

Rev. Dan Welch Pentecost 9 8 -10-25 Text- Hebrews 11: 1 -16

“Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen. For by it the people of old received their commendation.” (vv. 1-2) “**The people of old.**” As far back as I can remember, I’ve always been fascinated with those **people of old**, the faithful men, women, and **children** of the Bible. Through Sunday School and Vacation Bible School stories, especially the ones with pictures, I’ve always been fascinated with what it would have been like to **be** them, or at the very least be around these famous people of God’s Word. Our text today from Hebrews, tells us about some of these famous “heroes of faith” who lived during the Old Testament times.

Speaking of famous heroes, last weekend, (on 8/2/25), the National Football League held its annual ceremony to induct the latest group of sports heroes into their Hall of Fame. The Minnesota Vikings’ very own Jared Allen was one of the four former players to receive that honor this year. You could say that Hebrews chapter 11 serves as God’s Hall of Fame **of Faith**. Recorded and catalogued for us here are some of the most famous men and women of the Old Testament who trusted in God’s promises.

These faithful ones believed God and trusted His Word even though they couldn’t actually see what it was they believed in. Because of this they are worthy of our recognition and imitation.

Many young boys really look up to Hall of Fame football players and hope to be like them some day. (When I was a boy, I wanted to be like the Viking’s Hall of Fame Quarterback, Fran Tarkenton. I would even pretend to be him when playing tag football with my friends.) Do you ever think about the great people of faith in the Bible, those people of old and wish you could be like them? Don’t you sometimes wish you could have that kind of faith? I know I do. We **did** just sing in our sermon hymn, “We are called to stand together with the saints of ages past, with the patriarchs and prophets in the **faith** they once held fast.”

Well, here in Hebrews 11, the Hall of Fame of Faith in the Bible, we read about so many of the great people of old who trusted in God, despite all that stood against them. We begin with Abel. Our text tells us that Abel, Adam and Eve’s second son and the world’s first herder of sheep- “offered God a more acceptable sacrifice than Cain.” Why was it better do you think? It’s because it was offered in **faith**: Rather than believe that his sacrifice earned God’s favor, Abel offered it because he **believed God’s promise** -- that promise which God had first spoken to Adam and Eve that the Seed of the woman would be born to save him from sin. His sacrifice which Abel gave **in faith** showed that he was

righteous before God, for the sake of Christ Who was to come. And without a doubt, Abel suffered for his sacrifice: His brother Cain was jealous. That jealousy led to anger and anger led to hate and that hate led to the world's first murder. Cain took Abel out into the **field** and killed him. Isn't it interesting that the world's first shepherd was the first to die because of sin? What an amazing foreshadowing of Jesus, the **Good** Shepherd, Whom soldiers would lead out of the city of Jerusalem to be put to death for the sins of the world.

Next in our lineup is Enoch. We don't learn a whole lot about Enoch from the Bible, but we are told that He was a righteous man and an ancestor of the Lord Jesus. Beyond that, here's what else we can know: According to the book of Jude (v. 14), Enoch was a prophet who warned of God's judgment against sinners. We also learn that Enoch did not see death. Instead, as Genesis 5:24 says, "Enoch was taken up (to heaven) so that he should not see death, and he was not found, because God had taken him." Enoch didn't die. Why? Because of his own goodness? No, because he lived by faith in the Messiah, Christ, Who would taste death for him, and rise again. **Faith** is the key ingredient to eternal life, "for without faith it is impossible to please God."

Next up in Faith's Hall of Fame is Noah. I think we're all more familiar with his story. Noah and his family lived as believers in a world that had otherwise rejected God. The Lord warned Noah that the Flood was coming, and He promised Noah deliverance through the ark. Noah believed the Lord's promise and built the ark; and during the decades which the project took to complete, Noah proclaimed God's Word (2 Peter 2:5). He warned others of God's impending judgment. But the people didn't listen, and so they were swept away. Noah and his family were delivered as heirs of the righteousness that comes by faith. "Heirs" is an excellent word here in Hebrews: They didn't **earn** righteousness. They **received** it by faith for the sake of Jesus, Who would endure the flood of His Father's wrath on the cross, so that He might wash their sins away.

The next inductee into the great "Hall of Faith" is Abraham. The Bible says that he was "called to go out to a place that he would receive as an inheritance." Sure, Abraham already had a nice home where he was in the land of Ur, yet he believed the Lord's promise that he would receive the land of Canaan; so, he packed up his household and left all that he knew. The Lord kept His promise, and Abraham dwelt in the Promised Land; unfortunately, nobody else outside of his family believed it. So, while all of Canaan belonged to Abraham, everyone who lived there saw him as a stranger, a foreigner. Despite all of this, Abraham trusted God's promise and remained there. He lived by

faith in Jesus, Who would not be properly received when **He** came to dwell among His people, but Who would be the foundation for the City of God, the Church, forever.

Along with Abraham comes his wife Sarah, who was childless throughout her life. At ninety-years-old, she heard God promise her a son- an idea that at first, with her advanced age, she found **hilarious**. But the Lord had promised, and Sarah eventually did believe. Soon afterwards, Isaac was born to her and Abraham. Why? Because Sarah believed the promise by faith- faith in her descendant, the miracle Son, Who would be born to the virgin Mary, to save her from her sin.

We hear of these five saints, and it's an amazing list. Abel, who died for his faith. Enoch, who preached against evil and **never** died. Noah who built a boat against all common sense and appearances. Abraham who left his home for a land that was his, even though no one else recognized it; and with Sarah, he fathered a miracle baby when he and his wife were in their nineties. Why did they all do these things? **How** did they do these things? The text couldn't be more clear: By **faith**.

And what else does Hebrews 11 say about these men and women? It says that they not only lived by faith, but they also **died in** faith, except for Enoch who was taken directly to Heaven. They saw very few of God's promises fulfilled, but they trusted that God would keep them; so, they died believing in what was yet to come. They willingly faced suffering, ridicule, hardship, and death in this life because they believed they were just strangers here, heaven was their home. They counted their lives and livelihood as **nothing** because they had a different homeland- an eternal heavenly country. And so, our text honors them with this caption, "Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God, for He has prepared for them a city."

I know I would be honored to have such an epitaph chiseled on my gravestone. And maybe you find yourself saying, "Yeah, I wish that I had that kind of faith. I can't imagine leaving home for a foreign land or building the ark or suffering death for a sacrifice. I know "we are called to stand together" with them, but I also know that isn't me. I'm not like that. I only **wish** I could have faith like them."

The truth is you **do** have faith like them. You have the same faith as Abel and Enoch, Noah, Abraham and Sarah. Please consider these very important verses, Ephesians 2: 8-9: "For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith- and this not of yourselves, it is the gift of God- not by works so that no one may boast." What is the gift of God? **Faith**, along with grace. Faith is given to you by

God with forgiveness. It's not something you earn by working for it. Faith is a **gift**-- that you believe in Jesus-- is a gift from God. It has to be this way. If we truly believe the Scriptures that we were born dead in sin, then we couldn't make ourselves alive. God had to give us life, and this He does by giving us forgiveness and faith. God has given you forgiveness for Jesus' sake, just as He did for Abel, Enoch and all the rest- because like you, they were all born dead in sin. It's the same Jesus and the same forgiveness. In the same way, He gives you the same faith.

And faith's object is **Jesus**. It **believes** in Jesus. Faith clings to the Savior and the forgiveness He has won. To have faith is to believe that Jesus, the only begotten Son of God, became flesh and died on the cross for you. You can't believe in Jesus without faith. By faith, you believe in Him, and so God's forgiveness is yours. This faith comes to us by the work of the Holy Spirit.

Who died for the sins of Abel, Enoch, Noah, Abraham, and Sarah? **Jesus** did. In whom did they believe? In **Jesus**, the Savior Who was to come. Their faith held on to Jesus, just like your faith does. Same Jesus, same faith. So, you really **do** have the same faith as these saints and that means you have the same forgiveness, the same Savior, the same salvation and the same eternal life.

It's important to add this, though, the Bible talks about **strong** faith and **weak** faith. Strong faith is better able to resist temptation and accomplish more good works than weak faith. Having strong faith rather than weak faith will also be a source of tremendous peace when you face hardships and losses in life. Think of it this way: If you have a heartbeat, you're alive. You're alive whether your heartbeat is weak or strong--though a **strong** heartbeat is clearly much better than a weak one. In the same way, you're alive in Christ whether your faith is weak or strong--though a **strong** faith is **much** better. How is your faith made stronger? Romans 10: 17 tells us: "Faith comes from hearing the message, and the message is heard through the Word of Christ." The Holy Spirit gives you faith and **strengthens** your faith through the Word of God. That's why we should daily rejoice to remember our Baptism, where God gave us faith by water and the Word. That's why faith just can't **wait** to get to church - to the Divine Service- to hear the God's Word and gain strength. That's why faith loves to feast on the Lord's Supper for the forgiveness of sins and strength for our faith.

In short, your faith is a gift given to you by God. It worked the same with the saints in our reading from Hebrews. Faith clings to **Jesus** and His forgiveness, like it did for them. Faith comes by hearing the Word—just like you, me, and the saints in our text have heard God's Word.

Your life may or may not display huge acts of obedience like theirs. But you can be sure of this: The same Savior, Jesus, gives you the same forgiveness and faith. This is the truth too: God is not ashamed to be called ***your*** God, and He has prepared a city for you- all for the sake of Jesus, the One in Whom you have your faith. Amen.