

Hebrews Chapter 11G

I am fairly certain that you are all familiar with the idiom “*Seeing is Believing.*”

- That particular saying was first recorded in its current form in the year 1639.
- Those who employ this idiom in essence are stating that ONLY physical, concrete evidence can provide essential and convincing truth.
- When you think about it Thomas, one of Jesus’ twelve disciples was a man who believed, at least for a time, that “*seeing is Believing.*” Isn’t that what he said?

John 20:25, "Unless I see in his hands the mark of the nails, and place my finger into the mark of the nails, and place my hand into his side, I will never believe."

- In essence he said seeing is believing.
- You might remember how the Lord Jesus’ responded to Thomas, one week later, when he met the disciples in the upper room.

John 20: 29 Jesus said to him, "Have you believed because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed."

- Thomas, there is a special blessing for those who believe without seeing.
- We learned from the writer of Hebrews that true and saving faith is itself sufficient evidence of those things we cannot see with our physical eyes.

Hebrews 11:1 Now faith is the assurance (substance, title deed) of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen.

- At the end of Chapter 10 the writer tells us that those blessed saints who receive God’s gracious gift of righteousness will actually live their lives on the basis of faith and not sight.

Hebrews 10: 37 For, "Yet a little while, and the coming one will come and will not delay; 38 but my righteous one shall live by faith, and if he shrinks back, my soul has no pleasure in him." 39 But we are not of those who shrink back and are destroyed, but of those who have faith and preserve their souls.

- In light of this powerful warning & strong exhortation the writer of Hebrews moves on to provide us with a list of men and women who lived their lives by faith and not by sight.
- He wants his readers to KEEP on BELIEVING and not give up so he provides them with example after example of those who endured incredible hardship all the while holding fast to the promises of God.
- Friends, these are our Heroes of Faith!

This morning we are going to see that the gift of faith:

1. Is given to a very diverse group of people. (Diverse People)
2. Who faced very different experiences. (Different Experiences)

In verses 30-31 the great diversity of the people of faith is displayed through the lives of two very different individuals who are co-heirs of the promise of God and shares together in His gracious gift of faith.

- Joshua and Rahab (Man and Woman, Jew and Gentile)

Hebrews 11: 30 **By faith the walls of Jericho fell down, after they were compassed about seven days.** 31 **By faith the harlot Rahab perished not with them that believed not, when she had received the spies with peace.**

- Forty years had passed since the crossing of the Red Sea when God finally brought the people of Israel into the Promised Land.
- Moses died at the age of 120 never actually entering the land. He was only permitted to view it from a distance.
- Joshua had been prepared and was now charged with the momentous task of taking the people of Israel in and possessing the land.
- The Lord himself spoke to Joshua saying:

Joshua 1: 6 **Be strong and courageous, for you shall cause this people to inherit the land that I swore to their fathers to give them.** 7 **Only be strong and very courageous, being careful to do according to all the law that Moses my servant commanded you. Do not turn from it to the right hand or to the left, that you may have good success wherever you go.**

- NO doubt you are familiar with this narrative.
- Remember that the Lord himself appeared to Joshua as “The Angel of the Lord” and through that appearance He provided a detailed plan for the destruction of Jericho.
- So long as Joshua listened and obeyed the Word of the Lord He would “Have good success wherever he went.”
- In Verse 30 (Hebrews 11) the Author memorializes the obedience of faith displayed in the life of Joshua and He reminds us of the great victory brought about by the hand of the Lord through the faith of His anointed.

BUT the story of Jericho would be incomplete without making mention of the faith of Rahab. So the writer of Hebrews moves on to make note of her courageous act.

Hebrews 11: 31 **By faith Rahab the prostitute did not perish with those who were disobedient, because she had given a friendly welcome to the spies.**

- You might remember that Joshua learned from previous experience that you don't need 12 spies to go and spy out the land, he only sent 2 into Jericho.
- When the King of Jericho learned there were Hebrew spies in his city He searched for them and his search led to the home of an Amorite Prostitute named Rahab.
- Of all the hiding places that these Hebrew Spies could have gone in the vast city of Jericho they ended up in the house of the one woman whose eyes had been opened by God's gracious gift of faith. (Evidence of God's Sovereignty)

Joshua 2: 9, (Rahab's expression of faith) **I know that the LORD has given you the land, and that the fear of you has fallen upon us, and that all the inhabitants of the land melt away before you.**

- And she went on to speak of the exploits that God had done through the Israelites. And she implored them by the Lord that they would save her and her family when the Lord gave the city into their hands. (What happened?)
- By faith Rahab brought her family into her house, by faith she hung the scarlet rope from the window as she was instructed.
- AND in a way reminiscent of the scarlet blood of the Lamb that the Israelites placed on their door posts during the Passover Rahab hung a scarlet cord from her window.
- AND when the judgment of God came upon the city of Jericho Rahab's house remained standing.
 - Now Let's Consider this Diversity:

No matter how hard we try, I don't think we could come up with two individuals who illustrate a greater diversity than Joshua and Rahab. Think about it:

- Joshua was a man, an Israelite man, one who had seen the glory of God, a valiant and courageous warrior, an elite leader of God's chosen people.
- Then there is Rahab; a woman, a member of the cursed Amorite race, a woman who stood on the bottom rung of society's ladder, a Prostitute, A citizen of the cursed city of Jericho.
- The only thing that they had in common was that they believed on the Lord and trusted his power to save.
- Looking back from our vantage point the multitude of their vast differences fade into the background all that really matters is their common faith and the salvation that God graciously provides

I am reminded of Paul's reaction when God brought salvation to the house of Cornelius Acts 10: 34 **So Peter opened his mouth and said: "Truly I understand that God shows no partiality,**

- In this time of great racial and ethnic divide we need to remember that God is not a respecter of persons. The Gospel is to be proclaimed to ALL people.
- There is ONE salvation, ONE Lord, ONE faith, ONE baptism.

I am going to ask that you set aside your political feelings for a moment and allow me to address the refugee crisis from a different angle.

Did you ever stop to think about how the sovereignty of God may be at work, today in the great dispersion of Muslim people into what we could loosely call Christian nations. (Europe and America)

In the sovereignty of God, you may not need to leave your home town to do cross cultural ministry. You may be able to visit the Syrian couple that lives on your street.

- I think it is important that we Remember: these people are running away from Muslim aggression.
 - That itself is an open door for the Gospel of Jesus Christ.
 - Multitudes of moderate Muslims questioning their own religion in light of the violence promoted by the extremists.
- What we need is the FAITH to actively share the life changing Gospel.

The diversity of God's people of faith is matched by the diversity of the experience of their faith.

- Here in Hebrews 11 we find TWO groups of people with two very different experiences.
- There are some who do exploits in the name of God and experience great victories in this present life.
- There are others, true partakers of faith, who experience horrendous suffering, hardship even torture in this life and yet they hold firmly to the faith.

IN verses 32 – 34 we come upon a listing of assorted heroes of faith, many of them were rulers in Israel to one degree or another and the characteristic that lands them on this special list is the earthly victory that they obtained by faith.

Hebrews 11:32 **And what more shall I say? For time would fail me to tell of Gideon, Barak, Samson, Jephthah, of David and Samuel and the prophets. 33 who through faith conquered kingdoms, enforced justice, obtained promises, stopped the mouths of lions,**

- Gideon, Barak, Samson and Jephthah were all judges who served the nation Israel.
- Despite their sins and obvious character flaws each of them by faith conquered kingdoms, enforced justice and obtained promises.

Gideon assembled an army of 32,000 men to fight against a coalition of the Midianites and Amalekites. And they presented an impressive force: Listen to this description: Judges 7: **the Midianites and the Amalekites and all the people of the East lay along the valley like locusts in abundance, and their camels were without number, as the sand that is on the seashore in abundance.**

- You might remember that God told Gideon that his army was too large
 - (I would have replied, "Have you seen THEIR Army?")

So Gideon told everyone who was fearful to go home. 22,000 left!

- Even then: In God's eyes the army was still too large. Finally, Gideon's force was cut down to 300 men.
- Armed with nothing more than trumpets, pitchers and torches the heathen armies were routed by the hand of the Lord.

Only a fool would have attempted such an unorthodox approach to battle apart from God's specific direction.

- From the perspective of faith only a fool would refuse to obey the commands of the Lord when he promises to provide the victory.

Barak alongside of Deborah experienced similar victory against the army of Sisera and his 700 chariots of iron.

And you remember Samson – (He is not the kind of man that I want my children to emulate) BUT He is a faithful reminder that we are justified by faith alone and not by the works of the Law.

- By faith he destroyed more Philistines in his repentance and subsequent death than he did in his life.

Jephthah overcame the Ammonites, David experienced victory over the Philistines.

- All these men **conquered kingdoms, enforced justice, obtained promises** but it doesn't stop with them.
- Very quickly the Author moves on:

The Prophets did not battle against flesh and blood, instead they fought the internal, spiritual enemies of Israel. They stood against the enemies of Idolatry and immorality that were even more devastating than the Canaanite Armies. And they are listed here among those who experienced victory here on the earth.

- Remember Elijah's victory on Mt Carmel over the Prophets of Baal
- Nathan the Prophet who was used of the Lord to bring King David to repentance.
- Zechariah and Malachi who prepared the people of God for the coming of Christ
- The writer goes on to describe the exploits of others like Shadrach, Meshech and Abednego, Elijah and Elisha who by faith:

Hebrews 11:34 **quenched the power of fire, escaped the edge of the sword, were made strong out of weakness, became mighty in war, put foreign armies to flight. 35 Women received back their dead by resurrection.**

- We rejoice with these great heroes of faith, declaring the great power and glory of our God.

If the account of faith were to stop right here it might leave us with the dangerously false impression that true saving faith is always victorious and guards, protects and keeps us from experiencing the suffering of this corrupt world.

- This is the kind of false portrayal of faith that is all too frequently proclaimed by the purveyors of a False Gospel.

- Verses 35 – 38 refute such thinking telling us that “Others” (ALLOS – others of the same kind) Others who share in God’s gracious gift of faith, had a very different experience.

Hebrews 11: 35 **Some (ALLOS - Others) were tortured, refusing to accept release, so that they might rise again to a better life. 36 Others suffered mocking and flogging, and even chains and imprisonment.**

37 They were stoned, they were sawn in two, they were killed with the sword. They went about in skins of sheep and goats, destitute, afflicted, mistreated, 38 of whom the world was not worthy, wandering about in deserts and mountains, and in dens and caves of the earth.

- These very difficult verse describe men and women who shared God’s gracious gift of saving faith, the same faith as those who won great victories.
- But the experience of faith was 180 degrees in the opposite direction from those previously mentioned. They were tortured, and they stood firm in the faith even in the face of death.
- Here the author is most likely speaking of the Maccabean Martyrs.
- Now that may be a new term to some of you.

Between the Old Testament and the New Testament in a time when the Seleucid King Antiochus Epiphanes ruled over the land of Israel, he began a horrible persecution of the people.

At that time ONE courageous family rose up and led a revolt against Antiochus, they were the Maccabees.

- If you have ever seen a Bible with the Apocrypha, you may remember 2 books that bear the name Maccabees wedged between the Old and New Testament.
- 2nd Maccabees described the torture and martyrdom of seven brothers who stood by faith against the King and refused to bow to the Greek Gods.
- Seven courageous brothers, one after the other, who embraced death rather than renounce their faith.
- The record shows that they shared the hope of a greater resurrection leading to eternal life.
- One of the brothers spoke boldly before he died.

2 Maccabees 7:9 **“The King of the universe will raise us up to an everlasting renewal of life because we have died for his laws.”**

The last of the Brothers to die confidently turned to the King and speaking of his deceased brothers said **“After enduring their brief pain, (THEY) now drink of ever-flowing life, by virtue of God’s covenant.”** (2 Maccabees 7:36)

The Author of Hebrews said of the Maccabees **They went about in skins of sheep and goats, destitute, afflicted, mistreated** —

This kind of sacrifice and fidelity is incomprehensible to the man who does not know God.

BUT to the eye of faith it is not unusual at all. Throughout the centuries many brave men and women have sealed their faith with the shedding of their own blood.

- And they continue today:

Kayla Mueller a young Christian missionary serving in the Middle East was abducted by Isis on August 4, 2013. For 18 months she was daily subjected to unspeakable torture, physical, mental and sexual abuse. She was even given over to the Isis leader himself where she was abused as a sex slave.

- The one and only effort put forth by the American Military to rescue Kayla from her hellish prison sadly missed her by about 12 hours.
- Everything that I have read, everything that I have watched concerning Kayla tells me that she held firmly to the faith unto the very end.
- I would personally add Kayla's name to this list of our heroes of faith.

WHAT Can We Take Home From This Portion of Hebrews 11?

1. God's gift of faith is graciously provided by God to a great variety of people (from every language, tribe and nation, so we must be committed to missions)
2. He leads his people on a journey of faith that is uniquely designed for His glory and their good. Whether that good involves victory or tragedy.
 - The life of faith is an extraordinary life – lived for the glory of God!

In closing let's consider the word of the Lord that came through the Prophet Daniel:

Daniel 11:32, (KJV) **the people that do know their God shall be strong, and do exploits.**

- We have heard of the Exploits that *Gideon, Barak and David accomplished by faith.* And We have seen the courage of faith in the testimony of the Maccabees

Fifteen times here in Hebrews 11 we have heard the words "**By Faith.**"

- By Faith Abel offered to God a more acceptable sacrifice.
- By Faith Enoch was taken up.
- By Faith Noah Constructed an Ark
- By Faith Abraham obeyed God and went to live in the Land of Promise.

BUT as we leave behind chapter 11, I want to leave you with this challenge this morning:

- What EXPLOITS does God's gracious gift of faith move you to perform in YOUR life?

Could it be that we are so satisfied, so contented with this present life that we really don't give much thought to the life that is yet to come?

- We live in nice homes, drive nice cars, receive a steady pay check and we are contented to sprinkle a little Bible on it, add a little church to it and we think that is what FAITH is all about?
- When was the last time that you did something that actually required a step of faith?
- Let's think about that for a moment.

For some of you it may be a huge step of faith to open your heart to your brother or sister in Christ because you have been severely hurt by Christians in the past.

- I have to admit that I struggle at times to open my heart to new friends because of the wounds that I bear from old friends.
- And yet BY Faith I know that I must love my brothers because HE first loved me.
- Jesus continued to love the disciples even after they all ran away from him in the Garden.

DO you step out in faith and share the Gospel with your neighbors?

Is your faith expressed in prayer as you diligently prepare to teach the kids in your Sunday School class?

Berks County Prison allows volunteer chaplains to come in on Tuesday nights to share the Word of God with inmates

- It challenged my faith the first time I heard those doors slam behind me.

What about those Muslim women you see at Wal-Mart dressed in the garb that inflicts fear in the heart of so many of us.

- We need to remember that underneath that cold black exterior is the heart of a person who is locked in a prison of false religion and God has given you the keys to the kingdom.
- Will you step out in faith and share the Good News?

Maybe you are here this morning and you have never actually heard the Good News yourself.

- God, the creator of all things,