

Faith Explained and Illustrated Part Two: Hebrews 11:8-22

Hebrews 11:8-22 Introduction

- Last week we began a lengthy discussion of faith in Hebrews 11.
- Biblical faith is frequently misunderstood in our culture, even by those who exercise it.

- Faith is not blind optimism.
- It's not something we work up through emotional hype.
- Faith is not the belief in something despite purely contrary evidence.
- Throughout this chapter we will see biblical faith explained and illustrated.

Biblical faith is our willing response to God, expressed inwardly by submissive trust, and outwardly by obedience.

Hebrews 11:8-22 Outline

- Faith may require uncertainty. 11:8
- Faith may look unimpressive. 11:9-10
- Faith may pull off the impossible. 11:11-12
- Faith may not let us look back. 11:13-16
- Faith may require great sacrifice. 11:17-19
- Faith makes us look past ourselves. 11:20-22

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Faith may require uncertainty. 11:8

- 11:8 Read Genesis 12:1-4
- Abraham did not actually know where he was going until he got there.
- Let's face it. That may seem ludicrous.
- We like measurable goals and specific targets and there is usually nothing wrong with that.
- But there is still more to a life of faith.
 - See Psalm 119:105. We may not see the goal.

Faith may look unimpressive. 11:9-10

- Read Genesis 12:7-8.
- Abraham and his sons looked more like temporary visitors than like the eventual heirs and owners of the Promised Land.
- By faith they were willing to look insignificant.
- Faith may not make you a celebrity.
- Faith may not make you a rock star.
- Faith may not win you crowds of admirers.

- In 1731 Count Nikolaus Ludwig von Zinzendorf of Moravia went to Denmark for the coronation of the new Danish king.
- While there, a slave named Anthony from the West Indies told him about the need for someone to preach the gospel to slaves in the Caribbean.
- Count Zinzendorf had what was then a radical idea; he began sponsoring missionaries.
- The next year, in 1732, the first German missionaries sailed to St. Thomas in the Virgin Islands to live among the African slaves.
- Soon others went out to live among the Inuit on Greenland.
- Still others went to India, South America, Africa and many other places.
- None of them became celebrities.
- None of them became rock stars.
- None of them won crowds of admirers.
- Zinzendorf was criticized for sending young missionaries off to die, for most of them did just that.
- They simply died – in harsh surroundings of unknown sicknesses.
- For a time, Zinzendorf himself gave up his life among the nobility of Europe to visit his missionaries in the American colonies.
- The Protestant missionary movement was born, brutally criticized, but mostly unnoticed.
- Within 60 years, by 1792, they had gathered 14,976 “souls for the Lamb” worldwide.
- John Wesley was converted at one of their prayer meetings at Aldersgate in London.

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Faith may pull off the impossible. 11:11-12

- When Abram received the promise that his descendants would be a great nation, he was 75 years old; his wife Sarai was 65.
- They had to wait 25 more years until their son was born.
- Sarah gave birth to Isaac at age 90.
- God may want to pull off the impossible in your life, but how long are you willing to wait?

Faith may not let us look back. 11:13-16

- At any point Abraham might have gone back to his birthplace in Ur of the Chaldeans.
- By all accounts it was bustling prosperous city located in Mesopotamia or modern Iraq.
- He still had family there.
- Isaac or Jacob might also have permanently settled with well-to-do family in that region.
- Instead, they lived as strangers and pilgrims.
- *“The worst that God has to offer is better than the best that the world can give.”*
 - Chuck Smith, in the *Word for Today Bible*

- We can't keep what we have in this world forever anyway.
- Once we step out in faith, it makes no sense to look back.
 - See Luke 9:62.
- 11:16 Notice the wording. It does not say that God will prepare a city for them.
- It says, "He has prepared a city for them."
- The work is done.
- The city that God has prepared for us is already completed and waiting for our arrival.
- Where are you going to call home?

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Faith may require great sacrifice. 11:17-19

- 11:17 only begotten *monogenēs*
- The sense here is "unique" or "one of a kind."
- In this case "only begotten" is not the best translation, because it seems to contradict Abraham having Ishmael with Hagar.
- In the original there is no contradiction.
- Isaac can be *monogenēs* while Ishmael can be his older half-brother.
- We've already pointed out that Abraham had to wait 25 years for the birth of Isaac.
- Now Isaac was growing up – and God asked Abraham to sacrifice his son on an altar.
- Our self-centered "believe-and-you-will-receive" theology challenges us to imagine what we can obtain for ourselves by faith.
- God may be asking us to give things up.
- We may see dreams die and visions fail.
- Our faith may require us to be willing to give up the thing or the person in our life that we love the most.
- That was the case with Abraham.
- This kind of thing is not fun.
- It's heartbreaking, isn't it?
- Resurrections are always preceded by deaths.
- The prettiest deaths are still ugly.
- But resurrections are always beautiful.
- Resurrections always get the last word.
- Is there anything in your life that you simply have to let die?
- Any hope, any dream, any aspiration?
- God may want you to exchange something for a hope a, a dream, an aspiration – or a life that lasts forever.

- Think about it:
- God-given, eternal hopes and dreams that never, ever die – that are unfailingly tied to our own eternal life – must certainly be absolutely, utterly fantastic beyond our wildest imaginations.
- On those terms, is sacrifice really such a big deal?

Faith makes us look past ourselves. 11:20-22

- Isaac, Jacob and Joseph each died knowing that God made promises that were only going to be fulfilled in future generations.
- Our culture trains us to live for the present.
- The future is too hard to see.
- We have hearts “trained in covetous practices” (2 Peter 2:14).
- We want it all and we want it now.

- Egypt was the superpower in the time of the biblical patriarchs.
- It is still famous today for its huge monuments and amazingly lavish tombs.
- Joseph had become a great man in Egypt.
- He could have been remembered as the hero that saved the nation from famine.

- Listen to how the book of Genesis ends.
 - See Genesis 50:24-26.
- Joseph was looking forward to his own resurrection.
- He didn’t want to rise at the last day from a pagan Egyptian tomb.
- He wanted to rise in the land of the promise.
- And he will.

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Hebrews 11:8-22 Conclusions

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- You may not enjoy the uncertainty that you face in this life.
- God may be giving you a chance to exercise your faith.

- You may wish your life looked more impressive to others than it does.
- God is looking at your obedient trust and not at your outward impressiveness.

- You may feel that the obstacles you face are impossible.
- Jesus said, “All things are possible to him who believes.” (Mark 9:23)

- You may be tempted to look back to previous “good times” in your life rather than move forward in your walk with the Lord.
- You are welcome to do so, but according to Jesus, that may have absolutely nothing in common with the life of faith.

- You may feel that your faith is requiring you to give up too much. Sacrifice is hard.
- But we are looking forward to the eternal, glorious city that God has prepared – and a life there that will be better than anything we have to give up in this life.

- You may be tempted to follow the example of all the self-focused, short-sighted people around you.
- And we all know that you are surrounded by self-focused, short-sighted people.
- That’s what the world is full of.
- God is calling you to live your life as an example to – and for the benefit of – future generations.

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