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**Sermon for Pentecost 9**  
August 7, 2022

## Heroes of the Faith

### Hebrews 11:1–16

<sup>1</sup> Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen. <sup>2</sup> For by it the people of old received their commendation. <sup>3</sup> By faith we understand that the universe was created by the word of God, so that what is seen was not made out of things that are visible.

<sup>4</sup> By faith Abel offered to God a more acceptable sacrifice than Cain, through which he was commended as righteous, God commending him by accepting his gifts. And through his faith, though he died, he still speaks. <sup>5</sup> By faith Enoch was taken up so that he should not see death, and he was not found, because God had taken him. Now before he was taken he was commended as having pleased God. <sup>6</sup> And 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. <sup>7</sup> By faith Noah, being warned by God concerning events as yet unseen, in reverent fear constructed an ark for the saving of his household. By this he condemned the world and became an heir of the righteousness that comes by faith.

<sup>8</sup> By faith Abraham obeyed when he was called to go out to a place that he was to receive as an inheritance. And he went out, not knowing where he was going. <sup>9</sup> By faith he went to live in the land of promise, as in a foreign land, living in tents with Isaac and Jacob, heirs with him of the same promise. <sup>10</sup> For he was looking forward to the city that has foundations, whose designer and builder is God. <sup>11</sup> By faith Sarah herself received power to conceive, even when she was past the age, since she considered him faithful who had promised. <sup>12</sup> Therefore from one man, and him as good as dead, were born descendants as many as the stars of heaven and as many as the innumerable grains of sand by the seashore.

<sup>13</sup> These all died in faith, not having received the things promised, but having seen them and greeted them from afar, and having acknowledged that they were strangers and exiles on the earth. <sup>14</sup> For people who speak thus make it clear that they are seeking a homeland. <sup>15</sup> If they had been thinking of that land from which they had gone out, they would have had opportunity to return. <sup>16</sup> But as it is, they desire a better country, that is, a heavenly one. Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God, for he has prepared for them a city.

Abraham never wore tights or a cape, he never carried a badge, served in the military, or worked in a hospital, yet, he is often referred to as a hero. Hebrews chapter 11 has been considered by many to contain a listing of the Heroes of the Faith. Each of the ones mentioned in this chapter received a commendation from God. Not only did they



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testify about Him, He testified about them, that through faith in Him, they found favor in His eyes.

Today's Epistle includes only part of that list, beginning with the primeval heroes: Abel, Enoch, and Noah,<sup>1</sup> and concluding with the father of nations, Abraham. Each of these believed God's promises, acted on them in faith, and through faith saw what to the eyes of flesh remained unseen. But there is one entry in this list which is unnamed, except by a simple pronoun. We'll reveal who this is a little later, but for now, we'll let the mystery stand and consider those whose names the Writer sets before us.

The Writer to the Hebrews – whose identity is also a mystery – begins his list of the Heroes of the Faith with Abel. Abel was the second human to be born; his brother Cain was the first. Cain murdered Abel when he became angry that Abel's sacrifice was accepted by God, whereas his own was not. Why was Abel's sacrifice acceptable to God? The Writer notes that it was given in faith; therefore, it was more acceptable. God commended him as righteous on account of his faith. The fact that he was murdered for this makes him the first martyr to die for the faith.<sup>2</sup>

The second person in our list is Enoch. In contrast to Abel, who was the first martyr, Enoch never died, but was transferred directly into the presence of God.<sup>3</sup> Scripture says that Enoch "walked with God" (Gen. 5:22, 24), meaning that his life was pleasing to God for its faithfulness to God's will and purpose.<sup>4</sup>

The Writer next mentions Noah. Moses tells us that God considered Noah righteous and blameless on account of his faith. Like Enoch, Noah walked with God (Gen. 6:9).

God spoke prophetically to Noah about things no one could imagine. We *know* about the Flood, yet it's impossible for us to conceive the enormity of it. The whole planet was covered in water to the highest peaks! Every land animal died, every single human being died . . . except those who entered the Ark – the animals God sent to Noah, and Noah's immediate family: his wife, his sons, and their wives. Who could have believed that something like this would happen? Noah believed. The Ark was evidence of his faith. Noah believed God and put his faith into action.<sup>5</sup>

Now we come to Abraham. Abraham's faith is seen in a number of instances. First of all, consider Abraham's call to leave his homeland for a destination unknown to him. God just said, "Go until I tell you to stop." The Writer tells us that Abraham would receive that land as an inheritance. Now, an inheritance is a promise of future blessing. Abraham believed the promise, and on the strength of the One promising, he left his homeland and headed for he knew not where.<sup>6</sup>

Abraham's faith was further shown in the conception and birth of Isaac, the child of promise. Though impossible by human standards – Abraham was 100 years old and Sarah was 90, well beyond childbearing years, even for that time – still, Abraham believed God on account of God's history with Him; God had *never* disappointed him. And, again,



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God was faithful to fulfill His promise, even though it took many years to come to fruition. Isaac was eventually conceived, but the power of conception did not come from Abraham's body; it came from God's Word, which creates life when and where He chooses. So, Abraham's faith was both active in obedience and confident in the creative Word of God.

Now, the Writer draws attention to an apparent contradiction: these Heroes of the Faith departed this world without receiving things that were promised to them. Abel had been accepted by God, but it wasn't long before his brother killed him. Even though Enoch escaped death, his time in this world was short in comparison to others at the time. He lived 365 years, but his son, Methuselah, lived almost 1,000! Abraham and Sarah did finally have a son, but they never had a permanent home in the Promised Land, living instead in tents like foreigners.

But, you see, those who died died *in faith*, because by faith they saw that God's promises extended beyond this world into His eternal kingdom, which was theirs on account of God's promises. By faith, Abraham understood that God's promise included earthly land (which his descendants did eventually come to possess), but also the Promised Land of heaven, his eternal inheritance. All these Heroes of the Faith saw what was as yet invisible, seeing what was yet unseen; they believed, and God credited it to them as righteousness.

So much for the Heroes in our text . . . almost. If you recall, I mentioned earlier that there is another Hero spoken of by the Writer, though referred to only by a pronoun. It's time now to unmask this mysterious hero.

Consider again the opening words of the chapter: "Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen. For by it the people of old received their commendation." So far, we've talked about those people of old: Abel, Enoch, Noah, and Abraham. But listen to what the Writer says next: "By faith we understand that the universe was created by the word of God, so that what is seen was not made out of things that are visible." Do you see? We who have faith in God's promises, we who understand by the power of His Spirit that He has created all things by His Word, we who recognize by His grace that He has authority over all things, visible and invisible, we are counted by God – we are *attested* by God – to be among the Heroes of the Faith. *You*, dear brother, *you*, dear sister, if you have faith in God through His Son, Jesus Christ, *you* are in company with the likes of Abel, Enoch, Noah, and Abraham!

Maybe you wouldn't classify yourself as a Hero of the Faith; maybe you're just glad to *have* the Faith. Amen to that. But what does that mean? What does it mean to a person of the Faith?

Taking our cue from those Heroes in our text, to be a person of the Faith is to believe in what is unseen simply because of the promises of God. To be a person of the



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Faith is to trust in God's promise when the promise is all you have. To be a person of the Faith is to remember God's track record, especially the salvation He accomplished through the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus.

Maybe you don't feel like any kind of hero. Maybe you've struggled in your faith. Maybe there are circumstances in your life that make you wonder if God really does fulfill His promises. Maybe you've been waiting for years for God to answer your prayers – expecting, hoping, *longing* for God to make the unseen visible to you. It's precisely for you and those like you that God has given words such as those in this chapter from the Letter to the Hebrews, for here He gives example after example of outlandish promises that He fulfilled and He uses them to encourage and strengthen our faith.

Listen: ultimately, it's God who is the real Hero of the Faith, isn't it. Abel, Enoch, Noah, Abraham . . . none of them were perfect, and neither are you. But God is. He never fails. He can be relied upon completely. Cape or no cape, He always comes through in the end, especially at the end of your sojourn in this foreign land. For, like Abraham, you live in a temporary dwelling, an "earthly tent," Paul calls it. We long – do we not? – "to put on our heavenly dwelling." One day, that part of us that is mortal will "be swallowed up by life" and we will be raised and transported to that heavenly country by Him "who has prepared us for this very thing" [2 Cor. 5:1-5].

Therefore, beloved, walk by faith as did those saints of old – faith in the God who saves. And "let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for he who promised is faithful" (Heb. 10:23). Praise be to God! In the name of the Father and of the + Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen

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1. The first three each represent a type of Christ.
  2. Abel is a type of Christ – a foreshadowing of Jesus – because, like Christ, he offered a righteous sacrifice that was accepted by God. St. Paul writes in Romans that Jesus "was declared to be the Son of God . . . by his resurrection from the dead" (Rom. 1:4). The resurrection is proof enough that God accepted Christ's offering for sin on the cross.
  3. Enoch's ascension into heaven foreshadows the Ascension of Our Lord.
  4. By faith Abel was declared righteous, by faith Enoch pleased God. The Writer draws a couple of important conclusions from this, the first being that faith is required if we are to please God. He rightly observes that if one is to approach God, he must believe that God exists. But simply believing there is a God isn't faith. A person could believe in a vengeful, angry God. That's not faith. Who would dare to approach a God like that? Faith trusts that the God who is is a



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merciful, gracious God, a God who rewards those who diligently seek Him.

5. Noah and his family were the first to be saved on account of the righteousness that comes by faith.
6. Though the Land of Canaan was given to Abraham by God, he lived, as the Writer tells us, as an alien, as in a foreign land, living in temporary lodgings, dwelling in tents. Is this any way for a landowner to live in his own land? But, you see, Abraham understood that the inheritance he was to receive was more than a chunk of farmland (earth); it was a city whose foundations were designed and built by God (heaven). Abraham looked forward to a place beyond this world, for all things of earth are temporary. We have here no lasting city, but we seek the city that is to come (Heb. 13:14), the heavenly Jerusalem (Heb. 12:22). In this promise Abraham believed, for Abraham had faith in this God.