

November 13, 2011

Sermon Overview:

“It will be alright, you just got to have faith.” As well intentioned as this statement might be, it is less than helpful when faced with the trials life brings. Sure, we need faith, but we need a specific type of faith.

What is it? Hebrews 11 portrays the faith we need to endure. When Hebrews says that faith is *the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things unseen*, it is portraying faith’s future-posture. But immediately we see that this is not the American optimism that says “it will all work out in the end;” for the text speaks about a resolute confidence that the things you hope for actually will come true. Such confidence in future events would be brash and even irrational, except for the fact that it is based on God’s promises. Abraham provides an example of such faith: his life was a promise driven life. Specifically, he was looking forward to an eternal city (v10), a heavenly country (v16), designed and built by God.

Do you have it? Two things mark a life that has the faith that it takes to endure. First, people who have this faith live as resident aliens. They confess themselves to be strangers and exiles on the earth (v13). Like Abraham, Christians always have an ambiguous relationship with the places where they live. On the one hand, Christians live as foreigners, displaced from their homeland. Thus whether a society is liberal or conservative, traditional or progressive, capitalist or socialist, communal or individualistic, no matter what, a Christian will never fully fit into any city or culture this side of heaven. On the other hand, Christians are the true heirs of the world. They live *as* in a foreign land (v9). They have a certain love for this world, not because of what it is, but because of what it will someday be by God’s grace.

Second, people who have this faith live in obedient anticipation. The phrase “by faith” resurfaces 18 times throughout this chapter. In each case the author shows how faith is, in Martin Luther’s words, a busy little thing. Faith acts in the present in anticipation of God’s future; it presumes upon the power and promise of God. Such anticipation invites preparation as Christians live in light of God’s future.

How do you get it? As we look at the qualities of faith, we must admit that, sadly, most of us do not have it; or if we do, we have it in part, but not in full. So how can we grow in the faith we need?

First, we must reflect on the City of God. Verse 16 tells us that those who had this type of faith *desired* a better country. One of the primary reasons why so many of us do not have this faith is because we are more satisfied with the city that is than with the city that is to come. We need to have our inappropriate desires dislodged by something more desirable. The sanctified Christian imagination plays a crucial role here. Reflecting on the city to come will show it to be more desirable than any city that is.

Second, we need to reflect on God. Abraham and Sarah were able to live as they did because they considered God, his faithfulness (v11) and power (v19). We need to consider God as well, and consider how he is not ashamed to be associated with those who desire this city (16). God’s character and power is revealed supremely in Christ. Faithful to his promise, he provided a savior and powerfully raised him from the dead. He associated with sinners when he bore our shame, suffering, and sin on the cross.

Questions for Preparation and Discussion *Note that some questions are designated for preparation (P) and some for group discussion (D). Study based on the English Standard Version*

Getting to Know Each Other:

1. Name one person, no longer living, that you believe has influenced you most. [D]

Looking at the Bible:

1. Look at each instance of “by Faith” in 11:8–19 and consider how these are appropriate examples of faith as it is described in v1: How do these examples specifically show that someone lived in an assurance of something hoped for, a conviction of something that was not yet seen? [P]
 - a. What specifically is being hoped for in each instance? [P]
 - b. How, in each instance, does confidence in the thing hoped for enable the person to offer the specific type of obedience that was required? [P/D]
2. Revelation 21–22 is the only extended description of heaven in the Bible. It is, of course, a highly figurative description (e.g., how can something be gold *and* clear as glass (21:18)?). Yet, it does teach us about heaven, both by communicating what will be present and what will be absent.
 - a. What do these chapters say will be absent from heaven? What do these figurative descriptions communicate? [P/D]
 - b. Likewise, what do these chapters say will be present? What do these figurative descriptions communicate? [P/D]

Looking at Our Hearts [ALL D]

1. Abraham endured because he believed that the future is entirely determined by God’s promises.
 - a. Functionally, what do you believe determines your future? What manifestations of this do you see in your life? What has the ability to give you hope or make you melancholy?
 - b. Think of specific difficulties you are facing right now. How does the certainty of your place in the city to come enable you to face these things?
2. Hebrews 11 says that the person who has faith lives as a resident alien. What might that look like for you here in Santa Barbara? What attitudes will this engender? What actions will result?
3. If how we speak indicates what city we desire (vv13–14), what desires does your speech reveal?
4. In order to increase in faith, we need to increase our desire for the city to come (v13). What specific things can you do to cultivate a desire for the eternal city? How might the imagination and the arts play a role in cultivating a desire for the city to come?
5. In order to increase our faith, we need to consider God. What specific things jump out to you from this text that increase your faith?

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Praying for Each Other *(Use the “Looking at Our Hearts” section to help focus your time in prayer together).*