

We have been on quite a venture through *Hebrews 11*. It has taken us 25 weeks. Verse **32** alone took us 11 weeks. We first started off with a definition of true Biblical faith in **11:1** and immediately proceeded into the forming of the universe, and then on to Abel and Enoch. We took a small break there in **11:6** to understand what it means when God said that without faith it is impossible to please Him and that anyone who comes to God must believe that He is and that He rewards those who seek Him.

From there we moved on to Noah, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Sarah, Joseph, Moses, the Israelites crossing the red sea, the Israelites marching around Jericho, Rahab the prostitute, Gideon Barak, Samson, Jephthah, David, Samuel, and the prophets. We have learned so much first of all about God's faithfulness and second why these men and women were considered by God to be faithful. But the one overriding theme throughout the entirety of this chapter (and the book for that matter) is that **faithfulness is God's character** as faithfulness is a part of His very nature. He is faithful and He will thus always be faithful.

As we start to move on to the final part of *Hebrews 11* the Spirit is going to try and cement some important truths in our head which He presented throughout the stories of our heroes of faith, but which I think has been very difficult for us to get our heads wrapped around. Primarily, that God's view of life and death and His view of the things of this world are so different from ours.

We have talked about this. We tend to hold on to this world as if this life is our all in all, our everything, our only hope. We forget that this world, and everything in it, is quickly passing away whereas eternity lasts a very long time. Too often we live as if what happens in this world, in terms of our personal circumstances,

somehow reflect on God's faithfulness. In other words, if we like what is happening in our life we proclaim that God is faithful and if we really can't stand what is happening in our life we start to doubt God's faithfulness and even disparage God's character.

We have to remember, God sees things so differently than we do. For example, when we think of Jephthah's daughter who was sacrificed or David's baby boy who lost his life on account of David's sin, there is something within us that twists and turns and causes us to question both God's faithfulness and His justice.

For some reason we fail to realize that the instant those children died they were in paradise; welcomed into their blessed eternity. They never had to face the pain, the horror, depression, failure and sadness that come with this world of flesh. They never had to be dominated by sin and sinful people. Do you really think they complained about their lot in life? As I said before, they got to skip all of it and jump right to the reward; believe me they got the better deal.

It is kind of ironic, we tell people that they should know Jesus and trust themselves to God so they can go to heaven; yet, when they get there we often act as if God did something wrong and was cruel to take them from this earth. Did you ever think about that? Our whole perspective on this life, I believe, is skewed, and warped.

In this final part of **Hebrews 11**, the Spirit is going to give us a little look at the Lord's perspective of such things as life, death, suffering, celebration, victory, defeat, glory and honor, etc. We would be wise to pay close attention as the Spirit wants us to be willing to align our thoughts and ideals with His perspective so we can understand how He wants us to view our time in this world.

And when I say “our thoughts and ideals” I am speaking also to our emotions. In fact, our entire heart, soul, mind, and strength need to be aligned with the Lord’s perspective. It is the only way we can successfully navigate this life and not be constantly torn to and fro by the events and changing circumstances of our life.

Before we jump into our text, I want to read from **1 John** as I believe it frames the perspective we, as believers, should have in regards to our life in this world. As I read, I want you to really consider what this passage is saying and what it means not just “to you” but for your life. Please try and avoid the tendency that many of us have to just pass over or marginalize the implication of this passage due to its intensity and the demands that it places on us. I want you to honestly think through this because the Spirit wants you to own it.

1 John 2:15-17

Do not love the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world— the desires of the flesh and the desires of the eyes and pride in possessions—is not from the Father but is from the world. And the world is passing away along with its desires, but whoever does the will of God abides forever.

You see, there is to be a complete separation between us and the world— complete separation. We must not seek to find our home in this world. We must not seek to find our fulfillment in this world. We must not seek to find our meaning in the successes and failures of this world. I guess another way to

capture this is to pull from a phrase we have used over the last couple of weeks and that is we must never own our blessings but only enjoy them (**1 Timothy 6:17**). The concept is synonymous.

It will be apparent from our passage tonight that we cannot find ourselves attached to this world in any way; even when it comes to something as simple as the blessing of our physical lives. We must enjoy what God gives us and if for some reason He wants it, we must be willing to trust ourselves to His purposes in the same way that our heroes of faith did. Paul says it this way:

1 Corinthians 7:29-31

But let me say this, dear brothers and sisters: The time that remains is very short. So from now on, those with wives should not focus only on their marriage. Those who weep or who rejoice or who buy things should not be absorbed by their weeping or their joy or their possessions. Those who use the things of the world should not become attached to them. For this world as we know it will soon pass away.

This passage and the one in **1 John** drive a serious wedge between what we say we believe and how many of us actually live. The Spirit wants the way we live to be in alignment with the truth: this world is not our home. We have a home waiting for us in heaven; therefore, we must live as if this is not our home. With this perspective, with this truth, let's dive into the rest of **Hebrews 11**.

Hebrews 11:32-40

And what more shall I say? For time would fail me to tell of Gideon, Barak, Samson, Jephthah, of David and Samuel and the prophets who through faith conquered kingdoms, enforced justice, obtained promises, stopped the mouths of lions, quenched the power of fire, escaped the edge of the sword, were made strong out of weakness, became mighty in war, put foreign armies to flight. Women received back their dead by resurrection.

Some were tortured, refusing to accept release, so that they might rise again to a better life. Others suffered mocking and flogging, and even chains and imprisonment. They were stoned, they were sawn in two, they were killed with the sword. They went about in skins of sheep and goats, destitute, afflicted, mistreated—of whom the world was not worthy— wandering about in deserts and mountains, and in dens and caves of the earth.

And all these, though commended through their faith, did not receive what was promised, since God had provided something better for us, that apart from us they should not be made perfect.

Every time I read the first part of this passage, I want to throw my hands up in the air, do some high 5's, and a victory dance in the end-zone. It makes me just want to rejoice; after all, that is the way the Christian life is supposed to be—kicking some serious booty—at least that is what many of us have been taught and have hoped for. But then as seamlessly as possible, with no transition to speak of, the Spirit eerily moves to those who were absolutely brutalized and oppressed and deals with this group in the same way as He did with the first.

They were all commended for their faith, they were all honored by God because they believed, they were all preserved for the promise, but their experiences in this world were completely different. Some lived what we would consider to be powerful and incredible lives whereas others just flat-out suffered. Both eventually died, but the death of some was beyond hideous.

For example, that phrase “they were sawn in two” is believed to refer to the time when Manasseh slew Isaiah. Isaiah was sawn in two by a wooden saw—yes a wooden saw—so you know it took some time and was pretty messy. Now, the way tradition goes, he was not sawn in half across his body bisecting the top from the bottom, but he was sawn in half length wise splitting the right half of the body from the left, and it was not until the saw reached his mouth that his soul fled. Just the thought of it is horrific.

So let’s think about all of this in terms of our own lives and our relationship with God. I know that many of us have felt from time to time (and sometimes for extended periods of time) that our lives have not been fair and that the lot which has been handed to us is so difficult that it must mean one thing and one thing only: God is cruel, unloving, unmerciful, and unjust. I know that we have all foolishly thought this at one time or another.

And with this perspective, we get so angry at Him and hell-bent to prove that He is everything that we feel He is, and our lives become consumed by our anger. In addition, we also become envious of the lives that others have been privileged to lead and that envy also consumes us. We think it is all just so unfair and we get all twisted up in knots, absorbed into ourselves, and we become a total mess.

Our anger and our envy, however, are rooted in various wrong beliefs about what this life is supposed to offer to us and what we believe God owes us in this life. Yet, from what we read in this passage, we really cannot expect a specific outcome for our lives. Our lives can teeter to either side of this spectrum between great blessing and great suffering and of course everything in between.

You see, the issue is not our circumstances—it is never really about our circumstances—but a faithful God who approves us by our faith in the midst of our circumstances. The circumstances are just the tools that the Lord uses to faithfully accomplish His purposes in our lives—to conform us into His image.

Besides, I want you to consider God's perspective on things. It is very clear to me that His view of life is so different than ours. For those of us who have suffered and have had very difficult lives, God says that the world is not worthy of us. How is that for a commendation? The world is not worthy of us!

How would it be if we were to adopt this perspective as our own? It might just change how much time we spend in self-centered whining and despair. It is imperative that we get our heads wrapped around this truth. *To each of us this must become an issue of faith.* The world is not worthy of us! This means that we are special, unique, and were never truly made for this world. In fact, the truth is that we belong somewhere else entirely; we belong in the presence of the living God and as soon as we are done with this life in the flesh that is where we will be.

I want you to look at the amazing response of these faithful heroes. They were given the opportunity to put an end to their suffering and torture, but they chose to endure it looking forward to their eternity. It is hard to believe, but they rejected the opportunity given to them for release and chose—yes, they chose—

to boldly face the suffering that was appointed for them; even when that suffering ended in death. This is amazing; their view of life and death was in alignment with the way God views life and death. They did not place such a high value on the things of this world, even their own lives, as we tend to do. They were ready to trade up, so to speak.

They knew that this life was nothing and they were ok that it was being taken from them; they didn't even try to hold on. They looked forward to their reward and they trusted that God was a faithful God who would deliver on His promise of that reward. Their faith kept them from falling into the trap of self-pity believing that God was supposed to keep them from harm or pain or that He was just supposed to only give them prosperity, success, and blessing like He did so many of their ancestors.

The Spirit put forth these examples so we can understand God's thoughts and His mind, desiring us to choose to be like Him. I know this is hard; we have all become so addicted to our comfort and safety and the mistaken thought that God owes us good things in this life because we have "served" Him so faithfully. But hopefully we can re-write those wrong beliefs with the truths we have learned throughout Hebrews, namely: only God is good; we are not! We must therefore be conformed to His image and His ways and not demand that He conforms Himself to what we want when we want it.

Thus, whether we are in a time of great blessing or a time of great suffering, our eyes must always be fixed on the Lord and on our eternal reward, not on ourselves. The Spirit tells us:

Colossians 3:1-4

If then you have been raised with Christ, seek the things that are above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. Set your minds on things that are above, not on things that are on earth. For you have died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God. When Christ who is your life appears, then you also will appear with him in glory.

The Spirit exhorts us in this manner because of a promise that has been made to us elsewhere in the New Testament and that is that all those who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will suffer persecution (**2 Timothy 3:12**). There is no way around this; if your aim is to be like Jesus you will be hated just as He was hated. It comes with the territory. Jesus predicted this and warned us of this reality.

John 15:18-20

If the world hates you, you know that it has hated Me before it hated you. If you were of the world, the world would love its own; but because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, because of this the world hates you. Remember the word that I said to you, 'A slave is not greater than his master.' If they persecuted Me, they will also persecute you; if they kept My word, they will keep yours also.

I want you to focus on that phrase: we have been chosen out of this world. According to **Hebrews 11:13** we are strangers and exiles on this earth. We do not

belong and that is how we are supposed to live. We are not to live as if we kind of belong to this world white knuckling our existence trying to hold on to some fragment of peace that we try and make with this world. The world is an enemy of God; and, as a result, it hates all those who love God.

We must know this and expect resistance as a normal part of our life. Therefore, it should not confuse us or dumfound us when we face any kind of suffering. Besides, we were chosen out of this world from before time, before anything was ever even made (*Ephesians 1:4*). Before we were even born, we were marked as holy unto the Lord and therefore I do not believe it is a stretch to say that even the suffering that we experienced as children resulted from the hate that the world and the enemy has for people who have been chosen of God.

Now, as we have learned throughout Chapter **11**, God has clearly used all our suffering for His own purposes and glory, as He causes all things to work out for the good of those who love Him (even the hate poured out on our lives).

Our suffering has not been random or excessive. It was just what God needed to accomplish His purposes in and through our lives so we can be in this place where we can freely choose to live as chosen ones, separated from the world, fully identified as sons and daughters of the living God, knowing that the full consummation of our reward is ahead of us. Again, for us this must all become an issue of faith!

Now, **11:39** takes us all the way back to *Hebrews 11:6*. These heroes of faith were commended not because of what they did, but through their faith. That is it. Their great victories were pleasing to God only because they were rooted in faith. In the same way, their great suffering was also pleasing to God only because it

was rooted in faith. They chose to bet their lives on the character and nature of God despite what they were personally experiencing in their circumstances, whether good or bad, as such they were approved!

The idea here is that they did not internalize their personal circumstances in such a way that they became angry and bitter toward God as if He owed them something different. They did not think that their own personal suffering stood in conflict with God's great compassion, unfailing love and faithfulness; rather, they saw that one really had nothing to do with the other. To them God was faithful because He is—period! God was faithful because faithfulness is part and parcel of His character and nature; just like unfailing love. I believe that these saints of old remembered what was written in the scriptures:

Deuteronomy 32:1, 3-4

Give ear, O heavens, and let me speak; and let the earth hear the words of my mouth. ... For I proclaim the name of the Lord; Ascribe greatness to our God! The Rock! His work is perfect, for all His ways are just; a God of faithfulness and without injustice, righteous and upright is He.

Yes, God's work in our life is always perfect; it is always exactly what we need considering that our aim, our goal is, to be like Him in all things. This is why we not only can, *but must*, ascribe greatness to our God and stop disparaging Him just because we don't like what is happening in the practical circumstances of our lives. He is faithful, without injustice, righteous and upright is He. That is our God!

Now I don't want you to misunderstand me. I am not saying you have to like what you are going through, and the writer of Hebrews will make that clear in Chapter **12**, but we cannot use our circumstances to define our theology. Do you understand? One has nothing to do with the other!

11:39-40 is also intended to induce an intellectual and emotional response in each of us. It is an argument from the lesser to the greater. The lesser being the heroes of old and all of us who have the Holy Spirit of Christ are the greater.

Follow me on this. If these great heroes of old, who did not have the privilege of being filled with the Holy Spirit, were motivated by a hope of paradise and a promise of eternal life to live lives of faith, how should our great reward motivate us? Our promise is Jesus; our promise is perfect love and a peace that is indescribable.

The argument the Spirit makes is that clearly our willingness to live by faith and bet our lives on the character and nature of Christ should far and exceed that of the Old Testament saints. They heard about God, but we know God as Jesus Christ through the Spirit of God dwells within our being.

11:39-40 is also intended to provide a contrast to life under the law versus a life lived completely under the grace of Jesus Christ. The argument is this: since God gives us the amazing blessing of living under grace, having been forgiven of every sin we have ever done or ever will ever do, the kind of faith which should be displayed in and through our lives should supersede that of the saints of old.

Moreover, if God allows us to run into His presence any time that we want and there is no longer any wall of separation between us and God (**Hebrews 10:21-22**), we should without wavering hold tightly to our hope and our promise of

salvation knowing that God can be fully trusted to keep His promises (*Hebrews 10:34-35*). Not only that, He loves us (and has given us His grace) not because of what we have done or can do for Him, but merely because He does. He chose us—you and me—to be objects of His great affection, mercy, compassion, and tender love. He chose us and always keeps His eye on us; in fact, His thoughts toward us are innumerable (*Psalms 139:17*)!

He chose us to be vessels through which He lives and through which His glory is displayed to the world and to the spiritual authorities that rule in this world. Therefore, we must not throw away our confident trust in the Lord, no matter what happens in our lives. We have better things waiting for us in eternity. This life is not our end all be all; and it was never intended to be. As such, this world will always disappoint and will never truly satisfy us or bring us contentment.

This world and all that it has to offer always leaves us wanting—always! Believe me, even if you get what you want thinking that it will make you happy you will just start wanting something else and then something else and then something else. There never is a stopping place for our lusts and desires. Not even a husband or wife, or a boyfriend or girlfriend, can bring closure to that desire in our soul. Our only contentment and satisfaction comes from knowing Jesus; that is it.

11:40 is also quite a fascinating verse. Despite all their heroics, the saints of old did not receive the promise; they still have to wait and wait and wait until the time when we are perfected. Now, the meaning of this may not seem readily apparent to you, but the reason they have to wait for us is because God intends that all of His loved ones be united under faith into one body; all together as one

bride prepared for His Son; collectively a temple of the living God (**1 Corinthians 3:16; Ephesians 2:19-22**).

It is not us and them—it never has been really divided that way (it has just seemed that way); it has always been, and is, collectively “us!” Paul captures this in **Romans 10:12, Galatians 3:28, and Colossians 3:11** and Jesus does as well when He says that many will come from east and west, and recline at the table with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob and all the prophets in the kingdom of heaven (**Matthew 8:11; Luke 13:28-29**). We all comprise one body; the bride of Christ.

Now this time of perfection refers to the time of the end; the time of the believer’s resurrection from the dead, or to use a more technical term, the first resurrection, and the purification of the saints that happens soon after the first resurrection.

The resurrection of the dead for believers was prophesied about in **Daniel 12:2, 13** where he wrote about the time of the end; you know the time of the Antichrist and all that. So the hope of our resurrection has been around for a very long time. But more specifically, the first resurrection is referenced in **Revelation 20:5-6** where it states that those who participate in the first resurrection will rule and reign with Christ for one thousand years when He returns to the earth.

In the Greek, the word “*protos*” translated into English as “first” means first in time, place, order, and importance. Thus, I want you to understand, there will be no other “resurrection” prior to this event mentioned in **Revelation 20**.

The first resurrection is the time when the dead in Christ will arise first, and then those who are alive and still remain on the earth will be caught up together with them (being the dead in Christ) in the clouds and will meet Jesus in the air

and will from that time forward forever be with Him (**1 Thessalonians 4:14-17**). In Corinthians Paul explains that it is this time when the mortal shall put on immortality. Let's read how he captured this. We will jump into the middle of a rather long-drawn-out argument Paul makes regarding the resurrection.

1 Corinthians 15:35-53

But someone may ask, "How will the dead be raised? What kind of bodies will they have?" What a foolish question! When you put a seed into the ground, it doesn't grow into a plant unless it dies first. And what you put in the ground is not the plant that will grow, but only a bare seed of wheat or whatever you are planting. Then God gives it the new body he wants it to have. A different plant grows from each kind of seed.

Similarly there are different kinds of flesh—one kind for humans, another for animals, another for birds, and another for fish. There are also bodies in the heavens and bodies on the earth. The glory of the heavenly bodies is different from the glory of the earthly bodies. The sun has one kind of glory, while the moon and stars each have another kind. And even the stars differ from each other in their glory.

It is the same way with the resurrection of the dead. Our earthly bodies are planted in the ground when we die, but they will be raised to live forever. Our bodies are buried in brokenness, but they will be raised in glory. They are buried in weakness, but they will be raised in strength. They are buried as natural human bodies, but they will be raised as spiritual bodies. For just as there are natural bodies, there are also spiritual bodies.

The Scriptures tell us, "The first man, Adam, became a living person." But the last Adam—that is, Christ—is a life-giving Spirit. What comes first is the natural body, then the spiritual body comes later. Adam, the first man, was made from the dust of the earth, while Christ, the second man, came from heaven. Earthly people are like the earthly man, and heavenly people are like the heavenly man. Just as we are now like the earthly man, we will someday be like the heavenly man. What I am saying, dear brothers and sisters, is that our physical bodies cannot inherit the Kingdom of God. These dying bodies cannot inherit what will last forever.

But let me reveal to you a wonderful secret. We will not all die, but we will all be transformed! It will happen in a moment, in the blink of an eye, when the last trumpet is blown. For when the trumpet sounds, those who have died will be raised to live forever. And we who are living will also be transformed. For our dying bodies must be transformed into bodies that will never die; our mortal bodies must be transformed into immortal bodies.

This is amazing; we get entirely new bodies. And after the first resurrection, we will be judged (**1 Corinthians 3:13-15; 2 Corinthians 5:10; Romans 14:10**), completely purified and prepared, dressed in white, permitted to wear the finest white linen as we join the marriage supper of the Lamb along with all who have placed their faith in Jesus Christ; including all our heroes of faith like Able, Enoch, Noah, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, David and so on. "Blessed are those who are invited to the wedding feast of the Lamb." "These are true words that come from God" (**Revelation 19:7-9**).

This is our hope—the day when we will be united, or made one, with Jesus Christ. This is why we endure. This is why we can make it through our times of suffering. Our promise is beyond fabulous. We will be one with Jesus in the same way that He is one with the Father; all being perfected into one (***John 17:22-23***). And our faithful God will ensure that this comes to be; as He said: “These are true words that come from God” (***Revelation 19:9***).

So this is the reason why the saints of old must wait; they wait for us. They wait for that time where together we will be perfected into this beautiful bride of Christ and be made one with Jesus and one with the Father. This is something that I cannot even begin to fathom or explain to you—words are wholly inadequate—but I know it will be nothing short of glorious.

In closing this amazing chapter, I want to reach back to the end of ***Hebrews 10*** and remind all of us of the truth that should mark and define our time here on this earth.

Hebrews 10:37-38

For in just a little while, the Coming One will come and not delay. And a righteous person will live by faith. But I will have no pleasure in anyone who turns away.

Without question Jesus is coming back; therefore, we must live by faith! And because of what we have been given and what we have been promised, our

entire life should be based on what we know to be true of God's character and nature and not on our fears, failings, or anything that this world has to offer.

There should not be a single area of our lives that is not marked or defined by who God is and who we are to Him. Remember, the point of **11:39-40** is that our faith should by many magnitudes speak louder than the faith of all the heroes that we have studied over the last 25 weeks. It is time to believe!

This also means that each and every one of us has the potential already inside of us. We don't have to go find it, we don't have to do something to earn it; we have it. I can only imagine how incredible it will be when we remove our walls of wrong belief and unbelief and release this potential. Jesus will shine through us in such a way that this world will be rocked. It has happened before and it will happen again and each and every one of us will experience Jesus to an extreme. Our faith will be loud!

Next week, we will jump into **Hebrews 12** and start to understand how this life of faith is to be practically realized in our day-in-and-day-out lives.

Let's Pray.