

August 14, 2016 Temple Baptist Church, Jamestown, ND
TITLE: PILGRIMS' PROGRESS, Hebrews 11:1-16 (*But We See Jesus #15*)

How many of you have read the classic by John Bunyan, *Pilgrim's Progress*? What is the basic theme of the book? (A man named Christian is trying to make his way to the Celestial City, encountering various individuals who either help or hinder in his quest.) Bunyan, an early Baptist, wrote in the 1600's, inspired from the personal experiences of his conversion and outspoken faith, including imprisonment.

The letter of Hebrews is an **encouragement to followers of Jesus to keep the faith together in the only One Who can save**. *But we are not of those who shrink back and are destroyed, but of those who have faith and preserve their souls.* Hebrews 10:39 **But what is faith?** What follows is one of the most beautiful definitions and examples, a list of those who lived before Jesus looking forward to the day of His coming. **Hebrews 11 is about the OT pilgrims, those on a journey to a place they had never been, a place for which their hearts yearned, a place where all who truly seek God are destined.**

Read Hebrews 11:1-16. The author shares specific examples of what faith is, how faith lives and what faith gives.

- What faith is: Faith is living now with the conviction of what will be. (11:1-3)

Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen. 11:1 The word *assurance* can also be translated *substance* (cf. 1:3; 3:14). The word for *things* comes from the word from which we get the word *pragmatic*. Faith is practical.

Faith is not blind. Rather, it springs from hope. One cannot have faith without hope. Hope then, leads to faith. And **faith leads to a conviction that what is real is beyond what our eyes may see**. Paul says something similar when he writes, *For in this hope (of the Spirit's work) we were saved. Now hope that is seen is not hope. For who hopes for what he sees? But if we hope for what we do not see, we wait for it with patience.* Romans 8:24-25

Faith is not a thing; it is an action. **Faith is living now with the conviction of what will be.** *For by it the people of old received their commendation.* 11:2 **Marriage** is an example of faith. It is not about a wedding day, i. e. something a couple **did**, but what they **do** with a goal of **what will be**. For example: a marriage is based on a promise that continues of each submitting to the other for the good of this new family. The emphasis is living now with the hope of what will be: relationships with others, often including children.

When the author of Hebrews is asking his readers to live by faith, a faith that preserves their souls, a faith in Jesus the high priest Who Himself is the sacrifice for our sins once

for all, he appeals to the **example of those who never even had the opportunity to know Messiah, but who lived their lives in anticipation of His coming.**

So, far from being blind, faith is forward-looking, but what is seen is not necessarily with the physical eye. Chapter 11 is rooted in the *people of old*, specifically in how they lived their lives. Before he begins with these saints, with whom does our author begin regarding faith? (Audience)

God. The discussion about faith and hope to this point has been generic. One can have faith based on a hope that isn't Christian. To some extent I can have this kind of faith and hope in the Democratic or Republican parties, but I would question the reason for it. One can be a Muslim or a Jew or Buddhist or some other follower of some other belief, but when we make faith specific to God, and specifically to faith in God's Son, we change everything.

By faith we understand that the universe was created by the word of God, so that what is seen was not made out of things that are visible. 11:3

The kind of faith our author is talking about is rooted in the Creator of this universe. He didn't take stuff and remake it. The *word* means the *spoken word*, i. e. God spoke this world into being. *In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth . . . And God said . . . And God said . . . And God said.*

When our author talks about faith that is a conviction in things not seen, he is asking us to have the kind of faith that is evident in how this world came to be, a faith based in God Himself. But faith is not looking back. **Faith recognizes what is behind, but it always, always, always is directed ahead.**

What faith is: Faith is living now with the conviction of what will be.

- How faith lives: Faith always directs the focus to God. (11:4-12)

Following the example of God creating by faith the things which we now see, he lists several people of old, people of faith. The first is **Abel**. The account in in Genesis 4 of both he and Cain bringing sacrifices to God. God does reject Cain's offering, not because of what he offered, but because of his heart. Genesis 4:7 implies that Cain does not come with the focus on God, but rather, himself.

When God accepts Abel's gifts, it is not because the gift is right, but because the giver is. The long term effect is that although Abel is dead, the gift he gave from a heart focused on God continues to give. One implication for us is that **when we give from hearts that are right, the impact of our giving is not limited to that instance. God uses it as an ongoing testimony to Himself.**

The next person mentioned is **Enoch**. Genesis 5 says that he walked with God and God took him. The LXX version states that Enoch pleased God. **We cannot please**

God apart from living in a way that focuses on Him. That's what brings God pleasure.

The author then makes a comment, implied by Enoch's life and all the others he lists in this chapter. *And without faith it is impossible to please him, for whoever would draw near to God must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who seek him.* 11:6 Those who please God are those who demonstrate their faith by drawing near to Him. And no one draws near to someone he doesn't think exists or ignores.

We draw near to God because we believe He exists and cares about us. We draw near with confidence to the throne of grace (4:16). We draw near to God through Jesus, Who saves us completely (7:25). We draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith (10:22).

What is the evidence of a faith that focuses on God? **For Abel it is in his offering. For Enoch it is in his walking. For Noah it is in his building.** Noah responds to God's warning *concerning events yet unseen* and builds an ark in the middle of dry land. (Recently an ark exhibit, based on the measurements in Genesis 6, was opened at the Creation Museum in Kentucky.) Noah's faith is evidence that he is one who follows God, who is righteous and so **God declares Noah as His heir, an heir of that which is right.** This *righteousness that comes by faith* is a theme important, also, in Paul's letters (e. g. Romans 4:11; 10:6; Philipians 3:9).

The next example is of the man of faith championed throughout the Bible, Abraham. *By faith Abraham obeyed when he was called to go out to a place that he was to receive as an inheritance. And he went out, not knowing where he was going.* 11:8 Ladies, when your husband doesn't ask for directions, even though you know he doesn't know where he is going, he's acting like Abraham! Ha! Maybe.

The point is that **Abraham leaves all that he knows to go where he's never been to receive what will never be his in his lifetime.** God says that he will make him into a great nation, make his name great and bless all the nations through him (Genesis 12). Abraham (Abram at the time) is 75 and childless, yet he goes and becomes Abraham. God tests his faith for another 25 years before giving him and Sarah a son long past the age when she could conceive.

By faith he went to live in the land of promise, as in a foreign land, living in tents with Isaac and Jacob, heirs with him of the same promise. 11:9 The focus on God points to His promises, i. e. our focus is based on God's word. This is **how the faith of a follower of Jesus is different. It always directs the focus to God and what He has already said, what He promises.** Even Isaac and Jacob lived this way. Indeed, the promise of the land would not come for another 400 years AFTER Jacob.

Why did Abraham live by faith? *For he was looking forward to the city that has foundations, whose designer and builder is God.* 11:10

Abraham's faith also impacts his wife Sarah. *By faith Sarah herself received power to conceive, even when she was past the age, since she considered him faithful who had promised. Therefore from one man, and him as good as dead, were born descendants as many as the stars of heaven and as many as the innumerable grains of sand by the seashore.* 11:11-12

Our faith impacts others. Abraham's faith becomes the model for his wife Sarah, for his son Isaac and for his son Jacob. **Based on the faith of one man, who is willing to go where he has never been to receive what will never be his, God builds an entire people through which He will bring His Son to bring all who will to be His people.**

How does faith live? It ALWAYS directs the focus to God. **Abel expresses it by offering, Enoch by walking, Noah by building, Abraham by obeying and going.**

- What faith gives: Faith gives us a vision of our future home. (11:13-16)

What motivates the athletes competing in Rio? (Audience) So what kept all these folks listed here in Hebrews going? It's **the destination that doesn't forget the journey.** Read 11:13-16. What are some of these promises they didn't receive? (Audience) Land. Nation like stars and sand. Blessing of others.

But they caught a glimpse of those promises like Moses did the Promised Land. Here and now we regard ourselves as aliens (strangers) and exiles. We are on a journey, pilgrims traveling to our homeland, a better country, a heavenly one, to what is eternal, to what is ultimate reality.

Jesus told His followers that the reason He was leaving was to prepare a place for them, a heavenly place, a place that is real and eternal. *"If I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and will take you to myself, that where I am you may be also."* John 14:3 **The promise of both His work and His return is His giving of the Spirit to us now.**

Writing from a prison cell Paul reminds the believers in Philippi, *But our citizenship is in heaven, and from it we await a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ.* Philippians 3:20

Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God, for he has prepared for them a city. 11:16b When God appears to Moses in the burning bush hundreds of years AFTER the death of Jacob, He identifies Himself as the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob (Exodus 3:6, 14-15).

God is not ashamed to be identified with us. We are God's chosen race, royal priesthood, holy nation, His possession and people, writes Peter. The real question is: Are we ashamed to be identified with Him?

What we call *home* does not last. Our homes here are temporary. Immediately following his words about who we are in Christ, Peter reminds us that **we live now with our gaze to the future**. *Beloved, I urge you as sojourners and exiles to abstain from the passions of the flesh, which wage war against your soul.* 1 Peter 2:11 (cf. 2:9-10) **Who we are impacts Whom we serve. Whom we serve impacts both how we see and how we live.** Keeping up the home in which we live takes time and effort. How are you regularly investing now in ways that prepare you for your future home?

Conclusion. In Bunyan's story Christian eventually arrives at the Celestial City. Each of us must individually respond to God's grace of forgiveness and life in Christ. No one else's faith can substitute for our own. We journey, though, together, as Jesus, Paul, Peter, James, John and the writer of Hebrews all remind us. This is not an individual journey of one pilgrim, but Pilgrims' (plural) Progress. Are you one who is offering, walking, building, obeying and going . . . by faith? (Pray)

NEXT STEPS: Review the outline and passages listed. With another read through Hebrews 11:1-16 aloud several times. Share where you sense God causing you to *pay attention*. Discuss how your understanding of faith is similar to or different from what is described here. Abraham's faith influences his wife, son and grandson. How do you live out your faith? Is there something that needs to change? Share your next step and pray together. BONUS: In your personal devotions, spend time reading about God's speaking (Genesis 1), Abel's offering (Genesis 4), Enoch's walking/pleasing, Noah's building (both Genesis 5) and Abraham's obeying/going (Genesis 12). Prepare for worship next week by reading Hebrews 11:17-40.