Hebrews chapter 11..............................Opening – vv. 1-13

Hebrews 11 has been called:

“The saints’ hall of fame”
“The honor roll of Old Testament saints”
“The Westminster Abbey of Scripture”
and
“The faith chapter”

The chapter deals with the importance and the excellency of faith.
It is almost as if someone has been following the writer’s well-constructed arguments and then asks, “But can anyone live like that? Are there any examples of men/women who lived by faith as you have been describing?” As if in answer to such a question the writer gives 16 names of individuals who lived by faith.

The Holman Bible Commentary says this:

Faith provides a certainty about things we cannot see. Many Old Testament saints exemplified this faith. Hebrews 11 applauds many of these, holding them up for an example. Included are Abel, Enoch, Noah, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Joseph, Moses’ parents, Moses, Israel during the Exodus from Egypt, Gideon, David, Samuel and Isaiah. Rahab is a surprising member on the list. All these lived by faith, placing their confidence in things they could not see.

Old Testament saints departed life without receiving God’s promise. New Testament believers experience the something better which God made available through Christ. As we run the race of the Christian life, the champions of Hebrews 11 can encourage us to faith.
A. The definition of faith vv. 1-3

Hebrews chapter 11 talks much about faith. In fact, verse 1 tells us what faith is when we read, “Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen.” (KJV)

This is the closest the Bible comes to defining faith, but we really don’t know much more than we did before. We need to unpack this verse a bit to get a clearer understanding of exactly what faith is in the New Testament.

Some other translations read:

NASB: Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen.2

The Message: The fundamental fact of existence is that this trust in God, this faith, is the firm foundation under everything that makes life worth living. It’s our handle on what we can’t see.

NIV: Now faith is being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see.

We can see a key to what faith is in verse 27 where we read, “...as seeing him who is invisible.”3

Faith apprehends as a real fact what is not revealed to the senses. It rests on the fact, acts upon it and is upheld by it in the face of all that seems to contradict it. Faith is real seeing.

The word “substance”4 means that which stands under, a foundation.

It speaks of the ground on which one builds hope. It was used to define the legal documents that proved ownership of personal property.

A suggested translation reflecting this would be, “Faith is the title-deed of things hoped for.”

The Holy Spirit’s energizing act of faith in the Lord Jesus is the believer’s title deed to the things hoped for in the future.

1The King James Version, (Cambridge: Cambridge) 1769.
3The King James Version, (Cambridge: Cambridge) 1769.
4The King James Version, (Cambridge: Cambridge) 1769.
The word “evidence” means “that by which invisible things are proved and we are convinced of their reality”

The word “things” embraces not only future realities, but all that does not fall under the cognizance of the senses. This includes past, present or future events.

So faith is the foundation on which our hope is built. It is the title deed to our assurance of things which will be ours in the future which are now invisible to our senses.

Faith is used in various ways in the New Testament. Primarily the word means trust or confidence in God.

In Mark 1:15 Jesus says, “repent ye, and believe the gospel.” believe is the verb form of faith. There is no English equivalent for this word.

In Mark 11:22 Jesus uses the noun form of the word when he says, “Have faith in God.” Jesus is calling His hearers to place their confidence in God.

In the gospels Jesus often says “...thy faith hath made thee whole.” A person’s confidence in or allegiance to God makes him/her whole.

Faith in the New Testament is related to:

Sanctification
Purification
Justification (or imputed righteousness)
Adoption as children of God

5 The King James Version, (Cambridge: Cambridge) 1769.
6 The King James Version, (Cambridge: Cambridge) 1769.
7 The King James Version, (Cambridge: Cambridge) 1769.
8 The King James Version, (Cambridge: Cambridge) 1769.
9 The King James Version, (Cambridge: Cambridge) 1769.
Faith is an attitude toward and relationship with God mediated by Jesus Christ. It is surrender to God's gift of righteousness in Christ rather than seeking to achieve righteousness on our own.

Faith is a fruit of the Holy Spirit and sometimes is given by God to some for the completion of special tasks.

Heb. 11:6 tells us it is impossible to please God without faith.

Faith is the intellectual acceptance of the proposition that to have a right relationship with God it is necessary to believe that God is, that God has revealed Himself in Christ and to believe that God accepts your faith.

Faith is also the living out of one's belief in God. It is Christianity in action. Paul talks about this in 2Cor 5:7: ...we walk by faith, not by sight.

Paul tells us that faith both in the sense of Christian piety and of the trust and confidence one puts in God determines our actions in life.

Paul also tells us that faith is a shield against sin and evil in our lives.

The Holman Bible Dictionary has this to say:

So faith is what we believe; it is Christianity itself, but primarily it is the relationship we have with God through what Jesus accomplished in His death and resurrection.

Faith is the central concept of Christianity. One may be called a Christian only if one has faith.

In the early 1900s B.H. Carroll, an elderly, widely-respected Baptist preacher, was traveling by train through the Texas panhandle. Carroll was deaf. He began to think of the fact that there was no training facility for ministers to serve the rapidly growing Baptist churches in the area.

The state had medical schools for doctors, law schools for lawyers, but no schools for training Baptist preachers. Carroll sensed God calling him to start such a school, but he resisted because of his age and his plans to retire and devote his time to his beloved books.

10The King James Version. (Cambridge: Cambridge) 1769.
Finally overwhelmed by a conviction that God was calling him, he stood to his feet, grabbed the seat in front of him and said, “Lord, it is clearly thy will; what is impossible with man is possible with God: Go thou with me and I will try.” Embarrassed, he realized the passengers were staring at him with amusement and amazement.

Armed with the determination of faith, Carroll founded Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary in Fort Worth in 1908.

He had responded by faith to the call of a God he could not see.
He had shown a faith that was pleasing to God.

B. In vv. 4-38 we see examples of faith.

1. In vv. 4-7 the generations before the flood.

The writer lists first “Abel” and Cain, two sons of Adam.
Abel, we are told, brought a better sacrifice than his brother Cain.
We don’t know exactly why God preferred Abel’s sacrifice.
It could be that God had instructed them to bring a blood sacrifice and that Abel obeyed and Cain did not.
The mention of the word faith12 in Hebrews suggests that Abel’s offering was made with a proper attitude and in the proper manner.
Abel means “breath”, “vapor”...An interesting wordplay on his brief life and a reminder to us how brief even a long earthly life is. Cain gives us a lesson when instead of repenting he became jealous and killed his brother.
Our reaction when we sin should be one of sorrow and repentance.
We should imitate Abel’s faith, obedience and humility.
Abel’s blood cried out for vengeance.
Christ’s blood carried with it the forgiveness of mankind’s sins.

11 The King James Version. (Cambridge: Cambridge) 1769.
12 The King James Version. (Cambridge: Cambridge) 1769.
The Holman Bible Dictionary says: “Abel is outstanding because he was the first person to worship God correctly, to demonstrate faith accurately, and to please God fully.”

What a challenge for us. Do I...

Worship God correctly?
Demonstrate faith accurately?
Please God fully?

Enoch is listed next. His name means “dedicated”. He lived so closely to God that he was taken to heaven without dying.

He is our example of:

Faith
Living for God
Being close to God
Pleasing God

Noah is an example of great faith. It had never rained. God told him to build a boat in a landlocked area.

Gen. 6:8 says, “But Noah found favor [grace] in the eyes of the LORD.13”
Gen. 6:9 says, Noah was a righteous man,
   blameless in his time;
   Noah walked with God.14

Apparently Noah built and preached to a mocking audience for 100 years. What an example of faith in God.

2. In vv. 8-22 we see Abraham and the patriarchs.

Many times we describe Abraham as the father of the faithful. God called him from a land of prosperity and plenty, a land of great intellectual distinction. God called Abraham to move to a land that He would show him.

Abraham obeyed, journeying approximately 1,000 miles to a strange land. The great example of faith in the life of Abraham is his obedience to God’s command to sacrifice his only son Isaac.

Verse 19 tells us that Abraham had enough faith to believe that even if he killed Isaac God would be able to raise him from the dead.

Abraham was willing to become a pilgrim in a strange land because he believed God.

Abraham’s faith extended to his family members. Isaac and Jacob became linked as heirs with him of the promise because of their faith.

By faith Abraham could see beyond the cares and heartaches of this life. He could see an eternal city whose builder and architect was God Almighty. Abraham could look beyond the visible and see the invisible.

What a goal for us.

Can we by faith keep our eyes on the eternal city to which we are moving?

It’s so easy to get distracted by things here below and lose our focus on eternal things.

Abraham’s faith is our example of looking to eternal, future things.

Can you begin to fathom the faith of Abraham and Sarah? When he was 100 and she was 90 God told them they would have a son even though they were childless and both past normal childbearing age.

Both laughed, but both shared the conviction that God was faithful to his promises.
From this couple of faith came a nation teeming with life as numerous as the stars in the sky and as countless as the sand on the seashore.

Verses 13-16 summarize the piety of the patriarchs Abraham, Isaac, Jacob and Joseph.

We are told three things about them:

First – These men were still living by faith when they died.
Second – They did not receive the things promised.
By faith they embraced the promises and trusted God to give further generations what they hoped for.
Third – They confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on this earth.
They looked for a heavenly city.
What was the result of their shining faith?
In v. 16, despite their obvious failings, “God is not ashamed to be called their God”15 He had prepared a spiritual city for them and He was delighted to be known as their God.

• Will it be said of us when we die, “He/she was faithful till they died”?
• Will we trust God to give future generations what we hope for even if we do not receive them?
• Are we pilgrims looking for a city or are we so comfortable here we don’t want to move?

In vv. 20-22 we see three very different men demonstrating a faith which death could not weaken or destroy.
The ordinary Isaac blessed both Jacob and Esau and spoke of their future.
The scheming Jacob showed his faith in blessing Joseph’s sons.
And the righteous Joseph showed his faith in a future exodus of his people by giving instruction concerning his bones and burial after the exodus.

15The King James Version. (Cambridge: Cambridge) 1769.
3. In vv. 23-28 - The Faith of Moses

Exodus tells us how Moses was hidden for three months. Heb. 11 mentions two features of his parents’ actions in v. 23.

First: They sensed that this was no ordinary child. They sensed something in him which destined him for spiritual greatness.

Second: They were not afraid to obey God rather than man. Pharaoh had decreed, “Throw him into the river”. God said, “Thou shalt not murder”. They trusted God to save Moses, disobeyed Pharaoh’s command, and God rewarded their faith.

Moses, we are told, chose a future eternal inheritance rather than a pleasant temporary one.

Moses’ friends at the palace probably thought he was crazy, but he was looking ahead (by faith) to the reward.

Moses was willing to suffer here and now in order to secure the future blessing of an eternal reward.

The writer of Hebrews is calling on us to exhibit the same kind of faith and attitude that Moses experienced.

We need to look beyond our circumstances and by faith see the eternal reward laid up for us in heaven.

In vv. 27-28 the historical effects of Moses’ choices are summarized.

By faith Moses left Egypt, fleeing across a barren desert with a multitude of people. By faith he led those people in the celebration of the Passover which commemorated their deliverance from the death angel and the Pharaoh. Moses’ faith in a God he could not see or touch overcame his fear of the king and the death angel.

4. In v. 29 The Faith of Israel

Israel’s faith faltered when they came up against the Red Sea.
Moses’ faith inspired them to go forward and by faith they crossed the Red
Sea. Their faith faltered again as they fell into faithless, bickering,
quarrelling and disobedience.
The Egyptians showed no such faith and they perished in the sea.

How we need to learn the lesson of discerning God’s will, then getting out of His way, and by faith allowing Him to work through us.

5. In vv. 30-38 - Faith Throughout Jewish History

Faith led God’s people to win battles, endure persecution and anticipate the life beyond.
Faith allowed Joshua to lead the people around Jericho for seven days. By faith the walls fell down.
Rahab’s faith saved her and her family from destruction.

Gideon, Barak, Samson and Jephthah were judges who acted by faith.
Samuel was a link between the judges and the kings.
David was the most outstanding king.

Verses 33-34 list nine achievements of faith:

They conquered kingdoms...
Established justice...
Inherited spiritual promises...
Shut the lions’ mouths...
Quenched the fiery furnace...
Escaped the edge of the sword...
Found strength for weakness...
Became powerful in battle...
and
Routed foreign armies.
Elisha raised the Shunammite’s son. Some were tortured, endured jeers, beatings and imprisonments. Some were sawed in two.

The apocryphal book of 2 Maccabees tells of the death of a mother and her seven sons. All eight endured barbarous torture because they refused to disobey God’s laws. The pagan king encouraged the mother to encourage the last of her sons to renounce his faith and eat swine’s flesh. The mother, who had seen six other sons die, said to her son, “Fear not this tormentor, but, being worthy of thy brethren, take thy death that I may receive thee again in mercy with thy brethren.16” The son refused to renounce his faith and was treated with greater rage than his brothers.

All these acted by faith in the God who they could not see.

The writer makes the poignant observation that “…the world was not worthy of them.”

Faith does not guarantee comfort in this world. We need to think through our faith so that we can stand faithfully. If our faith is ever put to the test, we must determine to stand faithful no matter how severely we are persecuted or martyred.

C. The Vindication of Faith – vv. 39-40

The promises eagerly waited for were not realized by the OT saints. They lived and died in the hope of a fulfillment which none of them saw on earth. The reaping of those benefits did not occur until Christ died to provide eternal salvation.

Through faith in Christ all believers can experience their eternal inheritance. Ultimately all the redeemed from all the ages will be gathered under Christ.

The OT saints looked forward to Christ’s sacrifice by faith.
We look back to his death by faith. We both obtain salvation through faith in the finished work of Jesus Christ.

The Holman New Testament Commentary lists
Five principles and five applications

Five principles

• Faith is a confidence in the reality of what we cannot see.
• Faith begins with a confidence in the existence of God.
• Faith provides a confidence that God rewards those who seek Him with their whole heart.
• Faith enabled Abraham, the patriarchs, Gideon, David, Samuel and a host of other followers of the Lord to honor Him in daily life.
• Through Christ believers receive the rewards of their faith.

Five applications

• Trust God because of His faithfulness and reliability.
• Believe in God’s promises and trust in His character.
• Do you enjoy life on earth so much that you lose sight of your heavenly destination?
• Be willing to face threats, persecutions, and even death as you believe God’s promises.
• Claim kingdoms for God as you trust Him for the victory.

Faith allowed the early Christians to stand true to Jesus even though it meant dying for their faith.

Around 156 AD a crowd in Smyrna demanded that Christians swear obedience to Caesar by burning incense before his stature and affirming, “Caesar is Lord”. A squad of soldiers roughly brought an old man before the

proconsul. The captain, taking pity on the injured old man, said to him, “What harm is there in saying ‘Caesar is Lord’? Swear loyalty to Caesar and save yourself.” Polycarp refused.

The proconsul said, “Think about your age. Swear by the divinity of Caesar. Just say, ‘Away with the atheists’”.

Polycarp knew the true atheists were those who denied the deity of Jesus Christ. Raising his hand toward the pagan crowd he cried, “Away with the atheists!”.

The proconsul insisted, “Take the oath of loyalty to Caesar and I will let you go. Revile Christ.”

Then the old man said (And may this be our confession if we are every placed on trial for our faith), “Eighty-six years have I served Him, and He has done me no wrong. How can I blaspheme my Savior and King?”

Further argument proved useless; the crowd roared, demanding execution. He was sent to the stake and burned for his “faith”.

Polycarp’s faith enabled him to live well and to die well. May ours be as strong.
Hebrews chapter 11

Introduction:
- Definition of faith - vv 1-3
- Examples of Faith – vv 4-38
  1. Before the flood – vv 4-7
  2. Abraham / patriarchs – vv 8-22
  4. Israel – v 29
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5 Principles
- Confidence in the reality of what we cannot see.
- Believe in God's existence.
- Confidence of God's reward.
- Faith allowed OT saints to honor Him.
- Believers receive the reward of faith through Christ.

5 Applications
- God is faithful / reliable.
- Believe in God's promises and trust His character.
- Keep your eye on eternity.
- Be willing to face threats, persecution, death.
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