

Motivation for Imitation

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[0 : 00] You can take out your Bible and please turn on over to the book of Hebrews. And this is in the New Testament.

And we are going to start today a new preaching series. And this will take us up until Thanksgiving time.

And then we'll do something for Advent. But this will take us right up through that. And here's the plan. We're going to use Hebrews chapter 11 as sort of a preaching outline to give us opportunities to go and look at some of the Old Testament characters who are mentioned in the chapter of Hebrews 11.

And it's our goal to see them and to answer this question every week. What is faith? That's what we're going to try to answer and continue to develop our understanding of what it means to be believers, what it means to trust in God, what does it mean to have faith?

So what is faith? And today we're going to start Hebrews chapter 11. And Jenny is going to read Hebrews 11 verses 1 and 2.

[1 : 18] Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen, for by it the people of old receive their commendation. Thanks, Jenny. Do you remember where you were on September 10th, 2001?

Probably not. But I suspect you might remember, some of you anyway, where you were on September 11th, 2001.

Three days after the attack that destroyed the World Trade Center towers and killed 2,996 people, President George W. Bush visits Ground Zero in New York City.

And standing atop smoldering rubble, the president borrows a bullhorn so that he can address rescue workers.

And someone calls back, calls out to him from far away and says, we can't hear you. And the president replies with these words, I can hear you.

[2 : 40] I can hear you. The rest of the world hears you. And the people who knocked down these buildings will hear all of us soon.

The president's words stirred hope and sent a clear warning to the perpetrators of the attack and catalyzed a nation to action.

The author of Hebrews does something similar as he begins bringing his book to a conclusion. He encourages readers to press on in hope.

He warns against abandoning the gospel. Over the next several weeks, we are going to walk through the hall of faith in Hebrews chapter 11.

But first, we should understand what faith is. At the beginning of the musical Oklahoma, some of you will know this, Curly McLean sings, Oh, what a beautiful morning.

[4 : 02] Oh, what a beautiful day. I've got a wonderful feeling. Everything is going my way.

Is that faith? Or just cheerful optimism? Will we have good weather for the picnic?

Well, I hope so. Is faith just a hunch? Some kind of a holy hope so? Is that faith?

Occasionally, we hear the phrase, Leap of faith, as though faith is somehow blind. Is the faith of the Bible described in a way that makes us set aside logic or reason?

Thoughtfulness? Is that faith? A leap of faith? Here's my working definition. Faith is careful thoughtfulness about God and His promises that nourishes hope and catalyzes obedience.

[5 : 18] So let's start here. Where does faith begin? Where does faith originate from? What is the source of faith? Faith is rooted in God's faithfulness.

Back up in your Bible to chapter 10 and look at verse number 23. Let us hold fast. Hold fast. The confession of our hope without wavering.

For He who promised is faithful. And let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works.

What are we to do? What are we to do? We are to hold fast. To what? To the confession of our hope. To the truth. To God's truth. Especially that truth that is revealed in the person, His Son, Jesus Christ.

But don't just hold fast for yourself. Help others hold fast to the truth as well. No lone ranger Christians.

[6 : 22] No brother or sister left behind. Help one another hold fast. And notice what lies between these two encouragements.

Hold fast. Help one another hold fast. Be together. Stir up love and good works. Encourage one another. What's in the middle of them? Since He who promised is faithful.

Faith does not begin deep down in your own heart. Faith, according to Ephesians chapter 2, is a gift from God.

Hold fast to God. Help one another hold fast to God. Because faith is rooted in God's faithfulness.

Kids, maybe you can help me with this one. What would you call it if you refuse to obey your parent or your teacher or perhaps the adult who is with you at midweek at the playground?

[7 : 42] What would you call it if you refuse to obey someone who is in charge of you? Anybody? Kids, are you listening? Okay.

Yes? Evan? What would you call it? You would call it disobeying. You would call it Elam. Are you going to say the same thing? Oh, having fun. Yes.

You would call it having fun. And in your having fun, you would still be disobedient, right? Now, if you take that idea of refusing to follow direction, choosing not to obey, rebelling against the person. If you take the idea of disobedience and you put that idea in the context of religion, faith, we would call that apostasy.

Apostasy. It's when you stop following, when you stop obeying, when you abandon some truth that you used to hold to.

[8 : 48] Some of the readers of Hebrews are tempted to turn away. They are being tempted to apostatize from Jesus and go back to the law and to animal sacrifices.

But the author of Hebrews clarifies this. If you reject Jesus' once-for-all sacrifice, there is no other sacrifice for sin.

Once Jesus has come and died for sin, once for all, all of the animal sacrifices have now been made invalid. And so if you go back, if you apostatize from Jesus, if you abandon the gospel, if you walk away, turn away from the faith, then you cannot be saved.

There is no hope. There is no forgiveness any longer apart from the death of the Lord Jesus. There is no other way to be right with God. Look at verse 26.

For if we go on sinning deliberately after receiving the knowledge of the truth. See that?

[10 : 02] You received the knowledge of the truth. You have an understanding of the gospel. And then you willfully, deliberately choose to go on sinning.

There no longer remains a sacrifice for sins, but a fearful expectation of judgment and a fury of fire that will consume the adversaries.

Some of you may recall Professor Harold Hill, the music man.

And he warns the people of River City, Iowa this way, friends, either you are closing your eyes to a situation that you do not wish to acknowledge.

Or you are not aware of the caliber of disaster indicated by the presence of the pool table in your community. I wonder, friend, if you are closing your eyes to a situation that you do not wish to acknowledge.

[11 : 18] That to turn away from Jesus. To abandon faith.

To stop believing. Is a very, very serious caliber of disaster. Those who reject Jesus, the author of Hebrews says, should fearfully expect a furious, fiery judgment.

It reminds me of the book of Daniel. Kids, let me ask you again, because I want to make sure that you are listening and I was not convinced last time.

If your brother or sister says to you, it is time to clean up. And you ignore your brother or sister.

That's bad, right? What if your brother or sister comes and says to you, mom says it's time to clean up.

[12 : 28] And you still ignore your brother or your sister. That's worse, isn't it? What if your mom herself comes into the room and says to you, it is time to clean up.

And you ignore, you disregard, you don't listen, you disobey Elam, your mom's clear instruction. That would be even worse, wouldn't it?

You see how it goes from bad to worse to even worse? If you disregard your co-worker's instruction, that's bad.

But if you disregard your boss's, boss's, boss is instruction, that's even worse, isn't it? The author of Hebrews warns with a similar comparison in the next several verses.

If you disobey God's law on the evidence of two or three witnesses, then you deserve the death penalty. But how much worse punishment, he says, is deserved by someone who rejects the gospel.

[13 : 49] Look at verse 28. Anyone who has set aside the law of Moses dies without mercy on the evidence of two or three witnesses.

How much worse punishment? Worse than what? Well, apparently worse than physical death. That's the illustration.

That's how the comparison works, right? How much worse punishment do you think will be deserved by the one who has trampled underfoot the Son of God and has profaned the blood of the covenant by which he was sanctified and has outraged the Spirit of grace?

It makes me so very sad when I hear about a person who is no longer holding fast to God's truth. It makes me sad to hear about a person who has chosen to stop believing the gospel. Sometimes we might say of these dear people, they have fallen away.

[15 : 10] And yet that is not quite accurate. No one falls away from faith. Apostasy is always deliberate.

Can you think of anything so valuable that you would just walk on it? Did that sound confusing? It was supposed to be kind of confusing. Because that's what the author says people do when they abandon faith in Jesus.

When they hear and understand the gospel and reject Jesus. It's not a falling away. Apostasy is deliberate.

He says they trample on Jesus. They just stomp on him. Like we stomp on gravel. They profane Jesus' work.

[16 : 13] Do you see how this is deliberate? They treat the death of Jesus like a filthy, stinky sponge that just needs to be thrown away. And they insult the Holy Spirit.

Yes, I think Professor Harold Hill is right. You got trouble, my friend. Right here, I say, right here. Look at verse 29.

How much worse punishment do you think will be deserved by the one who has trampled underfoot the Son of God and has profaned the blood of the covenant by which he was sanctified and has outraged the Spirit of grace.

For we know him who said, vengeance is mine, I will repay. And again, the Lord will judge his people.

It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God. Because faith is rooted in God's faithfulness, we have been encouraged to hold fast to God's truth.

[17 : 46] And because apostasy is always deliberate, we have been warned against turning away from the gospel. And now the author of Hebrews urges followers of Jesus to persevere in faith.

See, it wasn't all that long ago that these first readers of Hebrews were persecuted for their faith. And God gave them sufficient grace to persevere.

Notice how he reminds them of this in verse 32. But recall the former days, when after you were enlightened, you endured a hard struggle with sufferings, sometimes being publicly exposed to reproach and affliction, and sometimes being partners with those so treated.

For you had compassion on those in prison, and you joyfully accepted the plundering of your property. These few verses remind me of a verse from Matthew chapter 5.

There, Jesus says, Blessed are you when others revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account.

[19 : 17] Rejoice and be glad, Jesus says. These Christians were publicly shamed for their faith in Jesus. They were dishonored.

They were insulted. They were disgraced and discriminated against. And they didn't abandon their brothers and sisters when they suffered those same injustices.

And they didn't even fight for their own rights. Did you notice that? They joyfully accepted being wronged for the name of Jesus.

The author's purpose in inviting them to remember those former days is to help them call to mind God's grace that sustained them in their suffering.

If God's grace sustained you back in those good old days when you endured faithfully don't forget that God's reward still awaits those who endure.

[20 : 27] What kind of a reward? Well, Peter tells us it is an imperishable undefiled and unfading inheritance. inheritance. This inheritance will be yours if if you persevere in faith.

Look at verse 34. For you had compassion on those in prison and you joyfully accepted the plundering of your property since you knew that you yourselves had a better possession and an abiding one.

Therefore, do not throw away your confidence which has a great reward for you have need of endurance so that when you have done the will of God you may receive what is promised.

Don't throw away your faith like a child tosses aside a sweatshirt at the park on a hot afternoon. The faith that saves is preserving faith.

Faith that holds fast. Faith that refuses to turn back. Faith that remembers God's grace that sustained through past suffering and faith that obeys God now and will be rewarded in the future.

[22 : 08] The author's urging reminds me of Aragorn in the return of the king facing the black gate of Mordor.

He rallies his soldiers. Hold your ground. Hold your ground. Sons of Gondor, of Rohan, my brothers, I see in your eyes the same fear that would take the heart of me.

A day may come when the courage of men fails, when we forsake our friends and break all bonds of fellowship, but it is not this day.

Verse 37. For yet a little while and the coming one will come and will not delay, but my righteous one shall live by faith.

And if he shrinks back, my soul has no pleasure in him. But we are not of those who shrink back and are destroyed, but of those who have faith and preserve their souls.

[23 : 40] There's a little play on words here between verse 38 and 39. In 38, he describes those, the action of shrinking back.

You see that there in your Bible? If he shrinks back, verb, and then in verse 39, he switches it and he uses the noun form of the same word and he says, we are not shrink backers.

We are not retreaters. We are not those who turn away from Jesus. That is not us. Do you see that? You see his urging? You see the importance of persevering in faith until the coming one comes?

We are not retreaters.

We are not those who turn back from following Jesus. We don't hold to God's truth loosely. We cling to it with every ounce of strength that we have.

[24 : 44] We are not shrink backers. We are those who by God's grace persevere in faith and preserve our souls.

faith. So then what is faith? Chapter 11 verse 1. Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen.

for by it, by faith, the people of old received their commendation. Faith is the assurance of things hoped for.

Faith grabs hold of God's promises for the future and pulls those promises into the present and then lives as if those promises have already come true.

faith. That's faith. Faith is the assurance, the confidence right now of things that you could otherwise only hope for.

[26 : 08] Faith is the conviction, the certainty, the certitude of things that have not yet been seen. That's faith.

faith is careful thoughtfulness about God and his promises that nourishes hope and catalyzes obedience.

What does the word catalyze mean? if you bring a blue cooler of ice cream treats out on a hot sunny day, the blue cooler of ice cream treats will catalyze children gathering around you.

The ice cream motivates, it energizes, it even causes the children to gather. That's what it means to catalyze.

Faith catalyzes obedience. Faith motivates and energizes and even causes those who trust in Jesus to obey him, even when it is hard, even when life hurts, even when you want to quit and give up and turn back from following Jesus, even when you are reviled and persecuted and people, even your friends utter all kinds of evil falsely against you and you wonder, is it worth it?

[27 : 57] a hundred different voices are happy to tell us what we should believe and some will tempt us not to believe anything or anyone.

Let me tell you, that is a path towards giving up, isn't it? To not believe anyone or anything, this is what we should believe.

God's truth we should hold fast to God's truth. We should believe what God says. Careful thoughtfulness about God and His promises nourishes hope.

on September 12th, 1962 at Rice University in front of about 40,000 people, John F.

Kennedy urged his fellow Americans this way. We choose to go to the moon in this decade and do the other things.

[29 : 21] not because they are easy, but because they are hard. Life is hard.

And that is often especially true for followers of Jesus. Jesus. And so like the author of Hebrews, I don't want you just to have faith.

I want you, my dear brothers and sisters, to persevere in faith. faith. I don't want you just to start believing.

I want to encourage and warn and urge you so that you don't stop believing. Not today, not tomorrow, and not until you see Jesus himself face to face.

Why? Because in a little while, the coming one, Jesus himself will come. You will see him face to face.

[30 : 41] Persevering faith will not be easy, but I promise you, it will be worth it. Is your faith weak?

Have you all but given up hope? Perhaps you have turned back from following Jesus. Maybe you've never yet believed in Jesus. Set your attention and affection on God.

Give careful thoughtfulness to God and his promises. Repent and believe the gospel. Grab hold of God's promise for your future.

Pull it into the present and act, respond, obey, as if God's promise has already come true. They will come true, you know, because he who promised is faithful.

Should we pray about that together? we are so, so grateful to have your word and we confess that we need the encouragement and the warning and the exhortation, the urging that your word has brought to us today.

[32 : 07] We confess that life is hard and we are desperately needy for your sufficient grace for every moment of our exile here.

Father, we so desire to persevere in faith and yet we understand because we hear the voices calling us to give up, telling us it's not worth it, tempting us to turn away from the gospel.

O blessed Holy Spirit, please, please, by your grace, cause us to persevere in faith.

Nourish our hope with these reminders of the coming one, our Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ.

Give us humble confidence to lay hold of your promises to us in Christ and to respond to those promises as if they have already come true.

[33 : 29] we know that you are faithful. Thank you for giving us the gift of faith.

Please help us to hold fast to you. And we confess that you are holding fast to us. thank you blessed Holy Spirit.

Thank you Lord Jesus for interceding for us. Thank you Father for all that you have done for us.

Please help us as we continue in our time of worship.

We desire to honor you as we have already prayed with all of the things that we do and say. It's in Jesus name we pray. Amen. Amen.