



# VILLAGE BIBLE CHURCH

## SUGAR GROVE CAMPUS

## Real Faith

### Hebrews 11:4–35a

Tim Badal | March 21, 2021

As we talk about faith in our message this morning, it's exciting to see faith lived out in our parents and in our young people as we serve and honor the Lord. Turn in your Bibles to Hebrews 11. We've been in a series entitled, "Jesus: Greatest of All Time." We've been going chapter by chapter, verse by verse, through the book of Hebrews. Today we find ourselves in this very famous passage. We could spend weeks here—and in fact, we did do that. About three years ago our teaching team went through each of the biographies listed here.



My desire today is to do what the author intended, that is to see this passage as one big illustration of what real faith looks like in a messy world. As you know, we live in a world where there are a lot of imposters. If you've ever traveled overseas, you can easily become a victim of people trying to sell you fake items. It might be a purse or jewelry or a watch. It's easy to be fooled into thinking you're getting the real deal, only to find out that Rolex is fake. Even if you only spent pennies on the dollar, you're still not getting a good deal.

We live in a world full of fakeness. We spend hundreds if not thousands of dollars changing things we don't like about our bodies, rather than living with our bodies the way God made them. We do this in order to fake people out about how we really look. This fakeness is also very evident in the way we engage social media. We impress our fake friends with our fake life so they'll think our life is way better than it probably is.

This fakeness, this "impostering," has been seen in the most insidious ways. Can you believe it's now possible to eat fake meat? Say in ain't so, friends. My goodness. We're eating meat made from plants. Come quickly, Lord Jesus! I cook pork chops and chicken in my other job. I assure you it will always be the real deal.

Do you know when the worst part of impostering happens? It happens regarding faith. People will say they have faith in God, or faith in the promises of our Lord Jesus Christ, but when the rubber meets the road it is just words. The problem with these "knock-offs" is that they're close enough to the real thing that people are deceived into thinking they're doing something real.

The writer of Hebrews speaks in chapter ten about some imposters who are making fake professions of faith. He tells us that the real deal is proved when a person endures. How do we persevere when hard troubles come our way? We do this by having authentic faith in God and His promises.

Last week we looked at the first four verses of Hebrews 11, in particular at how faith should be defined. Our working definition was this: faith is the assurance or confidence in the truth of God's biblical assertions. The Bible has many promises from God to us. Faith says, "I will believe this because God has said it. But not only will I mentally accept this or even verbally confess it, but I will also act upon it."

In a world of imposters, the writer of Hebrews tells the people what real faith looks like. He defines it in the first four verses, then for the rest of the chapter he demonstrates what it looks like. So again, I'm not going to focus so much on the stories themselves, but more on the strategy of what real faith is. In other words, we'll be looking less at the people and more at the principles they modeled. As the writer said in Hebrews 10, life is hard. For us, there will not only be issues and troubles, but we'll also have people who want to harm us. In order to persevere, we need to live out authentic faith each and every day.

Any time we're reading a book, a newspaper story or a social media post where someone says something nice about someone else, it's easy to think that everything about that person is great. In Hebrews 11, which is often called the "Hall of Faith," these stories speak of the great moments in the lives of these individuals. That's why we can sometimes think that they're much greater individuals than we are. We think they are out of our league. Because if this, we can assume the kind of faith they exhibited is much more powerful than what we ourselves can experience. As a result, we can distance ourselves from these Scriptures. But that's exactly the opposite of what the writer is trying to accomplish.

Rather, he wants to show us that ordinary, broken people can do great things through God if we would just receive His promises and walk them out by faith. My aim here is for you to see that just like these men and women, you too can step out in faith. When we do this, God will do more than we can ever ask or imagine. Yet along the way we'll see some caveats.

We'll be looking at three specific things this morning. I'm going to read a portion of this Scripture, then we'll get into our discussion. The writer starts with a catalog of Old Testament saints, then he says this, beginning in verse 13:

<sup>13</sup>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. <sup>14</sup>For people who speak thus make it clear that they are seeking a homeland. <sup>15</sup>If they had been thinking of that land from which they had gone out, they would have had opportunity to return. <sup>16</sup>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.

There are two truths I want to show you in these verses.

- First, when you live out a life of faith, God is not ashamed. Rather, He is well pleased to be called your God. It's kind of like when my boys do something impressive, my joy as a father is being able to say, "That's a chip off the old block." That's what God is saying here.
- Second, when we live lives of faith, we are not living in light of the present. Rather, we're living in light of God's promises. We'll talk later about how that impacts us.

Now jump ahead to verse 39 for a moment: *"And all these, though commended through their faith, did not receive what was promised, since God had provided something better for us."* The writer is talking about us here. After the cross and resurrection, after all Christ accomplished for us, we now are receiving something better. How much more should we be people of faith, now knowing what these Old Testament men and women did not know, what they only "saw from afar."

This means Hebrews 11 is a challenge to New Testament believers to live every moment with faith. How do we do this? Let's look at three things this morning.

## **Remember the faithful who show the way.**

Hebrews 11 succinctly brings us a group of people like ourselves. How were they like us?

### **Hebrews 11 is filled with all types of people.**

First, this chapter speaks about all types of people. There are both men and women. They are young and old. There are rich and poor people. There are princes and prostitutes. Some of the people were victorious; others saw defeat after defeat. All this serves to remind us that it doesn't matter who you are, how old you are, or what you have or don't have in this world. If you are a follower of Jesus Christ, God is calling you to live out real faith.

### **Hebrews 11 is filled with all kinds of problems.**

It's easy for us to "sanitize" these people. Like many of you, I grew up during the flannelgraph days. Those Old Testament saints always looked happy and cleaned up—life was good. We would only hear about the good things they did—and they did a lot of good things. But along with those good things and good days, these people also had problems. They were more like us than we often want to give them credit for. For example, let's look at Abel. He came from a family that was far from perfect. He had an issue with his brother, or maybe I should say his brother had an issue with him.

How do we know this? Cain doesn't just all of a sudden come up with a desire to kill his brother. There had to have been a back story. There had to have been some sort of sibling rivalry that produced the fit of anger Cain had when God approved Abel's sacrifice but not his.

How about Noah? Noah's life was filled with problems. Think about it. You invest 120 years of your life building something your neighbors and friends—and even some of your family—think is absolute nonsense. Every time you go out, you hear, “Hey, Noah, what have you been up to?” “I’m still building that boat.” “Well, you know, Noah, it’s never rained here.” “I know. But I talked with a God Who is invisible. He said it’s going to rain and even flood the earth.” “Well, you know we’ve never seen a flood in these parts.” “I know.” “You know you’re a little crazy listening to voices.” “I know.” Poor Noah couldn't go to a single party without the subject of his craziness coming up.

But there's more. How about Abraham? He never built a house for himself. He always lived in a tent. His issue was a medical one. His wife was barren. They could not have children. In a society where having kids was the benchmark of health and prosperity, this man who was promised great things by God had a barren wife.

Talk about problems—how about Joseph? Joseph was part of a very dysfunctional family. His father loved him more than any of his siblings. He lived in a family where all his brothers hated him. They hated him so much that they wanted to kill him. Then they had a better idea and they sold him into slavery instead. He ended up spending years as a slave, then was tried for a crime he didn't commit. He spent the next 13 years in prison. Only then did his life take a positive turn. Joseph lived a rough life filled with problems.

How about Moses? He was an adopted son from a different ethnic background. He went from being a slave to a prince. Then right when things were going well for him, he tried to take justice in his own hands in a certain situation and immediately became a fugitive. He ran and hid for 40 years. Moses had problems too.

You see, the walk of faith isn't exempt from problems. Maybe today you're trying to faithfully walk in obedience to God and His Word, but you're thinking you're not doing something right. There are too many problems in your life. Welcome to Hebrews 11. Real faith has its share of problems.

### **Hebrews 11 is filled with all manner of pitfalls.**

Let's go a step further. When we speak of the Hall of Faith, it's easy to see these people as extraordinary, super-Christians with abilities and faith we could never imagine having. In some ways, some of what these people experienced were not just problems outside themselves, but also problems of their own making.

In other words, they suffered as a result of their sins or lusts. Sometimes their sinful words got the best of them. After saving the human race to live on in the earth, after 120 years of walking in huge faith, the first thing Noah did when he got to dry land was to get drunk and naked and did unspeakable things. That's our man of faith.

Wait a minute. What a pitfall. How about Abraham? God promised to give him a land and offspring. What does he do? At every turn, Abraham takes his life into his own hands. Rather than believing God and walking daily by faith, he often messed things up. Not wanting to be killed in Egypt, he tells the Egyptians his wife is his sister, so they could do whatever they wanted to her. That was a huge blunder.

Even Sarah, who is listed here as a great woman of faith, had her weaknesses. Knowing she was barren, she handed her husband another woman so they might produce a child. Talk about a big mess. We can go on and on. Moses, the greater leader, often lost his temper. We learned earlier in Hebrews that the children of Israel rebelled and went against God over and over again.

How about Gideon? He's afraid of his own shadow. Samson is a fool who can't harness his lusts. Jephthah is probably the biggest moron in this text. He made a really dumb vow that the first thing that came out of his house would be sacrificed to God. I guess he thought it would be an animal, but it turned out to be his daughter. So she became the sacrifice.

Are you kidding? These people had issues, amen? The reason I want you to say amen is because I want you to be reminded that these men and women were far from perfect. They had massive problems where their sin would get the best of them. If you're like me, this is true of you as well. And the devil is telling you that because of your sin, you have disqualified yourself from the faith. But Hebrews 11 stands here as a clarion call to say, “It's not too late.” Just like these men and women, you and I have dysfunctions, issues and struggles. We're sinful. But because of the blood of Jesus Christ, real faith is able to transcend those things and enable us to do great things for God.

So there are all types of people with all types of problems having all manner of pitfalls. Yet what we have here is a group of people who did extraordinary things for God. That means there is one hero in this chapter. There's one hero in the book. There's one hero

in the entire Bible—and it wasn't Moses, Abraham, Sarah, Rahab or anyone else listed here. It's not Pastor Tim or any of our elders. The only hero in our midst is Jesus Christ, the Author and Perfecter of our faith (Hebrews 12:2). We look to Him, just as they looked to Him, believing what God says about Him. As a result, we too can experience the promises of God. To do this, we need to understand a few more things about what this faith is all about.

## **Recognize some important truths that are often forgotten.**

When we look at this Hall of Faith, we often think, "It must have been really awesome to have a part in these things." But as we go through Hebrews 11, we'll find some truths that will help us live out our life of faith.

### **Faith impacts both the mundane and majestic moments of life.**

Yes, it is true that Hebrews 11 is full of majestic, magnificent and even awesome moments. Some of these things wouldn't happen in a hundred, a thousand, ten thousand or a million lifetimes. That's what makes them so significant. Let's face it. Many of us won't spend our lives building an ark so we can live through a worldwide flood. Many of us are not going to be 90 or 100 years old and then have our firstborn child. Many of us are not going to experience what it means to walk around a city and have the walls come tumbling down. Many of us, if not all of us, will probably never be face to face with a giant as a teenager and with one smooth stone bring the giant down. The stories go on and on. These are once in a million lifetimes events.

We can look at all these majestic moments, but if we read all of Hebrews, we'll see a more honest picture of what faith includes. Let's look at some of the mundane moments as well. For example, think about Abel. All we're told about him is that he gave an offering to God. When you give part of your income to the ministry of God, that's also an offering. There are many right now who are serving in the other building, using their gifts and abilities to give an offering to God. Those who served on the worship team and our AV team are also giving an offering to God. Those who serve throughout the week are doing what Abel did. There's nothing that significant about that. They didn't give their time or giftings with false motives; their gifts are wholly acceptable to God. That's what Abel did and he was commended for his faith.

How about Enoch? Nowhere do we see anything about lives being converted, about him preaching great messages or healing people. It just says he lived a faithful life. We aren't given any details about that. He just quietly and consistently lived a life of faith.

How about Jacob? It says that at the end of his life, Jacob blessed his sons. What parent or grandparent hasn't put their hands on their children or grandchildren? Jacob was commended for: blessing his sons and grandsons to create a legacy of faith.

What about Joseph? Joseph did a lot of amazing things. He endured severe hardships. One of my favorite sermon series ever was the story of Joseph. It's so amazing to see all he did and read about his faithfulness. But do you know what he's commended for in Hebrews 11? It says that when he died in Egypt, his children and grandchildren were to take his bones and bury him when they made it to the Promised Land. God had told him Egypt wasn't their home, Canaan was, and he believed God.

This week we had a funeral at the Plano campus for a man who had spent most of the last years of his life in Florida. He died there, but his body was brought back here, because it was his desire to be buried where he lived in Illinois. That might just seem like a formality. "When you go back to Illinois, take my body and bury me there." Yet that's what Joseph is commended for.

What I want you to see is that faith isn't always done in the majestic or the marvelous. Sometimes the faith God commends is in things no one else sees. So Mom who's home with lots of kids, caring for them yet sometimes wanting to pull your hair out—no one sees this and the kids don't appreciate it, but God commends this as you teach them faith.

Maybe this week you're going to faithfully return to work, dealing fairly with your employer or fellow employees or customers. God commends you for that faithfulness. Student, when you treat others with respect at your school and work hard on your assignments, God commends this.

Sometimes faith isn't seen in a spotlight, but in the quiet moments of daily life. God will commend many more things than you can imagine on the day of judgment for the quiet acts of faithfulness, more than the preachers who are in the spotlight. So keep walking in faith.

## **Faith is suitable to use in all situations.**

We have all these people with all these problems and all these pitfalls, spanning a couple thousand years. Yet in all their situations of life, the one thing that seems to be consistent is their faith in God. This tells us that we too can trust that faith in God will also be effective in our day. It worked for Noah, Abraham, David and Moses. It worked for the disciples. It worked for the author of the book of Hebrews. It worked for the readers of the book of Hebrews. They put their trust in God's promises and He didn't let them down. Even now they stand as a great cloud of witnesses, watching us run our race with perseverance and cheering us on (Hebrews 12:1).

That means in our here and now, in the situations of our lives, we need to be applying faith to everything. But here's one issue. We can talk about faith on Sunday, or we can put on faith for our small groups, or for the baptisms and the child dedication days. We put on faith like a hat that can also be taken off. The author wants us to know that these people demonstrate the truth that faith is to be lived out in all the facets of our lives. It's not something to be put on and then taken off when we take off our church clothes. It's something we should take into our schools, workplaces and communities, with our friends and with strangers alike. It's suitable for all situations.

## **Faith gives no guarantees for a good ending.**

Now, let's be honest. Some of the faith stories have very positive outcomes. The children of Israel made it through the sea on dry ground. The second they stepped into the Red Sea, it parted. Faith can produce a good result.

Then there were the walls of Jericho. For six days they walked around the city, then on the seventh day they walked around it seven times. They yelled and blew trumpets by faith. They didn't take up weapons. But what happened? The city was conquered. That was a positive outcome.

How about later in the text, where it talks about widows who received their dead back from the dead. This is an allusion to Elijah, who was living in the home of a widow. She had a young son who died. By faith Elijah prayed over the child and he was raised from death to life. Another positive outcome.

There are preachers today who say, "If you have faith, you'll be healthy and wealthy. Good things are going to happen." But that's not what Hebrews 11 tells us. It says sometimes bad things happen to faithful people. Back at the beginning of the text, Abel pleased God with his sacrifice—and what did he get? He got killed for it. That's not positive. How about Abraham? He walked by faith, yet he had to wait a whole lifetime before the promised son was given to him. Sometimes faith even involves being tortured, mocked or beaten. Some of the faithful were destitute, stoned, put in prison or mistreated in other ways. We need to get away from the idea that if we step out in faithful obedience, God promises good in the here and now.

Remember, God doesn't speak about our faithfulness in the present, except for one truth. He says, "I will never leave you nor forsake you." So bad things are going to happen, good things are going to happen, ugly things are going to happen in the here and now. God's promise for the here and now is that He will be with us. But in the future, no eye has seen, no ear has heard what God has prepared for His people (1 Corinthians 2:9).

Heaven is being promised to us, and it will be so awesome that if we have to endure 80 years of hell here, it will still be worth it. What the author is saying is, "If you have to go through the valley of the shadow of death, you don't have to fear evil. God will be with you" (Psalm 23). We must not get focused on this life, but rather we must turn our gaze to the heavenly city where Jesus is preparing a place for us (John 14:1-7). When all is ready, He will come back to take us to be with Him forever.

## **Faith encourages us to endure as exiles.**

We can persevere. We can endure the most difficult circumstances. The crux of this passage is found in verses 13-16. This is the one indispensable truth we must never forget. A life of faith recognizes that this is not our home. You say, "Yeah, I got that. This is not our home."

Listen to me. This is such an important truth. If we grab hold of this truth by faith, it will revolutionize how we live our lives. In His Sermon on the Mount, Jesus said, "*Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy...*" (Matthew 6:19). If we truly grab hold of the importance of faith, we will spend our time differently. We'll spend our resources differently. We'll look differently at our relationships. We'll see our time spent with God's people in a different light.

Why? Because it's not about the here and now; it's about what is to come. A life of faith always realizes, "I'm heading somewhere. This is not my destination. This is not where I find my identity. This is not where I find my ultimate pleasure and possessions. There's a better place with better possessions waiting for me that in due time God has promised I will experience. So I'm going to live every moment of this life with eternity in mind."

If this is how we look at our lives, it will change the way we spend our money. It will change our dreams. It will change our attitude toward our possessions. When we begin to live as exiles, it will change everything. This is not our home, so church, let's not make it our home.

## **Respond by following their example.**

What do we do? We need to respond. How? By following the example of these people in Hebrews 11. They ran the race marked out for them. At times they did this in broken and dysfunctional ways, but the God Who promised was faithful to see them to the finish line. The God Who began a good work in you and me will also be faithful to see that work to completion (Philippians 1:6). What then do we do in the here and now, as we wait for the promises of God?

### **Faith involves living in obedience.**

The life of faith begins with obedience. Here's the amazing thing. We don't see the word "obey" in this passage. But as we sing in the old hymn, faith involves trusting and obeying. If you want a short definition of faith, it's trusting and obeying God. As the song says, "Trust and obey, for there's no other way to be happy in Jesus, but to trust and obey."

Almost 20 different times in our text, you will see two words: "By faith." But when you see these words, I want you to understand what the Bible is saying. It's saying, "By trusting and obeying, so-and-so did the following... By trusting and obeying, Rahab... By trusting and obeying, David... By trusting and obeying, Gideon..." They did these things—how? By trusting and obeying.

What does this call us to do? When God calls us to something, we'll trust that what He's saying is true and obey it. So looking back at this last week, how did you do at trusting God and obeying Him? Take a moment. Don't do the math for the person sitting next to you. That's being a Pharisee. During this past week, could it be said of you that you trusted and obeyed God? If you can't say that, I'm going to say in the most loving way, you are not living by faith.

Here's the great thing: the One Who promised is faithful. Maybe this week you didn't live by faith. Maybe you didn't trust God as you should have. Maybe you didn't obey God and His precepts as you should have. This is an opportunity, in the quietness of your heart, to say, "Lord Jesus, forgive me for that. It's not my desire. That's not what I want. I want to trust You. I want to obey You." Jesus promises that He's faithful to forgive us and to cleanse us of our lack of trust and our lack of obedience (1 John 1:9).

### **Faith involves looking for opportunities.**

When we trust and obey, we are enabled to not live in the past, but rather to live looking to the future, looking for opportunities. That's the next response we should have. We can look for opportunities in the week to come. Knowing that we missed the mark this past week, now we have a whole new week ahead of us. We're facing a whole week of work, a whole week of school. We've got a whole week with our neighbors and our family.

Maybe it's time to start the Eastman Tea Time. Some of us are feeling really bad as parents right now. Sunday at the Badal house is Netflix Sunday. Noah, Josh and Luke will be sitting around the table and talking about our problems. We're going to do what the Eastman family does because there's a good result—amen? They look for opportunities; we need to look for opportunities. We need to pray for opportunities. "Lord, give me opportunities that cause me to stretch my faith. I need to strengthen the muscles of my faith. And God, when those opportunities come, I want it to not be like last week. This week I'm going to trust You and obey You."

Here's the thing. We'll be back next Sunday and we will have failed in some other ways. But God will forgive us and cleanse us, then we're going to keep striving to walk by faith. That's what this walk of faith is about. It isn't perfect or clean. It's messed up. There are all kinds of curves and detours along the way. But never forget that God is the One Who is faithful.

## Faith involves leaning into the One Who overcomes.

That's why, my friends, we need to lean into the One Who overcomes. All of this is intended to point to Jesus. That's why in Hebrews 12 the author says we look to Jesus. That looking isn't just looking at Him from afar. It's to put all our weight, all of who we are, on to Jesus, Who is the Author and Perfecter of our faith. He's the One Who started our faith; He's the One Who's going to finish our faith. So we lean into Him.

Maybe you've come into this place this morning for a variety of reasons. I want you to know that the God of the universe is inviting to live your life in the arms of Jesus Christ rather than to live life on your own. Will you trust and obey Him, not only for your salvation, but for every day of your life? If you do, you will be able to receive the good promises God has for you. It may not happen in this world, but it will in the world to come.

When we do this—albeit imperfectly and dysfunctionally—God will take us to the next step, then the next step, then the next step. Then one day when you stand before Him, He will be able to say, “Well done, good and faithful servant.” Amen? That's what real faith is all about. Let us leave this place with the intention and the focus and the prayer that God would equip us with this real faith, so that we may honor God in the good, the bad and the ugly of life, and that we might show a world what faith is all about.

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