

By Faith, We. . .

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Introduction.

- A. Everybody has their heroes. I suspect that every child in America has someone they want to grow up and be like, and when we look back, it's easy for us to remember who our childhood heroes were. I certainly know who mine were. Long, long before anyone had ever heard of Peter Jackson or Elijah Hunt Wood, I idolized the characters of *The Lord of the Rings*. I spent hours and hours daydreaming about fighting the Balrog in the mines of Moria, or charging into battle with the riders of Rohan. That's just scratching the surface, folks!
- B. Clearly, these are not heroes whom I can directly imitate. For one thing, evil in real life doesn't normally take the form of an army of nasty-looking creatures camped out on our doorsteps, and even if it did, I'm just not physically equipped to take my sword in hand and chop a path through them. Instead, these days, I must look to the Fellowship of the Ring for virtues that are not physical, but moral.
- C. Of course, once we get on the subject of moral heroes, we must turn from the works of the human imagination to the inspired word of God and the people that it holds up for us to admire. Many of these people appear in Hebrews 11, in what is commonly called the Heroes' Hall of Faith. This portion of Scripture recounts the great things that God's people have done through their faith in Him. However, unlike the hobbits and elves and dwarves of *The Lord of the Rings*, these are people whom God means for us to imitate. Their specific deeds may be beyond us, but the way they lived their lives is not. Let's turn, then, to Hebrews 11, to examine what these godly men and women did and how we can do the same by faith.

I. Hebrews 11:4-10.

- A. Once the Hebrews writer begins talking about real people, the first godly act we are urged to imitate is to **OFFER A BETTER SACRIFICE**. This appears in Hebrews 11:4. It refers back to a character from the earliest part of the book of Genesis, Abel, the son of Adam, who offered an animal sacrifice to God when his brother Cain offered a sacrifice of the fruit of the ground. God rejected Cain's sacrifice, but accepted Abel's.
- B. The first thing we can learn from this is that we need to offer a better sacrifice by doing what God wants. Although the text doesn't say one way or the other, it is extremely unlikely that either Cain or Abel acted without instruction from God. Cain knew what God wanted; he just didn't do it..
- C. Now, this might sound like an unlikely thing for Cain to do, but there are millions of people all across this country this morning who are offering to their Creator an inferior sacrifice. The Bible is quite clear about what God wants in worship, but 99% of those who call themselves Christians have chosen not to do it. We need to offer a better sacrifice. We need to do what God wants, not what we want.
- D. Second, we need to recognize the scope of our sacrifices. Paul teaches us in Romans 12:1 that we are to present our bodies as living sacrifices. We need to look at everything we do as something we offer to God. God doesn't want us for two hours on Sunday morning. He wants us always and forever.
- E. In the next segment, we are instructed by example to **PLEASE GOD**. This is encapsulated in the story of Enoch in Hebrews 11:5-6. Unlike many of the other characters in this narration, Genesis says very little more about Enoch than we read here. It just says that he walked with God, and was not, for God took him.
- F. However, Hebrews 11:6 provides the background we need to understand this translation of Enoch directly to heaven. He came to God by his faith. He believed that God is, and that God is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him. He acted on the basis of that faith, and that's how he walked with God and pleased Him.
- G. We need to have this same attitude. In particular, we need to believe that God is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him, and we need to act on that, because it tells us how we need to be Christians. There are a lot of people out there who believe that God is, but they miss out on the second part because they think they can come to God without a diligent search beforehand. Let's be wiser than that. Let's understand that if we want to go to heaven, we have to put time and effort into the journey. Nobody ends up in heaven by accident. Instead, only those who live with diligence and wisdom will please God and claim His reward.
- H. After this, we are told to follow after the righteous and **PREPARE FOR SALVATION**. This thought is highlighted in the capsule story of Noah in Hebrews 11:7. Noah was warned by God that the earth would be destroyed by water, so he believed God and prepared for the flood by following God's instructions and building an ark. He and his family were saved when everyone else on earth perished for their wickedness.
- I. Friends, we need to show this same foresight and preparation. Just like Noah was, we are warned of coming devastation. Noah's world was destroyed by water, but ours will be destroyed by fire. The earth and its elements will be consumed with fervent heat. Nor will this destruction be any less total for the souls of the unprepared. If we don't plan for that day, we ourselves will undergo a fiery death that lasts forever.
- J. None of us want that. We want to be like Noah instead. We need to protect ourselves now from the disaster that will occur later. God has told us how to do that. We are not instructed to build an ark, but we are told to

follow His plan for salvation through Jesus Christ. Just like the ark saved Noah, that plan will save us if we remain faithful to it. We can't see the end now, but it's coming. Let's be prepared instead of doomed.

- K. The next way we imitate these examples is to **OBEY BY FOLLOWING**. This is the point of Hebrews 11:8-10. This is actually one of my favorite little twists in Scripture. Here, the Hebrews writer is describing the story of Abraham, who, in Genesis 12, left his family behind to go where God said, even though he didn't even know where that was. The neat thing about this passage, though, is that in that journey, he didn't follow God for the sake of the physical land God had promised. Instead, he was looking for a city where he could dwell eternally with God. He was looking for heaven, although he might not even have realized it.
- L. We likewise need to obey by following. There are a lot of folks out there who don't know where doing right will take them, and they let that uncertainty scare them off. They don't know what will happen with their families, their jobs, or their lives, so they stay where they are, apart from God. Friends, that's not faith. That's fear, and we must not allow our fears to rule us. Let's put it this way: If we obey God, true, we don't know what will happen. But if we don't obey God, guess what? We don't know what will happen either! We can be sure, though, of what will happen to our souls depending on the choice we make. Here's what it boils down to. We can choose an uncertain future with the certainty of going to heaven, or we can choose an uncertain future with the certainty of going to hell. That's not even a close case! Let's not be foolish about this, friends. Let's conquer our fears and obey God by following Him.

II. Hebrews 11:11-16.

- A. Next, let's imitate the godly who **CONSIDER GOD FAITHFUL**. We see this brought up in Hebrews 11:11-12. This is about the faith of Abraham's wife, Sarah. Although she knew that she was past the age of childbearing, she believed the promise of God, and eventually gave birth to Isaac, through whom came all of Israel.
- B. To put it in plain English, we need to show our faith by believing that God is trustworthy. Do we think God will do what He has said, or don't we? This is true of the promises that God makes to both the evil and to the good. In the first place, do we really think that God will condemn those who do not obey Him to eternal torment? He has certainly said He will, as clearly as it can be said. Do we count Him faithful who has promised, or do we doubt His word and live wicked lives anyway? Thankfully, though, God has also made promises to the righteous. It's easy to believe in those promises when they don't call us to do anything different, but what about when believing those promises changes what we would do? What if we would drink, or gamble, or leave our spouses without God's promises? What if believing in God's promises brings us into family conflict that we hate and fear? Where do we stand then? If we want to be people of faith, if we want to be His people, we need to count Him faithful who has promised.
- C. After this, we should seek to follow after the righteous who **EMBRACE THE PROMISES**. The Hebrews writer brings this point up in Hebrews 11:13. He says of the patriarchs that they never saw the promise they believed in before they died, but nonetheless, they saw them by faith and embraced them. "Embraced" is a powerful word, friends. An embrace is like a hug, only more intimate. An embrace is what you give your best friend when she's going away and you might never see her again. That's the way that the men of faith felt about the promises of God. They held them close in their minds until they day they died.
- D. We need to embrace the promises too. We need to think about just how special our hope of heaven is. A lot of the time, there's a temptation before us to get blasé about the promise. We're used to it, so we don't treat it like the big deal it is. We say, "I'm going to heaven. Yay." Let's rejoice in the promise instead.
- E. The Hebrews writer next says that we should imitate the godly by **CONFESSING OURSELVES STRANGERS**. This is the message of Hebrews 11:13-15. Here, the writer refers back to Abraham and the other patriarchs. They were from Mesopotamia, but they neither referred to themselves as its citizens nor desired to go back. They lived in Canaan, but they held themselves separate from its people in expectation of the day when they would inherit the land. They were strangers and exiles because of God's promise.
- F. This is the way we need to be as well. With our words, our attitudes, and our actions, we need to confess that we are strangers and exiles in this land. America is a wonderful place, friends. There are many opportunities here, many things we can do and enjoy. But this is not our home. If we want to dwell with God, we must think of ourselves not as citizens of the United States, but as citizens of heaven.
- G. Finally, though, we must follow Abraham and the others by **DESIRING HEAVEN**. This is where the Hebrews writer concludes this section of Hebrews 11, in Hebrews 11:16. This tells us that all of those men and women of faith weren't doing what they were doing for some hope of material reward. Instead, they did what they did because they wanted to follow God. They wanted a home even better than Canaan, a home with God.
- H. We need to share this attitude. We need to really, truly want to go to heaven. We need to ask ourselves: If Jesus appeared secretly to me five minutes from now and asked me if I wanted Him to come back tonight, what would I say? Would I say "Lord, come quickly!" like Paul did? Or would I say, "Could you hold off on that a little while, God? There are things here that I want to finish first." There have been times when I wanted God to come back right now, but I don't always think that way. I need to. We all need to.

Conclusion. If you aren't ready for the Lord to return, now is the time to make your preparations.