Intro

* + \*transition from *Hymn of Heaven*…
    - ///////
  + We’ve spent the better part of the year **Fixing Our Eyes on Jesus** by walking through the book of Hebrews
    - ///////
  + We’ll be going through some **Examples of Persevering in Faith Without Proof** that our text provides
    - Before I read the passage, I want you to look for 2 key features of the text: I’ll try to highlight each of them as I’m reading
      * I want you to look for the correlation between FAITH and JUSTIFICATION – in other words, the promise that faith in God *alone* is what puts us in favor with Him
    - Second, I want you to look for the prevalence of the concept of SIGHT – a concept often placed at odds with FAITH
      * You’ll see this theme of “sight” in the repeated concepts of seeing, visible, looking, knowing, seeking, etc.
        + The point of the second observation is simple: faith, though unseeing, is never *blind* – so long as its eyes are set on Jesus

Text

* + *Hebrews 11:1-16 –* ***1*** *Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen.****2****For by it the men of old gained approval.* ***3****By faith we understand that the worlds were prepared by the word of God, so that what is seen was not made out of things which are visible.****4****By faith Abel offered to God a better sacrifice than Cain, through which he obtained the testimony that he was righteous, God testifying about his gifts, and through faith, though he is dead, he still speaks.****5****By faith Enoch was taken up so that he would not see death; and he was not found because God took him up; for he obtained the witness that before his being taken up he was pleasing to God.****6****And without faith it is impossible to please Him, for he who comes to God must believe that He is and that He is a rewarder of those who seek Him.****7****By faith Noah, being warned by God about things not yet seen, in reverence prepared an ark for the salvation of his household, by which he condemned the world, and became an heir of the righteousness which is according to faith.* ***8****By faith Abraham, when he was called, obeyed by going out to a place which he was to receive for an inheritance; and he went out, not knowing where he was going.****9****By faith he lived as an alien in the land of promise, as in a foreign land, dwelling in tents with Isaac and Jacob, fellow heirs of the same promise;****10****for he was looking for the city which has foundations, whose architect and builder is God.****11****By faith even Sarah herself received ability to conceive, even beyond the proper time of life, since she considered Him faithful who had promised.****12****Therefore there was born even of one man, and him as good as dead at that, as many descendants as the stars of heaven in number, and innumerable as the sand which is by the seashore.* ***13****All these died in faith, without receiving the promises, but having seen them and having welcomed them from a distance, and having confessed that they were strangers and exiles on the earth.****14****For those who say such things make it clear that they are seeking a country of their own.****15****And indeed if they had been thinking of that country from which they went 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 a city for them.*
    - To give a brief overview of where we’re going, I’ll spend some time talking about the overall *concept* of faith, followed by walking through the 5 examples of this faith that we’re given in our passage
      * First…

**I. Faith Means that We Will Not Have Proof**

* + What does it mean to have faith?
    - Whenever I get that question, I go to the first verse of our passage:
* **Hebrews 11:1-2 – Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen. For by it the men of old gained approval.** 
  + Notice in this definition the *concrete*, followed by the *abstract* – the *certain*, followed by the *uncertain*…
    - Faith is when you are totally assured… of things that you hope for
      * Hope is naturally uncertain to us – it’s future-oriented, and we have the grave displeasure of not knowing the future
        + Yet regardless, genuine faith has hope for the future that cannot be shaken
      * And again, faith is having a rested conviction… in that which you cannot presently see, according to our passage
    - So real faith is totally confident regarding the future, and utterly convinced regarding the present
      * How is this possible?
        + We’re only able to be unshaken due to the OBJECT of our faith (YHWH), and the nature of His PROMISES (totally trustworthy)
  + Because the truth of the matter is – everyone exercises faith of one kind or another
    - It’s easy to see “faith” in men and women of other systems of belief (Hinduism, Buddhism, Islam, Mormon, etc.)
      * Though the *concept* of faith can be seen in each of these, the problem lies in the OBJECT of that faith (what or who they are believing in), and what that object PROMISES about the present and future
        + Placing one’s faith in the wrong object will produce disastrous results – whether it’s in the short-term or long-run

And that’s because God – the One true God and Father of our Lord Jesus – He *alone* is able to PROMISE and actually *deliver* on those promises

* + But what about faith in those who would deny any adherence to religion? Do they have faith?
    - This question reminds me of the Frank Turek book “I Don’t Have Enough Faith to Be an Atheist”
      * Why is that?
        + Because even the professor down the hill at Purdue University, who would hold open contempt for those who claim faith in God, has a faith of his own

And yes, this faith still has an OBJECT, and that object still has PROMISES

* + - Perhaps the OBJECT of his faith would be his objective reasoning, and it PROMISES to provide him with the most impartial interpretation of whatever data he ingests
      * But what’s the problem with this object and its promises?
        + Both will fail him egregiously, and in the end, eternally…
  + What about our faith?
    - Our faith is rested in the future hope of the PROMISES of God
    - Our faith is grounded in the present conviction of the unseen OBJECT of that faith and those promises: the Lord who has proven Himself faithful time and again
      * We don’t know the future, and the present is a mist
        + But faith in Christ allows us to rest in the only OBJECT worthy of that unwavering assurance, and know that His PROMISES will never fail
  + Our passage gives us 5 examples of this unwavering faith
    - But one thing common between all of them is that…

**II. Each Example Died Before They Saw the Fulfillment**

* + Some of us find it hard to trust in something for more than 5 minutes
    - If I’m meeting with someone at noon, and I look at my watch and it’s 12:04 and they’re not at the restaurant yet, what am I beginning to think?
      * They ditched me!
        + I’m not believing in the PROMISE of my friend (the OBJECT of that promise) when he said he’d be there at noon
    - But what’s the truth of the matter?
      * He may really *have* forgotten or ditched me
  + But what if that promise extends beyond our own lifetime?
    - If I struggle to hold fast to faith for 4 and a half minutes, how am I going to believe until the end?
      * I’d need to have total confidence in the OBJECT of those PROMISES, wouldn’t I?
        + It’s true that my friend could forget or flake out on me, but do I believe the same about the Lord?

What will be the fruit of that faith or faithlessness?

* + - * Just what we talked about two weeks ago: the test of this faith is found in whether or not I *hold fast*…
* **Hebrews 11:13 – All these died in faith, without receiving the promises, but having seen them and having welcomed them from a distance, and having confessed that they were strangers and exiles on the earth.** 
  + You and I have the fulfillment of SO MANY promises of God in our rear-view mirror – the OT saints didn’t have that advantage
    - The most obvious example is God’s provision for our salvation
      * All of those promises were prospective for those found in Hebrews 11 – for us, we can look BACK at the cross (\*brief explanation of God’s provision of salvation in the cross + encouragement to place one’s faith in His PROMISE of salvation)
* So faith places its hope in the PROMISES of a particular OBJECT
  + True faith is grounded confidently in the promises of God, alone
    - And we have examples of those who have gone before us, who didn’t have the advantage of SEEING the fulfillment of several promises
      * But we have a faith in common with those who have gone before us…

**III. Each Example Longed for the Ultimate Promises**

* + …and so do those who place their hope in Jesus
* **Hebrews 11:14-16 – For those who say such things make it clear that they are seeking a country of their own. And indeed if they had been thinking of that country from which they went out, they would have had opportunity to return. 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 a city for them.**
  + All of the examples we’re about the walk through held this in common: they each longed to be in heaven with their Savior
    - This is what enabled them to forsake placing their hope in the PROMISES of any earthly OBJECT – it’s what allowed them to turn away from the lies of this world and fix their gaze on the hope of heaven
      * We have that in common with those who are listed in our passage today
  + But along with the *definition* of faith, the preacher of Hebrews also gives us the *criteria* of faith:
* **Hebrews 11:6 – And without faith it is impossible to please Him, for he who comes to God must believe that He is and that He is a rewarder of those who seek Him.**
  + How do I know if I have the right sort of faith?
    - Well, first, it will be convinced that God IS
      * What does that mean? (\*more than belief in His existence (James 2:19))
        + The understanding of this definition is tied into the name of YHWH, as described in Ex 3 (\*explain)
    - Second, the right sort of faith understands that God rewards those who seek Him
      * In other words, he or she is convinced in the promises of God – after all, He’s promised to reward those who draw near to Him
        + This is one of the central arguments of the whole Book
  + But here’s the test: is there evidence of genuine faith in your own life?
    - Do you believe that God IS? In other words, do you have the correct OBJECT of your faith (because, remember, you DO have faith)
      * Do you trust in His PROMISES – particularly that He rewards those who seek Him?
        + This will be obvious in your life: is there evidence that you are actually seeking God??
  + God gifted us with examples of this faith – men and women we could look to who ran the race of faith successfully
    - So let’s go to our…

**IV. Five Personal Examples of Those who Exercised Faith**

* + But before getting into the individual examples of faith, the preacher provides a blanket statement regarding the unavoidable need for each person to place “faith” in that which is unseen:
* **Hebrews 11:3 – By faith we understand that the worlds were prepared by the word of God, so that what is seen was not made out of things which are visible.**
  + For those who ask the question: “how did all of this get here,” the answer must tie back to what is unseen
    - Many of you, I’m sure, have heard the “turtle” explanation…
      * There are a lot of supposed origin stories, but here’s the one I heard several years ago…
        + \*turtles all the way down
    - Of course, that “solution” only begs the question – where did the turtles come from
      * But the same problem exists for those who hold to a naturalistic worldview – they need to explain how “something” came into existence, because “something” can’t come from “nothing”
        + From a Christian worldview, we believe that “something” is the Word of God – the God who has no beginning spoke creation into existence

How do I know that to be the case?

Because He said that’s how it happened, and look around at all the “something” that exists, just as He said He spoke it into being

* + - The preacher uses creation as evidence towards faith: since we believe that which is seen was made out of that which is *not* seen, so we can trust in the Word of Him who cannot be seen
      * This is the very Word that called things into existence – how could we not place our unwavering faith in Him?
  + The passage proceeds with several examples that begin with the phrase, “by faith…”
    - The first example is that of…
* **Example #1: Abel**
  + **Hebrews 11:4 – By faith Abel offered to God a better sacrifice than Cain, through which he obtained the testimony that he was righteous, God testifying about his gifts, and through faith, though he is dead, he still speaks.**
    - What happened with Cain and Abel?
      * Both sons of Adam and Eve, they presented an offering to the Lord: Cain from his produce and Abel from his flock
        + God accepted Abel’s offering but had no regard for Cain’s grain
    - We don’t know the specifics of *why* God accepted Abel’s and not Cain’s – we simply know that Abel’s offering was done *in faith*…
      * Cain would go on to show faithlessness, taking his bitterness out on his brother by striking him dead
  + But notice the end of the passage: through faith, though he is dead, he still speaks
    - I believe this to be a call back to the Genesis 4 narrative – God asks Cain where his brother is, though both know Abel had been killed by Cain
      * Instead of fessing up, showing a belief in God’s sovereign power, Cain seeks to cover it up
        + By God responds by saying:

**Genesis 4:10 – What have you done? The voice of your brother’s blood is crying to Me from the ground.**

* + - Death was unable to silence the voice of righteous Abel
      * Similarly, his testimony of faith speaks to us today: true faith brings forth the better sacrifice
        + According to Romans 12, that sacrifice is our very lives, lived out in full for Jesus
  + Next, our passage gives the example of…
* **Example #2: Enoch**
  + **Hebrews 11:5 – By faith Enoch was taken up so that he would not see death; and he was not found because God took him up; for he obtained the witness that before his being taken up he was pleasing to God.** 
    - The preacher presents this curious character in the form of a chiastic structure
      * Not much is said about him in the OT, other than a few verses in Genesis 5…
        + **Genesis 5:22, 24 – Then Enoch walked with God three hundred years after he became the father of Methuselah... Enoch walked with God; and he was not, for God took him.**
    - This presents a break from the flat recounting of the genealogy in Genesis 5, where Enoch is reported to have “walked with God” – the same Hebrew phrase used to describe God’s “walking in the garden” in Genesis 3
      * Enoch lived 365 years, walking with God, and then it seems like he simply walked right into the presence of God
        + This brings about an entirely different testimony than that of Abel

True faith walks with God

This is closely tied into the exhortation from two weeks ago for us to DRAW NEAR to God

* + - * Paul reminds us in 2 Corinthians 5 that “we walk by faith, not by sight”
        + Faith walks with God and keeps its focus on Him

Unbelieving sight (which is really spiritual blindness) walks by whatever a person happens to be feeling or thinking, and is focused on the things of this world

* + - Next up is the curious case of…
* **Example #3: Noah**
  + **Hebrews 11:7 – By faith Noah, being warned by God about things not yet seen, in reverence prepared an ark for the salvation of his household, by which he condemned the world, and became an heir of the righteousness which is according to faith.**
    - Much like Enoch, Noah is described in Genesis 6:9 as one who “walked with God,” in spite of the wickedness all around him
      * At the ripe age of 500, he’s commanded by God to build a big ‘ol boat in the middle of the desert
        + This boat took 100 years to build – all the while, you can only imagine the ridicule he was facing from those around him
    - And yet, he went on crafting the boat with his children and their families
      * It’s a stark reminder that God doesn’t always call us to comfort and conformity
        + True faith may cause you to look like a fool in eyes of the world, or give up what the world values for true treasure in heaven

Not everyone is called to full-time ministry – I understand that

In fact, James warns that “not many of you should become teachers,” because we’ll face the harsher judgement

But I was ministering alongside a lay leader quite a number of years ago – it’s no one that goes to this church, by the way

He loved teaching, he loved serving, and he had a clear gift in ministry and even perceived a possible call to become a pastor

But when he was pressed on the issue, his response was “I make too much money to be a pastor…”

* + - * First off, you’re all very generous to your pastors, so this isn’t a knock on our compensation
        + Rather, this friend had perceived the call of the Lord and had made a different decision

True faith is willing to give up what the world has to offer—even counting it as rubbish—in order to gain Christ

For you, maybe that *does* look like pursuing full-time ministry

But for all, it certainly will look like small and big decisions that say “yes” to Jesus and “no” to the world and our flesh

* + - * After Noah, the preacher brings up part one of…
* **Example #4: Abraham**
  + - You’ll get a bit more of him from Pastor Rob next week, but here’s what our passage has to say about him…
  + **Hebrews 11:8-10 – By faith Abraham, when he was called, obeyed by going out to a place which he was to receive for an inheritance; and he went out, not knowing where he was going. By faith he lived as an alien in the land of promise, as in a foreign land, dwelling in tents with Isaac and Jacob, fellow heirs of the same promise; for he was looking for the city which has foundations, whose architect and builder is God.** 
    - What do you think about when you hear the word, “home”?
      * There’s something *settled* about the concept—something that feels like a final destination
        + Once you’re “home,” you’re not looking for anywhere else to go
    - Abraham was asked to leave the only place he’d called “home” in order to pursue the promise of a better “home” – one that wouldn’t ultimately be realized in his lifetime
      * That’d be a hard calling! To uproot and wander for the duration of your life
        + That’s why Paul says…
    - **1 Corinthains 15:17, 19 – if Christ has not been raised, your faith is worthless; you are still in your sins… If we have hoped in Christ in this life only, we are of all men most to be pitied.**
      * If this life is the only one we’ve got, then we better make the most of it!
        + Get all the pleasure, and comfort, and glory we can possibly ingest, and then die before we get too old to enjoy it!

But those who have true faith—faith in the risen Christ—understand that this life is just a passing vapor

In it, we either work for the present kingdom that’s passing away, or the city with real foundations, whose architect and builder is God!

* + - * + Abraham left what the world would call home in order to seek the one that is promised after we die

Those with true faith live for the kingdom to come – this will cause discomfort for us and even hostility from those who life for this present kingdom

* + - Live for the risen Christ who has established His eternal kingdom in the life to come!
      * And lastly, the preacher brings up…
* **Example #5: Sarah**
  + **Hebrews 11:11-12 – By faith even Sarah herself received ability to conceive, even beyond the proper time of life, since she considered Him faithful who had promised. Therefore there was born even of one man, and him as good as dead at that, as many descendants as the stars of heaven in number, and innumerable as the sand which is by the seashore.** 
    - This is a story of *patience*
      * Sarah was barren and thus, incapable of conceiving a child
        + As our passage phrases it, “beyond the proper time of life,” God opened up her womb and allowed them to have a child

But one thing that’s often missing from the recounting of this narrative is the timeline…

* + - * In all, Abraham and Sarah waited about *25 years* from the first mention of offspring to the final fulfillment of His promise
        + True faith understands that if God says it, He’s going to do it – no matter how impossible it may seem to us

We are called to simply be patient—or “be still”—and trust that the OBJECT of our faith will carry out all of His PROMISES

Conclusion

* Take-aways…
  + 1) ///////