

Let's open our Bibles tonight to Hebrews 11:1. We have two verses left - 39 and 40 - so let's start at verse 1. Because tonight we come to the final series of looking at the kind of faith that pleases God. I hope it's encouraged you. This is our sixteenth week going through forty verses. And we've gone slow enough, I think, so that we can consider all that God considers important; what truly is a biblical faith, what it looks like, what God intends to develop in our own lives.

It is our intention to spend the next three Wednesday nights - which will bring us to the end of the year - looking at a couple of different topics that'll help us look forward to a new year. And then, on January 4th (the first Wednesday), we're going to go to the book of Joshua, where we had kind of stopped - right at the end of Deuteronomy - and left three million people sitting on the border; and we've left them there for four months. They're not too happy with us. But we're going to go with them into the land and spend the first couple of (four) months of the year going into the land with Joshua to possess the possessions that God had made available. And I think we'll do a lot better with it having gone through all of these studies that we've needed to on faith and prepared ourselves.

The pressure that the Hebrew Christians faced when Paul wrote this letter was enormous. The suffering was unabated. It came from the hands of their families because they had forsaken their Jewish roots and had turned to Christ. It was coming from the Romans who were ruling the world and beginning to blame the church for much of their woes. In fact, it wouldn't be but fifteen or twenty years down the road that Nero would come and begin killing, wholesale, the believers in a wave of persecution that the early church hadn't yet seen. As a result of that kind of pressure - and you and I certainly don't face that tonight - some of the folks had chosen not to go to church anymore. They had skipped fellowship, according to what Paul writes to them. Some people had contemplated turning away from Jesus entirely. And Paul spends a good portion of this book - up through verse 19 of chapter 10 - kind of taking them step-by-step, if you will, through the things that God had done for them as a nation, their history, if you will, and the fulfillment of all of the promises God had made to them and through them, as God's people. He took them to the Temple and through the sacrifices, through the prophecies, in essence, to say to them, "Look, you've come from that place that pointed to Jesus.

Now you're at Jesus. Where can you possibly go now?" And that was really the argument. By the time that you arrive to chapter 10 of this book and this letter, Paul starts by using these words, "Let us." "Let us," verse 22, "draw near with a true heart." "Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering. And let us consider one another in order to stir up love and good works," verses 22 and 23. And he turns from the argument of, "You have come and arrived at faith and a place of life in Christ" to "Let's walk that way." In fact, he ends the last five verses of chapter 10 by saying, "You have need of endurance, and after you have done the will of God, you're going to receive the promise. But hang in there. The just have always had to live by faith." And that really was the work-up to what we've been studying, this hall of faith - where God defines biblical faith. He then illustrates it in the lives of many folks that they were well familiar with, only to say to them, in chapter 12, "They've run the race. Now you run it. They've finished their course. Now you finish yours. Follow their example. Don't just read about their stories. Live their lives. And learn from them so that you can walk with the Lord even under the harshest of circumstances." And from definition to example, from illustration in the lives of the Old Testament saints to demonstration of God's power that the weak men and women could be made strong by their trusting the Lord, God puts it on display for us to emulate and follow. Three injunctions are in chapter 10 that kind of lead up to this application portion - draw near, hold fast and consider. Those are the three big terms that he uses there, and then run the race, chapter 12. But in between is this chapter (chapter 11) so the exhortation that defines faith and exemplifies it in all of its facets, that you might look and see what God wants to develop in your life. What kind of trust can you have that will honor the Lord? What's true biblical faith?

And so tonight, in our sixteenth week - and our last look at this chapter, I thought we could go over the book as a summary. Would that be all right? And I'll try to give you all highlights in case you didn't take good notes.

Verses 1, 2 and 3 - the Lord defined (for us) faith. It is the definition. And we are told that, "Faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen. By that faith the elders obtained a good testimony. By faith we understand the worlds were framed by the Word of God, so that the things which are seen were not made of things which are visible." So three verses - definition of faith. Everything else is example, illustration. But more than a sentiment or a positive outlook, true faith (we learned) has God as its object of focus and His Word as our only hope. Our eyes are upon the Lord. His Word is what we hope in.

And the final assurance that we can trust Him is that we've come to know Him to be true. The word "substance" means foundation or supporting beam. So when you read in verse 1, "Faith is the substance of things hoped for," it literally speaks of undergirding those things that you hope for. The word "evidence" is the word for proof. True faith has sufficient proof, for it believes and provides a firm foundation for your life. I have God's Word, I have the proof of God's behavior, and I'm convinced that He does what He says. So that's what faith, by definition, is. It undergirds your life and gives you assurance for what you believe. The idea is fairly simple. Faith has a certainty attached to it. When we were going through these verses, I said to you biblical faith grabs hold of the future, which is hoped for, and holds it, in its foundational outlook, in the present tense. In other words, you live today in a way that you believe what God says He's going to do; and whether that is to provide for your needs or one day to come and take you home - those are all future things that you enjoy in the present tense because you believe what God has said to you. True faith can celebrate today what the future holds, near-term and far-term, and the content of your hope as a believer is made present by your faith in God and His Word. When you seek a future crown, and you don't store treasures upon the earth, you do that by faith. It isn't that you hold them in your hands; you send them forward into heaven. You trust that God is going to reward you for storing your treasures there. On the earth, it's going to be lost, but there it'll last forever. How do I know that? Because God says so. I forgive and walk in His love even when I don't feel like it because I believe that God will forgive me as I forgive others; that, if I'm going to ask of Him that forgiveness, I'm obligated to extend it. Faith comes by that realization that it becomes the foundation for your life. And so you trust God for provision, you trust God for open doors, you trust God to lead you by His Spirit, you trust God for rest and for protection and for wisdom and for ability. And it's all future tense, but it is based upon the truth that you know about the Lord. To know that God will do as He said - to know it with undergirding certainty - will cause you to live life in such a way that there will be substance to it, no matter the cost. And it changes the way you study your Bible. If you really believe this was written to you and for you, and God wants you to believe in it, it's exciting. If you just feel like you've got to knock out two chapters, "I've gotta read through the whole Bible in a year, man, I'm really behind," not quite the same. So faith has certainty.

Faith also has activity. Notice in verse 2 that we're told - and this is really what the chapter is all about - that by faith those folks of old, the elders, obtained a good testimony. It seems unreasonable to take a stand by faith, but verse 2 says

there's a rich history of those who did so and walked by faith, commended by God, and their acts of faith, permanently recorded here, show us that it works. We can trust God. There's proof in the lives of those who've gone before. There's proof in the generation that has passed. It's why parents are to tell their kids about who God is and what He has done - because there's proof in the generations that preceded them. They are given a good testimony - that's what we read in verse 2 - the same word, we'll run into it in verse 39 tonight as we finish. But it speaks of a witness who is refused by the world but still has an internal assurance that the Holy Spirit is giving him that he is on the right track, or divine approval, if you will. I think it was John, in his epistle, when he was 90 years old (in 1 John 5:10), that said, "He who believes in the Son of God has the witness in himself." God assures you of that witness, no matter if anyone is with you or not. It assures you. And, by doing so, you join a litany of people that are (some of them) mentioned here, if you will, who have gone before - living and walking and dying by faith. And God records them. Faith has certainty. Faith has activity.

And verse 3 says faith brings wisdom or understanding. What the natural man cannot know, a person of faith wiser than he can know because he knows God. Maybe creation is one of the better examples. Right? The smartest people in the world believe in evolution. That's not smart nor is it very biblical. But the most simple believer knows better. "In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth" (Genesis 1:1). I just read one verse in the Bible, and I'm way ahead of the game already. It's right there at the beginning. For me to be a smart guy, from the very start. "In the beginning, God created." Faith not only makes the future present and certain, allowing the view of the invisible, it provides knowledge. That's what the word is, "*noeo*." It means to know. The evolutionist without God is looking for big bangs and changing his ideas and living in "la la land," where you just stand and go, "Yeah, God created the heavens and the earth. I know Him." So that was week one.

Let me see if I can get through sixteen weeks - let me add up. Okay, we're doing fine. Week two (I can speak faster if we need to) we began in verses 4, 5 and 6, and we looked at Abel and Enoch. Abel was the second generation from Adam. He was the first guy to have to walk totally by faith. Adam and Eve were created by God. They showed up with a belly button, didn't they? And yet God had made them. Or maybe they didn't have one. I don't know. But Abel was limited in his knowledge of God because, as you learn from the Bible, biblical knowledge is progressive in the sense that God reveals Himself as you go forward. Same thing

in your life. You come to know you need salvation, you come to meet Jesus as your Savior, but there's lots to learn. And as the days and weeks go by, you learn and you grow. So Abel was a fellow that obeyed what he knew. He came to worship God in the way that God had prescribed, and he obeyed the Lord and came in a way that God would be pleased with. So it produced in him a genuine, lasting, righteous life. He didn't know much. He's the first generation after those who were created by God directly, and so Abel finds himself just doing what God, "Is this what you want, Lord? Then that's what I'm going to do." And faith was defined by the example as just doing what God requires. His brother Cain is just the opposite example. Cain worshipped God as he saw fit. He made his own rules, he set his own standards; he becomes, in the process, the father of false religion where people just decide, "Well, if God doesn't like this, forget Him! He should be thankful that I'm here. And look how faithful I've been!" But you can't come to God any way you like. Religion is not faith. It's unacceptable to God. "There is a way that seems right to a man," the Bible says, "but those are the ways of death," (Proverbs 14:12). It's a deadly way to live, and Cain chose that path. And so God refused Cain's offering, but He refused it with this challenge - He said to Cain (Genesis 4:7), "If you do well, will you not also be accepted? But if you will not do well, then sin lies at your door, and its desire will be for you. But you're going to have to rule over it. You're going to have to make a decision, Cain, as to who you're going to follow and who you're going to choose to serve."

In those same three verses on week two, we looked at Enoch. Enoch was a fellow from the seventh generation forward from Adam; you find him in Genesis 5. He lived in the days of Noah, and he stood up above the corruption of his day. He was a man that, at the birth of his son Methuselah, turned his heart to God. We don't know much about him prior to the birth of his boy - the one who lived the longest - but we know that, for 300 years after he was born, he lived for the purpose in which he was created; he lived to please God. In fact, Jude picks up Enoch's story, and, without telling us where he got it, he says in verses 14-15 that he walked around the world prophesying about the coming judgment of God and calling men to faith and to repentance; a guy that was really amazing for the culture in which he lived. And then we read one day the Lord just took him because he lived this testimony - while he was alive, he pleased God. And, again, by definition, to walk with God by faith implies that you're heading in the same direction, you're moving at the same pace, you're headed to the same place. Walking with God means you're in stride with Him. You're right where God wants you to be. And, as a type of the church, he was removed before the flood of judgment came upon the world. So

Enoch teaches us, from verse 6, that faith believes simply that God is all that He claims to be and that we believe He will truly reward those who trust in Him faithfully. So biblical faith has a proper concept of God, it obeys Him, it recognizes the consequence of disobedience, and knows that judgment is coming. It maintains its witness, like Enoch, even when the whole world is contrary. And you may even have to walk alone. But Enoch was a guy that was willing to do that. That's the faith that pleased God. And verse 6 tells us the only way to live by faith is to please the Lord. It doesn't say "without faith it's harder to please God," it says, "without faith it is impossible." Isn't that right? And there're only two little truths, if you will, attached to that regarding faith. You believe God is. And, as the Greek simply says, "You believe God is everything that He proclaims to be of Himself." And second of all that He rewards those who diligently would seek Him. And Enoch becomes the example because that's the modifier that's attached, in verse 6, to his life in verse 5. Week two.

Week three - Noah, verse 7, lived in the worst generation the world had ever seen. God warned of destruction, a worldwide life-ending flood. But He did so to a man who had lived at a time when the globe was still enveloped in a moisture bag around it, sack around it, if you will; it had never rained. But God said it was coming, and so we read of Noah moving in reverence or fear of God. Noah's course, after he was told of this rain, was set for the next 120 years of his life. He was going to be building a boat. He was going to build an ark to save his house, as faith sees the invisible and gives the future a present reality. It's coming. Not coming today, not coming in 100 years, but it's coming, and I can trust God for, when He speaks, He does exactly what He says. From Noah, we see that this God-honoring faith is to act in obedience. Even when you're not sure, you can fully explain what you've understood. I mean, Noah had no boat-building experience from all that we can tell. He had terrible access to wood. He had no real helpers. Okay, he had a couple of kids. How helpful could they have been? And at much personal cost to him, and to the jeers of three generations of people, he builds - in the desert, hundreds of miles away from water - because God said, "It's going to rain." I know we laugh sometimes, "Hey, the Lord's coming." People laugh at you like, "Sure He's coming. You're a knucklehead." No. He's coming. You may not believe it, you may not think so, you may have waited a long time. He's coming. He said so. And Noah was willing to stand upon God's Word. And for 120 years, while the sun shined, there were no hints of rain, no drizzles of preparation, Noah stood by on God's Word. And by faith, it says, "he became an heir of righteousness." That means he inherited a life that pleased God. Righteousness just means that which God

accepts or is delighted with. Noah's faith led to action. He didn't get the process of rain. He simply moved by God's Word. He was saved because of it. He provided deliverance for his family as well, and he became a testimony to the world around him that he believed God. That's kind of what the church is called to do. To say I believe but don't respond is deceptive. Faith acts. And he acted. And it was God's Word that moved his heart. Not only did it make him stand right with God, the righteousness of God, God used him as a shining light to the generation that wouldn't listen.

In week four, verses 8-12, if you're following along, we looked at the life of Abraham. And we learned a couple of things from him. And I think I told you several times, as we went through this chapter, because this is a chapter of faith - the things that God honors and is blessed by - you won't find anybody's failure in this chapter. You'll find them all in the Old Testament, but when you come by faith, you're going to get to heaven one day, and there's not going to be any of your record of wrongs. Isn't that going to be nice? We keep a record of each other's wrongs. But in heaven there won't be any. Clean slate. And so you'll find that to be so in chapter 11. Abraham did some foolish things, but what we learn from him are all the positive things that God enjoyed: verse 8 - that he obeyed. When Abraham was called by the Lord, not knowing where he went, he went. The cost was great. The reward of leaving home and family and security, at best - early on - was vague, not very well laid out, and yet we are told that Abraham left a very idolatrous culture by faith, not knowing where he went. Faith goes before it understands everything. That's how faith works. "I trust God." "Where are you going?" "I don't know." "What are you going to do?" "I don't know. But I know God's in charge. I know God's leading me. I know God will do as He's promised." Faith obeys.

Second of all, verse 9, faith will hang out or sojourn. We learned from Abraham that he had to camp in this life and not make it a permanent home. He was promised a land - Canaan land - but there were lots of people living in his land, and there was no exterior or outside assurance that that land would ever belong to him. And yet Abraham's faith persevered, and he was willing to wait upon God. And we talked that night about something that's very important, and that is this - faith, in God's eyes, is an end in itself. I know that so often when you hear people talk about faith, they always attach to it, "And I believed God, and then I got this," or, "He did that," or, "He came through," and they want to point to what faith accomplished. In reality, from this chapter, you trusting God is the end. Some

people died trusting God. Others were delivered from prison trusting God. The issue was - did they trust God? And Abraham came to the point where he just trusted the Lord. Faith is an end in itself. And God is only looking for your trust in your life. And receiving is secondary. In fact, Abraham pleased the Lord long before he or anyone else in his life ever got that Land of Promise. In fact, his kids never saw it; oh, they saw it, but they didn't have it. They certainly didn't hold it, and they couldn't have pointed to it. So faith obeyed, faith sojourns, faith is an end in itself.

Verse 10 tells us that faith's outlook is very positive, that there's a positive outlook to faith. Right? That we look past what we see to what God has promised to do. If you're ever truly discouraged or you have that self-pity party, I'll tell you the best cure is to focus yourself on eternal things. Because whatever is frustrating you I know is temporary, and what God's promised is eternal. And one of the secrets of Abraham's faith was his constant upward gaze to the eternal - waiting for the city which had foundations. He looked beyond the temporary to the eternal. Faith does that very well.

And, according to verses 11 and 12, faith is very optimistic. In other words, faith will never view the promises of God as impossible. You know, if you're a worldly person, you might have someone say to you, "Faith is blind." That's absolutely incorrect. Faith doesn't ignore the facts, but it considers them in light of knowing God and His ability. That's different. I realize if God doesn't do it, it won't get done, but God can do it, and that's the issue. Faith is rational, it's reasonable, it's never blind; not in the life of the saint. So, here we have the example in verses 11 and 12 of an older couple bearing the son of promise, that they waited twenty-five years for, until they were unable to help God out, and then they believed God. It's kind of funny because sometimes these examples push you to have faith. If you're 100, and the Lord says, "You're going to have a kid," you're going to go, "Yeah, You'd better help out here." What else are you going to do except trust God?

In week five, we looked at verses 13-16, and we looked at some of these folks in Abraham's life, and in Sarah's life, and God begins to speak of them, and He said, "They died in faith." The word in Greek means "with a full persuasion." They died truly believing what they had lived believing. Great faith won't keep you from dying. They saw the promises afar off. Remember, faith is an end in itself. Faith has a vision. What is the vision of faith? They are persuaded, made sure of them; they embraced them, they confessed outwardly they were only visiting this planet;

they made earth-dwellers into pilgrims, just passing through. Faith does that. It detaches you from the world around you and attaches you to the promises of God. Faith has a vision. Faith has a hold. Faith has a language. Faith hangs on.

And notice, in verse 13, that they died in faith not having received the promises. Neither Abraham nor Sarah nor Isaac nor Jacob ever took physical control of the land that God promised them. Yet, in faith, they enjoyed what would yet come. They brought it into the present tense and believed accordingly. They are what Paul will describe in Romans 8:37 as "more than conquerors," "*hupernikao*." The conqueror is to be the winner after the battle is over. But to be more than a conqueror is to win in the midst of the battle when the outcome looks like it's in doubt, when it really is not.

Verse 14 says those who say these things - their speech and their lifestyle are consistent; they identify themselves as believers against the backdrop of sin.

And verses 15 and 16 say that faith's focus is one that the ultimate reward is eternal. "I've decided to follow Jesus," we sing, "no turning back." Faith sees the world as fading, forgets the old life, desires a better one. And then it says this, "God is not ashamed to be called their God" because they have a heavenly mindset and a heavenly desire and a heavenly home made for them by the Lord.

Week six - how are we doing so far? Okay? Verses 17, 18 and 19, the Lord spoke to them about how faith can be tested to the limit. And again we're with Abraham, but now we're with Abraham at 125 years old. He'd been walking with God for fifty years. He had had a boy for twenty-five years that he had waited for twenty-five more; miraculous kid, born to parents unable to have children. And now God tests him. And faith will be tested. But through the tests of Abraham, especially in terms of his son and the sacrifice of his son, he is brought to know the heart of God in a way that you couldn't learn if you weren't in the midst of the trial. Abraham, through this trial, would learn the heart of the Father. You can read a lot in the Bible about the suffering Son, "My God, why have You forsaken Me?" and sweating great drops of blood, and all of the rejection that He faced. But this is the example - Abraham's issue with Isaac - where God made Abraham know His heart in sending His only Son to die. Abraham, at 125, had a mature faith. It was a proven faith. When God called him, he didn't hesitate or argue; he went right where God wanted him to go. God had promised descendants that you couldn't count through Isaac. Isaac wasn't even married. And so he went with Isaac to

sacrifice him to the Lord with this mindset. "Hey, if He's got to raise him from the dead to fulfill His promise, He's going to have to do that because God does not lie." And he went with that kind of conviction and confirmation. In fact, verse 19 it says, "concluding that God was able to raise him up." The word "concluding," there, is the Greek word for "logarithm," or, if you will, Abraham factored God into the equation. Faith never figures without God. And he did.

In week seven, we turned to verses 20, 21 and 22, and we looked at the legacy of faith, and there're three guys there - Isaac, Jacob and Joseph - and God took their lives and said, "I want you to look at their dying faith," and He pushes them to the end of their lives. Now, I mentioned to you at the time that Isaac only thought he was dying. He was 137 years old, he could barely see, he could hardly walk. We can relate to that. He's 137. He would live forty-four more years in that condition. His wife would die before he would. But he thought otherwise. He thought he was going. And certainly Jacob and Joseph, the examples from their lives that God chooses to point out other aspects of faith, came at a time when they were going to die. But their trust in God, that was a legacy to their upbringing, each of them made provisions for the future that only faith could see; and doing so, they did so in their last moments, believing and seeing God's promises and not letting go of them.

Isaac, verse 20, did so amongst much weakness. Remember, he tried to bless Esau, his favorite boy, who made him great venison stew while God had chosen Jacob to bless, and he's a mama's boy. Right? Mama liked Jacob, and, man, the deception in this family was ridiculous. But when Jacob and his mama fooled daddy, Isaac, and then got kind of found out, Isaac, rather than being angry with them, trembled because he realized he had tried to stand against the will of God; and, believing he was on his last legs, he submitted himself to God's will. He said, "God, You're right. That's what I have to do. Your will be done." And God says, "There's faith in a man that thinks he's dying," and at the end of his days, he relinquishes himself to the Lord.

In verse 21, Jacob came from years of the self-help lifestyle. He was the guru of help yourself. He finally was broken, and he surrendered to the Lord, and the mention (in verse 21) is again of the blessing of the younger over the elder and what he'd experienced but his father had refused. Jacob would acknowledge and would do as God said. He would, in his dying days, bring blessing to the person that God had chosen.

In verse 22, Joseph - he's not a guy I particularly like in the Bible because he's got no flaws; he's one of those few guys in the Scriptures that shows up in the biblical record for chapter upon chapter, and there's nothing he ever does that's even questionable - he's just a phenomenal guy. The Lord would have had anything in his life to choose from to say to us, as the people of God, "Here's an example of real faith that I'm pleased with." But what He takes is Joseph's look towards the future. And when Joseph is dying, he says to the children of Israel who were still stuck in Egypt, "When you go one day to the Land of Promise that God has promised to us, make sure you take my bones with you." And, on his deathbed, he looks ahead to the future because that's what faith does.

And all three of those examples - Isaac, Jacob and Joseph - were those who looked beyond the grave to the faithfulness of God's Word, and the logic of faith and the legacy of faith is that it is able to face death without discouragement; that God's Word won't fail; that you stick with it to the bitter end. And if so, that changes the way you live. If you believe it, you can't help but live a different kind of life.

There aren't many, by the way, deathbed confessions of faith in the Bible. Oh, there're a couple. The thief on the cross seemed to have gotten in by the skin of his teeth. Manasseh certainly came around really late in life (2 Chronicles 33) - one of the worst guys in the Bible. But if you're waiting till the last minute to go, "I'll just fix it at the last minute," you really don't have much to stand on biblically. You're better off getting saved now and waiting fifty years, or five minutes - however long the Lord gives you.

In week eight, we looked at Moses in verses 23 through 26. Moses and his parents faced great difficulties living by faith. They were in Egypt under captivity. And they were living at a time when Pharaoh's order was if you had a male child, he had to be killed because "we don't want these Jews getting too big to be a threat to us" militarily, numbers-wise. But yet when Moses was born, his parents believed God had called their son. They hid him for a time. They finally released him upstream from Pharaoh's home. They were given the child back - by a miracle of God - to raise him for three or five years and share his calling with them. But it says, in verse 23, they didn't act in fear. As horrible as the situation was, their decisions were not based on fear but on faith. When Moses got to be 40 years old, he chose to be what God had called him to be. He leaves the palace of the Pharaoh. He chooses poverty and struggle over riches, power and ease. He saw the worst God

had in store for him as much better than the best the world had to offer. And faith will choose eternal over temporal. Right? Faith has an eye on the reward, always. But Moses had a lot to learn about God's calling though he, by faith, left Pharaoh's home. He tried to push himself on the people. He believed that somehow they should have understood God had called him to deliver them. He killed an oppressive Egyptian; was found out. And rather than maybe thinking the thing through, he ran to the back side of the desert where he lived forty years more; so, at the age of 80, he would be broken and ready for God to use him for the next forty years of his life.

In week nine, we looked at verses 27 and 28, and we looked at faith and how faith works over fear. So, Moses' leadership in faith would bring deliverance to an entire generation, but in the face of Pharaoh and the resistance - even from his own people - Moses dared, in faith, to lead. And he brought them out of Egypt into the great unknown with his eyes upon the great I AM. And he was sure. Verse 27, "he forsook Egypt, he didn't fear the wrath of the king because he endured as seeing Him who is invisible." No thought on how to handle the water problem, food, or the oppressive heat, let alone the powerful desert clans that lived everywhere. Faith isn't unreasonable. Faith is more than reasonable - it puts God into the equation. Right? And so, enduring as seeing Him who is invisible, verse 28, he kept the Passover in haste because the Lord had told him to do so - that the tenth plague would be the last. Everyone heard from Moses to follow suit, to apply the blood to the home, and without explanation or full understanding, the people, in faith, did what God demanded. And I think that's important that you know that. You don't have to fully understand everything God's asking. You just have to be obedient. But you can learn from Moses that, if you'll do it, faith is also very contagious. And if you're walking with God, there're people around you that are going to want to do that, too. If you're sloughing off, you can drag people down with you.

Verse 29 tells us, in week ten, that faith was contagious, and we talked there about that the people were led across the Red Sea as it was parted. And we spent the whole night on verse 29 (on the tenth week) talking about how God forced these guys to cross and then said, "Good job." (Pastor Jack claps) This is one of those - you're trapped. Right? There're the Egyptians behind you, and the Red Sea in front of you, and mountains on both sides, and the Pharaoh's pretty angry; and the Lord said, "Well, just go through here," and the people go, "All right because that's our only way out." And then the Lord said, "Great faith." And you go, "Lord, they

didn't have any faith at all! They were pushed into a corner, and then they ran the way you said." And the Lord said, "Yeah," (Pastor Jack claps) "that is great faith." And I love that chapter because even though they have no option, God blesses them for their willingness to go His direction. That's how God measures faith.

In week eleven, in verse 30, we talked about how foolish faith is, and we said true faith isn't foolish, but obeying the Lord might look to be foolish in your lifestyle. And we talked at great lengths about the ark in the center of this march as these men were following the directions of the Lord, going around the city for six days, and the seventh going around seven times - surrounding Jericho and the walls fall down - and it just looks foolish. But faith isn't foolish. Faith is wise, isn't it? And people say, "Aren't you worried?" You go, "No. I'm just praying, man. God's going to work it out." You look foolish. But it isn't foolish.

In verse 31 we, in week twelve, looked at Rahab. You remember Rahab? And we talked about that faith comes by hearing. The faith of Rahab, the harlot, who lived on the wall of Jericho, was at best imperfect. She lied, she manipulated. But she was moved by an understanding that the God of the Jews was the God that she would have to deal with. And she exercised her behavior based solely on the hearing about God from travelers who had traveled through the bordello and against public opinion. Her heart was converted, and though her behavior was questionable early on, she risked her own neck to serve God and His people; and she did all that she could with what she knew. Faith comes by hearing. And it saved her, didn't it? And it saved her family. Not only that. God assimilated her into the people of God so that you find her as a relative to David, and you find her in the genealogy of Jesus; because you trust God, God puts you in His family. And here's a Gentile prostitute - from a people that was set aside in a covenant sense because of their rejection of God - who gets in because, "Faith comes by hearing and hearing by the Word of God" (Romans 10:17).

In weeks thirteen and fourteen, we looked at verse 32, and we looked at six men of faith that are listed there together. And we said the one thing that ties them together is these were six men that had yet not arrived to a very mature level of faith, for the most part. They were, through faith, made strong; they were weak men made strong. And if God had used them, He can certainly use you and me. Gideon and Barak and Samson and Jephthah and David - interesting bunch of folks; Samuel. And yet it is the weakness of these men that brings them together. David very well known, maybe Barak and Gideon not quite so well known; but they all found

themselves, before God, extremely weak - unable to offer themselves to God at all, excusing their behavior - and God said, "Look, I can use your life." And with great encouragement, He did; and He made the unqualified, qualified and the unusable, usable. And God marks their faith. And I would suggest if you read some of their lives, you'd go, "Man, I can't find faith in this guy's life at all!" And yet God did - even by the likes of Samson, who could have lived a godly life and, man, had a great influence, but he had to die at the end of his life to serve God at all. He could have done better. God marks it out, though. He'll take whatever He can get from you, but He's looking for faith.

We looked, in week fifteen, at the sufferings of the faithful from the end of verse 32 down through verse 38. Because though there were some who were delivered by faith, miraculously, great miracles, there were also many saints who persevered and died in faith who didn't get a miracle at all. In fact, their miracle was they didn't get a miracle; and the miracle was they didn't leave - they stuck it through. But in both cases, faith pleased the Lord - and whether it was James, who dies in prison because Herod thinks he's really making points with the Jews or Peter, who is slated to die so that Herod can make more points with the Jews, who's broken out of jail by an angel and then kind of disappears from the pages of the book of Acts - either one pleased the Lord. One died, and God was finished with him; one lived, miraculously so, and God wasn't finished. We always like the miracle part. I know we do. I would rather the miracle. But sometimes the miracle is just standing fast.

Well that brings us to verse 39. Look at us. "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." All these obtained a good testimony. The word "testimony" there is the same one as in verse 2. It's the word for "martyr," but it is usually not meant for someone that dies physically (although that's the way we use "martyr"); it is used for somebody who bears witness through his life and receives an internal assurance of faith that pleases God. Note that all (verse 39) those were delivered and those who were not - all these obtained a good testimony through faith. All of them did. Romans 8:16 says, "The Spirit Himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God." That's a cool thing because so often, again, we measure faith based on getting; especially these faith preachers on TV. "If you'll believe like I do, if you'll send me a little love gift, if you believe like I believe, you can get your own airplane." You're an idiot. And I believe the Lord would use that word to describe

these guys. That's not at all what the Bible teaches. The Bible teaches that faith in God accepts God's plan for your life and follows Him no matter what. Sometimes there's a cost, sometimes it's a breeze; sometimes you get healed, sometimes you stay sick way too long. I prayed with a guy six months ago that died in my hands. You want me to pray for you, think about that. (Laughing) I was praying, and he died. "Hey, dude....." Gone. Just think about that. Maybe call one of the other pastors. And sometimes people get healed. We had a lady that the doctors gave up on six weeks ago. She was going to die. She's doing just fine. What happened to her? The Lord stepped in. It wasn't her time. Both of them had great faith. All of these have obtained a good testimony - all of them, the living, the known, the unknown, the famously triumphant, the persevering and suffering, those killed for their belief, the guy who was sawn in half - all commended for their faith. God, who forgets no one, just covers them all. All of these.

Yet notice all of these died not having received the promise. Look, there were a lot of promises made, and a lot of them fulfilled, but these are Old Testament saints that had to wait for the promised Messiah. And until the Messiah came, they didn't get into heaven. But when He came, we all get in through Him. So they are all waiting. Every one of them listed here died before Jesus came upon the scene. So they were saved in the Old-Testament sense of faith in God, in anticipation of what God would do. We're saved today looking back to what God has done. But we both look to the same place. We both need Jesus to make it. And all of us have to come there by faith.

So, it isn't a surprise that, by the time you get to chapter 12, the first thing you read is, "Therefore we also," (now he's talking to the present church) "since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses," (who are they - all of these chosen in chapter 11) "let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which so easily ensnares us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith, who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. For consider Him" (Paul says to these Jewish believers) "who endured such hostility from sinners against Himself, lest you become weary and discouraged in your souls." The word "consider" there is the same word "logarithm" that we said a minute ago. Verse 4, "You have not yet resisted to bloodshed, striving against sin." So, come on, man. They've run, now you run. They've done it, now you do it. They've accomplished it, now you accomplish it. It's not any easier for them than it's going to be for you. The just have to live by faith.

So there's an awful lot, I think, in this chapter that I hope you are able to internalize and apply to your own life. God wants faith from you. That's what He's looking for. Your greatest accomplishment? Trust God. It puts the biggest smile on His face. "Yeah, I witnessed to my whole neighborhood." Great. Do you trust God? "Yeah, I preached from the highest building." Yeah, great. Do you trust God? That's what He's interested in. That's what He cares about. Isn't that what you care about in your relationships? That people love you and believe you and trust you? How much more God? That's exactly the way He feels about us and towards us.

So for the next three weeks, we're going to pick some topical studies out we think you'll enjoy. They'll certainly go along with making a plan for the coming new year, and then we will look forward. In fact, I am seriously thinking on New Year's Eve about teaching the first four verses of Hebrews 12 - just about running the race and the fact that you should all wear gym shoes to New Year's Eve service or that Sunday morning because I like the study. It's all in your head until it gets to your feet. You know?

Submitted by Maureen Dickson
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