

THE GOSPEL OF CHRIST

SPREADING THE SOUL-SAVING MESSAGE OF JESUS

HEBREWS LESSON 7 (Chapter 11)

Introduction by narrator accompanied by a cappella singing:

THE GOSPEL OF CHRIST. Spreading the soul-saving message of Jesus. And now, Ben Bailey.

“But without faith it is impossible to please Him, for he who comes to God must believe that He is, and that He is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him” (Heb. 11:6). Welcome to our study of Hebrews 11—God’s “hall of fame of faith.” Hebrews 11 is all about faith. This text teaches us what faith is. In Hebrews 11:1-2 we see faith defined. In Hebrews 11:6 we see the necessity of faith, and we learn that faith is commanded. In Hebrews 11:5-40 we see faith described through real-life examples of people who were faithful to God.

Hebrews 11:1 sets the stage for what faith really is. There is much confusion regarding what faith is, but this passage says that “faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen.” Faith is the substance or assurance of things for which we hope. It is the evidence (or conviction) of things not seen. In the Bible, faith is never a “leap into the dark.” It is never something that is “better felt than told.” Faith is always based on substance. We know that God exists—not because our families were members of the church and believed in God, or because we simply think it is right to do such things, but because the evidence teaches us that “the heavens declare the glory of God” (Ps. 19:1). Romans 1:18-20 tells us that we can see that God exists through the things that are made. Faith is based on evidence that is substantive. This is what true faith is all about. We must have a faith that is pleasing to God.

The phrase, “by faith,” is one of the key phrases in the Book of Hebrews, and especially in chapter 11. This phrase, “by faith,” does not imply that we accept something by mere mental acceptance alone. “By faith” means that we accept something by conviction, by trust, and by obedience to the Word of God. We must have an obedient trust in God. Let me illustrate. Hebrews 11:30 provides a summary of how the book uses the word “faith.” “By faith the walls of Jericho fell down after they were encircled for seven days.” “By faith” here does not mean merely “mental acceptance.” The people believed God, but it was not at the point of their belief that the walls of Jericho fell. Notice that the verse says that the walls fell “after they were encircled for seven days.” The walls fell when the people—by faith—did what God told them to do. The people heard God and took Him at His word. Their faith then caused them to encircle the city’s walls for seven days. After they had done that, then their faith was complete, and that was when the walls of Jericho fell. In the Bible, faith is never just “mental acceptance,” but instead is an obedient trust in God that is based on Who He is and what He has done for us.

Notice, too, the necessity of faith. When we talk about faith, we are talking about something that is absolutely essential to being a child of God. Hebrews 11:6 says, “But without faith it is impossible to please Him, for he who comes to God must believe that He is, and that He is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him.” We must be convicted that God does exist and that He is going to do what He says He will do. We must know that He will give us eternal life if we follow Him. The text of 1 John 5:4 illustrates the necessity of faith. “This is the victory that has overcome the world—our faith.” Faith is not only necessary in order to be rewarded by God, but also is necessary in order for us to overcome

the world. In Luke 18:8 Jesus asked the haunting question, “When the Son of Man comes, will He find faith?” This is something that Jesus demands of His faithful followers. Romans 10:17 tells us how we obtain faith. How does a person get the type of faith of which we are speaking here? If we plan to overcome by a faith that is based on substance and evidence, what is the source of that faith? The Scriptures tell us that they themselves are the source of faith. “Faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God.” How do we obtain faith? It is by hearing the Word of God. Faith comes through reading, studying, and adhering to the Word of God. It is essential that we have faith, and the only way to obtain faith is through the Word of God. If we want to obtain more faith and grow in our faith, then we must grow in our knowledge of God’s Word. We need to study to show ourselves approved unto God (2 Tim. 2:15). We need to search the Scriptures daily (Acts 17:11). We need to grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior (2 Pet. 3:18). Faith is necessary to please God. And we obtain faith by reading, studying, and applying the Word of God.

Once we understand what faith is, how it is defined, and that it is demanded of all of God’s children, we can see some examples of faith, thanks to the writer of the Book of Hebrews. Faith is demonstrated in the lives of those of whom we read in the Old Testament. This shows us the importance of taking God at His word, persevering, never giving up, and following God—no matter how difficult it may be. This was an important lesson that the Christians to whom the Hebrews writer was speaking needed to hear. Some of them were thinking about giving up and going back to the Old Law. But the message of Hebrews 11 is, “Look at these people who overcame by faith. They experienced difficulties, but they never gave up. Some of the people even gave their lives as a result of their faithfulness. Yet you are thinking about giving up?” The writer’s point is that the only way to win the Christian race is by a faith that perseveres and endures to the end.

Look at some of the examples of faith that the writer provides. The first is that of Abel in Hebrews 11:4. “By faith Abel offered to God a more excellent sacrifice than Cain, through which he obtained witness that he was righteous, God testifying of his gifts; and through it he being dead still speaks.” Here we are told that “by faith Abel offered to God a more excellent sacrifice than Cain.” In 1 John 3 we learn that his sacrifice was righteous. Genesis 3 and 4 explains that Abel’s sacrifice was exactly what God commanded. Abel offered a more acceptable sacrifice than his brother Cain because he operated by faith—which means that He did what God told him to do. Had there been no command, then God could not have said that one sacrifice was righteous while the other one was not. The very fact that one was right, and the other was wrong, proved that God had spoken on the matter. How did Abel operate by faith? He took God at His word, did exactly what God said, and followed through on obeying God’s commands. Thus, he was the one who was pleasing to God. If we expect to be pleasing to God, we cannot operate any other way than that. Just like Abel, we, too, must take what the Bible says and live it in our daily lives. We must follow God’s commands whether or not we think they are right or fit in with society’s way of thinking. We must obey God because that is what God told us to do.

In Hebrews 11:5 we find another example—Enoch. “By faith Enoch was taken away so that he did not see death, ‘and was not found, because God had taken him’; for before he was taken he had this testimony, that he pleased God.” By faith Enoch went to Heaven without even tasting of death. We will taste death. But we still are trying to get to Heaven. It was because of Enoch’s faith that God took him to Heaven. Notice that Hebrews 11:5 says that “before he was taken he had this testimony, that he pleased God.” Enoch’s faith caused him to be pleasing to God. How did it do that? Just like Abel, and others of whom we will read shortly, Enoch heard the Word of God and was willing to obey it. Even when it might not have been popular or when it might not have been what everyone else was

doing, Enoch took God at His word. He did what God said. He persevered. He endured. And he never gave up. Because of that, Enoch went to Heaven. If we are going to make it to Heaven, we must be just like Enoch. We must take Jesus at His Word. In Matthew 7:21 Jesus said, "Not everyone who says to Me, 'Lord, Lord,' shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father in heaven."

When we think of perseverance, we think about the example of Noah. Look in Hebrews 11:7. Noah is one of Bible's great men of faith. "By faith Noah, being divinely warned of things not yet seen, moved with godly fear, prepared an ark for the saving of his household, by which he condemned the world and became heir of the righteousness which is according to faith." Look at Noah's faith, as evinced through his actions. By faith he moved. By faith he prepared. By faith he condemned. Noah's faith caused him to get out and do something. He built an ark, having been "divinely warned of things not yet seen." God was going to bring rain into the world, likely for the very first time. The whole world was wicked. Noah found grace in the sight of the Lord. God told him to build and prepare an ark and to preach to the world, which would be condemned if it did not obey. Noah then went and did those things. Can you imagine being in Noah's shoes—out building a boat, but having probably never before seen rain? He preached or so many years that a flood was coming, yet people refused to believe him. Noah—because of his faith—acted on God's word. And that is how we today will be saved. We must act on the faith in order for it to be pleasing to God. James 2 discusses a pleasing type of faith—a faith that is combined with works. It is not a faith without works, which is a dead faith. Rather, it is faith that is combined with works. We must do what God has told us to do.

Think, too, about Abraham's example. Hebrews 11:8-10 says of Abraham,

"By faith Abraham obeyed when he was called to go out to the place which he would receive as an inheritance. And he went out, not knowing where he was going. By faith he dwelt in the land of promise as in a foreign country, dwelling in tents with Isaac and Jacob, the heirs with him of the same promise; for he waited for the city which has foundations, whose builder and maker is God."

Abraham was a man of great faith. Can you imagine being in Abraham's situation? God said in essence, "Abraham, pack up your things. Get the boxes ready. Go rent a U-Haul. Get in it, and when you get behind the wheel, I'll tell you where to go." Can you imagine being told that? God told Abraham where to go, and that is where he went. He dwelled there, and obeyed the commands of God. He could not see the end from the beginning. He did not know all that was going to happen. But there was one thing Abraham did know: he knew that God could be trusted. So, He took God at His word. Regardless of whether or not he could see the end, Abraham did exactly what God said. This is such a powerful principle for Christians. We may not always understand the reason why. We may not always be able to see the end. But one thing we do know is this: "We know Him in whom we have believed, and we are persuaded that He is able to keep that which we have committed unto Him until that day" (2 Tim. 1:12).

Take, for example, the command of baptism. Some people have a problem with baptism. They might not understand why God has asked them to be baptized. They might not see the importance of it. But if we are going to be like Abraham, here is what we need to understand. God said to do it, and we need to do it for that reason alone. Baptism is essential to salvation (Mk. 16:16). It is something by which we receive the forgiveness of sins (Acts 2:38). It puts us into the body of Christ (Gal. 3:27). So, if we are going to be like Abel, Enoch, Noah, and Abraham, then we God commands such things as baptism, we need to take Him at His word and do it. We do not need to question, wonder, or insist upon more information. We need to simply obey God and do what He says.

In Hebrews 11:20 we find the example of Isaac. "By faith Isaac blessed Jacob and Esau concerning things to come." Isaac operated in accordance with the promises and prophecies of God. Thus, he blessed Jacob. Esau was the one who was supposed to have received the blessing, but because of Jacob's trickery he blessed him instead. God was working in accordance with that. Isaac was doing the right thing by trying to follow the will of God. Thus, he was operating on faith based upon the Word of God and its testimony. Look how God worked through Isaac and through Jacob. Through the lineages of those men came Christ, the New Covenant, and the forgiveness of sins. When men work hand in hand by faith with God's commands, look at the great things that God does for such people. We are no different today. When we work hand in hand with God, and when we are willing to take Him at His word by obeying Him and doing what He says, what great things God can accomplish through us as His people.

Look at Hebrews 11:21. "By faith Jacob, when he was dying, blessed each of the sons of Joseph, and worshiped, leaning on the top of his staff." Jacob blessed the sons of Joseph, who would become the tribes of Israel. He set in motion prophecy as well as condemnation. By faith Jacob took God at His word, said what God wanted him to say, and did what God wanted him to do. As a result, God worked through Jacob's life. How powerful it is when we are willing to follow the commands of God. When we are willing to do exactly what He said, then His purpose can be accomplished in us.

Look, too, at the example of Joseph in Hebrews 11:22. "By faith Joseph, when he was dying, made mention of the departure of the children of Israel, and gave instructions concerning his bones." The mere mention of the name of Joseph provides a great lesson about faith. Think of the faith of this man. He was hated and despised by his brothers. They found him in the field one day, and decided (because of their envy) to kill him. But instead of killing him, they tossed him into a pit. They took his coat back to his father and told him that an animal had killed him. However, instead of leaving Joseph in the pit, his brothers decided to sell him to some Midianites. Joseph was trusting in God the whole time. The Midianites took him to Egypt, and sold him into slavery. He became a servant in Potiphar's wife. Because of his work ethic, trust in God, and righteousness, Joseph was promoted. Eventually, he even became second in command to pharaoh himself. Earlier Joseph had been thrown into prison because Potiphar's wife wanted to have relations with him but he refused. So, he was thrown into prison. But even there he was a visionary man of God. He interpreted dreams, and even interpreted pharaoh's dream. Joseph was left for dead in a pit, yet because of his faith and obedient trust in God he was exalted to a position of importance that was second only to pharaoh himself. Look at how God worked through Joseph to preserve his own family and the lineage of Christ. By faith, Joseph never gave up. He did not give up while he was in the pit. He never gave up when he was in jail. And he did not give up when he had to face his family. Joseph overcame "by faith." If we are going to overcome, and if we are going to make it to Heaven, it will be only by faithful trust in God.

Hebrews 11:24-26 provides a powerful example about Moses as a great man of faith.

"By faith Moses, when he became of age, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter, choosing rather to suffer affliction with the people of God than to enjoy the passing pleasures of sin, esteeming the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures in Egypt; for he looked to the reward."

Look at Moses, whose whole life is a picture of faith. During the time of Moses, Jewish children were being put to death. Moses' parents placed him into the Nile River because they trusted God. By faith they did that. And look who gets him out of the river. Pharaoh's daughter took Moses out of the river and took him to her house where he was reared as the son of pharaoh's daughter. No doubt Moses had great privileges, amenities, rewards, and bles-

sings during his life in Egypt. Yet Moses chose “rather to suffer affliction with the people of God than to enjoy the passing pleasures of sin.” He esteemed the approach of whom? Christ! Moses was working hand in hand with God’s commands. He did not give in to sin. Yes, sin is pleasurable. But it is a passing pleasure. It is not something that will last forever. Moses suffered with the people of God. Those people complained and murmured, yet look what God did through Moses. He sent the ten plagues upon pharaoh and the people of Egypt. He opened the Red Sea so the Israelites could walk through on dry land. He led God’s people to Mt. Sinai where they received the Ten Commandments as God’s covenant with Israel. He led the Israelites right up to the brink of the Promised Land so that Joshua could lead them in. Look at all that God did through Moses because of his faith. If we are faithful like Moses, if we will take God at His word, if we will choose to suffer because of righteousness rather than living a life of sin, and if we will look forward to Heaven, then there is so much that God will do for us as well.

The writer of Hebrews also talks about other examples such as Sarah, Rahab, and the Israelites during the time of the fall of the walls of Jericho. These were people who overcame by their faith. There were people who were slain, who were sawn in two, and who faced the mouths of lions (like Daniel). These people had suffered greatly, yet none of them gave up. All of them remained true to God and His promises. But here is the important point. The writer provided these kinds of examples in order to show Christians that those people did not even possess (in actuality) the promise of Christ and forgiveness of sins through His New Covenant. Yet those people never gave up. The Hebrews writer wanted the people to whom he wrote to know that they had those things. They had the joy, blessing, and privilege of being Christians—yet they were thinking about returning to the Old Law?!

The point of all of this is found in Hebrews 11:39-40. “And all these, having obtained a good testimony through faith, did not receive the promise, God having provided something better for us, that they should not be made perfect apart from us.” Yes, all of those people were looking forward to Heaven. They were looking for God’s promise. But they did not receive it because it was still a promise. We today now have the fulfillment of everything God had worked to provide. Why, then, would we want to go back to the Old Law? The people in the Old Testament lived in hope because they did not have the realization of God’s promises. Yet look at all they suffered and endured because they wanted to one day see the realization of their hope. We today have such a realization. The writer’s point is this: “You have the realization, yet you are thinking about going back to the Old Law? Look at the people who suffered, yet did not even possess the realization of God’s promises.” The lesson is that we today should understand what a joy and privilege it is to be a Christian. We can have forgiveness of sins. We can have peace that surpasses all understanding. We can have the avenue of prayer and the blessings that are in Christ (Eph. 1:3). We have it all! Why, then, would we dare go back to a law that is incapable of saving us? Why would we dare return to a way of life that cannot offer any hope or joy?

The lesson for those who are not children of God is that they should not want to remain in a life of sin when they can have all the blessings, promises, and privileges associated with being a Christian. Sin can offer nothing of lasting benefit. Yes, it can offer some passing pleasures. But they are just that—passing. They will not last or endure. Ultimately, all that sin can offer is death. Romans 3:23 says that all of us sin. Romans 3:10 tells us that none is righteous. And Romans 6:23 says that “the wages of sin is death.” “The soul who sins shall surely die” (Ezek. 18:4). Sin separates people from God. Isaiah 59:1-2 tells us, “The Lord’s hand is not shortened, that it cannot save; nor His ear heavy, that it cannot hear. But your iniquities have separated you from your God; and your sins have hidden His face from you, so that He will not hear.” If a person lives in sin and refuses to (by faith) obey

the Word of God, there is no way that person can be saved. But the good news is that Jesus “tasted of death for everyone” (Heb. 2:9). He lived a perfect life (Heb. 4:15). He made salvation available. He is able to “save to the uttermost” (Heb. 7:25). His sacrifice for our sins was made once for all time. If you want to live a life that allows you to obey the Gospel, you must do it based on faith. Take God at His word, do what He says, live faithfully, and you can rest assured that you will have a home in Heaven.

What must a person do to obey the Gospel “by faith”? He must hear the Word of God. Romans 10:17 says, “Faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God.” This means that we must recognize that the Bible is the only source of correct information for us. In Mark 9:7 God’s voice came down from Heaven and said, “This is My beloved Son. Hear Him!” We must recognize the voice of Jesus as the only voice that can bring us salvation. Once we come to understand that Christ is the Son of God and the only way to be saved, we then must believe in Him. In Acts 8 the Ethiopian eunuch has been traveling down the road with Philip, who had been teaching him the Gospel. They came to water, and the eunuch said, “See, here is water. What hinders me from being baptized?” Then Philip said, ‘If you believe with all your heart, you may.’ And he answered and said, ‘I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God’” (vss. 36-37). Once a person has believed in Jesus, then he or she must be willing to repent. In Acts 3:19 Peter preached, “Repent therefore and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out, so that times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord.” Repentance means that a person must make a 180-degree turn. A person must turn from sin to God. Then a person must confess that Jesus is God’s Son. Romans 10:10 says, “With the heart one believes unto righteousness, and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation.” And yes, to live by faith a person must take God at His word regarding baptism. In John 3:3 Jesus said, “Unless one is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God.” In 1 Peter 3:21 we are told that baptism “does now also save us.” Paul said in Galatians 3:27, “As many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ.” Are you a person of faith? Do you exhibit in your life faithful, obedient trust in God? If so, then you can look forward to the same reward in Heaven that those people in the Old Testament looked for. If not, then I urge you to live a life of faith by obedience to the Gospel.

Narrator accompanied by a cappella singing:

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STUDY QUESTIONS FOR HEBREWS LESSON 7 (CHAPTER 11)

1. According to Hebrews 11:1, what is “faith”?
2. What does the phrase, “by faith,” mean?
3. What does Hebrews 11:6 say about the importance of faith?
4. When Hebrews 11:30 says that “by faith the walls of Jericho fell down after they were encircled for seven days,” what point is the passage making about true biblical faith?
5. According to 1 John 5:4, what “overcomes the world”?
6. What important question did Jesus ask in Luke 18:8?
7. According to Romans 10:17, what is the source of true faith?
8. According to Acts 17:11, what is a good way to increase our faith?
9. According to 2 Timothy 2:15, what must a person do to increase his or her faith?
10. According to 2 Peter 3:18, what should be one of the goals of every Christian?
11. What, according to Hebrews 11:4, did Abel do that Cain did not?
12. What does Hebrews 11:5 say happened to Enoch because of his faith?
13. What does Hebrews 11:7 say that Noah did because of his faith?
14. What does Hebrews 11:8-10 say that Abraham did because of his faith?
15. Who does Hebrews 11:22 mention as being a great hero of faith?
16. According to Hebrews 11:24-26, what did Moses do that ranks him as a hero of faith?
17. What does Hebrews 11:39-40 mean when it says, that “all these, having obtained a good testimony through faith, did not receive the promise”?
18. According to Ephesians 1:3, who has “received the promise”?
19. According to Ephesians 1:3, where are “all spiritual blessings” found?
20. What, according to Romans 6:23, is the “salary” of sin?
21. Who, according to Romans 3:23, has sinned?
22. What, according to Isaiah 59:1-2, does sin do for humankind?
23. What are the steps of salvation, as listed in such passages as Romans 10:17, John 3:16, Luke 13:3, Romans 10:10, and Acts 2:38?