

Hebrews 11.1-12.2—By Faith We Desire a Better Homecoming—a Heavenly One

I. Introduction

- a. Welcome to Homecoming at Union Hill Baptist Church. This local church was established in 1859 by the grace of God. Its members took up this great endeavor by faith and year by year the church presses on toward that upward call. There have been many who have gone before us and by God's grace, many will continue on by faith to be a light pointing others to Jesus, the Author and Perfector of our faith.
- b. We assemble on this Lord's Day in the year 2022, some 163 years later, to look back *and* to look forward. We will look back over the previous year with a letter in the service after lunch and we will look forward beyond what is ahead of us. We must look beyond so that we might endure the race marked out for us.
- c. I hope this look at Hebrews 11 will motivate us to do Hebrews 12:1-2. We are still in the race and we need to set our eyes on the Jesus—the prize! For when we do, an abundance of gifts come with him!
- d. If the writer of Hebrews thought it necessary through the inspiration of the Holy Spirit to give this cloud of witnesses to show how many before us lived by faith, then it seems necessary that we all need to be reminded of what this looks like. I know that I needed it this week.

II. Main Point

- a. The main point is easy to see. God's people live by faith in Jesus Christ, the Author and Perfector of our faith.

III. Outline

- a. A definition of Faith
- b. Four Lists of those who lived by faith
- c. The Response: Let us Lay Aside and Let us Run Looking to Jesus

IV. Exposition

- a. The author of Hebrews begins this chapter by defining what faith is, first.
 - i. If I were able to hold up this word faith in front of you, I would liken it to a diamond and as I turn it you would see multiple beauties.
 1. The author of Hebrews doesn't tell us everything he sees on the diamond but he does tell us what we need to know in order to understand what he is about to say. To tell us more would hinder our understanding.
 2. Rather, he fills our mind with a few of the beauties that we might carry them with us on this journey through the Hall of Faith.
 - ii. First, he says that faith is the assurance or faith is being sure of things hoped for.
 1. Life has more than one reality.
 - a. There's more than one reality in our lives. There's more to life than _____. You fill in the blank.
 - b. Faith is certain of other things.
 - i. And these things are not equal to or less than the reality that you live in now. They are not worse things or a reality you know nothing about.
 - ii. In fact, they are things that we should be looking forward to. Things that are better.
 - iii. Second, faith is the evidence of things not seen.
 1. The reality you live in everyday can be seen.
 - a. Many of the elements of this world are visible.
 - b. Many of them are also temporary.
 2. If faith is the evidence of other realities, then it's saying that these realities are objective realities not subjective.
 - a. To be subjective would be like saying I feel like they are real but I can't know for sure.

- b. So, how is faith evidence...objective evidence for things not seen? If you can't see them, how do you prove that?
 - c. Verse 3 illustrates this by saying, (Heb. 11:3) By faith we understand that the universe was created by the word of God
 - i. We understand that what we see, the physical world, was created by the word of God.
 - 1. You cannot see spoken words. So, what we can see was created by something we did not see and cannot see.
 - 2. How's that proof? Turn to (Rom. 1:19-20) ¹⁹ For what can be known about God is plain to them, because God has shown it to them. ²⁰ For his invisible attributes, namely, his eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly perceived, ever since the creation of the world, in the things that have been made.
 - 3. We must conclude with the writer of Hebrews that faith is the evidence of things not seen. We all see the evidence in creation. Some gladly submit to the truth while others suppress the truth.
 - iv. We skipped v. 2 and we need it in our toolbox to understand the rest of this chapter.
 - 1. It says (my translation): because by it...by faith...the people of old were testified of.
 - a. God bore witness to their faith. He got on the witness stand and put his name on the line by commending that they indeed had faith.
 - 2. This whole section is sort set off by two bookends. God bore witness of their faith in v. 2 and v. 39 which speaks of all the examples we will now look at.
 - v. We need to look forward to other realities with sure evidence even though we cannot see them. And if you are struggling to do that, maybe seeing others that have done that will encourage you to do so.
- b. The author has traveled all the way back to Genesis to begin his list of examples. There are four separate lists all tied together with the words—by faith.
 - i. Was there something going on with the people to whom this letter was written to?
 - 1. Sure. Always! They are people just like me and you.
 - a. The other places the author speaks about faith is accompanied with the exhortation not to be sluggish...not to shrink back...not to disobey. (4:2; 6:1; 10:22, 38, 39; 12:2; 13:7)
 - b. Secondly, they were suffering too, like many in this list. Turn back to chapter 10 verse 34. (Heb. 10:34) For you had compassion on those in prison, and you joyfully accepted the plundering of your property, since you knew that you yourselves had a better possession and an abiding one.
 - c. Their present temptations and sufferings needed to bask in the beauty of a lives lived by faith.
 - ii. How to think about these stories.
 - 1. What you need to pay attention to in these stories is that these people were doing things by faith. The emphasis is on their faith but their faith was at work!
 - a. It's like when you don't want to be at work 5 minutes after arriving and you endure the work day by remembering the 5 o'clock is coming.
 - i. We do not avoid the realities of life by looking ahead to the end.
 - ii. People who try not to think about the realities of life usually are not looking ahead either.
 - 1. When you put up walls to keep yourself from thinking about difficult present realities, that same wall keeps out the thoughts

of what is to come. You don't get to choose which thoughts you keep out. Walls don't work like that.

- iii. The people in these stories do not--not think about the difficulties of life. They see the seen things and look to the unseen things.
- iii. By the assurance of things looked forward to and the evidence of things not seen, Abel offered a sacrifice to God.
 1. Gen. 4 explains that he and his brother Cain offer a sacrifice to God. Both are appropriate sacrifices but neither are acceptable or pleasing without faith.
 2. The difference is faith. Offering the sacrifice by faith makes it pleasing to God. NO faith, God is not pleased.
 3. The story of Abel is very short. Yet, through his faith though he is dead, he still speaks. Why? Because he was a man of faith. He offered a sacrifice to God by faith. That's it.
 - a. In other words, his faith still speaks to God even though he's dead. That means God is still pleased with him.
- iv. The next story is about Enoch.
 1. If you were to turn to Gen 5, you would see the brief account of Enoch listed in a genealogy.
 - a. The repetition makes it easy to spot the difference. Each person is named and they fathered so and so at some age and they had so and so many sons and daughters and they lived to this age and they died.
 - b. When you get to Enoch, it says something different. (Gen. 5:21-24) ²¹ When Enoch had lived 65 years, he fathered Methuselah. ²² Enoch walked with God after he fathered Methuselah 300 years and had other sons and daughters. ²³ Thus all the days of Enoch were 365 years. ²⁴ Enoch walked with God, and he was not, for God took him.
 - c. He didn't die! Why? He walked with God in this life and therefore walked with him in the next! He is pleasing to God because he had faith.
- v. Now Noah.
 1. Remember the definition of faith. It says in v. 7 that Noah, being warned by God concerning events as yet unseen, constructed an ark by faith.
 2. If I were to warn you as the book of Hebrews does quite frequently, would you respond by faith?
 3. It is appointed for man to die once and then the judgment which is an event as yet unseen. Will you get in Christ for the saving of your soul?
- vi. All of these men are considered righteous, men who walked with God and men who were pleasing because of their faith. Does that describe you?
 1. (Heb. 11:6) without faith it is impossible to please him, for whoever would draw near to God must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who seek him.
- vii. Let's look at Abraham now
 1. By faith, he obeyed.
 - a. Called to go to an unseen place
 - b. Promised an unseen inheritance
 2. By faith, he went.
 - a. Living in the land of promise...don't miss this...as in a foreign land. Living in tents (temporary dwellings).
 - b. For he was looking forward...remember...assurance of things that he was looking forward to...why's he not satisfied with what he can see? Because the promised land was pointing to an unseen reality.

- i. He wants a city that has foundations whose designer and builder is God!
Tents do not have foundations.
 - ii. This is a man who saw his present reality and looked forward to an unseen reality—the City of God!
 - viii. Let's keep seeing these. Skip down to vv. 13 and 14.
 - 1. I think "these all died" means Abraham, Sarah, Isaac, and Jacob. It says they all died IN FAITH having not received the things promised.
 - a. That means the promised land was pointing to another land...and unseen land...but notice...they lived in the promised land in v. 13 acknowledging that they were strangers and exiles.
 - b. What? Wow! Look at v. 14--(Heb. 11:14-16) ¹⁴ For people who speak thus make it clear that they are seeking a homeland. ¹⁵ If they had been thinking of that land from which they had gone out, they would have had opportunity to return. ¹⁶ But as it is, they desire a better country, that is, a heavenly one.
 - c. While living as strangers in the land, they longed for an unseen land...a better land...a heavenly one!
 - 2. Listen, if you think this land, we live in is paradise, you are fooling yourself! We are strangers here. Our citizenship is in heaven!
 - a. Friends, I want to hear these words from my heavenly Father because by faith I live here as a sojourner who is just passing through knowing this place is just temporary—the city of man—but longing for the city of God.
 - b. (Heb. 11:16) Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God, for he has prepared for them a city.
 - c. If you are not looking forward to beholding God, to the reward, to that heavenly land then you are not pleasing to the Lord.
 - ix. The next section concerning Moses, begins to be more clear about the present reality of the seen world we too live in.
 - 1. I wish I had time to walk through every detail but let it suffice to see what Moses chose by faith.
 - 2. Notice there in v. 24--(Heb. 11:24-26) ²⁴ By faith Moses, when he was grown up, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter, ²⁵ choosing rather to be mistreated with the people of God than to enjoy the fleeting pleasures of sin. ²⁶ He considered the reproach of Christ greater wealth than the treasures of Egypt, for he was looking to the reward.
 - a. How does one fight the pleasures of sin now? By longing for the eternal pleasures that are to come!
 - b. Faith isn't satisfied with the things of this world. Moses did not deny the realities of it but rather chose to be mistreated with the people of God for an eternity of joy with THE ONLY KING!
 - i. Which did Moses consider as more valuable? The treasure of Egypt or the reproach of Christ?
 - ii. It doesn't make sense if he doesn't see with the eye of faith something greater! It doesn't make sense if there is no proof of those things that he cannot see.
 - iii. He looked around and was honest about the world he lived in.
 - 1. That's it? Is this all this world has to offer? It's rubbish compared to what he will have forever!
 - x. As it says in v. 32. Time will not allow me to tell of more.
 - 1. A quick summary that we need not miss.

2. What do you see in this seen world?

- a. There in v. 33 they see wars with kingdoms, injustices, lions that want to kill them, fires that want to destroy, swords that want to kill, weaknesses yet by faith they WERE made strong!
- b. Some were tortured, refusing to accept release. Why????
 - i. Some of the women received back their dead by resurrection.
 - ii. Why not avoid torture?
 - 1. SO THAT (Heb. 11:35) they might obtain a better resurrection
 - iii. When by faith you look for the better country, the city of God, the heavenly city, the heavenly eternal reward, the better resurrection not one for which you will die again...
 - iv. You can suffer mocking and floggings...even chains and imprisonment. 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—OF WHOM THE WORLD WAS NOT WORTHY—wandering about in deserts and mountains, and in dens and caves of the earth.
- xi. May we be a “People who risk property and life in order to bring the love of God to others. People who do not look for comforts and ease and security as a necessary thing in life. People who are free from the American dream. People who know there is one life to live and only what's done in the name of Christ and for the eternal good of others will count in the end.” (Piper)

V. Response

- a. The first two verses of chapter 12 tell us what to do in light of chapter 11.
 - i. (Heb. 12:1-2) Therefore (here's how we should respond) since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight, and sin which clings so closely, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, ² looking to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God.
 - ii. Every person in this room has things for which they need to change and repent of.
 - 1. If you are not running it may be that you have too much on your plate. The bible says to lay it aside that which is keeping you from running the race with endurance.
 - 2. If you are not running it may be that you have sin in your life that needs to be brought to the Advocate who will forgive you and cleanse you from all unrighteousness.
 - 3. If you are not running the race you may be somehow blind to the realities of this world. Instead of looking to Jesus, you are looking at your stuff. All of your stuff will be gone.
 - iii. Do you want to be where Jesus is? You must finish the race marked out for you and you do that by faith and Jesus is the Founder and Perfecter
 - iv. Jesus is the ultimate example. For the joy set before him, he endured the cross, despising the shame, and is now seated at the right hand of the throne of God.