

By It Men of Old Gained Approval

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[0 : 00] You can be turning to Hebrews chapter 10, I'm 11, Hebrews chapter 11.

As we continue our march through the book of Hebrews and see the wonder of what God has done, let me just give you a bit of a review before we get into things here. I want you to remember that the book of Hebrews was written to Jewish Christians who were suffering and being tempted to return to the old covenant ways to find relief from their suffering.

They were suffering because the Romans had conquered them and they didn't have a problem as Jews serving Judaism.

The Romans were all right with that. But as Christians now, who could not worship the false gods in any way, and how I say that, and the Jews couldn't, but the Romans saw the Christians as a threat. And so they started persecuting the Christians. And the Jews said, well, hey, you know, we were Jews before we were Christians and that was God back there. Let's just go back and they won't persecute us anymore.

[1 : 19] And the writer of the book of Hebrews is saying, no, no, no. What God did back there was to lead to where you are.

Don't go back. So the book of Hebrews was written as a sermon to show them that the old covenant was not effective and it was only a shadow that pointed them forward to the real work done by Christ.

Up to this point, we've seen the writer of the book of Hebrews build a case for how Christ and his work in the new covenant is better than the old covenant and what these suffering Hebrew Christians were tempted to go back to.

In other words, it's better than what they were tempted to go back to. Broadly, we could say that Hebrews 1 through 7 told us who Christ is and that Hebrews 8 and 9 told us what Christ has done. Chapter 10 was a culmination of what the writer of the book of Hebrews has been sharing about the work of Christ and begins to turn a corner. That passage summarized and shared with us how Christ was the perfect sacrifice, the only sacrifice that was pleasing.

[2 : 36] And then the last time we looked at the book of Hebrews, we looked at how the writer began to give us the proper response to all that he's been teaching us about Christ.

He commanded us in the end of chapter 10 to hold fast to the confession of our hope and consider how to stir one another up to love and to good works.

So he took this whole argument and began to turn and say, not in opposition, but because of what he says, he says, let's continue.

What Christ has done is so perfect and so right. Let's continue. So the proper response is not to turn away from Christ because of what they're going through.

The proper response is to hold on. But you can almost hear the Hebrew people saying, but we don't see hope.

[3 : 38] We don't see an end of our suffering. We see it as being continual. We see it as being that which will take our lives. And we were safe in the old covenant ways.

We see what we do now as not safe. People are being killed. We're watching loved ones suffer in front of our eyes. We're watching loved ones die for the sake of Christ.

How can we keep going? And so the writer of Hebrews continues into chapter 11. I want to start reading in verse 35 of chapter 10.

He talked about how they had started and they were willing to suffer for Christ. They're beginning to doubt because they don't see the end of it. He tells them to keep going. And then in verse 35, therefore do not throw away your confidence, which has a great reward for you have need of endurance so that when you have done the will of God, you may receive what is promised.

And then he quotes from the Old Testament. For yet a little while and the coming one will come and will not delay. But in the meantime, I'm adding there just so you understand his argument.

[5 : 02] But my righteous one shall live by faith. And if he shrinks back, my soul has no pleasure in him. But we are not of those who shrink back and are destroyed, but of those who have faith and persevere their souls.

Preserve their souls. And now we come to chapter 11. And I'm going to read the whole chapter. And what I want you to get as we go through this is the list of people who are given as examples of those who didn't shrink back, but those who had faith and preserved their souls.

And he's going to explain this and show how it's such a great example. But let's catch the gist.

Remember, this is a sermon. And so what he's saying here, he would not have taken, for instance, Abel in verse 4 and spent a week on Abel and talked about Abel.

And then he would not have come back the next week and spent a week on Enoch and how the things that Enoch did. This is a sermon where he used all these people as an example.

[6 : 29] So hang on as we go through this and watch for the argument that he's making. Hebrews 11. Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen.

For by it, by faith, for by it the people of old received their commendation. 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 invisible.

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. By faith Enoch was taken up so that he should not see death. He was not found because God had taken him.

Now before he was taken, he was commended as having pleased God. 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.

[7 : 47] 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 heir of the righteousness that comes by faith.

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.

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. For he was looking forward to the city that has foundations, whose builder, I'm sorry, whose designer and builder is God.

By faith Sarah herself received power to conceive, even when she was past the age, since she considered him who had promised.

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.

[9 : 00] 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.

For people who speak thus make it clear that they are seeking all land. If they'd been thinking of that land from which they had gone out, they would have had opportunity to return.

But as it is, they desired 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.

By faith Abraham, when he was tested, offered up Isaac. And he who had received the promises was in the act of offering up his only son, of whom it is said, Through Isaac shall your offspring be named.

He considered that God was able even to raise him from the dead, from which, figuratively speaking, he did receive him back. By faith Isaac invoked future blessings on Jacob and Esau.

[10 : 08] By faith Jacob, when dying, blessed each of the sons of Joseph, bowing in worship over the head of his staff. By faith Joseph, at the end of his life, made mention of the exodus of the Israelites and gave direction concerning his bones.

By faith Moses, when he was born, was hidden for three months by his parents because they saw that the child was beautiful and they were not afraid of the king's eating.

By faith Moses, when he was grown up, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter, choosing rather to be mistreated with the people of God than to enjoy the fleeting pleasures of sin.

He considered the reproach of Christ greater wealth than the treasures of Egypt for he was looking to the reward. By faith he left Egypt not being afraid of the anger of the king for he endured as seeing him who is invisible.

By faith he kept the Passover and sprinkled the blood so that the destroyer of the firstborn might not touch them. By faith the people crossed the Red Sea as on dry land.

[11 : 19] But the Egyptians when they attempted to do the same were drowned. By faith the walls of Jericho fell down after they had been encircled for seven days.

By faith Rahab the prostitute did not perish with those who were disobedient because she had given a friendly welcome to the spies. What more shall I say?

For time would fail me to tell of Gideon, Barak, Samson, Jephthah, of David, and Samuel, and the prophets who through faith conquered kingdoms, enforced justice, obtained promises, stopped the mouths of lions, quenched the power of fire, escaped the edge of the sword, were made strong out of weakness, became mighty in war, put foreign armies to flight.

Women received back their dead by resurrection. Some were tortured, refusing to accept release so that they might rise again to a better life. Others suffered mockings and floggings and even chains and imprisonment.

They were stoned. They were sawn in two. They were killed with a sword. They went about in the skins of sheep and goats, destitute, afflicted, mistreated, of whom the world was not worthy.

[12 : 40] Wandering about in deserts and mountains and in dens and caves of the earth. And all these, though commended through their faith, did not receive what was promised, since God had provided something better for us, that apart from us, they should not be made perfect.

Let's pray. Father, I thank you for the example that you have given in this book that is wound through the ages of old covenant history.

And I thank you that there's not a man or a woman here who is great. There is a God who is great. And I thank you that every instance that's here points to the fact that these people trusted a God who was great.

And great things happened. Help us to be people who have faith in this same God. And I pray that you would work in us. May all these examples frequently be brought to mind to convince us to be people who do not turn back but pursue you because we are assured of the things that we can't see and are convinced of these things.

I pray that you would be with us and build in us faith in a great God. And I pray that you would make yourself known today through your word in Jesus' name.

[14 : 22] Amen. Amen. As we look at this chapter we begin he mentions or asks the question or basically I'm asking the question. He answers the question what is faith?

As we look at what's going on here he just defines it. Now it's not the kind of definition we would often think of when we talk about faith. But he defines it because he's going to show how each of these people had faith when there was no reason to have faith.

And it was their trust in God that got things done not their goodness or I'm not going to hold any one of these up and say you need to be like Moses you need to be like Abel you need to be like Cain.

This passage points to the fact that God is a God who honors his promise and these people were enabled by God to be people who trusted in what God said even though they couldn't see it.

And so he starts out by saying faith is putting your confidence in what God says. Let me reread verse 1. Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for and the conviction of things not seen.

[15 : 37] Faith is putting your confidence in what God says whether it be the promises that he makes or the statements of what he declares to be true. Faith is saying that's what God says that's what I'm trusting in even though I don't see how it could happen or where it could be or how any of this could take place.

It's putting your confidence in God in what God says whether it be the promises that he makes or the statement of what he declares is true. Often the promises or statements that he makes have not yet come to pass.

And we can see through this and we're going to look at the examples. We can see this all throughout this. God makes promises and God makes statements to his people that many of them never see the end of.

But faith says even though I don't see the end of it it's true. So let me reread this statement. Often the promises are statements that he makes have not yet come to pass or cannot be seen by human

eyes.

And so the writer of the book of Hebrews reminds us that faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen.

[16:58] Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for. Faith says that the promise of God is so sure that no matter the circumstances what God has promised will certainly come to pass.

And we're going to see evidences of that. He was careful to point out a lot of evidences of that as we go through. So faith says that when God promises something no matter what I can see or can't see no matter how many things are stacked up against what looks to be the way God would answer the problem or fulfill the promise it says it's going to happen.

Why? Because it is a God who says it. It is the God who says it. It is the God who has all wisdom all power all knowledge and is in absolute control.

so faith is the assurance that when God says something he'll do what he says. Faith also is the conviction of things not seen.

Faith says that I can have the conviction that the things that I have not yet seen are true are true because God says they are true. faith says that such thing as heaven is I'm getting my pronouns mixed up.

[18:21] Faith says that such thing as heaven is true because God is true and cannot lie. In verse 3 he uses the example of creation in the creation of the universe.

No one was there to see it. We have the conviction that God created the universe so that what is seen was made was not made by things that are visible.

He uses that as an illustration of how we look back the universe was created. How do we know that God has created it? Well God said that he created it. Now right off before we get into this chapter and before we go through all these examples you might say well you're just about now to build a proposition on blind faith and my answer is no.

And I think every one of these examples points to the fact that the answer is no. This whole chapter uses the dealings of God with those who have gone on before to show that God is true.

He's true to his word so that even today our faith can be an assurance of the things hoped for and a conviction of the things not seen because God has been faithful to his word throughout the millennia.

[19:36] many of the things God has promised have come to pass. Many of the things people have hoped for have come to pass.

And God did that throughout the whole course of history and he does it today. There are things that he's promised that we may never see but there are things that he has promised that we have seen. Just think of the biggest example of this. The biggest example of this comes starting from Genesis 3.15. Speaking to the serpent he says I'm going to send one the seed of the woman who will crush your head and you will but bruise his heel.

basically 4,000 years go by and even as you go through all these promises you can't see until it happens exactly how God could fulfill that promise but he absolutely did.

Christ was born of a virgin he wasn't a sinner. He lived a perfect life so that he could be acceptable before God and he was acceptable but he lived a perfect righteous life for us that we could have righteousness and then he died in our stead and that promise that was made 4,000 years before the birth of Christ before the death of Christ took those 4,000 years to be accomplished but it happened.

[21:17] The promises of God are always fulfilled. so it's not promoting a blind faith he's proved his worthiness his trustworthiness throughout scripture no one has ever gone on blind faith Adam and Eve saw God and could give testimony to their sons God was real and so when Abel came to offer a sacrifice he wasn't going Adam's going son God said it and his faith was built on what was proven to be true I've titled my message today by it men of old gained approval from verse 2 by it men of old gained approval that's verse 2 let me read that it says for by it the people of old received their commendation and I made reference as we are reading it the it in verse 2 refers to faith so it's saying by faith the men of old the people by it the people of old received their commendation for by faith people listed here received their commendation the people listed here did not earn God's favor by the things that they did the people listed below earned

God's favor the people listed below received God's favor by trusting in what God said when they could not see the things they hoped for or the things unseen were yet my sentence makes no sense

to me they were blessed because they trusted in what God had said and God commended them let me go right into the next sentence as we go in here we begin a whole section where he fires off these commendations God commends these people he says they were trusting me they were faithful to me and he does it based on their faith as we jump into verse four by faith Abel offered to God a more acceptable sacrifice than Cain through which he was commended as righteous God determined or God proclaimed that he was righteous so what does

God's commendation look like well Abel could not see the one who would crush Satan under his feet but by faith God commended that he was trusting him that he was righteous because he offered a sacrifice that pointed to the one that was coming who would crush Satan Enoch was shown to be commended by God taking him without dying because he believed that God existed and that God would reward those who seek him in the midst of a whole world who chose to turn from God and would be destroyed in that situation that is the situation just before Genesis 6 5 where God said the wickedness of man is great in the earth and he repented that he had made man on the earth and then he speaks about Noah but in the chronology of time Enoch was taken the year that

Noah entered the ark and what's going on there is that that whole time in the whole earth it got down in the days before Noah entered the ark that it seems as though Enoch and Noah and his family were the only people who believed the promise that God would send one to crush the serpent's head the rest said we will live like we want without God and because Enoch said that without faith is impossible please him he believed that he existed and he believed that God rewarded those who sought him Enoch was said to be a righteous man and so God took him going on Noah was commended by commended by God God would destroy the world with a flood when Noah had never seen rain we see the creeks rise because of the rain we see flood and we've seen a lot of it this year we see the creeks rise and flooding because of rain

Noah had never seen rain the earth was watered by a mist that came out every morning and yet God said at one point I'm going to destroy the earth I'm going to do it by rain and he told Noah that over a hundred years before it came and when Noah heard that he said God has told me to build an ark I've never seen rain I've never seen flood I've never seen the world destroyed because of their wickedness but he obeyed and so God commended Noah for being assured that God would destroy the world of the flood and he built that ark to the saving of his family and the scripture says that his actions condemned the world for not believing the word of God at that point there were potentially billions of people on the earth and eight souls believed the word of

[27 : 10] God how many of us would stand up and serve God if there were only eight of us in a world of seven billion people who said there is no God and he will not destroy the world Abraham goes on to demonstrate the faith that God commends him by he's told to leave his land and go to a land that God would show him and he would inherit that and so he leaves without knowing where that land was or what his inheritance would be and the writer of the book of Hebrews goes on by the things that Abraham said and did to show that he didn't just believe that he would inherit a land in Canaan he believed that he would inherit land or a city built by

God and speaking of heaven scripture points out here and so he leaves leaving behind all that he would have inherited in the land to inherit something that was promised by God even though he couldn't see it he lived in tents in that land he didn't set up house in that land he lived in tents until the land was given to him by God and looking forward to the land that would be his eternal heaven his eternal resting place next it mentions here that Sarah demonstrated faith in coming to believe God's promise of her having a son even though she was 90 years old women don't get pregnant have the strength to carry and bear children at 90 but because Sarah had the assurance to believe that God's word was true she along with Abraham were able to be the descendants that were as many as the stars of heaven and innumerable as the grains of sand it wasn't that they were great people is that they were people who believed steadfastly though they couldn't see in what God had said the passage goes on to say in verse 11 or 13 these all died in faith not having received the these here I believe are Abraham Sarah Isaac Jacob and the 12 sons and their families because those are the people who died without inheriting the land Abraham Sarah Isaac Jacob 12 son all died without seeing the promise to inherit the land be fulfilled and yet they were all assured that even though they did not see it the promise of God was true and at any time they had the opportunity to go back to Abraham's homeland and say forget it I don't believe it I know there's land our family owns there I can have an inheritance left either Egypt to go to Haran where

Abraham was from or Ur of the Chaldees not one of them left Canaan to do it before they went down into Egypt they all died believing

God's giving us this land and then Abraham was commended by God when he promised when the promise of a son to be his heir and the command to kill that heir clashed can you imagine Abraham he struggled so long to have the son that God promised him he struggled in believing and that he came to rest in the fact that God would indeed give him a son that would be the heir of all that God had promised him and then one day God says kill him take him up to the mountain sacrifice him and so Abraham was faced with the dilemma I was promised a son who would inherit I believe he will inherit God has told me to offer that son and sacrifice to him that word is true I have

I'm speaking as if I could be Abraham I have no way of figuring out how that this promise could be true and this promise could be true I can't see it he has he comes to assume that if both promises are true if the promise and the command are true then God must be able to raise my son from the dead because God said he would be the heir and he said he must die and so Abraham was commended when Abraham chose to believe both the promise and the command and and believed since both were true God would have something like would do something like raise Isaac from the dead Abraham believed God even when he could not understand Isaac was commended by God by blessing his sons according to the promise of God even when it did not work out the way he wanted

[32 : 34] Esau but God chose Jacob but he trusted God Jacob was commended for blessing Joseph's sons according to the promise of God rather than the desire of Joseph Joseph said no Jacob blessed this one this one is the older and Jacob had his hands crossed and God commended him for obeying his command rather than following Joseph's refusal Joseph was commended by God for believing that God would bring Israel back to the land of the promise according to God's promise so he said when you go take my bones he didn't see any way that that could happen didn't see when it could happen but when you go take my bones Moses's parents were commended by God for being willing to save Moses in opposition to Pharaoh's command to kill all the male children their trust in God provided the deliverer that

God had promised don't don't know don't know how we're going to save him because that's what God would want Moses was commended by God for choosing to associate with the people of God rather than enjoying the fleeting pleasures of sin for a season I'd rather trust God than enjoy all that the palace had to offer Moses was commended for keeping the Passover believing that God would truly pass over those who were under the sprinkled blood and by that same act kill all the firstborn who were not under that sprinkled blood and by that very act God delivered Israel from Egypt Moses and the people of God were commended for crossing the Red Sea on dry ground because they were assured that

God would hold the water apart as he said he would even though they could not see how or understand how and for that trust God would deliver them from their enemies and their enemies when they attempted to do the same died God commended the people of Israel for trusting that God would make the walls of Jericho fall after circling them for seven days as God had commanded and promised how can circling walls people have tried to save vibration caused an earthquake but they trusted the command of God though they didn't see how it could happen Rahab Rahab was commended by God for giving a friendly welcome to the spies because she believed that God existed and he would reward those who seek him she makes mention of her understanding that God truly had promised this land to the children of

Abraham and so she trusted even though she could not see and then the writer goes on to say and what more shall I say people throughout the Old Testament are listed as those who are assured of what was promised and convinced of what was unseen some saw the answer to the promises some suffered for what they were promised and never saw the answer and we read the list of all the things that happened some died some lived some saw their children but they trusted even though they couldn't see though some saw what God promised for that day for their day this is the end of the passage and this is so sweet though some saw what God promised for their day none of them saw what it was ultimately promised Abraham didn't see the land become his families but some did Joseph never saw the land of

Canaan but some did and the promises abound some saw the walls of Jericho fall some saw promises that at first they couldn't understand how it happened but there was one promise that lived through the whole period that none of them saw all them died assured that the promise that the one

who had crushed the serpent's head that one would come but until Christ was born lived and died on the cross not one of those people saw that promise but it was fulfilled and we can look back and see that it happened they were all commended for their faith in the coming to their savior even though they didn't see him what am I saying I'm saying that

[37 : 45] Abraham come to trust Christ he trusted the promises of God yes but he came to trust Christ as much as he knew and waited for the day when someone would come to be his redeemer Moses trusted God for the things God had promised him but he trusted in one who would come that would ultimately be his redeemer all these people died until Christ came and he allowed them to wait on that promise so that we together with Christ might be able to inherit that with them might be able to inherit that some quick applications Christian God's commendation I'm not saying condemnation I've been tempted to say that the whole time God's commendation does not come to great people that is not why these people are listed it's not because they are great people

God's commendation comes to those who are assured that God will do what he says he will do faith is believing that God's word and his promises are true and that they're more real than the circumstances I see we may face the kind of persecution for our faith we may face this kind of persecution for our faith the same as some of these did God wants us to be convinced that the promise of his presence is more firm than the loneliness that persecution could bring God wants us to be convinced that the promise of his reward is more firm than the poverty that persecution could bring God wants us to be convinced that the promise of eternal life and life with him is more firm than the suffering and dying that persecution could bring.

And so let me encourage you. What he's encouraging these people, they were ready to quit because they couldn't see an end to their suffering and their persecution. They couldn't see how what had been promised to them could ever be fulfilled.

And so he took a swing through the whole of the Old Testament and said, these are people who some saw, some didn't, but they trusted. And God says, that's the kind of person that is my child. They trust in my promise. They are assured of my promise, though they cannot see it. And they have no concept of how it could come to pass. God commends people not because they're great, but because they believe his word.

[40 : 41] There's a whole multitude of people who have been commended for their faith in God and his word. And so the writer of the book of Hebrews knew that those to whom he was writing needed to be reminded of those who were commended for their faith, even though some of them didn't see the outcome of their promises until much later or until they are in heaven.

And just as those to whom this was written, it was to be an encouragement to them, we are to be encouraged to have assurance that God is faithful to what he has promised, even though we can't see it.

Let me just end by saying this. This picture of Enoch and Noah is amazing to me, in that the whole world said, there's no God.

God's not going to do anything. We don't need to live for him. It's said in scripture that people have said, from the beginning, all things have continued as they were.

Where's the promise of his coming? And they, in a sense, are saying, where is the promise of his judgment? If you're here and don't know Christ, God's promise of judgment and eternal torment is true, even though you may not see it now, just like the days of Noah.

[42 : 10] All mankind without Christ are condemned to that judgment and eternal torment. But if you're here, God has promised that whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved.

And that is absolutely true also. Let's pray. Father, thank you for your word. Thank you, Father, that you have chosen to encourage us in such a way as to see that it was not the great things these people did that commended them.

You commended them because they were people who saw what you said to be true, even though they couldn't understand how it could work out. Lord, I pray that the Christians here would determine that even though I can't see how it would work out, God knows and is still going to do it. And Father, for those who don't know Christ, I pray that today would be the day that they would not spurn the long suffering of God, but be assured of even what they cannot see, that God will judge the quick and the dead.

and may they turn and trust you before it's eternally too late. In Jesus' name, amen.