

Session 2: The Example of Faith

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Preacher: Kyle Essary

[0 : 00] We discussed how faith is, and we talked about two words, assurance and conviction. We discussed how the object of our faith, God, grounds the certainty of our faith.

We discussed how faith understands the truths of God, directs itself toward God, and seeks God's delight. Now this morning, we are going to continue working through Hebrews 11 and come to this first section that was just read of many examples of biblical faith.

There are many examples throughout the chapter, but the section that we're looking at this morning covers a wide range of history. It begins with Abel and ends with, ultimately, Joseph.

But as we will see, and as we heard, this section primarily focuses on the faith of Abraham and Sarah.

If we look at Hebrews 11, 4 to 22, we see, look in your Bibles, you can notice this, there are four verses before the author begins to discuss Abraham, and there are only three verses after the author discusses Abraham.

[1 : 25] But verses 8 through to 19, all are focused on the faith of Abraham and Sarah. And so these three sections, the four verses, the verses about Abraham, and then the three verses afterward, will be the three sections of this morning's message.

In verses 4 through to 7, we see three examples of faith before Abraham. Obviously, in verses 8 to 19, we see the faith of Abraham and Sarah.

And then in verses 20 through to 22, we see the faith of Abraham's descendants. What we will see in this section is that God commends those who live by faith in promises that they may never find fulfillment of in their lifetimes.

The faith that we see repeated in this chapter is faith in promises that may never come to completion while the individuals are still living.

The writer of Hebrews commends these examples to us to illustrate the faith that he wrote about at the beginning of the chapter. So let's look at the first section this morning, where the author shows us the example of faith before Abraham.

[2 : 56] Let me read those verses again, verses 4 through to 7. It says this. I'm reading out of a different translation, but I think you can read along.

By faith, Abel offered to God a more acceptable sacrifice than Cain's. Through this, he received approval as righteous.

God himself giving approval to his gifts. He died, but through his faith, he still speaks. By faith, Enoch was taken so that he did not experience death, and he was not found because God had taken him.

For it was attested before he was taken away that he had pleased God. And without faith, it is impossible to please him. For whoever would approach God must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who seek him.

By faith, Noah, warned by God about events yet unseen, respected the warning and built an ark to save his household.

[4 : 03] By this, he condemned the world and became an heir to the righteousness that is in accordance with faith. What we see in these verses is that those who had faith were accepted by God, pleased God, and found salvation through the work of God.

God accepted Abel's offering. God, or Enoch, pleased God. And Noah was saved from God's judgment.

So let's look at these three examples of faith. The author gives each of these three examples, which come from Genesis 1 through to 11.

Now, back in verse 3, if you look in your Bible, what we looked at last night, we saw that faith believes that the universe was created by the word of God so that what is seen was made by what is not seen.

And so we have the very first example of faith actually being creation. Right? By faith, we believe that God created all things that are seen out of things that are not seen.

[5 : 18] So this looks back to the very beginning of Genesis, where in Genesis 1, all things are created by God's words alone.

But interestingly, the author of Hebrews skips over the story of Adam and Eve and goes directly to the story of their sons before discussing Enoch's faith and then Noah's faith.

It is Abel who provides the author's first example of faith. But what is it about Abel that makes him an example for us?

It's an interesting choice, isn't it? If anything, if you simply read Genesis 4, verses 4 through to 5, much is left unsaid.

That passage reads as thus. Let me read it. Abel also brought of the firstborn of his flock and of their fat portions. And the Lord had regard for Abel and his offering, but for Cain and his offering, he had no regard.

[6 : 33] So Cain was very angry and his face fell. End quote. All Genesis tells us is that God had regard for Abel's offering and did not have regard for Cain's offering.

It's unclear why. And to this day, Genesis scholars continue to debate the possible reasons.

However, I think that from reading the New Testament, we can see some clear indications of the difference.

So if you consider Matthew chapter 23, verse 35, it says that Abel was righteous. Furthermore, 1 John chapter 3, verse 12, says that Abel's deeds, Abel's actions, were righteous.

And if Abel was righteous and his actions were righteous, then we know that he must have brought this offering in faith.

After all, Habakkuk chapter 2, verse 4, says that the righteous one will live by faith. And I believe that this verse, the righteous one will live by faith, is in the mind of the author of Hebrews.

[7 : 58] He has just quoted it at the end of chapter 10. The righteous one will live by faith. So what does righteousness look like? It looks like active faith.

Here are some examples of faith. So what we see is that Abel must have brought this acceptable offering in faith.

And that's exactly what the author of Hebrews tells us. But I want us to notice one more thing in this brief little mention of Abel.

It says that though he is dead, he still speaks. It's a subtle reminder of his death, how he died, slain by his own brother.

In other words, a faithful life might not end with joy and peace. However, even if it ends in such a violent story as that of Abel's life, it still receives God's commendation, as Abel's does here in this passage.

[9 : 15] The author then moves to Enoch for the second example. Enoch pleased God and was taken up without experiencing death.

If you turn to Genesis 5, verses 22 through to 24, say this. Enoch walked with God after he fathered Methuselah 300 years and had other sons and daughters.

Thus all the days of Enoch were 365 years. Verse 24, Enoch walked with God and he was not, for God took him.

End quote. Just like the story of Cain and Abel, there are many mysteries from this passage in Genesis. But the author of Hebrews doesn't focus on those many questions that we might have. What the author of Hebrews emphasizes is that Enoch's faith pleased God. We see this through Enoch walking with God in verse 24, Genesis 5, 24.

[10 : 27] To walk with God means to live in such a way that you are following the Lord's ways. It's a common idiom throughout the Old Testament. Enoch knew the Lord.

Enoch lived in the Lord's ways. And Enoch found the Lord's delight. It pleased God that he was faithful.

Thus, Enoch pleased God and the text tells us that the Lord took him. We don't know more than that.

The Lord took him. He did not experience death. And then the final example, before discussing Abraham in chapter 11, is the example of Noah.

But notice the things that it emphasizes about Noah. Faith led Noah to obey God. To build an ark. To recognize God's judgment against the world.

[11 : 27] And to find salvation for himself and for his family. In fact, it says it clearly. The purpose of the ark was for the saving of his family.

2 Peter chapter 2 verse 5 calls Noah a herald of righteousness. One who declares the righteousness of God.

Furthermore, Peter associates Noah's ark with our salvation through Jesus. In a sense, the ark of God points to Jesus.

In Hebrews and back in Genesis chapter 6 through to 9, the ark preserves those with faith from God's wrath against sin.

Just as Jesus preserves those of us with faith from God's wrath against sin. According to the author of Hebrews, God saves Noah to make him an heir of the righteousness that comes by faith.

[12 : 46] Once again, notice that slight allusion back to Habakkuk 2 verse 4. The righteous one will live by faith.

I think that there is a theological point worth emphasizing here. Righteousness, the type of righteousness that God desires from us and that pleases God, righteousness does not come through works, but through faith.

The righteous one will live by faith. And so faith for Noah led to righteousness and salvation.

Brothers and sisters, I believe that the faith of these examples and our faith have the same results.

If we consider Hebrews 11, 4 to 7, we see that faith led to God's acceptance, God's pleasure and salvation through faith.

And if that is the case, and the text says that it is, our faith in Jesus also assures us of our acceptance. The one who saves us, Jesus, will not lose us.

[14 : 08] We are firmly accepted in Christ, not because of our actions, but because of his actions and because of the faith that he produces in us.

Because of Jesus's life, his death, and his resurrection, we have assured and confident faith that we will be accepted by Christ.

Furthermore, we know that our faith pleases God. It's stated in this passage, it's stated across the scriptures. And ultimately, we know that our faith results in our salvation.

And that's what we were singing about so joyfully earlier. Our faith results in our salvation. 1 Timothy 1 verse 15 says this clearly.

It says, The saying is trustworthy and deserving of full acceptance that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am the foremost.

[15 : 21] And so after giving these three brief examples of faith, the author of Hebrews shifts his focus to consider the faith of Abraham and Sarah.

We see this in verses 8 through to 19. I'm not going to read all of these verses again, but I ask that you look at these verses as we consider them. Abraham and Sarah had faith in God despite difficult callings.

Four times, the passage says that Abraham and Sarah acted by faith. But look at the situations in the text of their faith.

In the first two examples, Abraham went to a place he didn't know to live as a foreigner in tents.

Jachian said that she would sleep under the stars.

Abraham was supposed to sleep in tents, right? In the next example, Sarah had been barren, unable to have a child, and was now advanced in age.

[16 : 37] In the final example, Abraham had been called to offer up he and Sarah's only son as a sacrifice to God.

None of these are joyful situations. They are all challenging situations. And in the midst of them, they had faith.

In the first example of Abraham and Sarah, they were already elderly. They had no children. They lived far away from the promised land.

And now they are called to move to a place that isn't specified. To leave behind their family, their friends, their career, and everything else to obey God's command.

Now, I know that many of you have studied overseas or traveled overseas. I've lived the majority of my life outside of the nation where I was born.

[17 : 44] Even in our day today, it's not easy to move far away from family, friends, and a culture that we know.

But the author of Hebrews reveals something that Genesis hadn't revealed to us. Abraham was not just looking for the promised land.

Abraham looked for a better country than the country of his birth. It wasn't just the promised land, which he saw, the land of Israel and Palestine today.

No, Abraham pursued this heavenly country. They reached the promised land. But they never saw the fulfillment of their faith, as verse 13 says.

But the author also notes in verse 16 that God has prepared for them a city, which we know is the new Jerusalem, as the author will note later on in the book.

[18 : 54] In the second example of their faith, Sarah had been without a child for many years.

Verse 11 says that she was past the age to get pregnant.

If you go back to Genesis, Genesis 17, verse 17 says that Sarah was 90 years old. I don't believe that anyone in this room is yet 90 years old.

We are all younger than Sarah was at this time. That's considerably past the standard childbearing age.

It seems such a ridiculous promise that when God informs her that she will give birth to a son, she laughs.

And that's why Isaac has his name. Because she laughed. However, she still had faith in God's promise.

[19 : 57] From a human perspective, the promise seems ridiculous. Can a 90-year-old woman give birth? But the author of Hebrews says in verse 11, she considered him faithful who had promised.

And the author notes that as a result of their faith and God's fulfillment of this promise, the descendants of Abraham are now exceedingly numerous.

The stars of the sky, the sand on the beach, that numerous. In the final example of Abraham's faith, we see Abraham's response to the great test, the act of offering up his only son.

Now, if we go back to Genesis 22, we have all sorts of questions about what is happening there.

But the author of our passage emphasizes two points.

First, God had already promised to Abraham that through Isaac shall your offspring be named. And second, that Abraham believed God could even raise Isaac from the dead to fulfill his promise.

[21 : 19] When we read that story back in Genesis 22, we're filled with questions about why God would test Abraham in this way. But the author of Hebrews ignores all of those questions.

What matters in our passage this morning is that Abraham showed incredible faith in the promises that God had already made about Isaac.

And this led him to obey God's command, having faith that God might need to raise Isaac from the dead if needed. He still obediently moved forward in faith.

And so in response to the examples of Abraham's faith, I wonder, how do such situations relate to my faith?

How would such situations relate to your faith? If God made a promise or demanded something that seemed ridiculous to you, how would you respond?

[22 : 26] What if God called you to make a seemingly radical decision to move somewhere else or to believe something that seemed impossible?

That is the point of these examples with Abraham and Sarah. He left his family and everything else for hope of a heavenly city.

She trusted God's promise despite being past the age of childbirth. Abraham trusted God's power and his promises even when God seemed to ask for something that was contrary to God's very own promises.

That's the point. This radical faith in God. The point that the author is making is that we too should have faith that follows God no matter the situation.

Throughout the history of Christians, we have always had periods where we face trials. We face persecutions. We face opposition.

[23 : 38] And even in the midst of those, we will follow him who is faithful. And so, we see more of this faith displayed in the next section in verses 20 through to 22 with Abraham's descendants.

Let me read those three verses to us as a reminder. It says this beginning in verse 20. By faith, Isaac invoked blessings for the future on Jacob and Esau. By faith, Jacob, when dying, blessed each of the sons of Joseph bowing in worship over the top of his staff. By faith, Joseph, at the end of his life, made mention of the exodus of the Israelites and gave instructions about his burial.

Abraham's descendants had faith in God's future blessings. The statements about the faith of Isaac, Jacob, and Joseph are very brief considering all that we know about these individuals. [24 : 58] But each of the statements emphasizes something of God's future-oriented promises. So we see three generations of this future-oriented faith.

First, the author of Hebrews gives the very brief example of Isaac. He merely states that Isaac invoked future blessings on Jacob and Esau, but that he did this by faith. Isaac confidently knew that God would fulfill the promises he made through Isaac toward his sons. And so Isaac's blessings assumed the fulfillment of God's promises that had been made even to his father, Abraham.

And so he could reiterate those to his sons. He trusted in God's promises to speak confidently about the future of his children.

Second, the author of Hebrews gives another brief example of Jacob. Now, if you go back to Genesis, Jacob is as prominent a character as Abraham.

[26 : 16] Abraham is, I mean, he takes up chapters 12 to 25, and then Jacob takes up basically the rest of the book, right? Even throughout the Joseph narrative, Jacob is a major character.

But here, the author of Hebrews simply mentions that he had faith in God's future promises when he blessed each of, notice, Joseph's sons.

So here, he's blessing two of his grandchildren. Personally, if I were writing the book of Hebrews, I would have highlighted the blessings he made towards his own sons in Genesis 49.

But the author of Hebrews highlights the future-focused faith in his blessing toward Joseph's sons, Ephraim and Manasseh in Genesis 48.

God promised future blessings on both grandsons of Jacob. And if you go through those promises in Genesis 48, you see that they both look forward to a restoration in the promised land.

[27 : 32] They focused on a future blessing for these children that would be a fulfillment of the blessing and the promises to Abraham.

Abraham. Finally, the author of Hebrews looks at the final words of Joseph.

Now, many sermons that preach through the story of Joseph will end with Genesis 50, verse 20. What you meant for evil, God meant for good.

Right? But those are not the final words of Joseph. And in fact, I would argue that within the narrative of Genesis, Joseph's final words are even more important than Genesis 50, verse 20. Here's what Joseph's final words are in Genesis 50, verses 24 and 25. Joseph said to his brothers, I am about to die, but God will visit you and bring you up out of this land to the land that he swore to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob.

[28 : 47] Then Joseph made the sons of Israel swear, saying, God will surely visit you and you shall carry up my bones from here.

End quote. Just as his emphasis from Isaac and Jacob, the author of Hebrews also looks at Joseph's future-focused faith when he is an old man.

Blessed with power, blessed with wealth, and a stable future in Egypt, should they choose, Joseph instead looked forward to an exodus when he said that God would visit his people and restore them to the promised land.

He also made note of his bones. Like his father, grandfather, and great grandfather, Joseph wanted his bones to have their final resting place, not in Egypt, but in the promised land.

He looked even beyond his death to a future hope that God's people would obey his wishes for his remains. And so the book of Genesis ends by saying, so Joseph died, being 110 years old, they embalmed him, and he was placed in a coffin in Egypt.

[30 : 23] End of book. book. But this is not the final story of Joseph's traveling bones. In fact, Exodus tells of Joseph's bones being taken when the Israelites will leave Egypt a few hundred years later.

Joshua tells of Joseph's bones being buried in the promised land. The emphasis in Hebrews is in this forward-looking faith that trusts God to fulfill promises even beyond the life of the individual.

Let me conclude this section with a brief comment on the bones of Joseph and the legacy of our faith. You see, Joseph's bones remind us that true faith may look forward even beyond our own lives.

True faith can leave a legacy that looks forward to the fulfillment of God's promises. Even in death, Joseph bore witness that Egypt would not be the final home of God's people.

For generations, the bones of Joseph in that coffin in Egypt pointed God's people beyond their present captivity to God's promise that he would restore them from the promised land.

[31 : 54] Maybe you can imagine. Nine-year-old Israelite kid comes up to his parents. They're in slavery. And the kid asks the dad and says, why do we have that creepy old coffin over there in the corner of the room?

And the dad says, those are the bones of my great-great-great-great-grandfather Joseph. And the child says, what? And the father says, Joseph was a great leader over Egypt.

He had been placed there by God and he in faith said, there will be a day when God delivers us from this land of slavery and restores us to the land of promise.

In the same way, our faith may outlive us. We may not see every prayer answered or every promise fulfilled in our lifetime.

But like Joseph, we can live and maybe we can even die with a forward-looking faith that says God will surely visit his people.

[33 : 16] So let me conclude this morning's message in this way. We've seen throughout the passage that God commends those who live by faith and promises that may never find fulfillment in their lifetimes.

The author of Hebrews certainly wanted his original readers to ponder these examples and consider their own faith. So let's do that this morning.

How does our faith compare with the examples given this morning? Do their examples inspire us to be people of greater faith?

We have seen this morning that God commends those who live by faith in promises that may never find fulfillment in their lives. Abel, Enoch, Noah, Abraham, Sarah, Isaac, Jacob, and Joseph all looked beyond what they could see with their eyes and trusted in God's promises.

Their lives remind us that faith is not about controlling what may happen to us, but by trusting in a sovereign God who controls the future.

[34 : 32] God and unlike these heroes of faith, we have more of God's revelation to stand on. Have you ever thought of that?

You have more of God's revelation when you read the Bible than Abraham did, than David did, than even the apostle Paul did.

We have more of God's word to stand on. We live on this side of the cross and of the resurrection of Jesus.

We have seen the fulfillment of many of the promises that they were still longing for. Their faith was commendable, but our faith has even greater assurance because Jesus has come, lived, died, and risen again.

He now reigns from heaven as the king of kings and the lord of lords. So let us hold fast to God's promises with confidence, knowing that he who calls us is faithful.

[35 : 42] Let's pray. Father God, you are faithful. You are the sovereign lord over the universe. All your words are true.

All of your promises will come to pass. Whether we see it in our lives or not, let us be people of faith who look forward to the fulfillment of those promises.

Let us be people of faith who like Joseph leave a legacy of our faith to the future. Help us to live in such a way that no matter the situations we face, even if they seem as serious as those of Abraham and Sarah.

That we still have faith looking forward in hope knowing that you are a God who answers prayers, you are a God who fulfills promises, and we can trust in you.

In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.