

Hebrews 11:17-22

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[0 : 00] This morning's text is Hebrews chapter 11 verses 17 through 22, where we will observe once again the faith of Abraham and his descendants.!

Do you ever feel that way? Do you ever think, why are we spending so much time in one book and therefore on one theme?

This feeling was punctuated by my nine-year-old Cade, who asked me last night, Dad, are you preaching from Hebrews tomorrow? And when I responded, yeah, he said, oh, in a slightly disappointed voice.

So I wanted to understand that, and I probed further, and I pressed a bit, and he told me that it feels like he can only remember us ever studying the book of Hebrews.

I asked him what he thought the book of Hebrews is supposed to teach us, and his stumbling with an answer, although he didn't totally miss the point, but he stumbled around to answer me, reminded me why long expositions can be of some value to the church.

[1 : 28] Now, most of us are not nine, but then I thought about my week, and I thought about likely your week, and considered how many opportunities were presented to us to not persevere by faith, to grow cold and listless, to forget the glorious truth of the supremacy of Jesus Christ, to forget that we who are in Christ were once desperately lost, but now have been found, to forget and to think, right, all the pleasures the world has to offer us are temporal and fleeting, but we have an eternal reward in Jesus.

We should not grow tired of learning the lesson of Hebrews, because we are always in need of it. The ESV Study Bible Introduction to Hebrews defines the book's theme this way, Christ is greater than any angel, priest, or old covenant institution.

Thus, each reader, rather than leaving such a great salvation, is summoned to hold on by faith to the true rest found in Christ, and to encourage others in the church to persevere.

And I will give you a bit shorter version, and then we will get to work. Followers of Jesus Christ need to persevere by faith in the absolute supremacy of the gospel of Jesus Christ.

So Hebrews chapter 11, beginning in verse 17, Beloved, this is God's word to us, written for his glory and our good. We would all do well to listen to it, in order to believe its promises, and to obey its commands.

[3 : 10] By faith Abraham, when he was tested, offered up Isaac. And he who had received the promises was in the act of offering up his only son, of whom it was said, through Isaac shall your offspring be named.

He considered that God was able even to raise him from the dead, from which, figuratively speaking, he did receive him back. By faith Isaac invoked future blessings on Jacob and Esau. By faith Jacob, when dying, blessed each of the sons of Joseph, bowing in worship over the head of his staff. By faith Joseph, at the end of his life, made mention of the exodus of the Israelites, and gave directions concerning his bones.

So this morning, a very simple outline for our text. Number one, Abraham's legendary faith. And number two, Abraham's legacy of faith.

And then finally, I'll ask us some questions concerning our faith. So Abraham's legendary faith, Abraham's legacy of faith. And then I'll ask some questions concerning our faith.

[4 : 16] So number one, Abraham's legendary faith. We're going to break this down into some pieces as we kind of walk through a bit of this story. And I want to read much of it to you from Genesis chapter 22.

The author of Hebrews is not trying to make a very complex point. It's a simple point that he's making. It's just a point that must be worked out in our lives. And he's using the life of Abraham,

particularly this episode, to show us this very thing.

So we can see first, at the beginning of verse 17, the calling of faith to Abraham. God asked something of him.

Asked him to do a very difficult something. Beginning of verse 17 says, By faith Abraham, when he was tested.

So if you will, keep your finger marking Hebrews chapter 11, but turn with me to Genesis chapter 22. And we'll pick up and read a bit of it and jump back into Hebrews and back and forth just a tad this morning.

[5 : 19] So we see first the testing of Abraham's faith.

God is saying, Do you really believe? I've made a promise. Do you really believe that I will bring the promise to pass? Genesis chapter 22, beginning in verse 1.

God tested Abraham and said to him, Abraham, and he said, Here I am. He said, Take your son, your only son Isaac, whom you love, and go to the land of Moriah and offer him there as a burnt offering on one of the mountains of which I shall tell you.

So Abraham rose early in the morning, saddled his donkey, and took two of his young men with him and his son Isaac. And he cut the wood for the burnt offering and arose and went to the place of which God had told him.

Now, I think that we too quickly read these stories. I don't know that we often really take the time to have some imagination for what it must have been like.

[6 : 32] The overarching point of what the author of Hebrews is talking about here is the promise being fulfilled in Isaac. It was said of him, Through Isaac, your offspring will be named.

This is the large idea that he's speaking about here. But just imagine for a moment, God asking you to take your son, your only son, the son that you love, and offer him as a sacrifice.

I have sons. And it is difficult to imagine what it must have been like for Abraham. He's very eager, we see. Genesis chapter 22 and verse 1, right?

God says to him, Abraham, and he says, Here I am. And we don't get any clue as to the emotions that he's feeling following that, but I have to imagine he's not nearly as eager as he's told what he is to do.

Travel to a place and offer your son as a sacrifice. But we see that he goes, right? He rises in the morning, saddles his donkey, takes young men and his son.

[7 : 39] He even does the proper preparation to go and to be obedient for this great sacrifice. As we read on, we can see the journeying faith of Abraham.

This isn't a short trip that he takes. We read on in verse 4, On the third day, Abraham lifted up his eyes and saw the place from afar. Then Abraham said to his young men, Stay here with the donkey.

I and the boy will go over there and worship and come again to you. And Abraham took the wood of the burnt offering and laid it on Isaac, his son. And he took in his hand the fire and the knife.

And so they went both of them together. And Isaac said to his father, Abraham, My father. And he said, Here I am, my son. He said, Behold the fire and the wood, but where is the lamb for a burnt offering?

Abraham said, God will provide for himself the lamb for a burnt offering, my son. So they went both of them together. So again, imagine for a moment what the Lord was asking of Abraham.

[8 : 50] They traveled. They went on a journey. And they did this with time. And he has not yet informed his son of what's going to happen at this. Can you just imagine?

What are they going to do to make a sacrifice? He's aware of this, Isaac is, because he asked the question. I see the supplies except for the lamb.

And the type of faith it must have taken. The type of perseverance in the promise of God to travel this distance, knowing what was coming at the end of that journey.

And then we see the sacrificing faith of Abraham. We begin in verse 9. When they came to the place of which God had told him, Abraham built the altar there and laid the wood in order and bound Isaac his son and laid him on the altar on top of the wood.

Now we don't know exactly the age of Isaac. There's much guess to this. I'm going to tend toward him being younger because of kind of the naivety of his questions in the previous verses.

[10 : 00] But surely he was faster than his dad. His dad was getting extremely old at this point. So Isaac seems to be a willing participant, trusting in his father, even as he's laying him on an altar to

be burned.

Verse 10. Then Abraham reached out his hand and took the knife to slaughter his son. And I have a hard time reading that and not shuddering at the thought, the measure of faith, to say, right, this is the Lord's will, that I would sacrifice my son and I'm believing in the promise.

So when you look in Hebrews 11, 17 and 18, it says, There was a specific promise that it was through this son, this son that he is now raising the dagger in order to slaughter, that all these promises of God would come to pass.

It defies logic, natural reasoning. It makes no sense whatsoever. And yet, he is willing to act. Not willy-nilly, but because of what the Lord had said.

So we see him here at the end of verse 10, ready. He's taking the knife. He's ready to slaughter his son. And in verse 11, But the angel of the Lord called to him from heaven and said, Abraham, Abraham.

[11:37] And he said, I imagine eagerly, Here I am. He said, the angel, Do not lay your hand on the boy or do anything to him. For now I know that you fear God.

Seeing you have not withheld your son, your only son, from me. Proving of his faith. And Abraham lifted up his eyes and looked, and behold, behind him was a ram caught in a thicket by his thorns. And Abraham went and took the ram and offered it up as a burnt offering instead of his son. So Abraham called the name of that place. The Lord will provide.

As it is said to this day, on the mount of the Lord, it shall be provided. This is an astounding picture. And the author of Hebrews places this in Hebrews chapter 11 as an encouragement to us to persevere in faith.

Don't miss that. Don't lose that. We are meant to also believe in the promises of God. God likely won't. I highly doubt.

[12:43] He's going to ask you to offer your son. We should have a good conversation if you think or are convinced that he's doing so. I'd have words for you. But he's going to ask us to do things that are weighty and are sacrificial, believing in his promises.

So how is it that Abraham was able to have such faith? It's given to him as a gift from the Lord. But it's not an unreasoning faith.

It's a reasoning faith. And we see this back in Hebrews chapter 11 and verse 19. We see that Abraham considered his reasoning.

He's thinking this through. He's given a command. He's traveling a distance. He's got to be in turmoil over it. But wait a second. God made a promise. He made a promise to bless all the nations. He made a promise that my descendants would be as many as the stars. He made a promise that it would happen through Isaac. How does this make sense? He considered that God was able even to raise him from the dead.

[13:52] He knew that God would be sure to his promise. He knew somehow God is going to work this through. And certainly, God did.

Instead of having him sacrifice Isaac, which he certainly could have raised from the dead, he provides an alternate sacrifice in the form of a ram. And the author says, from which, figuratively speaking, he did receive him back.

Isaac was as good as dead to Abraham. He had come to the place where he was willing to sacrifice his own son in obedience to God. And he did, in fact, receive him back, figuratively, from the dead. Abraham's reasoning was audacious. It was audacious. But it went something like this. God promised to make of me a great nation.

Therefore, he gave me a son when I was as good as dead. Far too old to father a son, and my wife Sarah far too old to mother.

[14:55] Therefore, God has now asked me to sacrifice my son the only reasonable way that God can fulfill his promise. Therefore, God is not a liar, and God will make a way to keep his promise.

What faith. What astounding faith in God's spoken word. God has said it. It will come to pass. God promised it. Therefore, I believe it. This is the type of faith that we are asked to have in our God. This is the type of faith that the author of Hebrews is encouraging and encouraging and encouraging and encouraging.

Did you have that kind of faith in this past week? Did God ask you to do anything that was difficult but consistent with his promises that you failed to do?

You just said, I just don't believe the promise. Functionally, I'm not so sure. Cognitively, I ascend to these promises, but functionally, eh.

[16:05] And as a result of Abraham's faithfulness, God restates the promises of his covenant with Abraham and with his descendants. He says again, lest anyone forget in the reading of this story, the promise that came and is coming.

Verse 15 down through 18 of Genesis 22. And the angel of the Lord called to Abraham a second time from heaven and said, By myself I have sworn, declares the Lord. Because you have done this and have not withheld your son, your only son, I will surely bless you and I will surely multiply your offspring as the stars of heaven and as the sand that is on the seashore.

And your offspring shall possess the gate of his enemies. And in your offspring shall all the nations of the earth be blessed because you have obeyed my voice.

Abraham's faithfulness, his willingness to sacrifice his only son, because of God's promise to him made possible another son, the Lord Jesus Christ.

His willingness to sacrifice his son prefigures God the Father sacrificing his only son, actually sacrificing his only son, the Lord Jesus Christ, that all the promises of the Abrahamic covenant would be fulfilled.

[17:29] And they are being fulfilled to this day. It's an astounding faith. So Abraham has this legendary faith, but he also has a legacy of faith.

And the author of Hebrews gives that to us kind of in rapid succession in the next three verses 20, 21, and 22. We won't spend much time on these at all, although we could spend a whole week on each and every one of them.

But we want to get to the beginning of chapter 12 at some point, don't we? So first, Isaac's faith.

Verse 20, By faith, Isaac invoked future blessings on Jacob and Esau.

The story of Isaac's blessing of his sons is quite the debacle. I'll encourage you to read it from Genesis chapter 27, the whole chapter, and through the beginning of chapter 28, but the point is, the point that the author of Hebrews is making is that he believed that the blessings given to his sons, particularly the blessing of Jacob, would come to be realized.

The continuing blessing of the promise to Abraham. All that was said would come to pass through this lineage of Jacob. So we see this example of Isaac's faith.

[18:42] We also see the example of Jacob's faith. Verse 21, By faith, Jacob, when dying, blessed each of the sons of Joseph, bowing in worship over the head of his staff.

So when Jacob was very old, the sons of Joseph were brought to him. And when Jacob's sons came to be blessed, excuse me, Joseph's sons came to be blessed, the older brother Manasseh was placed on his right hand to receive the greater blessing, the younger brother, Ephraim, on his left, or Ephraim.

But Jacob, responding to the direction of God, crossed his hands and gave the greater blessing to Ephraim. Right? He believed what God said.

Against the tradition of giving the greatest blessing to the eldest son, he instead gave it to the next in order. We also see the example of Joseph's faith.

Verse 22, By faith, Joseph, at the end of his life, made mention of the exodus of the Israelites and gave directions concerning his bones. Joseph was confident that nothing could thwart God's promise that his people would possess the land of Canaan.

[19:54] He believed in the Abrahamic covenant. He had once dwelt in that land and had left that land out ahead of his brothers because of famine. He was quite forced to do so at the age of 17 to go to Egypt.

He became the precursor to his family and the Israelites all ending up in Egypt prior to the exodus. and yet he was still holding this promise.

Israel will leave Egypt. They will be settled in the land that God has promised them. And again, just imagine the faith. He went to Egypt at the age of 17.

He left this land that was promised to his people and he lived there until he died at 110. Do you sometimes feel like the promises of God are tearing?

Look at the examples of these people, this great hall of faith, these witnesses that have gone before us. God's word is sure. And he was so confident of this that before he died he spoke of the exodus and he gave them instructions to take his body with and bury it in that place.

[21 : 00] He said it's going to happen so when it happens be sure to take me there. I want my body to be laid to rest in there. And then in fulfillment of his directive Moses carried his body out of Egypt, Exodus 13, and was buried in Shechem by Joshua when Canaan was conquered in Joshua chapter 24.

So you see what the author of Hebrews is doing. Last week we looked at the text prior and this week the great confidence in the promise God made in the Abrahamic covenant. These things will come to pass.

And the way that these men's lives lined up with a great belief in those promises. So these are examples for us of persevering faith.

Faith in promises that they had yet to see fulfilled but believed all the same. The author of Hebrews is spurring us this morning on to the same kind of faith.

And frankly beloved as we consider the faith of these men we ought to have more confidence because we have seen and we are seeing the promises fulfilled.

[22 : 06] We have a greater understanding of how it is that God is bringing all these promises to pass. We have a greater picture of the revelation of how things are coming to pass because we are chapters ahead in the story of redemption.

It ought to be that much easier for us to see it and to have this kind of faith. So allow me in a few moments to ask some questions concerning our faith.

Just two. Well, there's some questions. Number one, has God promised it?

Has God promised it? We believe in a closed canon. This means that God has spoken. We are not adding books to this text. God has spoken.

It is a completed work and it is God's complete work to mankind. It is inerrant because God has said it and God cannot lie. Is it authoritative book? Because he is the God of the universe, therefore what he says must go.

[23 : 15] It reigns then over us and it is sufficient. So it contains within it all the promises that we need to know and to believe.

So do you do you know the promises of God? He has made some astounding promises, life-fulfilling promises, some beyond-this-world promises.

Has God promised it? Secondly, do we believe it? Do we believe it? Do we believe what the Bible says about salvation?

John 14, 6, as Jesus said, I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me. Do we understand, do we live in the light of that truth that we can only be saved by the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ?

Have we thrown ourselves on the mercy of God found in Christ's life and death for us, his active and passive obedience on our behalf?

[24 : 32] Do we believe what it says about sanctification? Paul wrote to the Philippians, chapter 1 and verse 6, I am sure of this, that he who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ.

Do we believe that having been set apart by the gospel, having our souls saved, that we are meant to now be continuing in holiness and that we have the spirit of Christ who uses careful exacting application of the word of Christ to bring us to that day.

That we can in fact grow in holiness because we have in fact been set free from the power of sin. Too often we act like we're powerless when the truth of the scripture is that we have been given power to put away sin and to put on righteousness.

Do we believe what it says about glorification? 2 Corinthians chapter 4 verse 16 and following Paul writes so we do not lose heart.

Whatever is going on in the world around us we do not lose heart though our outer self is wasting away our inner self is being renewed day by day.

[25 : 51] Paul's talking about outer man like the part of us that we won't take with us and inner man. It's being renewed day by day for this light momentary affliction is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison.

as we look not to the things that are seen but to the things that are unseen for the things that are seen are transient or passing away but the things that are unseen are eternal.

Do we live in that way as Abraham and his descendants lived in tents awaiting the promise? Do we live in a transient mindset?

Sojourners aliens and exiles in a place that's ultimately not our home? To recognize that the reason that you are so unsettled with the way the world is because you were not made for this world. You were made for a new world that is beyond. We get so focused on the mess going on around us and we forget the glorious truth that God is making all things new.

[27 : 04] It's a winding down of the world. It's the thing that's been promised to us. And beloved, it will get worse. It will get worse and worse and worse until the end comes. But the kingdom of God is coming to bear in the hearts of men and women.

In that sense, the world is winding up. The gospel is going forth. The church is being gathered. The day will come when Christ will say enough. He will come back.

He will eternally judge the living and the dead. We will be raised with him and we will reign with him forever. Do we have that kind of faith?

Do we live in that way? On your bulletin, there's a William Bates quotations, Puritan, as they typically are. He said, God will try our faith before he satisfies our sight.

Now, I've been reading to our boys, the Chronicles of Narnia, I hope you're familiar with this work of C.S. Lewis. And right now we are reading my favorite of all the books, which is The Horse and His Boy.

[28 : 11] And it is my favorite of all of his books because it's all about providence. It's all about the way in which Christ works in the world. And so I want to read a little bit of it to you because I think we often find ourselves identifying with one of the primary characters, a young man, young boy named Shasta.

Kind of his, he has this very I'm the most unlucky person in the world kind of attitude throughout the book. And I don't want to totally spoil the entire story for you, but I got to give you a little bit of a background for it.

Shasta is being raised by a man who is not his father in a land that is not his land, the land of Calorman. And he discovers a talking horse of Narnia, all the horses of the land of Calorman are what they call dumb, they don't speak, but he discovers a talking horse of Narnia, a war horse named Bree, and he decides to escape on Bree, and they take off for Narnia.

And along the way, they meet a young adult woman named Erebos, and a talking horse named Quinn. And they're brought together through some providence, they travel through a major city of the land of Calorman, where they find out a plot that the prince of Calorman is going to attack Narnia, first by taking a city of a land called Archenland, called Anvert.

And it lies between Calorman and the country of Narnia. So this is kind of the backdrop of what's happening. And so finding this out, they decide to quickly escape to Narnia, and to first warn King Loon of this coming attack.

[29 : 53] These guys are coming, 200 horsemen, they're coming to attack, we must get across in order to be of help. And one of the dangers that they encounter along the way is that they're chased by lions.

There's a number of circumstances by which they are chased by lions. So as the story goes on, they have gotten to this land of Archenland, and Shasta has gone on by himself on a dumb horse. He's not Umbri anymore, he's on a horse that can't speak. And he finds King Loon, and he warns King Loon, and King Loon and his hunting party that's with him, they take off back to Anver to raise the alarm and bolt the gates, and a deep, deep mist, a mist rolls in, it becomes night, so picture this, it's night time, it's dark, it's gloomy, and his dumb horse won't keep up, so he loses them, he loses the pack.

So here he is again, the most unlucky that can be. And he hears horsemen riding up behind him, and this is the enemy coming along, and so he takes an alternate route, so he's going by himself through the mountains in the dark, and as he's doing so, he begins to sense a creature walking along him, beside him, okay, and this is what I'll start reading, okay.

Who are you? he said, scarcely above a whisper. One who has waited long for you to speak, said the thing. Its voice was not loud, but very large and deep.

[31 : 20] Are you, are you a giant? asked Shasta. Shasta? You might call me a giant, said the voice, but I am not like the creatures you call giants. I can't see you at all, said Shasta, after staring very hard.

Then, for an even more terrible idea had come out into his head, he said, almost in a scream, you're not something dead, are you? Oh, please do go away. What harm have I ever done you? Oh, I am

the unluckiest person in the whole world.

Once more, he felt the warm breath of the thing on his hand and face. There, it said, that is not the breath of a ghost. Tell me your sorrows. Shasta was a little reassured by the breath, so he told how he had never known his real father or mother and had been brought up sternly by the fishermen. And then he told the story of his escape and how they were chased by lions and forced to swim for their lives, and of all their dangers in Tashban and about his night among the tombs and how the beast howled at him out of the desert. They told about the heat of the thirst of their desert journey and how they were almost at their goal when another lion chased them and wounded Erebus and also how very long it was since he had had anything to eat.

I do not call you unfortunate, said the large voice. Don't you think it was bad luck to meet so many lions, said Shasta? There was only one lion, said the voice. What on earth do you mean?

[32 : 33] I just told you there were at least two the first night and there was only one, but he was swift of foot. How do you know? I was the lion. And as Shasta gaped with open mouth and said nothing, the voice continued.

I was the lion who forced you to join with Erebus. I was the cat who comforted you among the houses of the dead. I was the lion who drove the jackals from you while you slept. I was the lion who gave the horse the new strength of fear for the last mile so that you could reach King Loon in time.

And I was the lion, you do not remember, who pushed the boat in which you lay, a child near death, so that it came to shore where a man sat, it was I.

But what for? Child, said the voice, I am telling you your story, not hers. I tell no one any story but his own. Who are you?

said Shasta. Myself, said the voice, very deep and low, and so that the earth shook. And again myself, loud and clear and happy, and the third time, myself.

[33 : 40] Whispered so softly you could hardly hear it, and yet it seemed to come from all around you as if the leaves rustled with it. Shasta was no longer afraid that the voice belonged to something that would eat him, nor that it!

He knew the night was over at last. He could see the mane and ears and head of his horse quite easily now. A golden light fell on them from the left. He thought it was the sun. He turned and saw, pacing beside him, taller than the horse, a lion.

The horse did not seem to be afraid of it or else he could not see it. It was from the lion that the! came. No one ever saw anything more terrible or beautiful. Luckily, Shasta had lived all his life far too south in Calamon to have heard the tales that were whispered in Tashpen about a dreadful Narnian demon that appeared in the form of a lion.

And of course he knew none of the stories of Aslan, the great lion, the son of the emperor over the sea, the king above all high kings in Narnia. But after one glance at the lion's face, he slipped out of the saddle and fell at its feet.

He couldn't say anything, but then he didn't want to say anything, and he knew he needn't say anything. The high king above all kings stooped toward him, its mane and some strange and solemn perfume that hung about the mane was all around him.

[35 : 19] It touched and the fiery brightness of the lion rolled themselves together into a swirling glory and gathered themselves up and disappeared.

He was alone with the horse on a grassy hillside under a blue sky and there were birds singing. Hebrews chapter 12 verse 1 and 2 says 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 looking to Jesus the founder and perfecter of our faith for the joy that was set before him endured the cross despising shame and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God Let's pray together