

Hebrews 11:8-16

Common Characteristics of Saving Faith

These all died in faith... v. 13

We've seen a number of individuals, so far, in our study of this chapter. Each one has had something to teach us in the matter of living by faith. Recall, if you will, the words of Heb 10:37,38 for they give us an important key as to the practical application of chp. 11. *For yet a little while, and he that shall come will come, and will not tarry. Now the just shall live by faith: but if any man draw back, my soul shall have no pleasure in him.*

The Hebrew Christians were tempted to draw back. Had they drawn back they would have stood in stark contrast to the believers listed in this 11th chapter. These are the ones who did not draw back but lived by faith. To draw back, then, would have put these Hebrews in stark contrast to Able, Enoch, Noah, Abraham and Sara. These are the characters we've considered so far. They would also have stood in contrast to Isaac, Jacob, Joseph, Moses and the others listed in this chapter.

Each of these saints of God demonstrated by their lives and by the challenges they faced that it is possible to live by faith. There is no excuse for the follower of Christ not to live by faith. Now when it comes to our spiritual experiences it can be argued that there is a great deal of variety among us. The same thing applies to initial conversion. There are some that come through great wrestlings and find salvation after a lengthy and intense struggle. There are some who come into salvation as naturally as a seed shoots forth a blade of grass out of the ground.

I once read a sermon by Spurgeon in which he described the various ways in which Christ healed blind men. In some cases he simply spoke the word and a blind man was healed. In other cases he spit on the ground and formed a clay and applied the clay to man's eyes and the man gained his sight. On one occasion the Lord spit on the man's hands and then touched his eyes and the man saw men as trees walking. And then Christ touched him again and he was completely healed. Spurgeon drew the application from these various healings that it's the same in salvation. There are various ways in which men and women are converted.

By while there are varieties of ways in which men are saved and varieties of spiritual experiences that we go through after we're saved, there are, nevertheless, common characteristics of true faith. Note the beginning of v. 13 *These all died in faith*. And what is said in the verses that follow pertains to *these all*. So you could say that: These all saw the promises; these all were persuaded of the promises; these all embraced the promises; these all confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth.

There is some disagreement between commentators about who exactly *these all* applies to. Some commentators think the phrase applies to the immediate context indicating Abraham, Sara, Isaac, and Jacob. Still other commentators believe the phrase applies to every person named up to this point in chp. 11 which would include, then, Abraham, Sara,

Isaac, Jacob and also Able, Enoch, and Noah. I think Arthur Pink presents the right view when he suggests that the phrase *these all* not only applies to those mentioned before but also to those mentioned in the following verses. This argument is strengthened when you see the same phrase occurring again in v. 39. Notice the last two verses of the chapter which read: *And these all, having obtained a good report through faith, received not the promise: God having provided some better thing for us, that they without us should not be made perfect.* These verses indicate a unity not only among the saints that are specified in the chapter but a unity that includes all who ever have or ever will live by faith.

And so what we find in vv. 13-16 are statements that apply to all who will live by faith. This is why I say that even though there is a wide array of spiritual experiences between the people of God there is still some things that the people of God have in common. I want to focus on those things this morning by calling your attention to:

The Common Characteristics of Those Who Live By Faith

I. They are Characterized by Lifelong Endurance

Note the very beginning of v. 13 *These all died in faith.* The meaning of this statement is that they went through their entire lives from the moment of their conversion living by faith. Had there been a time in their lives in which they drew back it would have to be said that they died not in faith but in unbelief.

And when you look at the characters mentioned in this chapter it's fair to say of the ones that we're given historical accounts of that they, like the Hebrews Paul is addressing, underwent trials and afflictions and difficulties and challenges. There was nothing unusual, therefore, in what the Hebrews themselves were facing.

And when you think about it – do you find any saint in the Old Testament or the New Testament who didn't undergo trials and afflictions? We considered in our last study some of the trials that Abraham endured. He sojourned in the land of promise as in a strange country. He was told he would have as many children as the stars in the sky and yet the waiting time for the first child was so long as to make it impossible, humanly speaking.

And what about Moses who is mentioned in verses that follow. What trials he faced. What a battle he had to endure against Pharaoh. And what trials he had to endure when it came to leading the children of Israel out of Egypt and into Canaan. What a reluctant and rebellious congregation he had to direct – men and women who were always trying to draw back and would have killed Moses and returned to Egypt if left to themselves.

We're given but a brief mention of David in this chapter. His name is mentioned in v. 32. But when I think of one who lived a life of trials David certainly comes readily to mind. It seems that once he was anointed by Samuel to be the next ruler in Israel his troubles began and he would find himself having to flee for his life and hide for several years until the time of his reign eventually came. And once he did reign he faced trials to the flesh. He faced trials from within his family, one of which would force him to flee Jerusalem and

would lead to civil war within the nation. He faced trials to his pride and he didn't always fare so well in these trials and yet he's known as a man after God's own heart.

The point I'm now making about these men is that their faith was indestructible. This doesn't mean they were sinless – far from it. It doesn't mean that they were always victorious. There were numerous defeats. What it does mean, however, is that they never drew back. They never reached the place where they said it wasn't worth it to serve Christ.

I can think of an example of a man in the Bible, not mentioned in this chapter, who thought he could draw back and was even resolved at one point to never make mention of the Lord again – that man is Jeremiah. Jeremiah 20:9 begins with Jeremiah's resolve - *Then I said, I will not make mention of him, nor speak any more in his name.* Jeremiah's ministry, you see, was never well received. It did nothing for him but bring hardship upon him so he was faced with the temptation of throwing in the towel, as it were, and giving up his prophetic calling. But the rest of Jer. 20:9 says *But his word was in mine heart as a burning fire shut up in my bones, and I was weary with forbearing, and I could not stay.*

Every true child of God, you see, can and will grow discouraged. I think every believer in this meeting this morning could attest to this. Being a Christian doesn't bring an easier path to life. If it did there would be many more Christians than there are. Being a Christian does not exempt us from trials or challenges or doubts or discouragements but in spite of these things the true Christian does endure. *These all died in faith* our text says which again indicates to us that they lived their lives in faith. They did not draw back.

And isn't it interesting that the verse says they died in faith. It doesn't say that they lived their entire saved lives in faith but that they died in faith. May I suggest to you that this is the way to die. Our faith, you see, does not merely equip us to live – it equips us to die. It removes from us the bondage of the fear of death mentioned earlier in this epistle (2:15). Our faith equips us for death because our faith is placed in the One who through his own death has conquered death and has won to himself the keys of death. And because the issue of judgment which inevitably follows death and contributes to making death a fearful thing has been decided in our favor thanks to the life and death of our Savior, we can say that the sting of death is removed for the believer.

This stands in stark contrast to the man who dies in unbelief rather than faith. For him there is an awful dread to death. The judgment to follow is a fearful thing to contemplate. Unbelievers do not want to think about death and no wonder – there is no sacrifice for their sins. There could have been but they had no faith in the sacrifice of Christ. There is nothing for them, therefore, but *a certain fearful looking for of judgment and fiery indignation, which shall devour the adversaries* (10:27).

The lesson here for the tempted believer, therefore, is obvious. You must persevere in your faith. You must tend to your faith. You must not draw back but continue to persevere. Your trials should not be regarded as strange. Christ himself said they would come. The history of redemption testifies that trials do come. You should expect them and you should expect to overcome them through the power of Christ's love which has the potential for

making us more than conquerors. We see, then, the first common characteristic of faith – it is indestructible and those who possess it will experience lifelong endurance. Would you consider next about those who live by faith:

II. They are Characterized by a Plain Declaration

Note the words of verse 14 *For they that say such things declare plainly that they seek a country.*

We have noted in our study of Noah and our study of Abraham that these men were not attached to this world. Noah, by his activity of building the ark, condemned the world. Abraham by his action of leaving his homeland to go where God directed him and by his action of sojourning in the land of promise as in a strange country made it quite apparent that he saw beyond this world and looked for a city which hath foundations, whose builder and maker is God (v. 10).

What is true of Noah and Abraham is true of everyone who lives by faith. They share a common confession which is given to us in v. 13 *These all died in faith...and confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth.* And what this means is that the Christian, living by faith, does not place his allegiance in this world and he does not set his affections in this world, and he does not allow his aspirations to be governed by this world.

He has higher aspirations, you see. He's a citizen of heaven. And his highest allegiance is to Christ and he sets his affections on things above and not on the things of this world. I like the Authorized Version's translation of this phrase – *they... declare plainly that they seek a country.* There's nothing like a plain declaration to make the issue apparent. There is no confusion or ambiguity in a plain declaration. The preaching of the gospel should be such that it becomes a plain declaration.

This translation of the phrase *declare plainly* also poses a challenge to the believer. I wonder this morning – how plain is your declaration that you seek a country that is far beyond and above the countries of this present evil world? So many Christians hamper their testimonies because their declaration is not plain enough. They seem to be as much in love with this present world as lost sinners. They seem to declare plainly that they love and want this present evil world. They want the same fashions as the world. They want the same music as the world. They want the world's applause and the world's approval. They become like Lot, in Sodom, who declared so plainly that he was a part of the world that when it came time to flee Sodom because of the judgment about to fall on it, he seemed as one that mocked.

This challenge to declare plainly becomes even more heightened when we look at some of the alternative translations of the phrase. In Young's Literal Translation the phrase reads: *for those saying such things make manifest that they seek a country;* A plain declaration may be interpreted as pertaining to the words we speak. And there are those who can speak a good game, as it were, but when it comes to a clear manifestation of their love and loyalty, what they manifest doesn't always align itself with what they speak. In

such cases the world says to the inconsistent Christian – *excuse me, I can't hear you. Your life is speaking too loudly to the contrary of what you're trying to tell me.*

How successful we become in our plain declaration of our love and loyalty to Christ and the world to come will depend, then, on the consistency detected by the world with regard to our words and our lives. And the words of v. 15 indicate to us the challenge that must be met in order for our declaration to be a plain declaration. Notice the words of v. 15: *And truly, if they had been mindful of that country from whence they came out, they might have had opportunity to have returned.*

Don't those words bring to your mind the many instances in the book of Exodus and the book of Numbers where the Israelites desired to return to Egypt? They remembered the garlic and the leeks and would have gone so far as to kill Moses and Aaron and appoint a leader that would bring them back to Egypt. They remembered the garlic and the leeks. They forgot the bondage and the slavery. They remembered the garlic and the leeks but they forgot the killing of their children. They dreamed of Egypt rather than Canaan to come. They looked back rather than looking ahead. In their distorted imaginations they deceived themselves into thinking that their present trials were more difficult than the bondage of slavery.

I wonder how often believers remember the pleasures of the world but forget the weight of guilt they bore. They remember the pleasures but forget the destruction. They remember the pleasures of sin but forget the defilement and destruction of sin. When it comes to reminiscing we sure can be selective in what we remember and what we forget.

Notice what v. 15 says because this is an important key as to how well we'll persevere in the faith. *If they had been mindful of that country from whence they came out, they might have had opportunity to have returned.* Do you see where the potential temptation lies? By being mindful of the world you may become tempted to return to the world.

This is why we're to set our affections on things above and not on the things of this world. The things of this world are passing. The country we're headed for is eternal. This world is under a curse the country we're headed for will know Christ's blessing and presence.

Your success or failure, then, in persevering in the faith will be contingent on the things you mind. If you mind the things of the world, if you find your soul and heart dominated by those things then the temptation to return to the world will become strong and humanly speaking, you run the risk of drawing back. If you, like the saints in this 11th chapter of Hebrews, become mindful of where you're headed and not mindful of where you've come from then you'll overcome in your trials and the real prospects of a city which hath foundations whose builder and maker is God will keep you steadfast in your faith.

There is yet another very strong motivational argument for persevering in the faith found in these verses. We see that those that live by faith are characterized by lifelong endurance and that they make a plain declaration. Would you consider finally:

III. They are Characterized as Those That Gain Divine Approbation

Notice the words of v. 17. This verse shows us the common desire of those who walk by faith and the effect this desire has upon God. *But now they desire a better country, that is, an heavenly: wherefore God is not ashamed to be called their God: for he hath prepared for them a city.*

There is a connection in this verse between the Christian's desire and God's approbation of the Christian because of that desire. *Wherefore* we read in the middle of the verse. For this reason you could interpret it. Because the Christian, by faith, is not mindful of that country from whence he came out and has not returned to the world but now desires a better country, even an heavenly – for this reason God is not ashamed to be called his God.

Do you not find in such a statement tremendous condescension on the part of God? Think of it – God not ashamed to be called our God! The things we do or fail to do that give God cause for being ashamed of us are too numerous to be counted. If there is anything that could compel me, at times, to think that I ought to give up in the Christian life it would be the thought that I fail to bring honor and glory to Christ. I fail to measure up to the standards of his perfect law. I fail to serve him the way I ought. I find myself having to plead the blood of Christ so often over so many things that it can tempt me to think – why would God want anything to do with me? Why would God take pleasure in me? Why would God allow me to own him as my God and call him my heavenly Father?

And the reason is that the resolution of all these things is found in Christ. He has atoned for all our sins. He has fulfilled all righteousness as our Covenant Head. He has supplied what we lacked and He has made propitiation for our transgressions. It's on account of what he's accomplished that God is pleased to be owned by us.

Some time ago when we studied the Lord's prayer I made the remark that it cost Christ his life-blood for us to be able to pray *Our Father which art in heaven*. The sinner can't claim God for his Father. The sinner is alienated from God. And so were we. Listen to the words of Eph. 2:11-13 *Wherefore remember, that ye being in time past Gentiles in the flesh, who are called Uncircumcision by that which is called the Circumcision in the flesh made by hands; 12 That at that time ye were without Christ, being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers from the covenants of promise, having no hope, and without God in the world: 13 But now in Christ Jesus ye who sometimes were far off are made nigh by the blood of Christ.*

We are brought near by the blood of Christ. How near are we brought? We are made heirs with Christ – heirs of God and joint-heirs with Christ (Rom. 8:17). And because we believe the gospel, because we believe in all that the gospel encompasses which is the cleansing and forgiveness of our sins and to be clothed in the righteousness of Christ – because we, by faith, affirm these things God is not ashamed to be called our God.

And if God is not ashamed of to be called our God, is there any excuse for us to be ashamed of him? We sang this morning that hymn that asks: *Jesus, and shall it ever be, A*

mortal man ashamed of Thee? Ashamed of Thee, whom angels praise, Whose glories shine thro' endless days? Ashamed of Jesus! Sooner far Let evening blush to own a star; He sheds the beams of light divine O'er this benighted soul of mine.

I've always found it interesting that it was when Paul addressed Christians in his epistle to the Romans that he felt led to write: *For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ: for it is the power of God unto salvation to everyone that believeth; to the Jew first, and also to the Greek.*

I can understand Paul making such a bold affirmation while addressing pagans or addressing unconverted Gentiles or addressing unbelieving Jews – but why such a statement addressed to Christians – unless Paul knew of the inhibitions of the flesh which might lead us at times to act as if we were ashamed of Christ and Christ's gospel.

At any rate – God is not ashamed of the sinner that has faith in his Son. God is not ashamed of the one who believes that Christ is the Savior of sinners. It is possible, you know, for a professing Christian to wallow in his sense of sinfulness. He may believe that in his humility for his sin God is pleased with him. You've heard me say it before – that it's a good thing to come under conviction of sin but it's never a good thing to never get beyond it. If we fail to acknowledge and appropriate the glorious truth that Christ atoned for our sins then let us not flatter ourselves into thinking that we are somehow honoring God in our humility.

This text and this chapter makes it plain that we honor God by believing in his Son and if we believe in his Son then we are bound to believe that his Son has made full atonement for our sins. And Christ has made full provision for heaven and everlasting life. God hath prepared for us a city, our text says. And all that we need to qualify for this city has been provided for by Christ.

Here, then, are the common characteristics of faith. They who walk by faith endure in that faith. This is not to say that they never suffer defeats or setbacks. It is to say that they like Micah proclaim: *Rejoice not against me, O mine enemy: when I fall, I shall arise; when I sit in darkness, the LORD [shall be] a light unto me* (Micah 7:8).

And it is to say that they make a plain declaration by their words and by their actions. They declare that their hearts are set on heaven. Their affections are on things above and not on the things of the earth. And because they believe in Christ they gain Divine approbation. God is not ashamed to be called their God: for he hath prepared for them a city.

I wonder this morning – do these common characteristics of faith describe your faith? Let every man examine his own heart and respond accordingly.