

The Endurance Of Faith

Hebrews 11:13-16

Introduction

Our chapter began with an explanation of faith (vv.1-3;6); and continued with examples of faith (vv.4-12); why they were; what they did; what they endured; but now we have a brief glimpse into why they acted in faith. Here the writer inserts his belief about the history of salvation. The men and women of faith saw an invisible city; the city of God; later we learn the men and women of faith believed suffering for the cause of Christ was more valuable than all the riches of the world (v.26); and could with confidence look forward to their own resurrection from the dead (v.35). The men and women of faith experienced God's assurance and anticipated God's approval.

We walk by faith. We walk by faith counting on the promises of God; absent complaint (vv. 13-14); absent compromise; absent comparison (v.16). The writer of Hebrews points out their faith was not temporal—but eternal. A faith that seeks an unseen territory; a heavenly country; with the permanent approval of God.

This world is not our home. We are just passing through. In order to see and grasp our future we must look beyond this contaminated and corrupt world. We have to see further. Our faith in Christ must grow and mature. And we must actively seek this future territory promised both to them and us. The men and women of faith separated from this world; sought the promised land; embarked on the journey and stayed on the course!

Enduring Faith Leaves No Room For Complaint (vv.13-14)

Hebrews 11:13–16 (NKJV) 13These all died in faith, not having received the promises, but having seen them afar off were assured of them, embraced them and confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth.

The writer has already told us that faith is the substance of things hoped for and the evidence of things not seen (v.1). Faith is the assent of the mind to the truth about God and His gospel; fully persuaded that God's Word is valid and reliable. Faith is more than just the assent of the mind but also incorporates the consent of the will—and so responds to the call of God by obedience to His word. Faith's accent is trust; faith trusts or relies on the Lord. With our mind we are persuaded by the Lord; with our will we have confidence in the Lord; and through trust we rest in the Lord!

These all died in faith (persuaded, confident, trusting). They believed the promises, and kept believing the promises and died believing the promises. Remember—a promise is only as good as the person who makes the promise and has the power to insure the promise comes to pass.

What was Abraham promised? God would create a nation through his seed (Gen.12:2-5). God would give Abraham and Sarah a child—though it seemed impossible (Gen.15:1-6; Rom.

The Endurance Of Faith

Hebrews 11:13-16

4:17-18). An eternal city (Heb.11:8-10; 13-16); Abraham believed in God's power to raise the dead (Heb. 11:17-19)

Abraham and Sarah would have a singular son in the line of promise. Isaac would have a singular son in the line of promise. Jacob would have a singular son in the line of promise. The circumstances did not offer much comfort that God's promises would be kept. But we have already learned that God must keep His promises—despite circumstances. Abraham was buried in the tomb he purchased for his wife Sarah. Isaac was buried in the same tomb with little evidence that possession of the land was in the future. Jacob died in Egypt—and made his children promise to bury him in the land.

God had made a promise. “God is a surer thing than a post-dated check from a billionaire” (John Phillips p. 157).

Abraham, Isaac and Jacob died not possessing the land. But they did not complain! But rather confessed they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth. **Did God make an earthly promise? Yes. Did God make a heavenly promise? Yes.**

The earthly promises and possessions were simply a shadow of the heavenly promises and possessions. This vision of the earth made them hold—lightly the things of the earth—and hold tightly—the things of heaven. Did Abraham and Isaac and Jacob believe God would give them the land? The answer is yes.

In the end the pilgrim has two objects of possession: a tent and an altar (see John Phillips p. 158).

“With the tent they confessed their attitude toward this world; they would not let its attractions blind them to spiritual realities. With the altar they confessed their relationship to the world to come; they were believers! Thus they adopted the attitude that, as far as this world was concerned, they were strangers (away from home) and pilgrims (going home). God had truly weaned their hearts away from the earthly to the heavenly. This, of course, was the very thing the Spirit of God was seeking to accomplish in the lives of the Hebrews to whom the letter was addressed, so the relevancy of the whole passage is evident” (p.158).

You might think; “I'm not happy here.” Of course your not happy here. You don't belong here. The writer of Hebrews reminds us that Abraham and the others refused to make themselves comfortable here. The world contaminates and corrupts. The challenge—how do we live here—not allowing this world's character to become our character. The hearts of the Patriarchs were set on pilgrimage. Trusting God will turn even the most settled citizen into a pilgrim.

What is the answer to complaint? Vision.

Thomas Carlyle famously said; “He who has no vision of eternity has no hold on time.”

The Hebrew never occupied the whole land promised to them.

The Endurance Of Faith

Hebrews 11:13-16

The Old Testament Saints did not live to see the coming of the Messiah (John the Baptist perhaps the exception).

Vision that looks inward becomes duty.

Vision that looks outward becomes aspiration.

Vision that looks upward becomes faith.

14For those who say such things declare plainly that they seek a homeland.

Vision. They say certain things; they seek certain things. Enduring faith sees—and grows—and has its sight set on home. A homeland. The Jew would later lose the homeland. The Diaspora would force Jews to live all over the world. One of the appealing things about Israel as a Jewish homeland allows a place for a Jew to be a Jew. But what about the Christian? Where can we call home—home? Our faith—will never be satisfied with this world. We will always yearn for a better land. A land where Jesus is King and Lord.

Augustine wrote; “Do not seek to understand in order that you may believe, but believe so that you may understand.”

Joseph Fort Newton: “Belief is a truth held in the mind. Faith is a fire in the heart.”

Enduring Faith Leaves No Room For Compromise (v.15)

15And truly if they had called to mind that country from which they had come out, they would have had opportunity to return.

Remember the Hebrew Christians were in danger of going back to Judaism!

Abraham left Ur of the Chaldees. Their was no going back! Abraham had forsaken the land of his Fathers—and more importantly their idolatry! When Eleazar suggested that Abraham allow Issac to return to their ancestral homeland to find a bride—Abraham made Eleazar swear an oath under no circumstance was Isaac to return to Mesopotamia (see Gen.24:5-5).

What prevented Abraham from going back to his homeland and his old life? He believed God spoke to him and made promises to him. For Abraham to go back would be apostasy. The Christians who were tempted to go back faced similar pressures to give in to compromise. The writer of Hebrews invites them to consider themselves strangers (away from home) and pilgrims (on their way home). **Abraham had no desire to go back to his ancestral home. There was nothing there for him.**

When Joshua reviewed the history of Israel (chapter 24) he said (v.2b-3) “Thus says the Lord God of Israel: ‘Your fathers, including Terah, the father of Abraham and the father of Nahor, dwelt on the other side of the River in old times and they served other gods. (3) ‘Then I took

The Endurance Of Faith

Hebrews 11:13-16

your father Abraham from the other side of the River, led him throughout all the land of Canaan, and multiplied his descendants and gave him Isaac.”

There’s no going back to the old life.

Drake Raft said; “Compromise is always wrong when it means sacrificing principle.”

Compromise is often the first step towards disobedience. In the Bible we see Pilate wanting to satisfy the crowd—and in doing so—did a grave injustice to Jesus. Jesus was innocent.

Compromise can weaken and destroy faith. Paul wrote to the Galatians (2:14) “When I saw that they were not acting in line with the truth of the gospel, I said to Peter in front of them all, “You are a Jew, yet you live like a Gentile and not a Jew. How is it then, that you force Gentiles to follow Jewish customs?” Compromise can weaken our respect for the truth. The Judaizers accused Paul of watering down the gospel to make it easier for Gentiles to accept, while Paul accused the Judaizers of nullifying the truth of the gospel by adding conditions to salvation—that don’t belong! On what basis are we saved? Is salvation through grace and Christ alone—or by keeping the Law?

What is the answer to those who are tempted to compromise and return to the old life? Vision. A growing faith. A working faith. An enduring faith.

We refuse to go back. “We know that suffering is a source of endurance, endurance of approval, and approval hope” (Romans 5:3-4 REB).

Someone once said; “What we obtain too easy, we value too lightly; it is the cost that gives value.”

The Bible invites us to forsake compromise and embrace the hard thing—not simply as something hard—but will become endurance.

In the movie “Unbroken” Louis Zamparini wants to kill his captor. A wise officer reminds him the best way to answer the cruelty and wickedness of the Japanese was to survive.

Enduring Faith Leaves No Room For Comparison (v.16)

16But now they desire a better, that is, a heavenly country. Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God, for He has prepared a city for them.

The Jew is powerfully drawn to the land. Israel is a special place. But there is a better place. Heaven. In the end there is no comparison to the land here—and the land there!

Once a person has a clear vision of heaven the most beautiful places on the earth “grow strangely dim in the light of His glory and grace”. Look at the word “desire”—“they desire”—it means to

The Endurance Of Faith

Hebrews 11:13-16

stretch the hand—or stretch out the hand—or reach further. The picture is a picture of man stretching out his hand as far as his fingers will allow—to touch—to grasp.

The writer of Hebrews is inviting his readers to see—what they apparently had failed to see; to grasp what they apparently had failed to grasp; a vision of Heaven.

The Jew reading this might pause. Why then were most of the promises—promises that related to the land? What about all the promises that related to the physical and material prosperity in the land?

What about the men and women of faith (persuaded, confident, trusting)? The Lord God described Himself as the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob (Ex.3:6). Even Jesus referred to God as the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob (Matt.22:32)! The Lord God was not ashamed to be called their God!

“God has not only recognized these men, but He also rewarded them” (Phillips p.159).

And what is God’s reward? God’s approval.

The Lord is not ashamed to be called their God.

Why is God ‘not ashamed’? Because they believed Him. Because God is not ashamed of a people who are willing to call Him—their portion—and Heaven their home!

But what about the person whose faith is not real? What about the person who doubts the promise or denies the truth or fails to see or refuses to grow?

Look carefully at the expression “He has prepared a city for them”. The verb is in the aorist tense, meaning that it has already been done. God has prepared a place of rest; God has prepared a place of satisfaction; God has prepared a place of perfect peace and profound joy!

In John’s Gospel Jesus Himself claims that He has prepared a place for us to receive us to Himself (John 14:3). Lewis Sperry Chafer said, “Heaven is a prepared place for a prepared people.”

The Lord prepared a city and delivered a city. But this is no ordinary city. It is the heavenly city. A city that lasts forever and ever. “For he looked for a city which hath foundations, whose builder and maker is God” (Hebrews 11:10). “But ye are come unto Mount Sion, and unto the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to an innumerable company of angels” (Hebrews 12:22).

The city was described in verse 10. The city is also described in Revelation 21:1-4. We sing there. We serve there. We learn there.

David Brainerd was a missionary to the Native Americans just prior to what some historians call our First Great Awakening. David died young (age 29). He wrote in his journal; “My heaven is

The Endurance Of Faith

Hebrews 11:13-16

to please God and glorify him, and to give all to him, and to be wholly devoted to his glory; that is the heaven I long for.”

Our longing for Heaven is not simply a refuge of joy and peace and safety. We long for Jesus.

Conclusion

What happens when you catch a glimpse of Heaven?

John Bunyon wrote; “They who will have Heaven must run for it because the devil, the law, sin, death and hell are following them. There is never a poor soul that goes to Heaven where the devil, the law, sin, death, and hell do not chase after it, “. . .you adversary the devil walks about like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour” (1 Peter 5:8); and I assure you the devil is nimble; he can run very quickly; he is light on his feet and has overtaken many; he has knocked them down, and given them an everlasting fall. Also there is the law, which can shoot a great distance. Be careful to stay out of the reach of the law’s great guns—the ten commandments. Hell also has a wide mouth; it can stretch itself further than you’re aware of. As the angel said to Lot, “Escape for your life! Do not look behind you nor stay anywhere in the plain. Escape to the mountains lest you be destroyed (Gen.19:17).

So I say to you take heed. Do not delay any longer, lest the devil, hell, death, or the fearful curses of the law overtake you and throw you in the midst of your sins, so you will never rise and recover again. If this were well considered, then you, as well as I, would say they would have Heaven must run for it.”

We walk by faith. Absent complaint; compromise or comparison. We walk by faith in vision, growth and endurance.