

August 28, 2016 Temple Baptist Church, Jamestown, ND  
TITLE: FAITH'S WITNESS(ES), Hebrews 11:17-40 (*But We See Jesus #16*)

The Olympic Games are over in Rio with the Paralympics beginning in 10 days. If you were to choose Olympians of the faith, who would you choose and why? (Audience)

The Bible has such a list in Hebrews 11, the saints of faith who came before Christ. When we looked at the first sixteen verses of the chapter a couple weeks ago, the champions of the faith included Abel, Enoch, Noah, Abraham and Sarah. We looked at: 1) what faith is - living now with the conviction of what will be, 2) how faith lives - always directing the focus to God and 3) what faith gives - a vision of our future home.

The writer continues his list as he encourages his readers who are going through difficult times because of their faith to remain steadfast. *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

When times get tough, it is especially important to be reminded of those who share faith in Jesus Christ with us. That includes those who lived even before Jesus came. They lived by faith in what would be. So what is faith? Let's listen to Hebrews 11:17-22. (Read) Faith . . .

- Points past death to life. (11:17-22)

The author previously lists Abraham as one who trusted that God would deliver a son, a people and a land when he was a foreigner, aged and childless. He then references the homeland for which people of faith long.

He returns to Abraham's faith, but now it is after Isaac is born. The account of God's asking Abraham to sacrifice Isaac, the one through which God's promise comes, is detailed in Genesis 22. But Abraham does not hesitate to obey the Lord. Yes, God's promise and command seem to be at odds, but that is God's problem. *He considered that God was able even to raise him from the dead, from which, figuratively speaking, he did receive him back.* 11:19

Next Isaac is listed as blessing Jacob and Esau. Then we have the account of Jacob's blessing his sons as he is dying, followed by Joseph's giving instructions of the taking of his bones from Egypt with them when they would leave Egypt to journey to the promised land of Canaan (Genesis 50).

The author points out the passing on of the blessing, the promise first given when Abraham is known as Abram. The blessing passes to Isaac, to Jacob and then his sons, with Joseph given special recognition. **Joseph's request to have his body reinterred is a specific call to faith on behalf of those who survive him, that they not forget God's promise of leaving Egypt for their own homeland one day.**

**For each one the emphasis is not of death, but pointing past death to life. God's promise is all about life.** Faith points past death, the ultimate limitation, to life.

When we gather at the funeral of a follower of Jesus, we grieve, but we don't dwell on the past or even the present. We dwell on the promise that points us past death to life. That promise is not empty, as we know, but is based on the One Who defeated death. What is remarkable about the OT saints is that they also have this kind of faith. How can we who live on the other side of the cross, the sacrifice paid once for all, think that we should go back somehow? Abraham, Isaac, Jacob and Joseph point us past death . . . to life. That's what faith does. Let's listen to Hebrews 11:23-28. (Read) Faith . . .

- Looks beyond what others see. (11:23-28)

You've heard about the baby that was so ugly the doctor slapped the mother. (That's a very OLD joke, which probably just offended someone.)

The point of verse 23 is not so much that Moses was a good-looking baby as that Moses' parents saw something beautiful IN Moses. Moses' parents see differently, as does Moses.

There are practical consequences for the faith of Moses' parents. They purposely defy the Pharaoh's order. Likewise, Moses chooses to be identified with the enslaved, maligned Hebrew people. *By faith Moses, when he was grown up, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter, choosing rather to be mistreated with the people of God than to enjoy the fleeting pleasures of sin.* 11:24-25

What is this sin? Is it the sin of wealth? Lust? Power? Comfort? Revenge? The text in Exodus mentions or alludes to some of these. **For Moses the sin seems to be choosing the temporary in place of what could be. For Moses it is the sin of turning back.**

Do you ever face that sin? Saying nothing? Doing nothing? Turning back when things get hard? Choosing comfort over the uncertainty connected with faith? Of course you do. So do I. I remember being confronted with a particular sin a couple years ago. Others didn't confront me, but God through His word did. I realized I needed to confess that openly, which I did to several people. God also convicted me that I needed to humble myself and seek professional counseling, which I did.

This was not anything known or even directly harming another, although all sin does harm others, no matter how private it is. That's one of the lies I was telling myself. All sin affects relationships. **I was confronted with no longer managing sin, but looking for genuine healing. I needed the help of others to not turn back.**

Why does Moses not go back and claim the comfort and status of being known as royalty? Because he desires to serve a different King. *He considered the reproach of*

*Christ greater wealth than the treasures of Egypt, for he was looking to the reward.*  
11:26 The Apostle Paul writes something similar to the believers in Philippi: *But whatever gain I had, I counted as loss for the sake of Christ.* Philippians 3:7

The writer of Hebrews is not saying that Moses knew of Messiah, although years later he would write in Deuteronomy 18 of the Prophet to come, which didn't happen for another fourteen centuries. The point is that **Moses was looking ahead. He saw what others did not see**, but he could only do that when he refused to turn back.

*By faith he left Egypt, not being afraid of the anger of the king, for he endured as seeing him who is invisible. By faith he kept the Passover and sprinkled the blood, so that the Destroyer of the firstborn might not touch them.* 11:26-28 The ultimate Passover lamb came and was sacrificed once for all (cf. 1 Corinthians 5:7).

**Moses' faith wasn't a looking-behind faith, but a looking-beyond faith to what others did not see, which was connected with the promise of God Himself.** Now for our response. I am tempted to turn back when/in . . . Let's listen to verses 29-31. (Read) Faith . . .

- Motivates others to move (forward). (11:29-31)

The next examples of faith are not individuals, but rather a people, who leave Egypt and cross the Red Sea on dry land. Forty years later the children, now adults, and those who were born during the years in the wilderness enter the Promised Land of Canaan, march around the walls of the fortress city of Jericho, proclaiming that the LORD is stronger . . . and the walls fall.

Then is listed, from our perspective, a most unusual example of faith. Verse 31 lists whom? Rahab. Rahab appears as one of five women prominently listed in the genealogy of Jesus in Matthew 1. (If you want to marvel at God's grace, take a look at the reputations of the five women: incest, prostitution, a foreigner previously married, adultery and a pregnancy before marriage.) James also includes Rahab as an example of faith (James 2:25).

What to our eyes seems imperfect, impractical, impossible, improbable and imperfect, is the very people God uses to display His power and glory. But the key is a faith that leads to action. **Faith motivates others to move, not backward, not sideways, but forward.**

Tuesday evening we had a great training with Charlie Hogstad, our guest from River City, our sister church in Fargo. Charlie led us with practical teaching and examples of what it means to form and be communities of believers who join God on mission. What does that look like? For those of you who missed it, please go to the TBC website to view his teaching. You'll miss the group discussion and interaction, which was very helpful. September 6 is #2 of our three trainings. Plan to be there. **We are attempting to refocus existing groups and begin new ones with intentional practices**

**emphasizing spiritual formation, authentic community and focused mission.**

Groups like this for some are scary. We don't want to commit to meeting each week. We don't want to get to know others to the point where they see through our façade and begin to ask questions. We don't want to be uncomfortable with reaching out to people who are different from us, who need to see and hear the good news of Jesus.

Faith motivates others to move forward. As the author reminded us in chapter 10, we spur each other on to love and good deeds. We do that when we gather together regularly. We give each other courage to face our fears, to deal with our doubts, to face the enemy, to remind each other of the promises of our God, to hold each other up when we need it. (Read vss. 32-38.) Faith . . .

- Endures the unthinkable. (11:32-38)

The next verses describe various OT events known from both scripture and tradition. The stories of Gideon and Barak, Samson and Jephthah, are listed in Judges. Each is a very imperfect example on whom the LORD's Spirit comes. The three pairs are listed in inverse order historically. For example David and Samuel are the principle people of 2 and 1 Samuel, David representing the kings and Samuel the first of the prophets. Like those listed earlier each has his faults, but is also linked with faith.

**God doesn't require perfect, superhuman people to accomplish His will. He uses ordinary people willing to obey an extraordinary God.** Through faith these people conquered kingdoms, enforced justice and obtained promises. They stopped the mouths of lions (Think Daniel.), quenched the power of fire (Think Daniel's three friends.) and escaped the edge of the sword (Elijah, Elisha and Jeremiah). They were made strong out of weakness, became mighty in war and put foreign armies to flight. The widow of Zarephath and the wealthy woman of Shunem had their sons raised from the dead.

But then the author says that others were not victorious, who were tortured, mocked, flogged, imprisoned, stoned, sawn in two, killed with the sword, destitute, afflicted, mistreated, living in deserts, caves and holes in the ground.

In the midst of that wonderful passage in Romans of nothing being able to separate followers of Christ from His love, Paul quotes from Psalm 44:22: *"For your sake we are being killed all the day long; we are regarded as sheep to be slaughtered."* Romans 8:36 Paul continues by calling us more than conquerors, literally *Super Nikes* who cannot be separated from that love even by death.

What causes these saints before Christ's coming to endure the unthinkable? Verse 35 says their goal is to obtain or acquire a better resurrection. Jim Elliot, eventually martyred by the Auca peoples in the remote jungles of Ecuador, answers this question when he wrote in his journal why he was compelled to share the gospel. *He is no fool who gives what he cannot keep to gain that which he cannot lose.* Is there anything, anyone, to which you are clinging more than Christ? **Are you a fool for Christ or a**

**fool for following something or someone else?** Let's read the last two verses together. (Read 11:39-40.) Faith . . .

- Anticipates the better. (11:39-40)

The author says that what is better for the saints of old is connected to us who live on the other side of the cross. **Christ is the link that binds us and reminds us to live by faith for something better because of Someone better.**

It's a better hope (7:19) through a better covenant (7:22), connected with better promises (8:6) made possible because of better sacrifices (9:23), which results in a better and abiding possession (10:34) connected with the saints of old holding out for a better resurrection (11:35).

Think about your life. Do you set goals, boundaries, priorities and relationships with thoughts of the eternal or the temporary? What others say is of value or *the better*? Are you stubbornly resisting the work of the Spirit in you, through you, through us, or are you learning to live with others by faith?

Conclusion. The word in verse 39 translated *commended* by the ESV and NIV is literally *witnessed*. **When we live by faith, it is a witness to others of the Lord God Whose we are and Whom we serve. When we live by faith, we do so together as witnesses of that faith.** The list of faith is not about extraordinary people, rather it is a list of flawed people who chose to trust an extraordinary God. How are you part of that legacy of faith? What step will you take today to begin living by faith? (Pray)

**NEXT STEPS:** Read through the text several times aloud. What word or phrase seems to hold your attention? Write down a few thoughts or reflections. Review the outline and spend some time on the questions. With another person read through the text. Share your thoughts about the text and responses to the questions in the outline. How do you see people living out faith around you? Where may God be inviting you to join Him? What is your next step? Pray together. Prepare for worship next week by reading Hebrews 12:1-11.