

Hebrews 11:8-16

“Looking Forward Faithfully”

What an incredible Ch we have embarked upon here in the 11th Ch of the book of Hebrews. It's a Ch that revolves around, shares w/us & shows *to* us faith. What it is, what it does *for* us, *in* us & *through* us, what it reaps *from* us; faith will always reap a response, a result in our lives. We spoke last time of the fact that though the word, “Faith” is a noun it settles down into our lives in verb form. It's “cause & effect,” it's almost like Newton's 3rd law of motion, you've heard it before, “For every action there's an equal & opposite reaction.” Faith is the cause, what happens in our lives is the effect, or the reaction, the response. Now, faith itself is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen, but the reality of that substance, the evidence of those unseen things demand a response or a certain course of action in my life. & As we discovered last time faith (at its roots) has at its basis the word of God. **It's not a leap into the dark, it's not believing in spite of evidence, it has substance, there's a foundation for it, & it's the Word of God. God speaks, I believe it; act accordingly to it, that's faith.**

& These 1st few Vs here in Heb Ch 11 have shown us through Abel, Enoch, & Noah that it's by faith that we are accepted *by* God, it's by faith that we walk intimately *with* God, & it's by faith that we respond *to* God & stand our ground in obedience to His Word regardless of the tide of the modern world, pop culture & all the rest.

& Now as we continue on you have to know that if you're going to be talking about faith in the context of a NT epistle it's almost impossible to do so w/out the Patriarch Ab entering into the equation. He seems to be the quintessential example in the NT of what a life of faith is all about, because Ab *believed* God & so it was accounted to him as righteousness. & Since he was around hundreds & hundreds of yrs prior to the law he demonstrates categorically that righteousness is not found through the legal do's and don'ts of law, but by faith. That the just shall live, by faith. & So as we approach Vs 8 Ab comes to the forefront, comes into focus for us to consider.

However I feel the need to point out something before we get too far into this Ch because we're going to see all kinds of names being brought to our attention as *shining examples* of faith. & Even though I don't want to focus on it I feel that it's important that you at least realize that as you study the lives of these people you come to find that everyone of them had what we might call “less than perfect” faith. You realize that they were human like you are & I am, they didn't always fully follow through *initially*, they were at times nervous or intimidated *personally*, they didn't have these impeccable records of perfection. But as we read through these accounts you'll probably pick up on the fact *that those things* aren't mentioned. If you were to know of their lives *only* through Heb Ch 11 you'd think that these guys/gals were superhuman, super saints, never made a mistake; & that's encouraging to me. You say, “Pre'tell what do you mean that's encouraging to you?” Listen, we all know that the people in this list all made their fair share of mistakes, didn't have faultless faith, but as they're looked back upon through the eyes of the New Covenant, through the eyes of grace & in the light of the work of the cross of Christ, there's not a record, not a remembrance of the faults, of the flaws, of the frailties, but rather of the *faithfulness*. Don't you see it? In Christ God remembers our sin, our short comings no more! As far as the east is from the west, that's how far He's removed our transgressions from us. If you're in Christ, God doesn't look upon you & see all your sin, He sees the righteousness of His Son, He doesn't keep record of your wrongs, but of your righteous works, He doesn't point out all the faults, He focuses on the faith.

That's grace, & that's grand, I don't understand it, I know I'm not worthy *of* it, but I praise God *for* it.

Vs8-10

So Ab *left*, he *lived*, & *looked forward* by faith. & We commend him on all 3 points, you have to remember that before God called Ab he was an idol worshiping gentile. (Joshua 24:2-3 make that clear) God called him not because of who he was (Ab) but because of who *He* was (God), it was through grace; & Ab responded in faith. & So again we see that the *cause* was faith, the *effect* was obedience; & remember faith has substance, it's not this mystical magical kind of an anomaly, he believed the *word* of God, the *call* of God & he responded accordingly.

Now remember this letter is being written to a group of people coming out of the comfort zone of Judaism & into what was being perceived as the ambiguous zone (at best) of Christianity. *They've been called to Christ, now when Ab was called of God out of his comfort zone he obeyed God venturing into "new" & "foreign" territory not really knowing where he was going. & Here's the deal, I mentioned how that all of these people had short comings, had faults, & so the idea is that if they can have faults like us, then we can have faith like them. It's not uncommon for God to call us out of our comfort zone.* To take us into (what is for us) unfamiliar/uncharted territory, into the "unknown" & that's where faith comes in, it's the substance of things hoped for the evidence of things *not* seen. Ab didn't exactly know what he was in for, but he believed the word of God so he *went out*, he *left* his homeland, we might say he was *in* the world, but he was no longer *of* the world, God had called him out.

& The same thing happened for you, God called you out of that familiar & comfortable environment of the world into a walk & relationship w/Him & so you left that place behind because you believed His word to you that if you would believe on J.C. you'd be saved, this world is no longer your home, you live as a stranger & a pilgrim on your journey heavenward.

That's what Vs 9 is about, "By faith he *dwelt* in the land of promise as in a foreign country." He *lived* there, by faith, because God told him it was his. Now that word "dwelt" is interesting because it doesn't mean "dwelt" as in planted roots & didn't expect to go anywhere. & The author underscores that by explaining that he lived there as in a foreign country. *That word "dwelt" is a word that describes a "resident alien." Someone who lives somewhere but doesn't have permanent status there, & you can generally tell who the resident alien is, or who it is who's not in your country because it was their original "homeland." How? Well, they usually talk different, act different, have different customs, mannerisms & relationships, their citizenship is different.* & All of those things speak of their native home, now if you're a believer but you're characteristics, mannerisms, form of entertainment, customs & all the rest are exactly like those who are in the world...there's a problem, because those things speak of permanent status, not temporary pilgrimage. *I've been to a couple different countries for a brief period of time, & its pretty ez to figure out the Americans in a completely different culture. Even so it should be pretty ez to figure out the believers in a secular society. Ab lived in the land of promise as in a foreign country, didn't get too attached to it, why?*

Vs10

He *left* the old life & *lived* in this life in a manner that *looked forward* to the next life. He "waited" for the city which has foundations, whose builder & maker is God. & The writer here is sharing w/us & showing *to* us that by faith we're to do the same. It's not ez, no one ever said it was. But by faith we leave the *old* life, & live in *this* life in a manner that looks forward to *eternal* life.

Because we believe in the promise of the word of God; so we wait for the city which isn't temporary, but that has foundations whose builder & maker is God. Jesus said, "*In My Father's house are many mansions; if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you to Myself; that where I am, there you may be also.*" John 14:2-3 Paul told the Corinthians, "*For we know that if our earthly house, this tent, is destroyed, we have a building from God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens.*" We have a new body that we'll receive, one that's perfect, free from the limitations imposed upon this one, free from sin, free from aging & breaking down, eternal in the heavens. & There's a new city that awaits us, the new Jerusalem (which of course you can read about in the book of Rev.)

So the life of faith is one that *looks forward* as opposed to resting & rooting itself in this world. We should also note that faith is *patient*, faith & patience go together. There's always a period of waiting between the *promise* & the *performance* of that promise. Ab received a promise, but he had to *wait* for it. Something that goes against the grain of all that we are as Americans in this "drive thru" generation. "Hey, if I can't order a burger, some fries & a coke, while I'm sitting in my car, drive up to the window & be on my way (burger in hand) in less than 30 seconds...I'm going to have a real problem." I remember my Nigerian buddy Bernard talking about the drive through when he came to America, it blew his mind. When you go to Nigeria you order your lunch at the breakfast table so that it'll be ready around noon or 1 o'clock. The fact that you could have a meal tossed out a window to you in literally 30 seconds or less blew him away. But it's what we've come to expect as the standard norm, "I'm an American!" But that mentality doesn't work in God's economy. Faith often demands patience in order to see the fulfillment of the promise.

Now, are you see how it is that faith creates works in a person's life? We've said it before it's not that works save you, it's that saving faith creates a work (a tangible result) in my life. We pointed out in Vs 7 last time that it was because of faith (trust in the word of God) that Noah being warned of things not yet seen (rain/flood) *moved* w/godly fear & *prepared* an ark for the saving of his household. Now words like "moved" & "prepared" are action words, they imply & speak of a work. His faith inspired a work in his life, w/Ab his faith in the word of God inspired him to *leave* the old life, to *live* in this life, *looking forward* to eternal life. His life reflected the reality of his faith, so to w/you, so to w/me.

Vs11

Couple things we want to consider here, as I said I'm not going to point out every flaw in everyone's faith along the way in this list, but let's consider Sarah for just a second here. You remember what was going on there, she was about 76, (give or take a yr depending when her b/day fell) & God promised to Ab that he was going to give him a male child (Ab would've been around 86 or so at the time. Well sometime went by & that didn't happen (remember faith & patience) & so Sarah had this idea. "Why don't you take my maidservant, go into her & should she conceive a son we'll count him as mine." So Ab thought about & said, "Hmmm...ok!" & As you know Ishmael was the result of that. Well, a few Ch's & some 12-13 yrs later the Lord returns to Ab on His way to destroy Sodom & Gomorrah. & Ab being a good host whipped up the best meal he could on such short notice for the Lord & a couple of His angels. & He told one of his servants to prepare the meat & he told Sarah to prepare 3 measures of meal for bread in the tent. While they were talking they said, "Where is Sarah your wife?" Ab said, "In the tent" & the Lord said, "I'm going to return to you according to the time of life (meaning 9 months or so) & behold, Sarah your wife shall have a son." Well, Sarah was eaves dropping from behind the tent curtain.

& When she heard that she laughed under her breath because she knew that she was passed the age of childbearing, & so she was all, “What, having grown old shall I have pleasure, my lord (Ab) having grown old to?” & The Lord called her out, “Why did your wife laugh at the idea of her having a child, is there anything too hard for the Lord?” & Sarah was all, “I didn’t laugh...” & The Lord was all, “Yes, *you did* laugh.”

2 Things to consider here, remember last time we spoke of the fact that faith never contradicts reason, though it may stretch *beyond* reason, it doesn’t *contradict* reason. & What I mean by that is that there may be an initial sense in which faith seems to contradict reason, but upon closer inspection you realize it doesn’t at all. For instance, it might seem contrary to reason for God to expect Ab or Sarah (or anyone for that matter) to believe that Sarah’s dead womb (being 89 yrs old, 90 at the time she delivered Isaac) could bring forth a child. I mean that just seems unreasonable, but *is it* unreasonable to believe that God *Who created life, Who created the womb*, w/Whom *nothing* will be impossible *could* do this, & *would* do it according to His promise? **Well that’s not unreasonable at all. You see w/God *nothing* will be impossible therefore as soon as you factor God into the equation *nothing* that He says to you or lays out as a challenge *before* you is unreasonable at all. Because whatever He promises, He’s able to perform (& we’ll see more of that next time).**

The 2nd thing I want you to notice here is this; when Sarah 1st heard the promise, did her heart fill w/wonder & amazement, was she overjoyed at the reality that she was going to have a son? No, she doubted, she even scoffed & mocked the idea, she laughed. But somewhere along the way those doubts were overcome & she received the faith to overcome what seemed to be impossible odds & her dead womb gained the vitality it needed to bear a child. What’s my point? **How often we’re initially overcome by doubt when presented w/the word &/or the promise of God. That part of our heart, or our personality is evidently deadened & withered, but faith can be imparted & can germinate & permeate in us even still. & Faith can enable us to experience vitality & life in areas of our lives that otherwise seemed dead or of no value.** We serve a God of grace, & if we’re just open to Him, He can take of our lives & make of them an example of the fact that He can do the impossible, He can make a way where there is no way, He’s in the business of bringing forth life out of death. We were dead in sin, yet He’s given us life in Christ Jesus.

Now, (1 more thing here) why was it that she was able to receive the strength to conceive seed, & bear a child being even though she was past the age? Because (underline it) *she judged Him faithful who had promised*. Think about that. How do I judge Him who’s promised? How do you judge Him who has promised? How do we know that Sarah judged Him faithful who promised? She had a child, her life displayed the reality of her faith. How will you know if I’ve judged Him faithful who promised, how will I know that you’ve judged Him faithful who promised? Our lives will display the reality of our faith, it will be apparent for people to see. Jesus said it like this, “*You are the light of the world. A city that is set on a hill cannot be hidden. Nor do they light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on a lampstand, and it gives light to all who are in the house. Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven.*” Matt 5:14-16
Vs12

Was there a reaction, a result to their faith? You better believe there was, countless millions of lives (including that of the Messiah) were brought into the world through the reality of their faith in the word of God. What can we say here except that *faith impacts lives*.

How many lives do you suppose have been impacted as the result of their faith? Countless, it's still having ripple effect to this day; make no mistake faith will impact lives. The lives of those around you, the lives of those who may come *through* you, perhaps for generations to come God will be working wonderful results through the fact that you counted *Him* faithful to His word & therefore put *your faith* in Him, & you responded, & lives are being impacted as the direct result of your trusting Him.

Vs13-16

“These all died in faith, not having received the promises,” Not only do we live in faith, we die in faith, & these all died in faith, not having received the promises. That is the promises of the Messiah & the heavenly homeland, the things that God would *do* for them & *fulfill* for them through Christ. They didn't receive those things, they only saw them from a distance, but because they knew the nature of God, that He is not a man that He should lie, that He who promised is faithful, they were #1 Assured of them, #2 Embraced them, & #3 Confessed (because of them) that they were pilgrims & strangers on the earth, not a permanent resident, just passing through on my way to a much, much better place.

Now I want to consider this for just a minute, they seen the promise from afar off, but were *assured* of them, why? Because it was God who promised, our faith is only as valuable, only as strong as the object of our faith, if my faith is in man I can't be *assured* of much of anything, because people let you down. If my faith is in *God*, I can rest assured, because God is not a man that He should lie. If He speaks it, He *will* perform it. You can't always count on man to perform his word. How many times have you seen the classic scene perhaps in a war movie or something, & the man is laying there on the battlefield all shot up or dismembered & his buddy grabs hold of him & says, “Look at me, look at me! You're not going to die, do you hear me, you're not going to die!” & The guy nods his head like, “Ok, I'm going to make it,” then he closes his eyes & he dies, because you can believe that man all you want, but he has no power to perform his promise. So it's tough to be assured of the distant promise of man. However if God says, “You're not going to die,” You're not going to die, because He's able to perform His promise. Now listen, God has made a promise. Jesus said, “*I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in Me, though he may die, he shall live. And whoever lives and believes in Me shall never die. Do you believe this?*” John 11:25-26 That's what it all boils down to isn't it? Do you believe this? It's up to you to trust Him for it, He'll deliver, but you have to believe. Why? Vs 6 “...without faith it is impossible to please Him, for he who comes to God must believe that He is, and that He is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him.” They were assured of the promise, therefore they embraced the promise, the net effect was that their lives reflected the promise, they didn't grip too tightly to the things of this world, their priority was upon the city whose builder & maker is God.

& Of course the real clincher is this (& we'll see it again next time). If they through faith endured difficulties & discouragement having never received the promises, (only seeing it far off at best) how much more should we who *have* received them? We've received the promise of the Messiah, we have the power of the Holy Spirit residing in us, the grace of God lavished upon us, shouldn't our lives reflect that reality all the more?

Vs15

What's he saying? That your freewill is still intact, there's always opportunity to return to the world. To that place from which God called you out of, but they didn't draw back, they drew near, they drew near to God & they patiently persevered. Remember that's the key, not drawing back, drawing near. Jesus said, “*No one, having put his hand to the plow, and looking back, is fit for the kingdom of God.*” Luke 9:62

Now listen, you've grabbed hold, don't look back, don't romanticize the "what if, would've, could've, should've" trail. You keep your eyes on Christ & continue to move forward w/Him. We don't draw back, we draw near, & we patiently persevere.

Vs16

Why didn't they draw back, why didn't they retreat to that place of comfort & ease, where no one bothered them, everybody liked them & things were just circumstantially better? Because they desired something better than what this world had to offer; the question is what do *you* desire...? Does your desire lie in the things of this world, or do you desire something more, something better, a heavenly home, a heavenly habitat. What's your priority, the things of this life...or Christ? It makes a difference.

They longed for a heavenly home, "...therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God, for He has prepared a city for them." I have that underlined in my bible, & beside it I wrote, "Is God ashamed to be called *my* God?" **The implication is, that would depend. What's my priority, what's my passion, is it the things of this world, am I caught up & absorbed w/this life? Or do I long to see Christ face to face, to walk w/Him intimately, to lead my life *before* Him righteously, is He truly my *priority*, am I looking forward *faithfully*?**

Prayer Points:

God may that be our testimony collectively as a body & individually before You. That You might be our passion, our priority, that our longing would be for a heavenly homeland, that we would handle loosely the things of this world, & that we would take seriously & work diligently in the things that pertain to Your kingdom. Lord continue to increase our faith as we give ear to Your word, & may our lives reflect the fact that we trust in You. Help our light to so shine that as people see good works in our lives, that Father You might be glorified in Heaven.

Perhaps you're here you've never sought to make Christ your priority, you haven't given a lot of thought to walking w/Him intimately. But today God is speaking to your heart, God is calling you out of the world, that you might walk in the light of His word & His work on your behalf in the person of J.C. Jesus was crucified for your transgressions, he was raised for your justification, & if you'll just say, "Lord, I believe" God will forgive your sin & you'll never be **the same**. Now I'm not talking about a mental assent to something that sounds nice, but a commitment from the heart. & If you commit to Christ in your heart, it'll be evident by what's reflected in your life. I won't need to tell you what you should or shouldn't do, God is well able, & He wants to have a relationship w/you, but you've got to come to Him on His terms, & that's through Christ. Are you willing to do that today?