

The Hall of Faith

Hebrews 11&12

CONTEXT: The writer to the Hebrews is writing to a group of Jewish people who are seriously considering abandoning the faith and returning to a legalistic form of Judaism. Perhaps they have fallen under the influence of the Essene community, perhaps the persecution of Nero is giving them second thoughts. Either way - they are considering turning back.

The author has reasoned with them in every way imaginable to stay the course... to press on... now he is coming down to his closing arguments. He sums up the argument of chapter 11 in chapter 12.

ILLUSTRATION: My family can tell you that I am deathly afraid of heights - I always have been. As a matter of fact in our garage there are 7 ladders that are shot... all except one and I'm putting off changing them as long as I can because I hate going up on the ladder. Well, when I was in about 8th grade I went to camp and one of the things that happened on like day 3 of camp was rappelling - going down a cliff with a rope.

I remember, getting the gear on - turning around backwards and the tight feeling in my chest as I had to walk backward off the edge of the cliff... I said the sinners prayer, I did the cross on my chest in case those guys were right... I had never been so scared in all my life... I was clinging to the cliff. But then something happened... at some point I finally shifted my weight from myself holding on to the cliff... onto the rope. My confidence grew till eventually I was kicking off the rock face and sliding down the cliff.

Now what happened? **I learned I wasn't really afraid of heights, I was afraid of being out of control.** But when I believed that I could trust the rope... things changed.

Some of you today are clinging to the side of life's cliff... you can't make any progress because you've gone as far as your muscles can take you.

Hear this great cloud of witnesses shouting at you saying, "trust the rope"

TEXT: Hebrews 12:1-2 (ESV)

¹Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight, and sin which clings so closely, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us.

So the picture is that of a **competitor in a great coliseum**, the stands are filled with cheering fans... shouting, clapping, rooting you on... encouraging you not to give up, continue on in faith.

Now for us these people are heroes but for the Hebrews, they were blood relatives.

There are **15 individuals** mentioned in chapter 11. We don't have time to unpack everyone one of them - so here is what we are going to do. Since the author gives over half the section to

one individual, **Abraham** - we are going to focus on him as well. But I am going to draw out the principles that were true of everyone mentioned in the list.

ILLUSTRATION: I remember playing basketball in high school - all of the voice in the coliseum would merge together into one roar. But there were two voices that always cut through the rest - I heard every word my coach said, and that my grandfather said. Well today we are going to let the voice of Abraham cut through all the rest.

He is showing them how pressing on in faith is worth it all...Namely that **TRUE FAITH** is **Obedient, Counter Cultural** and **Eschatological**.... let's jump in...

I. TRUE FAITH IS OBEDIENT

⁸ By faith Abraham **obeyed** when he was called to go out to a place that he was to receive as an inheritance. And he went out, not knowing where he was going. ⁹ By faith he went to live in the land of promise, as in a foreign land, living in tents with Isaac and Jacob, heirs with him of the same promise.

God spoke to Abraham and said pack your bags and go - Abraham says "where?" God says don't worry about that - I will show you. Abraham trusted God and he went.

ILLUSTRATION: Can you imagine the faith that it required of Abraham? How about Sarah? Ladies can you imagine if your husband said, "I think we are supposed to move" you say, "ok honey, is there a job offer"... no... "Do you think there will be a company hiring"... I'm not sure... "Well what city do you want to move to?"... I don't have a clue... I think it's west... WHY ARE WE MOVING... well... I was having my quiet time and God said go. But he didn't say where? Exactly... So, let's leave about 6:30 in the morning.

Faith always results in an obedient change of direction.

ILLUSTRATION: I remember when my father professed faith in Christ. The Pastor said, "now get a change of clothes and we will baptize you a week from Sunday". Dad simply agreed. Then he said, "And Carl, set aside one dollar for ever \$10 you make and give it back to God". Dad did it. Why, because he trusted God.

James 2:22

²²But prove yourselves **doers** of the word, and not merely **hearers**

The Greek word *akro-atēs* (**hearers**) was used of those who sat passively in an audience and listened to a singer or speaker.

- **ILLUSTRATION: Auditing a class-** McArthur suggests that it could be used of those who audit a college class, which they are required to attend and presumably listen to, but for which they are **not required to do outside study, write papers, or take any tests**. In other words, they are not held accountable for what they hear.

Tragically, most churches have many "auditors," members who willingly expose themselves to the teaching and preaching of the Word but have no desire for

that knowledge to alter their day-by-day lives. They take advantage of the privilege of hearing God's Word but have no desire for obeying it.

True faith always results in obedient action.

ILLUSTRATION: Last week I told you about God showing me that I was to marry Julie. Suppose I said, "Ok God, that's cool - but I started dating someone else". Either - 1. I don't really trust God, or 2. I don't like His plan.

But the fact was - my dating days were over at that point. Why? Revelation from God resulted in a change in direction for my life.

HONEST QUESTION: When was the last time you read something in God's word and made a significant change to your life? When was the last time you heard a sermon and redirected your life?

ILLUSTRATION: Get in the wheel barrel. You've probably heard the illustration about the man who laid a tight rope across Niagara falls and walked across, then pushed a wheel barrow across, the crowd shouted, "We believe in you!" Then he asked who would ride across in the wheel barrel - no one was willing. They honored him with their lips but their heart was far from him.

- Able's faith resulted in the obedience of worship
- Enoch's faith resulted in obedience of walking
- Noah's faith resulted in the obedience of working

But genuine faith always produces an obedient response.

II. TRUE FAITH IS COUNTER CULTURAL

Hebrews 11:13 (ESV)

¹³ These all died in faith, not having received the things promised, but having seen them and greeted them from afar, and having acknowledged that they were **strangers and exiles on the earth.**

You will see this idea all throughout the chapter.

Now the phrase **stranger and exiles** in the Greek is a very specific classification that the Hebrews would have been very familiar with.

It was that of the **RESIDENT ALIEN**. Remember many of these Hebrews had been dispersed throughout the empire under the persecution of Nero. So often they were residents in cities where they had not roots, no connections, not family. They were resident Aliens.

It is similar to our concept of having a "**GREEN CARD**" - you can live here, you can work here, but you don't vote, you don't hold office, etc.

The author here - uses that term to describe the life of faith. We are like resident aliens. We have a green card.

So we are residents - we live in this world in a real sense, but simultaneously our citizenship is in heaven.

NOW - understanding those two paradoxical realities is key to understanding the christian life.

This creates a TENSION for us to manage and maintain. If we fail to manage the tension and err on one side or another we make a tragic mistake.

- If we err on the side **RESIDENT** - that is to say, "*this world is our home*" we begin to succumb to the world system, employ it's morals, and loose our ability to shape and challenge the world. We are like salt that looses it's savor.
- If we err on the side on being **ALIENS** - that is to say, "our home is in Heaven and we have nothing to do with this world", we end up becoming a community unto ourselves and also loosing our influence because we so demonize those around us.
- The **Fundamentalist** -tends to err on the side of Alien and thus creates Alienation
- The **Liberal** - errs on the side of Resident and creates accommodation

Have you been to churches that assume if the world came up with it - it must be wrong? They emphasize - we are aliens.

Have you been to churches that affirm everything the world affirms? They are the politically correct church - they emphasize - we are citizens.

The Gospel calls us to live as RESIDENT ALIENS, we have a green card.

HERE IS WHAT WE ARE DEALING WITH:

1. **There are two cities**, the city of God and the city of Man
2. **They are in conflict with one another** - do you realize that if you live a life of faith you will perpetually be out of step with this world. You will do everything differently.
3. **Only one city lives for the benefit of the other** -As Resident Aliens - we are to be different from the city but live for the benefit of the city.

So we love the city that will never love us back. We are aliens but we are not alienated aliens. Do you see that is rare, difficult and weird. Most resolve the tension by being resident or aliens but not resident aliens.

True citizens of the Heavenly City are the Very best residents of the Earthly City.

TRUE FAITH allows you to live for people who will never live for you.

Isn't that what Christ did? He came down to serve a humanity that would ultimately crucify him.

So it's obedient, it's counter cultural...

III. TRUE FAITH IS ESCHATOLOGICAL

That is - it only meets it's ultimate conclusion in a new heaven and new earth.

Look at verse 9

Hebrews 11:9 (ESV)

⁹ By faith he went to live in the land of promise, as in a foreign land, living in tents with Isaac and Jacob, heirs with him of the same promise. ¹⁰ ***For he was looking forward to the city that has foundations, whose designer and builder is God.***

So somehow Abraham knew that even if he or his descendants had a physical promised land to call their home - God's promise pointed to something more.

³⁹ And all these, though commended through their faith, ***did not receive what was promised,***
⁴⁰ since God had provided something better for us, that apart from us they should not be made perfect.

Do you see that - some received a measure of what they were expecting - so Abraham was told to believe God for a son and he got Isaac... but even though he got what he expected he knew there something more...

Other's got nothing they expected... they died in faith.

So here is what I am saying... true faith is only resolved in a new Heaven and a New Earth.

There is a sense in which the **Prosperity Gospel** folks are almost right - It's just that we will never fully realize our prosperity here... and listen our faith will not let us.

- So we may see healing here, but resurrection is the only ultimate answer to our prayers.
- We may see a nicer home here, but there we will see a place he has prepared for us.

For Abraham - Palestine was never the ultimate land of promise... that is why nothing this side of eternity can fully resolve our desire. We yearn for something more.

Psalms 17:15 - I will only be satisfied when I see you face to face.

ILLUSTRATION: I told the story last week of my cousins child being healed. But here is what you have to realize - the child will ultimately die. So my faith in God's work was not resolved when the immediate problem was addressed. It will only be resolved when he is resurrected from the dead. Do you see?

True faith has one foot planted in the here and now... and one foot planted in new heaven and new earth.

ILLUSTRATION: An old missionary couple had been working in Africa for years, and they were returning to New York City to retire. They had no pension; their health was broken; they were

defeated, discouraged, and afraid. They discovered they were booked on the same ship as **President Teddy Roosevelt**, who was returning from one of his big-game hunting expeditions. No one paid much attention to them. They watched the fanfare that accompanied the President's entourage, with passengers trying to catch a glimpse of the great man.

As the ship moved across the ocean, the old missionary said to his wife, "Something is wrong. Why should we have given our lives in faithful service for God in Africa all these many years and have no one care a thing about us? Here this man comes back from a hunting trip and everybody makes much over him, but nobody gives two hoots about us."

"Dear, you shouldn't feel that way," his wife said. "I can't help it; it doesn't seem right." When the ship docked in New York, a band was waiting to greet the President. The mayor and other dignitaries were there. The papers were full of the President's arrival, but no one noticed this missionary couple. They slipped off the ship and found a cheap flat on the East side, hoping the next day to see what they could do to make a living in the city.

That night, the man's spirit broke. He said to his wife, "I can't take this; God is not treating us fairly." His wife replied, "Why don't you go into the bedroom and tell that to the Lord?"

A short time later he came out from the bedroom, but now his face was completely different. His wife asked, "Dear, what happened?" "The Lord settled it with me," he said. "I told him how bitter I was that the President should receive this tremendous homecoming, when no one met us as we returned home. **And when I finished, it seemed as though the Lord put his hand on my shoulder and simply said, 'BUT YOU'RE NOT HOME YET!'**"

Don't you see - true faith is never grounded this side of eternity - it's never truly satisfied.

Genuine faith is obedience, it is counter cultural and it is eschatological.

Hebrews 12:2.. is the call -

² looking to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God.