

Hebrews 11:8-22 // Persevere With the Perfect Priest

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Preacher: Michael Reader-Harris

[0 : 00] 1,209 in the church Bibles. Hebrews chapter 11. Beginning at verse 8.!

By faith Abraham, when called to go to a place he would later receive as his inheritance, obeyed! and went, even though he did not know where he was going. By faith he made his hope to go home in the promised land like a stranger in a foreign country. He lived in tents, as did Isaac and Jacob, who were heirs with him of the same promise. But he was looking forward to the city with foundations, whose architect and builder is God. And by faith even Sarah, who was past childbearing age, was enabled to bear children because she considered him faithful who had made the promise. And so from this one man, and he as good as dead, came descendants as numerous as the stars in the sky and as countless as the sand on the seashore.

All these people were still living by faith when they died. They did not receive the things promised. They only saw them and welcomed them from a distance, admitting that they were foreigners and strangers on earth. People who say such things show that they are looking for a country of their own. If they'd been thinking of the country they'd left, they would have had opportunity to return. Instead, they were looking for a better country, a heavenly one. Therefore, God is not ashamed to be called their God, for he has prepared a city for them. By faith, Abraham, when God tested him, offered Isaac as a sacrifice. He who had embraced the promises was about to sacrifice his one and only son, even though God had said to him, it's through Isaac that your offspring will be reckoned. Abraham reasoned that God could even raise the dead. And so, in a manner of speaking, he did receive Isaac back from the dead. By faith, Isaac blessed Jacob and Esau in regard to their future. By faith, Jacob, when he was dying, blessed each of Joseph's sons and worshipped as he leaned on the top of his staff. By faith, Joseph, when his end was near, spoke about the exodus of the Israelites from Egypt and gave instructions concerning the burial of his bones. This is the word of the Lord.

Let's pray as we sit. May the words of my lips and the meditations of all our hearts be now and always acceptable in your sight, O Lord, our strength and our Redeemer. Amen.

[3 : 16] Well, we're now coming towards the end of Hebrews, and I'm going to put up on the screen a structure diagram of the middle two-thirds of Hebrews. This is the one that was used last week, which is where I'm starting. And so, we're now in the section with the green tick that follows the main central section about Jesus the priest. And now, on top of that, I'm going to project what I think are the two sentences, which I think are key. And you can see them there, quite small print.

But I think that in these two sections, either side of the central one, the two sections that call us to approach God boldly, we have in Hebrews 10.36, that's the one on the right, you need to persevere so that when you've done the will of God, you will receive what he has promised.

Or in 4.14, therefore, since we have a great high priest who has ascended into heaven, Jesus, the Son of God, let us hold firmly to the faith we profess. So, these are the two calls to approach the throne of grace, to stick with Jesus, to stick with him as our priest, and to persevere.

The instruction is, don't turn back to Jewish priests and ritual, persevere with the perfect priest. But what does that look like? Outside the middle section, we have two very important sections that give examples of what perseverance, what faith looks like. Chapter 11, which we're in now, looks at examples of faith, essentially ones of perseverance. And we're going to look at some examples tonight.

Chapters 3 and 4, which we did quite a long time ago now, talk about examples of lack of perseverance. They're ones that talk about how people wandered. So, tonight we're on keep going, persevere, follow Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Joseph, Sarah. Don't be like those in the wilderness who

wandered off.

[6 : 01] We'll think a little bit more about that later. So, tonight we've got, as I said, five examples, really. And I guess the first three of those are usually referred to as the patriarchs.

Patriarchs have a bad name sometimes these days. But patriarchs are male rulers of tribes. But in the Bible, the patriarchs are the first leaders of God's people.

They are Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. And they're all people of faith, which was defined in verse 1 of our chapter as confidence in what we hope for and assurance about what we do not see.

And that definition of faith is very important because the temptation for the readers of this letter, the receivers of it, was to turn back to the more visible rituals of Judaism rather than trust the perfect priest enthroned in heaven.

If you go back to those people in chapters 3 and 4, the ones who are the wilderness wanderers who are the example of what not to do, they were tempted to lose confidence in God, to go back to Egypt, which they knew, and to miss out on what God had for them over the horizon in the Promised Land.

[7 : 29] So if we're going to go forward with the patriarchs, what does that look like? What does the patriarch's faith look like?

Well, I think the first thing is that faith looks forward. Now, it's difficult for us almost to imagine what it must have been like for Abraham to be called to go to somewhere that he'd never seen.

At first, he wasn't even told where he was going. He was just told to go. Now, if we were told to go to Canaan or somewhere, we'd Google it and we'd know what it looked like.

We'd have pictures popping up on our screen. There'd be that sort of terrible nightmare that comes that whenever you're doing anything, you get more pictures of the holiday that you only vaguely thought about.

And somehow everyone else knows, or rather the system knows, what you've been thinking about. But Abraham couldn't see any of that. By faith, verse 8, Abraham, when called to go to a place he would later receive as his inheritance, he obeyed and went, even though he didn't know where he was going.

[8 : 41] Sometimes we think of faith as a sort of nice feeling. People say to us, I wish I had faith. But faith in the Bible isn't like that.

It's not just a warm feeling. It involves action in obedience to God's Word. Abraham actually left, and he went, and he lived in tents.

He moved from a proper city to somewhere where he was just in a tent. Verse 9, By faith he made his home in the promised land, like a stranger in a foreign country.

He lived in tents, as did Isaac and Jacob, who were heirs with him of the same promise. Now, I did SU camp, and I camped in a tent for a week, a year, for 25 years.

But at 56, I was really glad it was my last year in a tent. There was a particular reason. Actually, I'd had an injection into my eye, and I was told I wasn't allowed to sleep in a tent.

[9 : 49] So, that really, that was the end of my sleeping in tents for camp. I think my camping to climb Monroe's stopped earlier.

Now, when we go for our hill walking week, we rent a shooting lodge. But the point is that Abraham left the comforts of a proper home for God.

And the writer to the Hebrews says, For he was looking forward to the city with foundations, whose architect and builder is God. Our author tells us that Abraham was looking for an eternal home.

He wasn't just looking for Canaan. In terms of Canaan, he only ever owned a tiny part. I want to come back to that later on. So, Abraham went because he was looking for a land over the horizon. But he wasn't only looking for a land. The promise to him was of a people as well. God had said to him in Genesis 12, verse 2a, I will make you into a great, great nation and I will bless you.

[11 : 05] Now, given Abraham's age, perhaps an age when tents become less attractive, and Sarah, verse 11, was past childbearing age, she, by faith, was enabled to bear children because she considered him faithful who'd made the promise.

It wasn't easy for Abraham to believe. Humanly speaking, it was impossible they'd have children. He was old and Sarah was far too old.

And if we read the story through, we'll see that Abraham had wobbles in his faith. He didn't just plow forward at all times, but I'm not going to explore the whole story of Abraham tonight.

In particular, it was a long wait before he got, before Isaac was born. I actually think people laughed at Abraham when he said he came from Ur.

They probably said, oh, you should go back there. I think they had central heating in her. It was the place to be. And if there'd been a local hospital for Sarah to go to, they would have laughed at her when she got there.

[12:24] When she got there, they said, oh, you don't need maternity. You want geriatrics. You see, there's a contrast between these people who are going forward in faith and those wilderness wanderers, as I call them, who are in chapters three and four.

The ones who set off with Moses, got to the, got part of the way and then said, why did you bring us up out of Egypt to kill us and our children and our livestock with thirst?

They looked back. They thought even the awfulness of Egypt was going to be an improvement.

They didn't trust God and they stopped moving forward.

But Abraham kept going. He kept going with God. He acted in obedience to faith and he even carried on believing when the supreme challenge came.

Verse 17, by faith Abraham when God tested him offered Isaac as a sacrifice. He who had embraced the promises was about to sacrifice his one and only son.

[13:41] Even though God had said to him, it is through Isaac that your offspring will be reckoned. His obedience to God is very impressive.

It's one of the most difficult passages in the Bible to read. But verse 19, Abraham reasoned that God could even raise the dead and so in a manner of speaking he did receive Isaac back from death.

He trusted that somehow God's plan would be worked out that there would be descendants through Isaac. I'm going to go back to verses 13 to 16 at the end but I want to look at the other examples of faith in our passage.

Abraham, example of faith going to the place that God called him. Sarah, example of faith trusting God's word that she would have children.

Verse 20, by faith Isaac blessed Jacob and Esau in regard to their future. Now in some ways seeing Isaac as an example of faith may be an encouragement to us.

[14:55] Isaac in some ways is not a particularly impressive character in the Bible. He did believe in God's purposes for his family. He did have assurance about what he didn't see in that respect but for much of the story he fought against God's plan that Jacob his younger son was the one through whom the people of God should come into being.

He wanted the God's purposes to go through Esau, the older son. He wanted to make him his successor but through the famous story in which Jacob dresses up as Esau so that he would have the chance to receive the blessing by trickery and gets it.

Do you remember those wonderful words? My brother Esau is a hairy man but I am a smooth man says Jacob and then he puts the skins on and becomes briefly a hairy man.

He ends up getting the blessing that Isaac wanted to give to Esau. Isaac says to Jacob may God give you heaven's due and earth's richness.

May nations serve you and peoples bow down to you. Be lord over your brothers and may the sons of your mother bow down to you. So Esau does give the blessing to Jacob.

[16:31] I think that the moment when Esau's actual faith does come into view is at the very end when after he has blessed Jacob Esau turns up and Esau stands before him and Isaac doesn't attempt to undo the blessing.

He accepts finally that that is God's will and his blessing to Esau goes you will live by the sword and you will serve your brother.

Isaac couldn't see with ordinary eyes. That was how he got tricked. But with the eyes of faith he ultimately accepted God's will and played his part in creating a people.

A people that was yet only a handful of people and he trusted in God's purposes. Then more straightforwardly we have Jacob.

verse 21 by faith Jacob when he was dying blessed each of Joseph's sons and worshipped as he leant on the top of his staff. What's the point here?

[17:42] I mean Jacob blessed all his children but the point here is that Jacob is preserving the people. If you remember Joseph had gone down to Egypt if you've seen the well-known musical he'd gone down to Egypt he'd married an Egyptian wife so of course Joseph's sons had an

Egyptian mummy and Jacob is now blessing them that they may be part of God's family.

He has faith that God's purposes of a great family will come to pass and he plays his part in preserving that family. He blesses actually he blesses these children.

And then there's Joseph. If Jacob's concern was particularly about people as I think was Isaac's and Sarah's Joseph were back onto the theme of the land again.

Verse 22 by faith Joseph when his end was near spoke about the exodus of the Israelites from Egypt and gave instruction concerning the burial of his bones.

Now the story of Joseph is of making an amazing success of his life in Egypt. He didn't want to be there. He'd been taken there by Midianites etc.

[19:19] He'd been in prison but in the end he ended up being number two in the whole of Egypt. So he was really important and really special and I don't know enough about pyramids but maybe he could have had a pyramid perhaps a little one for him but instead of getting a pyramid he holds in faith to the vision of the land and the people.

He wants his bones to go back to the promised land. I'll read to you from Genesis chapter 50 in verse 24.

Then Joseph said to his brothers I'm about to die but God will surely come to your aid and take you up out of this land to the land he promised on oath to Abraham Isaac and Jacob.

And then he goes on you must carry my bones up from this place. Joseph trusts that God's promise of a land for his people will come true.

They won't be in Egypt forever. His bones are in a coffin they're not in a pyramid they're available to move and they're able to go with Moses in Exodus 13 verse 19.

[20:41] They're a sign up to that point that Egypt is not the permanent home that God has something better for them. Eventually in Joshua 24 32 Joseph's bones are buried in the promised land in land that Jacob himself had bought.

It's actually the penultimate verse of the whole book of Joshua when it's clear that God's promises have been fulfilled and the land has been attained.

So that promise the bones will end up where Joseph wanted them because God's promise of a land will come true.

So tonight we thought about five people. Their focus was on a land that isn't theirs yet and on a people that only exists in embryo as it were.

They focused their hopes on the future they accepted delays like the one before Isaac's birth. They accepted a side trip to Egypt but knew that God's family must carry on and that God's family must reach the land that God has for them.

[22:04] Verse 13 All these people were still living by faith when they died. That might be a warning for some of the older ones of us that faith involves perseverance.

It wasn't just that they had faith when they were young they kept going to the end. That's been the challenge in the morning as we've been thinking about Solomon. He started well but by the end had wandered off.

There's also the fact that verse 13 or 14 I think it is they didn't receive the things promised.

They only saw them and welcomed them from a distance admitting that they were foreigners and strangers on earth. Faith often involves waiting.

We don't receive everything now. are major things yet to come. Verse 15 If they had been thinking of the country they had left they would have had opportunity to return.

[23:14] That's back to that theme of the wilderness wanderers. They were tempted well here it's the theme of the Hebrews who attempted to go back.

They were tempted to go back to Judaism to leave Jesus. But instead the patriarchs went forward. Verse 16 They were longing for a better country a heavenly one.

Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God for he has prepared a city for them. What the writer is saying is that God is no man's debtor.

As Paul put it what no eye has seen what no ear has heard what no human mind has conceived the things God has prepared for those who love him.

So what about us? How does this relate to us? How do these long ago people affect our lives today? Well I think for us faith is about keeping making the future that we can't see as important and as clear to us as what we can see.

[24 : 25] And I think a good way of seeing that is to think about a land and a people. We want our lives to contribute to bringing a people to the heavenly city.

To bringing them there by evangelism, by hospitality, by giving, by sharing the word. So how do we keep that heavenly vision bright?

Well one way is by meeting together. Here we are this evening. Church at its best is a foretaste of the heavenly home. Here are some of the people with whom we are travelling to the heavenly city. Look round and see them. What can we do for them? How can we help them? on the way? How can we walk together? I think it's important to say that otherworldliness doesn't make us useless. It makes us workers. We actually want to go together. That's that exciting thought. We're on a journey. The wilderness wanderers, they gave up.

[25 : 46] They wanted to go back. we want to go on and we want to go together. Earlier in Hebrews it says, encourage one another daily, as long as it's called today, so that none of you may be hardened by sin's deceitfulness.

The place I go to encourage myself is to look at some of the great hymns about heaven. We're going to have a couple come up on the screen now.

This is what Bernard of Clooney wrote in 1140 as translated by J.M. Neal. Jerusalem the golden with milk and honey blessed beneath thy contemplation sink heart and voice oppressed.

I know not, oh I know not, what social joys are there, what radiancy of glory, what light beyond compare. They stand those halls of Zion conjubilant with song and bright with many an angel and all the martyr throng.

The prince is ever in them, the daylight is serene, the pastures of the blessed are decked in glorious sheen. Look at some of the thoughts that this particular medieval had.

[27 : 03] Social joys, he looked forward to that in heaven. He looked forward to the light. He looked forward to singing. I don't know whether J.M. Neal made up the word conjubilant, but I do like it a lot.

Conjubilant with song. And most importantly, it's being with Jesus. The prince is ever in them. We're all there together. Or if we go on to one more, one more hymn, the next slide, by Thomas the Kempis in the 15th century.

First verse is fairly similar to the thought we had before. Lights abode celestial Salem. Vision whence true peace doth spring. Brighter than the heart can fancy.

Mansion of the highest king. Oh, how glorious are the praises which of thee the prophets sing. But this is about verse 4. And when you get to my age, you like this verse. Oh, how glorious and resplendent fragile body shalt thou be, when endued with so much beauty, full of health and strong and free, full of vigour, full of pleasure, that shall last eternally.

there are lots of other, probably more modern songs that you might choose to look at. But I think that in different ways, meditating about heaven is one of the things that we can do.

[28 : 22] Keeping it bright, and that doesn't mean we just sit otherworldly sort of thinking. What actually happens is that we want to bring everyone else there too with us.

And we're excited about that. and the patriarchs can help to encourage us because they wanted a land and a people, and they went for it.

Let's pray. Heavenly Father, thank you that you have amazing things for your people. Thank you that what no eye has seen, what no ear has heard, what no human mind has conceived, God has prepared for those who love him.

And Father, it's so easy for us to be so concentrated on the things that we can see, the things round about us. But Lord, help us to have eyes of faith.

Help us to walk with you, walk with your people. to the former land. Amen. Amen.