

Sermons on Hebrews - Lowell Johnson

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OH! WHAT A SAVIOR

Hebrews 1:1-3

We are beginning a study of the Book of Hebrews. By way of introduction let me share some facts with you:

1. The People

The book was written mainly to Jewish believers who were under persecution. Because of their persecution many of them were wavering in their faith and their spiritual growth was stunted. They were still serving but they were sluggish (Hebrews 6:9-12).

2. The Period

The book was written before AD 70 because the Temple was still standing and sacrifices were still being made in the temple.

3. The Purpose

To exalt the Savior and to exhort the saints.

Notice with me five characteristics of the Book of Hebrews.

I. It is a Book of Evaluation

The writer shows the superiority of Jesus Christ and His Salvation over the Hebrew system of religion. He uses three words over and over again.

1. "Better" – The word better is used 13 times.

Jesus is better than: (1) prophets, (2) the angels, (3) Moses, (4) Aaron, (5) Joshua, (6) the Levitical priest.

2. "Perfect" – The word perfect is used 14 times.

A. It means a perfect standing before God. This perfection could never be accomplished by the Levitical priesthood (Hebrews 7:11) or by the Law (Hebrews 7:19), nor could the blood of animal sacrifices achieve it (Hebrews 10:1). Jesus Christ gave Himself as one offering for sin, and by this He has "perfected" forever them that are sanctified (Hebrews 10:14).

B. The writer is contrasting the Old Testament system of Law with the New Testament ministry of grace. He is making it clear that the Jewish religious system was temporary and that it could not bring in the eternal "better things" that are found in Jesus Christ.

3. "Eternal" – The third important word in the Hebrew message

- Christ is the "author of eternal SALVATION" Hebrews 5:9
- Through His death, He "obtained eternal REDEMPTION" Hebrews 9:12
- He shares with believers "eternal INHERITANCE" Hebrews 9:15
- His THRONE is eternal Hebrews 1:8
- He is a PRIEST forever Hebrews 5:6; 6:20; 7:17, 21

II. It is a Book of Exhortation

The writer calls this epistle "the word of Exhortation" (Hebrews 13:22). The word translated "exhortation: means "encouragement."

Because of persecution some were forsaking the regular worship services (Hebrews 10:25) and were not making spiritual progress (Hebrews 6:1). Some were even in danger of going backward (Hebrews 5:12ff).

What does God do while this spiritual repression is going on? He keeps speaking to us, encouraging us to get back to the Word and to go on to maturity.

This is a good place to deal with the five so-called "problem passages" ...passages of warnings. But even in these "warning passages" the Holy Spirit encourages us. He warns us of:

1. Drifting from the Word 2: 1-4 Neglect
2. Doubting the Word 3: 7-3, 13 Hard heart
3. Dullness toward the Word 5:11 – 6:20 Sluggishness
4. Despising the Word 10:26-39 Willful sinning
5. Defying the Word 12:14-28 Refusing to hear

If we fail to listen and obey, then He begins to chasten us. God does not allow His children to become "spoiled brats" by letting them do as they please in willful disobedience. He always chastens when He must. This He does in love.

III. It is a Book of Examination

The writer wanted them to not only to examine themselves to be sure they were in the faith, but to examine their hearts to answer

the question, "What am I really trusting?" Am I trusting the Word of God, or am I trusting the things of this world that are shaking and ready to pass away?

The Jewish temple was about to be destroyed and the Jews would soon be scattered, but they could be secure while everything around them was falling apart ...knowing that the Kingdom of God cannot be moved (Hebrews 12:28).

IV. It is a Book of Expectation

The focus in this book is on the future. The writer informs us that he is speaking about "the world to come" (Hebrews 2:5), a time when believers will reign with Christ. Jesus Christ is "heir of all things" (Hebrews 1:2) and we shall share in the "promise of eternal inheritance" (Hebrews 9:15).

The emphasis in Hebrews is: "Don't live for what the world will promise you today! Live for what God has promised you in the future! Be a stranger and a pilgrim on this earth. Walk by faith, not my sight."

V. It is a Book of Exaltation

The Book of Hebrews exalts the Person and Work of our Lord Jesus. The first three verses set this high and holy theme which is maintained throughout the entire book.

At least seven truths are given to prove the superiority of Christ over everything and leaves you singing, "Oh! What a Savior."

A. Jesus is "Ruler of God's Universe" 1:2

"Whom He appointed Heir of all things." This thought points forward to the end and crown of all history. Christ is appointed to inherit everything.

B. Jesus is the "Reason for God's Creation" 1:2

1. John 1:3 "All things were made by Him."
2. Colossians 1:16 "For by Him all things were created."
3. Colossians 1:17 "All things were made by Him and for Him."

C. Jesus is the "Radiance of God's Glory" 1:3

1. "Who being the brightness of His glory." The glory of God is the manifestations of all His divine attributes. It is the shining forth of His glorious Person.
2. Since God the Father is invisible, Christ, like the Shekinah glory of God which hovered as a shining cloud above the Holy of Holies, is the manifestation (or the exact expression) of what God is.

D. Jesus is the "Revealer" of God's Character 1:3

"The express image of His Glory." The words "express image" translate the word "character" in the Greek. It is used of an engraving used to make an exact impression. Jesus Christ perfectly displays the character of Holy God. This speaks of His deity. The Lord Jesus set forth the holiness, the love, the mercy and the grace of God. There is no need to wonder what God is like, or who God is – we have seen God in Jesus Christ.

E. Jesus is the "Repent" (sustainer) of God's Power 1:3

"Upholding all things by the Word of His power." The word "uphold" means to bear a load and speaks of support. Jesus is the "administrator" of God's Word to and in the world. The word of Jesus is the word of power. What Jesus says, He has the dynamic power to support.

F. Jesus is the "Redeemer" of God's People 1:3

"When He had by Himself purged our sins." He is not only the Revealer of God, but the Redeemer of man. When He purged our sins, He removed them completely

Lifted up was He to die,

It is finished is His cry,

Now in heaven exalted high,

Hallelujah, What a Savior.

G. Jesus is the "Recipient" of God's Honor 1:3

"Sat down on the right hand of majesty on high." The Lord having done His work, is seen to have obtained His rightful position. It is significant that when the High Priest entered the Holy of Holies he did not sit down, no provision was made for this. But Christ, having accomplished His work of redemption, is shown by this statement to have completed it – "Sat down."

**The Father shouts across the ages as He sees His pierced Son – "This is my beloved Son in Whom I am well pleased."

**The Lord Jesus Christ has no rival or equal.

All hail the power of Jesus' name,

Let angels prostrate fall.

Bring forth the royal diadem,

and CROWN HIM LORD OF ALL!!!!

JESUS: BETTER THAN ANGELS

Hebrews 1: 4-14

The Bible speaks a great deal of angels. There are 105 direct references to angels in the Old Testament and 165 in the New Testament.

The primary purpose for their creation was to render special worship and service to God. (The service of messengers and ministers.)

Angels were created. Angels are servants. Angels serve before the throne.

Christ was begotten. Christ is sovereign. Christ sits on the throne.

Seven Old Testament passages are quoted in these verses to prove that Christ is superior to angels and are descriptive of Christ as "Son" from His incarnation to His glory.

1. Hebrews 1: 5 Psalm 2:7 Refers to His Sonship
2 Samuel 7:14
2. Hebrews 1: 6 Psalm 97:7 Refers to His Coming
3. Hebrews 1: 7 Psalm 104:4
4. Hebrews 1: 8 Psalm 45:6-7 Refers to His Exaltation and Rule
5. Hebrews 1:10 Psalm 102:25-27 Refers to His Millennial Reign
6. Hebrews 1:13 Psalm 110:1 Refers to the culmination of all things

Christ is better than the angels because of:

I. His Excellent Name Hebrews 1:4-5

Several angels are named

1. Michael was glorious in "might" as the commander and chief of the armies of heaven.
2. Gabriel was glorious in "ministry." He was the herald angel, bearer of messages from God to men.
3. Lucifer was glorious in "majesty" (before the fall) for he was the anointed cherub, the highest of all created intelligences.

The Lord Jesus has a more excellent name than any angelic being.

1. He is not merely mighty like Michael; He is Almighty.

2. He is not just a messenger like Gabriel; He is the Word.

3. He is not just a star like Lucifer; He is the Sun.

What is this “more excellent name” of His? SON!

Again: Angels are created. Angels are servants.

Christ is begotten. Christ is Sovereign.

The reference to 2 Samuel 7:14 takes us to the cradle. The reference to Psalm 2 takes us to the empty tomb and to the second advent.

As ministering spirits, angels were to “announce His birth” to “attend His resurrection.” and in a coming day to “accent His return.”

They are His servants – they cannot be compared to or with Him !!

II. His Earthly Fame Hebrews 1:6-7

The angels worshiped Him “when he stepped off His throne to be born in that Bethlehem barn.”

- They worship Him now as He is “seated upon the throne.”
- They will worship Him when “He comes again” to set up His kingdom.

They worship Him because they are but creatures and He is the Son.

The angels, great as they are, are only ministering spirits whose function is to rush to His bidding.

A. There are Messenger angels:

Those that came to the “patriarchs” – Abraham, Jacob

- “prophets” – Daniel
- “priest” – Zachariah
- “people” – Elizabeth and others

B. There are Ministering angels:

Who came to apostles like Peter and Paul.

Who care for “little children.”

Who came to Christ in the wilderness and the garden.

Who concern themselves for Christians.

C. There are Militant angels:

Who do battle against God's foes.

D. There are Managing angels:

Who rule the elements and function in connection with God's creation.

III. His Eternal Claim Hebrews 1:8-14

The Lord Jesus is indeed the Son of God as demonstrated by:

A. His Person Hebrews 1:8-9

In Hebrews 1:10-14 we have a description of Jesus Christ as our unchanging, unchangeable God. To be “unchangeable” does not mean that Jesus Christ is old-fashioned. What it does mean is that He is “eternally contemporary.” He is always current. He is always up-to-date.

Notice the description of the Lord Jesus:

1. His Sovereignty

“Thy throne, O God, is forever and ever” Hebrews 1:8

His dynasty and rule will never end.

2. His Authority

“The scepter of uprightness is the scepter of Thy kingdom.”

The constitution under which He governs can be summed up in a single word.

Uprightness.

His kingdom is organized around that one principle – He loves righteousness.

3. His Integrity

His integrity is beyond all question.

The authority under which He governs is upheld by His personal integrity.

4. His Spirituality

“God, Thy God, hath anointed thee.”

God's anointing added a spiritual dimension to the ministry or task for which a man was called. Moses anointed Aaron; Samuel anointed David; Elijah anointed Elisha – each anointed for his office and each anointed by another man.

The Lord has been anointed by God. There is no higher anointing than that.

When He was on earth, He was anointed so that He might redeem; now He is anointed so that He might reign.

5. His Vivacity (liveliness, spiritedness)

He was anointed with the “oil of gladness.”

The word for “gladness” here means “much leaping” and it carries the thought of dancing, exaltation, and rejoicing.

It was used of the unborn John who “leaped” in his mother's womb when Mary brought tidings to Elizabeth that the Messiah was soon to be born.

Once Jesus was “the man of sorrows,” but now He is “leaping” with joy upon His throne.

B. His Power Hebrews 1:10

The expression “hast laid the foundation” is an architectural term. It means that Jesus Christ was the one who conceived and designed the earth and the heavens. That great power of creation is still operative today.

When a man gives his heart to Christ, the creative power of God goes to work to make a new creation of that life (2 Corinthians 5:17).

C. His Permanence Hebrews 1:11-12

Although the suns and stars of space will perish, He will remain unchanged.

The whole material universe is like some vast clock slowly running down. Our sun is burning out at the rate of 4.2 million tons of heat every second. All things will eventually fold in upon themselves.

Creation will collapse but Christ will continue.

Like a garment that wears out or a mantle that is rolled up, creation is degenerating. Jesus, forever, remains the same. He is eternal.

D. His Position Hebrews 1:13-14

No angel has ever been invited to share God's throne.

Satan, trying to grasp that throne, was hurled out of heaven.

Angels, even the greatest and mightiest of them, are the servants of those whom Christ redeems.

Come and behold Him!

Born the King of Angels.

O come let us adore Him.

O come let us adore Him,

O come let us adore Him

Christ the Lord !!!

THE TRAGEDY OF NEGLECT

Hebrews 2:1-4

Neglect is one of the most destructive realities of life. Neglect can destroy so many things.

1. A house that is not lived in and is neglected.
2. A garden that is not cultivated and is neglected.
3. A marriage when a husband and wife neglect each other.
4. An older person in a nursing home that is neglected by family and loved ones.

I. The Reproach for Neglect Hebrews 2:3-4

The focus of this passage is on the word "salvation." Salvation is an inclusive word, encompassing everything God does for us and intends for us when He saves us.

Salvation involves:

- Regeneration – happens at the moment of the new birth.
- Sanctification – progressive growth in righteousness
- Glorification – our final state of being what God intended us to be when He saved us.

This is the first of five warnings in Hebrews designed to call people to remember the superiority of Christ and has to do with "neglecting salvation."

Notice again verse 3: "How shall we escape if we neglect so great salvation?"

Not just Salvation – but Great Salvation. Not just Great Salvation – but So Great Salvation.

The word "so" is used here in the same way it is used in John 3:16. This salvation is unequalled and unparalleled.

This salvation is great for four reasons:

1. The Person

A. The Person Who Provided it:

God designed it and gave it to man. He provided it!

The NIV says in verse 3 : Salvation was "...first announced by the Lord." But He did more than just announce it. He provided it.

Christ left the blessedness of the Father's throne room in heaven for the brutality of this earth to die as the Lamb who takes away the sins of the world (John 1:29).

B. The Price He Paid For It:

Our salvation was paid for with His shed blood and substitutionary death on the cross. Dare we neglect it?

The song writer said: Your love endured the cross ...despising all the shame

Your tears ...Your blood ...Your pain

You paid much too high a price for me.

But He knew that it was the price that must be paid if mankind was to be saved.

C. The Power It Possesses:

Men have borne witness to its power and greatness for Jesus has changed the lives of people through the centuries.

We could call Simon Peter and Paul to the witness stand and they would testify of the power of this salvation. Great Christians could be called from all the ages of history and their witness would be, "It is a great salvation" – more than that, those who gather in the church today would testify to the greatness of salvation.

Salvation by the blood of the crucified Son

Kept by the power of this blessed one

All glory to God, my sins are all gone

I'm saved by the blood of the crucified One.

D. The Provisions It Promises:

Our salvation is a multidimensional salvation! When most of us think about salvation, or being saved, we think of what happened in our lives in a moment of repentance and faith when Christ was accepted as Savior.

But the Bible teaches that salvation encompasses the Past, Present and Future. Thus we are able to say:

"I have been saved" from the Penalty of sin (Romans 6:23).

"I am being saved" from the Power of sin.

"I will be saved" from the Presence of sin.

How shall we escape – what? Hell? NO. Jesus has already paid the price for our sins and when we sin, we do not risk going to hell. But believers cannot escape the chastisement of God now and the examination of God at the judgment seat if they sin and take lightly the great salvation God has given them.

II. The Results of This Neglect Hebrews 2:1-2

Notice the subject is about a salvation "neglected" not "rejected." There are those who reject God's offer to be saved. But this isn't what the writer had in mind. He wasn't writing to the lost, but to saved people.

Since salvation in the past tense is an established, unalterable experience, and salvation in the future tense is yet to be experienced, the possibility of neglecting our salvation relates to the present tense. We have been saved, and because of that we have the assurance that we are being kept for the salvation yet to come (I Peter 1:5). But what about salvation in the present dimension?

What is involved in the believer neglecting this great salvation?

- It is the failure of the believer to make the most of the great salvation God has provided and which has been accepted.
- It is the failure to draw near to God in fellowship with Him through the reading of His word, through daily prayer and communion, through growth and development and maturity to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ (Ephesians 4:13).

Neglecting salvation results in the possibility of being slipped by.

The Greek word for "slip" has several meanings:

It is used of a ring slipping from the finger and being lost. A Christian cannot lose his salvation, but like losing a beautiful ring, he can lose the Preciousness of it. We could lose the wedding/engagement ring that our spouse gives us, but it does not mean that we would lose our spouse. It would just mean that we lost a precious part of a gift.

It is used of a jar that has a small unnoticed crack that gradually Leaks out all the contents. A Christian can, like a leaky jar, lose the fullness of salvation. Gradually, we can become back-slidden and lose the overflowing presence of the Lord. I am reminded of the black preacher who kept preaching on the fullness of the Spirit. Once a deacon asked him why he didn't choose another subject. He replied, "Because you brethren leak."

It is used of a vessel drifting on the water losing its Direction. The word “slip” means to flow like a river so the picture is not of a Christian drifting. It is a picture of a Christian being stationary and a river flowing or passing by him. Dr. Dobbs states: “It is the peril of being drifted by. The river of God's will is ever flowing on to bigger and more glorious purposes. Some individuals and churches are content to stand like children and splash in the shallows, while the great plans of God flows by them.”

III. The Remedy for Neglect Hebrews 2:1

The phrase “give the more earnest heed” means to apply the mind tenaciously. It means:

1. Don't miss out on the abundance of your salvation.
2. Don't let it slip by you.
3. Give the more earnest heed.
4. Pay careful attention.
5. Listen to the Word of God and obey the commandments of Jesus.

JESUS CHRIST: JUST THE KIND OF SAVIOR WE NEED

Hebrews 2:5-18

These verses present an unusual truth: Jesus is The Son Of God – but He has a Ministry as the Son of Man!

- As the Son of God, He might seem remote and unapproachable.
- As the Son of Man, He is the nearest of kin to all mankind.

Jesus is the Son of God who became the Son of Man that He might minister to us. God became man and experienced what men experiences.

Man experiences: He Experienced:

- trials trials
- temptation temptation
- sorrows sorrows
- misunderstanding misunderstanding
- sufferings sufferings
- death death

The Son of God did not have to become the Son of Man, but He did so that He might be an example, an encouragement and enabler to us as mankind.

He is sovereign over us. He suffered for us. He can sympathize with us as a man.

He is just the kind of Savior we need! !

John Milton, the blind English poet, composed of the greatest pieces of literature in the English language.

In his epic poem Paradise Lost he depicted the creation of man, the fall of man, and the effects of that fall in heaven and on earth. He described the efforts of God to redeem man from that fall by sending the Lord Jesus into the world.

Four years later Milton composed another poem, Paradise Regained. In those two poems he captured the essence of the gospels.

The Bible is the account of how human beings, by sin, lost paradise and how, by the death of the Lord Jesus Christ, paradise can be regained.

Hebrews 2 tells the story of paradise lost and paradise regained.

There are three things I want you to see:

1. Christ's Sovereignty Hebrews 2:5-9a

2. Christ's Sufferings Hebrews 2:9b-10

3. Christ's Sympathy Hebrews 2:11-18

I. Christ's Sovereignty Hebrews 2:5-9a

A. Mankind Reviewed 2:5-8b

This section of the epistle begins with a review of the sovereignty originally bestowed by God on mankind.

The writer gives us examples of what God intended for mankind and what believers – God's new creation of mankind – shall one day be and do:

1. Hebrews 2:5 The time is coming during the millennial reign of Jesus Christ that every born again child of God is destined to reign with Him and the inhabited earth and even the angels will be put under man's authority (see 1 Corinthians 6:2-3).

2. Hebrews 2:6 God is ever mindful of man – man is always on God's mind!

God ever "cares for", "visits", and "looks after" man. Throughout the Old Testament era God visited man: He visited Adam in the Garden of Eden. He visited Abraham, Hagar, Jacob, Moses, Gideon, Daniel, and the three Hebrews in the fiery furnace. He visited with Israel in the wilderness. Best of all, He visited Israel in the person of the Lord Jesus.

3. Hebrews 2:7-8b God's original intention was to crown man with glory and honor and give man dominion over plant life and animal life.

B. Mankind Revoked 2:8c

Mankind's intended rule over the created world has been largely revoked because of man's rebellion against God.

Hebrews 2:8c (Amplified Version): "But at present we do not yet see all things subjected to man."

Man can't control creation. In fact man cannot even control himself. He has fallen from that lofty pedestal where God placed him. Now he is a totally lost sinner in need of a Savior.

C. Mankind Revived 2:9a

All is not lost. The sovereignty bestowed on man has been gloriously, permanently, effectively, revived for "we behold ...Jesus" (2:9a).

In Him everything is restored. In Him, God has provided a second man. One worthy of the trust forfeited by Adam.

Christ's sovereignty will not merely be over a garden or even a globe, but over glory itself. Thus, our attention is drawn back to Christ. The dominion Adam recklessly threw away has been picked up by the Man, Christ Jesus.

II. Christ's Sufferings Hebrews 2:9b-10

It evokes no wonder that man should be made a little lower than the angels, but that God's eternal Son should be made lower than the angels will be an endless theme of astonishment throughout the universe.

He was made lower than the angels so that He might experience the sufferings of death on a cross. But notice the marvelous triumph of His suffering on the cross.

1. His sufferings were fitting: 2:10a "for it became Him."

2. His sufferings were fruitful: 2:10b. He brings "many sons unto glory."

3. His sufferings were fundamental: 2:10c. They made the Author of our salvation perfect. His sufferings are the foundation upon which all of His present ministry rest.

III. Christ's Sympathy Hebrews 2:11-18

A. We Are Related to Him 2:11-13

He does not have to be ashamed of us (2:11). Christ's sanctifying work on the cross is so perfect that God sees us in Him as perfect as He is. As for our standing is concerned, it is perfect.

A beautiful illustration of this is given in the Old Testament. Joseph's brothers behaved scandalously toward him. They hated him, scorned him, opposed him, and finally sold him into Egypt for the price of a slave. Yet, afterward, when they were thoroughly

repentant, Joseph was not ashamed to call them brethren. Joseph took them into the very presence of Pharaoh himself and presented them before the throne, and they were accepted by him.

We look at the Lord's people today in all their frailty and feebleness but Christ looks beyond and sees the fulfillment of God's purposes. Hence He calls us brethren and confesses us openly and joyfully before the great congregation in heaven.

B. We Are Rescued by Him 2:14-15

Jesus Christ accepted flesh and blood so that He could do what we could never do: face Satan and destroy him, "that through death he might bring to naught him that had the power of death, that is, the devil" (2:14b).

The word "destroy" (Heb 2:14) is a little misleading. It might suggest that the devil is no longer in existence or is no longer at work. Experience tells us that the devil is very much at work.

The word "destroy" doesn't mean that Jesus Christ put the devil out of existence, but would better indicate that Christ put the devil out of commission. Through His death, Jesus defeated and disarmed Satan and rendered him, at least potentially inoperative in the lives of believers.

A bomb squad can render a bomb inoperative. These experts in deactivating and disarming bombs find the trigger and take it out. The bomb is still very powerful, it can still explode and do a great deal of damage, but the squad members have taken the pin out. They have disarmed the bomb.

The Bible says that through His death on Calvary, Jesus disarmed the devil. Jesus took away the chief weapon of the devil – the power of death. When Christ rose from the dead He showed He had conquered death, Hell, and the grave.

C. We are Reconciled Through Him 2:16-18

We are reconciled through Him because He understands our nature from His own human experience.

Notice 2:16: The Lord did not take on the nature of an angel, He became a member of a human family, specifically, a Hebrew family..."he giveth help to the seed of Abraham."

The Lord Jesus has been much like his brethren so that He can be to us all we need.

We need someone to intercede for us compassionately – He is Merciful.

We need someone to intercede for us continuously – He is faithful.

Because He was tempted, "He is able to succour (help, aid, come to the rescue) them that are tempted.

The word "succor" means "to run to the cry of", "to answer the call of." Jesus is able to run to the call of those who are tempted.

He is just the kind of Savior we need !

WHERE ON EARTH DOES GOD LIVE

Hebrews 3:1-6

Where on Earth does God live? That's a strange question!

When Solomon was told to build a house for God – a temple, listen to his response – I Kings 8:27:

"But will God indeed dwell on the earth? Behold the heaven of Heavens cannot contain Him, how much less this house that I have builded?"

In Scripture God lived in six houses on earth and the pattern was the same in all six.

- God Designed the house – the house became Defiled – the house was Destroyed.
- God moved in – the house got dirty – God moved out!

Let me share with you four houses that God has lived in:

Primary – Pattern – Perfect – Permanent

I. God's Primary House (primary meaning original or first) Adam

Adam was God's primary house. Genesis 1:26-27; 2:7. Adam, God's first house, was built to reflect God's triunity.

First Thessalonians 5:23 – You and I are made up of three parts (rooms).

1. Body the world beneath us

2. Soul the world around us

3. Spirit the world above us

The house was designed.

The house was dirty.

The house was destroyed (in the day ye eat thereof...)

- You say, Adam didn't die – but he did.

He died spiritually – immediately

He died in soul – progressively

He died physically – ultimately

- Cut a flower: it's dead – it takes time to show, but it's just a matter of time.

God moved in ...the house got dirty ...God moved out.

II. God's Pattern House

The Tabernacle – Exodus 40:34-35 Three rooms: Outer Court

Holy Place

Holy of Holies

Solomon's Temple – 2 Chronicles 7:12

Herod's Temple in Jesus' day.

That temple was defiled – Matthew 21:13

The temple was left desolate – Matthew 23:38

God moved inthe house got dirtyGod moved out.

III. God's Perfect House John 2:19-21

Jesus is the only person who was born perfect. He was born of a virgin – without the sin nature of such as you and I were born.

Wait! Jesus never sinned. How was He defiled?

He who knew no sin became sin for us – Isaiah 53:6.

Thus, he cried on the cross ...”My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?”

John 2:19: “Destroy this temple and in three days I will raise it up.”

IV. God's Permanent House Hebrews 3:6: “Whose house we are.”

First Corinthians 6:19-23 – We are God's temple and His royal presence lives in us.

He has promised to never move out of us – John 14:15-20.

What if our house (temple) gets dirty?

- He will clean house, but He will never move out.

- I John 1:7, 9
- Hebrews 12:5-11

We are given:

1. A Holy Character – Hebrews 3:1

“Holy” means set apart. We are holy brothers and sisters in God's family.

2. A Heavenly Calling – Hebrews 3:1

3. A High Calling – Hebrews 3:6

The word translated “hold fast” is a nautical term meaning “to stay on course.” With faithful determination we should stay on course.

HEART TROUBLE

Hebrews 3:7–4:11

One of the killer diseases of our day is arteriosclerosis – known also as “hardening of the arteries.” If left unchecked, it will restrict blood flow and eventually kill. The heart by-pass operation is used to correct this problem.

There is a real danger of spiritual sclerosis – where our spiritual arteries are hardened and there is the restriction in the flow of, not blood, but spiritual blessings.

This is the second in a series of five warnings in the Book of Hebrews – and it is a warning to those with a rebellious heart.

- Hebrews 3:8 “Do not harden your heart.”
- Hebrews 3:10 “They do always err (go astray) in their heart.”
- Hebrews 3:12 “Beware lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief in departing from the living God.”
- Hebrews 3:15; 4:7 “Do not harden your heart.”

We are given:

1. An Illustration
2. An Explanation
3. An Affirmation

I. An Illustration Hebrews 3:7-11, 15-19

God often uses Old Testament events and experiences as illustrations in the New Testament.

Romans 15:4 “Whatsoever things were written aforetime were written for our learning.” Here we can learn from the experience of the children of Israel.

Three locations are important in understanding the history of Israel: Egypt, the wilderness, and Canaan.

A. Egypt: God delivered Israel from the land of Egypt. When they applied the blood of the Passover lamb to their houses all of the people who were “under the blood” were spared. This is a picture of salvation. You and I are “under the blood” of the Lord Jesus Christ. We who have been led out of Egypt, so to speak.

B. Canaan: God not only wanted to take Israel out of something, He also wanted to put them into something. They were to be led out of Egypt and they were to be led into the land of

Canaan (Deuteronomy 6:23).

Canaan does not represent Heaven. Sometimes the old hymns we sing mislead us. When we read the Old Testament we see that Canaan certainly wasn't heaven. There were a lot of fights in Canaan, and there were giants in the land. But in heaven all battles are over.

Canaan reminds us that the child of God needs to live a life of victory on a daily basis.

II. An Explanation Hebrews 3:12-13, 16-19

A people who had trusted God to bring them out of Egypt simply refused to trust God to bring them into Canaan. As a result they lost, not their salvation, but the joy, the peace, and the rest God intended for them in the promised land.

What happened to the children of Israel is familiar to most of us. Instead of believing in God's ability to lead them to the land of Canaan, the children of Israel rebelled against the Lord. Instead of going on into Canaan they went back into the wilderness and wandered for 40 years.

Israel disbelieved the promises of God, yet their history was one of miracle after miracle.

- They had been spared the death of their firstborn when the Passover Angel came through the land of Egypt.
- God opened the waters of the Red Sea.
- He gave them manna out of heaven ...water from a rock.

Read the report and plea of Joshua and Caleb – Numbers 14:7-9.

Because the children of Israel would not believe God and rebelled against Him, He was grieved (disgusted) with them and with the exception of two men, all of the generation wandered in the wilderness until they died; their graves testimonies to the danger of disbelief.

The true believer in the Lord Jesus Christ can fail as sadly as Israel failed in the wilderness. We are living in a world which is as barren of spiritual things as the Sinai Desert was of the things needed to the Israelites on their way to Canaan. God planned the wilderness experience for Israel as a necessary stage on the way to the promised land.

The Journey from Sinai to Kadesh Barnea was to be brief and each step a maturing process. The Hebrews failed to profit from the wilderness experiences and as a result were condemned to know nothing better than the wilderness.

What the wilderness was to Israel, the world is to us. God has something better for us than the world.

What caused the failure of the Israelites?

1. They hardened their heart toward God – Hebrews 3:8, 15; 4:7
2. An evil heart of unbelief – Hebrews 3:12
3. The deceitfulness (trickery) of sin – Hebrews 3:13

Be very careful. Don't let sin cause your heart to harden. Sin is like cholesterol. Get cholesterol in your system and you are going to have heart problems. Sin is the cholesterol of the spiritual heart.

III. An Affirmation Hebrews 3:18; 4:11

The word "rest" means:

- to be inwardly quiet, composed, peaceful.
- to be free from guilt and even unnecessary feelings of guilt because of the total forgiveness of God.
- to maintain our confidence in God and to enjoy the perfect, unshakable confidence in our salvation that we have received from our Lord.
- to enter into God's rest means that for the remainder of our lives and for all eternity we can learn of God. We can be sure that He will never fail to support us. We can depend on Him FOR everything and IN everything.

A threefold rest is discussed here:

1. Creation's rest 4:4-5

But God's Sabbath was broken by sin, as the Lord Jesus clearly declared. When the Jews accused Him of breaking the Sabbath, He replied, "My Father worketh even til now, and I work" (John 5:17).

2. Canaan's rest 4:6-8

3. Calvary's rest 4:9-11

Matthew 11:28-30

What a blessing it is to be at peace and at rest. We live in such a restless, warring world. Two artists once attempted to paint a picture of peace. The first painted an ocean, still as a pond, mirroring in its lines its depth, with a sailboat floating quietly by. Overhead the sky was blue with light, fluffy clouds. And on the shore children played in the shallows and made sand castles. It was a picture of peace.

The second artist's picture was nearer to the truth. He depicted a wild and rocky shore against which angry waves burst in towering clouds of spray. The sky was black with the storm, and the surging waves towered and heaved. But far up on a rocky crag, hidden in a cleft of the rock and sheltered from the wind, sat a bird, safe and secure in her nest, looking out with a serene and untroubled eye at all the turmoil beneath. It was a picture of peace indeed.

"There remaineth therefore a rest for the people of God."

THE AMAZING WORD OF GOD

Hebrews 4:12-13

What an amazing book the Word of God is!! It contains 66 books – 39 Old Testaments books and 27 New Testament books. Yet, it has only one theme – Jesus the Redeemer of mankind. Though over 40 men entered in to the writing of the Book, it has only one spiritual author – The Holy Spirit.

It was written over a period of 1400 years. Over 1500 miles separated the writers over the globe. Yet, it is without contradictions and speaks with equal ease and authority of:

- the known and unknown
- the pleasant and the unpleasant
- man's accomplishments and failures
- the past and the future.

The Word of God declares its:

- Authority Psalms 119:89 "Forever, O Lord, thy word is settled in heaven."
- Accuracy Proverbs 30:5 "Every word of God is pure ..."

Matthew 5:18 "For verily I say unto you, till heaven and earth pass, one jot or one tittle shall in no wise pass from the law, till all be fulfilled."

- Agelessness Matthew 24:35 "Heaven and earth shall pass away, but my words shall not pass away."

1 Peter 1:23 "...the word of God ...liveth and abideth forever."

The Bible describes itself like this: The Bible is ...

1. A Light for our understanding: "Thy word is a lamp unto my feet and a light unto my path." Psalm 119:105
2. A Balm to heal our wounded soul: "He sent His word and healed them and delivered them from their destructions." Psalm 107:20
3. A Mirror that reveals man's "For if any man be a hearer of the word, and not a doer, he spiritual condition: is like unto a man beholding his natural face in a glass." James 1:23
4. A Sword for our conflict: "And take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the of the spirit, which is the word of God. Ephesians 6:17
5. A Fire that purges out the dross: "Is not my word like a fire saith the Lord." Jeremiah 23:29
6. Honey for our delight: "More to be desired are they than gold, yea, than much fine gold: sweeter also than honey and the honeycomb." Psalm 19:10

7. A Hammer to break our stubborn “Is not my word like a hammer that breaketh the rock in will: pieces?” Jeremiah 23:29

8. Meat for our strengthening: “But strong meat belongeth to them that are of full age, even those who by reason of use have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil.” Hebrews 5:14

9. Milk for our nourishment: “As newborn babes desire the sincere milk of the word, that ye may grow thereby.” I Peter 2:2

10. A Seed that produces fruit in our “The seed is the word of God ...he that received seed into lives: the good ground is he that heareth the word, and

understandeth it, which also beareth fruit, and bringeth forth, some an hundredfold, some sixty, some thirty.” Luke 8:11; Matthew 13:23

11. Gold for our enrichment: “The law of Thy mouth is better unto me than thousands of gold and silver.” Psalm 118:72

Sing them over again to me,

Wonderful words of life!

Let me more of their beauty see,

Wonderful words of life!

The Word of God is amazing because of its:

I. Inspiration Hebrews 4:12

It is the Word of God ...its origin is God Himself.

Second Timothy 3:16:

- All scripture is inspired of God – God breathed.
- All scripture is profitable – beneficial, productive, and sufficient –
 - For doctrine – instruction, teaching
 - For reproof – conviction of sin
 - For correction – training in righteousness.

II. Operation

A. The Word if Alive

The word “quick” does not mean fast. “Quick” is an old English word that means alive. If you are cutting your fingernails and you cut the wrong way, we say we cut it to the quick – that means you cut it down where you live, down were it hurts.

The Word of God is alive and life giving. It comes alive in our hearts.

B. The Word is Active

The word “powerful” comes from the word that we get our word “energize” from. It brings life where there is death.

The same Greek word is used in I Thessalonians 2:13 where Paul referred to the Word of God “which effectually worketh also in you that believe.” Paul is saying that the Word of God works in you, energizes you. The Bible does something on the inside of a person.

What does the Bible do for us?

1. “Converts the soul” Psalm 19:7
2. “Comforts the heart” Psalm 119:50
3. “Cleanses the life” John 17:17; 15:3

III. Penetration

The Word of God is sharper than a two-edged sword.

A. As a sword it can be used ON us by the Holy Spirit.

A physical sword stabs living people and makes dead. Our sword, the Bible, stabs dead people and makes them alive.

The Bible probes deeply into the human heart.

The Bible Explores our lives:

- piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, and of the joints and marrow.
- the Bible probes deeply into the human heart.
- the Word of God reaches areas no human being is able to see. It gets under our skin.

The Bible Examines our lives:

- It is a “discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart.”
 - Other people see what we do, but God's Word examines why we do what we do.
 - It deals not only with our thoughts, but also with the intents behind the heart.
 - The Word of God examines our motives – we not only read the Bible, the Bible reads us.

B. As a sword it can be used BY us.

The Bible is our offensive weapon in spiritual warfare.

Ephesians 6:17: “And take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the spirit, which is the word of God.”

Simon Peter learned that you have to use the spiritual sword, not a physical sword. In the Garden of Gethsemane he decided he would take things into his own hands and he used a physical sword. He was aiming for a head, but all he got was an ear. He learned his lesson though, and on the day of Pentecost he picked up another sword. He began to preach the Word of God and the Bible says that when he preached those listening were pricked – they were stabbed, stung, cut – in their hearts. The result? Three thousand were saved that day.

IV. Revelation Hebrews 4:13

We are fully exposed to God. Nothing is hidden from Him.

There is no substitute for the study of the Word of God. 2 Timothy 2:15. There needs to be a devotion and a discipline in studying the Word of God.

Here are some guidelines to studying the Word of God.

1. Read it regularly.
2. Read it alertly.
3. Read it systemically.
4. Read it with variety (different translations).
5. Read it prayerfully.
6. Read it expectantly (expect God to speak to you).
7. Read it obediently – when you stop reading it obediently it will become a closed book to you.

JESUS: OUR GREAT HIGH PRIEST

Hebrews 4:14–5:10

The writer of Hebrews continues his theme of the superiority of Jesus Christ – above everything and everyone.

- In Hebrews 1 and 2 Christ is superior to all prophets and angels.
- In Hebrews 3 Christ is superior to Moses.

- In Hebrews 4 Christ is superior to both Moses and Joshua.
- Now in Hebrews 5 Christ is superior to Aaron, the first High Priest.

If you had been born an Israelite 2,000 years ago in the city of Jerusalem, your life would be very different from what it is today.

1. You would not be going to church every Sunday – you would worship on the Sabbath day (Saturday).
2. You would worship at a temple located in the center of the city.
3. You would only be allowed to go into certain areas of the temple.
4. There would be no pews or chairs to sit on.
5. Instead of a preacher or pastor, a priest would officiate. He would lay an animal on an altar as an offering.
6. Once a year the high priest would be allowed to go into the innermost sanctuary known as the Holy of Holies; there he would take the blood of a lamb, sprinkle it on the Mercy Seat, and make propitiation for the sins of the people. He would follow that same ritual year after year.

Jesus has changed all of that! Things are different now. We don't need a priest. The Bible says that we have been made priests in the Lord Jesus (Revelation 1:5-6).

But ...the Lord Jesus is our great High Priest.

The very existence of a priesthood and a system of sacrifices give evidence that man is estranged from God. It was an act of grace of God's part that He instituted the whole Levitical system.

Today, that system is fulfilled in the ministry of Jesus Christ. He is both the sacrifice and the High Priest who ministers to God's people on the basis of His once-for-all offering on the cross.

Note the marks of His priesthood.

I. He is Our Sovereign Priest Hebrews 4:14

Aaron was a high priest, but Jesus is the Great High Priest. No Old Testament priest could assume that title.

What is it that makes Him a Great High Priest? It is seen in:

A. His Person

To begin with Jesus Christ is both God and man. He is Jesus, the Son of God.

The name "Jesus" means savior and identifies His humanity and His ministry on earth. "Son of God" affirms His deity and the fact that He is God. In His unique Person, Jesus Christ unites deity and humanity, so that He can bring people to God.

B. His Position

Aaron and his successors ministered in the tabernacle and temple precincts, once a year entering the Holy of Holies.

But Christ has passed through the heavens. When He ascended to the Father, Jesus Christ passed through the atmospheric heavens and the planetary heavens into the third heaven where God dwells (2 Corinthians 12:2). How much better is it to have a High Priest who ministers in a heavenly tabernacle than in an earthly one?

He is enthroned on a throne of grace (Hebrews 4:16). In the Old Testament the Mercy Seat was veiled in the Holy of Holies. But grace does not veil itself from the people. Grace does not hide itself in a tent.

The common people were not permitted to enter the Holy of Holies precincts of the tabernacle and temple, and the priest got only as far as the veil. The high priest alone went beyond the veil and only on the day of Atonement. But every believer in Christ is invited and even encouraged to come boldly unto the throne of grace.

II. He is Our Sympathetic Priest Hebrews 4:14 – 5:3

Jesus knows us better than we know ourselves and still loves us.

A. He knows our Nature 4:15

We have weaknesses because of our human nature. Jesus became one of us. He experienced our weaknesses. He knew what it was to be lonely, to hurt, to weep, to hunger, to thirst, and to be rejected.

Furthermore, He was tempted in every way possible by Satan and yet did not sin.

B. He knows our Needs

We have many needs but our greatest need is for someone to deal with our sin problem.

No one else ever died the kind of death that Jesus died. He was made sin for us (2 Corinthians 5:21; I Peter 2:24). Men die because of sin, but only Jesus died for the sins of the whole world.

He meets our needs because He cares so much for us. He cares about our Sins, Sicknesses, Sorrows, Sufferings, Separations.

How comforting to be assured that He cares:

O, Yes, He cares, I know He cares.

His heart is touched with my grief,

Though the day be weary and the long night dreary

I know my Savior cares.

III. He was our Suffering Priest Hebrews 5:4-8

In the Old Testament the priest brought a sacrifice. Our great High Priest was Himself our sacrifice.

Look at our Lord praying: 5:7

- What did He pray for? That He might not have to die??? NO.
- Notice the last part of that verse – “and He was heard” – God answered His prayer.

His prayer was to be saved – not from dying, but out of death. The Greek word translated

“from” means “out of”. Jesus was praying to the Father for the resurrection.

Notice Hebrews 5:5: “Today I have begotten you” refers to the resurrection.

IV. He is our Saving Priest Hebrews 5:9-10

Hebrews 7:25

511 PILGRIMS SHOULD MAKE PROGRESS

Hebrews 5:11 – 6:20

When John Bunyan wrote Pilgrim's Progress he wrote of a man that he called “Christian.” He wrote of his conversion, his trials, the temptation he faced, his journey into the heavenly city. He traced the progress that “Christian” made from the time he was saved until he entered glory.

The truth is that every pilgrim – every Christian should make a spiritual progress in his earthly sojourn.

This passage in the Book of Hebrews has been the source of great misinterpretations through the years. It has caused more problems of interpretation than any other passage in the Bible, perhaps.

This very passage is the reason why many students of the Bible and preachers of the Gospel avoid preaching and teaching through the book.

If we keep in mind that the emphasis in this section is on making spiritual progress (and not the matter of salvation), we will steer safely through misinterpretations that could create problems.

In this passage, the writer deals with three topics that relate to spiritual progress:

I. The Marks of Spiritual Immaturity

Hebrews 5: 11-14

It is essential to be born into God's family in order to go to Heaven. But birth is only the beginning point. Birth is not the end of our Christian experience. The Bible says we ought to grow into maturity in the Lord.

- Second Peter 3:18 "grow in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ."
- Ephesians 4:13-14 We are all "come in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man (unto a full-grown man), unto the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ."

But these Hebrews had not grown. He describes their condition this way:

A. Retarded Development 5:11-12a

They were "dull of hearing." The word dull means "no push", "slow", "sluggish." "Dull hearing is not something we talk about much.

More often, we talk about dull preaching or dull teaching. I've heard some dull preaching, and to be honest I've done some myself! But, dull preaching is not the problem dealt with in Hebrews 5:11. This verse is talking about dull hearing.

There was "no push" to hear ...to receive ...to apply. Their condition was one of spiritual apathy and laziness that prevents spiritual development.

Someone has said: "The truths our forefathers once died for we now sleep through."

One of the first symptoms of spiritual regression, or backsliding, is a dullness toward the Bible. Sunday School class is dull, preaching is dull, anything spiritual is dull. The problem is usually not with the Sunday School teacher or pastor, but with the believer himself.

B. Restricted diet 5:12b-14

The "milk" of the Word refers to what Christ did on earth...His finished work on earth – His birth, life, teaching, death, burial and resurrection. The "meat" of the Word refers to Christ's unfinished work in Heaven.

The immature can not exercise their spiritual senses and develop spiritual discernment. It is a characteristic of little children that they lack discernment. A baby will put anything in its mouth. (I know some adults that are a little like that too.) They will listen to any teaching and not be able to discern between right and wrong.

II. The Call To Spiritual Maturity Hebrews 6:1-12

If we are going to make progress, we have to leave the childhood things behind and go forward in spiritual growth.

The "first principles of doctrine" are the ABC's of Christ's teaching.

- In kindergarten you learn your ABC's ...but you don't keep on learning the basics.
- You learn your ABC's so that you might read words, sentences, books. You learn the basics to go on to better things!

What are the ABC's?

1. Repentance and faith – is conversion.
2. Baptism and laying on of hands – preferences in ordinances.
3. Resurrection of dead and eternal judgment – prophecy.

The lesson of Hebrews 6:1-3 is clear. "You have laid the foundation. You know your ABC's. Now move forward! Let God carry you along to maturity!"

This progress does not affect salvation 6:4-6.

Several approaches to this serious passage:

A. View One: The writer is warning against the sin of apostasy, willfully turning one's back on Christ and returning to the old life. According to them, such a person is lost forever.

Several problems with this view:

1. The Greek word "apostasia" is not used in this passage. The verb for fall away (6:6) is "parapipto" which literally means "to fall

alongside.”

2. The scriptural teaching that assures the true believer is that he can never be lost. In fact, one of the greatest arguments for security is the last section of this chapter. (Hebrews 6:13-20; John 5:24; 10:26-30; Ro 8:28-30).

3. Those who teach you can be lost after salvation also teach that you can be saved again.

This passage says just the opposite! (Hebrews 6:4-6)

B. View Two: That these are not saved people at all.

Problems:

1. They were enlightened. The “once” means enlightened once and for all.
2. Tasted of the heavenly gift ...same Greek word to say Christ tasted death for every man. (Hebrews 2:9)
3. Made partakers of the Holy Spirit.
4. Note Heb 6:6. How could a lost person disgrace Jesus Christ and put Him to open shame?

C. View Three: He is presenting a hypothetical case.

His argument runs like this:

“Let's suppose that you do not go on to maturity. Does this mean that you will go back to condemnation, that you will lost your salvation? Impossible! If you could lose your salvation, it would be impossible to get it back again; and, this would disgrace Jesus Christ. He would have to be crucified again for you, and this could never happen.”

In Hebrews 6:4, the writer changed the pronouns from “we” and “us” to “those.” This change would suggest that he had a hypothetical case in mind.

D. View Four: May refer to one who commits the sin unto death. You should note that the words “crucify” and “put” in Hebrews 6:6 are, in the Greek, present participles: “while they are crucifying ...and while they are putting Him to an open shame.” The writer did not say that these people could never be brought to repentance. He said that they could not be brought to repentance “while they were treating Jesus Christ in such a shameful way.” Once they stop disgracing Jesus Christ in this way, they can be brought to repentance and renew their fellowship with God.

Christians can “sin unto death.” (I Corinthians 11:30-32; I John 5:16-17). This is God's chastening, a theme the writer of Hebrews will take up in Hebrews 12.

Notice the words of encouragement ...not to be dull of hearing, but to go on to maturity and produce fruit for the Lord Jesus (Hebrews 6:9-12).

- This progress demands diligent effort (verses 11-12).
- Christians may not produce the same amount of fruit, but they will produce the same kind of fruit.
- He tells them not to be lazy or slothful.
- The illustration of the farm (Hebrews 6:7-8), and the admonition to be diligent, reminds me of Solomon's warning (Proverbs 24:30-34). Read it – and heed it!

III. The Basis For Spiritual Security

Hebrews 6:13-20

Lest anyone should misinterpret his exhortation to spiritual maturity, the writer ended this section with a tremendous argument for the assurance of salvation. All of us Christians are not making the spiritual progress we should, but we need never fear that God will condemn us. The writer gave three arguments for the certain salvation of true believers.

1. God's promise (verses 13-15)
2. God's oath (verses 16-18)
3. God's Son (verses 19-20)

Our hope in Christ is like an anchor for the soul.

The Greek word for “hop” means “an anchor rope.” In past times, in every harbor great stones were embedded in the ground near

the water's edge. These served as moorings for the sailing vessels. Sometimes the ships could not make it to the narrow mooring under their own sail. In such cases a "forerunner" would go ashore in a small boat with a line which would be tied to the anchor rock. When the rope was fastened, those on the ship would pull the ship to shore with the anchor rope.

Our Lord Jesus, the Great Forerunner, has gone into glory and tied the rope of our salvation to His throne. Though we cannot see that rope, it is tied firmly to the Rock of Ages. Thank God for the unseen certainty, our hope in Jesus Christ.

I've anchored my soul in the haven of rest
I'll sail the wild seas no more.
The tempest may sweep o'er the wild stormy deep,
In Jesus I'm safe evermore.

When logical thinking breaks down ...theological thinking builds up!

MYSTERIOUS MELCHIZEDEK

Hebrews 7

Hebrews 7 introduces the second main section of the Book of Hebrews.

A. A superior Person – Christ. Chapters 1-6

Better than prophets ...angels ...Moses ...Aaron.

B. A superior Priesthood – Melchizedek. Chapters 7-10

1. A superior Order Chapter 7
2. A superior Covenant Chapter 8
3. A superior Sanctuary Chapter 9
4. A superior Sacrifice Chapter 10

It is difficult for a person whose faith has been deeply ingrained in one religious system to move from that into a different one.

For example: For centuries the Jewish people had been accustomed to having a priest represent them before God. That is what God had taught in the Old Testament. That is the way God had set it up.

Now, because of the Lord Jesus and His death at Calvary, the writer of Hebrews was saying, "It's all over for that system. God has opened up a new and living way. The old priesthood has passed away. You don't have to go to a man anymore to get into the presence of God."

Those ideas were hard for Jews to understand and accept, as it would be for us today if we were told to change our manner of worship.

Keep in mind that this section deals with a new ...better priesthood, and that Hebrews 7 deals with a new order in the priesthood. Priest after the order of Aaron is about to be replaced by a new order . . . Jesus Christ, who is after or like unto the order of Melchizedek.

I. His Person

This mysterious personality is mentioned only three times in the Bible.

Genesis 14:17-24 Four kings had come against Sodom and Gomorrah and won the battle against them. They took all of the goods of Sodom and Gomorrah and all their food, "and they took Lot," Abraham's nephew who dwelt in Sodom, and all his goods into captivity. Abram took 318 of his trained servants and went against the kings. He recovered Lot and all of the goods ...not only Lot's, but Sodom's also. It was there that Abram met

Melchizedek. (Read Genesis 14:17-23)

Psalm 110:4 This is a prophetic Psalm saying that the Lord Jesus will set up a new priestly order after that of Melchizedek. "The Lord hath sworn, and will not repent, Thou art a priest for ever after the order of Melchizedek."

His Position Hebrews 7:1-3

A. Notice His Titles

1. King of Salem (Jerusalem).

Priest of the Most High God. Hebrews 7:1

a. That combination must have startled the Jewish people, because in the Old Testament, God made it clear that there was to be a separation of the offices of priest and king.

b. But Melchizedek was a priest and king at the same time. He was a picture of the Lord Jesus who is our priest and king. He combines what was intended to be separated among men.

2. King of Righteousness } Righteousness and peace are often found together. "Mercy and King of Peace } truth are met together, righteousness and peace kissed each other (Psalm 85:10).

Notice Hebrews 7:3 "Without father, without mother, without descent ..." That doesn't mean Melchizedek didn't have a father and mother, he did. It means means that as far as the record is concerned, no mention is made of them.

B. Notice His Tithes Hebrews 7:4-5

Abraham gave him "the chief spoils", "the pick of the spoils", "the top of the heap."

Notice Genesis 14:18-19 Melchizedek brought Abraham bread and wine, predicting the Lord's table. And he blessed Abraham.

His Preeminence

There are two reasons why a new priesthood order was needed.

- The Levitical priests were subject to death. Hebrews 7:8, 12-16, 23-24.
- The Levitical priests were subject to defilement. Hebrews 7:24-28.

Jesus, our Great High Priest is:

- A Continuing Priest He lives forever.
- A Capable Priest He is able to save to the uttermost.
- A Consecrated Priest Hebrews 7:26-27

GOD'S NEW COVENANT OR CHRIST'S LAST WILL AND TESTAMENT Hebrews 8:1-13

Notice Hebrews 8:1 This is the sum ...the crowning point ...the main point.

The heart of Hebrews 7-10 is the priesthood of Christ, our Heavenly Great High Priest.

A. He is a Better Priest Hebrews 8:1-3

He is a Saving Priest Verse 1

... a Seated Priest Verse 1

... a Sovereign Priest Verse 1

... a Serving Priest Verse 2-3

B. He ministers in a better place Hebrews 8:4-6

- He is enthroned and exalted ...at the right hand ...seated.
- He ministers in the heavenly sanctuary ...not a copy or pattern of the heavenly.

I. The Description of the New Covenant

There are two Greek words for the word translated “new.” One of them meant an exact reproduction of something in the past. Thus, it would be new in point of time, but not new in kind.

The word that is used here is a word that means something brand new ...completely different.

There is an inescapable difference between this covenant and the Old Covenant:

1. The Old Covenant was basically ritualistic; the New Covenant is spiritual.
2. The Old Covenant is decaying; the New Covenant is eternal.
3. The Old Covenant was external; the New Covenant is internal.

There are two Greek words that are translated “covenant.”

1. One was any agreement by which two parties came together on equal terms, bargained with each other, and agreed to make a covenant.

The fulfilling of the conditions of that covenant were the determining factors of that agreement. If either of them went back on his word, the agreement was null and void. That was one kind of agreement.

In biblical terms, “marriage” was an agreement by which two people agreed to give themselves to each other. The success of their agreement depended on both of them.

2. But, the word here might better be translated “will.”

- A will does not depend on two people, it depends on one person.

- One person makes the will by saying, “This is what I'm bequeathing. This is what I want

to come to pass. I am going to make my will, and this is the way it is.”

- A person who is a beneficiary of a will is an heir of a will and only has one choice. He can not change or alter the will. He can only accept or reject it ...receive or refuse it.

That's the word used here.

Many people approach God as though they are on equal terms with Him. They bargain with God and try to get Him to agree to their conditions. It won't work. The new covenant is a divine instrument. It is a will. God has committed Himself to us. God has said to us, “I love you. I gave my life for you. I will give you eternal life. I will give forgiveness. You have to just receive it. You cannot change it.”

II. The Demonstration of the New Covenant Hebrews 8:7-12

Three promises are given by God:

A. The promises of God's grace Hebrews 8:7-9

The emphasis in the New Covenant is on God's “I will.”

The nation of Israel at Sinai said, “All the words which the Lord hath said will we do.” (Exodus 24:3). But they did not obey God's words. It is one thing to say, “We will,” and quite another thing to do to.

But the New Covenant does not depend on man's faithfulness to God, but on God's faithfulness to man.

In fact, six times in Hebrews 8:8-12 God says “I will.”

B. The promise of Internal change Hebrews 8:10

The law of Moses could declare God's holy standard, but it could never provide the power needed for obedience. Sinful people need a new heart and a new disposition within; and this is just what the New Covenant provides.

The Law was external; God's demands were written on tablets of stone. But the New Covenant makes it possible for God's word to be written on human minds and hearts (2 Corinthians 3:1-3). God's grace makes an internal transformation that makes a surrendered believer more and more like Jesus Christ (2 Corinthians 3:18).

We do not become holy people by trying to obey God's Law in our own power. It is by yielding to the Holy Spirit within that we fulfill

the righteousness of the Law (Roman 8:1-4); and this is wholly of grace.

C. The promise of Forgiveness of all. Hebrews 8:11-12

There is no forgiveness under the Law because the Law was not given for that purpose.

- Romans 3:20: Therefore, by the deeds of the Law there shall no flesh be justified in His sight; for by the Law is knowledge of sin.”

- The Law could not promise forgiveness to Israel, let alone mankind. It is only through the sacrifice of Jesus Christ that forgiveness is possible to all who call on Him.

The Old Testament sacrifices brought a remembrance of sins, not a remission of sins. (Hebrews 10:1-3, 18).

What does it mean that God remembers our sins and iniquities no more? (Hebrews 8:12) This important statement is quoted again in Hebrews 10:16-17. Does it mean that our all-knowing God can actually forget what we have done? If God forgot anything, He would cease to be God! The phrase “remember no more” means “hold against us no more.” God recalls what we have done, but He does not hold it against us. He deals with us on the basis of grace and mercy, not law and merit. Once sin has been forgiven, it is never brought before us again. The matter is settled eternally.

As a pastor in counseling ministry, I have often heard people say, “Well, I can forgive – but I can not forget!” “Of course you can not forget,” I usually reply. “The more you try to put things out of your mind, the more you will remember them. But that isn't what it means to forget.” Then I go on to explain that “to forget” means “not to hold it against the person has wronged us.” We may remember what others have done, but we treat them as though they never did it.

How is this possible? It is possible because of the cross, for there God treated His Son as though He had done it! Our experience of forgiveness from God makes it possible for us to forgive others.

III. The Destination of the New Covenant

Hebrews 8:13

The Old Covenant is fading out of sight. It is passing off the scene. The New Covenant will continue on for all eternity. The Old Covenant has been replaced, but the New Covenant will never be replaced. It is eternal. It is permanent.

This is what God offers us now. He offers us relief, forgiveness and eternal salvation with Him. It is God's eternal agreement with us. He extends it to us now. Ours is but to accept His provision.

THE BLOOD COVENANT

Hebrews 9:1-28

The “blood” is spoken of no less than ten times in Hebrews 9: verse 12 (twice), 13, 14, 18, 20, 21, 22 (twice), 25.

It would be easy to get bogged down in verses 1-10, but the emphasis is not on the tabernacle or the things in the tabernacle.

- The writer makes that plain in verse 5: “But we can not discuss these things in detail now.”
- The emphasis is on that which is seen and that which is unseen ...not just the outward part of the tabernacle but what took place in the hidden part – the Holy of Holies.
- Just so, the important thing with man's relationship with God is not what goes on with the body – that which is “seen” ...but that which goes on in the soul – that which is not seen.
- That is why he uses the word “conscience” twice (verses 9-14).
- What is the point of this whole chapter

Many individuals hope that by doing something external, they will solve something internal.

The writer says, “No. Deal first with the internal. Make sure you make right the hidden part – the soul of your being.”

Read Hebrews 9:11-28

“Covenant” is the term applied to various transactions made between God and man, or between two men. The Hebrew word “berith” means “to cut.” In the Old Testament a covenant included an oath and was ratified by the slaughtering of an animal. This was an indication that if a party broke the covenant it would fare with them as with the slain animal.

The Old Covenant included the Law and the system of blood sacrifice of animals. The transgressor of divine law was subject to the penalty of death. God provided a system whereby an animal could be slain to atone or cover those sins.

The New Covenant displaces the old. The New Testament word “diatheke” means “will” (and is sometimes translated “testament.”

Our Lord Jesus Christ was “cut,” as the offering, to ratify the New Covenant. Furthermore, the New Covenant was His last will and testament ...thus, it was in force upon His death, and all the blessings of New Covenant became available to those that believe. Salvation is not merely a decision we make, but a covenant we enter.

The issues of salvation are matters of life and death. In this chapter, the word “appear” occurs three times in relationship to Jesus. It is His threefold appearing that guarantees the covenant.

I. The Ratification (Approval) Of the Covenant

Hebrews 9:11-15, 2

Christ appeared on earth to shed His blood for us and to obtain the eternal. Christ appeared on this earth and became subject to the limitations of time that He might give us the eternal!

Notice: the word “eternal” is used three times in these verses.

A. By His blood He obtained eternal redemption. Hebrews 9:12

Notice: By His own blood. Why blood? To teach us that: ...sin is serious.

...forgiveness is costly.

...life is in the Blood. (Leviticus 17:11)

Listen to Hebrews 9:22: “Without the shedding of blood there is no remission (forgiveness) of sin.”

The blood of Jesus Christ: ...purchased our redemption (verse 12)

...purged our conscience (verse 14)

...provided our inheritance (verse 15)

...pardoned our sins (verse 22)

...put away (annulled) our sins (verse 26)

...precluded (interrupted) our judgment (verse 27)

Hallelujah for the blood!

He offered Himself through the Eternal Spirit (Hebrews 9:14). What Jesus came to do was not temporary or repetitive. His offering was once for all. The Old Covenant could not cleanse the conscience, only cover up the sin. Jesus cleanses the guilt and sets us free to continually serve God.

By His death we may receive, once and for all, an Eternal Inheritance (Hebrews 9:15). The will of our Lord is now ours because of His death. We are the recipients of a great inheritance. The cost of that great inheritance was His blood.

II. The Preservation of the Covenant

Hebrews 9:15-24

Verse 26 tells us Jesus appeared on earth to shed His blood for us.

Verse 24 tells us Jesus now appears in Heaven to plead His blood for us.

When Jesus died on the cross, His last will and testament came into effect. Every believer was in Christ's will – we were the benefactors.

What was in His will? What did He will us?

- Eternal redemption.
- Eternal inheritance – an eternal home.
- No possibility of ever being judged for our past sins.

It often happens that a will is contested in court. The benefactors intentions are set aside, as relatives and other claimants come forward, insisting that the terms of the will be changed. Often, clever lawyers can completely annul the intentions of the testator as declared in his will. To ensure that the terms of a will are carried out to the letter as intended by the testator, the ideal thing would be for the testator himself to come back and execute his will! Such a thing is patently impossible – except for Christ. This is exactly what He has done. The remaining verses show just how our inheritance is being controlled by our Benefactor Who, living in the power of an endless life on the resurrection side of the grave, makes quite sure His intentions are carried out.

III. The Consummation (Completion) of the Covenant.

Hebrews 9:27-28

There remains one more appearance. He shall appear the second time on this earth to consummate our salvation ...and take His people home.

Notice Hebrews 9:27: God's desire was that man only die once – not twice because they rejected Jesus.

There will be a time of accountability.

The choice is ours: reward or punishment.

The difference between a Christian and a non-Christian is judgment.

For the Christian, judgment is behind him.

For the lost, judgment is ahead of him.

A young man attending a revival crusade was prompted by the Holy Spirit to go forward and give his heart to Jesus, but he did not go. The service was dismissed, and the boy walked away to his car. Under deep conviction, he decided to go back to the church, where the evangelist was busy packing up. The young man said, "Sir, I have come back because I want to know what I have to do to be saved."

The evangelist hardly lifted his eyes from what he was doing. "I'm sorry, son. You are too late."

The boy said, "Too late, sir? You're still here. I know the service is over, but surely I'm not too late. Surely there's time for me to find out what I have to do to be saved."

Then the evangelist looked at him with a twinkle in his eye. "You are 2,000 years too late. Jesus did it all. Jesus paid it all. Jesus Christ at Calvary's cross did everything necessary for you to be forgiven of your sins."

GOD'S INVITATION TO BELIEVERS

Hebrews 10:1-25

The Bible is filled with invitations to the lost person to come to the Lord Jesus Christ to receive salvation.

Revelation 3:20: "Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If any man will open the door I will come in to him ..."

Revelation 22:17: "And the Spirit and the bride say, 'Come!' And let him who hears say, 'Come!' Let him who thirsts come. Whosoever desires, let him take of the water of life freely."

But the Bible is also filled with invitations to believers:

Matthew 11:27-30: "Come to me all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest ..."

Now, here in Hebrews God along with the writer of Hebrews gives the believer a threefold invitation:

1. "Let us draw near ..." verse 22.

2. "Let us hold fast ..." verse 23.

3. "let us consider one another ..." verse 24.

Three things these verses reveal:

I. The Purpose of the Law. Hebrews 10:1-4

The Law was given as a "shadow", a "type", an "image" of the real ...but it can never make one whole, or satisfied or fulfilled.

It is much like a cookbook: A cookbook can tell you how to cook a good meal and even show you pictures of how the meal will look if you follow the instructions that are given carefully. But all those picture and instructions can never satisfy hunger!

Hebrews 10:1 is a telling verse for the legalist who says that to be right with God one has to keep rules or laws. Listen to the last part of the verse: "The law can never make one perfect (whole)." The law reminds us of sin, but it cannot take away sin or change us on the inside (Hebrews 10:3).

Charles Swindoll gives an illustration of this truth: He said that a man that was paid to help him keep the law pulled him over. He was doing 40 in a 30 MPH speed zone. To make a long story short, he said that he paid an offering for his sin (a sin offering, he called it). A few days later he was driving the same road, looked down at his speedometer, and realized that he was going about 40 again in that same 30 MPH zone. The law reminded him of his wrong, but it didn't change him on the inside.

- Every time you drive by a prison you are reminded of the law.
- Every time you drive by a speed sign you are reminded of the law.
- But just being reminded of the law doesn't change you on the inside.

II. The Plan of the Lord

Hebrews 10:5-18

Christ Jesus took away the copy (shadow) to give us the original (Hebrews 10:5-10). His sacrifice on the cross gives three benefits:

A. He gives us sufficient power in us to live as we should (Hebrews 1:15-16)

- An old man was driving a Ford in the country when he had car trouble. He pulled over, got out, tried to fix what was wrong, but could not. He looked down the road and saw a brand new Ford coming toward him. The man in the new car stopped, took a few tools out of his car and within a few minutes, had the old man's car running again. The old man asked the man who he was. He was Henry Ford!
- The Holy Spirit is given to live within us to give us power to do what we could never do on our own.

B. He gives complete and eternal forgiveness of sin (Hebrews 10:17).

- If He remembers our sins no more – holds them against us no more – why should we hold things against ourselves or others.
- We need inside help with our sins and only He can give it.

C. There is no need for further sacrifice for our sins (Hebrews 10:18).

III. The Plea for Loyalty

Hebrews 10:19-25

The Blood of Jesus has opened the way (verse 19). The presence of Jesus has filled the place (house) (verse 21). What, and where is the place (house)?

It is inside the believer. His Spirit fills your heart and your soul!

1. Hebrews 3:6 "Christ as a son over His own house, whose house we are..."
2. 2 Corinthians 6:16 "...For you are the temple of the living God. As God has said: 'I will dwell in them. I will be their God, and they shall be my people.'"
3. 1 Corinthians 6:19-20 "...do you not know that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you...glorify God in your body and in your spirit, which are God's."

4. Hebrews 10:19-21 “Therefore” since this is true – we have an “open invitation” to enter the presence of God.

The Old Covenant high priest visited the Holy of Holies once a year, but we are invited to dwell in the presence of God every moment of each day.

We are given a threefold invitation. Three times he says, “Let us” (verses 22, 23, 24).

A. Let us draw near. Hebrews 10:22

The song writer said:

“There is a place of quiet rest, near to the heart of God.
A place where sin cannot molest, near to the heart of God.
There is a place of comfort sweet, near to the heart of God.
A place where we our Savior meet, near to the heart of God.
There is a place of full release, near to the heart of God.
A place where all is joy and peace, near to the heart of God.”

Notice how we are to draw near to God:

1. “With a true heart” – God always has and always will look at our hearts first.
2. “In full assurance of faith” – our journey is a faith journey with full assurance (confidence) that He will always be all we need.
3. “Having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience” – (no guilt). “And our bodies washed with pure water” as the Old Testament priest would stop by the laver before they entered the Holy Place (Exodus 30:18-21). New Testament Christians must come to God with a pure heart and a clean conscience. Fellowship with God demands purity (I John 1:5; 2:2).

Do you draw near to Him – or are you standing at a distance. We have the privilege of drawing near!

B. Let me speak out – hold fast the confession of our hope. Hebrews 10:23

And we are to do so without wavering. We are to be steady in our speaking out ...our confession of hope.

Believers have the hope that his world needs and longs for. We are surrounded by folks who do not have the hope – the assurance – the answer to life and eternity that we have.

C. Let us stir up ...love and good works. Hebrews 10:24-25

Did you notice the progression – Faith, Hope, Love.

We are to encourage one another, affirming one another. This is one of the major reasons for us worshiping together (verse 25).

It is interesting to note that the emphasis here is not on what a believer gets from the assembly, but rather on what he can contribute to the assembly.

The words “forsake not” (verse 25) is a military word. When we abandon gathering together with God's people, we become “spiritual deserters” – we are **AWOL**.

Just as a hot coal that is pulled from the fire soon loses its warmth and effectiveness, so we as Christians lose our warmth and effectiveness when we try to live in isolation.

God's invitation? Let us draw near – speak out – stir up!!

CAN A CHRISTIAN SIN AND GET BY WITH IT?

Hebrews 10:26-39

Since a person who comes to know the Lord is saved eternally, is it really a serious matter when he/she sins?

It is! In some ways sin in the life of a believer is even more serious, more dangerous, than in the life of a nonbeliever.

I have known Christians who have expressed this thought: "I know what I am doing or what I plan to do is wrong, but I'm saved, and I can always ask God to forgive me and everything will be alright." Has that kind of thinking ever been a part of your life?

That kind of thinking is very dangerous!!

Note again Hebrews 10:26-31.

I. The Examination

Hebrews 10:26-31 has caused great differences of opinion. Devout Bible teachers hold diametrically opposite views about the meaning of these verses.

Opinion seems fairly evenly divided on this matter.

- Some Bible-believing teachers think these verses are addressed to those who have never been saved.
- Other teachers believe that these verses have to do with those who are already genuinely saved.

I believe these verses concern deliberate sin in the life of a Christian.

Hebrews 10:26-31 is closely connected to Hebrews 6:4-6. I believe both refer to saved folks. I see four reasons in these verses for assuming he is/was talking to and about Christians.

A. The "we" is used twice in Hebrews 10:26 ...the context makes it clear that he is talking to believers.

"For if WE sin willfully after that WE have received the knowledge of the truth."

The context makes it clear that the reference is to believers:

- Hebrews 10:22 – "Let us draw near,"
- Hebrews 10:23 – "Let us hold fast the profession of our faith,"
- Hebrews 10:25 – "...not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together."

This focus on truly saved people continues in Hebrews 10:26. Clearly it is Christians who are being addressed.

B. Second, notice the clause, "after that we have received the knowledge of the truth" (Hebrews

10:26).

The word "received" refers to a definite act. We have received in a definite manner the knowledge of the truth. The Greek word for "knowledge" here means "full knowledge," not just an acquaintance with the way of salvation.

See I Timothy 2:3-4.

C. Third, notice the clause, "wherewith he was sanctified" (Hebrews 10:29).

The word "sanctified" means "set apart." When you are saved, you are sanctified; you are set apart for the Lord. As far as our position in the Lord is concerned, at the moment of our salvation He sets us apart.

Note again in Hebrews 10:14 – "For by one offering he hath perfected for ever them that are sanctified."

D. Forth, notice: "The Lord shall judge His people" (Hebrews 10:30).

The Lord is going to judge His own – saved people.

Do you ever sin on purpose? Do you ever know you ought not to do something, but you go ahead and do it anyway?

II. The Explanation

The tense of the verb indicates that Hebrews 10:26 should read, "For if we willfully go on sinning." This exhortation is not dealing with one particular act of sin, but with an attitude that leads to repeated disobedience. It refers to sins that a Christian commits in full knowledge. It shows a Christian who knows better, a Christian whose heart has been enlightened, but who rejects that teaching and rebels against God.

Here is someone who has been saved and yet maliciously, willfully, deliberately plots to disobey God, to rebel against God. This does not refer to an accidental sin. It is not merely an isolated act of sin or lust or passion.

This text refers to careful, premeditated, deliberate sin against God by a believer. In spite of knowing that his deed is against God and His will and purpose, he shakes his fist in the face of God and says, "Leave me alone. I will do as I please." It is a willful, premeditated rebellion.

Under the Old Covenant, there were no sacrifices for deliberate and willful sins (Exodus 21:12-14; Numbers 15:27-31).

- Presumptuous sinners who despised Moses' law and broke it were executed (Deuteronomy 17:1-7).
- This explains why David prayed as he did in Psalm 51. Because he deliberately sinned, he should have been slain; but he cried out for God's mercy. David knew that even a multitude of sacrifices could not save him. All he could offer was the sacrifice of a broken heart (Psalm 51:16-17).

How does an arrogant attitude affect a believer's relationship or, better, his fellowship with God?

1. It is as though he trods Jesus Christ under foot (Hebrews 10:29). When a Christian deliberately sins, he or she is saying to a lost world, "Jesus is no more than the dirt under my feet; that's what I think of the Lord Jesus Christ."
2. He cheapens the precious blood that saved him (Hebrews 10:29). He is saying to the Lord Jesus, "I don't care that you died and shed your blood for me."
3. It insults the indwelling Holy Spirit (Hebrews 10:29). If you start living in intentional sin, you are treating that precious indwelling Holy Spirit of grace with contempt. You are like a husband who brings a diseased-infested prostitute into his home and says to his sweet, loving wife, "You'll just have to endure it. I'm keeping this prostitute right here with us."

A Christian with open sin in his life is useless to the cause of Christ. His life openly ridicules everything that the Lord Jesus Christ stands for. It gives the lost world another opportunity to laugh and mock and jeer at the Christian faith.

Jerry "Bear" Watts ...48, died Monday, June 17, 1996

Jerry was nicknamed "Bear" because of his size and the full beard that he always wore.

All through his teenage years, Jerry was in trouble with anyone in authority. When he was about 19, he joined "Hell's Angels." By age 24, he was the leader of one of the chapters of Hell's Angels in Florida.

In the early part of 1973, after about three weeks of drinking and drugs in Florida, while coming back to his home in New Albany, MS, the Lord began to deal with him in a mighty way.

As a child, he was in church and Jerry believes God used those early years of hearing the gospel to bring conviction to his heart. He shared with me that he could not get "scenes of Hell" out of his mind. By the time he reached New Albany, it was 2:00 AM Sunday morning. He stopped by the only preacher's house that he knew of – the home of Pete Evans. There he gave his heart and life to the Lord.

I was pastor of Wallerville at That time and because he lived near the church, Jerry joined our church. His life was totally changed. He cleaned himself up, began sharing his testimony almost weekly in churches in Mississippi, Alabama, Tennessee with many, many being saved. Folks began asking him, "Don't you think you ought to preach?"

God had been dealing with him about preaching, but in his heart he didn't know if he was ready. I encouraged him to do just supply preaching for a while, go to Blue Mountain College, get some training, grow!

Beech Springs in Union County called him as pastor and against my counsel, he went. Being a "problem church," he was there only three months when problems started and being a novice (I Timothy 3:6), he could not handle the problems. He was so hurt by "Christian people" ...heard by so many to say, "I knew he wouldn't last," he stopped preaching.

All the time knowing that he was rebelling against God's call...God's word...God's will, he got so far into sin that he had to spend time in jail. He went back to his old ways – saying openly to his family that he knew he was rebelling against God and that he one day would pay the price for his willful sin.

In 1993, he told his wife that he never doubted his salvation or his call to preach and, despite that, he was totally, willfully turning against God, knowing God would not let him continue living as he was. Pat, his wife, said that she has never seen a more miserable person than he was. He wrote many poems to her in those three years – all with the same theme.

Pat asked that the funeral message warn Christians of a wayward life, and that a Christian cannot sin and get by with it. J. P. Kirkland and I shared that message and used this poem that Jerry wrote not long before he died.

Why God, please tell me why
If you really love me, let me die.
I know I have sinned and did wrong
The hurt within is much too strong.

Lord, if you really love me take my life.
Give strength to my children – more to my wife,
She is your child, she is filled with love.
Give her your understanding from above.

My life has been wrong, my sin is great.
No love for others – my heart full of hate.
Once I asked you to save me for I was lost.
The things wrong I have done,

Now I am paying the cost.
Only few love me, please help them see.
Only in your hands can my soul be free.
Give my family what I could not.

Give them love – give them hope.
But mostly help them to understand
That I really wanted to be in your hand.
For my sins I now have paid,

I'm with you – not in the grave.
Soon they will see me – no hurt will be,
Only with you can a man be free.
Lord, have mercy and please forgive,

Without you is no reason to live.

III. The Expectations

What can this kind of Christian expect from God? He can expect severe discipline ...judgment and fiery indignation (Hebrews 10:27)
...or sorer punishment (Hebrews 10:29).

God has at least three options in dealing with such a person:

1. He may choose to take that person off the earth - Jerry Watts
2. He may allow the believer to live out the consequences of his sin and rebellion.

God forgave David's sin, but David suffered the sad consequences for years afterward (2 Samuel 12:7-15). David had “despised the commandments of the Lord” (2 Samuel 12:9) and God dealt with him.

3. He may deal with him at the Judgment Seat of Christ in the loss of rewards (1 Timothy 5:24; 1 Corinthians 3:11-15).

IV. The Encouragement

The writer of Hebrews has seen their faith and faithfulness and now he encourages them to stay true to the Lord.

“Now the just shall live by faith.” Hebrews 10:38.

LIVING BY FAITH Hebrews 11:1-7

Hebrews 11 introduces the final section of this epistle – Hebrews 11-13.

Living by faith is what the remaining chapters of Hebrews is all about.

1. The Christian life begins with personal faith in the Lord Jesus Christ – Ephesians 2:8-9.
2. The Christian life is also lived by faith – Galatians 2:20.
3. Actually you cannot live a day of your life apart from faith. Everyone has faith and exercises faith almost every moment of every day.

You have faith in the post office ...bank ...doctor ...druggist ...chair ...etc.

The difference in natural faith and supernatural faith is the object of faith. We put our faith in the finished work of the Lord Jesus, and having done that, we put our faith daily in the promises of God.

Here are a few of the titles that have been given to Hebrews 11:

- The Saints' Hall of Fame
- The Heroes of Faith
- The Honor Roll of the Old Testament Saints
- The Faith Chapter

I like the title: God's "Hall of Fame of Faith."

Now, before we get into Hebrews 11, Hebrews 10:32-39 are the hinge which the door of Hebrews 11 swings.

A. Hebrews 10:38 is a quotation of Habakkuk 2:3-4. "The just shall live by faith."

1. The phrase is repeated in three New Testament books, but there is a different emphasis in each book.
2. Romans 1:17 Emphasis is on the words "The just"

Galatians 3:11 Emphasis is on the words "shall live"

Hebrews 10:38 Emphasis is on the words "by faith."

B. Hebrews 11 illustrates those who lived lives of faith and did so in spite of circumstances and consequences.

1. Attention is drawn to James 1:2-4.

"My brethren, count it all joy when ye fall into divers temptation; knowing this, that the trying of your faith worketh patience. But let patience have her perfect work, that ye may be perfect and entire, wanting nothing."

2. Compare James 1:2-4 to Hebrews 10:32-34.

He causes them to "remember the former days ...when they stood their ground in the face of great suffering and afflictions" (Hebrews 10:32).

They were "made a gazing stock" (KJV)...they "were publicly exposed to insult and persecution" (NIV)...they were put on the stage of the world for all to see. They suffered:

- a. Through reproaches (verse 33), verbal abuse. They were objects of disgrace, false accusation and defamation of character.
- b. Through afflictions (persecution) (verse 33) – being mistreated by others for doing right .
- c. Through indirect suffering (companions of them that were so used (KJV) ...at other times you stood side by side with those who were so treated (NIV) – it is indirect suffering. It doesn't affect you ...but someone you love. It's not our suffering but, yet, it is like when our children suffer, we suffer.
- d. Loss of valuable things (verse 34) ...the spoiling of your goods (KJV) ...the confiscation of your property (NIV) – loss of health ...mate ...child ...security...memory...possessions ...freedom.

Hebrews 10:35-39 encourages them to continue in faith: do not draw back, but go on living by faith!

I. The Description Of Faith

Hebrews 11:1-3, 6

How do you endure trials? By faith.

Some observations of faith:

1. Faith involves confidence and conviction – Hebrews 11:1

“Substance” means “assurance.” It means to stand under. It is the idea of a foundation. There is no greater foundation than God's Word! This is confidence!

“Evidence of things not seen” ...the conviction or cement ...that inward conviction from God that what He has promised, He will perform.

2. Faith always points to the future.

3. Faith involves things not seen.

4. Faith is always active.

- Abel offered a sacrifice
- Noah prepared an ark
- Abraham offered up Isaac
- Moses left Egypt

5. Faith is basic to pleasing God (Hebrews 11:2, 6).

6. Faith means focusing fully on God (Hebrew 11:6).

II. The Daring Of Faith

Hebrews 11:4-5, 7

Seventeen people pass in review for us to see their faith in this chapter.

For the most part, the people named in Hebrews 11 were ordinary “garden variety” people who accomplished great things:

- Gideon was a frightened farmer when God called him.
- Moses was a fugitive from justice.
- Jephthah was an illegitimate son, unwanted by his family.

A. Abel – Faith Worshiping (verse 4) Genesis 4:1-10

Abel's faith answers the question about worship. How does a person approach God?

Abel's blood offering displayed that he recognized his guilt and his need for an innocent substitute to atone for his sin.

B. Enoch – Faith Walking (verse 5) Genesis 5:21-24

To walk with God implies compatibility – agreement ...harmony with God ...blessed communion and fellowship with God.

Enoch was the first man to go to heaven without experiencing death ...a picture of the rapture.

C. Noah – Faith Working (verse 7)

Noah teaches us that “faith without works is dead ...” By faith, Noah worked, not to be saved, but because he was saved.

The only evidence he had for the coming disaster was the word from God. God had said it and that settled it. Noah labored for 120 years without regard for what people thought.

We learn from Noah that faith moves at God's word.

If faith was the topic of conversation in your community ...in your family ...among your friends ...would your name be brought up?

WELCOME TO GOD'S HALL OF FAME OF FAITH

Hebrews 11:1-3, 6

There are some verses in the Bible that stand out as strategic above other verses. All verses, of course, are important, but there are some verses that hold a strategic position and are meant to be like a compass to keep us on course. These verses do just that.

Notice again Hebrews 11:6. We are so used to using phrases like “pleasing God” that I think sometimes we fail to realize what they really mean. If you stop and think about it for a moment, it is quite a remarkable feat, that it is possible for you and me to please God; God, who is holy and righteous, so holy the Bible says that He is too pure to even look upon sin; the God who has such an infinite moral standard. Then you realize how weak and frail and sinful we are by nature. Do you mean to tell me there is a way in which I can be pleasing to a holy and righteous God whose standard is absolute perfection?

This is even more remarkable when I remind myself that I can't even please men! Isn't that amazing? I can't please men, but I can please the Lord.

The fact is that you and I can be pleasing unto the Lord. By the way, that is the purpose for which God has created us. I don't care how active or busy or well-liked, or applauded you are in church, if it cannot be said of you and me that we are pleasing to the Lord, our life is a failure. That's the test: Am I pleasing unto the Lord?

Notice He doesn't say that without faith it is hard to please Him. He says it is impossible. The tense of those words indicate that it is impossible to please God a single time apart from faith.

As we walk through Hebrews 11, we see the portraits of men and women of outstanding faith. James 2:17 says that “Faith without works is dead.” In Hebrews 11 we have pictures of Living Faith!

I. Faith Is the Step That Connects (With God)

Faith has been badly misunderstood. Many people would agree with the little boy who said, “Faith is believing what you know isn't true.” Or, they think faith is the opposite of rational thought, as if faith is nothing more than positive thinking or wishful dreaming.

Some feel that faith is nothing more than a blind leap into the dark. But faith is much more than just walking around, blindly waiting for providence to bump into you. Faith is your response to the promises of God for your life. Faith is never a leap into the dark. It is always based upon the firmest foundation: The Word of God. The person who really walks in faith never walks through life blindly. He always knows what is ahead.

Faith is not a blank check, like the “Name it and Claim it” philosophy. Some people believe that if they want something from God, all they have to do is to “pray about it” and believe it and then look for it to happen. God is not a genie or a cosmic Santa Clause just waiting for us to place our orders so we can drive away with anything and everything we desire.

Real faith brings a deep settled assurance that God is in absolute control of all situations and that His will shall always be accomplished in the life of the believer.

Faith is the assurance that God will do exactly what He has promised to do.

These are the only verses in the Bible that tell us what faith is.

Faith is the only thing that connects us with God. You cannot LEARN your way to God. You cannot EARN your way to God.

The Philippian jailor asked, “What must I do to be saved?” or to be connected to God. The answer: “Believe; trust by faith on the Lord Jesus Christ and you shall be saved.”

What does that mean? What does it mean to fully trust by faith in Jesus to save you? It means that, without any reservation, by an act of your will, you turn loose of everything – your sin, your pride, your self-reliance – and totally place your faith in Jesus to save you.

Have you ever bungee jumped? You have to turn loose of everything and depend on that bungee to work as it was designed to work. I've watched it done and I've wondered what it would be like, but I've never committed myself to do it. That's the way it is with many when it comes to putting their faith in Jesus for salvation. They have seen others commit their lives to Jesus and they have thought about doing it, but they have never made that commitment themselves.

Faith is the substance ...the evidence (11:1). "Sub" means under; "stance" means to stand on. Faith is the bedrock; the thing that will support you in Christ. Leave faith out and you will have nothing to stand on. Faith or trust is THE ingredient on which everything hinges in the spiritual life.

Notice 11:2: "By faith the elders obtained a good report." Do you remember when you used to bring your report card home? It evaluated what you had done with the ability you were given. One boy brought his report card home and his dad told him, "Well, you ought to get an "A" for courage for bringing this card home for me to see."

Your heavenly report card is going to be graded according to your faith. God measures us according to our faith.

Notice 11:6. Believing and having faith are the same thing. The phrase "coming to God" is a worship term. It was used of a priest as he came into the presence of God to worship and offer sacrifice. The life that is pleasing to God is that life that is lived in constant and consistent fellowship and communion with God. In order to do that, he must have faith. He must believe.

Well, what am I to believe? Two basic things:

1. I must believe that God is.

Better, he must believe that God STILL is. These people had suffered much persecution. To these people it looked like God wasn't. Where was the evidence of God? Where were God's miracles? Why isn't God delivering us? Why isn't God protecting us? The kind of faith that pleases God is the kind of faith that doesn't need constant additional information or confirmation, but believes that God is, even when it looks like He isn't.

One of my favorite Old Testament characters is a man by the name of Gideon (Judges 6). The people of God were under the yoke of bondage by the Midianites. Gideon is out one night, risking his life, hiding some food. Suddenly, an angel of the Lord appeared to him and said, "Hail, thou mighty man of valor, the Lord is with thee." Gideon answered, "Oh my Lord, if the Lord is with us, then why are all these things happening to us?" Why aren't we seeing some of God's miracles?

Gideon thought that if God was with them, then nothing bad would happen to them. "If the Lord is with us, then tell me why all these bad things keep happening to us." It didn't look like God was with them. From all appearances it looked as though God had abandoned them.

Do you remember what Habakkuk the prophet said? The Chaldeans had surrounded the city and were laying siege to it. If God didn't intervene, they were going to be lost. Habakkuk begins to pray to the Lord. Well, it's not as much a prayer as it is a complaint. He says, "How long, O Lord, will I have to cry unto you? Lord, why don't you do something? I've been praying and praying. Lord, the Chaldeans are at the gate. God, if you don't do something about the Chaldeans, they are going to destroy us."

In verse 5 God says, "I have been working, and I'm going to tell you what I'm doing, but you won't like it when you hear it. I've been raising up the Chaldeans to come against you." The point is that the very thing that caused Habakkuk to think God wasn't at work was the very work that God was doing. Understand that God is always working – whether we see it or not.

2. You've got to believe that God is a rewarder.

The writer of Hebrews is saying, "Listen, it may look as though you are wasting your time serving God and seeking the Lord, but nobody ever waste their time seeking God because God in no man's debtor; He is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him."

God is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him. The Lord will allow Himself to be found.

No man was ever disappointed who put his trust in God!

II. Faith Is The Shield That Protects 11:2

"This is what the elders (the ancients) were commended for." When the writer mentions "The ancients," he is talking about Old Testament saints like Noah, Moses, David, Job, Daniel, and all the others who trusted in God. The text says, "They received a witness." Sometimes a preacher will get excited and say, "Can I get a witness?" They are wanting someone to shout "Amen!" That's what 11:2 means, only it's God doing the witnessing.

When Moses stood up for righteousness, when David slew Goliath, when the three Hebrews children refused to bow, when Elijah defeated the prophets of Baal, in all those moments God looked down from heaven and said, "Amen! That's my boy. That's my girl. They belong to me."

God loves it when His people dare to trust Him. He loves it so much that He bears witness to the world that His people belong to Him.

Ephesians 6:16 says we are to take the shield of faith as our protection against whatever Satan fires at us.

III. Faith Is the Stuff That Erects Hebrews 10:38a

Faith is not only needed for our salvation, we also need faith every day of our life after we are saved. Faith is what you can build your life upon. Look what faith can do:

A. Faith Sees the Invisible.

Faith sees what others do not see. Some folks say, "Seeing is believing." Faith says, "Believing is seeing." "Faith means believing in advance what will only make sense in reverse."

You say, "I can't believe in or accept anything I can't see." You can't see electricity; yet, you believe in it and trust it to give light.

You can't see a voice that says, "I love you;" yet, you believe the person who said it.

B. Faith Attempts the Impossible

Someone said that faith is "belief plus unbelief and acting on the belief part." Sooner or later, we all have to act on the belief part.

Notice 11:32-35.

Faith calms our Fears, Cushions our Fall, Confirms our Future.

C. Faith Endures the Intolerable Hebrews 11:36-38

These folks served God in the sunshine and the rain. Don't ever let a trial steal your faith. It is often during a trial that some forsake God.

D. Faith Expects the Indescribable 11:39-40

God has something indescribable for us. Heaven is going to be grand, but God has something for us while we are on our way to heaven.

Are you ready to follow Jesus wherever He leads? That's all He wants. Somebody may ask, "What if Jesus asks me to do something I can't do?" He will! He will! He will! If He only asked you to do something you could do, you wouldn't need Him. I promise you this: If you decide to follow Jesus, He will ask you to do the impossible, and then He will help you do it.

ABEL: FAITH WORSHIPING **Hebrews 11:1-2, 4; Genesis 4:1-12**

Look again at Hebrews 11:2. "For by (faith) the elders obtained a good report (testimony)." The first example in Hebrews 11 of the heroes who "obtained a good report" by their faith is Abel, the fourth person of the human race. The first three examples in Hebrews 11 who "obtained a good report" by faith, were men who lived before the flood. Abel, Enoch, and Noah.

It is fitting that the first example of heroes who "obtained a good report" through faith involves salvation, because salvation is the first and foremost work of faith. Faith begins with soul salvation.

Hebrews 11 contains the most complete treatise on faith to be found in the Bible. It also gives us biographical illustrations to show us faith at work in the lives of a variety of people.

The first man of faith who is mentioned is Abel, whose faith enabled him to approach God and to worship Him acceptably. Then in Hebrews 11:5, we read of Enoch, who Walked with God; then in 11:7 we read of Noah, who Worked for God, but first we read of Abel, who Worshiped God. Worship is the highest function of the human soul, and only as we are able to Worship can we effectively Walk with and Work for God.

The story of Cain and Abel is known by people who know the Bible and by those who do not know the Bible. Abel is in God's Hall of Fame, but Cain is not.

We have just taken the offering. May I ask you, did you bring a gift or an offering to God today? The first man in God's Hall of Fame is there because he brought a gift or an offering to God.

What kind of gift did you bring today? Was it a gift of service or of encouragement or of songs and praise, or of a sweet spirit and a delightful attitude? What did you bring?

Sadly, most wonder if they will GET something out of the worship service, but what did you bring? Abel brought good gifts and offered them to God.

I. The Invitation

Notice Genesis 4:3. This is the first recorded worship service. Notice the phrase, "And in the process of time it came to pass." That is an interesting thought in the Hebrew. The Hebrew says, "at the end of days" and it means "in the cycle of days." God set us up on a seven day cycle. It wasn't done by the government or the state, but God set us up so that we work six days and then that we have one day set aside so that we can spend time with God.

The reason some folks are in trouble is because they have ignored God's cycle. God set the sabbath day or the Lord's day up for man; not for Himself.

Many folks think when they come to church to worship, that they are doing God a favor or an honor. No. God is honoring you and me by setting one day in seven for us to meet with Him. He didn't have to do that, but He knew WE needed a time of rest, change and refreshment. You ought to feel empty when you miss worship.

The first family understood God's cycle and how important it was to follow God's cycle. When these boys came to worship, they brought gifts to God. They realized that everything they had came from God and they wanted to give something back to God. Notice that both boys brought gifts, both worshiped at the same place, and both worshiped in the same way.

II. The Evaluation

The term "by faith" is found over 20 times in Hebrews 11 and there was some sort of Divine revelation from God in some way. "Faith come by hearing, and hearing by the Word of God" (Romans 10:19).

Abel's "by faith" indicates that he had a Divine revelation to make the offering. Either he received the command directly from God or it was passed on to him by Adam and Eve.

True faith leads men to worship Regularly and to worship Correctly. When God evaluated the worship of the two boys, here is what He said: "And the Lord had respect unto Abel AND to his offering, but unto Cain AND to his offering He had NOT respect."

What made the difference?

1. God requires the Right Sacrifice and the Right Spirit.

There is a right way and a wrong way to worship God. God seeks people who worships Him in a way that pleases Him.

- Hebrews 11:4 says that "Abel offered a more excellent (a better) sacrifice than Cain."

- Genesis 4:2 tells us that Abel was a keeper of sheep, but Cain was a tiller of the ground...

"Cain brought of the fruit of the ground an offering unto the Lord. And Abel, also brought of the firstlings of his flock and of the fat thereof.

No doubt Cain was a hard-working farmer who plowed, planted, cultivated and harvested his crops. Cain's offering was certainly more pleasant than Abel's. He probably beautifully arranged the fruits and vegetables on the altar.

But God had apparently given instructions concerning the time, place, and type of sacrifice that pleased Him.

Abel brought the "firstling and the fat thereof" of his flock. That is, Abel brought the finest and the best to the Lord. Abel gave his best. He did not save the best for himself. He did not give God the seconds or the leftovers. He gave God the best. Sometimes folks say, "Well, after I pay my bills and spend a little for my enjoyment, if there is anything left over, I'll give that to God." No, God deserves the first part and the best. If you are going to worship God faith, it will cost you.

2. We are told that "By Faith Abel offered unto God."

That is not said of Cain's offering. Cain's offering was not made "by faith." Cain's offering was the result of his hands, his works, his hard work. It represents all the good things people offer to the Lord.

There are still many of Cain's descendants bringing the wrong offering with which to worship God. They are good, hard-working, moral people who come offering God their good works, but God describes our good works in His eyes as being "like filthy rages"

(Isaiah 64:6). All of my good works are not enough. I can do nothing to earn or merit God's forgiveness.

"There is a way that seems right to man, but the ends thereof is the way of death" (Proverbs 14:12).

When Adam and Eve sinned, the best work they could do was to cover themselves with fig leaves. God said that would not do. It would take the blood of a substitute to cover their sin. God shed the blood of an animal and put the skins of the animal around them to signify that to cover sin, blood must be shed.

One of the most important features of Abel's offering is that it foreshadowed and anticipated the greatest offering of all – the coming of the Lamb of God in the Person of Jesus Christ to give Himself as THE sacrifice for our sins on the cross of Calvary. There is only one way for a sinner to approach a Holy God and that is through the shed blood of the Lamb of God.

It is interesting that when Cain offered the wrong sacrifice that God gave him an opportunity to right the wrong and offer the right kind of sacrifice to God, but he would not (Genesis 4:6-7).

3. God requires that we worship Him in the right spirit. One of the things that was wrong with Cain was what was IN Cain.

Dr. Jim Futral tells of an experience that happened in his church. He said a man came to him after a service and said, "Preacher, I think that was the most meaningful service I have ever been in." Then, between 5 and 10 minutes later, another man said to him, "Preacher, I believe that was the worse service I have ever been in."

Dr. Futral said he went to his office and wrote, best as he could remember, word for word what both men said. It was the same service, the same sermon, the same songs, and the same group of folks who were worshiping together. What made the difference?

It's not so much what's in the service, but what's in you that makes the difference!

These two boys, Cain and Abel, came to meet with God, but the two left at opposite ends of the worship experience. How you and I respond to God determines how God responds to us ...or, to say it another way, what you do After the service indicates how you have worshiped. Genesis 4 tells us how Cain reacted after the worship service.

1. He was Mad 4:6

Listen to this! Since Cain would not let God have His way in his heart, he became angry With His Brother! Does that make sense to you! Abel hadn't done anything to Cain. He had just worshiped God! When we are not right with God, it effects how we relate to those around us.

2. He Became a Murderer 4:8

How it must have broken Adam and Eve's hearts as they looked for their two boys and found one dead physically and one dead in sin.

3. He Mocked God 4:5-7. 9

God's reproof and correction of Cain was an act of love on God's part. In mercy God gave Cain an opportunity to repent and to right his wrong. That's what God did for Adam and Eve when they sinned and they accepted God's mercy. Cain refused it.

III. The Inspiration 11:4

"He being dead still speaks." In the old West folks use to say, "Dead men tell no tales," but the Bible says they do.

Though not one of Abel's words is recorded in the Bible, he has been speaking eloquently for millenniums about the kind of worship that pleases God. Abel still speaks, telling us the only way to worship God is with the right sacrifice, the blood of Jesus Christ, and the right spirit, a humble and submissive heart.

ENOCH: THE WALK OF FAITH

Hebrews 11:5; Genesis 5:21-24

The first person mentioned in God's Hall of Fame in Hebrews 11 is Abel. Abel is the fourth person of the human race. Abel was killed by his older brother, Cain. Able must have been a young man when Cain killed him because there is no Biblical record of Abel having a wife or children. We are told God gave Adam and Eve another son instead of Abel, whose name was Seth (Genesis 4:25). Cain represents the ungodly line while Seth represents the godly line., Enoch is the seventh from Adam through the godly line of Seth. Add the years up and you get 5,579 years and then Enoch was translated to heaven and never tasted death.

It's interesting that Abel and Enoch are in God's Hall of Fame together – interesting because in some ways they are so different; yet, both of them are men of faith and both are in God's Hall of Fame.

They are different in the way they left this earth and left life:

Abel, although he was an innocent man of God, was killed in a field by his own brother. Enoch didn't die at all. He was one of only two men in the Bible who did not die.

Abel died a premature, painful death. Enoch, on the other hand, did not have to experience any of the pain or struggle associated with death.

I mention that because, here are two men of God, and they went through life so differently. One had struggles and pain and the other seemed to have such an easy life.

Why? I don't know, but what I do know is that both men left this earth trusting God! You may be facing things others may never face, but one thing God wants from us is to trust Him. The issue is this: whether it is your lot to have an easy life or a hard life, live it in faith, trusting Him.

Three things I want you to see about Enoch, this man who walked with God:

I. Enoch's Life-changing Moment

“Enoch lived 65 years, and begot Methuselah. After he begot Methuselah, Enoch walked with God 300 years” Genesis 5:21-22.

Notice: It was AFTER the birth of Methuselah that Enoch began to walk with God and he walked continually for 300 years.

Enoch's life was transformed by a baby. What was it about this baby that brought Enoch to the place where he began to walk with God?

A. Enoch Realized His Parental Responsibility.

As Enoch held his little son in his arms, he realized the responsibility he had as a father and that he needed a godly example and a good influence. He realized that one day his little boy would go to heaven or hell and the way he lived would largely determine which one. How we live before our children has a great impact on our children.

In Daddy's Steps

There are little eyes upon you, and they are watching night and day;
There are little ears that quickly take in every word you say;
There are little hands all eager to do everything you do.
And a little boy who's dreaming of the day when he'll be like you.

You're the little fellow's idol, you're the wisest of the wise.
In his little mind about you, no suspicions ever rise;
He believes in you devoutly, holds to all you say and do.
He will say and do it your way when he's grown up to be like you.

There's a wide-eyed little fellow who believes you're always right,
And his ears are always open, and he watches you day and night;

B. He Received a Prophetic Revelation

Methuselah means “When he is dead, it shall be sent or it shall come to pass.” What was going to happen when he died? The message in the name of Enoch's boy was concerning the flood. When Methuselah died, the flood of God's judgment would come.

Let's do a little math:

- Genesis 5:25 – “Methuselah lived 187 years and became the father of Lamech.”

Genesis 5:28-29 – “Lamech lived 182 years and begat Noah.” Add 187 and 182 and you get 369.

- Methuselah was 369 when Noah was born. Genesis 7:11 says that Noah was 600 when the flood began. Now add 369 and 600 and you get 969. Note Genesis 5:27. The flood came when Methuselah died. I believe it began to rain the very moment Methuselah drew his last breath.

It's interesting that the oldest man who ever lived was Methuselah. Coincidence? Absolutely not! Everyday Methuselah lived was another opportunity for man to get right with God. God was merciful and long-suffering, not willing that any should perish.

Enoch received in his son a message from God. Judgment was coming. I believe that each time that boy had a fever or pain, Enoch thought that maybe this is the time. God has also told us what to look for before His Son returns for His own. We are getting close to our Lord's return. Jesus is coming soon! That's why we should walk with God. When He comes, we will be face to face with Him.

II. Enoch's Life-arranging Moment

Two things are said about Enoch:

A. "He had this testimony, that he pleased God" Hebrews 11:5.

This was not his testimony of himself. Enoch didn't say, "I want you to know, I please God." This was the testimony of others concerning Enoch and, more importantly, this was God's testimony of Enoch.

- How do you please God? "By faith!" Faith is not a one time experience. Faith is not to be just for salvation. Faith is to be involved in all of the decisions of life AFTER salvation as well.

- Romans 4:21 gives us a Biblical description of faith. Faith is being fully convinced that what God has promised, He is also able to perform.

"He pleased God." Not many folks are doing that today. Most folks are concerned about pleasing themselves or their fellow man, but not God..

The time that Enoch pleased God is very significant. It was not good times. Jude 15 says it was ungodly times morally and spiritually. In ungodly times we hear many excuses for living, like, "Well, everybody else is doing it." But that is not true. Enoch stood upright in the midst of great wickedness.

B. He walked with God.

Twice in Genesis 5 (22, 24) we are told that Enoch "walked with God." You could say that Enoch's only claim to fame was that he walked with God. We never read of him parting the sea, raising the dead, healing the sick, or leading an army. His entire life is summed up in the words, "He walked with God." There is nothing greater that could be said about us than that we walked with God.

What does it mean to walk with God?

1. Walking with God means we Practice the Presence of God.

That means that God will always be an essential part of our thoughts and interest. It denotes fellowship. Enoch did not walk independently, but in dependence with God. He lived in the conscious presence of God and in the center of His will. It is the picture of two friends walking together in agreement (Amos 3:3). It is a life of communion with God

2. Walking with God means walking at the same Pace as God.

We don't run ahead of Him or lag behind Him. When we walk with God we always make advancement. God is on the move. If we are going to walk with God, we must move ahead. We can't go anywhere standing still.

C. Walking with God means walking according to His Precepts.

Walking with God requires meditating on and obeying God's Word.

III. Enoch's Life-exchanging Moment

Genesis 5:24 says that "Enoch walked with God; and he was not (here), for God took him." Hebrews 11:5 says, "By faith Enoch was translated that he should not see (experience) death."

Someone put it like this: One day God and Enoch were out walking together. God said to Enoch, "Enoch, it's getting late and we are closer to My house than we are to your house. Why don't you just come and go home with me?" Enoch said, "Lord, I believe I will."

The word "translated" means "change of place or condition." The translation changed him from mortality to immortality. His body had to change, for the physical body is not compatible to a heavenly abode. I Corinthians 15:52-53.

Enoch was caught away and carried across. There is a generation that will not have to cross over the river of death, but will be carried over by God.

Hebrews 11:5 says that Enoch “was not found.” That means that there was an extensive search party to find Enoch, but he was not to be found on earth. Enoch exchanged the earthly life for the Heavenly life. What an exchange that will be!

Jesus says that one of these days the rapture will take place. Two will be in the field; one will be taken and the other left. Two will be in the bed; one will be taken, the other will be left. Two will be in a car; one will be taken, the other left.

Don't you think those who are left behind will search for those who have been taken?

That is going to happen one day and I'm convince that day is closer than most folks think. The question is, “Will you be taken or will you be left?” What fear and hopelessness will come to those who have heard the Gospel truth of the rapture and when the saints are gone, will know they are doomed, but it will be too late!

That's why the Bible says, “Today is the day of salvation!”

NOAH: UNSINKABLE FAITH **Hebrews 11:7; Genesis 6:5-8**

Before I read our text, let me test your Bible knowledge:

What was Noah's wife's name?

Dr. R. G. Lee asked that question one day while he was visiting New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary. He said that her name was “Grace,” because Genesis 6:8 says that “Noah found Grace.”

What kind of lights did the Ark have in it? Flood lights!

Enough of that, let's read the text.

When I think of the Ark, the “Good Ship Grace” that would not sink, I think of another ship – the Titanic. The Good Ship Grace was built by amateurs; the Titanic was built by experts. In 1912 the Titanic set sail as the “unsinkable ship,” and that's about the only thing it did! It was a mighty ship with ballrooms, beauty salons, tennis courts, and huge dining areas.

Three things marked the Titanic:

1. Confidence

It was built with water-tight compartments. The boast was that if one compartment leaked, the other would keep the ship afloat. One sailor said, “Even God couldn't sink this ship!”

2. Carelessness

No one even considered the possibility of it sinking. The passengers thought only of pleasure and fun!

3. Calamity

Moving along at 22 knots at 11:40 pm., it hit an iceberg and a 300 foot gash was ripped along the side of the ship. Someone on board said that it felt like Someone with a giant finger drew it along side of the ship.

Five water compartments were sliced open. Flares were shot to signal for help, but no help came. Life-boats were let down. There were over 2,000 on board and there were only life-boats for half that many. Women and children were put into the life-boats. Some men tried to disguise themselves as women, trying to get into the life-boats.

The life-boats encircled the Titanic. Some said it was like relatives standing around a death-bed of a dying loved one. They watched as the ship went into its watery grave.

When she set sail there were many classes of people on board, but when she went down, there were only two classes: saved and lost.

What a difference between the Titanic under Captain Smith and the Good Ship Grace under Captain Noah.

Look with me at:

I. Noah and His Faith Hebrews 11:7

Notice that Noah's faith is mentioned twice in this one verse: By faith Noah build an ark ...By faith Noah condemned the world.

In Abel we see an example of Faith Worshiping; in Enoch we see an example of Faith Walking; in Noah we see an example of Faith Working.

James 2:17 says, "Faith, without works, is dead, being alone." Wherever there is true faith in God, there is always an outward evidence of that faith. Faith shows itself in works.

What is the work of Faith?

According to Genesis 6, it was a sad day in the history of mankind. Man had become so wicked that God said, "I must destroy man from off the face of the earth."

How wicked does man have to become before God says, "Enough is enough?" How wicked does a nation have to become before God says, "Enough is enough?"

Yet, "Noah found grace in the eyes of the Lord." Noah was at his best when times were at their worse! The name "Noah" means to be cheerful, joyful, to dispel the gloom. We associate Noah with clouds and rain, and storms: yet, his name means cheerful.

Everything that works to destroy faith was working to destroy Noah's faith.

A. Work

Noah lived in the dark, sinful days before the flood. There was moral and spiritual wickedness. By faith, Noah heard God speaking to him. It was not easy for Noah, because, like us, he was surrounded by so many confusing voices – even religious ones – but the work of faith is to catch God's voice amid all the other voices.

What God told Noah to do was contrary to human reason. Who had ever heard of an ark or a flood? Many scholars believe that it had never rained because prior to the flood streams came up from the earth and watered the whole surface of the ground (Genesis 2:6). Though Noah had never had never seen a boat or rain, he moved with godly (holy) fear, dropping everything and starting construction of the ark.

The phrase "holy fear" means "reverence." Building the ark was Noah's act of showing reverence for God. Noah built an ark because he had holy fear – not of God's punishment, but of not pleasing God.

We are also told that Noah was righteous, which means he always tried to do what was right; he was a man of integrity.

Blameless doesn't mean Noah was perfect, but that he had no outstanding faults. Blameless is being innocent of wrongdoing or injustice that would bring public reproach or tarnish one's reputation.

Noah was also a preacher of righteousness (2 Peter 2:5). There are two sides to Noah's message: There is salvation for all who will enter the ark; and there is judgment for all who will not enter the ark.

Noah had worked and preached for 120 years and saw very little happen as a result of his work. Only his family – eight souls – were saved.

B. Waiting

When we don't see things happening, waiting is the greatest enemy of faith. Impatience is Satan's best tool to use in the life of saints.

C. Wickedness

Noah suffered opposition and he must have been discouraged. The wicked scoffed at Noah. Many have such a thin armor that the slightest word of scoffing causes us to quite.

D. Water

God had said that the flood was coming. Now that it was here, even the fulfillment of God's word brought testing – not only concerning what was going on outside the ark, but also what was going on inside the ark.

Noah's faith was based on Divine Revelation: "Being warned of God." Real faith is rooted in the Word of God. It may have been a cloudless day when God spoke to Noah, but Noah believed God.

II. Noah and His Fear

“Noah ...moved with fear.” Fear is not always a bad thing. Some people accuse some of using fear to reach folks for Christ. Doctors use fear. They say, “If you don't lose some weight, you're going to have a heart attack.” You look both ways before you cross a street for fear you'll be hit by a car. We are motivated by fear every day, except in the spiritual realm.

Jesus said, “Do not fear him that is able to kill the body but cannot kill the soul. Fear him who is able to cast both soul and body into hell.” A man's greatest danger is that he would stand before God unpardoned, unsaved, and uncleansed.

“I'd rather frighten people into Heaven than tranquilize them into hell” (Adrian Rodgers).

“The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom.”

III. Noah and His Foresight

“Noah prepared an ark.” He made preparation. He had some foresight. He didn't wait until it started to rain and then started to build. It would have been too late then! Like Noah, we should get ready!

Amos said, “Prepare to meet thy God.”

In Matthew 24:36-39 we find three marks of Noah's day: Indifference, Immorality, Ignorance. Have you made preparation?

IV. Noah and His Family

Not only did Noah save himself, but he saved his family – his wife and children and their spouses.

I can imagine a little boy talking to his dad. He heard Noah preach and came home and said, “Dad, what do you think about what Mr. Noah is saying?” The dad responds, “Oh, Son, I heard that when I was a little boy. It bothered me too at first. In fact, it scared me to death. I talked to my dad, your grandfather, about it and he said for me not to worry about it. All these years have passed and there hasn't been a flood yet.”

V. Noah and His Forecast

“By the which he condemned the world.” How did he condemn the world? By warning the world. He had preached 120 years and his messages were rejected.

“Light came into the world, but men loved darkness rather than light” (John 3:19). Those who perished couldn't come before God and say, “God, I didn't know.” They did know, they just didn't respond to God.

Noah and His Fortune

“And become heir of an inheritance.” Have you ever thought of the time, effort, labor and cost that went into the building of that ark? It was his life's work! He invested his life in the things of God while others around him invested their life in Real Estate and the things around them. In the end, Noah gained it all and those around him lost it all. “What does it profit a man to gain the world and lose his soul?”

ABRAHAM: WAITING FAITH **Hebrews 11:8-10; Genesis 12:1-4**

Our text mentions a man named Abraham. He is known as “The Father of the Faithful.” Abraham is revered by over one-half of the world's population and is held in high esteem by Jews, Muslims, and Christians alike. Abraham is presented to us as a great example of a man who lived his life by faith. Abraham was called “The Friend of God.” A great portion of the Book of Genesis is devoted to his life.

If you had been watching Abraham when he left his home in Ur at the age of 75, you would have said, “There goes a man of God.” But, if you had seen him lying to Pharaoh and later sinning with the Egyptian handmaid, Hagar, you would have said, “That fellow Abraham is a phony!” But, which observation would be true?

God is careful to show us the ups and the downs of Abraham's life in Genesis. God shows us Abraham's highs and lows; his defeats and his triumphs; his faithfulness and his unfaithfulness. All of that we see in the Book of Genesis, but he was saved and forgiven by the grace of God, and when we hear God's evaluation of Abraham after he died, God doesn't mention his failures; only his victories. Abraham struggled and stumbled – yes! And so do you and I, and while we are alive on this earth, God will deal with our sin, but we have been justified in His sight and in heaven we will be robed in the righteousness of Jesus and that is the way the Father will see

us.

One other thing, God called Himself, "The God of Abraham." God was not ashamed to be called the God of Abraham, in fact, He gloried in it. Wouldn't it be wonderful if God was not ashamed to be called our God and glory in the fact that we belong to Him! Good news! God put in His Word that He is not ashamed to be called our God – Hebrews 2:9-11.

Abraham is called "The Father of the Faithful" and every believer is called a "Seed of Abraham." We are akin to Abraham in relation to our faith and trust in God.

You and I cannot see faith. We cannot fill a jar with faith and say, "Here is what faith looks like." But we can see faith as it puts skin on and see how it acts and reacts before us.

Look with me at this Father of the Faithful Folks:

I. The Failures of an Imperfect Man

We tend to think of Bible saints as perfect men and women, but they are not. They had faults and failures just like you and I. The Bible does not try to hide their mistakes and failings. If all we saw of the saints in the Bible is perfect folks, how discouraging it would be for those of us who are saints. If we never saw their struggles and faults and then see how we struggle and fail, it would cause us to wonder if we were really saved. If being saved means the Christian is perfect with no failures, how would we react to our own failures? We need to see how the Bible saints handled their own failure.

Notice Abraham's first failure – Genesis 12:1. Did Abram do as God had commanded? No. See Genesis 11:31 He had not left his kin. His father and nephew went with him. Nor did he go directly to Canaan. He went half-way to Haran.

Abram was guilty of Incomplete Obedience and Incomplete Dependence – Genesis 12:10 (Nobody told him to go to Egypt. God had promised to take care of him, but he trusted his own wisdom rather than depending on God.).

He was guilty also of Incomplete Honesty – Genesis 12:11-13. Sarah was his half-sister, but Abram made it look as if she was his sister – period.

Yet, with all of Abram's faults and failures, you don't read of one fault against him in Hebrews 11. When God remembers Abraham, He doesn't remember his faults and failures; only his Faith.

Psalms 32:1-2: "Blessed is the man unto whom the Lord imputeth not iniquity." As far as the East is from the West, so far has the Lord separated our sins from Himself and remembers them no more."

II. The Follies of an Impatient Man Genesis 15:3-6; 16:1-4

Faith has a Trust and a Time element. We need Faith and Patience. It is just as wrong to run Ahead of God as it is to fall Behind the Lord.

What made Abraham impressive? His faith! His faith was marked by three things:

A. The separation of Faith

1. Abram's Irresistible Call – Hebrews 11:8

Abraham was a lost pagan, living in a place called Ur of the Chaldees (Genesis 11:28). He was raised in a society of people that worshiped a moon god. He was headed for Hell, but we are told that God called him to Himself.

How God spoke to him, we don't know, but that He spoke to him we are quite sure, and Abram heard his voice and obeyed.

When God speaks to us, it is sometimes very difficult to explain the "How" of it. But we know that God spoke to us. If God has ever spoken to your heart, you know what I mean. If He has never spoken to your heart, no amount of explaining can tell you how God speaks.

God somehow quickens the dead spirit within us and causes the sinner to hear His Voice.

2. Abram's Individual Choice

Notice "He went out, not knowing where he was going." Living by faith means accepting God's call without knowing where it will lead.

That is literally true. When God called me to preach, there was no doubt that He was calling me to preach, I said "Yes" to Him. Now what? What do I do next? God didn't tell me then. I had to turn to Him and depend on Him to show me what to do next. It was "one

day at a time, Dear Jesus. That's all I ask from you!" If He had shown me all that lay ahead for me in the ministry, it would have scared me to death. I tried to prepare myself for whatever He wanted me to do, but it was one step at a time and one day at a time.

Although Abram made some mistakes, he obeyed God. Look back at Genesis 12:

Verse 4 "Abram departed" He left.

Verse 5 "They went forth" They set out .

Verse 6 "Abram passed through the land" He traveled throughout.

Verse 8 "He removed from thence" He went on.

Verse 9 "Abram journeyed, going on still" He set out and continued.

Faith is letting go of earth's securities and holding on to God's promises.

Ur of the Chaldees in Abram's day was a world-class city with perhaps 250,000 people living there. It was the center of mathematics, astronomy, commerce and philosophy. All indications are that Abram was a wealthy man in that city. No doubt many of Abram's friends thought he was crazy. Why would he want to leave Ur? Obeying God's call meant giving up his friends, his career, his traditions, his home, his position, his influence, and his country. His promise from an unseen God was to lead him to "a land that I will show you."

"Abram, where are you going?" "I don't know, God will show me." "How will you know when you get there?" "God will tell me. I trust Him!"

When Abram left Ur, he burned his bridges behind him. Here's the point: When God calls, there is no guarantees about tomorrow. Abram didn't know: Where he was going, How he would get there, How long it would take him, he didn't even know for sure he would know he was there when he got there. All he knew was that God had called him and he choose to obey. He stepped out in faith and left the results with God.

A little girl was going down the hall of their home and she noticed the trap door that lead to their basement was raised. She looked over in that black hole and said, "Who's down there?" Her dad said, "It's me." She said, "I want to come down there where you are." He said, "I've moved the ladder, but if you'll jump, I'll catch you." She looked at that dark hole and could see nothing, but her dad's eyes had adjusted to the light as he looked up. She said, "Daddy, I'm afraid." He said, "Don't you trust me? Do you believe I can catch you? Do you believe I'm strong enough to catch you? Have I ever told you a lie? Don't you know that I love you?" She said, "OK. Here, I come, Daddy." She jumped and her dad caught her. That's faith! John said, "Whom having not seen, we love."

B. The Satisfaction of Faith Hebrews 11:9-10

Poor Abraham. When he followed God he had to leave it all – his family, his friends, his homeland. Oh, No! Separation is never just separation FROM something, it is separation TO Someone! Don't get the idea that when we are separated unto God that we are losing. We're gaining! We are dead to the world, but alive to God! Nothing brings more satisfaction to a life than knowing that you are in right relationship and fellowship with God.

Two things marked the life of Abraham: A Tent and An Alter (Hebrews 11:13)

A. A Tent

The tent spoke of Abraham being a stranger in the land. He moved at God's command. He never put the tent pegs too deep into the ground, because he was on the move through this world.

This world is not my home, I'm just a passing through.

My treasures are laid up, Somewhere beyond the blue!

B. An Alter

Wherever he went, Abraham worshiped God. His focus was God. He bowed in submission, worshipping and loving Him!

C. The Sacrifice of Faith Hebrews 11:17

The record is given in Genesis 22:1-5, 13-14. Abraham said to his servant, "The lad and I are going yonder to worship and we shall both return." How? He didn't know, but he trusted God.

Once Abraham offered Isaac, Isaac seems to disappear for a while. The next time we see Isaac in Scripture, he is receiving his bride. What a picture of Jesus! When He offered Himself as a sacrifice for our sins, He went home to be with His Father. The next

time we see Him, He will be receiving His Bride, the Church.

Living by faith means waiting on God to keep His promises. Living by faith means never taking your eyes off heaven (Hebrews 11:10).

Abraham's faith was an expectant faith. It was a faith that looked beyond the here and now and embraced a time far into the future. Abraham longed for the day when he could settle down and put away his traveling shoes. He was not looking for a city on this earth, but he was looking for a heavenly city, built by God, where he could live forever in the presence of the Lord.

As we journey through this world, we know we are not there yet. We know that there is a city called Heaven and The New Jerusalem, where we will settle down and wander no more.

Abraham had to wait for God to fulfill every promise He made to him. He waited for a son, he waited for a land, he waited in faith, knowing that God would fulfill His promises – And He did!

God always keeps His word! He calls for us to trust Him, and for those who trust Him, He has promised a home in glory where we will be with Him forever!

SARAH: THE PATIENCE OF FAITH

Hebrews 11:11-12

How long would you wait for a good friend to keep a promise? A month? Six months? A year? Sarah, the wife of Abraham in the Old Testament, waited 25 years.

Sarah is different from the others we have studied thus far in God's Hall of Fame. In some ways we are surprised to find her in God's Hall of Fame. For one thing, she is the first woman we have encountered who made it into God's Hall of Fame. We will meet another woman later in our study of Hebrews 11 – Rehab. Faith is not gender-conscious.

For another thing, Sarah had a real struggle with her faith at times. The fact that Sarah was a woman had nothing to do with her struggle with faith. Both men and women struggle with faith from time to time. Sarah failed God on more than one occasion. She was an impatient waiter, and her patience was tested by God over a period of time. She even made the mistake of trying to help God out or giving God a hand. That is always a recipe for trouble.

Finally, Sarah's faith was in a very practical area, namely, child-bearing. Sometimes we think of faith as being only for something like worship or some big endeavor such as building the ark or being a missionary in some strange land. These areas are certainly places for faith, but faith can apply to the personal areas of our lives too, such as child-bearing.

I. The Person of Faith Hebrews 11:11

"Through faith Sarah herself." We know Abraham, the Father of the Faithful, had faith, but Sarah herself was a woman of faith. God listed her as a woman of faith for three reasons:

A. Her Doubts

The first time God promised Abraham a son is in Genesis 15:4. Sarah was 65 years old and Abraham was 75. Abraham thought he and Sarah were too old to have a child, so Abraham suggested to God that he adopt his trusted servant, Eliezer, as the male heir.

Ten years pass and no son. Abraham is now 85 and Sarah is 75. In Genesis 16, Sarah suggests that Abraham father a son through Hagar, her maid. It wasn't right, but it was the custom of that day. I think Sarah's motives were honorable, but she was wrong in what she did. When Hagar conceived and a son was born, great tension followed between Sarah and Hagar and her son until Hagar and her son were driven into the desert.

Then when Sarah was 89 and Abraham was 99, God appeared again to Abraham outside his tent and told him that by the next year, they would have a son born to them. Sarah, who was inside the tent, heard what was said and she laughed and God confronted her because she laughed. A year later a son was born. Sarah was 90 and Abraham was 100.

B. Her Duration

Go back to Hebrews 11:11 and we see another difficulty for Sarah. She "was past age" for having children. Her body functions and her physical capabilities seem to make it impossible for conception and for delivery. Not only was her age an obstacle to believing

the promise, but Abraham was ten years older than she was. He did not have the physical capabilities of producing a son.

But age is not a problem with God. Age doesn't keep God from blessing, but lack of faith does keep God from blessing.

C. Her Disability

When we are first introduced to Sarah in Genesis 11:30, we are told that she was barren. Barrenness was considered permanent. Many thought barrenness was judgment from God upon a woman for some sin. Rare were the exceptions when a barren woman finally gave birth. But God likes to work in such situations to show His power. He showed His power in this way in the mothers of Samson, Samuel, and John the Baptist.

In her early life Sarah had failed to honor faith in her life, but she recovered and went on to become a woman of great faith. What an encouragement to anyone who has failed in the past. You can still claim great victories by faith.

II. The Praise From Faith Hebrews 11:11

Sarah got straightened out, stopped doubting, and started believing when she began to think more highly of God and when she began to give great honor to God.

"She judged Him faithful who had promised." Faith begins with respect and trust in the One who gives the promise. She began to trust the faithfulness of God and the power of God. No one is as faithful as God and no one is as powerful as God. She held God's Word in the highest honor and respect.

III. The Power of Faith Hebrews 11:11

Notice: Sarah herself received strength to conceive seed and also to deliver a child at childbirth. Both Sarah and Abraham knew it would take a miracle for her to conceive, and as weak as she was in the flesh at age 90, it would take a miracle for her to deliver and to care for a child.

God could have given them a child years before when they were naturally capable of having children, but God waited until they were utterly weak in themselves so they had to rely upon Him for the strength to accomplish the deed. That way God would receive the greatest honor.

IV. The Productivity of Faith Hebrews 11:12

"Therefore." Faith always produces a "therefore." Sow the seed of faith and you will have a blessed harvest. Faith will not be stopped. Faith will always get results.

Faith can take that which is "as good as dead" and bring so much life that it will be like the stars in the heaven and the sand by the seashore in number.

Faith can produce much from a most unlikely candidate. We may have failed miserably in the past, but faith can make the difference and give us victory for God.

Have faith in God when your pathway is lonely,
He sees and knows all the way you have trod.
Never alone are the least of His children,
Have faith in God, Have faith in God.

Have faith in God when your prayers are unanswered,
Your earnest plea He will never forget;
Wait on the Lord, trust His Word and be patient,
Have faith in God, He'll answer yet.

Have faith in God tho all else fail about you;
Have faith in God, He provides for His own.
He cannot fail tho all kingdoms shall parish,
He rules, He reigns upon His throne.

Have faith in God, He's on His throne,
Have faith in God, He watches o'er His own.
He cannot fail, He must prevail,
Have faith in God, Have faith in God.

WHY WE KEEP BELIEVING

Hebrews 11:13-16

Hebrews 11:13-16 (NIV):

“All these people were still living by faith when they died. They did not receive the things promised (while they were alive on earth); they only saw them and welcomed them from a distance. And they admitted that they were aliens and strangers on earth.

People who say such things show that they are looking for a country of their own.

If they had been thinking of the country they had left, they would have had an opportunity to return (there).

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.

If you don't believe in heaven, you can skip this sermon.

That may seem like an odd way to begin a message, but it's a true statement, and the truth is always a good place to start. Everything in this sermon is about Heaven, so if you don't believe in Heaven, then a lot of this sermon won't make sense to you.

There are a lot of things that Christians do that can only be explained because we believe in Heaven. And therein lies the problem. We believe in a place that we can't see, feel, touch, or smell. Heaven, by definition, lies beyond the veil of this visible, seen, touchable, tangible world that is real to us. Since this world is the only world we are sure of, how can we say or believe that there is another world out there somewhere that we can't prove exist in the ordinary use of the word “prove?” How can we know there is a Heaven?

These verses appear in this chapter as a kind of parenthesis. The writer of Hebrews has been talking about the faith-virtues of Able, Enoch, Noah, Abraham, and Sarah, and then suddenly thinks to himself, “people will never believe this, so I'd better explain it.”

The writer wants us to consider why certain people do what they do and live the way they live that seems to be so different from the rest of the world. Go back to Hebrews 10:32-34 and you will find a description of folks in the early days of the church and the hardships they encountered because of their faith:

1. They remained faithful in spite of terrible suffering (v. 32).
2. They were exposed to public ridicule (v. 33).
3. They were persecuted (v. 33).
4. They helped others who suffered the same way (v. 33).
5. They showed sympathy to those thrown in jail (v. 34).
6. They lost all that they had (v. 34).
7. And here's the kicker, they accepted it with joy (v. 34).

Why did they accept it with joy? It was more than enduring it with gritty determination and a tight jaw and a “hang tough, boys.” That can't last forever.

There is something within the Christian that goes beyond just a “stiff upper lip.” Listen to the way Phillips translation presents verse 34: “You endured this because you knew you had a much more solid and lasting treasure in Heaven that would last forever.”

Something better. Something that would last forever. That's a good description of Heaven and it's better than anything we have on earth.

Unlike the things on earth, Heaven lasts forever. So we give up what we have here because we can't keep it anyway and we know we've got something better coming that will never be taken away from us.

Remember the famous words of Jim Elliott, “He is no fool who gives up what he cannot keep to gain what he cannot lose.”

It is ALL about Heaven. How do Christians explain what they do and how they live? Why do Christians love a God they cannot see and serve a God they cannot see and give to the cause of a Christ that died 2,000 years ago and suffer if needs be to stay true to Him? Why do we keep believing?

It's all about Heaven and the blessed hope that Christ will return to catch us away to be with Him forever.

Look at Hebrews 11:13. Abraham and Sarah rightly perceived themselves as "strangers and pilgrims on the earth"; 11:14, "they sought a country (homeland); 11:16, "a better – heavenly country"; 11:16 "God has prepared a city for them."

Christians live by a Different Standard and Die with a Different Hope and Look for a Different Reward.

I. Christians Live by a Different Standard 11:13

"All these people were still living by faith when they died. They did not receive the things promised while they were alive on earth; they only saw them and welcomed them from a distance. And they admitted that they were aliens and strangers on earth."

All these heroes of faith died as believers, still living by faith. To die still believing is the way I want to die. "They died in faith." To die out of faith is to die as an unbeliever. It is a tragic way to die because to die out of faith is to go to hell for eternity.

In Luke 16:22-31 Jesus tells us what it's like when a man dies out of faith – eternal anguish, pain, suffering, separation, torment.

2 Timothy 4:7 Paul died, knowing he had fought a good fight and finished his course and kept the faith.

These ran with patience because they died before they received the promise. But the promises of God do not end at the graveyard. God's promises have no expiration date!

They did see the promise of faith afar off. They were like sailors who saw the shoreline a great distance away, and stood on the railing waving and shouting and say, ""See, there it is! What a beautiful land! And look at all those people! They are waving back to us." The sailors see the land, but their ship never reaches the shore. So they sail on, left with their memories of a harbor they never seem to reach.

"They confessed (admitted) they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth." They did not live for the here and now, but primarily for the hereafter.

Truly, we are not from around here. We've gotten a green card that says "Citizens of Heaven." We are from somewhere else, a realm not visible or touchable to us now, but it will be before long.

II. Christians Die with a Different Hope 11:14-16a

"People who say such things show that they are looking for a country of their own. If they had been thinking of the country they had left, they would have had opportunity to return there. Instead, they were longing for a better country – a heavenly one."

People who walk by faith have their interest in the hereafter. They are not satisfied with this old world.

John Wesley, the father of the Methodist movement, used to say, "Our people die well."

The Puritans preached a great deal to their people about how to die well – full of faith and hope and joy in the Lord. They trained their people so that they would live with conscious, abiding faith in Jesus Christ to the very end of life, and that they would give a joyful testimony to the watching world they left behind.

Those who live by faith know that there are two worlds – this one and the one that is far better, for it is a heavenly one.

A famous southern gospel song put it this way:

This world is not my home, I'm just a passing through.
My treasures are laid up somewhere beyond the blue.
The angels beckon me from heaven's open door,
And I can't feel at home in this world anymore.

O Lord, I know, I have no friend like you,
If heaven's not my home, O Lord what will I do?
The angels beckon me from heaven's open door,
And I can't feel at home in this world anymore.

That vision of Heaven keeps us moving forward when it would be easier to give up and go back.

Spurgeon gives us his whole message on this passage in just one sentence (six words): "Our expectations are our largest possessions."

Spurgeon applies the text this way: Don't expect the men of this world to treat you as one of themselves – if they do, be afraid. Dogs don't bark when a man goes by that they know – they bark at strangers. When people slander and persecute you no longer, be afraid. If you are a stranger, they naturally bark at you. Don't expect to find comforts in this world that your flesh would long for. This is our inn, not our home. We tarry here a night; we are away in the morning.

That's why we don't go back.

ABRAHAM' S SUPREME ACT OF FAITH

Hebrews 11:17-19

This is the second section on Abraham in our study on The Heroes of Faith in Hebrews 11.

- In Hebrews 11:8-10 we read of the Call of Faith to Abraham as he would leave Ur of the Chaldees and dwell in Canaan.
- In Hebrews 11:11-12 we read of Abraham and Sarah and the birth of Isaac by faith.
- Now in Hebrews 11:17-19 we see Abraham's commitment of faith as he would offer Isaac as a sacrifice unto God. Abraham was willing to give back to God his son of promise, Isaac.

I think of Abraham's commitment of faith; then I think of the lack of commitment when some will not even fulfill their offering commitment by putting their tithe in the envelope at church.

Hebrews 11:17-19 shows us three aspects of Abraham's amazing faith in the greatest trial he would ever face.

I. Abraham's Test Hebrews 11:17

In reading this account we are faced with several problems. The first and largest problem has to do with God's character. How could a loving God ask Abraham to sacrifice his only son, who was the promised son? Some critics have dismissed the story on the grounds that it goes against the character of God. Perhaps the only adequate reply is the obvious one – that we humans are hardly in a position to criticize Almighty God on any grounds whatsoever.

Others say that Abraham just misunderstood God. They say that the pagans who lived around Abraham would sacrifice their children to their gods, so Abraham mistakenly thought that God wanted him to offer his son as a sacrifice to Him.

But Abraham did not misunderstand God. In Genesis 22:1-2 God qualified what He wanted Abraham to do in three ways. God said, "Take your son," "your only son" (not forgetting Ishmael who was also his son, but meaning that Isaac was the promised son), "Isaac" (the son for whom Abraham and Sarah had waited for 25 years), "whom you love." There was no misunderstanding what God asked Abraham to do.

At that point, Abraham, the man of faith, only has two options. Either obey or fail to obey. If he had stopped to argue with God, that in itself would have been a form of disobedience. If he had tried to talk God out of it, that too would have been disobedience. If he had offered an alternate plan, that would have also been disobedience. The word "tried" in verse 17 means to test something or someone by examining or probing it. God was probing Abraham's faith to see its quality.

Where there is true faith in God, that faith will always be tried and tested. It is impossible to be a believer and not be tested. And, it is the Lord who does the testing. He may use many agencies, but He is the one who directs the testing of our faith. The testing of our faith is Precious to God and Profitable to the child of God. Where there is true faith in God, that faith will always be tried and tested. It is impossible to be a believer and not be tested. And, it is the Lord who does the testing. He may use many agencies, but He is the one who directs the testing of our faith. The testing of our faith is Precious to God and Profitable to the child of God.

How much is faith tested? It is clear that some are tested more than others. For example, not all are tested to the same extent as Abraham, Job, or Paul. Lot was not tested.

There is a principle that will help us to explain the degree of testing. Faith is tested according to the measure of faith. There are degrees of faith. We begin by trusting God simply for forgiveness and pardon, but as we go on we learn to trust God in ten thousand other ways. As faith grows, it is tried and tested according to its measure; but God has promised not to test us beyond our ability to bear it.

Let me show you some degrees of faith from Bible text.

- Mark 4:40 Jesus asked His disciples, "How is it that you have NO faith?"

- Matthew 6:30 Jesus said to His disciples, "O ye of LITTLE faith."
- Matthew 17:20 Jesus said, "If you have faith as a grain of mustard seed." He is not talking about Little faith, but LIVING faith!
- Luke 17:5 His disciples said to Him, "Lord, INCREASE our faith."
- Luke 7:9 Jesus said, "I say to you, I have not found SO GREAT faith, no, not in Israel."

There you have our Lord's description of the degrees of faith: "No faith, Little faith, Living faith, Increase our faith, So Great faith."

To offer Isaac was not Abraham's first test of faith; it was nearly his last! He would not have been ready for this great test at the beginning of his experience of faith in God. This is true of our experiences of having our faith tested.

Faith is somewhat like school and schools have test. Notice the testing of Abraham in the school of faith.

A. The Regularity of his Test.

Again, this was not Abraham's first test of faith. He was repeatedly tested. He had been tested a number of ways:

1. The Forsaking Test, when leaving Ur of the Chaldees to come to Canaan.
2. The Famine Test, after arriving in Canaan.
3. The Falsehood Test, in Egypt when he lied about Sarah.
4. The Family Test, in regards to parting with Lot.
5. The Fortune Test, in turning down the reward offer from the wicked king of Sodom.
6. And here, The Foremost Test, when he is asked to offer up his son, Isaac.

B. The Response to the Test.

Abraham didn't pass all the tests he was given. He failed the Famine test and the Falsehood test. We all fail test in the school of faith. But test are not given to embarrass the student, but to help the student. Test often show us our weak points where we need improvement.

Faith test are allowed to improve our service and to increase our faith.

HOW is our faith tested?

1. Sometimes our Affections are touched.

We see this in the case of Abraham. We hear the Lord saying to him, "My child, put back into My hands what I have given you."

2. Sometimes the test comes in the realms of our bodies, as was the case with Paul when he was given a thorn in his flesh.
3. Sometimes the trial of faith involves the loss of position.

Job 23:10: "But He knows the way that I take; when He has tested me, I shall come forth as gold."

WHY does God test our faith?

1. God tries our faith to prove the genuineness of it. "Abraham, do you trust me? All right! Prove it!"
2. God tries our faith to increase the measure or degree of it.
3. God tries our faith to produce the fruit of it.
4. God tries our faith to use the testimony of it.

II. Abraham's Trust Hebrews 11:18

Isaac was the promised son that God said would have multitude of descendants and would bring forth a nation. But how could that happen if Isaac was dead? If Abraham obeys the command, does that cancel the promise since Isaac will be dead? If he disobeys the command, what happens to the promise? Abraham didn't know how God would do it; he just knew God would do it somehow. Herein lies the lesson for all of us. When God makes a promise, it's foolish for us to wonder "How" He will get it done.

Faith believes and leaves the "How" in the hands of Almighty God! Remember that Abraham had no idea about what was about to happen. He just set out to obey God. He knew nothing about God "staying his hand" to keep him from cutting Isaac's throat. He knew nothing about the ram caught in the thicket by its horns. There are times in life when our only job is to take the next step. We aren't called to figure out the big picture or to explain why God is doing things the way He's doing them. Our job is to obey and leave the rest to God!

III. Abraham's Triumph Hebrews 11:19

Abraham “thought” he knew how God would keep His promise. He reasoned that he would put his son to death, but that God would raise him from the dead. It had never happened before, but that’s what he reasoned. It turned out that he was partly right. God can raise the dead. In fact, He proved it at the empty tomb outside the walls of Jerusalem.

Now we can stand back and see the story in clear perspective. Abraham knew what God told him to do and he knew what God had promised, he just didn’t know how God was going to do it. But for 2,000 years Christians have seen in this story a picture of the death and resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ. In Genesis 22 we see what a man would do for the love of God. But at Calvary we see what God would do for the love of man. Abraham was only asked to sacrifice Isaac; God actually sacrificed His only Son. When God’s hand was raised at Calvary against His Son who was given as a sacrifice for our sin, there was no one to cry out, “Stop! Do not harm your Son!” There was no ram in the thicket to offer in His place. So God’s hand fell in judgment on His own Son, and Jesus died for you and me.

What are we supposed to take away from the story of Abraham and Isaac? After Abraham’s great trial of faith was over, the ram was sacrificed, Isaac was spared, the promise reaffirmed, God commends Abraham by saying, “Now I know that you fear God, seeing that you have not withheld your son, your only son from me.”

God did not withhold His Son for us, what should we offer to Him?

Take my life, and let it be consecrated, Lord, to Thee.
Take my moments and my days; let them flow in ceaseless praise.
Take my hands, and let them move at the impulse of Thy love.
Take my feet, and let them be swift and beautiful for Thee.
Take my voice, and let me sing always, only, for my King.
Take my lips, and let them be filled with messages from Thee.
Take my silver and my gold; not a mite would I withhold.
Take my intellect, and use every power as Thou shalt choose.
Take my will, and make it Thine; it shall be no longer mine.
Take my heart, it is Thine own; it shall be Thy royal throne.
Take my love, my Lord, I pour at Thy feet its treasure store.
Take myself, and I will be ever, only, all for Thee.

ISAAC: FAITH FOR THE FUTURE

Hebrews 11:20

An old man in North Mississippi had a long-time fascination with the ocean. He had never seen the ocean, but he had read stories about it. Now in his seventies, his family took him on a short vacation to the Gulf. When they got down there, they let him out on the sandy beach and he made his way down to the edge of the water. He looked to his left and then to his right, turned around and with his head down and kicking in the sand, said, “Uh, ain’t as big as I thought it’d be.” His son tried to tell his dad that there was far more beyond what he could see, but he left believing that what he saw was all there was.

When we come to Isaac, it’s one of the shortest statements of faith you will find in Hebrews 11. It simply says, “Isaac blessed his sons concerning the things of the future.”

After the two sections on Abraham, the writer of Hebrews gives brief comments on three heroes who were at or near the end of their life.

What Isaac did was to instill in his sons a kind of faith that reach beyond this life and into the future.

Isaac might be called the “Plain Jane” of the Patriarchs. We know a great deal about Abraham and Jacob and Joseph, but how many of us could share one thing that Isaac ever said or did?

Someone said that “Isaac was the ordinary son of a great father and the ordinary father of a great son. Yet, God describes Himself as the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.” But who is Isaac? Why is he in the Hall of Fame?

Three things I want you to see about Isaac:

I. Some Information about Isaac

Four things we know about Isaac:

A. His Birth

He is the promised son of Abraham and Sarah. They had to wait 25 years after God promised that he would be born for God to fulfill His promise. He was a miracle baby, for Abraham was 100 years old when he was born and Sarah was 90.

B. His Sacrifice

In Genesis 22 God instructs Abraham to take Isaac to a mount and to sacrifice him there. Abraham did as God told him. What great faith he had. But what about Isaac? It's one thing to offer your son as a sacrifice, but it's another thing to BE the sacrifice. We often think about Abraham's faith, but what about Isaac's. He had to have faith in God but he also had to put himself in Abraham's hands.

C. His Bride

His bride was chosen by a servant of Abraham. The servant asked that the Lord show him whom the Lord had chosen. He had come a long way with his camels. The servant asked that the right woman for Isaac would give him a drink of water and that she would water his camels as well. I don't know about you, but for me, it would take a lot of faith for me to receive a bride with that as a sign!

D. His Service

Isaac's main service was to dig wells of water and leave them so that others who followed him could be blessed and refreshed. We might look upon that as a small thing, but that's what God led him to do.

II. The Inspiration Concerning Isaac

Isaac's life closes out in Genesis 35:29. There is an interesting statement there concerning Isaac. We are told that Isaac was "old and full of days" or literally, "days that are full."

What is being said is that Isaac filled up each day. He did not build up any great army. He did not conquer any land. He wrote no books. We cannot put our finger on one great thing he did.

Here is what I want you to see: He made the most of his days even though they were simple, ordinary days. Most of us miss the meaningfulness of consistently living out in faith ordinary days. For 180 years he filled up ordinary days living in faith.

Most of us don't do big things. Most don't go to big places or fellowship with big folks, but we can fill up ordinary days, living consistently by faith.

One reason he is in the Hall of Fame is because he filled up each day and lived it to the full.

But, now, here is one mark of genuine Christianity. When you come to the end of your life, you still hold on to what you believe. When someone dies, we want to know, "What were his final words? That's what our text is all about. What was his final words and his final deeds?"

How does faith show itself at the end of life?

I have already said that Isaac was a kind of plain, ordinary man. One reason for that may be because he had such a strong father and a protective mother, and a domineering wife, so he never established his own identity. He was also manipulated by his wife and by both of his sons. Yet the Bible says, "By faith Isaac." He must have done something right. At what point do we see his faith in action?

We see his faith in action when Jacob puts on the goatskin as his mother had instructed him and fools Isaac into thinking that he (Jacob) is his hairy brother, Esau, instead. Isaac then gives Jacob the blessing he intended to give to Esau. Later when Esau asks his father to bless him, the deceit is discovered.

This is THE crucial moment. Isaac knows he has been tricked into giving Jacob the blessing. Everything about the way it was done was underhanded and wrong. And yet Isaac refused to reverse what he had done. "I blessed him – and indeed he will be blessed" (Genesis 27:33). Later he gives Esau a blessing as well, but it was much less significant.

This is an example of the overruling grace of God. He didn't try to reverse the blessing obtained through deceit because he believed God was at work in the trickery of his wife and his younger son.

He thus affirmed God's choice of Jacob over Esau. By faith he ratified what God had ordained. Somehow he saw the hand of God behind all the conniving.

What a lesson about the sovereignty of God working through sinful human circumstances. Isaac understood that God's will comes first, and we must bow before it even when we don't understand it. We must do what is right even when it goes against our personal preferences.

Did Isaac have faith? Yes. He was strong in the end when it counted. He made sure his children were blessed "regarding the future." He didn't accomplish a great deal from a worldly point of view, but he passed his faith along to his children. And in the end, that's all that matters.

The one area of life that really matters is the spiritual example you leave for your family.

Again, back in Genesis 35:29 we are told that "Isaac gave up the ghost, and died, and was gathered unto his people." That means he died with dignity. He left this life here to be gathered with his people there with dignity.

How you and I die says a lot about us. Isaac died with dignity. He ended his life on a high note.

III. The Implications Concerning Isaac

The implications for you and me concerning Isaac is this: God has a plan for our life and it should be lived out in a moment by moment faithfulness to God.

What you and I do right now will affect what we are in the future. What we do now and the years that are before us will determine how we meet our Master.

The song writer put it this way: "It is Well With my Soul." Oh, to meet our Master knowing that all is well with our soul.

JACOB: A WORM WHO BECAME A PRINCE **Hebrews 11:21; Isaiah 41:14; Genesis 32:28**

(Isaiah 41:14 "thou worm Jacob")

The fairy tale says that if you kiss a frog that it will turn into a prince. I don't put much stock in that, but Jacob was a worm who became a prince.

Jacob, the worm, didn't look much like "prince material," but God was able to make him into a prince.

If there was a person that you might wonder, "Why is he in the Hall of Fame?," it would be this man, Jacob. No one is more aptly named as Jacob. His name means cheater, con artist, deceiver, liar, double-crosser.

He lived most of his life, always trying to get the upper hand on folks; using and abusing folks; doing whatever it took to get the advantage for himself.

And HE is in the Hall of Fame? How did HE get there?

Three simple points I want to share with you: Jacob, the wretched man, the wrestling man, the worshipping man.

I. Jacob: The Wretched Man

Jacob really was a worm of a man. Let me share with you just how sorry this worm of a man was.

A. What he got in life, he got by taking advantage of people.

You will remember that the birthright was rightfully his, because God had designed it so, but he didn't get it God's way. He got it by tricking both his brother and his father. He took advantage of his brother's hungry condition and traded the birthright for a bowl of stew. He tricked his old, blind dad by putting animal's skins on his arms so he would be hairy like his brother. He took advantage of his father's blindness to get what he wanted for himself.

Have you ever known someone who got ahead in life by using other folks? They didn't get what they got in life the old fashion way, by earning it. They used others to profit themselves. That's Jacob.

B. When he took advantage of his dad, he broke relationship with his brother and left a gap of broken relationships behind that lasted for years.

People of God are to bring reconciliation and mend broken relationships; but not Jacob!

Matthew 5 says that before you can worship God, if there is an offense between you and a brother, go, make it right with your brother, and then come and worship God.

C. He mistreated his parents; especially his dad.

The fifth commandment says we are to honor, respect, and obey our parents. He tricked his dad and broke his heart.

There was one redeeming factor in Jacob's life toward the later part of his life. He developed a heart for God. Other people hated Jacob, but no one hated Jacob like Jacob hated Jacob before he got right with God.

II. Jacob: The Wrestling Man Genesis 32:24-26

The Angel of the Lord who wrestled with Jacob was the Lord Himself. God had to get him alone before He could work in his life. The same is true of us.

After the wrestling God did a work in Jacob's heart and changed his name to Israel. And even after that Jacob begins to scheme again. Esau and Jacob are about to meet face to face. Jacob prepares gifts in an effort to cool Esau's hatred. He can't run any more; he's crippled now. No longer is he Bargaining; he's Begging!

III. Jacob: The Worshiping Man

Jacob is now an old man. As the King James Version put it, "he was dying." One by one he calls in his sons and gives each one a blessing suited to him. When he comes to Joseph, he blesses him and then he blesses Joseph's sons, Ephraim and Manasseh.

The story of the blessing of the grandsons is interesting because Jacob did an unexpected thing. Joseph wanted him to bless Manasseh, the older, with his right hand as a sign of the greater blessing, but at the last second, old Jacob crossed his hands and blessed Ephraim, the younger, with his right hand. This displeased Joseph, but Jacob would not change his blessing.

Some who are younger sons and daughters can draw great encouragement from this story. Many times the firstborn children are favored and children that come later are overlooked. But the Bible is full of hope for the younger children. Isaac was a younger child. So was Jacob. So was Joseph. So was Moses. So was Gideon. So was David.

In blessing the younger over the older, Jacob teaches us that God is no respecter of persons. He exalts those who honor Him, regardless of their background or birth order. Very often it is through the "overlooked" people of the world that God does His greatest work.

Jacob knew that his grandsons, Ephraim and Manasseh, had been raised in the lap of luxury in Egypt. Because of Joseph's exalted position, they had been reared to appreciate all that the pagan world had to offer. Now Jacob would assure that Joseph's boys would learn the ways of Jehovah.

"And he worshiped as he leaned on the top of his staff." Worship is the highest function of the human soul. The one thing which counts most with the Lord is not our worship or our ceaseless activity, but the love, adoration, and worship of our hearts.

Jacob was 147 years old, weak, weary, and ready to leave this earthly scene for his mansion in the skies. How was he spending his last moments on earth? Worshiping! How beautiful to die while enjoying perfect communion with the Lord!

Jacob's staff was a symbol of the Lord's unfailing mercy and tender care. The worship of faith will soon be superseded by the worship of sight. If we are to worship Him in Heaven, we must first worship Him here!

On his death bed, Jacob was worshiping God.

When Dr. R. G. Lee was nearing death, Billy Graham and Cliff Barrows went to Memphis to see him. They met Dr. Rogers and Tommy Lane at the airport and the four of them went to Dr. Lee's home. Dr. Lee's adopted daughter was at the home and when she went to check on Dr. Lee, she came back and told the four men that she could not wake him and his breathing was faint.

Dr. Rogers said, "Dr. Lee loved singing. Why don't we sing him into glory?"

The four men circled the bed, holding hands, and Cliff Barrows lead in singing, "O, come, angel band, come and around us stand. O, bear me away on your snowy wings to my eternal home. O, bear me away on your snowy wings to my eternal home."

Dr. Lee opened his blue eyes and saw Billy Graham, pulled him close and hugged him. Then he closed his eyes and in a few minutes was in the presence of God.

The time is coming when we will meet the Lord. Have you learned to lean on Him?

JOSEPH: FAITH FOR TRIALS AND TRIUMPHS

Hebrews 11:22; Genesis 50:24-26

Of all the people in the Old Testament, Joseph is the most beautiful and the most striking type of our Lord Jesus Christ. Lay the life of Joseph along side the life of the Lord Jesus and you can't help but see similarities between the two of them.

1. Joseph was especially loved by his father, as was the Lord Jesus.
2. Joseph was hated and sold by his brethren, as was the Lord Jesus.
3. Joseph was unjustly condemned, as was the Lord Jesus.
4. Joseph was raised to a position of great power and authority, as was the Lord Jesus.
5. Joseph became a blessing to the Gentiles and took a Gentile bride, and so did the Lord Jesus.
6. Joseph revealed his identity to his brethren, and so will the Lord Jesus.
7. Joseph assured his brethren of his unchanging love, and so does the Lord Jesus.

Joseph really was a godly man in the good times and in the hard times.

For too many Christians, their faith is a kind of fair-weather faith. When things are going well for them, it's a good time to know the Lord. But what do you do when life doesn't go the way you think it should go? When trials come in your life? When life is really tough? Where is your faith at that point and what do you do in the midst of trials?

Think about this: Our trials give us more opportunity to exhibit our faith than anything else in life. It is during trials that the kind of faith you really have is seen. It's one thing to have faith in the good times and another thing to have a faith that can stand the test of trials.

If there is one person who faced undeserved trials – one after another – it was Joseph. And yet, he seemed to face each trial with the right spirit. Joseph had a faith that endured in both trials and triumphs.

Three things I see about trials in the life of Joseph:

I. Trials Are Going to Come in Life

Trials come in life for many reasons, but trials come in Joseph's life because of:

A. Over-caring Parents

Ten sons were born before Joseph was born and all ten sons were born to the woman who was married to Jacob through deception. After ten sons, Joseph was finally born to the love of Jacob's life. Think what a big to-do both Jacob and Rachel must have made over Joseph. The other ten boys must have felt that they were invisible now that little Joseph was born. He got all the attention. He was privileged. And mother and dad must have expressed their favoritism openly. He was even given a coat of many colors to indicate that he was favored and loved above all the rest.

Now if you don't think that's a trial, you're wrong. Parents do an injustice to any child by showing them favoritism. Think of the resentment they live with from the other brothers and sisters. And add to that, that the favored child often begins to feel that they deserve to be treated special by society and they feel that they are just a little better than other folks.

I don't know how many times I've heard a child say, "I wish my parents realized they had two children or three children" – over-caring parents.

B. Under-caring Brothers

Joseph was sent by his father to check on his brothers who were tending the flock and to carry them provisions. When the brothers saw him with his coat of many colors, anger and resentment began to manifest itself in each of the brothers. They said to one another, "Let's kill him!" Sanity prevailed slightly and instead of killing him, they threw him into a pit and later sold him as a slave to folks who were going to Egypt.

What an undeserved trial for a seventeen year old boy.

C. Unfair World

God blessed Joseph in Egypt, even when he did the right thing and refused the advances of Potiphar's wife. She lied and said that Joseph tried to rape her, and Joseph was thrown into prison. But in the midst of it all, he kept trusting God, doing what was right and kept his spirit right.

II. Joseph's Trials Were Turned Into Smiles

Don't miss this point. Sometimes when folks face trials, especially if the trial or hardship is undeserved, their life is turned into frowns of depression and dejection.

With Joseph, undeserved trials were turned into smiles. How was Joseph able to do that? Even when Joseph seemed to be at the bottom with no way to get out of the pit or prison, he kept trusting God and knew that God could work in his life, even in the deep pit and lonely prison experiences.

What do we do when we find ourselves in a pit or prison experience? Do we crawl off in the corner and sulk or do we continue to trust God?

I heard about a man who fell off a steep cliff. On the way down he tried to catch on to several branches. Finally, he was able to catch on to a strong branch. He did not know it, but he was only about two feet from the ground. He looked up and cried out, "Is anybody up there?"

A voice said, "Yes, I'm up here." "Who are you?" "God. Let go!" "Is anyone else up there?"

In the good times and in the hard times, the best thing we can do is trust God.

We ought to be at our best when things are at their worst. If you want to see Joseph at his best, watch him as he spends two years in prison for something he didn't do. He kept a sweet, forgiving spirit throughout his trials.

III. Joseph Turned Trials into Smiles Which Resulted in Blessings in Huge Piles

The time will come when Joseph will be second in command over Egypt.

Remember my title for the message: "Faith for Trials and Triumphs." Joseph's faith was strong in trials, but now he is in second in command during a famine and his brothers, who treated him so badly, must come before him for food. He is on top now. He has the opportunity to get even with his brothers who hurt him. What will Joseph do now that the tables are turned?

Joseph told his brothers who he was, and they were afraid! But Joseph tried to calm their hearts when he said, "You meant it for evil toward me, but God meant it for good."

There are so many acts of faith in Joseph's life that God could have said, "This is why I put Joseph in my Hall of Faith." But God chose a reason that most of us would not have chosen as a reason to put him in Hebrews 11.

When he was dying, Joseph remembered the promise that God made to Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and through these three, to him also. God had promised them the Promised Land. Although Joseph lived most of his life in Egypt and even became second in command over all of Egypt, and dressed like an Egyptian, in his heart he was a Jew, an Israelite, an heir of the Promised Land. He knew that one day God would keep His promise and deliver the Israelites from Egypt and would give them a homeland of their own. Because he believed the promise so firmly, he instructed his brothers not to leave his bones in Egypt, but to make sure to carry his mummified body with them and give him a burial place in the Promised Land.

Moses took the bones with him when the Jews left Egypt (Exodus 13:19) and years later Joshua buried them at Shechem (Joseph 24:32). There his bones rest in the dust of the earth to this day.

Joseph lived and died without ever hearing about Moses and Joshua. He knew nothing of their mighty deeds. But in his old age God gave him faith to believe that although he was dying in Egypt, his future belonged to the Promised Land.

By the way, the greatest thing we can do is to pass our faith along to our children and grandchildren. Abraham gave it to Isaac, Isaac gave it to Jacob, Jacob gave it to Joseph, and Joseph gave his faith to the whole nation of Israel.

I have faith because someone passed it on to me. And someone gave it to the person who gave it to me. On and on the line goes, stretching back 2,000 years. I must make sure my son follows in my steps. I must not fail here. The baton of faith must be passed on to the next generation. Passing my faith along is the work of an entire lifetime. It's never done, no matter how old I get!

MOSES: THE GREAT REFUSAL

Hebrews 11:24-28

“The greatest thing you will ever do is learn how to say NO.”

I'm not sure who said that, but whoever it was spoke the truth. Nothing is harder than learning how to say “no” at the right time, in the right way, for the right reasons.

Life is made up of choices, in fact, that's really all life is – a series of choices we make that leads us in one direction or another. When we make our choices, our choices turn around and make us.

If you and I make wrong choices, we make mistakes and find our self full of regrets. Wrong choices leave us with a long list of things we are sorry for, and an extremely short list of things to be proud of.

Every day we choose to go one direction or another. We can't say “yes” to this without saying “no” to that. In the spiritual realm our choices are light or darkness, sin or righteousness, life or death, heaven or hell. So go ahead and make your choice.

Before we say “yes,” we have to learn to say “no.” That's the message from the life of Moses as it is summarized in Hebrews 11:24-28. Moses did great things for God because he learned to say “no.”

Moses had a good start in life even in difficult circumstances because his parents were people of faith in the Living God. In the providence of God, the early years of his life – those formative years when a child's character is shaped – he was taught at his mother's knee. She told him about the things of God.

We as parents have a great responsibility to train our children in the ways of the Lord and such a short time to train them. We need to take advantage of every opportunity.

But, the time came that Moses must find the will of God for his own life! Parents cannot decide for Christ for their children. Parents can teach and train and share and be the right kind of godly example, but children must decide for or against Christ for themselves.

When Moses was 40 years old, he made his choice for God and that tremendous decision influenced the remainder of his life. He was in the prime of life, when the lure of the world and the pleasures of sin would seem most attractive, and when the opportunities for gaining prominence in Egypt would be most tempting. “By faith” Moses made his choice for God.

Four verbs in this passage form an outline of Moses' priorities and his life's view.

1. “Esteem” Hebrews 11:26 (esteeming)

The word “esteem” means “to account” or “to weigh the pros and cons.” It signifies a calm, reflective decision. Moses looked at everything Egypt had to offer him, then looked at what God and His people had to offer him. Moses knew the riches of Egypt were temporary and that life with the God if Israel was eternal. After he “esteemed” the situation, it was no contest! He chose God!

2. “Choosing” Hebrews 11:25

The world would have thought Moses was crazy in light of what he was giving up. The “pleasures of sin” had much attraction for him, but he chose to side with the people of God. Too often folks fail to look ahead to eternity and see what God has prepared for those who love Him. A “No” on earth means a “Yes” in heaven. Moses gave up the pleasures of a season for pleasures forevermore.

3. “Refusing” Hebrews 11:24

Moses said, “I could, but I won't. It's possible for me to do, but I'm not going to.” Moses refused to sell out to the things of this world. Instead of turning his back on God, he turned his back on Egypt and its riches.

4. “Looking” Hebrews 11:26

Moses didn't look to the pleasure in this life; he “looked to the reward.”

I. The Riches He Refused Hebrews 11:24-26

Notice the words, “he refused.” The “refusal moments” are so important in our life. What you and I refuse is going to determine what we become in life. Well, what did Moses refuse?

A. Worldly Position

“He refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter's son.” Some may see this as an act of ingratitude since it was Pharaoh's daughter who saved him. She took him in, kept him from being killed as the other Hebrew babies were, sent him to the best schools Egypt had to offer.

It was not ingratitude that caused Moses to refuse to be called Pharaoh's daughter's son. I think Moses appreciated what she had done for him. I think Moses refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter because he was not her son; he was not an Egyptian. He wanted to make it clear that he was identifying with God's people. He would not be identified with Egypt's religion or lifestyle.

There is nothing wrong with worldly position, if that's where God wants you. God wanted Joseph in high position, second in command in Egypt; but that was not God's plan for Moses. God didn't want Moses to lead Egypt. He wanted Moses to lead His people.

Have you ever thought how Moses could have rationalized the situation? He could have said, “Well, I can still free God's people as the head of Egypt. I can just make a decree and let all of God's people go free.” Maybe! But the nation wouldn't have seen God work like they saw Him work because Moses followed God's plan.

One of our missionaries was approached by one of the large oil companies in the South Seas. They knew how much he made as a missionary, so they offered him more than double the salary. He turned them down. Big oil companies are use to being turned down on their first offer, so they upped the offer. Again he turned it down. “Whatever it takes to get him, make the offer,” they said.

Again, he turned it down. Finally, they asked, “Mister, how much money do you want?” “Oh,” he said, “you have misunderstood. It's not that the salary isn't big enough; it's that the job is too small.”

B. Worldly Pleasures Hebrews 11:25

Moses could have been a playboy prince, but he turned his back on it all. Understand, there IS pleasure in sin – for a season; for a little while. But for every kick, there is a kickback. You can choose your kicks, but you can't choose the kickbacks.

R. G. Lee use to say, “You can eat the devil's corn if you want to, but he'll choke you on the cob every time.”

Psalm 16:11 says “there are pleasures in the Lord forevermore.”

C. Worldly Possessions Hebrews 11:26

“The treasures in Egypt” was the greatest in the world in that day; but listen to Ecclesiastes 5:10, “He who loves silver will not be satisfied with silver.”

II. The Reproach He Received Hebrews 11:24-26

The Bible is full of illustrations of the refusals of faith:

- In Genesis 39:9 Joseph refused the indecent proposal of Potipher's wife.
- In Daniel 3 King Nebuchadnezzar made a nine-foot gold image and said that anyone who would not bow down to the image would be cast into a fiery furnace. Shadrach, Meshach, and Aded-Nego refused to bow, but God protected them in the fiery furnace.
- In Daniel 6, Daniel was told he must not pray to God or he would face the lion's den. He did pray, was thrown in the lion's den; but God shut the mouths of the lions.
- In Acts 4, Peter and John were told not to preach any more in the name of Jesus, but they said that they “must obey God rather than man.”

Look at the reproach Moses suffered. He chose “to be ill-treated” (verse 25) and “disgrace” (verse 26), but he gained an eternal reward and the peace of God filled his heart.

Jesus didn't sugar-coat trusting in Him. He said that “all who live godly will suffer persecution” (2 Timothy 3:12).

In this day of compromise, Christians are going to be tempted more and more not to take their stand for Christ.

In 1827 William Booth, founder of the Salvation Army, was born in England. He was lead to Christ by a Wesleyan. God gave Booth a heart for the hard-hearted, the down and out, the harlots, the thieves, and the drunkards. He had a street ministry in the slums of London, right in the middle of the red-light district. He would win those folks to Jesus and teach them to witness and praise the Lord and form little bands of people he called “Hallelujah Bands.” They would stand on the corners and praise our Lord and get people

saved.

Some hated Booth. They would throw stones at him and attack him with clubs and he would come home with his head bloody and his eyes black. Booth's "Hallelujah Bands" were a disgrace to the cultured denominations of that day. Finally, they called Booth before the Ecclesiastical Court and told him he couldn't do his ministry anymore. They said, "We ask you one more time. Will you cease doing what you are doing?" His little thin, proper looking wife stood with a white handkerchief, waved it and said, "William, William, Say no ...Say no!"

Booth said, "Gentlemen, the answer is no!" With that little two-letter word, the Salvation Army was born and thousands have been saved, fed, and clothed because he was willing to suffer reproach. How did he do it? By faith!

III. The Religion He Rejected Hebrews 11:27-28

Moses left Egypt for the first time when he fled for his life after killing the Egyptian slave master (Exodus 2:14-15). That time he fled because he feared Pharaoh's wrath. On the second occasion, he turned his back on Egypt and all it represented. This time he would not leave in fear, but in faith.

Notice: "he endured as seeing Him who is invisible." How do you see Him who is invisible? Moses' faith in God was such that he responded to God's commands as though God were standing visibly before him.

After nine plagues the moment of ultimate truth and faith came when God told Moses to keep the Passover.

God said to Moses, "Tell the people that if they want to be delivered, each family must kill an unblemished one-year-old lamb, and then take the blood of the lamb and put it on the doorpost and the lintel at the top of the door of their house. Then they must roast the meat and eat it with bitter herbs. They are to eat all of it and eat it quickly." Exodus 12:12-13.

God said, "Either the lamb dies or the firstborn of the family in each house dies. The blood must be shed either way."

Suppose you were an Israelite being asked to sacrifice a lamb and put its blood on the doorpost. Would you do it? Would you have faith that the blood could save you from death and judgment?

God wants to know one thing from each of us, "Do you have faith that the blood of Jesus can wash away all your sins?" Jesus is the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world (John 1:29).

There is a fountain filled with blood, drawn from Emmanuel's veins;

And sinners plunged beneath that flood lose all their guilty stains.

Lose all their guilty stains, lose all their guilty stains;

And sinners plunged beneath that flood lose all their guilty stains.

FAITH TO CROSS THE RED SEA **Hebrews 11:29; Exodus 14:1-10, 13-14**

In this study and the study next week, we are going to be looking at the faith, not of an individual, but of an entire nation. The nation was comprised of some 2.5 million people.

Hebrews 11:29 tells us not only of the faith of Moses, but of the faith of the children of Israel as well.

It was important for Moses to have faith in God and to obey the Lord. If Moses had not obeyed the word of the Lord, the Exodus experience would have failed. But, it is also important that not only the leader, but also the people to obey the Lord as they follow God's leader. God says that by faith the whole nation followed God's word.

The whole nation is commended by God for their faith and was even listed in God's Hall of Fame. Is that amazing to you? The children of Israel were a complaining and rebellious bunch – so much so that what should have taken a month to arrive in the Promised Land, took 40 years and only two of the original 2.5 million got to enter the Land.

The original 2.5 million experienced such victory through faith, but lost so much because of their unbelief. The same can happen to us.

Let me give you a number of instructive characteristics of faith:

I. The Perplexity for Faith

When Israel left Egypt, Canaan was their destination. But first, they must go to the wilderness to sacrifice unto God. The logical route would be to go from Rameses to Succoth to Ethan (Numbers 33:5-6). The next step would seem to be to continue on into the wilderness and set up camp there so Israel could worship. God had told Moses that they would serve Him upon Mt. Horeb. That's the direction Israel was headed when they stopped at Ethan.

But then God ordered them to head for Pi Hahiroth which was on the west side of the Red Sea. That seemed like a strange move since they needed to go east instead of west. Going west would not take them to Canaan, but into Africa.

Why would God lead them in the opposite direction from Canaan? Two reasons:

1. To put their faith to the test. Would they acknowledge that God's wisdom was higher than man's wisdom? They needed to learn that if God's leading seems perplexing, behind His leading is the wisdom of God.

2. God knew that Pharaoh would send his army after the children of Israel, so God would set a trap for Pharaoh and his army. And it worked. When Pharaoh saw the people of God headed west instead of east, Pharaoh thought the people were lost in the desert and they would be easy prey. If they continued to go west, they would soon be "hemmed in," like being in a cul-de-sac, and would be able to do absolutely nothing. Pharaoh's army would have them hemmed in and rounded up at the same time. On one side of them was a mountain; on the other a desert, and in front of them the Red Sea. They were defenseless before Pharaoh. A bloodbath is all they could expect.

But instead of Pharaoh hemming the people of God in with no where to go, God had Pharaoh hemmed in with no where to go.

II. The Plea of Faith Exodus 14:10

Not everything the Israelites did was commendable, but this act was. They were scared to death. They thought they were doomed; so, they cried out to God.

Sometimes even when you are walking by faith, circumstances may go sour. The wisest thing to do is always go to the Lord in the time of trouble.

III. The Power of Faith Exodus 14:15-16, 21-22, 29

"Go forward?" "Lord, you do see the Red Sea out there, do you not?"

"Lift up your rod, Moses" and when he did, the Lord's power took over. "Now, step out! Step in! Step on dry ground! Step through the wall of water on both sides of you!"

The power came from God! The Israelites needed a way made for them through the Red Sea. They had no bridge. They could not build enough boats to save them from Pharaoh's army. The power to escape came from God.

God's power worked in several ways:

1. He parted the Red Sea. What a powerful wind God directed to part the water and cause a wall of water to hold its place on each side. And, yet, as strong as the wind was to control the water, it did not hinder the youngest child or the weakest old man from going across.

2. Did you notice it says that they WALKED across on dry land. They didn't rush through at top speed. There was no confusion. They walked in an orderly fashion. They demonstrated complete confidence in God.

3. Five times in Exodus (14:16, 21, 22, 29; 15:19), one in Nehemiah 9:11, Psalm 66:6 and Hebrews 11:29, the Bible mentions they went over on dry ground. How long does it usually take for a river bed to dry up? Yet, the ground was rock-hard in a moment.

4. The waters closed at the right moment. Pharaoh didn't have the people of God hemmed in after all!

IV. The Preservation by Faith

What Victorious Faith!

1. The Name of the Lord was honored and glorified Exodus 14:4, 17-18, 25.

2. The People of God were delivered Exodus 14:29-31

3. The Powers of darkness were overthrown Exodus 14:27-28

The Egyptians had no command from God to cross the Red Sea. To attempt to cross it was not faith, but presumption. What others may do by faith is not something you are to do unless you have a Biblical premise for doing so.

The Egyptians did not have the right motive in crossing the Red Sea. They were not crossing it for God's honor, but for personal gain.

Have faith in God!

BY FAITH, JOSHUA FIT THE BATTLE OF JERICO

Hebrews 11:30; Joshua 6

Few stories in the Bible are better known than the story of Joshua and the battle for Jericho. We know it so well that when someone starts to tell the story, we subconsciously start to sing the old spiritual:

Joshua fit the battle of Jericho, Jericho, Jericho.

Joshua fit the battle of Jericho, and the walls came tumbling down.

And then comes the verse:

You may talk about your men of Gideon,

You may brag about you men of Saul.

But there's none like good old Joshua

At the battle of Jericho.

It's a story of God's people emerging victorious when facing an impossible situation.

Joshua was commissioned by God to succeed Moses in leading the children of Israel into the Promised Land. Primarily, his task was to conquer the existing peoples, drive them out of the land, and subdivide the land into portions for each of Israel's tribes.

Subduing Jericho was first on the list since it was a large, fortified city sitting right across the Jordan River in the middle of the land. Conquering Jericho first would mean the land would be divided, allowing easier entrance into the Northern and Southern portions.

What was Jericho to Joshua and the people of God?

- A city of pagan unbelief.
- A city of strategic importance.
- A city of human impossibility.

All three are crucial. Pagan unbelief must be confronted head on. The corrupt Canaanite religion with its emphasis on idolatry and immorality could never coexist with the true worship of God. It must be confronted and defeated. Thus the city had a spiritual importance and a military importance. Deuteronomy 9:1 tells us that the walls around Jericho were so high that they seemed to reach to the sky, so the city must be completely defeated or the Jews would never be safe.

Three things I want you to see as the entire group of Hebrews moved in faith against Jericho:

I. The Promise of Faith Joshua 6:1-2

God takes Joshua into His confidence and gives him the plan for how to proceed. It starts with the promise from God: "I have given Jericho into your hand." (Joshua 6:2)

The promise of God was absolute. All faith is based on the word of God and the promise of God. Faith is taking God at His word. God's word to Joshua was that Jericho would be delivered into his hands.

The promise of God was perfect, but it was also conditional. The people of Israel had to follow Joshua into battle and implement by faith the plan of God.

This is what God said to Joshua BEFORE He gave him the plan: "See, I have delivered Jericho into your hands, along with its kings and its fighting men" (Joshua 6:2). Note the past tense: "I have delivered." Not "I will deliver." God speaks of Jericho as having already been defeated. That's a key point. God is saying, "It's a done deal. Those walls are coming down. It's just a matter of time."

In a real sense, the battle was over before it was started. God promised to deliver the city, and in due time, He made good on His

promise.

II. The Plan of Faith Joshua 6:3-5

Here is the plan God gave to Joshua:

- March around the city once a day for six days (verse 3).
- March with the Ark of the Covenant (the physical representation of God's presence) (verse 4).
- Put seven priests in front of the Ark (verse 9).
- On the seventh day march around Jericho seven times (verse 5).
- Have the priest blow ram's horns as they march (verse 5).
- On the seventh time around on the seventh day, have the people shout (verse 5).
- When the people shout, the walls come down (verse 5).
- When the walls come down, enter the city and conquer it (verse 5).

Joshua added a few refining details to the plan:

- He instructed the people to be perfectly silent as they marched around the city.
- He put soldiers in front of the priests and behind the Ark.
- He had the priest blow the ram's horn (the Shofar) continually.

For six days they marched around the city once in silence and then returned to their camp. On the seventh day, at the end of the seventh time around the city, the priest sounded a long blast, and the people shouted as loud as they could.

Let's stop the story right here. What are the chances that this particular strategy would cause the mighty walls of Jericho to come tumbling down? Marching. Blowing horns. Shouting. What you have so far is a whole lot of noise. I guarantee you that no military expert anywhere would recommend the Joshua Plan as the best way to conquer a walled city.

But there is another aspect to consider: Faith! What is faith? Let me give you this definition: Faith is belief plus unbelief and acting on the belief part.

We all know that belief is involved in faith. You have to believe something before you can have faith. So belief is always the first part of faith. It is the conviction that certain things are true.

Unfortunately, some people stop their definition of faith right there. They think faith is belief plus nothing else. Faith to them is pure belief without any mixture of doubt.

You think it didn't take faith to march around Jericho for six days, and then seven times on the seventh day? God told them that the walls would fall down, but they still had to do the marching. That's "acting on the belief part."

Living by faith means acting on the belief part. It means taking a step of faith, however small. And in that light we can understand this story even more clearly.

The real battle of Jericho was not with the Canaanites. The real battle was in the hearts of the people of God. Would they believe what God had said? Would they do what seemed absurd (from a human point of view) in order to see God do the impossible?

The people marched around the city thirteen times without complaining. They were patient and persistent. They were faithful though nothing seemed to happen, until they completed what God asked them to do.

Notice Joshua 6:16, 20. "The people shouted with a great shout." This shout was a proclamation of faith, for it was a shout BEFORE the walls fell down, not AFTER the walls fell down.

Joshua 6:20 indicates that the walls did not fall outward on the Jews, but inward toward Jericho so that the Israelites could go "straight before him" into the city.

All the walls fell down except the wall where Rahab lived, as we'll see next week. Joshua 2:15 tells us that Rahab's "house was upon the town wall."

The walls falling down was a great miracle. History tells us that Jericho was surrounded by two massive walls. The outer wall was six feet thick and twenty feet high. The inner wall was 12 feet thick and 30 feet high.

How do we apply this experience to us in our day? The walled city of Jericho stood as a physical and psychological obstacle between the people of God and them claiming the land God had promised them. Before they could move deeper into Canaan, the walled city of Jericho first had to fall.

Those walls represent some things that are obstacles in our life that keeps us from going deeper with God. What is it that keeps us from going deeper with God? It may be some besetting sin. That sin that seems to defeat us over and over again and we don't seem to be able to get victory over it. It may be a root of bitterness or unforgiveness. It may be some bad attitude or some hurt.

Whatever it is, it has stopped you in your tracks and you can go no further with the Lord until you win the spiritual victory over it.

For Joshua the victory came in Joshua 5:13-15. Before Joshua received his marching orders from the Lord in Joshua 6, he would submit himself to the Lord.

Joshua encountered a mighty man with a drawn sword whom he did not recognize. Joshua asked the man whose side he was on: on his side or on the side of their enemies. Then the man identified himself as the commander of the Lord's army. It was the Lord Himself. He told Joshua that He had not come to take sides, but He had come to take over. There He would remove every obstacle if he would submit to Him.

Submitting our all to the Lord and letting Him take over completely in our life is the only thing that will bring victory!

RAHAB: FROM THE HOUSE OF SHAME TO THE HALL OF FAME

Hebrews 11:31

There are certain occupations that we associate with certain biblical characters. To say a particular name brings a certain occupation to mind.

- David was a shepherd/king.
- Nehemiah was a cup bearer.
- Peter was a fisherman.
- Herod was a king.
- Esther was a queen.
- Matthew was a tax collector.
- Lydia was a seller of purple cloth.
- And Rahab was a ...

Mention the name Rahab and only one occupation comes to mind. Rahab was a harlot. She traded sex for money in what has been called the world's oldest occupation.

The Bible makes no bones about Rahab's occupation and makes no attempt to cover it up.

- The first time we meet her in Joshua 2:1, she is called a prostitute.
- In Joshua 6:17, 25 she is called a prostitute again.
- Then in Hebrews 11:31 and James 2:25 she is called a prostitute two more times.

And the Bible mentions Rahab the harlot as a hero of the faith. Think of the list! Noah, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Moses – and then, with a big gap – far away from these men, because a prostitute can't get too close to these men of faith – stands the scarlet woman, Rahab.

Choices have consequences, and just as we remember Peter who denied the Lord and Judas who betrayed the Lord, we remember Rahab was a harlot.

Notice the past tense. She "was" a harlot. That's what she was. But through the grace of God, she became a woman of faith.

I. Rahab's Confession of Faith Joshua 2:1-11

Rahab has an ugly, awful past; but the fact is that every one of us has a past. I do and you do!

- Ephesians 2:1-3; I Corinthians 6:9-11 (“And such WERE some of you”).
- There is not a person who, in his right mind, would stand and say, “I want my life to be an open book to be read by everyone.” There are thoughts that have flashed upon the screen of your mind which, if known by others would embarrass you tremendously.

The writer of Hebrews choose only two women to highlight in this Hall of Faith: one was Sarah, the wife of Abraham, and the other was Rahab the harlot. By including a woman like Rahab, the writer wants us to know that the ground is level at the foot of the cross.

We first meet Rahab in Joshua 2. We find out that she was a citizen of Jericho and made her living as a harlot. Joshua had sent two spies into the city to check it out prior to the conquest and they went to Rahab's house that was built upon the city wall.

Rahab was a harlot. Some attempt to play down that fact and seek to soften the impact by translating the word as “innkeeper,” but there is no need to do that. The fact the she was a harlot magnifies the grace of God by demonstrating that even the lowest of the low could find a place in God's family. These same folks say that the word “harlot” could be used to denote a “hostess.”

Here is a woman who has had no contact with Israel or Israel's God, and yet just on the basis of the rumors through the grapevine, she has a sense that the God of these invading people is the one and true God – the God of heaven and earth.

She had heard about Israel's passage through the Red Sea, the defeat of the Amorites, Sihon and Og. How could she possibly know so much about Israel before they ever arrived in Canaan? Remember that she was a prostitute. She had travelers coming in and out of her house all the time who talked about this nation of a couple million people who had come out of Egypt 40 years before and who had their eyes fixed on Canaan as the place they were going to live. Maybe it was just fear, the desire to stay alive, but somehow the word about the works of the God of Israel had changed her heart.

It seems that God had been working in her heart long before Joshua ever came near the city. Her amazing confession of faith takes place on the roof of her house where she had hidden the spies.

II. Rahab's Covenant for Her Faith Joshua 2:12-21

Rahab took a great risk when she hid the spies and then sent them out another way, and when she refused to tell her own people where the two spies were and sent the soldiers on a wild goose chase on the road that leads down to the Jordan River.

She even went so far as to make provision for her own family. Joshua 2:12-13. This is another sign of true conversion. She now has a concern for the safety of her extended family. She doesn't want to be saved alone. She wants to make sure her family is saved with her.

The spies agreed to spare her family in the coming attack on Jericho if she tied a scarlet cord to her window. Why a scarlet cord? In the chaos of the coming battle, a scarlet cord would be easily seen by the attacking army. But there is a deeper symbolism at work here.

The scarlet cord reminds us of the blood of the Passover. The color was no coincidence. It was a scarlet cord that guaranteed her deliverance from the otherwise certain death. Note that as soon as the spies left, Rahab tied the scarlet cord in the window so everyone could see it. She had no idea when the attack would come. Maybe in a few days, maybe in several weeks. It didn't matter. She believed the promise and acted upon it.

Here is the key. Rahab heard the promise and did something about it. What would have happened if Rahab had forgotten about it or had never gotten around to tying the scarlet cord outside her window? She would have died like everyone else. It's never enough merely to hear the truth. Hearing the truth must move you to action. You and I must do the same thing. It is not hearing that saves us, but hearing and believing to the point that you reach out and trust Christ as Savior.

III. Rahab's Completion of Faith Joshua 6:16-17, 20-23, 25

Rahab represents a helpless sinner and the scarlet cord represents the blood of Jesus shed for you.

What can wash away my sin? Nothing but the blood of Jesus.

What can make me whole again? Nothing but the blood of Jesus.

Oh, precious is the flow that makes me white as snow.

No other fount I know, nothing but the blood of Jesus.

One final word. What happened to Rahab after the fall of Jericho? We know this much. She married a Jewish man named Salmon and together they had a son named Boaz, whose name pops up in the Book of Ruth. Boaz and Ruth gave birth to Obed, the father of Jesse, the father of David, who became the king of Israel.

Hundreds of years later, Rahab's name shows up on the first page of the New Testament (Matthew 1:5-6).

Rahab is part of Jesus' family tree. If you know Jesus, one day you will meet her in heaven. And there at last, she will be no more Rahab the harlot. She will forever be known as Rahab the child of God.

Let me end by calling to mind one sentence from a familiar gospel song called To God Be The Glory. The second verse goes like this:

Oh perfect redemption, the purchase of blood.
To every believer, the promise of God
The vilest offender who truly believes
That moment from Jesus a pardon receives.

Rahab proves that's true, and you can prove it too by coming to Christ right now. Don't let your past keep you away. Come to Jesus! Your sins will be forgiven. You will be saved; and your life will never be the same.

ENCOURAGEMENT TO LIVE BY FAITH

Hebrews 11:32-40

[Hebrews 11:32 ought to speak to all of us who are guilty of being long-winded preachers. When you know you are running out of time, summarize and get to the main point as fast as you can. The writer of Hebrews said, "I could go on and on, but I've run out of time."

Every preacher knows that sinking feeling, especially if you're only on Point Four of a seven-point message. You do have a few options, including preaching over until 12:20 pm, which is bound to frustrate everyone. Or, you could just wrap it up on time, either keeping the rest of the spiritual gems for the next Sunday or simply summarizing the rest of the message in the last three minutes.

Now that I've preached a sermon to myself, I'll preach the message that the Lord has given me for you.]

God is looking for men and women who will demonstrate faith in Him and His Word in the most adverse of circumstances.

Hebrews was inspired of God to encourage the Hebrew Christians so they could withstand the persecution that would soon come. Soon, Nero would try to eliminate Christianity from his empire by burning Christians at the stake because of their Christian faith.

Christians are called to be "the salt of the earth and the light of the world" (Matthew 5:13-14), but when Christians speak out against abortion, homosexuality, sexual immorality, and other evils of our day, they are sure to be labeled as bigots and intolerants.

As we come to this last section of Hebrews 11, I want us to focus on three things.

I. Faith's Conquest Hebrews 11:32-35

After citing a great number of the heroes of faith, the writer of Hebrews says that all of these are proof or evidence that any Christian can live in faith under any circumstances.

The evidence of faith is seen in the quality of faith and in the quantity of faith. He has listed some of the heroes of faith, but there are so many more that he could talk about if he had enough time.

A. Gideon Judges 6

In Gideon's day Baal worship was so strong that it was considered a criminal act, punishable by death, to refuse to worship Baal. Because of Israel's idol worship, God sent the Midianites as His rod of discipline against them. The Midianites waited until the Jews had planted their fields and cared for their crops, and then at harvest time, they would come down and take the harvest from them. The Jews were so afraid of the Midianites that they would flee to the mountains and hide in caves when they saw the Midianites coming.

When God called Gideon, He called him a "mighty man of valor" or courage; and yet, he was hiding in a winepress threshing wheat. But God gave Gideon the plan to gain the victory over the Midianites with only 300 men, a light, and a shout.

B. Barak Judges 4

Barak was a nobody who was so timid that he needed a woman to tell him what to do and then she had to push him to do it. He was

so fearful that he would not go against the Canaanites unless Deborah went with him. Deborah was the only woman judge in Israel because no man would take the lead.

C. Samson Judges 13

Samson was a strong-weak man. He had great physical strength, but he was weak when it came to self-control. He was a man who was full of anger, lust, and could not control himself sexually. His emotions were completely out of control. He defeated many Philistines, but he was brought down when he told a woman the secret of his strength and she shaved his head when she got him to lie in her lap.

D. Jephthah Judges 11

Jephthah defeated the Ammonites, but he made a foolish vow to the Lord that he would offer to the Lord as a burnt offering the first thing that came through the doors of his house. He expected the "first thing" to be an animal of some sort, but to his shock and dismay, it turned out to be his daughter, his only child, who came out to welcome him home. For two months his virgin daughter spent time in the hills with her friends, but at the end of two months, "he did to her as he had vowed. She died a virgin."

E. David I Samuel 16

David was just a boy in the field keeping his father's sheep when Samuel came to select a new king from Jesse's sons. He confronted Goliath with a slingshot, and won the battle against great odds.

F. Samuel I Samuel 3

Samuel was just a boy helper in the Tabernacle for Eli who had to clean up the priesthood in his day.

G. Prophets

The prophets had the difficult task of confronting the people of Israel with their sin and calling the land to repentance.

Hebrews 11:33-35 tells us some of the accomplishments and sufferings of those who lived by faith.

1. "Subdued kingdoms" Joshua, Judges, David and others
2. "Wrought righteousness" Faith produces holiness
3. "Obtained promises" God has given many promises to those who trust Him.
4. "Stopped the mouths of lions" Think especially of Daniel in the lion's den.
5. "Quenched the violence of fire" Like Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-Nego.
6. "Escaped the edge of the sword" Like David who escaped the sword of Saul again and again.
7. "Out of weakness were made strong" Samson lost his strength by allowing his hair to be cut, but when his hair grew again, his strength returned.
8. "Became valiant in fight" By faith David went boldly before Goliath while others cowered before Goliath.
9. "Turn to flight the armies of the aliens" As Gideon's small band of 300 turned to flight the great army of the Midianites.
10. "Women received their dead raised to life again" (I Kings 17:17-24). Elisha restored the son of the Shunammite to life again (2 Kings 4:18-37).

II. Faith's Costliness Hebrews 11:35-38

Faith does not come cheap and the cost can be extremely high. The cost of living by faith may come in the form of:

1. Stretching

The word "tortured" speaks of a wheel, drum, or rack on which a person was attached and then stretched until his arms and legs were pulled out of joint. It was a terrible, painful and cruel ordeal.

2. Scourging

This refers to lashing and whipping the back until the flesh was lacerated and the back was a bloody mess.

3. Sentencing

Even in our day Christians in Muslim countries are being sentenced to cruel treatment in prison because they embrace the Christian faith.

4. Stoning

Stephen was stoned (Acts 7:58) and Paul was stoned in Lystra and left for dead (Acts 14:19).

5. Sawing

This is a barbaric method of execution from folks who are not satisfied to kill someone, but they must make the killing as painful and gruesome as possible.

6. Sword

Christians by the multitudes have been slaughtered with the sword at various times. Both John the Baptist and Paul were beheaded with the sword.

III. Faith's Compensation Hebrews 11:39-40

Does it pay to live by faith? We are told that there will actually be Divine Praise from God for those who remain faithful to Him.

Jesus calls us to follow Him wherever He leads, whatever it cost. Put your life in His hands.

I wish I could promise you a long life with much happiness and no struggles or suffering if you walk in faith. But if you and I decide to live by faith, there are no guarantees. I cannot promise you an easy road if you decide to follow Christ. But I can promise you this. You will be blessed and you won't be sorry. And in the end, you will be glad you put your life in His hands!

GO FOR THE GOLD Hebrews 12:1-3

The first three verses of Hebrews 12 are really the climax of Hebrews 11.

Chapter and verse divisions were added many years after the text of the New Testament was given; the purpose of such divisions was to enable readers to find a particular passage quickly. Often these man-made divisions help us, but other times they obscure the fact that a certain chapter or verse relates to what precedes it.

After reviewing the great heroes and heroines of faith the writer sets forth the supreme example of faith – the Lord Jesus. When we see Jesus, how He ran the race of life, it should encourage us to be faithful.

Those who make up the “great cloud of witnesses” are not spectators who are encouraging us, but fellow contenders who have run the race of life already. Standing at the finish line of the race is our Lord Jesus Christ. He beckons us onward to the finish line.

Notice that we are told to “run.” There are four “postures” for the believer in the New Testament:

1. The believer Sits in heavenly places Ephesians 2:6

“And hath raised us up together, and made us sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus.”

This word speaks of our Security in life.

2. The believer is to Walk in the way of the Lord. Ephesians 4:1

“I therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, beseech you that you walk worthy of the vocation to which ye are called.”

This speaks of the Purity in which the believer is to live.

3. The believer is to Stand against Satan Ephesians 6:11, 14

“Put on the whole armor of God, that ye may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil ...stand therefore ...”

This word speaks of our Warfare as Christians.

4. The believer is to Run the Christian life. Hebrews 12:1

“let us run with patience the race that is set before us.”

This speaks of our Work as believers.

A balanced church must have all four postures. There are some churches that specialize in the sit posture.

Furthermore, these postures emphasize stages of maturity. A baby learns to sit, then walk, then to stand, and finally to run.

There are three things that we as believers are encouraged to do in this passage:

I. Remember The Witnesses Hebrews 12:1

There are those who believe that these “witnesses” are the heroes of the faith and they are hanging over the banister in heaven, as it were, watching us run the race ...like people seated in a stadium.

The word “witnesses” does not mean “spectators.” Our English word “martyr” comes directly from the Greek word translated “witness.”

The people are not witnessing what we are doing, rather, they are bearing witness to us that God can see us through. God bore witness to them (Hebrews 11:2, 4-5, 39) and they are bearing witness now to us. What an encouragement they are to us of God's faithfulness!

II. Release The Weights Hebrews 12:1

Two things we are told to do:

A. Lay aside. What?

1. The Encumbrances

The word translated “weight” was used by medical writers in Bible times to refer to excess body weight. You have to lay aside excess weight. A man told his doctor, “I've got back trouble.” The doctor examined him and said, “No, you don't have back trouble; you have front trouble. You have excess weight up front, and if you lose it, your back will feel better.”

The writer of Hebrews was talking about anything that would hinder us from running the race successfully for Jesus. The things that encumber us are not necessarily bad. Good things that have gotten out of proportion can encumber us.

You can be so involved in community affairs that are good in themselves that you miss what is best. It is possible for us to spend all our time in business, social, and personal activities that are good, and forget the race.

2. The Entanglements

“The sin that does so easily beset us.” All of us have “besetting sins.” Your besetting sin may not be the same as mine, and mine may be different from another persons. All of us have strong areas, and all of us have weak areas.

Let me give you a short list of what may be besetting sins:

- a. Pessimism – negative spirit.
- b. Pettiness – How do you get folks to stop fighting over little things? Raise bigger issues!
- c. Passiveness – apathy.
- d. Procrastination.

The word “beset” pictures a tree with a vine wrapped around it.

B. Run in Stride

“Let us run with patience.” Patience here means “endurance.” The Christian race is not a 100 yard dash; it's a marathon. We're in a distance race, so let us run with endurance and not stop until we hit the tape at the finish line.

Here is the encouragement: Don't give up!

Don't give in!

Don't give over!

Remember: every race is won on the last lap.

III. Run To Win Hebrews 12:2-3

How can we run – live the Christian life successfully to win?

A. Looking unto Jesus.

- Never take your eyes off of Jesus ...if you do, like Peter, you'll sink!
- You can't win the race if you're looking back.
- “Looking unto Jesus” describes an attitude and not just a single act.

B. Learn from Jesus Hebrews 12:2-3

Jesus is our example of endurance ...consider Him (verse 3).

1. Jesus is the Pioneer of our faith. The author or trail-blazer of our faith.
2. Jesus is the Perfecter of our faith. Our goal should be to be like Him.
3. Jesus is the Pattern of our faith. Jesus showed His people how to persevere. He didn't give up, even when going on meant the Cross.

You and I have only one shot at running the Christian life.

Only one life to live, t'will soon be past

Only what is done for Christ will last!

THE BLESSING OF THE BELT Hebrews 12:5-17

Before reading the passage.

The Book of Hebrews was written to a group of Jewish believers who were experiencing trials, tribulation, suffering and difficulty in their lives because they had become believers in the Lord Jesus.

The suffering had become so great that many of them were tempted to go back to their old ways of Judaism. Much of the Book of Hebrews is written to encourage these believers not to turn back, but to go forward in Jesus.

They were not the only ones who had suffered for their godliness:

- Hebrews 11:36-38
- Jesus, Himself, suffered greatly. Hebrews 12:2-3

But in the passage before us, Paul reminds these Jewish believers that some of them are not suffering because of their faithfulness to Christ, but because of their sin against Christ.

There is a principle that runs through the Bible: If you are bound to sin, you are bound to suffer. That is what is dealt with here in this passage.

Read the passage.

One of the mysteries down through the ages for Christians is why do the righteous suffer?

In Psalm 73 David confessed that he had a problem. He said, “Lord, I became envious of the wicked, for in all they did they seemed to prosper ...everything seemed to be going well for them...they didn't seem to have near the problems that I do. And here I am trying to live for God; trying to do His will and one problem after another seems to follow me. I did not understand until I went into the sanctuary of God; then I understood their end ...it was the way of ruin and destruction and doom.”

The same is true today. It seems that nothing ever goes wrong for that person who cares nothing for the things of God and here I am trying to live for God and everything that can go wrong does go wrong.

Well, why do Christians suffer?

I think there are at least three biblical reasons illustrated by three biblical characters as to why Christians suffer.

1. There is the Job type of suffering.

The Bible describes Job as an upright, moral, mature man who loved God and turned from evil, and, yet God allowed him to suffer. Why?

Two reasons:

a. To strengthen his own faith in God. You remember all that he suffered ...the loss of his wealth, the loss of his family, the loss of his health, the accusations which came from his so-called friends ...and, yet, when you come to the end of the book, Job said, "God has tried me like fire and I have come forth purified – stronger."

b. As an example to others. To show to others that a deep, steadfast, faith in God can and does cause strength and maturity to come in the life of those who suffer.

1 Peter 1:6-7

I knew a woman who was right before God and loved God with all of her heart and yet, she had much sickness. I would go to see her to pray with her and to try to bring comfort and cheer, and when I would leave her room, I was the one who was uplifted. I could not imagine the pain she must have been in and yet, she was always filled with praise for the Lord.

God taught me so much through that dear lady. She was such an example to me. I wonder how I would have reacted in a situation like hers.

2. There is the Jesus type of suffering.

He is the Man of Sorrows. He suffered because He was God.

Second Timothy 3:12: "...yea, and all that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution."

Matthew 5:11-12: "Blessed are ye when men shall ...persecute you ..."

When you identify with Jesus, you can expect to suffer in this world.

3. There is the Jonah type of suffering.

Jonah suffered because of his rebellion and his disobedience. The writer of Hebrews was reminding them that some of them were suffering because of their unfaithfulness to God.

God has a right to chasten His own children. Just as an earthly father has a right and a responsibility to chasten their children; so, the Heavenly Father has right and responsibility to chasten His children.

Now, let me say that every time suffering comes it does not mean there is sin, but you should so live that when suffering does come, you know whether God is punishing you or purifying you.

Chastisement has always been God's way of dealing with sin in the life of His own children.

2 Samuel 7:14

Notice three things from these verses:

I. The Ministry Of Chastisement

God not only has a right to chastise us, but He also has a reason. He never does anything without a reason. Hebrews 12:10.

An earthly father may at times chastise us for the wrong reason and for something that we didn't do. I could make a list of times I got a spanking for things I didn't do ...but I could make a longer list of times I should have gotten a spanking but I didn't get caught.

Now, our earthly fathers may err, but our Heavenly Father never does. He chastens us for our own good.

There are three reasons God chastens us:

A. To Prove our Sonship. Hebrews 12:8

In New Testament days if a man had an illegitimate child, he felt no responsibility toward that child, he felt no love toward the child; no responsibility toward his welfare.

The Bible says that if a parent doesn't chasten his child, then that parent hates the child. I hear some say, "I never spank my child; I love them too much." No, you love you too much. You just don't want to bother with the responsibility. You love the easy way. The responsible way is to discipline them.

Notice: It is God's children that He deals with. If two children are doing wrong and one of them is mine, it is my child that I am going to deal with.

You say, "Well, preacher, I willfully sinned against God and He has never chastened me." Don't brag about that. That just indicates that you don't belong to God. If you live anyway you please and God doesn't chasten you, then you have just classified yourself.

B. To Purge our Sins. Hebrews 12:10-11

Like a refiner of gold. He takes the impurities out of the gold until it is pure and he can see his image in the purified gold.

Jonah is a great illustration of that. If God had not laid the rod to Jonah, he would never have repented and preached to Nineveh.

That may be why He is chastening you; to get you to repent.

C. To Promote our Sanctification. Hebrews 12:10

God saved you and me, not just to keep us from hell and to take us to heaven, but to make us holy. Ephesians 1:4-5.

When God saved you He determined that you were going to be holy. You say, I will stiffen myself against God. OK, then, you are forcing God to chasten you even the more.

II. The Methods OF Chastening

Hebrews 12:5-6

God uses three different words to describe His methods of chastisement: "Despise not" means – don't take lightly.

A. Rebuke (to remove or convict).

He brings us to the place of sorrow for our sin. I believe He always uses the first.

It blessed my heart when I saw this. I knew that there had been times when I had sinned and wondered why God didn't "Zap" me. I had heard preachers say, "If you are a child of God and you sin, He will take you to the woodshed." I had sinned and nothing real bad had happened to me, and I wondered, "Well, maybe it's because I'm not His son." But I remembered the awful conviction and I confessed it; therefore, He didn't have to "zap" me to bring me back to Himself.

B. Chastens (to child-train). Hebrews 12:6

If we will not respond to His rebuke, then He must chasten. This is a little stronger than His rebuke.

Sometimes as parents when our children disobey us, we withhold privileges from them. Sometimes when we sin against God, He withholds His blessings, joy, benefits, power, etc.

We may even become a castaway – be put on the shelf of usefulness.

C. Scourges. Hebrews 12:6

There is nothing gentle or tender about scourging. When rebuke and chastening doesn't work, scourging comes, even to the point of physical death.

– 1 John 5:16

– Ananias and Sapphira

Sometimes, we force God to do more than speak to us; rather than speak, He must spank!

III. The Message Of Chastisement

A. A Word of Comfort Hebrews 12:6

I understand now why my dad chastened me. I didn't then but I do now.

I thank God for His chastening in my life, for it has caused me to grow. It shows me that God loves me.

B. A Warning against Carelessness

We cannot control the Job type of suffering or the Jesus type of suffering, but we can control the Jonah type of suffering. Stay close to the one who has the belt!

How do you stay away from the chastening hand of God? Stay close to God.

A CALL TO COMMITMENT Hebrews 12:12-17

Before reading the passage:

We have come to the fifth and final “warning passage” in the Book of Hebrews. By the way of review, let me share with you again the five warning passages.

1. Drifting from the Word Hebrews 2:1-4 Neglect

“How shall we escape, if we neglect so great salvation...” (Hebrews 2:3)

2. Doubting the Word Hebrews 3:7 – 4:13

Hard heart “Today if ye will hear His voice, harden not your hearts ...” (Hebrews 3:7-8)

3. Dullness toward the Word Hebrews 5:11 – 6:20

Sluggishness“...seeing ye are dull of hearing ...For it is impossible for those who were once enlightened, and have tasted of the heavenly gift, and were made partakers of the Holy Ghost, and have tasted the good word of God, and the powers of the world to come, if they shall fall away, to renew them again unto repentance; seeing they crucify to themselves the Son of God afresh and put him to an open shame.” (Hebrews 5:11; 6:4-6).

4. Despising the Word Hebrews 10:26-39 Willful sinning “For if we sin willfully after that we have received the knowledge of the truth, there remaineth no more sacrifice for sins ...” (Hebrews 10:26)

5. Defying the Word Hebrews 12:14-29

Refusing to hear“...looking diligently (to the way and will and Word of God) lest any man fail of the grace of God.” (Hebrews 12:15)

Read the passage

All the way through Hebrews, emphasis is placed on the importance of believers being everything they can be by the grace of God.

1. Hebrews 6:1 “Let us go on unto maturity.”
2. Hebrews 10:22 “Let us draw near (to God).”
3. Hebrews 10:23 “Let us hold fast the profession of our faith.”
4. Hebrews 10:24 “And let us consider one another.”

Hebrews 12:14-17 is another challenge to grow to maturity ...”Looking diligently lest any man fail of the grace of God.” (verse 15)

The writer was not suggesting that it is possible for a believer to be saved and then to be lost again. That would be contrary to what the Bible teaches. We must never interpret Bible doctrine by overturning a clear passage of Scripture with an obscure one.

The verb translated “fail” means “come short of; fail to reach a goal.” The same verb is used in Romans 3:23: “All have sinned and come short of the glory of God.” Hebrews 12:15 warns us that believers can come short of the grace of God.

The writer of Hebrews was warning, “Do not fail to be everything that grace can make you!”

How can we become everything God wants us to be? By making a godly commitment to:

I. The Disciplines of Our Lives

Hebrews 12:12-13 a two-fold challenge is given:

A. Be strong.

There verses resume the race metaphor.

The first thing that happens to a runner when he starts to tire is that his arms drop. The position and motion of the arms are extremely important in running, to maintain proper body coordination and rhythm. Your arms actually help you pull through your stride, and they are the first parts of the body to show fatigue.

The second to go are the knees. First, the arms begin to droop, and then the knees begin to wobble.

But if you concentrate on the drooping or the wobbling, you are finished. The only way you can hope to continue is by focusing on the goal ..."fixing our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of faith." (Hebrews 12:2)

During the Olympics, you saw some long-distance runners collapse just after they finished ...crossed over the finish line. Their heart and soul was committed to finishing the race!

Did you notice: We are not told to strengthen our hands or our weak and feeble knees, but the hands and the knees, regardless of whose they are.

In other words, we are not to concentrate on our own weaknesses, but to help strengthen other Christians in theirs.

One of the surest ways to be encouraged ourselves is to give encouragement to someone else. One of the best ways to keep continuing is to encourage others to continue.

B. Be straight.

"And make straight paths for your feet" refers to staying in your own lane in the race. When you get out of your lane, you not only disqualify yourself, but often interfere with other runners. Usually a runner who gets out of his lane does so when he is distracted or careless, or, when he loses his concentration on the goal.

"Paths" refers to the tracks left by the wheels of a cart or chariot, which later travelers follow. When we run, we leave a track behind us which will either lead or mislead others. We should take great care that the tracks we leave behind are straight.

The "lame" (verse 13b) could apply to the weak, limping Christians, who are easily tripped up or misled. Our weaker brothers will be the first to be hurt by our poor example. We are not to be stumbling blocks.

II. The Directions of Our Lives

Hebrews 12:14

A. Promote harmony.

Put peace as the center of the bulls eye and shoot for it.

It should be my desire as a believer to be a source of peace and never to be a source of conflict. Matthew 5:9: "Blessed are the peacemakers: for they shall be called the children of God."

There is never any excuse for the child of God to be rude, unkind, or tactless in our relationships with others. We should be courteous, considerate, and always refuse to be quarrelsome.

The Lord Jesus was a perfect Gentleman; gracious, thoughtful of other people, and tactful, even though firm and unsparing in His attitude toward sin.

B. Pursue holiness.

By deliberate choice, we are to seek cleansing from daily defilement. We are to deliberately choose those things which make for godliness.

"Follow ...holiness, without which no man shall see the Lord."

Matthew 5:8: "Blessed are the pure in heart; for they shall see God."

III. The Dispositions of Our Lives

Hebrews 12:15

Bitterness is a matter of one's disposition. A root of bitterness comes when we refuse to forgive. It is another name for "carrying a grudge" or having "ill will" toward another.

We don't have control over things that happen to us, but we do have control over how we respond to what happens to us. It is so important that we keep our spirit right ...or it will defile us and affect others.

Ephesians 4:312: "Let all bitterness ...be put away from you." None of us will ever become what God wants us to be as long as roots of bitterness are springing into fruits of bitterness in our lives. We must let God pull up those roots and sow the seeds of grace.

IV. The Decisions of Our Lives

Hebrews 12:16-17

Esau is called a fornicator, although his offense was not moral but spiritual. He was branded as impure and an impervious to spiritual privilege and responsibility.

He was "profane" because he treated spiritual things as being of no account, and proved it by selling his birthright for the immediate gratification of appetite. Later on he wanted the blessing. Too late he realized the value of what he had lightly thrown away.

The phrase "he found no place of repentance, through he sought it with tears" means that Esau pleaded with Isaac to reverse his action and give the blessing to him, but his pleading was all in vain.

The principle ever holds good; the believer who throws away golden opportunities in order to indulge in some carnal desire will pay for it in the end. Thus the writer, again, presses home his point. God has a stringent command that believers must follow holiness. They must not draw back, for if they do, if they settle for something less, if they trade spiritual things for earthly things as Esau did, they surely will live to regret it.

MOUNT SINAI AND MOUNT ZION

Hebrews 12:18-29

Before reading the passage:

In Hebrews 12 there are three truths that encourage the believer to be faithful to go on in the Christian life.

A. The Encouragement of the Race Hebrews 12:1-4

All of the faithful throughout history have endured the race course of life. Our Lord Jesus Christ has run the race as never before. Those who have gone before are testimonies to cheer us on, and our Lord waits at the finish line.

B. The Encouragement of the Rod Hebrews 12:5-17

God will not let sin that would entangle and cripple the faith life go unanswered. He chastens His own.

C. The Encouragement of the Reward Hebrews 12:18-29

Read the passage.

Whatever else may be said about our God ...our Heavenly Father ...He is a profound mystery. He is awesome. He is consuming in power and infinite in character.

Sometimes the might...and majesty ...and mystery ...and holiness of God bothers us – because we want everything kept simple.

Sometime we feel about God the way one lady felt about her pastor. She said, "We don't see him during the week and we don't understand him on Sunday."

God is incomprehensible and mysterious!

But the writer of Hebrews wants us to see God through "grace eyes," and he does so by contrasting Mount Sinai and the giving of the Law with the heavenly Mount Zion and the blessing of grace.

Look with me at the contrast between Mount Sinai and Mount Zion:

Mount Sinai <> Mount Zion

1. Sinai is in the desert. <> 1. Zion is in the promised land.
2. Sinai represents the thunder of law. <> 2. Zion demonstrated tender love on the part of God.
3. Sinai represents temporary, passing things. <> 3. Zion represents eternal, perpetual things.
4. Sinai is stern, forbidding, and condemning. <> 4. Zion is filled with glory and fulfillment.
5. At Sinai we have fear. <> 5. At Zion we have perfect love.
6. At Sinai we have perfect law. <. 6. At Zion we have perfect grace.

Sinai could regulate earthly life, but it offered no promise of eternal life.

It could reflect one's spiritual condition, but it could never restore one's soul.

I. Living Life at Mount Sinai Hebrews 12:18-21

When we look at this passage, the first thing that we see is condemnation. The law tells us that we are guilty.

It is the law that reveals to us that we are sinners.

We cannot keep the law ...we cannot abide by it ...it condemns us.

There are seven descriptions of this condemnation in the passage: (See Exodus 19:10-23)

1. The mountain could not be touched by man or animal or death would come.
2. The mountain burned with fire ...a consuming, destroying fire.
3. There was blackness (gloom).
4. There was darkness.
5. There was tempest (a raging storm).
6. There was the sound of a trumpet.
7. There was the voice of words which made the listeners beg that nothing more be said.

All that God's law can do in man's life is condemn him. No one of us can live up to it. No one of us can measure up to God's commandments. The law was given for one purpose – to show us our need of Christ, because we are unable to live it.

II. Living Life at Mount Zion Hebrews 12:22-29

The word "Zion" literally means "fortress." This means a place of protection ...a place where fear will be banished forever ...where the believer will live in complete security. What a contrast between Mount Sinai and Mount Zion.

Keep the context in mind. The context is about a race ...about a discipline.

- Run by the Mount of Sinai and you have a reason to run scared.
- Run by Mount Zion ...the Mount of Grace ...and there is no need to run scared ...but you need to run smart ...secure ...seriously!

Listen to the final warning in Hebrews 12:25-29 from the Living Bible:

"See to it that you obey Him who is speaking to you. For if the people of Israel did not escape when they refused to listen to Moses, the earthly messenger, how terrible our danger if we refuse to listen to God who speaks to us from heaven! When He spoke from Mount Sinai His voice shook the earth, but, 'next time,' He says, 'I will not only shake the earth, but the heavens too.' By this He means that He will sift out everything without solid foundations, so that only unshakable things will be left. Since we have a kingdom nothing can destroy, let us please God by serving Him with thankful hearts, and with holy fear and awe. For our God is a consuming fire."

Under Law, God spoke with authority ...under Grace there is still authority in His voice.

When we come to the Mount of Grace, we are tempted to "run free" ...or "looser," if you please ...with no law or restrictions.

The tendency on the part of grace runners – when they discover that there is a new arrangement under grace – is to lower the standards.

- We don't see God as awesome, as did Moses.
- We think of God under grace as being softer ...not as mighty.

His covenant is new but His character and standards are the same.

When we see God as softer, we tend to use grace for not taking God seriously: ...in our purity.

...in our giving.

...in living a disciplined life.

If the "Grace Race" were required ...punishable by death ...it might get our attention more.

Grace does not mean God can be trifled with. There, He shook the earth ...now, He shakes Heaven and earth.

Let me ask you some "grace" questions:

1. How fearful are you when you are on the verge of disobedience? Remember our God is a consuming fire!
2. How significant is God to you?
3. If God were to leave you suddenly and silently, how long would it be before you missed Him? Example: If you lose your Bible, how long before you miss it? Would you find one-fourth inch of dust on it? How much dust is on your God?

LIVING THE LIFE OF FAITH

Hebrews 13:1-6

The emphasis in this last section of the Book of Hebrews is on living by faith.

- In Hebrews 11 the writer presented the "Examples of Faith."
- In Hebrews 12 the writer presented the "Encouragement of Faith."
- In Hebrews 13 he presents the "Evidences of Faith" that should appear in our lives if we are really walking by faith.

The format for Hebrews 13 is different from the first 12 chapters. Let me share three differences with you and begin the differences with the words "Prior to this last chapter:"

1. The emphasis has been on the vertical rather than horizontal. The emphasis has been man to man – our relationship with our fellowman.
2. There are lengthy discussions of subjects (sometimes chapter lengths). In chapter 13 you have proverb-like statements that get right to the heart of the matter.
3. There are few practical commands and warnings – but in chapter 13 about a dozen appear.

In this passage the writer of Hebrews gives us four functions of faith in the Christian life:

I. Christian Compassion Hebrews 13:1-3

A. To be Shown to Saints Hebrews 13:1

The basis for spiritual fellowship is brotherly love. A church fellowship based on anything other than love for Christ and for one another simply will not last.

This idea of brotherly love keeps recurring in the Bible:

1. Romans 12:9-10 "Love must be sincere. Hate what is evil, cling to what is good.

Be devoted to one another in brotherly love. Honor one another above yourselves."

2. I Thessalonians 4:9 "Now about brotherly love we do not need to write to you for you yourselves have been taught by God to love each other."

3. I Peter 1:22 "...have sincere love for your brothers, love one another deeply, from the heart."

4. I John 4:7 "Beloved, let us love one another: for love is of God."

It is easier for us to talk about loving others than to do it. God's children aren't always so lovable.

To dwell above with saints we love,
That will be glory.

To live below with saints we know,
Well, that's another story.

B. To be Shown to Strangers Hebrews 13:2

This was literally true in the experience of Abraham. The three wayfaring men visited him; two were angels, the other was the Son of God Himself.

You and I may not entertain angels in a literal sense (though it is possible); but ANY stranger could turn out to be a messenger of blessing to us.

Matthew 25:35-30: "I was a stranger ...I was a stranger ...and you took me in ...In as much as you have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, you have done it unto me."

C. To be Shown to Sufferers Hebrews 13:3

Christians should remember those who are suffering for the cause of Christ and express words of love and acts of kindness toward them.

The specific reference is to those who are in bonds or jail for serving Christ ...but I think of people who are involved in the jail ministries today too.

II. Christian Chastity Hebrews 13:4

One of the church's largest ministries is to strengthen marriages – and the family.

A tremendous attack is being mounted on chastity today by the forces of evil.

- Permissiveness is the rule, and every moral restraint is being attacked and set aside.
- The marriage bond is being regarded as archaic, but God's Word has not altered.

Two commands are given:

1. Let the marriage bed be held in honor by all.
2. Let the marriage bed be undefiled ...which speaks of pre-marriage defilement (purity before marriage),and post-marriage defilement (fidelity during marriage).

Hold marriage in highest honor. Let the marriage be free from corruption ...defilement. God says, "Don't cheat on your mate ...don't cheat in your marriage."

Is there a way to follow this command in the day in which we live? Yes!!

- Commitment TO your mate.
- Contentment WITH your mate.
- Commitment and contentment says this: I don't need another intimate relationship outside my present marriage to give me satisfaction...I don't need it ...I resist it ...I resent it ...I reject it!!

God is serious about sexual purity.

III. Christian Contentment Hebrews 13:5a

The KJV says, "Let your conversation be without covetousness; and be content with such things as ye have..."
The NIV more correctly says, "Keep your lives free from the love of money and be content with what you have."

Be content – not covetous!

Note: Keep your lives free from the love of money. Realize: The Almighty Dollar is not the Almighty!!

I'm learning something as I get older and, hopefully wiser: If it has a price tag, it won't bring satisfaction.

Vance Havner said, "Most Americans know the price of everything and the value of nothing."

Philippians 4:11: "I have learned in whatever state I am, therewith to be content."

The giving ...sharing person is the content person. The holding ...selfish person is not content. That's why when a person tithes and gives to the Lord it speak volumes.

IV. Christian Courage Hebrews 13:5b-6

Three wonderful confessions are made here:

1. I am not Alone: for He hath said, "I will never leave thee or forsake thee."
2. I am not Ashamed: for, "we may boldly say ..."
3. I am not Afraid: for, " the LORD is my helper and I will not fear what man shall do to me."

God gives grace to help in time of need.

A woman said to evangelist D. L. Moody, "I have found a promise that helps me when I am afraid. It is Psalm 56:3 – 'What time I am afraid, I will trust in Thee.'" Mr. Moody replied, "I have a better promise than that! Isaiah 12:2 – 'I will trust and not be afraid.'"

HOW TO TREAT A SPIRITUAL LEADER

Hebrews 13:7-19, 24

One of the first things the Lord Jesus did after His death, resurrection, and ascension to glory was to send the Holy Spirit, not only to indwell men, but to give gifts – spiritual gifts – so they might function in His spiritual body, the Church.

1. Ephesians 4:7-16 The Lord Jesus gave spiritual gifts to His children, but He also gave gifts to His church – men who were to be the spiritual leaders within the local church.
2. Ephesians 4:11-13 "It was He who gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be pastors and teachers to prepare God's people for works of service..."
3. I Thessalonians 4:12-13 (AMP) "Now we beseech you, brethren, get to know those who labor among you – recognize them for what they are, acknowledge and appreciate and respect them all – your leaders who are over you in the Lord, and those who warn and kindly reprove and exhort you. And hold them in very high and most affectionate esteem in appreciation of their work."
4. 1 Peter 5:2-3AMP To the pastors, Peter says, "tend – nurture, guard, guide – the flock of God that is your responsibility ...(do it) willingly ...eagerly and cheerfully...being examples and models of Christian living to the flock (the congregation)."

Three times the writer used the designation, "Them that have the rule over you." (Hebrews 13:7, 17, 14) The phrase refers to the spiritual leaders of the local assemblies.

Each Christian has five responsibilities toward spiritual leaders in his local church:

1. Remember your leaders verse 7
2. Obey your leaders verse 17
3. Submit to their leadership verse 17
4. Pray for your leaders verse 18
5. Greet your leaders verse 24

I. Remember Your Leaders Hebrews 13:7

The verb "spoken" is in the perfect tense and refers to those who have been spiritual leaders and have died. It is our responsibility to remember those who have preceded us and were true to the faith.

- They gave themselves to Jesus Christ, and their lives were instruments that blessed our hearts and helped change our world.

- The believers could no longer hear their departed leaders speak, but they could imitate their faith and consider “the outcome of their way of life.”
- Their labor and sacrifices made it possible for us to minister as we do today.
- While we do not worship people or give them glory, it is certainly right to honor them for their faithful work.

But, no matter how faithful and committed our leaders may be to the Lord, there are times that they will waver and falter. Not so with the Lord Jesus!

Hebrews 13:8 “Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today, yea and forever.”

He is the ONE who never wavers, never changes. He is always the same.

- Look at Him when the pressures of life crowded in upon Him.
- Look at Him in the heat of debate with accusations, slander, and loaded questions coming at Him from every side.
- Look at Him at the supper in the Upper Room.
- Look at Him when He was confronted with mob violence in Pilate's judgment hall.
- Look at Him when talking to cultured, moral, upright Nicodemus ...when talking to the sin-laden woman at the well ...when faced with a bereaved widow's grief.
- Look at Him as a boy of twelve asking and answering questions in the temple.

He is always the same ...never ruffled ...never complaining ...never at a loss for words ...never wondering what to do ...never wrong ...never needing to apologize ...never out of communion with His Father.

What a Leader He is! What an Example He is for us to follow!!

II. Respond to Your Leaders

Hebrews 13:17

A. Because Church Leaders Represent God

The leaders of the church are called “elders” or “overseers” or “pastors,” the titles being interchangeable.

These mature men are ordered by the spirit of God to rule over (lead) His Church on earth until Christ returns. Every New Testament congregation had such men who ruled it. They were to lead and feed the flock. (Acts 20:28)

When a servant of God is in the will of God, teaching the Word of God, the people of God should submit and obey. This does not mean that pastors should be dictators (“Neither be lords over God's heritage ...” I Peter 5:3), but they should lead in love as they submit to God's leadership in their lives.

1. John 13:20 Jesus said, “He who receives whomever I send receives Me; and he who receives Me receives Him who sent Me.”
2. When a man is placed in the rule of a local church, our submission to him is equivalent to submission and obedience to Christ.

B. Because Church Leaders Are Accountable to God

The priority of every pastor is to care for the spiritual welfare of the congregation, for the deep watch over our souls, as those who will give an account. Quite frankly, it is much easier to “win souls” than it is to “watch for souls.”

The pastor must minister with an eye fixed firmly on the judgment seat of Christ at which they, too, must appear to give an account of their work.

Pastors must: Shepherd the flock ...know those entrusted to their care ...provide spiritual food ...hasten after those who are going astray ...exhort those who are growing cold ...encourage the weak ...visit the sick ...urge the development of spiritual gifts ...be exemplary in their own lives.

The pastor's responsibilities are heavy, and those over whom they rule must recognize that.

C. Because Church Leaders Can Receive Joy

“Let them do this with joy and not with grief” is addressed to the people, not to the leaders. In other words, it is the responsibility of

the church to help their leaders to rule with joy and satisfaction.

One way of doing this is through willing submission to their authority. The joy of our leaders in the Lord should be a motivation for submission. It is a serious (and all too common) thing for stubborn, self-willed people in church congregations to rob their pastors of the joy God intends faithful pastors to have.

Failure to properly submit brings grief rather than joy to pastors. The church at Corinth was the church that broke Paul's heart. But ...not so the Philippian Christians – Philippians 1:3-4. And ...not so the Thessalonian Christians – I Thessalonians 2:19-20; 3:9.

III. Renew/Refresh Your Leaders Hebrews 13:18-19

What a joy it is for a pastor to know that the people are praying for him. What renewal and refreshing it brings.

Paul often asked the churches to pray for him – Romans 15:30; Ephesians 6:18; Colossians 4:3;

1 Thessalonians 5:25; 2 Thessalonians 3:1.

Respect Your Leaders Hebrews 13:24

Love them ...encourage them ...be friends with them !!

Every Christian should be on speaking terms with his pastor.

Never allow any “root of bitterness” to grow up in your heart (Hebrews 12:15) because it will only poison you and hurt the whole church.

Where the people permit the pastor to lead, there is usually blessings and growth.

A HEARTFELT FAREWELL

Hebrews 13:18-25

The closing words of the Epistle to the Hebrews summarize what has been said and give us a further word of encouragement.

Hebrews 13:22: “I beseech you, brethren, suffer the word of exhortation – (bear with my word of exhortation, (NIV) – for I have written a letter unto you in a few words.”

The Epistle has been straightforward ... uncompromising ...somewhat complex ...and taxing to their minds, emotions, and wills. Yet, the writer was appealing to his readers to give this difficult letter a fair hearing.

The words “bear with” means “to be patient with the word of exhortation.”

Then he says that he has written “a few words” – sounds like a preacher, doesn't it!! (A few words ...less than 10,000.)

Reminds me of an older lady who drove an old model car. She told her pastor that she was going to modernize her car and she wanted him to see it. He wondered, “How do you modernize a car?”

She showed him the new tires, a new wax job, and on the dashboard were two pictures – one of him and one of the former pastor. “These,” she said, “are my dual air bags.”

Three things the writer shares in this heartfelt farewell:

I. His Dependence on the People Hebrews 13:18-19

“Pray for us.” That request is found frequently in the New Testament. All of us need the prayers of other people. Every pastor needs the prayers of his congregation.

If you and I really understood the forces that are active in the spirit world, unseen by human eyes, we would know the importance of prayer. God honors the prayers of humble, simple, praying people, but prayer is no simple activity.

Have you ever thought about the attention you draw when you begin to pray?

1. You draw the attention of the devil.

When you begin to pray, the devil will do anything he can to keep you from continuing.

He will send wondering thoughts into your mind ...cause outside distractions ...anything to disrupt your praying. I have to work to concentrate on praying.

2. You also draw the attention of God.

God has a lot to do ...make sure the sun comes up at the right time every day ...keep this earth circling in its orbit ...watch every sparrow that falls.

Yet, when you kneel down and say, "Our heavenly Father," He says to the angels, "Shhhh. One of my children down there has something to tell me and I'm going to give him my best attention."

Here is the request that he wants them to make before God on his behalf ...that he might keep his life clean ...pure ...unspotted – in deed, thought, attitude, motive, and spirit.

II. The Desire For His People Hebrews 13:20-21

Having asked his readers to pray for him, the author than prayed for the people. This is one of the great benedictions of the Bible.

- As the "Good Shepherd," Jesus Christ died for the sheep (John 10:11).
- As the "Great Shepherd," He lives for the sheep in heaven today, working on their behalf.
- As the Chief Shepherd," He will come for the sheep at His return (I Peter 5:4).

Our Shepherd cares for His own in the past, present, and future. He is the same yesterday, today, and forever!

His prayer for them was that God would "make you perfect" (KJV) – "equip you with everything good for doing His will" (NIV).

The phrase "make you perfect" is one word in the Greek and was familiar to the people who received this letter.

- To doctors it meant "to set a broken bone."
- To fishermen it meant "to mend a broken net."
- To sailors it meant "to outfit a ship for a voyage."
- To soldiers it meant "to equip an army for battle."

Our Savior in heaven wants to equip us for life on earth:

- Tenderly, He wants to set the "broken bones" in our lives so that we might walk straight and run our life-race successfully.
- He wants to repair the breaks in the nets so that we might catch fish and win souls.
- He wants to equip us for battle and outfit us so that we will not be battered in the storms of life.

In brief, He wants to mature us so that He can work in us that which will please Him and accomplish His will.

III. His Dedication To His People Hebrews 13:22-25

He shares his love for them and pleads with them to follow the instructions that he has just given to them.

"Do so for your Good and God's Glory," he tells them.

"Grace be with you all."