

Hebrews 11:1-40

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 23 August 2020

Preacher: Graeme Shanks

[0 : 00] Folks, we are going to turn to God's Word now, so let me invite you to grab your Bibles and turn to Hebrews chapter 11. So this is the third week where we've been in this section of Hebrews, and we're in tonight at one of the most wonderful chapters in the whole of Scripture, the series that we've called Running the Race with Perseverance, the Christian life. So Hebrews chapter 11 is where we are, and as you're turning there, let me tell you about a friend of mine at university, and for argument's sake, we'll just call her Carol, okay? I was at Aberdeen University in Halls, and there was a group of us when we first moved in, all went out for a drink to get to know one another, and I'm sitting around a table, and I'm chatting to Karen for the first time. I said her name was Carol, didn't I?

Never mind. I'm giving it away. Okay, careful. Carol. And I'm getting to know her. She's telling me her story, where she's from, right? What she's studying, why she come to Aberdeen, what does she hope to achieve? She's telling her my story. She turns to me and says, what's your story? And I start telling her my story, and she finds out I'm a Christian, okay? And she comes out with the phrase, she says, I wish I had your faith. I wish I had your faith, right? And in an instant, somebody came into the conversation, somebody else, and that moment was gone. And I often think to myself, how would I have answered Carol if I had my time back again? Have you ever had that question in your life before when somebody says, I wish I had your faith? And you're thinking to yourself, I wonder what you mean by that word faith. How would I help Carol understand it if I had my moment back with her again? Maybe that's you here today. What is this thing called faith? What is the Christian faith? Maybe it's a question that you've been asked. What do you say when somebody asks you that question? Okay? This is what Hebrews 11 is all about.

Okay? This is exactly what the writer of Hebrews wants his readers to understand. This is what biblical faith is. And what he does is he reaches right down through the ages, right down through the corridors of the Old Testament, and he pulls out person after person after person after person, and he lays it on the table and he says, here's what biblical faith is. Here is the pattern of faith. Here is the walk. And he's aiming to show them that faith is not some kind of New Testament construct. It's not a BC idea, but rather this is the way that it's always been for God's people. Walking by faith. Walking by faith. Every day, walking by faith and not by sight. Allowing what God has said is true about the future to make sense both of what you see and how you live in the present.

[3 : 07] So let's read this together. This is Hebrews chapter 11. Now this is, there's a lot of verses here, here's what I want you to do. I want you to really try and engage with what's going on here. Okay? Try and engage with this, because this is really worth the effort. What is faith? Okay? What is faith?

Hebrews chapter 11. Now faith is confidence in what we hope for and assurance about what we do not see. This is what the ancients were commended for. By faith, we understand that the universe was formed at God's command so that what is seen was not made out of what was visible. By faith, Abel brought God a better offering than Cain did. By faith, he was commended as righteous when God spoke well of his offerings. And by faith, Abel still speaks even though he is dead. By faith, Enoch was taken from this life so that he did not experience death. He could not be found because God had taken him away. For before he was taken, he was commended as one who pleased God. And without faith, it is impossible to please God because anyone who comes to him must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who earnestly seek him. By faith, Noah, when warned about things not yet seen in holy fear, built an ark to save his family. By his faith, he condemned the world and became heir of the righteousness that is in keeping with faith. By faith, Abraham, when called to go to a place he would later receive as his inheritance, obeyed and went, even though he

did not know where he was going. By faith, he made his home in the promised land like a stranger in a foreign country. He lived in tents, as did Isaac and Jacob, who were heirs with him of the same promise. For he was looking forward to the city with foundations, whose architect and builder is God. And by faith, even Sarah, who was past childbearing age, was enabled to bear children because she considered him faithful who had made the promise. And so from this one man, and he is good as debt, came descendants as numerous as the stars in the sky and as countless as the sand on the seashore. All these people were still living by faith when they died. They did not receive the things promised. They only saw them and welcomed them from a distance, admitting that they were foreigners and strangers on earth. People who say such things show that they are looking for a country of their own. If they'd been thinking of the country they had left, they would have had opportunity to return. Instead, they were longing for a better country, a heavenly one. Therefore, God is not ashamed to be called their God, for he has prepared a city for them. By faith, Abraham, when God tested him, offered Isaac as a sacrifice. He who had embraced the promises was about to sacrifice his one and only son, even though God had said to him, it is through Isaac that your offspring will be reckoned. Abraham reasoned that God could even raise the dead. And so in a manner of speaking, he did receive Isaac back from death. By faith, Isaac blessed Jacob and Esau in regard to their future.

By faith, Jacob, when he was dying, blessed each of Joseph's sons and worshipped as he leaned on top of his staff. By faith, Joseph, when his end was near, spoke about the exodus of the Israelites from Egypt and gave instructions concerning the burial of his bones. By faith, Moses, Moses' parents hid him for three months after he was born because they saw he was no ordinary child and they were not afraid of the king's edict. By faith, Moses, when he had grown up, refused to be known as the son of Pharaoh's daughter. He chose to be mistreated along with the people of God rather to enjoy the fleeting pleasures of sin. He regarded disgrace for the sake of Christ as of greater value than the treasures of Egypt because he was looking ahead to his reward. By faith, he left Egypt not fearing the king's anger.

He persevered because he saw him who is invisible. By faith, he kept the Passover and the application of blood so that the destroyer of the firstborn would not touch the firstborn of Israel. By faith, the people passed through the Red Sea as on dry land. But when the Egyptians tried to do so, they were drowned. By faith, the walls of Jericho fell after the army had marched around them for seven days.

[8 : 06] By faith, the prostitute Rahab, because she welcomed the spies, was not killed with those who were disobedient. And what more shall I say? I do not have time to tell about Gideon, Barak, Samthou and Jephthah, about David and Samuel and the prophets who through faith conquered kingdoms, administered justice and gained what was promised, who shut the mouths of lions, quenched the fury of the flames and escaped the edge of the sword, whose weakness was turned to strength and who became powerful in battle and routed foreign armies.

Women received back their dead, raised to life again. There were others who were tortured, refusing to be released so that they might gain an even better resurrection. Some faced jeers and flogging and even chains and imprisonment. They were put to death by stoning. They were sawed in two.

They were killed by the sword. They went about in sheepskins and goatskins, destitute, persecuted and mistreated. The world was not worthy of them. They wandered in deserts and mountains, living in caves and in holes in the ground. These were all commended for their faith. Yet none of them received what had been promised, since God had planned something better for us, so that only together with us would they be made perfect. Amen. And as we were thinking this morning, as God's word goes forth, he will accomplish his purposes. So, friends, there is so much in there. Let me encourage you to go home and to dig into these characters, these people of faith in your own time. This is a bit like when somebody comes to the UK, arrives in London, day in London, up to Edinburgh, down via the Lake District, to Cardiff, back to London, and says, hey Presto, I've seen the British Isles. Okay, this is what we're going to try and do in 20 minutes this evening. So, go home and invest in this chapter.

It is quite incredible. But here's what I want us to understand when it comes to biblical faith. Okay, I've tried really hard this week to try and condense this and to think about what is it that connects all these people? What is their confession? Right, here's what I want to tell us this evening, that biblical faith, it confesses three things. Okay, three things. First of all, faith says that I'm obeying something

better. So, here's the word that keeps coming up in this section if you've got it there. Right, it's the word promise. Did you catch it as we went through it? Promise. Verse 9, Abraham went to the land of promise. Jacob, heir of the same promise. Verse 11, Sarah considered him faithful who what? Promised. And verse 13, verse 17, verse 33, verse 39, all bringing attention to the fact that the God of the Bible speaks. He speaks and things happen. He declares things to be true.

We're thinking about it this morning, weren't we? The God of the Bible makes promises. Promises. You know, I find that when we're looking for a tradesperson to come into our home and do a job, right? The kitchen sink's plugged, the fuse box is out, the toilet keeps overflowing.

[11 : 29] We've got questions in our mind. We've got a job we know we want to be done. What is it we do? We think, who can we trust? Right? Who can we trust? Who's going to turn up in time? Who's reliable? Who will deliver? I got asked recently to give somebody a review on this thing called Trust Pilot, right?

Have you ever been on Trust Pilot? You go on there and people are awarded a star based on how people have rated them, okay? Do we trust people? We always make that decision in our lives, don't we?

Here's the point that the writer to the Hebrews is making. God makes promises promises and he's got a track record of always delivering on his word. Always. Every time.

And so the text asks us the question, do we know the promises that God has made? Do we know them?

Right? Are we familiar with them? Are we spending good time listening to and obeying what God by his incredible grace has said is true? Right? Are our noses in our Bibles? Are we speaking them to one another? Presumably that's the reason, if you think about this, right? As you journey with Israel through the desert, due to Ronnie, right, we get that command that they're commanded to what? Write God's law on the doorposts of their homes, right? Bind it on their foreheads. I did this recently in our home looking for a nice bit of decor for our hall. Trying to get a Bible verse up there to help you remember this. It says, give thanks in all circumstances and pray continually. Give thanks in all circumstances and pray continually at the end of Thessalonians. Why do we need those reminders? Because I walk out the door every morning and I forget to give thanks and I forget to pray because I've forgotten who God is. Knowing the promises that God has made.

[13 : 33] Our proneness to forget. I love this. People used to joke about John Bunyan. You know the guy who wrote Pilgrim's Progress? And they used to joke about his peers, that if you cut him anywhere, the guy would bleed Bible. It's a cracking nickname, isn't it? The Bible bleeder. Are God's promises pulsing through us? That's what it asks us, right? Come with me. Verse 7. I'll try and do this with each of the points. Just bring in one person as a little case study. Verse 7. Here is Noah. What did God do? He, seeing the text, he warned Noah. So he spoke to Noah about what was going to happen. What did he tell him to do? He told him to build a boat. Why? Because God was going to send a flood to judge the world because of the world's wickedness. If you do the maths around Noah's age, okay, he's building that thing for something like a hundred years of his life. That's what I call a long-term project.

Imagine some of his peers. What are you up to today, Noah? I'm building a boat, right? Why are you building a boat? Because God's going to send rain. What's rain? That's another question. Why are you building a boat? Because God's going to judge us for our sin against him. And the only safe place for you and I to be is on this boat. Noah, that's one of the most offensive things I've ever heard anyone say.

You see, friends, walking the path of faith won't see us met with a bunch of cheerleaders on the side. The world is not going to provide cheerleaders for the life of faith following Christ. Saying, I love it. Tell me again. Tell me again. How does it go? And the world will not say that.

What does the world want to hear? It doesn't want to hear truth. The truth of Jesus Christ. And you know that song from the 80s? What was that again? Tell me lies. Tell me lies. Tell me sweet little lies.

That's what the world wants to hear. Just tell me what I want to know. Tell me what I want to hear. Noah told people of his generation what God had said was true. What will that mean? It will mean mocking. It will mean scowling. It will mean jeering. It will mean hostility. And yet what did Noah do?

[15 : 47] He kept on building. He just kept on building. Plodding along in a life of faith. Why did he do it? And this is really important for us to see in the text. Why did he do it? He did it out of what?

Do you see these two words? Reverent fear. In other words, he knew that not only is God good for his words, but that God is holy. Okay, he's holy. And though he may be incredibly kind and patient with sin, ultimately he cannot tolerate it and finally tolerate it, which means that there will be an expiry date for all the existence of all the evil in our world. All the injustice and all the oppression and all the abuse and all the pride that stems from mankind's rebellion against him that is at odds with who he is. He will judge it. Friends, do you not feel it in your heart when you look at what's going on in China? Apparently at the minute, the people being taken away to concentration camps. Is it not wrong?

And we feel a sense of huge injustice at that. Is it not right that the God of the universe would feel the same thing? That is to say that I doubt that Noah got many birthday cards each year as his life progressed. In a hundred years in which he's building the ark. But you know what? Faith says that I am obeying something better. Here's the second thing it says. It says that I'm journeying somewhere better.

Okay, the constant destination in this chapter that we're drawn to, do you see it? Is the place that God has prepared for his people. As modeled, and here's our second case study, verse nine, modeled by this guy called Abraham, this pagan worshiper. We're thinking about him this morning, weren't we? This pagan worshiper who God calls for no other reason than just God is gracious and he's going to work his promises through this man. Calls him to come and follow him. Abraham responds to God's call to get up and go, to act on the promise of God, to not make your home in the land, your home, your permanent destination, your permanent postcode, but follow me as I take you to the promised land. This is what God pronounces over this guy's life and he had a lot of stuff.

[18:04] And God says, go, follow me. And he went, verse 10, do you see how he's looking forward to a city whose designer and builder is God's? It's one for the architects among us, isn't it?

Whose designer and builder is God. Reiterated again, verse 16, Abraham has his eyes set on a better heavenly city. Love the story of the Bible starts in the garden and what we told at the end of Revelation will come down out of heaven, a city. The gates are always open. Why? Because there's perfect peace. And when there is no sun, why? Because God himself is the city's light as he dwells with his people. Think about this for a minute. This is home. If you're a Christian here today, this is home. This is our future. This is our great reward and turn to the gospels. And this is where Jesus tells us to store up treasure for ourselves. This home. This is our real home. This home. Right. I don't know if you remember the past family. It used to be a number of years ago, we're part of our church family here and they were here for three years, moved across from Sydney, Australia, to Edinburgh for three years. I had to give up a permanent address over there. Couldn't store stuff, had to sell everything, get rid of everything and move over. Okay. Normally we'd think it might be leave Scotland to go somewhere sunny, but no, they left somewhere sunny and came to Scotland. Their call. Okay. Remember Kate, mum, wrote something for the Gospel Coalition website.

And the question was, what has God been teaching you in this time as you've moved, is you've moved absolutely everything to come over to a different content, different part of the world. And she wrote, first of all, that decluttering is good. And second of all, she wrote, God is reminding us as we've had to just get rid of stuff, how life is not about accumulating possessions.

And we're content. Because we're called to store up treasure in the next life in the heavenly city, where Jesus tells us to store up life, to store up stuff. Investing there, investing there.

[20:27] What does the author say here about Abraham? And this is a lovely word. Okay. What did Abraham do? He acknowledged who he was. Okay. He wasn't just unaware of this. He acknowledged this, right? Verse 13.

What did he acknowledge? And here's a Facebook profile status for you, right? Who are you? What was Abraham? He was a stranger and an exile on the earth.

Is he it? He's seeking a homeland. He's seeking a better place. And the truth for those who are wedded to Christ by faith is that this is where we're heading, this resurrection future.

And it was C.S. Lewis who famously once remarked that if you read history, you'll find that the Christians who did most for this present world were precisely those who thought most of the next. Faith says, I'm journeying somewhere better.

And thirdly and lastly, it says, I'm embracing someone better. Okay. Verse 23. Here's our last one. Here is Moses who talk about being born with a golden spoon in your mouth.

[21 : 38] Here's this guy. Grows up in Pharaoh's palace. The privilege is his. The title is his. The resources are his, which I don't imagine if you think about Egypt in this day and a few bits of loose change stored up somewhere, which I hope was really called the banks of the Nile.

Okay. What did he choose? Do you see in the text it says he chose to be mistreated with the people of God rather than embrace idolatry, the fleeting pleasures of sin.

Do you see it? Whatever that meant in that context, perhaps worshipping the gods of Egypt, following their customs, abusing their slaves, just thinking, right? Quite literally walking like an Egyptian.

That was his choice. Okay. But what did he choose? He chose the path of suffering and poverty over the path of ease and luxury. Now, why would anyone do that? Well, surely it's only if a deep work of God in your life has revealed to you the greater treasure that God has in store for you. And that treasure is worth sacrificing for because God is good for his words. And in some way, right? If you come with me, verse 26, I'm trying to really wrestle with what this means.

[22 : 53] Okay. As Moses sides with the Lord, he foreshadows and embraces in some way the life of Jesus Christ.

See, the author just bring attention to that there at that point. Who didn't count equality with God something to be grasped. Who didn't live his life for the praises of man, rather for the smile of his heavenly father, who humbled himself even to death on a cross.

The great treasure of every Christian believer. Right? Not stuff. But Christ. Because here is what these Hebrew believers are being led to understand.

Because think about it, right? All these people in this chapter find themselves living where? Okay? BC. For Christ. And these believers find themselves living when?

AD, right? After Christ. And the thing is to see, although it might be two testaments in our Bibles, although there might be a blank page in your Bibles, physically in the middle there, make no mistake that this is one story.

[24 : 08] This is one story about one God calling out for himself, one people of faith, who are heading to one place because of his sheer grace, because of the person and the work of one crucified and risen Savior.

Right? It is one story. This is what he wants them to see. This is always how the life of faith has been for God's people. They stand, sorry, they stood where they stood in the story and fast forward 2,000 odd years later and here we are.

We stand in God's great story. And we are invited, just like these guys are, to keep running on the conveyor belt of faith.

Keep persevering for the reward which is ours in Christ Jesus. And in the words of verse 40, we too, if we persevere to the end, will be made perfect with every name on this list and every Christian through the ages.

Right? Get your head around that one. Okay? Martin Luther, William Tyndale, right? Rico Tice, Ruby Matthew. You just keep on going.

[25 : 21] The saints that have gone before us, some of the saints that are still living now, running the life of faith, the race of faith. Friends, let me just give you two really quick things that encourage me from this passage this week and then we're done.

Okay? How do you feel as you respond to this? Here's how I feel. Okay? I don't feel like a hero of the faith. Right? I feel like a zero of the faith so often.

But we have to understand that these people aren't listed here because they were morally outstanding people. You check this and they just, they made mistake after mistake after mistake. But here's what I want you to see.

Verse 34, these people aren't commended for the strength of their faith. They are commended by their faith in who their God is. Right? Verse 34, they were what? Made strong out of weakness. And that gives you and I a hope encouragement as we run the Christian race. And yet, here's the second thing to see how does God feel. Okay? Verse 5, Esau commended because he pleased God.

[26 : 25] You see it in the text. Verse 6, without faith it is impossible to please him. You flip it around, right? Meaning conversely, with faith it is possible to please this God.

And that God rewards those who earnestly seek him. Isn't that a wonderful thought? I was thinking of it this way. Okay, I remember my little girl Chloe, she was two, she swam one length in the baby

pool.

Right? At the swimming pool. I say swam, Alex, my wife, carried her the whole way. Okay? She came home that night, toddled in with a tadpole badge that she'd won.

Right? She's flung it on the floor and she went and did something else. Honestly, I was the proudest dad ever. My little girl's won what? She's won what? She swam what? She got the tadpole badge? Beaming with pride. That's my girl. Think about it this way. Verse 16, those who walk by faith, God, our heavenly father, here it is, is not ashamed to be called our God.

[27 : 24] Meaning that when we make much of all that he promises to be for us and when we take even the baby steps of faith and obedience walking in light of who he is, he's proud to be our God.

Faith says to the world, I'm obeying something better. I'm journeying somewhere better. And I'm embracing someone better.

And so verse 39 of chapter 10, here's where we come full circle. But we do not belong to those who shrink back and are destroyed, but to those who have faith and are saved.

You see, here's what I learned about my friend Carol at university. As I got to know her and her story over the days and the weeks and the months that followed in halls, as I understood it at the time, what she said that night wasn't the remark of an inquisitive onlooker, thinking, oh, that's interesting.

What's your faith? Actually, again, as I understood it at the time, she was asking it as somebody who had kind of flirted with the Christian faith at school, had been on the SU scene for a while and had got to the end of sixth year university and decided, it's not for me.

[28 : 40] It's too hard following Jesus. Standing for a Christian sexual ethic in a world that says you're mental, no, not for me. Saying that there's only one way to God when we live our lives in a world that says there's many ways, you make up your own way, to say that there's one way, no, it's not for me.

It's hard following Jesus and you've got to understand that these Hebrew Christians who are reading this for the first time, that's exactly the question in their minds. Is it worth it? Is it worth it going on?

You've got to understand that they are most likely rejected from their Jewish community that they've grown up with, ostracized in their community, nobody on our side, ridiculed in the public arena for standing for a crucified man and they're saying, is it worth it?

And so the writer here in Hebrews 11 isn't giving them this to satisfy some kind of academic itch in them. This is the passionate plea from a pastor to keep on running for Jesus, to keep on cracking on for Christ and to finish the race and win the reward that is ours in Christ Jesus.

And we'll think about that more next week. But for now, friends, we will stand as children of the promise. We will fix our eyes on him our souls reward.

[30 : 12] Till the race is finished and the work is done, we'll walk by faith and not by sight.