

Hope for a Better Country

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Date: 23 May 2021

Preacher: Alan Barts

[0 : 00] Yeah, my name is Alan, and I'm one of the pastors here in One Harbor. Welcome to those of you here in person, and as well, there will be more that will be listening online later in the week, so welcome to that.

We typically preach through books of the Bible here in One Harbor, and this is exactly what we're doing now. Today is part 15 of our walk through this magnificent book called Hebrews, which we now know as a sermon written to a group of believers that have been drifting away and putting their full faith, hope, and trust from putting their full faith, hope, and trust in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

They have become complacent and have been convinced that there was more than Jesus. The preacher was fully aware of the dangerous track this church was following, and he was fully aware of the truth they needed to hear to get their faith back on the right track.

Even though this sermon was written a long, long time ago to a group of people that are very different compared to today's society, it is still very relevant and life-changing to us today.

So today's passage is very connected to the last week's sermon by Donnie, which called us to endure in this newfound faith that has been revealed to us, as we call ourselves Christians.

[1 : 22] So this week we're going to look at how true endurance is possible by having true biblical faith. Yeah, so today we are going to talk about faith.

And I plan to answer a few questions about what faith is, what it is not, and also what does it cause in us who seek to have more of it. We're going to be reading out of Hebrews 11, 1 through 16. It is not nearly as long a passage as some in the past, but if you have your Bibles you can pull it out now or the words will be behind me on the screen. Starting in verse 1 of chapter 11, Hebrews. 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. By faith we understand that the universe was created by the word of God, so that what is seen was not made out of things that are visible. By faith Abel offered to God a more acceptable sacrifice than Cain, through which he was commended as righteous. God commending him by accepting his gifts. And through his faith, though he died, he still speaks.

[2 : 27] By faith Enoch was taken up so that he should not see death, and he was not found, because God had taken him. Now before he was taken, he was commended as having pleased God. And without faith it is impossible to please him, for whoever would draw near to God must believe that he exists, and that he rewards those who seek him.

By faith Noah, being warned by God concerning events as yet unseen, in reverent fear, constructed an ark for the saving of his household. By this he condemned the world and became an heir of the righteousness that comes by faith.

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. 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.

For he was looking forward to the city that has foundations, whose designer and builder is God. By faith Sarah herself received power to conceive, even when she was past the age, since she considered him faithful he had promised.

Therefore from one man, and him as good as dead, were born descendants as many as the stars of heaven, and as many as the innumerable grains of sand by the seashore. 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.

[3 : 56] For people who speak thus make it clear that they are seeking a homeland. For if they had been thinking of that land from which they had gone out, they would have had opportunity to return. But as it is, they desire a better country, that is a heavenly one.

Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God, for he has prepared for them a city. Let us pray. Lord, we are just thankful again for this time to come together.

Lord, I pray that your word would speak to us, that it would change us, that it would stir up our faith, Lord. And as John alluded to earlier, that we would get rid of the excess things of this world, and fill our hearts and our souls and our minds with you.

You truly deserve it. You truly earned it. And for that, we are forever grateful. So Lord, speak to us today, and we're thankful for all these things. In your name we pray. Amen. So this whole sermon, this whole book, you will, has been about one major underlying theme.

That is for us to place our trust in nothing else other than Jesus and his finished work on the cross. Thus the title, Jesus is Greater. We have talked for months now about how this body of believers, as well as you and I, are constantly being tempted by the enemy to place our faith and hope in anything else other than Jesus.

[5 : 14] He is very conniving and good at tempting us and causing us to drift. In this case, it was their rituals and nationalism rather than placing their hope in Christ.

The author has used grace at times, and like last week's passage, kind of harsh terminology to redirect them back to the only true source of hope. He did all of this to show them and us that true life is only found through faith, that Jesus accomplished what needed to be done, what we could never do, and if this occurs, we find true salvation and an inheritance in glory.

This faith not only is our ticket to true hope and salvation, it can also be a stumbling block to the old mentality where we strive to achieve salvation.

This faith that saves us and allows us to rest from ritual is the same faith that perplexes us and forces us to submit and give up our own will, our own innate desire to earn our way rather than simply to receive.

This is why last week's sermon on endurance is so important and why he spoke so harshly because without endurance, we are easily distracted and begin the very dangerous habit of drifting.

[6 : 28] We become emotional or circumstantial Christians that are easily swayed by the troubles or temptations of this world. God is not interested in a bunch of religious fluff or rituals where we put on a show to impress ourselves or those around us, which leads us to be more concerned about presentation, looks, verbiage, and other things of this world that really don't matter.

We should be concerned about our heart, our soul, and our spiritual health. We need to be a body of believers where we all are searching for what real faith looks like and how deeply connected it is to real hope.

God wants his people to live by faith and hope. These two words, faith and hope, have become so familiar that the massive weight they carry often lost on T-shirts, coffee mugs, and of course those ever-popular Hobby Lobby plaques.

I have even seen a plaque saying faith, hope, and love, and the greatest of these is love, which is a good thing, but it was in a public restroom. I'm like, come on, man, in a public restroom.

Let's dive a bit deeper into this subject this morning and hopefully bring clarity to what godly faith looks like, but first, let's explore what godly faith is not. This first one might be the most important aspect of what faith is not.

[7 : 53] Faith is not doing something for God so that God will do something for you or me. This is not how it works, but this is how many of us operate or constantly struggle with.

We cannot try harder, do better, etc. God is not an all-knowing, all-powerful vending machine. This belief undermines what true faith is all about.

God is not focused on your comforts and material desires. He is focused on your heart and character. Faith is not blind optimism. It's not a state of mind and a state of positivity that simply looks on the bright side and keeps a good attitude.

It is not tiptoeing through the tulips. Faith cannot be cheapened to that level. With this outlook on faith, when this outlook on faith occurs, we are quick to turn our back on God when life happens.

We lose our job. We experience chronic sickness. A family member dies, etc. When this sort of thing happens in our lives, how do we feel when someone who probably has good intentions says something like, you got to keep the faith, bro, or you just got to have hope?

[9 : 04] What separates the Christian from the optimist is that our faith is tied to an empty grave and a reserved seat in heaven. All right, now let's transition to what biblical faith really looks like.

Faith is the expectation that God is who he says he is and will do what he says he will do. Verse 1 says, Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen.

This is biblical faith according to Hebrews. It's found in our assurance of God's claims and our conviction of his sovereignty overall. In other words, present faith is deeply connected to future hope.

N.T. Wright said, Faith for Hebrews is always closely linked to hope. Faith is looking at God and trusting him for everything. While hope is looking at the future and trusting God for it.

Faith is not about being chipper and forcing yourself to smile when you're down and out. Faith is an assurance and the ability to trust in the Lord even when you can't smile and your days are heavy.

Faith is not about your emotional state of mind which ebbs and flows.

[10 : 14] It is knowing God is good and working on your behalf even when your emotions don't feel it and your heart does not want to dance. Faith does not come in light of your momentary circumstances but rather it deepens in spite of your circumstances.

This is a big reason why we emphasize gospel-centered community groups. We just witnessed that. To encourage each other when we are experiencing hard times and to redirect our hearts and minds back to Jesus as the source of true hope.

This passage goes on to give real examples of people whose faith was commended and counted them as righteous. Living by faith should look very different.

The list of examples given in today's passage is really good because it helps us see what true faith looks like when it is lived out. These people were not commended for what they did but for their faith in God to come through.

The first example. By faith, Abel offered to God a more acceptable sacrifice than Cain through which he was commended as righteous. God commending him by accepting his gifts and through his faith though he died he still speaks.

[11 : 24] Like every other time when we are doing something for God the why is way more important than the what or the how. It is a heart issue. We have staff meetings on a routine basis and part of the reason we get together is to remind ourselves of the why we do everything we do.

It is so easy to get caught in the weeds of the what's and the how's of those kind of things but take hospitality for instance. They put out signs.

They put out water and hand sanitizer. They set up the seats. They sanitize the seats. Those are the what's. They have processes and different roles within the team.

Those are the how but the why is paramount to everything else. The why is God has saved us through the sacrifice of his son and because of that we are indebted to serve him and his bride the church with excellence.

It wasn't that Abel's offering to God was any better than his brother Cain's. It was the heart motive behind the offerings. Cain gave from a heart of obligation but Abel gave from a heart of admiration.

[12 : 34] His faith in knowing that God will show up and provide for him motivated his heart to give the best. Christians have been going through the motions for generations and I know how easy it is to put my best foot forward on Sunday mornings because I did it for decades.

But true biblically based faith motivates us to give our best because we recognize that God has given his best in his son Jesus Christ. Oftentimes faith looks like bringing your best to God in various circumstances.

You have talents. You certainly have time, your effort, your money, your relationships, your career with the right heart motive.

We are to do our best. We continue on. We read about Enoch and how faith pleases God. By faith Enoch was taken up so that he should not see death and he was not found because God had taken him.

Now before he was taken he was commended as having pleased God and without faith it is impossible to please him for whoever would draw near to God must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who seek him.

[13 : 40] Faith is leveraging our lives to please God and seek out what is pleasing to him. Modern day pseudo-Christian theology often has this opposite little undertone going on where faith is this thing we give God so that he will serve what is pleasing to us.

I will do A, B, and C if God will give me you fill in the blank. It is true that the Bible says God wants to give us the desires of our heart that is true but what we do not know is that often times those desires will lead us down a path that might not turn out so well.

I feel like this is a maturity thing in our walk with Christ. As we grow in our knowledge and understanding of what God has already done for us we become more aware of what he desires for us and our lives which transforms our desires to align with his which in turn pleases him.

Enoch embraced this understanding and provided a great example of what this mentality and faith in God truly looks like. Ask yourself am I living out my life in a similar fashion of Enoch's and then why or why not?

We then look at another great faith hero of the Bible Noah. By faith Noah being warned by God concerning events as yet unseen in reverent fear constructed an ark for the saving of his household.

[15:05] By this he condemned the world and became an heir of the righteousness that comes by faith. Do you know it took Noah about 120 years to build the ark? It was a massive ship.

Some people have compared it to a small battleship if you will. In all that time 120 years can you imagine people mocking him as being insane and I'm sure all the while he would warn them of the impending judgment calling them to repent calling them to turn back to God and leave the things of this earth.

Faith is being willing to do what seems insane unlikely and even confusing out of sure obedience that God will come through. God loves to bless and anoint those who are willing to step out of their comfort zone for his purpose.

the author then pulls out the Moab of all faith heroes the mother of all bombs the Abraham affectionately known as the father of the faith.

By faith Abraham obeyed when he was called to go out to a high place that he was to receive his inheritance and he went out not knowing where he was going. 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 for he was looking forward to the city that has foundations whose designer and builder is God.

[16:31] Abraham was a man that had it all. He was living the life of comfort and God said go to this place that I will show you and he did.

Faith is sometimes walking without even knowing where you're going. This is not the case every time but I guarantee you there will be times when God is going to ask you to do something or go somewhere without giving you the details.

The question is what are you going to do? God's not going to love you any less if you say no but I do feel like you will miss out on experiencing the true faithfulness of God in a supernatural and powerful way.

The funny thing is the further along this path of Christianity you go the more frequent these times occur with less details often times than the previous occurrence which is all a test of your faith. So not to burst your bubble but it doesn't get any easier saying yes when God says go and I'm certainly not perfect at this and feel like I have missed many opportunities to see God move and change lives all because of my doubt.

[17:40] The cool thing is God is not a one and done God. He will keep asking. I remember the first mission trip I went on to Guatemala a long time ago and we were doing a little skit out in Guatemala City which at the time was about a million and a half two million people and after we did our little skit because it's illegal to proclaim the gospel of Jesus Christ in Guatemala or at least it was 27 years ago and after we did our little skit we would ask people for prayer and give them point of contact to the local church we were working with and I remember distinctly one time when we had finished our skit and this gentleman who was on crutches came up and he asked for prayer and he had blue jeans on and he pulled up his pants and from his knee down it was gangrene it was oozing it was gross and he'd actually come into town to the city from the countryside to have his leg amputated to basically save his life and so we were a bunch of young college age late teenage individuals full of faith thinking we're out here on the front lines if you will in a third world country and we're going to lay hands on this guy and we're going to see a healing right here and so we did and we were full of faith and we prayed and when we opened our eyes we were like it looks the same what happened

God and so anyway we passed on information to the local pastor the guy and we went on and every evening we stayed in this compound and it was like a barrack it had like 15 foot concrete walls with

barbed wire on top of that and this huge gate and there was like no way in or out once they locked the doors and every evening we would come together in the little dining hall and do a debrief of what we had done today that day and then talk about what we were going to do the next day and I remember it was raining like a monsoon it was crazy raining hard and I just happened to be sitting beside the little screen door to come into the little dining area and all of a sudden this guy walks in the door I don't know how he knew where we were I don't know how he got there I don't have a clue but he walked in the door and of course they speak Spanish in Guatemala and he was talking about a million words a minute and I didn't have a clue what he was saying and all of a sudden we had an interpreter that came with us a local Spanish teacher and she just started crying I mean the tears just coming down her eyes I did this the first service and he just pulled up his pants leg and it was healed

I don't know how it happened it was definitely not a joke it was definitely not anything you know any kind of play or whatever but he was healed and I just remember all of us being really excited and ready to take on the world we were ready to walk on the water at that time you know kind of thing but it was just a cool experience and it changed my life and I guarantee you it changed all of our lives that were there that day that evening and God wants to show you and I supernatural things he wants to show you and I healings not only physical healings emotional healings release and relief from drugs and alcohol and all other kind of addictions he wants to pour out his glory on us as a church if we will just have the faith to walk in that freedom if you will so yeah he's not a one and done God when we say no he'll keep on asking which is really cool Proverbs 25 2 says it is the glory of God to conceal things but the glory of kings is to search things out it's like he has this little sense of humor where he likes to conceal things from us and we just have to have the faith enough to know that he's got our backs being a hero for the church is not about doing great things for God but expecting great things from him in today's passage we end with the preacher talking about the wife of Abraham

Sarah by faith Sarah herself received the power to conceive even when she was past the age since she considered him faithful who had promised therefore from one man and I really love this next little line here and him as good as dead were born descendants as many as the stars of heaven and as many as the innumerable grains of sand by the seashore Sarah's story is different from Noah's in that she is believing the impossible to become reality because God said it would be so Noah believed that a really improbable event was going to occur you see the difference impossible improbable Sarah was not going to have children not in the natural realm but she believed in the ability of God to do something in the supernatural realm so faith is believing God can do the impossible there will be times when you and I will have the opportunity to put faith in God for the impossible to become reality it doesn't get more biblical than this

God really loves to show up and do the impossible when there is no other way there are stories after stories throughout the Bible proving this point I'm not talking about some sensationalist waving a hanky in the air trying to play on your emotions and what we shouldn't believe that the only time God shows up for the impossible is when a loved one of ours is lying on his or her deathbed can God heal the sick and dying absolutely he's God he can heal anyone he chooses at any time he chooses but I believe God wants to show us that the impossible can become possible because he wants to draw many others to himself it is certainly not for yours or my glory but only for him I'm certain that many of you here today or listening have personal stories or know someone who has shared times in their lives when God came through when only he could come through those are times when lives are changed pathways are redirected reshaping our entire future real faith changes everything he then moves to a different angle of approach faith in a multi-generational [23 : 42] God means that some of the results of faith will come to pass after we pass from this earth this is a part of faith that we need to accept the truth faith I mean these all died these people all died in faith not having received the things promised but having seen them and greeted them from afar we serve an eternal God that does not look at cause and effect being full circle in your personal life all the time but rather wants to pull you into something greater than your own timeline and own physical years God wants to establish spiritual legacy in your life that often outdates you and outlives you he wants you to be the recipient of prayers of men and women before you that you will only fully understand in glory he wants to begin things in this moment and in this generation that will be experienced in the next and beyond that said this passage lands by showing us that faith and hope in God leads us to live like exiles and having acknowledged that they were strangers and exiles on the earth for people who speak thus make it clear that they are seeking a homeland if they

had been thinking out thinking of that land from which they had gone out they would have had the opportunity to return but as it is they desire a better country that is a heavenly one therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God for he has prepared for them a city now guys and gals this might seem like a bold statement but this was the statement of all statements for them this statement right here likely cut them deeper than all the other rebukes and challenges they had gotten thus far this is where the preacher tells them that their true faith in Jesus gives them a new citizenship and identity that their national pride of being from

Israel and all the identity and weight they placed in it was no longer primary there is something deep in us that loves our national identities it reverberates in our bones to feel a sense of pride of where we're from I'm from America right as an American in this modern nationalistic culture we live in I understand this Doug but this set of verses from Hebrews should be sobering and clarifying of where our primary allegiance should land if we are honest we are not all that much different than the Hebrews being addressed in this passage if we are not careful to guard our hearts we too can put more faith in our earthly borders and soil than in where our eternal home is being prepared there is nothing wrong with admiration of your homestead and country so long as it does not blur your lens of the very temporal state of things in this present age the mature hold lighter to things like nationality and borders because they know that one day soon we all will reside in heaven these verses gives a peek inside the human makeup of people seek a homeland desire a better country that is a heavenly one this is so revealing of the human spirit in that we truly do seek to be at peace and in unity we long for it but we often only see the opposite happening despite our best attempts so Hebrews lifts our gaze to a greater vision of our identity and says the deepest things about us is not that we are from

Israel or American or wherever your nationality is but that we are redeemed and bought with a price to have an eternal heavenly citizenship we are in the world but no longer of it just like exiles living in a foreign land Jesus showed us this was better than anyone he came from a throne of perfection and glory and unity to a world of dirt and decay and division he loved our culture and adapted to it to become effective and relative and missional for the sake of love as should we but he never was of it his allegiance was to his father and to the eternal kingdom that he came to establish he saw earthly nationalisms with a dotted line and reminded them that the eternal kingdom to come would be established one tribe one nation one people one kingdom as the band comes up if you're here and not a

Christian what is faith to you is it tied to anything other than the finished work of Christ on the cross I would implore upon you to consider Jesus I will also tell you that you will be called to a life that looks different than anything you have ever experienced but I assure you it will be a decision that you will never regret if you're here or listening and you are a Christian consider this is the primary reason for your faith so that God will bless you or is it so you can serve him do you find your life looking different than non-Christians it is impossible to please God by the gifts we possess but rather we please him by holding out our hands and eagerly await the gifts he wants to give us verse 6 says it is this faith filled expectation of reward that pleases him and finally we have a warning for us as Christians to do not fall to the temptation to give up our faith and look elsewhere for other rewards let's pray

God we are just thankful for this time once again to come together as a body of believers where we can you know cast aside all the responsibilities the worries and anxieties everything that is not of you and focus on you and Lord I just pray that the preaching of your gospel today has changed our lives that our faith would be stirred that it would be increased God that we would kind of streamline our lives to get rid of all these excesses that in the grand scheme of things really don't matter and focus on you fill our hearts Lord draw us close to you give us opportunities where we can experience and step out of our comfort zone into a faith filled area where you can show up and you can make much of yourself and draw people to you Lord Lord I pray that we would be known as a people who are on mission to be a part of this world but not like it that people would be drawn to us being different what's going on why are you different why did you respond this way why do you act this way why don't you do this and that would be an open door of opportunity for us to speak into people's lives

[30 : 44] Lord I'm thankful for this time thankful for you thankful for your love your grace your mercy and the fact that you never give up on us we ask all these things in your name we pray amen so as we come to one of my favorite parts of the service and that is partaking in communion where

we get to kind of think about how we've been living good bad and ugly come to the father ask for repentance and leave here changed Jesus Christ is never going to give up on you he's never going to leave you he's never going to forsake you all he wants is to spend time with you all he wants is to use you and I to make a big difference in this world where people are dying every day where people are throwing in the towel on life where they have lost all hope he wants to use us so I urge you to take this time before you take the sacraments the little wafer and the bit of juice to remind ourselves that God is faithful he's faithful to forgive he's faithful to encourage he's faithful to use us so do that and we'll continue on with the service