

Faith in the Unseen (Hebrews 11:1-40)

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[0:00] Well, as we continue in worship, let me invite you to join me in Hebrews chapter 11. And as you turn there, let me say thank you to Pastor Brett. We were texting overnight on his! Canadian vacation, and he sends his greeting to you. We had a chance to talk on the phone a few weeks ago and talk about this opportunity. So thank you to him. Also, just to echo what Pastor Jason said, thank you to you. Realize that not every church does this or is able to do this, to allow their pastor to go on a sabbatical like this. So thank you, First Baptist, for allowing your pastor to get some rest and to be productive. I know you've seen a lot of his pictures as they've been traveling.

I hope that he's able to come back next week refreshed and recharged. And finally, thank you to you, Pastor Jason. Thank you for your friendship. As Jason mentioned, he was my pastor in middle school and high school. So it's been a joy to see you, to see these different opportunities as you serve the churches in this area. Although, as he just mentioned, Brett texted us a couple weeks ago and said that he was going to finish up Hebrews chapter 10. That left all of Hebrews 11 for Jason and I. And being the nice guy that I try to be, I said, Jason, you're going first. You choose what you want. 40 verses. Jason chose six of those last week. So I have the other 34 today in the next 30 minutes or so. So if you can listen fast, I'll try to talk fast. Hebrews chapter 11. Well, this theme in Hebrews of faith you've seen the last couple weeks. With Brett two weeks ago, you heard this at the end of Hebrews chapter 10. Quoting from the Old Testament, verse 38, but my righteous one will live by faith. And then last week, again, in Hebrews chapter 11, verse 1, you heard this in verse 1. Now faith is the reality of what is hoped for, for the proof of what is not seen. What is not seen. I want you to make a note of that. Underline that or take a note there. That theme of faith in what is not seen or faith in the unseen is what we're going to trace through Hebrews 11 this morning as we look at all these different examples of men and women who had faith in the unseen. Now realize that this morning, as we sit here in Toccoa, Georgia, you have already shown faith in the unseen this morning. As you got out of bed and as you began to walk around your house, I'm imagining that you did not hold on to things for fear that gravity was going to float you up into the air. Or as you walked to your car, I'm betting that you did not hold on to some sort of rail afraid that gravity was going to take you into the sky and nobody would ever see you again. Why? Well, you had faith that gravity, though it is unseen, would continue to operate as it always has. You had faith this morning. You also had faith as you got into your car. Now imagine that for most of you this morning, you probably did not pop the hood on your car and look at every part of your engine to make sure it was working right before you put the key in the ignition or press start on your car and drove here this morning. You had faith in some unseen elements in your car that it would get you here to worship this morning. Now depending on who was driving, you may have had differing levels of faith. Maybe it was your spouse or maybe you were driven by a teenager this morning and maybe you had a little bit of lack of faith. That's okay. But you and I show faith in the unseen all the time. But friends, when it comes to God, when it comes to placing faith in our God who is unseen, we often struggle, don't we? Our God is spirit. He holds the worlds in his hands.

He operates in the unseen realm. And yet even as you heard last week, we have a tendency to want to place our faith in things that we can see, to place our faith in things that are tangible. And yet even that can deceive us. Even when we put our faith in things we can see, we can be deceived. And that's not just true in an age of artificial intelligence. That's been true since the beginning of the Bible. Genesis 3, Eve saw and then she was deceived. So as we go through Hebrews 11, let me invite you to have faith in the unseen this morning. Faith in our God who works for your good and for his glory, even when you cannot see. In fact, that's the main idea of this passage this morning. Because of God's past faithfulness to his people, we can have faith in the unseen by seeking Jesus. Because of God's past faithfulness to his people, as recorded for us here

in Hebrews 11, we can have faith in the unseen by seeking Jesus.

Let me read a couple of verses that we will end with today at the end of Hebrews 11 and then pray and ask for the Lord's help. Hebrews chapter 11, starting in verse 39. And God's word says this, Father, I pray that you would grant us this better faith in the unseen this morning. And we trust your promise even now that your word does not return empty. It's in Christ's name we pray. Amen.

[5:26] You know, when you have unseen moments in your life, when you're planning for the future and you can't see it, or are you going through suffering and you can't really see the end, when you and I have moments like that in our life, we often look to the past for faith in the present. We do this with God.

We do this just in normal everyday life. For example, if you have a surgery coming up and you're laying there on the operating table and the last thing you hear before the doctor begins to operate on you is, hello, this is my first time doing this surgery, that's probably not going to give you much faith. No, what you want to hear is that this person giving you surgery has reviews.

He's had successful operations. You want to hear testimonials. You want to hear how in the past he's been faithful to his craft. No one wants heart surgery from a doctor whose first time it is seeing an open heart. No, you want somebody who has been there before. Hebrews 11, then friends, is not a museum in this hall of faith. No, the point is not for you to walk around and see these great statues of Abraham, of Noah, of others, and to say, wow, what great faith they had. No, the point of this chapter is this is a resume, a legacy of God's faithfulness. How the Lord has been faithful from generation to generation to generation and how he continues to be faithful in your life even now.

This is God's great legacy of faithfulness. Hebrews 11 looks to the past. Almost 30 times in this chapter, you're going to hear this phrase of faith. Almost 30 times in these 40 verses, this idea of faith resonates throughout the passage. So what we're going to do is walk through this passage rather quickly, and then I want to close with four applications regarding our faith. Sound good?

That's what we're going to do anyways. All right, so verse 4, where you left off last week. By faith, Abel offered to God a better sacrifice than Cain did. By faith, he was approved as a righteous man because God approved his gifts. And even though he is dead, he still speaks through his faith.

Verse 5, by faith, Enoch was taken away, and so he did not experience death. He was not to be found because God took him away. For before he was taken away, he was approved as one who pleased God. So notice the repetition of the word approved there.

It just means to be a good witness or to give a report. We just read it in verse 39 as well. All these were approved by their faith. They were good witnesses. They gave witness to the fact that God was faithful.

[8:03] Again, we'll see that language throughout. Notice that Abel is an example of someone who is an innocent sacrifice. If you remember the story back in Genesis 4, Cain and Abel go out. They both offer certain things, but as the text says here, Abel has a better sacrifice for Cain. And Cain kills his brother Abel, the first family feud in the Bible, if you will. Abel is presented as someone who is innocent.

The Bible here refers to him as a righteous man. Keep that in mind. An innocent man, a righteous man, who will die on behalf of others. Sounds familiar, doesn't it? And what Abel and Enoch shows us here, friends, is that our reward for faith may not be in this lifetime. You see, when you place faith in God, you receive a reward that outlasts you. I see here in the text, verse 6. Now, without faith, it is impossible to please God, since the one who draws near to him must believe that he exists, and he rewards those who seek him. So there's going to be these summary statements throughout Hebrews 11. So the author here reflects on Abel and Enoch. And you say, Kenneth, what in the world?

How are these rewarded right here? How is Abel rewarded? He dies. How is Enoch rewarded? He's not given these lavish gifts. He's just simply taken away. Friends, it's because our faith in God earns a reward that outlasts this lifetime. You and I, when we place faith in Christ Jesus, receive a faith that escapes death. Abel and Enoch are alive even right now, experiencing the reward of faith. It's why we can say about martyrs who give their life for the cause of Christ have experienced the reward of faith.

Is that you? Are you willing to place your faith in Jesus to not receive reward here on this earth or even in this lifetime, but to receive it for eternity, to receive the reward for faith even in the next life? What about if God is calling you to do something radical or something crazy? Verse 7. By faith, Noah, after he was warned about what was not yet seen and motivated by godly fear, built an ark to

deliver his family. By faith, he condemned the world and became an heir of the righteousness that comes by faith. Again, notice that phrase in verse 7, this theme we're seeing.

[10 : 31] After he was warned about what was not yet seen. Not yet seen. So what was Noah, how did he have faith? How did he have faith in what was not seen? My family and I, we listened to Arky, Arky several times in the car on the way down. So we love the story of Noah. And Genesis tells us that at the time when Noah was told to build this ark, it had not rained on the earth and water had never come from the sky before. It came up from the ground in the Garden of Eden. You can read this in Genesis chapter 2.

So when God told Noah this was going to happen, what do you think Noah's conversation was like with the others around him? Yeah, I'm going to build this thing and there's going to be water falling from the sky. And these people looked at him like he had a six finger or something like, Noah, this is crazy.

That's never happened before. And Noah said, I'm going to build a boat. And Noah lived in a place out in the plains of Mesopotamia, not near any ocean or lake or anything like that. So Noah said, what's rain, God? What's a boat, God? These things were unseen. And yet Noah stepped out in faith.

What is God calling you to do that is unseen even now? What is he calling you to do that might even seem radical? This is what you heard from Abraham last week. He stepped out in faith, not knowing any of those details. Again, you heard this in verses 8 through 10. What is God calling you to do to step out into the unseen future? Parents in here, it's Father's Day. What is unseen in terms of the life of your kids? Are you willing to trust God with your kids and their future? Moms in here, future moms.

Are you willing to trust God even with your womb? Verse 11, by faith, even Sarah herself, when she was unable to have children, received power to conceive offspring, even though she was past the age. That's just a nice way of saying she was really old. She was 90. Since she considered the one God who had promised was faithful. Do you see what Sarah trusted in? The one who had promised was faithful. God's past faithfulness, his resume. Now notice this is an impossible situation that the Bible is describing here. Sarah is 90 years old. Abraham is 100 years old. And yet they are promised to go to a land, not knowing where they're going, but also to have a son. Verse 12, therefore from one man, in fact, from one as good as dead, again, just another nice way of saying it, he's old here, came offspring as numerous as the stars of the sky and as innumerable as the grains of sand along the seashore. Now imagine being 100 years old. Imagine being 90 years old. You've never had a child before and you're told to go to a land, not knowing where you're going, but you're also told you're going to have enough offspring that if you were to go to the beach, you're going to have more offspring than sand on the seashore. An impossible situation. Now as the dad of two little ones, I find it fascinating that they would even have the energy to keep up with two little or a little one, a toddler running around at 100 years old, at 90 years old. So I wonder, saints in this room, maybe you feel like you are too old for the Lord to use. I'm not saying you're going to have a child like this. Please don't hear me saying that.

[13 : 54] But I wonder what is unseen in your life. What is God calling you to do in your future? Would you place your yes on the table to follow him? Now Abraham got glimpses. The author here is going to provide another summary in verses 13 through 16. Let me read a couple parts for you. Verse 13, they all died in faith. But see at the end of verse 13 there, but they saw from a distance. They saw from a distance. This is similar to what the author has already said in Hebrews 10. These Old Testament saints saw shadows. Do you remember this from a few weeks ago? They saw shadows of that which the substance is who? Christ. They saw from a distance. Or even now in verse 16, but now they desire a better place, a heavenly one. Now these Old Testament saints, they are to be commended for their faith. But again, this is not a museum of saints here. It is God's resume. It is his legacy of faithfulness. We look to him. Well, that son of promise that was promised to Abraham and Sarah would eventually come. Verse 17, by faith Abraham, when he was tested, offered up Isaac. He received the promises, and yet he was offering his one and only son. His one and only son, to whom it had been said, your offspring will be called through

Isaac. And he considered God to be able even to raise someone from the dead. Therefore, he received him back, figuratively speaking. Now Genesis 22 covers this story where Abraham and Sarah are finally given Isaac in chapter 21. And in the very next chapter, Abraham takes Isaac on a father-son camping trip.

And yet he has Isaac carry this wood up a mountain, lays Isaac on the wood, holds up a knife to kill his son. And then the Lord calls out, Abraham, Abraham. Now I know that your faith is great. Now I've always wondered, what was the conversation with Sarah like after this camping trip? Did Abraham explain what happened? Or did Isaac say, yeah, dad raised a knife to my throat. But then the Lord provided the ram. They probably didn't go camping too much after that. But the ethical issue of killing one's son is not what the author of Hebrews mentions. Now instead, the author of Hebrews mentioned in verse 19, there's this tension. You see, if God promised that this line of faithfulness would come through Isaac, this one son, and then that one son was killed, then would God be considered faithful to his promise? If God finally provided this son, but then took this son away, what would people then think about God? And the answer, verse 19, is that Abraham even considered God to be able to raise someone from the dead. A one and only son raised from the dead to keep the promises of God.

God. Sounds familiar, doesn't it? Now here we come to the audience participation portion of our message. Look, I know this is still early. It's around 9.15, you know, the second service. They get to sleep in right now. But I need you to do this, and I did this with my four-year-old, so I know that you can do this as well. We're going to read through verses 20 through 31. Ten times you're going to see this phrase, by faith. So I'm going to say by, and I want you to say faith. All right, let's practice. [17:24] By faith. Okay, that was okay. We'll see if it gets better throughout, okay? Ten times. Ready? Follow along in your Bible. Verse 20, by faith. There we go. Isaac blessed Jacob and Esau concerning things to come. By faith. Jacob, when he was dying, blessed each of the sons of Joseph, and he worshiped leaning on the top of his staff. By faith. Joseph, as he was nearing the end of his life, mentioned the exodus of the Israelites and gave instructions concerning his bones. By faith. All right, more energy, more energy. We're almost done. Moses, after he was born, was hidden by his parents for three months because they saw the child was beautiful. They didn't fear the king's edict. By faith. There we go.

Moses, when he had grown up, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter and chose to suffer with the people of God rather than enjoy the fleeting pleasure of sin. For he considered reproach for the sake of Christ to be greater wealth than the treasures of Egypt since he was looking forward ahead to the reward. By faith. He left Egypt behind, not being afraid of the king's anger. For Moses persevered as one who sees him who is invisible. By faith. He instituted the Passover and the sprinkling of the blood so that the destroyer of the firstborn might not touch the Israelites. By faith. They crossed the Red Sea as though it were on dry ground. And when the Egyptians attempted to do this, they were drowned.

By faith. The walls of Jericho fell down. After being marched around by the Israelites for seven days. By faith. Rahab, the prostitute, welcomed the spies in peace and didn't perish with those who disobeyed.

Do you hear the repetition here? Throughout generations of God's people, by faith, by faith, by faith, they trusted in the unseen. God said, I'm going to knock these walls down. They trusted in faith. God said, you're going to cross through a sea on dry ground. By faith, they crossed over. And again, this is not a museum that we admire. Even the last one there, Rahab, the prostitute, even in the New Testament, her occupation is still referred to. These are people who were sinners, who messed up. And it continues in verse 32. And what more can I say? Time is too short.

[19:40] Pastor Jason, I feel this this morning. Time's a little too short for me. To tell about Gideon, Barak, Samson, Jephthah, David, Samuel, and the prophets who, by faith, conquered kingdoms, administered justice, obtained promises, shut the mouths of lions, quenched the raging of fire, escaped the edge of the sword, gained strength and weakness, became mighty in battle, and put foreign armies to flight. I mean, these often are not the ones that we would read through the Old Testament and put into a hall of faith. I mean, walk through some of these names here. Again, you see Rahab, the prostitute, Gideon, and Barak. Read through the book of Judges. Both these guys were scared to lead God's people into battle. Samson as well. Samson broke his covenant with God because he couldn't keep his hair cut. Jephthah foolishly sacrificed his own daughter. David had an affair, and it led to ruin in his kingdom. Friends, as we look at this list, this should give you and I hope and courage that we too can place faith in God. Because we too, sitting here this morning, are sinners in need of the grace and mercy that only our Lord Jesus can provide. Now, these men and these women had faith, and yet they were still sinners. Their faith was not made perfect because of themselves.

This should give you and I hope this morning. When you struggle with faith, when you struggle with doubt, I love what the honesty of the Father in Mark chapter 9, when Jesus asked, do you believe? And he says, I do believe. Help my unbelief. Don't you feel that in your life? Don't you feel the mixture of belief and unbelief in your own life? Lord, I do believe. Help my unbelief. The author brings it to the present day. Verse 35. Women received their dead, raised to life again. Other people were tortured, not accepting release so that they might gain a better resurrection. Others experienced mocking and scourgings as well as bonds and imprisonment. They were stoned. They were sawed in two. They died by the sword. They wandered around in sheepskins and goatskins, destitute, afflicted, and mistreated. I love the double mention of the others here in verse 35 and 36. Men and women who throughout the history of the church, we don't even know their name and yet we have been passed down this faith legacy from them. And I'm encouraged because most of us, if not all of us in this room, are not going to be included on a list of hall of faith like this.

Instead, we are the others. You are an other this week as you serve kids here at VBS. You are an other as you change diapers in the nursery so that other parents can get a break and come in here and worship. You are an other as you teach Sunday school. Your name, my name, is not written on any list like this, but friends, we are the others. Aren't you thankful for the others in your life?

I think of those who taught me Sunday school at Poplar Springs or those who took me to youth camp when I was young and obnoxious. Think of the others in your life. Would you dare to be an other for those in your life as well? And yet these others had an other worldly kind of faith. Verse 38, this world was not worthy of them. They wandered in deserts and on mountains, hiding in caves and holes in the ground. The world was not worthy of them because they had faith worthy of another world.

And we end where we began. Verse 39, all these were approved. Again, they gave a good report through their faith. But they did not receive what was promised since God had provided something better, something better, someone better for us so that they would not be made perfect without us. [23:41] Something better. You know, as I read through this story, especially as a kid, I always imagine what would it be like to be a part of these Old Testament stories. Have you ever thought about that? What would it be like to be on Noah's ark and to see all the animals come in? What would it be like here in chapter 11 to walk through the Red Sea on dry ground? What would it be like to experience the walls of Jericho just come tumbling down? And yet the author says here that as great as those stories are, when you and I get to heaven and we're talking to Noah, we're talking to Abraham, they're talking to Joshua, that they're not going to want to talk about any of that. Why? Because we have been given something better. We have been giving someone better. All these Old Testament saints had faith in someone better. A messenger, a Messiah, a seed from the line of Abraham, promised from the very beginning of the Bible. Someone better than the blood, innocent sacrifice of Abel in the field.

Someone better who would taste death unlike Enoch. Someone better who went on a journey in faith from heaven to earth. Someone better than Isaac, a true one and only son brought back from the dead.

Someone better than Moses, a greater prophet. Someone better than the Red Sea who liberates all from captivity. Someone better than Joshua. Someone better than David. A better prophet, a better priest, a better king, a better sacrifice, a better tabernacle. And his name is Jesus. Jesus, friends, is better.

He is better. Why? Why is Jesus better? You'll be here next week, but let me read just a portion. Hebrews 12. Therefore, in light of chapter 11, all these saints, since we have such a large cloud of witnesses, that is everybody that we've seen here surrounding us, let us lay aside every hindrance and the sin that so easily ensnares us. Let us run with endurance the race that lies before us, keeping our eyes on Jesus. See it here. Who is the source? Who is the foundation and the perfecter of our what?

Our faith. How do you have faith in the unseen? You have faith in the unseen by keeping your eyes on Jesus. Jesus. Friends, Jesus, especially if you're here this morning and you've never placed faith in the Lord before, this is totally different from any other religion or worldview. There is no other religion or worldview that has a list like this of people who look forward to them. There is not a list of people who look forward to Muhammad or since then. There is not a list of people who look forward to Buddha before or since then. Krishna, go through the line. Jesus Christ, Jesus alone. He who was, who is, and is to come. Jesus Christ is the reason that you and I can have faith in the unseen.

So let me close with four applications here. Number one, have faith in the unseen reward. Have faith in the unseen reward.

[26:53] Just like Abel and Enoch did not experience a reward for faith in this lifetime, they experienced after death or in light of death. And friends, it's often tempting for us to live for the here and now, isn't it? To live for the temporary reward. So will you trust in Jesus and take a delayed payment for your reward of faith? Students in here, young people in here. It can be so tempting to live for the here and now. It can be tempting to want the boyfriend or the girlfriend because that's what everybody else has. It can be tempting to give into the substance because that's what's cool. It can be tempting to live for the here and now. And yet what Jesus offers you is better.

And it is not just better for eternity. He says that your life will be better now. Your life will be better now if you will trust in him. Have faith in the unseen reward. Number two, have faith in the unseen future. Have faith in the unseen future. Abraham, Sarah, Isaac, this line of promise to where they could not see right away, but they trusted. Even going to a place where they didn't know they were going. Even being old in age and having a child, they trusted in the future that God was planning for them. I know we're still in graduation season here. Maybe some of you in this room have graduated even over the last couple months from high school, from college, maybe from another degree. Will you place your faith in God as you enter the workforce, as you pursue more school? Perhaps you would even pursue a spouse and a family. Maybe some of you are pursuing your career even now and you look forward to that new job. Or maybe you're in the day-to-day. Maybe you left home this morning with bills on your kitchen table, left on your countertop, and you came here this morning not quite knowing how you're going to pay those this week. Will you trust in God for your daily bread, the one who provides and meets your needs? Will you trust in the unseen future? When you can't see a way out, will you trust in the

God who does? Number three, have faith in the unseen suffering. Have faith in the unseen suffering. Again, you look at this list of what the others endured here at the end of chapter 11. They were tortured. They were mocked. They were scourged. They were imprisoned. They were stoned. They were sawed in two.

None of these saw suffering coming. And the thing about suffering is when you're in the midst of suffering, you don't know when it's going to end either. Will you trust in the Lord who sees the unseen suffering, who gives us faith to endure, who gives us faith that one day our faith will be made sight? And number four, have faith in the better Savior for he has been seen. Praise God. The reason that you and I can have faith in the unseen reward, in the unseen future, and in the unseen suffering is because Jesus Christ left the unseen in order to be seen. He left the throne room of heaven, John 3, and was sent, like you and I are now sent, to tell others of the good news. And when Jesus Christ comes on the scene, he comes saying, repent, for the kingdom of God is at hand. Why?

[30:20] Because the kingdom of God has now been made flesh. Jesus Christ came, John says, and he tabernacled among us. The word of God from eternity past made incarnate for you and I. And now you and I have his words. You and I have these witnesses, these reports, these eyewitness accounts. Jesus Christ has been seen.

Therefore, you and I can have faith. Father's Day causes you to reflect on the past. I was thinking this morning, my four-year-old and my one-year-old. I remember being in the hospital for both of their births. I remember holding them for the first time. And I remember becoming a dad and then being a dad for the second time. And I remember both of those times being amazed at how our kids could recognize our voice, even though we had never seen them before and they had never seen us. It's precious holding your child and speaking to them and seeing them calm down because they recognize your voice. And they look to the past. Even though their past is only nine months in the womb, that's all they have to look back on. They recognized a voice. It calmed them. It soothed them. It does it even now when our toddler is running around in the park and she scrapes her knee. She looks to the past. She runs to mom and dad because she knows that we've always held her. We've always provided band-aids for her boo-boos.

We've always kissed her. She looks to the past and she does that because she knows that mom and dad will care for her. That's our resume as parents and we always will. Friends, does your relationship with God look anything like that? Does it look like running to the arms of a heavenly father like we just sang about? This is what he desires for you so that when you can't see and that when you don't know what's going on, he is waiting there for you to run to his arms, to trust in him

so that you can have faith when you don't see what's going on. That's his legacy. That's his resume. Trust him even for the first time today. Father, thank you for this passage. Father, I thank you that you have chosen to include people in this text even who did not live perfect earthly lives. Father, it is an encouragement to us in this room because we are not perfect. Father, we are sinners in need of a better savior, better faith.

Father, as we reflect on the lives of Abraham, Noah, Isaac, and others. Father, we are thankful for the cross. We are thankful that you as a one and only son did come back to life and therefore you have been seen and we can have faith. I pray for my brothers and sisters here this morning who are going through suffering, who have stress and anxiety about the unseen future in their lives. Father, even now would you have a chance for us to respond in faith, in faith, perhaps even for the very first time. It's in Christ's name that we pray. Amen.