

Hebrews 11B (2014)

- Today, we return to the Hall of Faith
 - In the first six verses of this chapter, the writer gave us an introduction to the nature and purpose and value of faith in the life of a believer
 - 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
 - By our faith, we give a testimony to the world concerning those future events
 - And by the examples of saints who have gone before us in life, we can learn what faith lived-out looks like
 - We can see their confidence in God's promises reflected in their choices and decisions
 - We can appreciate their testimony
 - And we understand that often, their faith leads to persecution and even martyrdom
 - We learn to accept that possibility, because the hope and confidence of the saints lies in eternal rewards, not earthly ones
- The main feature of this great chapter of Scripture is its list of saints who exemplify faith in action
 - The writer is encouraging wavering believers to stay the course, to live in keeping with faith

When Hudson Taylor went to China, he made the voyage on a sailing vessel. As it neared the channel between the southern Malay Peninsula and the island of Sumatra, the missionary heard an urgent knock on his stateroom door.

He opened it, and there stood the captain of the ship. "Mr. Taylor," he said, "we have no wind. We are drifting toward an island where the people are heathen, and I fear they are cannibals."

"What can I do?" asked Taylor.

"I understand that you believe in God. I want you to pray for wind."

"All right, Captain, I will, but you must set the sail."

"Why that's ridiculous! There's not even the slightest breeze. Besides, the sailors will think I'm crazy." But finally, because of Taylor's insistence, he agreed.

Forty-five minutes later, he returned and found the missionary still on his knees. "You can stop praying now," said the captain. "We've got more wind than we know what to do with!"

- Taylor was a man who lived-out his confidence in things unseen
 - Let's continue in our study of these inspiring saints, so that we would have good reason not to shrink back to destruction
 - Not to let the threat of persecution, or even death, convince us to abandon our walk with Christ
 - Remembering that faith without works is useless, being by itself
- Our next example, following chronologically, is Noah

Heb. 11:7 By faith Noah, being warned by God about things not yet seen, in reverence prepared an ark for the salvation of his household, by which he condemned the world, and became an heir of the righteousness which is according to faith.

- We all remember the story of Noah, of course
 - He was a man who received God's grace and a call to build a giant boat in preparation for a coming flood
 - As God revealed His plan to Noah, he made a promise to Noah concerning future events
 - The promise was that God would destroy the world with water, but if Noah built a boat, that would be sufficient to save him and his household from this coming judgment
- In v.7, the writer says Noah was warned about things unseen
 - What was unseen in Noah's day?
 - The Bible testifies in Genesis 2:5, that the earth did not know rain in those days

- God's plan to replenish the earth's water supply was to use a mist that settled on the earth every morning, so rain wasn't required
- But since it had never rained, the world had never experienced a flood either
- In fact, I imagine that the concept of a flood was literally unimaginable to a man like Noah
- Still, God spoke to Noah promising to bring an event that Noah couldn't fully appreciate or even understand, in response to which, Noah must begin a construction project of unimaginable proportions
 - Noah's response was reverence, the writer says
 - The word "reverence" means a respectful, sober or cautious response
 - In other words, Noah took God's promises seriously
 - He believed that what God said would happen would indeed happen
 - How do we know Noah took God's Word seriously?
 - Because he spent 100 years building an enormous boat
 - Noah is arguably the Bible's greatest example of sustained faith in action
 - There is no record that God spoke to Noah again during those 100 years of construction, until the very end when Noah was preparing to bring the animals into the ark
 - Do you wonder if Noah faced moments of doubt or discouragement along the way?
 - If he wondered if he had heard correctly from God or if all the sacrifice was truly worth it?
 - Nevertheless, Noah persevered, and no doubt he endured persecution along the way
 - He was building something that no one could have possibly found useful in his day
 - He was building the equivalent of a wooden Titanic in a landlocked location

- But faith will cause us to live in ways that the world considers crazy
- It's our testimony to our faith in the promises of God
- And in time, our faith will be rewarded
 - Notice the writer returns again to the concept of an inheritance, an eternal reward
 - He says by Noah's life of works according to faith, he becomes an heir
 - He will receive a great inheritance in the Kingdom
 - I wonder if Noah's inheritance will be on a coast or on a mountain?
- Next, the writer moves forward into the patriarchal period with examples of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob
 - But the writer focuses primarily on Abraham and his wife, Sarah

Heb. 11:8 By faith Abraham, when he was called, obeyed by going out to a place which he was to receive for an inheritance; and he went out, not knowing where he was going.

Heb. 11:9 By faith he lived as an alien in the land of promise, as in a foreign land, dwelling in tents with Isaac and Jacob, fellow heirs of the same promise;

Heb. 11:10 for he was looking for the city which has foundations, whose architect and builder is God.

- Abraham's story is probably as well-known as Noah's, at least among Bible students
 - Abraham was originally a pagan, named Abram, living in Mesopotamia
 - He was called by God into a life of faith, living in Canaan
 - The promise that God gave Abram was, that if he would leave behind the life he knew in Ur, including his family and livelihood, God would bless him with a great inheritance
 - That inheritance would be the Promised Land of Canaan and beyond
 - But as Abram first heard this promise, God didn't reveal the location of that inheritance

- As the writer reminds us in v.9, God required that Abram follow in faith without even an understanding of where God would take him
- Abram had to make a choice to follow God's Word, based on a confidence and hope of what God would do in the future
- Imagine you are an unbeliever, with no prior experience in trusting and following the Living God (we were all there once in our life)
 - And then you hear God telling you to leave behind your home (don't sell it, just abandon it)
 - And leave behind your family roots
 - And get in the car and go to the airport
 - And fly to another part of the earth, where you will live forever
 - He promises that if you do these things, you will receive a great inheritance from God
 - This is the test God placed in front of Abram
 - And Abram responded in faith
- But this was merely the beginning of the test
 - When Abram arrived in the Promised Land, the Lord revealed to Abram that the land God promised wouldn't be his in this lifetime
 - Instead, Abram would have an heir, and so his descendants would receive this land
 - Later, Abram himself would receive the promised land in full, but only in the Kingdom, after his resurrection
 - When Abram believed these promises, the Lord renamed Abram to Abraham, in recognition of Abraham's willingness to accept this promise
 - So not only did Abraham sacrifice his comfort and security for faith in God's promises, but he did so without the prospect of reward in this lifetime
 - The writer says in v.9, that Abraham chose to live as an alien and wanderer in the very land God had promised to him

- Abraham did not grow up a nomad in Ur
- He lived in a prosperous, major city
- He had no prior experience living in tents
- Yet, he adopted this unfamiliar lifestyle for all his days living in Canaan
 - He chose to live as an alien, as if he was in a foreign land, though the Lord had promised this land to Abraham
 - Why did he live this way? Because he believed God when he was told that he would not see his inheritance in this lifetime
 - He looked around Canaan and told himself, this will be mine one day, but not yet
- Notice in v.10, the writer says Abraham was looking for a different city
 - The Greek word for “looking” is *ekdechomai*, which means to expect to receive in the future
 - Abraham was expecting to receive a city which has foundations built by God
 - Abraham could see many cities around him in Canaan
 - Cities like Sodom, Gomorrah, Zoar, Shechem, etc.
 - These were cities built by ungodly pagans
 - These were not what God had promised to give Abraham
 - So Abraham, continued living as a nomad, because to do otherwise would have been to forsake the promises of God
 - He would have been trading what God offered for what the world offered
 - And even though they looked very similar, they were not the same thing
 - Abraham knew that the city he would receive wasn’t found on earth
 - It will arrive in the future, so for now, it’s an unseen hope

- Abraham's example of faith is so powerful because it was so absolute, so encompassing and so sacrificial
 - If we can say that Noah's example of faith was one of sustained obedience, then we can also say Abraham's example of faith was a dramatic, life-changing decision
 - Abraham became an entirely new person, with a new name, new home, new lifestyle and new outlook
 - He came to that place based on the Word of God, on the promises of God
 - And he lived forever more in keeping with his faith
 - But all the while, the world was pressing in on Abraham from all sides, seeking to pull him back from the walk of faith
 - Sometimes Abraham stumbled
 - But he never retreated from trusting in God's promises
 - Why? Because he knew a greater reward awaited him in the Kingdom than anything he might obtain for himself on earth
 - And so, his life was a testimony to the promises of God
- And his example of faith is matched by his wife, Sarah

Heb. 11:11 By faith even Sarah herself received ability to conceive, even beyond the proper time of life, since she considered Him faithful who had promised.

Heb. 11:12 Therefore there was born even of one man, and him as good as dead at that, as many descendants AS THE STARS OF HEAVEN IN NUMBER, AND INNUMERABLE AS THE SAND WHICH IS BY THE SEASHORE.

- Sarah is cited by the writer as a fellow heir with Abraham, because she too demonstrated faith in God
 - But her example confuses Bible students, who see her behavior as less trusting in God's promises
 - The writer refers to her confidence in God's promise to bring a child to her and Abraham, even though she was well past childbearing years

- In Genesis 18, Sarah is listening inside the tent to the conversation between the Lord and Abraham, as the Lord delivers the news that a child will be born within the year

[Gen. 18:9](#) Then they said to him, "Where is Sarah your wife?" And he said, "There, in the tent."

[Gen. 18:10](#) He said, "I will surely return to you at this time next year; and behold, Sarah your wife will have a son." And Sarah was listening at the tent door, which was behind him.

[Gen. 18:11](#) Now Abraham and Sarah were old, advanced in age; Sarah was past childbearing.

[Gen. 18:12](#) Sarah laughed to herself, saying, "After I have become old, shall I have pleasure, my lord being old also?"

[Gen. 18:13](#) And the LORD said to Abraham, "Why did Sarah laugh, saying, 'Shall I indeed bear a child, when I am so old?'"

[Gen. 18:14](#) "Is anything too difficult for the LORD? At the appointed time I will return to you, at this time next year, and Sarah will have a son."

[Gen. 18:15](#) Sarah denied it however, saying, "I did not laugh"; for she was afraid. And He said, "No, but you did laugh."

- Notice that Abraham's visitors (the Lord and two angels) inquired of his wife Sarah
 - The point of raising Sarah was to emphasize which of Abraham's two wives would be the one to bear the promised child
 - The promised decedents of Abraham were not going to arrive by Hagar, but by Abraham's wife, Sarah
 - God's provision would be supernatural and according to faith, not by the works of the flesh
 - There was probably a second reason the Lord mentioned Sarah by name as He talked with Abraham
 - He knew that mentioning Sarah's name would catch her attention, leading her to listen more closely to what followed next in the conversation
 - And listen she did, as we're told in Genesis 18:10
 - As Sarah hears the promise of a coming child, she laughs to herself in the tent
 - And the reason she laughs is found in v.11

- She realizes she is past childbearing years, and to this point, she has been denied the very thing she most wanted, which was a child
- And now at this point in her life, she learns that she will indeed bear a child
- And so she laughs in response
- And from her laugh and her thoughts and the Lord's response, we see clearly she is in disbelief of what she hears
 - She asks incredulously shall she bear a child while so old?
 - Obviously, she's expressing doubt at the prospect
 - And the Lord even issues her a mild rebuke for that doubt
 - So how can the writer of Hebrews now say she is an example of faith?
- Well, let's look more closely at the writer's statement in v.11
 - He says, by faith she received the ability to conceive
 - In Greek, the writer literally says, by faith Sarah gained the power to receive or collect
 - In other words, she was granted the ability to hold or receive Abraham's seed
 - We could say then, that Sarah's ability to conceive awaited her faith in God's promise
 - She is clearly lacking confidence in His Word at the time of the meeting at the tent
 - But based on the writer's words, we must conclude that within a few months, Sarah had reached the point where she trusted in the Word of God
 - And by her faith, she considered Him faithful who had promised
- Sarah's example is an encouraging one for any believer who has struggled from time to time in accepting the truth of God's promises and adopting a lifestyle of faith

- Remember, Sarah had traveled with her husband when he received his call to go to Canaan
 - So she had already made huge sacrifices
 - She had no doubt heard her husband explaining his reasoning for their dramatic shift in lifestyle
 - Yet on the day the Lord visited the tent, she was still struggling with faith in His Word
 - Nevertheless, in the end, she believed and she was rewarded
- Her example reminds us that we too can expect the Lord's patience, as we strive to believe and live in our faith
 - Remember the disciples, when they were confronted with promises too difficult to accept in the moment?

Luke 17:3 "Be on your guard! If your brother sins, rebuke him; and if he repents, forgive him.

Luke 17:4 "And if he sins against you seven times a day, and returns to you seven times, saying, 'I repent,' forgive him."

Luke 17:5 The apostles said to the Lord, "Increase our faith!"

Luke 17:6 And the Lord said, "If you had faith like a mustard seed, you would say to this mulberry tree, 'Be uprooted and be planted in the sea'; and it would obey you.

- The apostles found it unbelievable to forgive others in the way Jesus prescribed
- And so they asked the Lord to increase their faith
- Jesus' response is unexpected
 - He tells them that faith is not measured in quantity, but in quality
 - Even the smallest amount of faith is sufficient to please God
 - What's important is how it directs our life
 - Christ is the Author and Perfecter of our faith, and therefore, He gives everyone a measure of faith – the same measure
 - And like Sarah, He is patient to bring us along in our walk
 - But what distinguishes one believer from another is the willingness to act on our faith

- The one who has faith in God's plan to move a mountain into the sea can speak of these future events with absolutely certainty
- It takes just a mustard seed worth of confidence to be aligned with God's plan
 - And then the power to move that mountain is certainty of God's promises
 - What God intends to do will come to pass, and if we place our trust in that future and live according to it, we will never be wrong
 - And we will provide a powerful testimony of faith lived-out
- Noah, Abraham and Sarah were all people who heard the Word of God, faced a decision of what to believe, and ultimately conformed their lives to those promises
 - Noah heard in a moment, and then toiled diligently for a century to demonstrate his faith in a promise
 - Abraham received God's promises over many years, then was called to demonstrate his faith in critical moments
 - Finally, Sarah heard God's Word in a moment, but took time to accept its reality, ultimately leading her to faith and obedience
- Whether you are a Noah, or an Abraham or even a Sarah, recognize that God is the One revealed in Scripture, and He is a rewarder of those who seek Him
 - Next week, we continue with the patriarchs in the Hall of Faith