

Faith: Building Our Lives on Gospel Promise

As Christians, we celebrate and exult in Jesus as our Prophet, Priest, and King made possible through his death and resurrection. As our Prophet, he speaks to us; as our Priest, he listens to us; as our King, he cultivates and protects us. This is what the book of Hebrews is all about.

Those addressed in Hebrews were experiencing significant struggles and pain. As Christians, they were robbed, imprisoned, and abused because of their faith in Jesus. For some in this community, they simply could not endure such heartache, so they began to retreat back to their former Judaism. This provided the backdrop for an early church leader to articulate the Gospel to them in a very pointed way.

Hebrews 1:1-4 Long ago, at many times and in many ways, God spoke to our fathers by the prophets, 2 but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed the heir of all things, through whom also he created the world. 3 He is the radiance of the glory of God and the exact imprint of his nature, and he upholds the universe by the word of his power. After making purification for sins, he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high, 4 having become as much superior to angels as the name he has inherited is more excellent than theirs.

Hebrews 12:22-25 But you have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to innumerable angels in festal gathering, 23 and to the assembly of the firstborn who are enrolled in heaven, and to God, the judge of all, and to the spirits of the righteous made perfect, 24 and to Jesus, the mediator of a new covenant, and to the sprinkled blood that speaks a better word than the blood of Abel. 25 See that you do not refuse him who is speaking. For if they did not escape when they refused him who warned them on earth, much less will we escape if we reject him who warns from heaven.

Hebrews in a sentence:

Seated as the King of the Universe, Jesus continues to mediate his Gospel words to us.

Big Idea: Gospel faith causes God's people to persevere.

I. What is Faith? (Hebrews 11:1-3)

Hebrews 11:1-3,6 Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen. 2 For by it the people of old received their commendation. 3 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. 6 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.

"Faith is the resting of the heart on God." - William Ames

"Now we shall possess a right definition of faith if we call it a firm and certain knowledge of God's benevolence toward us, founded upon the truth of the freely given promise in Christ, both revealed to our minds and sealed upon our hearts through the Holy Spirit". – John Calvin

- promises from God reveal his commitment to us and our well-being and, thus, they should dictate our expectations
- promises from God are wholly dependent upon his ability to accomplish what he intends
- when we doubt his promises, we are either questioning God's commitment to us (love) or his ability to accomplish (power)
- we often doubt God because we misinterpret what God has promised and have built the wrong expectations – this is what causes us to worry, to fear, to get angry, or to disengage
- the excessiveness & extravagance of Gospel promises come from situations in which God is stacking that odds against us so that we he delivers, he gets the glory

II. What does faith look like? (Hebrews 11:4-40)

In verse 2, the author shows with the use of "for" that he developed his definition of faith based upon the observation that people of old were commended by their faith: "For by it the people of old received their commendation." Thus, in verses 4-38 he provides specific examples – this has become our "hall of faith" chapter. He starts in Genesis and barely gets out of the Pentateuch before the examples can no longer be named and he must simply give an overview of suffering in the rest of the Bible.

Along the way, the author provides two summaries of such faith exploits:

Hebrews 11:13-16 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. 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. Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God, for he has prepared for them a city.

Hebrews 11:39-40 And all these, though commended through their faith, did not receive what was promised, 40 since God had provided something better for us, that apart from us they should not be made perfect.

In these two summaries, he points to the obvious fact: *they all died before they received the promise*. So what does that mean?
- they considered themselves exiles (they had Gospel expectations – completion beyond death)
- we are included in the line of faith (if they completion had come, we wouldn't be here)

III. Jesus-centered faith (Hebrews 12:1-4)

Hebrews 12:1-4 Therefore, 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. 3 Consider him who endured from sinners such hostility against himself, so that you may not grow weary or fainthearted. 4 In your struggle against sin you have not yet resisted to the point of shedding your blood.

EXHORTATION: "let us run with endurance the race that is set before us" (vs. 1)

MANNER 1: "laying aside every weight, and sin which clings so closely" – this is repentance (vs. 1)

MANNER 2: "looking to Jesus" – this is faith (vs. 2)

Jesus is the creator of faith, object of faith, and the model of faith.

The sweetness of promise overcame all temptation and caused him to endure.

The suffering of Jesus can help bring us back into focus – give us true perspective.

COMMENT: "In your struggle against sin you have not yet resisted to the point of shedding your blood." - our pain and suffering could never match the pain and suffering of God (argument from the lesser to the greater)

"As a response to his presence and promises, God calls his people to trust and hope in Him alone even in the midst of circumstances that cause his power and word into question. Under God's sovereignty, the suffering of His people thus becomes part of God's gracious will, through which their faith is purified, their hope is strengthened, and the glory of God is made known to the world. We therefore conclude that endurance in the midst of suffering, not success, health, or wealth, is the mark of a genuine Christian life. Furthermore, this side of Christ's return, it is faith and hope in the midst of suffering, not miraculous deliverance from it, that display most clearly the all-sufficiency of God to a despairing world. In a word, believers are saved in hope, to the glory of God." - Scott Hafemann

Do you have the right expectations under Jesus in this life? Why do we have a hard time expecting pain? Why don't we want pain in our lives? What actually hurts the most – our pain/struggle or the reality that we are not getting our way?

Where do you find refuge when we suffer?

Do you get bitter or angry with God when things don't seem to go your way? Have you ever considered that maybe God is disciplining you and refining you?

Stresses, troubles, and pain cause us to doubt these realities. Why? It is because we want deliverance from such things now. We even think that we since we are Christians, or Americans, or both, that we don't deserve pain any more, and therefore we don't expect it. So when pain comes, we are ready to discard Jesus, saying "He didn't work for me" and go back to our idols. This is why Christians need to constantly hear the Gospel, so that we keep our expectations in sync with Jesus.

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