

Hebrews 11:8-16

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[0:00] Please take your copy of God's Word this morning and join me in Hebrews chapter 11. Amen. This morning, after an extended break, we will take back up our study of the book of Hebrews.

Recall with me that this letter was written to a church of Greek-speaking Jewish converts that had suffered much and that would likely suffer much more. The text gives us evidence that some of them had already abandoned the faith and that this remnant being written to was being tempted to do the same.

The author of Hebrews takes great pains throughout this letter to show his readers that Jesus as the Christ is more excellent than any faith system the world can offer with a particular backdrop of Judaism.

Today, we find ourselves just eight verses into the famous faith chapter of Hebrews in which its author is making the case that it is those who persevere by faith who save their souls.

He wrote in Hebrews chapter 10, verses 35 and following, Do not throw away your confidence, which has a great reward. For you have need of endurance, so that when you have done the will of God, you may receive what is promised.

[1:18] For yet a little while, and the coming one will come and will not delay. But my righteous one shall live by faith. And if he shrinks back, my soul has no pleasure in him.

But we are not of those who shrink back and are destroyed, but of those who have faith and preserve their souls. Chapter 11, he goes on, contains a biographical description of this soul-preserving, persevering faith.

He begins in chapter 11, verse 1 and 2. Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen.

For by it the people of old receive their commendation or approval. And he proceeds with many examples, beginning with Genesis 4, the example of Abel.

Then he speaks of the faith of Enoch, which can be discovered in Genesis chapter 5, and the faith of Noah, found in Genesis chapter 6. You see, he has his original Jewish listeners in mind as he is walking through the history of their patriarchs to make his point.

[2:29] Their history is also our history. So this point is not lost on us. This weekend, next, Lord willing, we will consider the paramount faith of Abraham and his family.

So join me as we read today's text, Hebrews chapter 11, verses 8 through 16. Before I read it, let me remind you, beloved, that this is God's word to us. It's written for his glory and our good. We would all do well to listen to it in order to believe its promises and obey its commands. By faith, Abraham obeyed when he was called to go out to a place that he was to receive an inheritance. And he went out not knowing where he was going. 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. For he was looking forward to the city that has foundations, whose designer and builder is God. By faith, Sarah herself received power to conceive, even when she was past the age, since she considered him faithful who had promised.

[3:37] 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. 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.

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. Therefore, God is not ashamed to be called their God, for he has prepared for them a city.

Remember that the book of Hebrews is written in the finest Greek in all the New Testament. So as we labor together to work out its meaning, we will do so in the following outline, which I hope is not overly simplistic, but helpful to us as we consider the faith of Abraham and his family.

Number one, faith in the promised land. And we will talk about faith obeying, faith costing, and faith tearing under that initial point.

[4:52] Secondly, faith in the promised son. We will also discuss faith is certain and faith is rewarded. And then finally, faith perseveres to the end.

So first, faith in the promised land. We can see in verse 8 that faith obeys. Faith obeys.

By faith, Abraham obeyed when he was called to go out to a place, that he was to receive an inheritance, and he went out. We can read of this in Genesis chapter 12, verses 1 through 3, which says, Now the Lord said to Abraham, Go from your country and your kindred and your father's house to the land I will show you.

And I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you and make your name great so that you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you and him who dishonors you. I will curse. And in you, all the families of the earth shall be blessed.

And then Genesis 12 and verse 4 says, So Abram went as the Lord had told him. He went. And he went, the Greek suggests immediately.

[6:00] In fact, the particular tense of the Greek in Hebrews 11, 8 suggests that even as God was speaking, he went.

Abraham did not act and gain faith. Abraham acted because he had faith. He believed that what God said was true, and therefore he acted.

It is this faith that the author of Hebrews tells us what gave Abraham his commendation in verse 2 of chapter 11. Similarly, our activity does not and could never save us, but saving faith acts. Saving faith is evidenced by activity. It is this very point that James makes when he asks the rhetorical question of James chapter 2 verse 14.

What good is it, my brothers, if someone says he has faith but does not have works? Can that faith save him?

[7:05] Saving faith is evidenced by obedience to God's commands. Not perfect obedience, as we'll see soon. None of us can claim that.

But a saving faith does in fact work. Desires to follow God and to be sent by him wherever he would have us go. Faith also, and most often, costs.

Faith costs. It costs us something. The last part of verse 8 says, And he went out, not knowing where he was going.

It wasn't until later that Abraham's destination was revealed to him as he stood and overlooked the land of Canaan. He had no real idea where he was going, and yet he went.

Abraham was willing to abandon his home for the sake of a better promise. Martin Luther wrote of Abraham's faith. It was hard to leave his native land, which it is natural for us to love.

[8:08] Indeed, love for the fatherland is numbered among the greatest virtues of the heathen. Furthermore, it is hard to leave friends and their companionship, but most of all, to leave relatives.

And then it is clear that with his obedience of faith, Abraham gave a supreme example of an evangelical life because he loved everything and followed the Lord, preferring the word of God to everything and loving it above everything.

We do not get to negotiate the terms of following God. We must come to him on his terms, by faith in Jesus Christ.

But to do so without counting the costs is foolish. Faith requires our everything. If you would have God, you will have him by following the way of Jesus.

And the way of Jesus was to give everything that he would please the father. Jesus says in Mark chapter 8, verse 34 and 35, If anyone would come after me, follow him, be his disciple.

[9:19] If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. You need to read there that this idea of cross is not a momentary and light thing, but a place of death.

This is the call to follow Christ, that we would die to ourselves in order that we may gain him. And then in verse 35 of Mark 8, For whoever would save his life will lose it.

Whoever loses his life for my sake and the gospels will save it. So faith costs. And do you find yourself trying to negotiate the terms with God?

Well, God, I will give you this and such, but not this and such. I'm willing to go this far, but only this far.

We must come to God on his terms. Faith also tarries. Verse 9 and 10 say, 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.

[10:35] Abraham never took possession of the land that was promised to him. Neither did his son or his grandson. The only land that Abraham ever owned was a tomb for his wife that he purchased near Hebron.

You can see that in Genesis chapter 23. He owned a small bit of alcove and a rock. But that was it. He didn't take any other possession of this promised land.

Stephen in his wonderful sermon in Acts chapter 7 in verse 4 and part of verse 5 stated, Then Abraham went out from the land of the Chaldeans and lived in Haran.

And after his father died, God removed him from there into this land in which you are now living. Yet he gave him no inheritance in it, not even a foot's length.

Abraham was a sojourner. He and his family lived in tents. Just imagine that God made a promise to you to give you the land of California.

[11:42] Trying to think of a strange place for us to go. So you pack up your whole family, you leave behind all that you know and many that you love. You take a nephew with you.

And you go and live amongst a strange people. This analogy is working out great now in my mind. I couldn't have written a better one. Who do not worship God that you worship, right?

Who will not grant you the rights of citizenship and you dwell there until the day that you die in a tent. This is the faith of Abraham practiced.

I think we look over the fact that he had no permanent dwelling place. In fact, in our reading of Genesis, he is constantly moving and being moved by others. God is faithful to him all along but never completes the promise that was made.

Would you stay? Would you at some point say, God has not been faithful to me. He said he would do a thing. He's not doing it. I'm packing up and I'm headed back to Georgia.

[12:52] I think many of us would. Would you believe in the promise of God even when you could not see it with your own eyes? How was Abraham able to do such a thing?

Our text tells us. He was looking forward, this is verse 10, to the city that has foundations, right? His tents had no foundations, dirt or grass floors.

He was looking forward to the city that has foundations, whose designer and builder is God. He was looking to a permanent dwelling place, a place beyond this world.

Beloved, our experience is not as unlike Abraham's as we may think. It seems that we make many efforts to keep our experience from being at all like Abraham's. We're doing lots of things to try to show our permanency here.

But the truth is simply this. We are sojourners and we are exiles and our faith must tarry.

[14:00] There's many promises that God has made for us that are going to be past this life. The greatest promises that God has made for us are past this life.

Our faith must tarry. It must endure. We are sustained here in temporal dwellings by faith in a future city.

A city that has foundations. A city that is built and designed by God. Paul writes in Philippians chapter 3 verse 20 Our citizenship is in heaven and from it we await a Savior the Lord Jesus Christ. This place is not our home. And in a few months we will study Hebrews chapter 13 verse 14 which states for here we have no lasting city but we seek the city that is to come.

So Abraham and his family express for us this wonderful paramount faith in the promised land. And we can see that it means so much more than just the promise of Canaan.

[15:14] It means a permanent place that we will dwell with God forever. Secondly Abraham and his family had faith in the promised son.

Faith in the promised son. In verse 11 we can see that by faith Sarah herself received power to conceive even when she was past the age since she considered him faithful who had promised. So faith is certain. There is a certitude to faith. Sarah was most likely 91 years old when she gave birth to Isaac.

His conception full-term gestation and healthy delivery let me remind you in a tent were not only improbable but impossible in human terms.

However Abraham and Sarah weighed the human impossibility of having a son against the divine impossibility that God would not be true to his word and they believed him. We put those two things on a scale together and God not being a liar highly outweighs any of our conception of what he has promised to accomplish.

[16:32] Thomas Watson Puritan once wrote this is on your bulletin where reason cannot wade their faith may swim. The author of Hebrews tells us in chapter 11 verse 6 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.

Abraham and Sarah believed in the promise of God and they had a son. But allow me to be of encouragement to you this morning. The faith of Abraham and Sarah was not a perfect faith. We read of the birth of Isaac in Genesis chapter 21 but before that in Genesis chapter 16 verse 1 and following we read now Sarah Abraham's wife excuse me Abram's wife they're getting new names soon had born him no children she's not believing the promise she had born him no children she had a female Egyptian servant whose name was Hagar and Sarah said to Abram behold me from bearing children go into my servant it may be that I shall obtain children by her and Abram listened to the voice of Sarah so after Abram had lived in ten years in the land of Canaan Sarah Abram's wife took Hagar the Egyptian her servant and gave her to Abram her husband as a wife I'll encourage you to read that chapter all kinds of things happen that are not favorable because of the unfaithfulness of Sarah and Abraham later we can read in Genesis chapter 18 verse 11 and following now

Abraham and Sarah were old advanced in years the way of women had ceased to be with Sarah this is this is a funny episode in the book of Genesis so Sarah laughed to herself saying after I am worn out and my Lord is old shall I have pleasure that's funny maybe when you get older you'll get it the Lord said to Abraham why did Sarah laugh and say shall I indeed bear a child now that I am old is anything too hard for the Lord at the point in time I will return to you about this time next year and Sarah shall have a son those chapters are riddled with doubt as a side note some people use this little bit of Sarah laughing as a context for something called holy laughter you need to ignore that this was not holy at all right this was

Sarah doubting fully doubting that God would do what he had said that he would do and can we blame them they they've been in the land quite some time now the promise doesn't seem like it's coming to pass right they're waiting and they are waiting I'm astounded in my reading of the Old Testament at how impatient I am as God works out his faithfulness with his people I kind of snap my fingers and see things happen I don't want to wait 10 years 40 years to see promises come to pass I don't really want to wait for promises to come to pass after I pass the faith of Abraham and Sarah was not perfect faith but it was sufficient faith this text reminds me of the father of the demon possessed son who says to Jesus in Mark chapter 9 and verse 22 and following if you can do anything have compassion on us and help us and in verse 23

[20:19] Jesus said to him if you can all things are possible for one who believes and then in verse 24 immediately the father of the child cried out and said I believe help my unbelief I feel that way often you may find yourself with faltering faith this morning find solidarity in the life of Abraham and Sarah find solidarity with every Christ follower in my hearing and know that God is abundantly merciful and a steadfast love endures forever be comforted this morning with a text like Isaiah chapter 42 verse 3 a bruised reed he will not break and a faintly!

burning wick he will not quench! do do you feel like your flame is just about to go out this morning if you are God's in Christ what I can promise you is that he will fan it back into flame be encouraged God does not expect of us a perfect faith but a sufficient faith so faith is certain or maybe one should say in time finds certitude and faith is rewarded verse 12 therefore from one man and him as good as dead I like that interjection there Abraham was quite old at the time they conceived were born descendants as many as the stars of heaven and as many as the innumerable grains of sand by the seashore beloved that's us in part we are counted amongst those many that by faith are grafted in to the family of God

I want to read to you just briefly Kent Hughes commentary on this he wrote this I just thought this was a great insertion here he wrote George Sweeting a past president of Moody Bible Institute once gave this memorable definition of optimism he said optimism is when an 85 year old man marries a 35 year old woman and moves into a 12 room house next to an elementary school inappropriate but you get his point but I have a better definition for him optimism is when a 90 year old man and his 90 year old bride hear God say they're going to be parents and believe their offspring will fill not a schoolhouse but the whole earth that they will be as many as the stars of heaven and as many as the innumerable grains of sand by the seashore praise God that now Abraham and Sarah in glory with God can see the promise fulfilled and being fulfilled and it started by their faith in the promised son faith and faith perseveres to the end faith perseveres to the end verse 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 that is to say these all died in faith

Abraham Sarah Isaac and Jacob all finished well they persevered in faith to the end and not only did they finish well but they lived well how how did they live and finish by faith the text tells us verse 14 for people who speak thus acknowledging is what he's talking about acknowledging that they're strangers and exiles acknowledging that this place is not our home acknowledging that there are promises for us that are beyond this place people who speak like that make it clear that they are seeking a homeland beloved this world is not our home we persevere by faith in recognizing that in knowing this is not where we belong there's a new place being made for us to dwell with God forever verse 15 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 therefore

God is not ashamed to be called their God for he has prepared for them a city they looked to the promise they looked to the future reward they knew that the promised inheritance was sure and they ran with endurance the race that was set before them we are asked to do the very same thing as we live in a place that is uncomfortable and growing in discomfort right this is not our home beloved right we are strangers and we are exiles and God is preparing for us a city and so in these few verses this morning we see faith in the promised land and that faith obeys that it costs something that it carries faith in the promised son that faith finds its certitude and that is rewarded and that faith saving faith perseveres to the end the author of Hebrews was charging his original readers and the

[26:20] Lord is using his pen to charge us today to take up the example of Abraham and his family in closing listen to the remarks of Hebrews chapter 12 and verse 1 therefore since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses let us also lay aside every weight and sin which clings so closely and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us let's pray together