of Faith, The Paradigm of Faith,** and the **Perspective of Faith** in Hebrews 11.

[slide] The Portrayal of Faith

1 Now faith is confidence in what we hope for and assurance about what we do not see. From v1, Faith is confidence that the promises of God -that we’re hoping to see fulfilled- will be fulfilled. Someone has said: What physical eyesight does for the visible, Faith does for the invisible. And, as I’ve suggested, when we engage that faith by acting on God’s word, some portion of our Hope is revealed to our “Faith eyes.” [Augustine wrote: “Therefore seek not to understand that thou mayest believe, but believe that thou mayest understand.] **Biblical Faith** gives substance to our **Hope** in Christ. **So please notice that in Heb 11 Faith is portrayed as entwined with Hope.**

[slide] They are two threads plied together into one- separate but unified.

Let’s look at the comment in v6 tacked onto the story of Enoch who, we’re told “pleased God. [slide] 6 ...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.

Any human who hopes to enter into relationship with the ”Immortal, Invisible, God, only Wise” must have that confident assurance that the God he has never seen, and has never heard exists. And not only Faith that He exists, *but faith that The God of the universe delights in His image-bearing humans-* as He delighted in Enoch- and rewards those who draw near rather than shrink back. [slide]

So Faith is portrayed as entwined with Hope and essential to Pleasing God.

V7 gives us another important facet of Faith as portrayed in **the story of Noah.**

[slide] 7 **By faith Noah, when warned about things not yet seen...** said, “what’s a cubit?” rolled over and went back to sleep-nope. ...made plans to quickly sell some valuable water-front property...nope. ...made an appointment with a psychologist to talk about this voice in his head...nope **7 By faith Noah, when warned about things not yet seen, in holy fear built an ark to save his family.** [Now THAT’S a reason for a psychologist... said all of Noah’s neighbors.]

And we see the same thing in Abraham’s story: 8 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**. What did both of them do? **They obeyed**. God said: build an ark and Noah did. God said leave home and keep walking until I tell you to stop, and Abraham did.

[slide] In Heb11 **Faith is entwined with Hope, essential to pleasing God, and demands devoted obedience.**

Another important aspect of Faith shows up in v9 [slide] . **Abraham** is in the promised land, but it’s not his. He lives in it like “a stranger in a foreign country”- and it’s hard. In v17 his faith is severely tested by the sacrifice of Isaac.

The point: Living one’s faith in God is NOT portrayed as a “walk in the park.”

It leads to situations that are *frustrating, dangerous and heartbreaking*.

This is reinforced in v32-40 where we see those pursuing faith doing great things: they administer justice, rout armies, quench flames and raise the dead. But simultaneously we see the faithful portrayed as insulted, imprisoned, tortured, stoned, stabbed and sawn in two.

[slide] And so in Heb11 **Faith is portrayed entwined with Hope, essential to pleasing God, demanding devoted obedience; accomplishing great good, but is no shield against suffering.** This is the portrayal of Faith in Heb 11. Now on to...

The Paradigm of Faith [slide]

Paradigm is a ten-dollar word for a **model, an example**. Just before defining Faith our author defined his congregation saying: **10:39** we do not belong to those who shrink back and are destroyed, but to those who have faith and are saved. **We are not people who fold under pressure, we have faith in God, His plan and His promises no matter what.**

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Abel by attitude and offering was faithful to God, up to and through the point of death. And though it got him killed his faith is a model for our Hebrews [and us].

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Our author knows **Enoch's** story from Genesis: **24** Enoch walked with God; and he was not, for God took him. And he knows Enoch's story in the Jewish book: Wisdom of Solomon **4:10** He pleased God, and was beloved of him: so that living among sinners he was translated. [Sweet story: Enoch and God- great friends- long walks together talking and laughing as friends will do. One day they got busy talking and walking and lost track of the time. Suddenly it was very late and they were very far from Enoch's house. So God said: We're a lot closer to my house than yours, why don't you just come stay with me? And so He did.] **Enoch's model of faith is that he believed in God and earnestly sought Him and this pleased God.**

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Noah's faith paradigm is that God came to him and told him something outrageous: I'm going to destroy the world with a flood, so build a boat big enough to hold pairs of every animal and bird I've created and your family. Build it, get inside and wait for the rain. And Noah obeyed God in this incredibly crazy act- which should make following Jesus in first century Rome look like a walk in the park – even with persecution.

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Abraham's faith model is even more amazing. God tells Abraham I'm going to give you a homeland, start walking and I'll tell you when to stop. No directions. No instructions. Just Go. And he goes. God told Abe and Sarah they would have a son - descendants like the stars in the sky or the sand on the shore- and though their old bodies and minds struggled with the idea they believed -and God counted them righteous. Even when God tells Abe to do the horribly unthinkable, and sacrifice the son he loves and the promise he's counting on Abraham did not shrink back. He was faithful and by the love and power of God **the Son and promise were saved!!**

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Isaac and Jacob & Joseph would never get to see God's promises fulfilled in their lifetime but **in faith they all assumed** God would fulfill His promises after their deaths [Joseph's bones].

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Moses parents' example is a Faith in God that gives them courage to defy the imperial authorities to protect their son. And v27 ascribes to **Moses** the same fearlessness in regard to the authorities. That's encouragement our Hebrews needed.

[slide] By faith Moses refused the easy life of the palace in order to 25 "...be mistreated along with the people of God." This is particularly applicable to our Hebrews who are trying to avoid mistreatment for Jesus by seeking out an easier, safer way of life without Jesus. *But Moses, by faith, refused the easy road and took the hard road of disgrace.*

[slide] **Rahab** is an interesting entry. She's the only other woman on the list and she is treated equally with the likes of Moses and Noah and Abraham. And she is mentioned last in order that she be remembered in this list of Faith Heroes. This Canaanite prostitute, a gentile, and a woman is held up to our Hebrews as a **prime paradigm of Faith.** She became convinced of God's greatness and her **formidable faith** enabled her to welcome and hide Israel's spies in Jericho.

By her faith she defied the Jericho authorities and aligned herself with the Living God. And despite Jericho's fall she had faith God would save her and her household. Listen:

Josh 2:10 "For we have heard how the LORD dried up the water of the Red Sea before you when you came out of Egypt, and what you did to the two kings of the Amorites who were beyond the Jordan, to Sihon and Og, whom you utterly destroyed. **11** "When we heard *it*, our hearts melted and no courage remained in any man any longer because of you; for the LORD your God, He is God in heaven above and on earth beneath. **12** "Now therefore, please swear to me by the LORD, since I have dealt kindly with you, that you also will deal kindly with my father's household, and give me a pledge of truth, **13** and spare my father and my mother and my brothers and my sisters, with all who belong to them, and deliver our lives from death."

The message to our Hebrews is clear: if this pagan, gentile, prostitute had faith and was saved, shouldn't you? If she and Noah, and Abraham and Moses had faith in God in dangerous times, shouldn't you?

The paradigm of Faith is taking God at His word and living accordingly.

It is walking with God. It's getting up and following God without explanation through walls and seas and old age and tests and trials and godless authorities- until He says stop. That's the paradigm of Faith. And finally let's consider:

[slide] **The Perspective of Faith**

Faith by its very nature is forward looking. If, for instance, you have faith in a person- positive expectations about how they will act in future circumstances- it is based on your past experiences but it's primary focus is on who they will be in the future.

The perspective of Faith is that it looks forward. [slide]

Like Abraham in v9-10. God promised that the land He would show Abraham would someday belong to him and his descendants. So Abraham followed God to this place with all his family. But it never belonged to him in his lifetime or the lifetime of his son or grandson.

That's why they lived there in tents like strangers in a foreign country.

Why did Abraham do this? Because his Faith in God kept him looking forward to what would come some day. **10** For he was looking forward to the city with foundations, whose architect and builder is God. **He was looking forward to the day God's Kingdom would come and God's will would be done on earth as it is in Heaven.**

Abraham had faith that God's promise -that ALL THE FAMILIES OF THE EARTH would be blessed through the blessing God had given Him- would come to pass even if he didn't see it. Listen to these verses: **13** 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, admitting that they were foreigners and strangers on earth. **14** People who say such things show that they are looking for a country of their own. **15** If they had been thinking of the country they had left, they would have had opportunity to return. **16** 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.

Within the lifetime of these saints God's Kingdom did not come and his will was not done on earth as in Heaven. God's blessing that would bless the world through Abraham was in its infancy with a long, long way to go to get to the cross and resurrection which would finalize God's promise of blessing the world through Abraham's family.

And evidently they- in some sense- understood that they could only see the vaguest shadow of the thing God was doing and **13** ...admitting that they were foreigners and strangers on earth. **16** ...longing for a better country—a heavenly one. **And because of their faith forward perspective 16** ...God [was] not ashamed to be called their God. **Still though, 39** ...all these, having gained approval through their faith, did not receive what was promised.

And ultimately the same is likely to be said for us. Of course we have more of the story than they did. We know Jesus, the Son of God came and lived a "truly Human life." We know He **1:3** ...is the radiance of God's glory and the exact representation of his being. We know He was **4:15** tempted in every way, just as we are—yet he did not sin. We know he was our great High Priest and perfect, once for all, sacrifice for sin.

And yet the fact remains we -here and now- are still looking forward to "the city with foundations, whose architect & Builder is God"- the New Jerusalem coming from Heaven to a renewed Earth. Our salvation may be settled but it's not yet complete as we look forward to the return of Jesus **Phil 3:21** who, by the power that enables him to bring everything under his control, will transform our lowly bodies so that they will be like his glorious body.

We've got the promises and Jesus as guarantee but we're still living as refugees in a foreign country- or we should be. The promises seem nearer to completion, but we still view the completion of our salvation at a vast distance. **[slide]**

Those of us engaging the **Perspective of Faith** are still looking forward to a country of our own, a better country, a “country” on Earth that is Heavenly in its Nature- Just as Jesus taught us to pray [slide] : May your Kingdom Come and your will be done on earth as it is in Heaven.

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Hebrews author ends this passage by telling us that God’s plan is to bring about the complete perfection of his people together- that’s all his people from the beginning to the end of time [v40].

And that my friends means **at Jesus’ return and the Resurrection of the Dead.**
That is the moment when salvation will be complete,
That is the moment the promises will be fulfilled.
That is the moment our faith shall be sight.

But until then we wait for the City of God as foreigners and strangers on earth.
May we be commended like Enoch for a faith that pleases God.
And may it be said of us [slide] : “The world was not worthy of them.”