

Hebrews 11:1-7

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[0 : 00] Thank you.

Thank you.

Thank you. And not only to it, but to those that you have pledged your life to who intend to follow it.

In other words, that we are giving ourselves to Christ and to one another. The need that you would do the right things, even when things beyond your control don't seem to change.

When I opened this series some months ago in Hebrews, I mentioned that some of us are like them in this respect.

[2 : 03] They had hit the wall. They were nearing the point of spiritual exhaustion. Their faith was running on fumes and the consequence would be similar to a car that had run out of gas.

They were stalled. Engine off. Side of the road. Hood up. Looking for a ride. Looking for another way home.

They were a people who were beginning to wonder if they should really go on with it. And really go on with the relational commitments they had made in light of it.

Christian friendship was on the line in that congregation. The value of church attendance was on the line. Marriages were on the line. Relational well-being was on the line.

Having the assurance of salvation was on the line. There was a great temptation in the congregation to quit, to compromise, to accommodate, not only in the content of the gospel, but on the welfare of their own lives.

[3 : 17] Men and women, children who had come to Christ in recent and long-ago days were seriously entertaining the idea that they might be better moving on without it.

Without Him and without those who were walking alongside. Moving forward in life without an attachment to Christ or to the people or to the practices that define their life in it.

In other words, this book was for everyone whose active mind has ever entertained the question about the staying power of those sermons that you came to faith by.

It's for those people. It's for anyone who's asking, Was it really God speaking to me in those previous days?

When the things that drew me to Christ, do they draw me into continued life? And will I really go on? In it?

[4 : 19] And with those I have pledged to share my life with it. Put differently, Hebrews is for people in need of endurance. Am I speaking to anybody here today?

Today we have come to a chapter, if you'll look at it in front of you, that is hemmed in, literally, by this word, endurance. We've opened into chapter 11.

But in chapter 10, verse 36, we read the preceding context, For you have need of endurance. So the chapter will come in on the heels of a need.

And when the chapter closes in chapter 12, we'll find those words again. Verse 1 of chapter 12, Let us run with endurance, looking to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith, who the joy set before him endured.

And in the middle of the chapter, verse 27, we'll see that Moses himself was like one who endured. This chapter, famous as being the hall of faith, is actually hemmed in by the need for endurance, which then puts the next four sermons in chapter 11 right into play.

[5 : 48] For if the need of the church is for endurance, and I mean this church, our church, your life, your family, if the need is for endurance in Christian faith, the means by which this author would move you is to give you ancient examples of men and women who endured.

Men and women who endured long suffering, many of whom never received all the things they hoped to have accomplished in and through their own life.

So here it is. Chapter 11. The book of Hebrews. We've arrived at the most famous chapter in the Bible where we see the actions and examples of real persons who endured amidst a life of incredible difficulty.

In other words, his congregation was on the edge. And he calls them to look back to the examples who persevered that they might have someone in front of them to lead them home.

How many of us would like a mentor today? How many of us would like someone we could look to along the way? How many of us wish I had one by my side that would speak to me in the midst of my duress?

[7 : 06] Here they are, a chapter loaded with them. And today we'll see three. Abel. Abel. Enoch. And Noah. Interestingly, the introduction to the chapter, verses 1 through 3, talks about the faith that will be exemplified through this endurance.

He writes, Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen, for by it the people of old, those are the ones he's getting ready to talk about, receive their commendation.

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. This is his introduction that will launch him into all of his examples.

And I want you to see two things from it. Notice, the faith that he is writing about rests upon God's word. It's a faith that comes by way of commendation, verse 2, attestation.

For the people of old received their attestation. They received it, and where did they receive it? In the word that was written down for us to read. This word, commendation, or attestation, appears five times in this chapter, three times earlier in Hebrews, and in every time, it's referencing something about one who is commended in the word of God itself.

[8 : 35] So the readers are called upon to believe in the word of God, through whom these examples are laid out before the people of God as securing all that they need to do in their life as they walk with God.

Let me see if I can put it a little differently. What you and I believe about the word of God is the most important thing we believe about anything.

Now, I mean, you may not believe that, but I believe it. What we believe about the word of God and whether what is written there actually has attestation, confirming power, commendation for our lives is the most important thing we believe about anything.

That's why he actually mentions here the idea in regard to your faith and the creation of the word, the world by the word, verse three. By faith, we understand that the universe was created by the word of God.

Look, the Bible, when it opens in Genesis 1, does not make an argument for God's existence. It simply opens with these words, in the beginning, God.

[9 : 58] It assumes, God, you must take it by faith or reject it through the impressions of your own subjective reasoning in mind. Now, I'm not talking about how we created the world.

I'm not talking about the arguments we get concerning the creation of the world. But I'm talking about we receive the fact that God exists and has created the world through what we have read in this word.

The Bible isn't asking for your reasoning in the sense of, well, I'll have to be convinced along the way. No. It simply says, in the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth.

faith, then, is attached to the word. All the examples we're going to read about over the next four weeks come forth by commendation or attestation within that word.

And our faith is not a blind faith. It rests upon this word. So there it is. Three to seven, then, or four to seven, give you three examples today from the word about enduring in ways that we need to endure as well.

[11 : 26] They all come from a primordial time. They all deal with Genesis one through eleven. They all deal with what we call prehistory in a way. Before you get to Abraham and the formation of the nation state of Israel.

This is like, he goes all the way back to the beginning and says, you got need of endurance? Let me tell you something. From the very beginning of time, from before time, at least in regard to the way you measure it, people endured by faith.

When they could have quit. When they could have walked away. Three of them. One, the faith of Abel. Let me read verse four. By faith, Abel offered to God a more acceptable sacrifice than Cain, through which he was commended as righteous.

God commending him by accepting his gifts and through his faith, though he died, he still speaks. In other words, he's actually saying, though he's even in the ground, I'm bringing him up to demonstrate to you that what he did is still valid.

The faith of Abel. The faith of Abel, highlighted here, concerns his enduring in the worship we bring to God.

[12 : 47] That's the emphasis that he's drawing from Abel. Notice, he offered to God a more acceptable sacrifice. That's an act of worship. It also then speaks of God commending him by accepting his gifts.

The faith of Abel endured in bringing to God that which was acceptable worship. And if you know the biblical story, and I know not all of us do, it's in contrast to Cain.

In the Genesis account, this is what we read of Cain. Quote, But on Cain and his offering, God did not look with favor. Abel endures by worshiping God in an acceptable way.

Cain did not. You may have all kinds of speculative conversations on what made the difference between the two, but don't lose the center of the chapter.

It was his faith. He was trusting in God's word to accomplish something on his behalf, whereas Cain was not. This is why in Genesis, when God creates a people and a place and gives them his word, once Cain walks out of all of that, having killed his brother, what does he do?

[14 : 08] He goes and creates his own place, he forms his own people, and in the Genesis account, he rules it by his own word. Cain substitutes God's way, God's people, in faith, and he says, I'll have it my own way.

I'll build my own city. I'll call people by my own name. Abel, of course, by now long dead, died in faith.

He brought acceptable worship to God. Now, what's the implication? Evidently, God does not accept every religious expression of worship as valid.

This is something we definitely need to hear today. God does not accept every religious offering expression of worship as valid.

He will not look upon all worshipers with favor. That's a stunning shock to us. You see, there's a division between what you're going to find God's word is saying and what you're going to hear being espoused by the world in which we are living.

[15 : 24] there's the word on one side and the world on the other side. It doesn't get any more stark than that. It's like wisdom literature. It's like wisdom and foolishness. Black and white.

God wrote it down. You'll accept it or you'll reject it, but this is the claim of scripture. God does not accept every form of religious worship. We've been led to believe something else.

We've been led to believe that as often as you as if you would merely offer him something with sincerity, he's good. You can give him what you want.

You can walk the way you want. You can live the way you want. But if you're sincere about it in his presence, he's good. This little vignette of faith overturns all of that.

Truth be told, many Christians in the world, and I am sure some in our own congregation, are right on the verge this morning of abandoning the faith of Abel, who is committed to offering worship that is acceptable.

[16 : 37] Ironically, this reworking of religious faith today along the lines of sincerity rather than along the lines of faith in Christ's atoning blood is largely the product espoused by elements at work within the Western world over the last few hundred years.

Pascal put it this way, quote, men become gods, creation of a new type of man, a heroic individualist no longer bound by traditional morality but creating his own rules.

that's what's happened. Let me give you the last 400 years in a nutshell. There was a time when the scriptures were put forward and they held authority within the community and in all communities.

That authority gave way to science. Science for a couple of hundred years therefore held sway in all things confirming truth. Science has now given way. It's no longer the queen.

Subjective, individual, freedom, and autonomy is now that which rules. what we determine is right before God is as varied as there are minds in the room.

[17 : 49] And the world is let loose on this experiment. What about you? Are you in your own mind listening to the word or the world?

I know I'm going to sound old-fashioned here. I probably should have worn a tie. Have you drifted from the fact that God does not look upon all worship as acceptable?

It's so easy to fall into this in our contemporary climate. And the word for us is endure. And think of the context.

He's just laid out massive arguments that the only acceptable sacrifice that God received was the death, the blood of Christ. Think of the ironic arrogance at work in the world, which feels it has the right to tell all of the religions that your religion contains some truths but not all truths and therefore you are all on equal ground and I who believe none of it are determining that we all can come before it together.

Think of the arrogance. Someone who doesn't even believe, determining for all faith traditions what they believe. Stunning!

[19 : 26] And yet that is the experiment in play today. And then there's Abel. And so I say endure. the kind of worship you decide to bring to God is consequential, just as is your compromise.

We need men and women and children who are willing to stand on the example of Abel rather than on the autonomy of the individual.

People may say that God will take our worship in any form, but Hebrews 11 says something different. For the Hebrews and increasingly for us, the reason to endure was also clear.

Persecution is coming. Persecution already is in play for those who will stand uniformly, restrictedly, on the blood of Christ and faith as that which brings you to God.

Persecution is there. It's in play. No wonder we want to give way. That's the way I think of 1 John.

[20 : 41] Take a look at 1 John. He's a writer later in the scriptures, almost toward the end. When he mentions Cain, he brings him up in the context of Christian persecution. 1 John 3 verses 12 and 13, we should not be like Cain who was the evil one and murdered his brother.

And why did he murder him? Because his own deeds were evil and his brother's righteous. Now look at the connection. Do not be surprised, brother, that the world hates you. There's an element of persecution already in play.

Cain killing Abel is not so much about the first murder and therefore our discussions on rising violence in the world. Cain killing Abel is actually about the first martyr and the one who held on to the word in the midst of persecution.

And we are going to let that go and when we do we let go of the Christian faith. And I would say to you, you have need of endurance. The way he put it earlier in the chapter, hold on, hold fast to the confession.

Don't make a mockery out of all he's given you in Christ as if it didn't matter, it was unnecessary and there were any number of other ways that are equally comparable. God will not have it that way.

[21 : 55] It tramples underfoot all that he has done in Jesus. And in Jesus alone. Second, the faith of Enoch.

Look at 5 and 6. By faith Enoch was taken up so that he should not see death and he was not found because God had taken him. Now before he was taken up, he too was commended as having pleased God.

And without faith it's impossible to please him for whoever would draw near to God must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who seek him. The faith highlighted here with Enoch turns from an emphasis on the worship we bring God and is concerned instead with the endurance we need in our walk with God.

The writer of the letter put it this way. Did you see it there twice? That Enoch pleased God. That's the translated word. Pleased God. In the Hebrew when you're reading about Enoch in Genesis 5 the word there is walked with God.

So the Hebrew writer Enoch is one who's walking with God. The writer to the Hebrews he's the one who's pleasing God. Walking and pleasing find their convergence in the Greek Old Testament where the translator of the Hebrew to the Greek took the word walk and wrote in pleased and there it is.

[23 : 23] So when I say to you we've moved into Enoch into the need to endure in your walk with God I'm rooting it in the Hebrew scriptures. It's right in our text.

text. Let me put it to you this way. Enoch had a friend in God.

He made God his friend. He woke up in the morning and wanted to walk with God.

All of Enoch's life by way of illustration is positive. He was what I call an Isaiah 30 verses 20 and 21 kind of man.

Take hold of this later today. Isaiah 30 20 and 21. I'll read it to you. And though the Lord give you the bread of adversity and the water of affliction yet your teacher will not hide himself anymore but your eyes shall see your teacher and your ears shall hear a word behind you saying this is the way walk in it.

[24 : 40] When you turn to the right or when you turn to the left then you will defile your carved idols. You will scatter them as unclean things.

You will say to them be gone. Isaiah is prophesying that yes God let you walk away from him and many of us have. And yet he's prophesying that there's going to come a time when God is going to return graciously toward those who have bolted on him.

And the time is going to come when he's going to teach them and it's as if it's as if their entire direction in life is suddenly going to be hearing the echo of a word the way it puts it in Isaiah.

A word behind you saying this is the way walk in it. That's what's going to happen. It's as if the preacher went to the back of the auditorium rather than the front.

And with you walking this way away from God the preacher says this is the way. Walk in it. And on that day you suddenly turn. There's a need for a turning in our congregation today.

[25 : 55] There's a need for a turning within the heart of the individual. Not merely the external behavior but what we really need is for God to reach inside and by his spirit re-inform our steps.

And on that day we say to all the things we've been chasing be gone. So I ask how's your walk? How's your walk? More simply where do you want your feet to take you this week?

I mean your heart already knows. You can sit in the middle of church and you might already know where you where your feet want to take you come Tuesday. And this word is on your shoulder saying this is the way.

Walk in it. Give yourself to righteousness to holiness. Let me put it this way. What better object is there for your eyes to see this week than Jesus and all he has done for you?

Is there any place that you would rather pursue than his side where you might please him? Enoch is the example. He's the one worth emulating.

[27 : 14] You know in Africa I've met a lot of men and women in Africa having been there six or seven times. And I've met a lot of them who have become Christians. And when they became Christians they have a some of them have a tradition.

I don't really know what to call it. They change their name. And man they go by some they're like Holy Trinity Hyde Park. They got some big old Bible names. In other words their name changes in accordance with their new way of life.

What I'm trying to tell you is some of you today from this sermon forward need to put Enoch on your own name.

Lord let me be Enoch. Let me be one who wakes to please you. Let me be one who wakes to walk with you. Let me be one who while I had resisted your word for years maybe decades now receives you.

Let me say be gone to the things that I went and got. Let me return to the place where I first found rest. Let me treasure again the gospel I believed when I received it and Lord have mercy on all the road in between it.

[28 : 46] That's Enoch. Wow. I mean that'll get you up and walking out today. You need help. We need help. From this day forward walk with God.

Boy what a simple prayer that would be in your seat today. Never even having to come forward. Never having to look the pastor in the eye. Never having to schedule an appointment. Simply to say oh Lord I want all the things that are ascribed to Enoch.

I'm done with the rest of it. Notice the reward. What does it say about Enoch in Genesis? He's a one off. He's an outlier. It says and he was no more.

The whole indication is that he was translated that is he went from one language to another. He went from one world to another. The implication is that he actually somehow just got caught up into the very presence of God having pleased God having walked with God having always been with God he was no more.

He was with God. Now imagine that's the reward of life. If you put Enoch on your shoulders, by that I mean the weight of what his heart was about, you will be given the reward of life.

[30 : 02] What a far cry from the jaws that this very world word pulls us from. I would just simply say it to this today.

Abel, hold fast to your confession. Give him endurance in your belief in the gospel. Enoch, start walking again in ways that please God.

Noah, verse 7, name of my own eldest. By faith, Noah, being warned by God concerning events as yet unseen, in reverent fear, constructing an ark for the saving of his household.

behold. By this, he condemned the world and became an heir of the righteousness that comes by faith. Now, the faith highlighted here does not highlight the worship we bring God in the same way Abel's did.

It does not concentrate on the intention or nuances of our walk before God the way Enoch's did, but rather it concerns the work that we give to God and the way in which we stay away from the wicked world on our way.

[31 : 12] It's our work and our ways. Notice, by faith, Noah, being warned by God concerning events as yet unseen in reverent fear, constructed something.

He made something. He built something. He actually built a houseboat that would save a people for God. Now, many of us, let me just say to the men in particular, you know how to tank your life and you know how to tank the life of your family.

We can do that sitting down. Moses got up, went to work to save his home and to save a people for God.

Think of it. The ark almost is symbolic of the church at the moment. It contains eight people. God gave you eight. Get them. Build into work work for the God that loves you.

Let me put it this way. Your engagement in kingdom work is so critical. You demonstrate yourself to be like one like Noah. He has given you things to do. Do them.

[32 : 23] Do them. In reverent fear. Knowing that you must do them now. Because if you don't do them now, there's a fearful expectation of judgment upon all in the future.

I've told you before about my dad. He's 83 now. He's got this, well he was a coach, so coaches kind of do this thing with God. And he says, in one sense, God, I'm 83.

I'm 13 years beyond what's full. But with the experiences you've given me, I've been asked to speak at such and such an event or to do something for you.

Oh Lord, how can you possibly take me before that thing is done? It's almost like a little deal with God. I'm talking in a healthy humorous way. As long as I've got something on my calendar that I'm doing, I don't think you can be taking me.

He may go to 100 like that. He may go to be like Bilbo Baggins and walk into its 111th year. But you've got whatever time you've got left. Build something. In contrast to the world that's falling apart, invest in the kingdom.

[33 : 37] Invest in individuals. Put something together that will actually secure the salvation of those who might come with you. Notice, it's not only his productive work, but it's the way in which he stayed away from the world.

Noah was like a John the Baptist. He could look anyone in the eye and tell them, no. But he could also look at them and go, I'm working for you, but no, I'm not working for you.

It says he condemned the world. Other places in the scripture says that he spoke against the world. They actually indicate that for 150 years, he's willing to look people in the eye and saying, you're out of your mind to be neglecting what I'm doing.

And they're like, well, we'd be out of our mind to be joining you in this. This is ridiculous, this kingdom house you're building. He said to the world, no.

I condemn you. He wasn't merely willing to be part of the conversation. He wasn't really just merely wanting to connect with those who didn't have his worldview. He was willing to actually say, we're on two sides of this fault line.

[34 : 44] And I'm going to go forward my way and you're going to go yours. He was willing to walk against the grain. We need men, women, high school students, junior high students.

We need people in offices. We need people in study carols who are willing to work for the kingdom of God and to speak against the ways of the world. And let the chips fall where they may.

I mean, imagine, some of us are so frightened to mention that we're following Christ. It's like we have a third arm and we got it tucked in behind our back. We don't want anyone to see it until eight months in and then we can let them know who we really are.

Noah had no choice. His third arm was out there, the big old boat. Everyone knew what Noah was on about. Some of you are waiting to get to a point in life where it's all secure so that you can let the word out.

Because only if I get to where I need to go will I be able to have the influence I need. You will sacrifice the permanent on the altar of the immediate, as my mother-in-law told us. It's got to get out now.

[35 : 52] Your boat's got to be seen. Your work's got to be known that they might glorify God on the day of His visitation. That's the temptation of our time is to be soft.

It's for you to blend in. But you've got to do the tough thing. You've got to do the boat thing. You've got to go big. You've only got one life. Might as well let it go. For God and His kingdom.

Noah did it. And through him. enduring faith is seen. Well I'm done.

Time for me to sit down. Our congregation, you, me, we, are in need of endurance.

There are many temptations to accede. There are many reasons to accommodate. There are many difficulties you would avoid by compromise. There are many self sustaining thoughts in your mind that might actually rationalize a reason to quit.

[37 : 01] To throw in the towel. To walk away. To lose a grip. To stop showing up. And there are three examples in the primordial world worthy of your emulation.

Abel, Enoch, and Noah. Three areas where we so desperately need them to guide us in an exemplary way. The worship we bring.

The walk we walk. The work we do along with the way in which we've decided to live. The question is are we ready for this moment in this letter? Are we really ready?

Are we convinced? Christ? Did his massive argument on the superiority of Christ have any weight on what you and I do from this day forward?

Oh, that it would. Give him faith. Your faith. Your allegiance.

[38 : 08] allegiance. And guess what? You're going to find him faithful. Our heavenly father, help us now to remember through whom all our strength will come.

Help us to put our mind on you even as we walk out with our minds filled with these three lives. And help us as a congregation to grow ever stronger day by day, to be ever more transformed into the likeness of your son, to be ever more kind, ever more gracious, ever more faithful, ever more obedient, ever more joyful, ever more willing to ask for forgiveness, ever more willing to change our ways that we might indeed reach the destination life eternal in Christ's name.

Amen.