

Hebrews 11 – Faith

We saw last week that the author had been encouraging his readers to keep going, to endure. He showed them that the righteous live by faith. He reminded them of their past confidence and hope in God. He wants them to hope again. He gave them every reason to keep on going, keep hoping in faith and be saved. The only alternative was the displeasure of God and destruction. Now our His intention is for them to be encouraged by the examples he gives. He wants them to live by faith. His focus is not on their hoping. It is how the promises of God express themselves in the lives of those who believe them. He wants them to endure, and by faith they can endure.

Hebrews 11:1-3

- Vs1 – The author here gives us a definition of faith. But this is where we run into translations problems.
 - ESV - Now faith is the **assurance** of things hoped for, the **conviction** of things not seen.
 - HCSB - Now faith is the **reality** of what is hoped for, the **proof** of what is not seen.
 - KJV - Now faith is the **substance** of things hoped for, the **evidence** of things not seen.
 - NET - Now faith is **being sure** of what we hope for, **being convinced** of what we do not see.
 - The words be translated objectively “reality/proof” or subjectively “being sure/being convinced”.
 - **Luther** - The second characteristic of faith is that it does not desire to know, nor first to be assured whether it is worthy of grace and will be heard, like the doubters, who grasp after God and tempt him. Just as a blind man runs against a wall, so they also plunge against God, and would first gladly feel and be assured that he can not escape out of their hands. The Epistle to the Hebrews says, 11, 1: "*Now faith is assurance of things hoped for, a conviction of things not seen.*" This clearly means faith holds fast to what it does not see, feel or experience, either in body or soul, but as it has firm trust in God it commits itself to and relies upon it without any doubt but its hope will be realized. Thus it will also certainly be realized, and the feeling and experience will come to it unsought and unsolicited, even in and through such hope or faith. (Sermon on Luke 17:11-19)
 - The author has used this word “reality” before. Heb 1:3b. “Who is the exact imprint of his *nature/person/essence/substance*”.
 - Certainly faith is confidence. We have seen that before. But our author is not focusing on the subjective confidence of faith, but the reality of faith, what it does in your life.
 - **Craig Koester** – The author, by using the provocative way of stating this, is pointing to the reality that faith, where it exists, is being called into an existence by something beyond—by a power of God that you cannot see with your eyes. What you see is God’s power continuing to awaken faith in all kinds of situations where you wouldn’t imagine faith existing. Here is a crazy analogy—from the realm of faith to the realm of the sciences. Think of the planets. The further out you get in the solar system to the planet Uranus was that the planet had a weird orbit. It didn’t go where people expected it to go—it was supposed to go ‘round and ‘round the sun. This one seemed to be getting pulled in a strange direction. There had to be something that was pulling it out of sync. There has got to be something unseen beyond it. People knew that the planet Neptune was out there even though they couldn’t see it because it had the power to pull the next planet in out of its usual orbit. For the author of Hebrews, that is what faith is. It is God pulling you out of your usual orbit. You see the power of God at work when it pulls people beyond the despair that you might expect, beyond the cynicism you might expect, beyond the sense of disappointment you might expect—into a sense of hope.
 - Faith is the reality of God's power at work in your life.
 - **James Thompson** – It suggests that faith is no subjective feeling but **the reality of things hoped for**. Indeed, it is both the reality and the “realization” of things hoped for. The author has offered an example of faith already in his recollection of the community's past when they suffered the loss of possessions because they knew that they had a better and abiding possession (10:34). That is, they recognized that “reality” was not found in material things or in one’s present situation, but in the transcendent world.
 - Faith is the proof of God's power at work in your life. It provides a firmness to endure as it lives in view of the unseen reality.
 - Vs2 – The author is getting ready to show that this is the perspective that guided the ancestors in all their circumstances.
 - We see the framework in 11:2 as he says “...by it the people of old received their commendation(confirmed)” and again in 11:39 as he says “And all these, though commended(confirmed) through their faith...”. Thus we see how that the focus is that those who loved with this perspective of “faith” were confirmed by God.
 - **Thompson** – the passive of *martyrien* indicates that they were “confirmed” by God. Abel was “confirmed” (11:4) and it was “confirmed” that Enoch was well pleasing to God (11:5). Thus the great “cloud of witnesses” are those who have been “confirmed” by God. God attested that those who had abandoned every earthly assurance in favour of the invisible reality were faithful.
 - Vs3 – The author list of those who acted by faith begins with creation. He does not mention the ancestors here but

describes the community's own faith. Why? He is linking them with the accounts to follow.

- “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.”
 - In other words, your faith also looks towards the unseen reality, because you believe in creation; something which happened by the unseen reality of God's word.
 - This is special for the people since back in 2:5 he showed us that their problem had to do with “the world to come” being subjected to Christ, which “they do not see”.
 - Just like the world became a reality, being created out of the invisible through the word of God, so too the “world to come” which is invisible will become a reality.
 - **Craig Koester** – by pointing out how the listeners view of the past relies on faith, the author helps to show that their stance toward the future must also depend on faith. If listeners rely on God's word concerning the genesis of the world, they must rely on God's word when considering the goal of the world.
 - **Thompson** – With his pastoral concern for the readers, he affirms that they orient their lives to the “things that do not appear,” the equivalent of “things hoped for” and the “things not seen”. What “we know” was also known to the ancestors, who were models of the same orientation.

Hebrews 11:4-5

- The righteous sufferer.
 - Abel is the first example. He was righteous by faith but murdered by his brother. Through his faith he still speaks after death. The idea of still speaking after death could be an idea of “life after death”.
 - **Thompson** – ...his primary reason is to show that Abel, the victim, overcame death. Beyond his death were “the things hoped for”. If he speaks beyond death, he has overcome death. Thus the voice of Abel, as the author indicates later (12:24-25), speaks to the temptations of a suffering community, telling them of the reality beyond death... Abel is the righteous martyr, and his situation is analogous to that of the readers, now now suffer alienation.
 - The second example of the “righteous sufferer” is in vs35b-38.
- The Victory by faith.
 - Enoch is the first example of faith's victory. He did not suffer but triumphed through faith. Enoch was taken to heaven. It was said he pleased God. Genesis says he walked with God for 300years. The fact that he didn't die showed the triumph, the victory he had through faith.
 - **Thompson** – Like Abel, Enoch (11:5) demonstrated the reality of “things not seen”... Although Enoch did not, like Abel, experience a violent death, both he and his predecessor were “confirmed” before God, and both built their lives on “things not seen”, for neither of the ancestors was defeated by death.
 - The second example of the “victory by faith” is in vs32-35a.
 - In vs32-38, The idea of resurrection from the dead is in the centre. The implication is that all those who suffered and were killed in 35b-38 and all those who were victorious in 32-35a were motivated by their hope of the resurrection of the dead.

Hebrews 11:6 seen through Hebrews 11:30-31

Victor Rhee highlights the 3 principles of faith seen in vs6 and shows how they are highlighted in vs30-31.

1. First, one cannot possibly please God without faith. This is seen in Jericho.
 1. **Victor Rhee** – this is the story of the second generation of Israel who acted in faith and pleased God, as opposed to the rebellious first generation. Thus in the gap between verses 29 and 30, the author of Hebrews implied that while the first generation was not able to enter God's rest because of disobedience (3:7–4:13), the second generation did enter the rest (i.e., the land of promise) by faith under Joshua's leadership. This obedience by the second generation was an act of faith which pleased God, and which corresponds to the first principle of faith in 11:6.
2. Second, faith involves believing in the existence of God, indicated by the verb "is". This is seen in Rahab's example.
 1. Bruce asserts that "it is not belief in the existence of a God that is meant, but belief in the existence of the God who once declared His will to the fathers through the prophets and in these last days has spoken in His Son."
 1. **Victor Rhee** – Second, the author's inclusion of Rahab (v. 31) is significant because she, a Gentile, became a member of the people of God by faith. Joshua 2:8–14 suggests she had the kind of faith described in Hebrews 11:6. She came to realize that the God of Israel is the true God, having been informed of the miracles performed by the Lord (e.g., His drying up the water of the Red Sea and His victory over the Amorite kings). This corresponds to the second principle of faith in verse 6, which states that the one who draws near to God must believe in the existence of God.
3. Third, faith involves believing that God rewards those who seek Him. This is seen in Rahab's example.
 1. It denotes "a singular determination to devote oneself to the service of God."
 2. The idea of "reward" implies a forward-looking aspect of faith, which is "a matter of unwavering hope in the God who controls the future. It exhibits the solid faith that is the condition for receiving recompense by God."
 3. **Victor Rhee** – Third, when Rahab realized who the true God is, she received the two spies in peace and pleaded

for her life and the lives of her family members (Josh. 2:12–14). Her act of faith indicates she believed God rewards those who earnestly seek Him out which corresponds to the third principle of faith in Hebrews 11:6. Rahab clearly exhibits "a faith that was oriented toward the future. She was prepared to put herself in danger for the sake of future safety."

Hebrews 11:7 Noah and 11:23-29 Moses.

- Here we have an example of "salvation" linked with "faith". Noah received a word from God, obeyed to save his household. He condemned the world and became an heir of the righteousness that comes by faith.
 - Notice Noah's faith was created by a word from God. ==> The listeners have received God's ultimate word!
 - Notice Noah's faith looked towards events yet unseen ==> The listeners look in faith towards what they do not see!
 - Notice Noah's faith was obedient to the word ==> The listeners are called to obey to the word they received!
 - Notice Noah's faith acted to save his household ==> The listeners have been called the household of God and exhorted not to abandon one another but to exhort one another as they see the Day approaching.
 - Notice Noah condemned the world ==> The listeners have left the world, become alienated in faith of God's promise.
 - Notice Noah became an heir ==> the listeners are also heirs of salvation.
 - Though Noah and the listeners share much, Noah is much more an example of Christ, who acted in faith seeing the joy set before him to save his household.
- Noah's act of building an ark indicates that faith involves obedience to God's word. The unseen events refer to the flood. This shows the forward-looking aspect of Noah's faith, life after the destruction of the world.
 - **Victor Rhee** – Noah's faith is a perfect example of faith described in verse 1. His action showed that he was convinced of the reality of things still in the unseen future, still in the realm of unfulfilled hope. Noah was able to obey the voice of God and build the ark because "he believed that what God had said He would do He would do. Despite all the appearances to the contrary Noah put his full trust in God."
 - Faith showed itself in Noah's obedience and trust in God which came through God's promise to him.

Hebrews 11:8-10 Abraham's faith

- Here we see 3 things about Abraham's faith.
 1. The obedience of his faith. Vs8.
 1. Just like Noah, Abraham received a word from God and responded by obeying it. Noah became an "heir" when he responded, and Abraham did to, as he went out to receive "an inheritance".
 1. **Craig Koester** – The author of Hebrews is picking up a story where Abraham was told to go to a place where God would show him. Abraham was 75! I can imagine that if I am 75 I don't want to leave my familyIt is a crazy kind of a story where God is calling Abraham out of his comfort zone into a future without giving him a detailed road map. Perhaps the three most astounding words in the entire Bible come up in Genesis: "so Abraham went." That is faith—to step forward into a future that you cannot see—a future that you have only in the form of a promise....
 2. The confession of his faith. Vs9.
 1. The NET bible brings out the meaning here: *By faith he lived as a foreigner in the promised land as though it were a foreign country, living in tents with Isaac and Jacob, who were fellow heirs of the same promise.*
 1. Even though Abraham was in the land that he was promised, he confessed himself to a foreigners, a stranger, and also that the land was a foreign land.
 1. **James Thompson** – The fact that he lived in tents further emphasises his transient status. Thus as the author maintained earlier in the homily (3:7-4:11), Canaan was not the ultimate land of promise. Even in the place where God led Abraham, the patriarch did not find the security of a homeland.
 1. The question remains, what was he looking for, if it was not Canaan? ==> vs10.
 3. The orientation of his faith. Vs10.
 1. Abraham looked forward to (expected/ waited for) a city who's designer and builder is God.
 1. The emphasis is on Abraham's forward-looking faith based on God's promise. Abraham was looking forward to the heavenly city. Abraham's faith was clearly future-oriented.
 1. When did Abraham confess himself as a foreigner, living in a foreign land?
 1. **Genesis 23:1-9** Sarah lived 127 years; these were the years of the life of Sarah. 2 And Sarah died at Kiriath-arba (that is, Hebron) in the land of Canaan, and Abraham went in to mourn for Sarah and to weep for her. 3 And Abraham rose up from before his dead and said to the Hittites, 4 **"I am a sojourner and foreigner among you;** give me property among you for a burying place, that I may bury my dead out of my sight." 5 The Hittites answered Abraham, 6 "Hear us, my lord; you are a prince of God among us. Bury your dead in the choicest of our tombs. None of us will withhold from you his tomb to hinder you from burying your dead." 7 Abraham rose and bowed to the Hittites, the people of the land. 8 And he said to them, "If you are willing that I should bury my dead out of my sight, hear me and entreat for me Ephron the son of Zohar, 9 that he may give me the cave of Machpelah, which he owns; it is at the end of his field. For the full price let him give it to me in your presence as property for a burying place."

1. It was in the face of death that Abraham made this confession. How could he confess this? Because he looked into the future, past the death. He looked to God's heavenly city.
 1. Abraham was able to look past even death, by looking towards God's heavenly city.
2. **James Thompson** – This city, as the author indicates elsewhere (11:16; 12:22; 13:14), is the heavenly world, the equivalent of the heavenly rest described in 4:1-11 and the promise that the author has mentioned repeatedly, and the place of the heavenly sanctuary. Thus Abraham exemplifies the principle of in 11:1 that faith is “the reality of things hoped for, the proof of things not seen”. The city prepared by God remains invisible to Abraham's eyes. Nevertheless, the author knows that it was the reality that served as the anchor of his life and enabled him to live as a migrant.
 1. This is very pastoral. The people have received a word from God. They have been alienated from their society. They can't see the promise. They need to look past the suffering and death around them by looking towards God's eternal city. Abraham is their example in that he obeyed God's call even leaving family, he confessed himself a foreigner in a strange land, looking past the death around him. He was able to do this as he look in faith towards the unseen promise, God's city.

Hebrews 11:11-12 “Sarah's faith seen in regard to Isaac's birth”

- Verses 11–12 show Sarah's steadfastness of faith in light of God's promise that He would provide a son for Abraham. The emphasis is on Sarah's trust in God's ability to bring about conception, even when she was barren.
 - Sarah's faith also looked past the death of her womb as well as the deadness of Abraham, as she trusted in God's ability to do what he said.
 - The concept of resurrection from the dead is implied in bringing back Abraham's physical deadness.
 - Sarah's faith came through God's promise. It looked forward and trusted in God's ability to do what He said. Faith conquers the grave (death/barrenness) once again.

Hebrews 11:13-16 “Focus of Faith”

- Verses 13–16 Have been called the centre of chapter 11.
 - **Victor Rhee** – Verses 13 to 16 emphasize not death, but the promises of God. In other words the author's main concern in the middle section was to show that the Old Testament characters died while anticipating God's promises by faith. This theme is also seen in the introduction (vv. 1–3) and the conclusion (vv. 39–40). In both passages the emphasis is that those whose faith was in the Lord had not yet received His promise. The references to “the men of old” in the introduction (v.2), “all these” in the center section (v. 13), and “all these” in the conclusion (v. 39) refer to all the Old Testament exemplars of faith mentioned in this chapter.
 - They did not receive the promise.
 - They saw them from a distance.
 - They looked forward/anticipated them with pleasure.
 - They confessed themselves to be strangers and foreigners on the earth.
 - It seems clear that faith looks to the future, looks past the present suffering, death, to the future promise.
 - In vs14 and 16 the author switches to the present tense.
 - He says that “those (presently) speaking like that make known that they (presently) desire a better homeland... and they are (presently) eagerly longing for a better one, that is for a heavenly one.
 - The author is showing the object that the faith of the the heroes look forward to “God's heavenly homeland”.
 - He points out in vs15 that if they actually didn't want this heavenly homeland, they had opportunity to return to the one they left. The fact they didn't showed they wanted the heavenly one.
 - He says that “therefore God is (presently) not ashamed of them to (presently) be called their God.
 - The change from aorist to present tense shows the life of faith, it conquers death, for all these died without receiving the promise.
 - It shows the present commendation of God towards who died in faith. He is not ashamed of them.
 - Also as **Victor Rhee** says “The author seems to have chosen the present tenses to identify the readers with the patriarchs.”
 - They too are presently awaiting that better, heavenly homeland. Thus the heroes truly are their examples.
 - At the end of vs16 he switches back to the aorist tense saying “because God has prepared for them a city”.
 - The author is showing us the reality behind their faith. God had prepared for them a better city, this truth changed the orbit of their lives, and they died in this faith, looking forward to it.
 - Faith looks forward and hopes in God's promise. Faith speaks beyond the grave. God commends those who look to Him. People of faith recognize that they are not fully at home in this world. They live like strangers or aliens, because in faith they hope for a better, heavenly life.

Hebrews 11:17-19 “Abraham's faith seen in regard to sacrificing Isaac”

- Verses 17–19 speak of Abraham's steadfastness of faith, specifically when faced with the command to offer up his son. As in the case of Sarah, Abraham's faith was also firmly based on God's promises. Abraham's dramatic act of offering up his son was based on believing in God's promise that Isaac would be the heir of the promise.

- The hope of resurrection from the dead is also seen in his faith. He considered that God was able to raise up Isaac.
 - Faith remains steadfast even when faced with difficulties. Faith conquers the grave.

Hebrews 11:20-22 “Faith of Isaac, Jacob, and Joseph”.

- In verse 20 the future aspect of faith is indicated by Isaac blessing Jacob and Esau "regarding things to come." Also Joseph's mention of the Exodus and the instruction about his burial (v. 22) was something for the future. Jacob's blessing on Ephraim and Manasseh also looked to the future.
 - Faith looks to the future as reality.

Hebrews 11:23-29 “Moses Faith”

- This section touches on three subjects: the faith of Moses' parents (v. 23); Moses' decision to suffer for Christ (vv. 24–26), and Moses' departure from Egypt (vv. 27–29).
 - The first section (v. 23) denotes the faith of Moses' parents. The fact that his parents were not afraid of the king's edict implies that they obeyed God, and their obedience shows their complete trust in Him.
 - The second section (vv. 24–26) describes the choice Moses made by faith. His faith involved enduring hardship in that he chose to share ill treatment with the people of God. This corresponds to the steadfastness of faith the author of Hebrews emphasized throughout the epistle... Another element in Moses' example of faith is seen in 11:26. Moses refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter because he looked to the reward God had stored up for him. In other words his faith involved a forward-looking aspect, where he found motivation to endure suffering.
 - The third section (vv. 27–29) further describes Moses' faith. Each of these three verses points out that faith is complete trust in and obedience to God. Moses departed from Egypt because he was steadfast as if seeing the One who is invisible (v. 27). Moses' instituting the Passover (v. 28) and the Israelites' crossing the Red Sea (v. 29) also show that faith involves trust in and obedience to God.
 - Just like Noah, Moses's faith is connected to the salvation of his house. Moses' sufferings are interestedly connected to Jesus. Faith involves suffering with the people of God and not abandoning them.

Hebrews 11:30-31 Jericho, Rahab and 11:6.

Hebrews 11:32-38

- This is the second example of the righteous sufferer and the victory of faith.
 - In vs32-38, The idea of resurrection from the dead is in the centre. The implication is that all those who suffered and were killed in 35b-38 and all those who were victorious in 32-35a were motivated by their hope of the resurrection of the dead.
 - **Victor Rhee** – Verses 32-38 may be viewed as a chiasm, in which verses 32-35a and 35b-38 complement each other by contrast, looking first at examples of victory through faith and then at examples of sufferings and martyrdom through faith.44 Both sections contain the idea of resurrection. Verse 35a speaks of the resurrection of those who had victory by faith, and verse 35b speaks of the hope of resurrection of those who experienced suffering and death by faith. The subject of the resurrection reveals that faith is directly related to hope, which is mentioned often in Hebrews. This hope of resurrection makes it evident that here faith involved an eschatological, forward-looking aspect. The chiasmic structure of verses 32-38 implies that faith manifested in the outer sections (vv. 32-34, 36-38) was based on the hope of resurrection in the center sections (v. 35). In this sense the characteristics of faith exhibited by the exemplars of faith were eschatologically oriented.

Hebrews 39-40 “Conclusion”

- Vs39a, The author concludes by saying that “these all were confirmed through faith”, closing the frame with vs2.
 - Being confirmed indicates that God bore witness to them in a legally binding way.
- Vs39b, Surprisingly the author does not conclude positively but says that they “did not receive the promise”
 - **James Thompson** – although many received promises, they did not enter into God's rest (3:11, 19), come to their homeland (11:14), or enter the city prepared by God (11:16)... until their death the ancestors lived by faith in “things hoped for” and “things not seen” (11:1), but they could see only through the eyes of faith (11:26-27). Thus the author reminds readers who now suffer because they “do not see” the world in subjection to the exalted Son that their experience does not undermine their confession but confirms that they now share in the legacy of faith.
- Vs40a, They did not receive the promise because God was **foreseeing something better for us**.
 - **James Thompson** - What is “better”... is the “abiding possession” (10:34) and the heavenly homeland (11:14-16) made possible by the superior sacrifice of Christ (9:23). As the indicates... the better promise (cf. 8:6) is “for us”, for the possibility of entering God's rest remains (4:3-11) for those who will demonstrate the same endurance as the ancestors whom God confirmed.
- Vs40b, the promise is not “for us” apart from our ancestors in so far as **without us they would not be made perfect**.
 - **James Thompson** – the context suggests that the ancestors will be “made perfect” only when they reach the heavenly city, which they could see only in the distance during their lifetime.
 - **without us**, brings us into the picture. Just like before, when the author indicated that they did not enter the rest, and God's eternal rest “still remains”, the author is showing them they these people did not receive the

promises. It highlights that the promise still remains. And thus these people can join the faithful and endure in their journey until the heavenly city. ==> Heb 12.

Hebrews 12:1-3

- The completes the story of the heroes by putting us into the picture in chapter 12.
 - **Craig Koester** – Here the author is doing something crazy. He is taking people to a race track. You have seats along the side and a long track. The author talks about witnesses to God, witnesses to hope, witnesses to the future that God has. We are surrounded by all these witnesses and he takes all these people and puts them in the stands so that it is like they are all there watching the race and you are here. You are being called forward. We are put in a position of athletes. The race is a struggle, work; it is not just fun and the same is true of faith. The author is saying that faith is a noble endeavor. Faith is something that is tiring, wearying, and yet it is glorious because you are a participant in a race that has been shared by countless others. And to move forward in hope is the author's way of talking about the power of faith and to pull you into the future even though you are weary and beleaguered.
 - **PHILIPPIANS 3:17-21:** *Brethren, join in imitating me, and mark those who so live as you have an example in us. For many, of whom I have often told you and now tell you even with tears, live as enemies of the cross of Christ. Their end is destruction, their god is the belly, and they glory in their shame, with minds set on earthly things. But our commonwealth is in heaven, and from it we await a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, who will change our lowly body to be like his glorious body, by the power which enables him even to subject all things to himself.*