



“Legendary...”

Hebrews 11

by Pastor Tim Dodson
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Hebrews 11

1 Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen. 2 For by it the elders obtained a [good] testimony. 3 By faith we understand that the worlds were framed by the word of God, so that the things

which are seen were not made of things which are visible. 4 By faith Abel offered to God a more excellent sacrifice than Cain, through which he obtained witness that he was righteous, God testifying of his gifts; and through it he being dead still speaks. 5 By faith Enoch was taken away so that he did not see death, "and was not found, because God had taken him"; for before he was taken he had this testimony, that he pleased God. 6 But 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 diligently seek Him. 7 By faith Noah, being divinely warned of things not yet seen, moved with godly fear, prepared an ark for the saving of his household, by which he condemned the world and became heir of the righteousness which is according to faith. 8 By faith Abraham obeyed when he was called to go out to the place which he would receive as an inheritance. And he went out, not knowing where he was going. 9 By faith he dwelt in the land of promise as [in] a foreign country, dwelling in tents with Isaac and Jacob, the heirs with him of the same promise; 10 for he waited for the city which has foundations, whose builder and maker [is] God. 11 By faith Sarah herself also received strength to conceive seed, and she bore a child when she was past the age, because she judged Him faithful who had promised. 12 Therefore from one man, and him as good as dead, were born [as many] as the stars of the sky in multitude—innumerable as the sand which is by the seashore. 13 These all died in faith, not having received the promises, but having seen them afar off were assured of them, embraced [them] and confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth. 14 For those who say such things declare plainly that they seek a homeland. 15 And truly if they had called to mind that [country] from which they had come out, they would have had opportunity to return. 16 But now they desire a better, that is, a heavenly [country]. Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God, for He has prepared a city for them. 17 By faith Abraham, when he was tested, offered up Isaac, and he who had received the promises offered up his only begotten [son], 18 of whom it was said, "In Isaac your seed shall be called," 19 concluding that God [was] able to raise [him] up, even from the dead, from which he also received him in a figurative sense. 20 By faith Isaac blessed Jacob and Esau concerning things to come. 21 By faith Jacob, when he was dying, blessed each of the sons of Joseph, and worshiped, [leaning] on the top of his staff. 22 By faith Joseph, when he was dying, made mention of the departure of the children of Israel, and gave instructions concerning his bones. 23 By faith Moses, when he was born, was hidden three months by his parents, because they saw [he was] a beautiful child; and they were not afraid of the king's command. 24 By faith Moses, when he became of age, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter, 25 choosing rather to suffer affliction with the people of God than to enjoy the passing pleasures of sin, 26 esteeming the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures in Egypt; for he looked to the reward. 27 By faith he forsook Egypt, not fearing the wrath of the king; for he endured as seeing Him who is invisible. 28 By faith he kept the Passover and the sprinkling of blood, lest he who destroyed the firstborn should touch them. 29 By faith they passed through the Red Sea as by dry [land, whereas] the Egyptians, attempting to do so, were drowned. 30 By faith the walls of Jericho fell down after they were encircled for seven days. 31 By faith the harlot Rahab did not perish with those who did not believe, when she had received the spies with peace. 32 And what more shall I say? For the time would fail me to tell of Gideon and Barak and Samson and Jephthah, also [of] David and Samuel and the prophets: 33 who through faith subdued kingdoms, worked righteousness, obtained promises, stopped the mouths of lions, 34 quenched the violence of fire, escaped the edge of the sword, out of weakness were made strong, became valiant in battle, turned to flight the armies of the aliens. 35 Women received their dead raised to life again. And others were tortured, not accepting deliverance, that they might obtain a better resurrection. 36 Still others had trial of mockings and scourgings, yes, and of chains and imprisonment. 37 They were stoned, they were sawn in two, were tempted, were slain with the sword. They wandered about in sheepskins and goatskins, being destitute, afflicted, tormented— 38 of whom the world was not worthy. They wandered in deserts and mountains, [in] dens and caves of the earth. 39 And all these, having obtained a good testimony through faith, did not receive the promise, 40 God having provided something better for us, that they should not be made perfect apart from us.

For many of us, there is the God we *want*, and the God that *is*. Seldom are these the same God. In our present generation we have embraced a premise wherein if I want it and verbalize it, it therein becomes truth and fact. So today we have millions of Americans who may very well be in a Sunday church service, but the reasons for their attendance are wide and varied, and their understanding and definition of “being a Christian” is something very different than the one we find in scripture. Theirs is moralistic at best, and certainly an ever fluid cultural design.

Today in America, the gospel is often presented as a costless addition to one’s life: just add churchgoing to your hobbies, add charitable giving to your list of good deeds, or add the cross to the trophies on your mantle. In this way, many people go through the motions of Christianity with no accompanying surrender to His lordship. These people, who do not “abide in Christ,” are what is known as “cultural Christians.” They are branches that hang around the True Vine but have no true attachment (see John 15:1–8).

There certainly was no such thing as cultural Christianity in the days of the early church. In fact, to be a Christian was more than likely to mark you for overt persecution, family rejection, and maybe even murder. The very term Christian was coined in the city of Antioch as a way to identify the first followers of Christ, and it was anything but a compliment! (Acts 11:26). The first disciples were so much like Jesus that they were called “little Christs” by their detractors. Unfortunately, the term has lost meaning over the years and come to represent an ideology or a social class rather than a lifestyle of obedience to God.

Cultural Christianity may be the modern social standard, but it is not true Christianity. A true Christian is one who has received Jesus Christ as both Savior *and* Lord. (John 1:12). Christ’s death and resurrection has been appropriated to that person as his or her substitute for sin (Romans 10:8–10; 2 Corinthians 5:21). The Holy Spirit indwells that person (Romans 8:9). “Receiving” Christ is far more than a mental acknowledgment of truth. After all, even Satan acknowledges the identity of the Son of God (Mark 5:7). The faith that saves us also changes us (see James 2:26). Jesus said that anyone who wishes to become His disciple must “deny himself, take up his cross daily, and follow me” (Luke 9:23). While we cannot earn salvation by sacrifice or good works, a lifestyle transformation and desire to please the Lord are direct results of being “born again” (John 3:3).

The following are some identifying marks of cultural Christianity:

- Denying the inspiration of Scripture or parts of Scripture (2 Timothy 3:16; 2 Peter 1:21).
- Ignoring or downplaying true repentance as the first step toward knowing God (Matthew 4:17; Acts 2:38).
- Focusing on Jesus’ love and acceptance to the exclusion of His teaching on hell, obedience, and self-sacrifice (Matthew 4:17; 23:33; Mark 9:43; Luke 12:5).
- Tolerating or even celebrating ongoing sin while claiming to know God (Romans 1:32; 1 Corinthians 5:1–2; 1 John 3:9–10).
- Redefining scriptural truths to accommodate culture (Numbers 23:19; Malachi 3:6).
- Understanding Jesus to be primarily a social reformer, rather than God in the flesh who is the sacrifice for our sin (Matthew 10:34; Mark 14:7).
- Claiming God’s promises while ignoring the requirements included with them (Psalm 50:16; Jeremiah 18:10).
- Denying or minimizing Jesus’ claim that He is the only way to God (John 3:15–18; 14:6).
- Performing enough religious activity to gain a sense of well-being without a true devotion to Jesus (Galatians 5:16–17; Romans 8:9).
- Talking much about “God” in a general sense, but very little about Jesus Christ as Lord (John 13:13; 14:6).
- Seeing protection and blessing as goals to be achieved, rather than byproducts of a love relationship with God (Mark 12:30; Deuteronomy 11:13–17).
- Choosing a church based upon any or all of the above (Revelation 3:15–17).

Jesus' clearly saw this coming and warned us in Matthew 7:21–23 ... *“Not everyone who says to me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only the one who does the will of my Father who is in heaven. Many will say to me on that day, ‘Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name and in your name drive out demons and in your name perform many miracles?’ Then I will tell them plainly, ‘I never knew you. Away from me, you evildoers!’”*

HEBREWS 11:1-40

Hebrews 11 is one of those epic chapters of scripture that are often familiar even to the unredeemed. There are actually several such passages in the Bible. (IE – 1 Corinthians 13, The “Love” Chapter) But as so often seems to be the case, over familiarity can bring a lax interpretation or at least one that leaves the full context and meaning lacking. Such passages are usually relegated to wall plaque material and wedding vows. The people that are listed in this chapter, knew nothing about “cultural Christianity” and social religion. For them, the decision to follow Christ cost them everything, often even their physical lives.

For 10 chapters, the writer of this book has sought to present this version...the only version that truly exists, one of historical and Biblical Christianity. This authentic dynamic we will have with our Creator because of what Jesus did on the cross that day unleashed a unmitigated power of transformation and living. That event is where we get the basis of what we call “the gospel: the “good news.” And, indeed it was...*and is*, on multiple fronts! It was “good news” that we had been redeemed, bought out of slavery to the guilt and penalty of sin by Jesus. He provided a way for us to come into the presence of God ourselves, something we could never do until that point. After that day there needn't be more offerings of animals on altars in temples and tabernacles. There was no longer a requirement to offer temporary payments for our sin through works and our giving. It was done. **Finished.** Paid for, for all of time. But now, as we near the close of this book, we are being asked that inevitable question: What are we actually going to do with all of it? How will it affect our lives? Will there be any practical ramifications? Chapter 11,...what is known as the Hall of Faith, is presented here for us to witness the authentic impact and lifestyle of a life of faith as God designed it to be, not our present “gumby” culture.

Our chapter today actual begins with the very definition of the subject at hand, an understanding that is crucial if we are to grasp the meaning and impact of the rest of the text. Verse 1 begins, *“faith is the substance of things hoped for...things unseen.”* Hmmmm, that seems somewhat ambiguous or at least rather vague. What does this mean? Well, to begin with, we must acknowledge that at the very least this thing “faith,” finds its way into the picture because there is a heart, a mind, and a spirit that is not yet satisfied, that still hopes. Thus we find it conspicuously present in a believer that is still “reaching,” still moving, still climbing. Clearly, faith is an active word. When it's real, it motivates people to action.

The fact is, sometimes, our possessing a premature or unnatural peace is just about the worst thing that could happen to us as individuals. For it seems that authentic faith is actually born upon the heels of discontent. Swept along through the daily living of those who haven't stopped, haven't found a couch somewhere to crash on and wait out the rest of their lives. So often I have heard those who have stepped away from a passionate calling and service to God declare how much “peace” they have now. But that kind of ease comes from inactivity, detachment, or a truce with the forces of evil. A man who moves away from the front lines of the battle no doubt experiences a very real “sense of peace” because no one is shooting at him! Yet that position is temporal and leaves one hungry, desirous of more, unsettled and wandering. It was exemplified in those who walked in circles in the wilderness for 40 years until they died!

We as a church have taken it on the chin on this matter over the years. Those in the cultural Christianity camp have been quick to point their fingers and cry "legalists" and "works-oriented" because we are an active community. Judgments are passed in short order and condemnation is given. But that is a "damned if you do and damned if you don't" scenario, isn't it? Should we hold people back who are passionate to be on the front lines? To be where Jesus is working and to share in that with Him? Do we beat back those who are hungry for more and never have enough of Jesus?

Are there those who highly involve themselves here and in every church with wrong hearts and wrong motives? A "keeping up with the Jones'" mentality? Sure. They come, but they always eventually go away too. Because the problem isn't with the church or the community; the problem was and is just them. THEY had a problem which they refused to deal with and THEY got out.

Biblical faith, *so says the book of Hebrews*, is experienced through the lives of those who hope, who desire more, and thirst for what's over the next hill. This is the very definition of those whose names appear here in this chapter, those who grace the "Hall of Faith" as it is called, is it not? Now I'm not talking about seeking possessions, more stuff, more world. Quite the opposite, really. But spiritually speaking, there are some folks who are seemingly never full, never done. They always are seeking more Jesus, more service, more experiences with God. They are constantly pushing the limits and reaching for more. Others have mistaken the "rest" that is spoken of in Hebrews as a "stop." *Inactivity. An end. A ceasing to move forward. An earthly version of our heavenly state.* But the Promised Land for Israel was not a picture of heaven! Oh no! There were giants in that land and walled cities which they were called to overcome. There were stubborn groups of peoples, enemies of the people of God, that had to be daily fought with and conquered. That doesn't sound like heaven.

The Promised Land is not a picture of heavenly rest, but a personal peace that comes with effectively being "in the zone" with the Holy Spirit, even if there are crazy things going on ...things like spiritual warfare and trials! Those who turned around and refused to enter into God's Promised Land no doubt experienced some earthly "rest and peace" for a time. But for the passionate believer, that kind of "peace" is fingernails-on-the-chalkboard...a boredom, a monotonous and tedious lethargy, one which they want nothing to do with! Ceasing to move forward is exactly what unleashed the anger of God against the children of Israel and resulted in a desert life for all of those who rejected His obedience. "Resting" in the traditional way was absolutely the wrong move there!

Two guys out of the thousands there in the desert had faith. Two guys wanted more than wilderness and desert for the rest of their lives. So many of us are simply satisfied with where we are today. We just want a job, a paycheck, a husband or wife, a few toys, and we're good to go. Oh, we want salvation and the whole heaven thing. We like our church and we have some friends here, and we serve once a week. But you know, that's it. That's enough. We're not looking to get all crazy with this Jesus thing. Because the truth is, you also want a secular life and the comforts of such. You're OK. You have enough. So you've pushed back from the table and set down your fork. For you, faith is an abstract concept, a religious buzzword, a belief system. But truthfully and personally, its manifestation is unnecessary because you have all you need...you're there. No need for hope. You're saved; you're in the club. It feels good there, so why push your luck?

It is truthfully a personal grate upon me, to watch how some people can just "coast." They float and ride the wave through life. Easily satisfied and void of real drive and passion. Real faith requires a discontent, a desire, a passion for more, a thirst for the beyond. There are some of you who feel there is something more out there. A hope, a greater purpose, an invisible power, an ultimate authority and calling. Something for which you can say, "I was born for this." So you push on. Every day you reach and strive and push. Because for you it is necessary! It is you that embodies the Christian faith, as it did in these listed here in this chapter. For these folks, they

never have enough and can never do enough. Once again, the accusation is that such folks are serving and striving in an effort to earn “brownie points” through their works, ...that they're legalists and fail the test for loving relationship. And no doubt such wrong hearts do exist out there. But my experience with such hungry folks is that they understand clearly that God loves them wholly and completely. They know they are forgiven and stand righteous because of Jesus only...because of the cross alone. They have embraced the work of the cross and the fact that Jesus alone saves without anything that they could add. But they are driven by something else: a passion to be not only near to Christ but near to where He is working, ...where He is “happening.”

How I loved to go to my Father’s workplace when I was a kid! My dad made mattresses at a big factory and specifically repaired all those huge industrial sewing machines that sewed mattresses. The place was constructed with unpainted wood and it all smelled of cotton and freshly sawn lumber. There was such a busy intensity there. I liked to see my dad work and see it all come together. And I guess I still do. And I’m not alone in this heart! For some, to be there to watch Dad work...there is nothing like it. It has nothing to do with obligation or earning points. It’s all about being where the action is. To experience it all. To watch Jesus at work.

As I said in the beginning, this chapter can easily be a nebulous “feel-good” chapter and when we get to the end, it all sounds so nice, but what does it really mean? Few are willing to ask questions. Questions like, “You say you love Jesus, but to what end? Where is it all supposed to go? Am I just to receive salvation and wait for Him to come and get me?” Again, it becomes like a poem or a painting on the wall. We stand before it and admire its beauty but what does it give you? Certainly a satisfaction, but it is a “cotton candy” joy, empty emotional calories. It’s not like we can literally use a poem or a painting to feed the hungry, stop oppression, or change the world! That’s not a criticism of great paintings or beautiful poems, but one must firstly understand just what the purpose is of the thing in question. What is our purpose here as redeemed individuals? (Bring glory to God? How do you intend to do that?)

Here it is easy to embrace the issue of faith without qualification and ignore just what the result of that faith is to look like. But because of faith, Abel offered to God an excellent sacrifice. Because of faith, Enoch had a testimony that pleased God and was “taken away.” Because of faith, Noah built an ark, Abraham obeyed and departed without a destination, Sarah received strength and had a child. The list in this chapter goes on and on, but all of them wore faith in the form of **action**, not emotion! There was still healthy discontent, and there was still hope for more than what was in front of them. Noah built, Abraham obeyed, Abel offered, Jacob blessed, Joseph gave, Moses refused. It’s funny how we can miss such an obvious aspect of this chapter. No doubt that’s because so many of us, again, are “satisfied.” We are interested only in a faith that believes and a faith that essentially gives us “stuff.” The fact is, real faith moves. Real faith acts. Not to earn. Not to accumulate points. But through the desire to be where Dad is working and if we can, do a little work alongside Him. Because all the experiences we had with Him in the past were not enough. We are not yet satisfied.

When I was young, I was raised with and lived under the false notion that I could lose my salvation. It was a terrible false doctrine: the very idea that I alone had the power to undo the cross, that I could overcome, with my power, the power of what Jesus did that day. There are so many scriptural supports for the fact that this is impossible for those who are truly reborn. But the effect of that doctrine upon me was to give me a precarious relationship with God. One that was afraid of Him getting too close and afraid of dropping the ball and being tossed from the game. I never spiritually grew up because my energy and focus was to just hang on, to just “stay in my lane” and not mess anything up. When I realized how wrong I had been, I was so very much set free. My life and relationship with God became one of passion and growing. It became a very busy journey of passion as I sought to not only learn more about God, but literally to be with Him when he was being God.

Verse 6 says, *“But without faith it is impossible to please Him, for he who comes to God...”*

If you just park, why would you need faith? There is no longer a need for hope or trust in God to answer because you have no risk...no need. Noah had faith. It says so right in this chapter. He had faith, not just to believe God would flood the earth, but He had a faith that motivated him to obedience and action. So he built a huge ship that was 500 miles away from the nearest ocean and started filling it with animals. I wonder if people thought he was just “works-oriented” and was trying to earn God's love? His faith was lived out in action. What he was doing must have seemed insane to those who stood on the outside. Absurd. Crazy even. But I wonder where we would be, personally or as a church, if we had failed to have the faith that followed the absurd? Consider our missions endeavors around the world. It's all so absurd, isn't it? We are just one small church in Wisconsin! We can't work in two developing countries, ...not to mention intensively on the domestic front. How can we keep missionaries full time in one country and build eight churches in another! That's just crazy. We're pushing 40 years of crazy now...and oh the stories we can tell! All because there were a bunch of us that wanted to be where Jesus was doing great stuff and maybe be a part of it. And wow! He amazed us, and we give glory to God and worship Him through it all. Everyone outside thought it was all so crazy and so impossible. But the rain came and everyone who thought they could dictate how they would come to God stood outside the crazy man's boat getting wet thinking what? Maybe he wasn't so crazy after all.

Many of you today just want to be where Jesus is. And you are passionately saying to Him in word and deed, "Show me your glory..." You know what? He does and He will. I don't know about you this morning, but I'm still hungry. I'm still at the table, and frankly, I just can't get enough of Him. I want to have faith in God. I want to be a part of what He's doing. I want to be one of these guys of Hebrews 11...