

A Good Testimony by Faith

Hebrews 11:39-40

Halifax: 4 February 2024

Introduction:

For months now, we have been looking at examples of Old Testament believers mentioned and described in Hebrews 11.

- Today we come to the conclusion of this chapter—a conclusion that prepares us for the challenge we will be given in chapter 12 & 13 to live up to our privileges as believers under the New Testament.

I will read the passage to you.

- I will read the whole chapter to you, but my text will be the last two verses.
- Here is God's holy and infallible word:

Heb 11:1-40: Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen. ² For by it the elders obtained a *good* testimony. ³ By faith we understand that the worlds were framed by the word of God, so that the things which are seen were not made of things which are visible.

⁴ By faith Abel offered to God a more excellent sacrifice than Cain, through which he obtained witness that he was righteous, God testifying of his gifts; and through it he being dead still speaks. ⁵ By faith Enoch was taken away so that he did not see death, "and was not found, because God had taken him"; for before he was taken he had this testimony, that he pleased God. ⁶ But 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. ⁷ By faith Noah, being divinely warned of things not yet seen, moved with godly fear, prepared an ark for the saving of his household, by which he condemned the world and became heir of the righteousness which is according to faith. ⁸ By faith Abraham obeyed when he was called to go out to the place which he would receive as an inheritance. And he went out, not knowing where he was going. ⁹ By faith he dwelt in the land of promise as *in* a foreign country, dwelling in tents with Isaac and Jacob, the heirs with him of the same promise; ¹⁰ for he waited for the city which has foundations, whose builder and maker *is* God. ¹¹ By faith Sarah herself also received strength to conceive seed, and she

bore a child when she was past the age, because she judged Him faithful who had promised. ¹² Therefore from one man, and him as good as dead, were born *as many* as the stars of the sky in multitude—innumerable as the sand which is by the seashore. ¹³ These 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. ¹⁴ For those who say such things declare plainly that they seek a homeland. ¹⁵ And truly if they had called to mind that *country* from which they had come out, they would have had opportunity to return. ¹⁶ But 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. ¹⁷ By faith Abraham, when he was tested, offered up Isaac, and he who had received the promises offered up his only begotten *son*, ¹⁸ of whom it was said, "In Isaac your seed shall be called," ¹⁹ concluding that God *was* able to raise *him* up, even from the dead, from which he also received him in a figurative sense. ²⁰ By faith Isaac blessed Jacob and Esau concerning things to come. ²¹ By faith Jacob, when he was dying, blessed each of the sons of Joseph, and worshiped, *leaning* on the top of his staff. ²² By faith Joseph, when he was dying, made mention of the departure of the children of Israel, and gave instructions concerning his bones. ²³ By faith Moses, when he was born, was

hidden three months by his parents, because they saw *he was* a beautiful child; and they were not afraid of the king's command. ²⁴ By faith Moses, when he became of age, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter, ²⁵ choosing rather to suffer affliction with the people of God than to enjoy the passing pleasures of sin, ²⁶ esteeming the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures in Egypt; for he looked to the reward. ²⁷ By faith he forsook Egypt, not fearing the wrath of the king; for he endured as seeing Him who is invisible. ²⁸ By faith he kept the Passover and the sprinkling of blood, lest he who destroyed the firstborn should touch them. ²⁹ By faith they passed through the Red Sea as by dry land, whereas the Egyptians, attempting to do so, were drowned. ³⁰ By faith the walls of Jericho fell down after they were encircled for seven days. ³¹ By faith the harlot Rahab did not perish with those who did not believe, when she had received the spies with peace.

³² And what more shall I say? For the time would fail me to tell of Gideon and

Barak and Samson and Jephthah, also of David and Samuel and the prophets: ³³ who through faith subdued kingdoms, worked righteousness, obtained promises, stopped the mouths of lions, ³⁴ quenched the violence of fire, escaped the edge of the sword, out of weakness were made strong, became valiant in battle, turned to flight the armies of the aliens. ³⁵ Women received their dead raised to life again. And others were tortured, not accepting deliverance, that they might obtain a better resurrection. ³⁶ Still others had trial of mockings and scourgings, yes, and of chains and imprisonment. ³⁷ They were stoned, they were sawn in two, were tempted, were slain with the sword. They wandered about in sheepskins and goatskins, being destitute, afflicted, tormented— ³⁸ of whom the world was not worthy. They wandered in deserts and mountains, *in dens* and caves of the earth. ³⁹ And all these, having obtained a good testimony through faith, did not receive the promise, ⁴⁰ God having provided something better for us, that they should not be made perfect apart from us.

Thanks be to God for His Holy Word.

What a fine list of examples to show us what faith can do.

- You are quite mistaken if you look at this list and are discouraged.
 - It is not that these believers were mighty.
 - The whole point is they trusted in God who is mighty.
 - You are called to trust in the same One that they trusted in.
 - He can enable you to do what He has called you to do just as He enabled them to do just what He called them to do!

I. We are told that they obtained a good testimony by faith.

A. Verse 39 says that that is what they all did.

- **And all these, having obtained a good testimony through faith.**
- Not one of them obtained a good testimony in some other way.
 - The things that they did and the things that they endured they did and endured by trusting in the LORD, and He did not fail them.

B. What does it mean to have a good testimony?

1. The same terminology was used to describe Enoch.

- It says that before he was taken up to heaven, "he had this testimony, that he pleased God."
- People who knew Enoch saw that he pleased God before he was miraculously transported up to heaven.

- Everyone could see that he walked with God and they said, “That man pleases God.” That was the testimony Enoch had.
2. Having a good testimony means that your life shows that you have a good relationship with the true and living God.
 - Your testimony as a Christian is that you have been saved from your sin.
 - You are now forgiven and restored to God.
 - You are now walking with Him, living in communion with Him.
 - You are living by His grace.
- C. If you trust in Him, there are two ways your life shows it.
1. First, if you trust in Him, you live as if you trust Him.
 - a. You will listen to His counsel and follow it.
 - Like Noah, if He warns you about something, like the flood, and tells you to build an ark, you will do it.
 - Like Abraham, if He calls you to leave your homeland and go to a land you do not know, you will do that.
 - Like Moses, you will believe that it is better to be afflicted with the people of God than to enjoy the passing pleasures of sin—so you will go with His people, no matter how hard it might be or how ill they may be regarded.
 - You will live as if what God says is true.
 - b. How could you do otherwise?
 - If someone trusts in riches, it shows. They will talk about it. They may work very hard, they may trample over others to get rich. They may lie and cheat, or they may believe that honesty is the best way to get rich. They might be someone that is always trying to win the lottery. But however they go about it, you can see that they trust in riches as the way to happiness.
 2. The second way that your trust in God will give you a good testimony is this:
 - When you trust God to save you, He does!
 - a. He pardons you and make Himself known to you.
 - He will give you wisdom to understand His will.
 - He will give you grace to obey Him, to serve Him, to trust Him, to do things like loving your enemies or enduring hardships and persecution.
 - b. In other words, God will transform your life when you trust in Him, and that transformation will be obvious.
 - That was the case with all these Old Testament believers.
 - As I mentioned already—the very point is not that they were people with great abilities that enabled them to walk with God—it was that they trusted God and then that He enabled them to walk with Him.
 - When you trust in God, people can see that He is at work in you.
 - You have a testimony that you are reconciled to the living God.

II. These Old Testament worthies stood out.

- A. Their examples are mentioned because they stood out among their peers.

1. In many cases, they were called to do extraordinary things that they could not do, like delivering a nation out of slavery in Egypt.
 - They did it by faith. They had a clear testimony that they were in a right relationship with God.
 2. We saw that others of them were called and enabled to endure extremely difficult things, such as those we looked at last week who were tortured and would not accept deliverance.
 3. Still others are on the list because though they spoiled their testimony in certain ways by disobedience that meant God had to chasten them, He did chasten them, and they were restored.
 - We saw that with Jacob or Samson. They are on the list because they overcome by faith—and ended up with a good testimony that they walked with God.
- B. But these worthies stood out not only among their peers, they stand out from us also.
- Our text tells us how:
 - They... **did not receive the promise, God having provided something better for us...**
1. What promise?
 - Some people think when it says “all these had a good testimony by faith” that it is only talking about the ones in vv 35b – 38 that were not delivered from their sufferings,
 - For example, the ones that were tortured and not delivered, or the ones that were slain with the sword.
 - But that is not correct. It is a promise that none of the saints in the Old Testament received.
 - It is not any promise, but the promise that they were all looking for!
 - And that was God’s promise of redemption by a Son born of the woman.
 - They were all looking for God to save His people from their sins and trusting Him to do it, but He did not do it while they were still alive.
 - They died, still trusting that He would do it.
 - They all died in faith, believing in this particular promise.
 - They believed that they were numbered with His people who would be redeemed because they were among those who trusted in His promise.
 2. For them, Jesus was always “the coming one” or “the promised one.”
 - They only had shadows of how He would save them—the appointed sacrifices for sin and such things.
 - They had faith in what God had promised to do.
 - We, on the other hand, have faith in what God has done!
 3. This makes the OT believers’ faith all the more remarkable.
 - They obtained a good testimony by faith with only a little light.
 - They did not know just how God would redeem His people of which they were a part, but they lived their whole lives in faith that He would.

III. The theme of the whole book of Hebrews is that “God has provided something better for us.”

A. Remember the issue.

- The book of Hebrews is written to Hebrew or Jewish believers who were being persecuted for believing that Jesus was the Messiah.
- Some of them were tempted to find relief by turning back to the ancestral traditions.
- Hebrews is written to show them that in Christ they have something far better.
 - And of course, in showing these original recipients that, it shows all believers the excellence of Jesus our Saviour and of our salvation in Him.

B. Let's cheer and refresh ourselves with the better thing that God has provided for us!

1. The book opens telling us of the excellent revelation we now have from God:

- Heb 1:1-4: **God, who at various times and in various ways spoke in time past to the fathers by the prophets, ² has in these last days spoken to us by *His* Son, whom He has appointed heir of all things, through whom also He made the worlds; ³ who being the brightness of *His* glory and the express image of His person, and upholding all things by the word of His power, when He had by Himself purged our sins, sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high, ⁴ having become so much better than the angels, as He has by inheritance obtained a more excellent name than they.**

2. We see the dominion we were given at creation restored in Him:

- Heb 2:6-9: **But one testified in a certain place, saying: “What is man that You are mindful of him, or the son of man that You take care of him? ⁷ You have made him a little lower than the angels; You have crowned him with glory and honor, and set him over the works of Your hands. ⁸ You have put all things in subjection under his feet.” For in that He put all in subjection under him, He left nothing *that is* not put under him. But now we do not yet see all things put under him. ⁹ But we see Jesus, who was made a little lower than the angels, for the suffering of death crowned with glory and honor, that He, by the grace of God, might taste death for everyone.**

3. Christ is better than Moses, the premiere prophet of the Old Testament.

- Heb 3:3-6: **For this One has been counted worthy of more glory than Moses, inasmuch as He who built the house has more honor than the house. ⁴ For every house is built by someone, but He who built all things *is* God. ⁵ And Moses indeed *was* faithful in all His house as a servant, for a testimony of those things which would be spoken *afterward*, ⁶ but Christ as a Son over His own house, whose house we are if we hold fast the confidence and the rejoicing of the hope firm to the end.**

4. Christ gives us a better rest than Joshua did when he brought them into the land:

- Heb 4:8-10: **For if Joshua had given them rest, then He would not afterward have spoken of another day. ⁹ There remains therefore a rest for the people of God. ¹⁰ For he who has entered His rest has himself also ceased from his works as God *did* from His.**
- God rested after He finished the work of creation, and we celebrate that completed work, but how much more the rest that Christ entered into after He completed the work of redemption!

5. Christ is a superior priest who, by His vehement prayers and suffering, is the author of eternal salvation—that is, He saves us forever.
 - Heb 5:6-9: As *He* also says in another *place*: “*You are a priest forever according to the order of Melchizedek*”; ⁷ who, in the days of His flesh, when He had offered up prayers and supplications, with vehement cries and tears to Him who was able to save Him from death, and was heard because of His godly fear, ⁸ though He was a Son, *yet* He learned obedience by the things which He suffered. ⁹ And having been perfected, He became the author of eternal salvation to all who obey Him.
6. Much is made of His superior priesthood in Hebrews.
 - a. He has a superior priesthood because it never ends:
 - Heb 7:15-17: And it is yet far more evident if, in the likeness of Melchizedek, there arises another priest ¹⁶ who has come, not according to the law of a fleshly commandment, but according to the power of an endless life. ¹⁷ For He testifies: “*You are a priest forever according to the order of Melchizedek.*”
 - b. He has a superior calling not by inheritance, but by an oath from God.
 - Heb 7:20-22: And inasmuch as *He was not made priest* without an oath ²¹ (for they have become priests without an oath, but He with an oath by Him who said to Him: “The LORD has sworn and will not relent, ‘*You are a priest forever according to the order of Melchizedek*’ ”), ²² by so much more Jesus has become a surety of a better covenant.
 - c. His salvation is eternal because He lives forever:
 - Heb 7:24-26: But He, because He continues forever, has an unchangeable priesthood. ²⁵ Therefore He is also able to save to the uttermost those who come to God through Him, since He always lives to make intercession for them. ²⁶ For such a High Priest was fitting for us, *who is holy, harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners, and has become higher than the heavens.*
 - d. He has a superior position at the right hand of the Father in heaven
 - Heb 8:1-2: Now *this is the main point of the things we are saying*: We have such a High Priest, who is seated at the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in the heavens, ² a Minister of the sanctuary and of the true tabernacle which the Lord erected, and not man.
 - This gives us access to heaven by Him.
 - e. He is Mediator of a better covenant with better promises...
 - Heb 8:6: But now He has obtained a more excellent ministry, inasmuch as He is also Mediator of a better covenant, which was established on better promises.
 - The better promises are the forgiveness of sins and the fullness of the Holy Spirit.
 - The Old Testament believers had forgiveness based on what Jesus would do, but now we have it based on what has been done—in other words, the penalty had not yet been paid for the Old Testament saint, but for us it has been paid and we can see how: by the blood of Christ.
 - Likewise, the Spirit did work on the Old Testament believer so that they might repent and come to God and that prophets might prophesy,

but Christ is *the* Anointed One who received the Spirit and entitles us to have Him forever.

- f. Christ alone has the sacrifice that actually takes away our sin. The OT ones were only shadows of His.
 - Heb 9:11-14 says: **But Christ came as High Priest of the good things to come, with the greater and more perfect tabernacle not made with hands, that is, not of this creation. ¹² Not with the blood of goats and calves, but with His own blood He entered the Most Holy Place once for all, having obtained eternal redemption. ¹³ For if the blood of bulls and goats and the ashes of a heifer, sprinkling the unclean, sanctifies for the purifying of the flesh, ¹⁴ how much more shall the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered Himself without spot to God, cleanse your conscience from dead works to serve the living God?**
- g. We are perfected forever by His offering.
 - Hebrews 10:10-14: **We have been sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once *for all*. ¹¹ And every priest stands ministering daily and offering repeatedly the same sacrifices, which can never take away sins. ¹² But this Man, after He had offered one sacrifice for sins forever, sat down at the right hand of God, ¹³ from that time waiting till His enemies are made His footstool. ¹⁴ For by one offering He has perfected forever those who are being sanctified.**

TRANS> Truly, we have something far better than the saints of the Old Testament had.

- God's salvation has been openly revealed!
 - Christ has come and He has accomplished the glorious work of redemption.
- But make no mistake.
 - Even though the Old Testament saints did not have this "better thing" of Jesus's finished work of redemption when they lived here on earth, they have it now.

IV. Our text shows that the Old Testament believers were saved, just as New Testament believers are, by the work that Jesus did two thousand years ago.

- Look at the whole passage again: Heb 11:39-40: **And all these, having obtained a good testimony through faith, did not receive the promise, ⁴⁰ God having provided something better for us, that they should not be made perfect apart from us.**
 - People often ask how Old Testament people were saved.
 - Here you have it. Not without us.
- A. The promise of redemption by Christ was the promise that they waited for and it is the glorious work that we rely upon and rest in.
 - But it is the same work for them as it is for us.
 - The difference is that we live in the times when we have the benefit and the privilege of seeing God's salvation, seeing what He did to secure our pardon.
 - They see it from their place with Christ in glory, but we get to see it during our pilgrimage here on earth.
- B. It is helpful to recognise that Christ only has one body and one church.
 - His church was not redeemed until He came.

- It had the promise of redemption, but there was no atonement for sin, no priest that could secure eternal salvation or the Holy Spirit.
- There were promises of these blessings given in shadows—the ceremonies with their repeated sacrifices and men dressed in priestly garments and altars made with human hands offering incense and animals, but there was no sacrifice to take away sin until Jesus came.
- The church was a church waiting for redemption.
- They could not be made perfect with out us... that is, our day, when Jesus came.
- Now that He has come and has done His work, we have the sacrifice that brings perfection—that is, complete forgiveness and eternal life.

V. How should we then live?

- A. We should live with extreme gratitude for Christ and what He has done!
1. We should look upon Him—our glorious saviour—and His saving work.
 - We should see His marvellous kindness to come here and bear our guilt.
 - Who could have thought that the most high God would do such a thing?
 - Such love, such grace, such mercy for sinners, such tender compassion!
 2. We should look upon this work to understand the depths of it, and then we should give thanks to God for it.
 - We should offer to Him the sacrifice of praise each day—in private and in our families—not just teaching time, but praise and thanksgiving time!
 - We should be eager each week to gather with the saints to offer praise and thanksgiving to Him—to gather around the Lord’s Table—to sing psalms to Him.
- B. Like the saints of old that we have read about, we should trust in the One who has proven Himself to be so trustworthy.
1. We should not doubt His goodness or His care for us.
 2. We should be ready to forsake all for His sake, to endure hard things for His glory, to obey Him and to look for His deliverance, His blessing, not the world’s.
 3. We should lay down our lives for Him and eagerly obey Him, for we have seen His great love and mercy in Christ.
- C. If the mere shadows of His work had such an effect on the saints of old, how much more should it affect you—you who have seen what Christ and His saving work accomplished.
1. Let His sweet work draw you in.
 - Let it deepen your sense of sin.
 - Let it give you greater assurance and confidence in His future promises.
 - Let it cheer you and fill you with joy and hope.
 - Let it make you entirely devoted to Him forever.
 2. Let the example of the Old Testament saints stimulate you and inspire you to trust God for the work that is still future to us.
 - a. There is a work future to us that they already have—that is the perfecting of our spirits to sin no more.
 - Let us go on by faith, trusting in Christ to sanctify us and deliver us from our remaining sin—as He has done for all who have departed to be with Him.

- b. There is also a promised work that is future to both us and the saints of old, and that is the work of raising our bodies from the dead and destroying all His and our enemies.
 - He will do it. He that shall come will come and will not delay.
 - Do not grow weary in serving Him now. Follow the saints of the OT who trusted Him with mere shadows—you have the revelation of Christ and His saving work.

Conclusion: We will be looking next at the encouragement to press on that is given to us in the remaining two chapters of Hebrews.

- It is addressed to us as those who have the better things of Christ and His saving work accomplished and revealed to us!