

Hebrews 11A (2014)

- As a Bible teacher, there are a few special chapters in the Bible that I find myself returning to time and time again
 - Chapters in the Law
 - Like Genesis 3
 - Leviticus 26
 - Passages in the prophets like
 - Daniel 9 (actually , most of Daniel)
 - Psalm 119
 - Isaiah 11, most of Isaiah
 - Jeremiah 31
 - And in the New Testament,
 - There are numerous key chapters
 - But none are more helpful and inspiring than Hebrews 11
 - We can teach every principle doctrine of the Christian faith from the examples the writer gives us in this chapter
 - In fact, this chapter is like a living museum of those chapter highlights I mentioned
- The writer's purpose for this chapter is to serve as an inspiring contrast to his earlier warning against apostasy
 - If we're caught in apostasy triggered by fears of persecution, then how does God to inspire us to move forward in obedience?
 - He does this in His word, of course
 - And in particular, through with testimonies of those who've gone before us in faith
 - Stories of ordinary men and women who found themselves in similar positions or even worse

- And yet when faced with fears and doubts, they moved forward in faith
- And because they moved forward, they pleased God and He gave them the strength to face those trials well
- Hebrews 11 is that chapter, often called the Hall of Faith
 - It explains the form and purpose of faith
 - And it drives its message home with example after example of saints from the OT
 - Men and women who lived out their faith despite various earthly barriers or temptations to forsake their trust in the Lord
- It's no surprise that the key word in this chapter is faith
 - It's used 24 times in the chapter
 - And twice more in the forms of faithful and believe
 - It's about becoming imitators of the saints before us as they exhibited patience so as to inherit the promises
- Because these examples are rooted in OT stories, we will revisit the story of each of these heroes and heroines to fully understand what made their faith remarkable
 - But first, the writer begins with two verses that define the nature, purpose and value of saving faith

[Heb. 11:1](#) Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen.

[Heb. 11:2](#) For by it the men of old gained approval.

- Notice the open word "now"
 - The word now connects this chapter to the earlier conversation in the prior 4 chapters
 - If we are to avoid the apostasy and the consequences the author described in chapter 10, then we must understand expectations of faith
 - If we are to inherit our full reward, then we must live with a full appreciation for what faith is and what it requires

- And from there, the writer gives us the Biblical definition of faith, including saving faith
 - First, faith is the assurance of things hoped for
 - The Greek word for assurance is hupostasis
 - It's an interesting word that can have to shades of meaning in English
 - It has an objective meaning, as in the reality of something
 - And it has a subjective meaning, as in having a certain viewpoint about an issue
 - And I think both meanings are working together in the writer's purposes
 - Faith is having a viewpoint that is rooted in the reality of what we know to be true
 - Biblical faith isn't wishful thinking
 - It's a perspective that understands the certainty of matters which can't be proven
- For example, do you know what would happen if you jumped off Empire State building?
 - You would answer, "Yes, I know I would fall and hit the ground and die."
 - How do you know that? You've never done it.
 - Yet you know that gravity is a law of the universe
 - And you know that the distance of that fall would certainly end your life
 - So you have a perspective of certainty, one that is rooted in the reality of what you know to be true
 - And yet, it's still properly called faith
- Why do we still call it faith? Because it concerns future events, which is the writer's second half of the definition
 - Faith is the assurance of things hoped for

- Things hoped for refers to future events, things that haven't yet come to pass but have been promised
- That hope was created because someone or something gave us reason to expect these things to come to pass one day
- That promised inspired our hope, and that hope is kept alive by our faith
- So faith is a perspective on the future – one rooted in reality and truth, not in speculation or fantasy – that trusts that things promised will come to pass
 - Once those things come to pass, then faith is no longer required
 - Instead, the reality is self-evident
 - As Paul says in Romans, hoping

Rom. 8:24 For in hope we have been saved, but hope that is seen is not hope; for who hopes for what he already sees?

- Having defined the *nature* of faith, the writer explains the *purpose* of faith
 - He says it's the conviction of things not seen
 - The Greek word for conviction is also an interesting word
 - It's the word *elegchos*, which means proof
 - And once again, unseen means something of the future
 - So faith is the proof of something that isn't yet reality
 - Our faith makes visible and tangible something that is unseen for now
 - Were it not for our faith, the reality of this future event would be completely absent in our experience
 - For example, your life insurance policy is a testimony to your eventual death
 - Your death is a future, unseen event

- But your life insurance policy is proof that you don't expect to live forever, at least not in this body
- And so if you faith in the promises of Christ proof of things that have yet to pass
 - And so for now, our faith and obedience to the word of God serves a purpose in showing the world a truth that they could not see otherwise
 - It's proof that the word of God is real and true and filled with the power to transform lives
- Finally, the writer explains the value of saving faith
 - He says that by faith, the men of old gain approval
 - The men of old are the Old Testament saints mentioned in this Hall of Faith
 - Let's note that when the writer uses the term "men" he's using it in the neutral sense to mean men and women
 - We know this because the examples he cites include both men and women
 - By their faith, these saints gained approval
 - Who's approval? The world's approval?
 - Hardly. As the examples demonstrate, the world hates those of faith
 - No, the approval was from God
 - And we're going to see, the approval the writer is speaking about isn't about going to Heaven
 - Obviously, our faith is the means of salvation
 - But the writer is speaking to an audience that is already Christian, as we saw in last week's lesson
 - He's interested in our walk of faith, whether we mature and grow in the face of trials or whether we shrink back to destruction

- So winning the approval of the Lord by faith means living in a faithful manner, seeking the Lord's approval so as to receive a full reward
- So we understand the nature, purpose and value of saving faith in the life of a Christian, but what does faith look like in action? Can we see some examples?
 - I'm glad you asked...lets' look at the writer's examples of saving faith
 - He proceeds in order of the scriptures, beginning in the Creation account
 - And then the writer moves through a series of carefully selected examples
 - Each will illustrate how saving faith always involves those three critical elements
 - A confidence in God's word concerning unseen events
 - A life that gave proof of that confidence
 - With the result for that saint of a great reward in the Kingdom, not on earth
- The first set of examples takes us through chapters 1-5 of Genesis

[Heb. 11:3](#) By faith we understand that the worlds were prepared by the word of God, so that what is seen was not made out of things which are visible.

[Heb. 11:4](#) By faith Abel offered to God a better sacrifice than Cain, through which he obtained the testimony that he was righteous, God testifying about his gifts, and through faith, though he is dead, he still speaks.

- You may never have thought of your view of the Creation account as a matter of faith, but of course it is
 - The Creation of the Universe happened before there were any human witnesses to observe the event
 - Not even the author of Genesis, Moses, saw those events
 - Therefore, any perspective on the origins of the Universe – regardless of the viewpoint you hold – must be a matter of faith
 - And faith in the word of God leads us confidence that the origins of the Universe are exactly as God describes them in Genesis 1 & 2

- So what do we learn from the example of the Creation story?
 - We learn faith is demonstrated first and foremost by a trust in God's word concerning the beginning of all things
 - We believe that by His word, God was responsible for bringing the entire physical Universe into existence
 - And notice, the writer says the world was made not out of what can be seen
 - In other words, not by Evolution
 - If you believe everything that exists today came from something that already existed, then you are living by sight and not by faith
 - When you hold to a Creation view as taught in Genesis, you give the world proof of the reality of the word of God
- Next, the writer raises the sons of Adam, Cain and Abel
 - The story of Cain and Abel is well known, at least in the broad strokes
 - But the details of what happened and why are often poorly understood
 - You can gain a full appreciation of what transpired in the relationship between these brothers and its meaning by studying chapter 4 of Genesis
 - Even so, the writer gives us the key to the proper interpretation here
 - The story centers around the actions of the brothers in worshipping God
 - Abel gave a sacrifice accepted by God
 - While Cain gave an offering that was insufficient to meet God's expectations
 - And the result was that Abel had a better testimony, that he was righteous while Cain wasn't
 - Why did Abel's sacrifice give him a better testimony?
 - First, a testimony is showing evidence of what you hold to be true

- Abel's sacrifice was a testimony of his faith in God's promise to save Abel from his sin by means of a sacrifice
- Abel made a blood sacrifice to reflect that confidence
- His behavior gave proof that he had placed his trust in God's promise to provide a future blood atonement in the Messiah
- The writer says Abel's testimony continues on even today
 - The recounting of Abel's actions witnesses to us through the scriptures long after he is dead
 - This is the power of faith lived out in our lives
 - It speaks louder and longer than our words could ever do
- Secondly, Abel was better than Cain because Cain's offering wasn't a blood sacrifice
 - Cain only brought a grain offering, which was an act of thanks for provision
 - He was content to thank God for blessing him with material comfort
 - But he made no acknowledgement to God that he was a sinner, much less that Cain needed to be saved through an atonement
 - Therefore, Cain's testimony was that he gave no consideration to God's word concerning sin and the need for a Savior
 - In Genesis 4, the Lord rebukes Cain telling him that he has the same opportunity to please the Lord if only he would trust in the sacrifice waiting at the doorpost
 - In other words, if Cain would trust in the blood of the Passover applied to the doorpost, then he too would receive God's approval
 - But because he didn't have faith to accept this truth in God's word, he went away unapproved
 - And this led to jealousy, hatred and murder
 - So what do we learn from their examples?

- First, that faith in God's promises requires that we honor the One Who gave us opportunity to become part of those promises
 - Faith requires a confession of what we believe, specifically that we accept that the solution to our sin comes from above and not from our own righteousness
 - Furthermore, faith lives on beyond us, as our life testimony has the power to motivate others to obedience
 - And finally, persecution at the hands of unbelievers is the common experience of all believers
 - If the first prophet and our Lord Himself were killed for their testimony, then who are we to expect better?
 - We can't let the discomfort of persecution become excuse to shrink back from faith
- Next, the writer addresses the mysterious story of Enoch from Genesis 5

Heb. 11:5 By faith Enoch was taken up so that he would not see death; AND HE WAS NOT FOUND BECAUSE GOD TOOK HIM UP; for he obtained the witness that before his being taken up he was pleasing to God.

Heb. 11:6 And without faith it is impossible to please Him, for he who comes to God must believe that He is and that He is a rewarder of those who seek Him.

- In Genesis 5 we hear a brief mention of a man who pleased God in his life, and as a result the God rewarded him by taking him up
 - The original Hebrew literally says he was here and then he was not here
 - This is a stark departure from Moses' normal genealogy, leading us to conclude that something other than death ended Enoch's time on earth
 - The closest parallel we have is the resurrection of the Church, when those who are alive won't experience death, according to Paul
 - Instead, the believer will pass directly from one body into the next
- It seems the writer included Enoch as a contrast to Abel's end

- While Abel died a death at the hands of the enemy, Enoch escaped death altogether
- Some believers will be martyred, while others will be raptured
- Abel was the first murder in scripture, while Enoch was the first man to escape death
- Both men had good testimonies; both pleased God
- So what do we learn from Enoch's example of faith?
 - You can please God by faith and be murdered or raptured
 - The way our life ends is not a measure of God's satisfaction with us
 - What counts is what comes in the next life, as we receive our rewards
 - God was pleased in Abel's testimony as a prophet and martyr
 - And He was pleased in Enoch's life of faithfulness
- In fact, the way to pleasing God rests on faith alone, but that faith has two parts
 - First, saving faith understands that God is
 - But to believe God "is" doesn't mean to simply believe in His existence
 - For James tells us that simply believing that God exists is without value

James 2:19 You believe that God is one. You do well; the demons also believe, and shudder.

- Even the sinful, rebellious demons know that God exists
- This fact is so obvious that even those sworn in allegiance with Satan acknowledge this truth
- In fact, they are so convinced of the reality of an all-powerful Judge of all Creation, that James says it causes them to shudder in fear of their coming judgment
- Nevertheless, this recognition can't save them from their sad fate

- So believing that God “is” means much more; it means accepting what He declares about Himself
 - It means believing He is the One and only Living God
 - It means accepting His representative, the Son of God
 - As Jesus says:

John 8:42 Jesus said to them, “If God were your Father, you would love Me, for I proceeded forth and have come from God, for I have not even come on My own initiative, but He sent Me.

- Furthermore, faith requires that we believe God is a rewarder of those who seek Him
 - The writer isn’t defining saving faith but faith lived out
 - Saving faith is belief in Christ as Savior
 - But faith lived out understands the reality of a reward waiting for those who let their faith guide their life
 - And in that way, their faith leads them to please the Father
 - And without that life of faith, it’s impossible to please God
- You are saved by a faith that is not of yourself, it is a gift of God
 - But you are rewarded for a life lived in accordance with that faith
 - And it’s that life of faith that the writer is trying to encourage among his readers
 - We can celebrate the faith that saves, but that faith was given to us while we were yet sinners and enemies of God
 - The scripture emphasize a life lived in faith, which is the upward call of Christ
 - Do you want to please Christ? Are you structuring your life to meet that goal? Then you’re living by faith
- On the other hand, have you assumed that every Christian is free to live without concern for judgment because of God’s grace?

- Then you haven't understood either Bible's teaching on faith or on judgment
 - Your faith must be rooted in the promises of God concerning Christ
 - And it must live in expectation that rewards are available for those who please Him
- And if you live in that awareness, you are far more likely to please Him
 - You will fight temptations to sin, knowing that rewards are on the line
 - You will resist the enemy, knowing he comes to steal your reward
 - You will sacrifice earthly gain for the prospect of greater rewards in the life to come
 - And you will gladly accept persecutions and trials, knowing that these tests give opportunity to receive an even greater reward
- You will live with eyes for eternity