

## 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 , all 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 the 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 opening 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 two 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 the 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 promise 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,

**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 your faith in the promises of Christ are proof of things that have yet to pass
  - Then, 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 gained 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
    - Whose 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 to a 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 out of what cannot 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
    - We can interpret "righteous" as "saved" – Abel was saved, while Cain was not
  - 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 (a veiled reference to the Passover sacrifice)
    - 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 an 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, 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 victim 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 please 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 own 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 scriptures 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 of the believer

- Your faith must be rooted in the promises of God concerning Christ
- And you must live in expectation that rewards are available for those who serve 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