

THANKSGIVING 1 SERVICE

SERIES SLIDE

Of all the Batman movies that have ever been made...it doesn't get worse than Joel Schumacher's 1997 film *Batman & Robin*.

To understand how bad this movie was- I give you some of Mr. Freeze's self-referential puns about things being cold. Which I will now do in my best Arnold Schwarzenegger accent.

When he introduces himself...

"Allow me to Break the ice"

When he busts up a party...

"EVERYBODY CHILL"

Just before he freezes the prehistoric section of a Museum...

"Who killed the Dinosaurs? THE ICE AGE!"

Or my favorite.

To get out of prison- he freezes the plumbing until it all bursts and blows a hole in the wall. To which he gives the wonderful home maintenance advice **"Always winterize your pipes"**

So the movie was awful.

But there is a little known gem on the sound track. You can't even access it on Spotify. You have to go to Youtube to find it.

The name of the song is "Gotham City". Yes R Kelly sings it and yes he is now in prison- and yes I am moving on from that conversation immediately...because he's not the point today.

Also- if you go to listen to it later- you must understand this IS NOT "Gotham City (remix)" That is not the same song.

Its just Gotham City.

The Song is sung from Batman's point of view.
It starts with these 2 lines

"Lookin' over the skyline of the City"

How loud quiet nights in the mist of crime

I didn't really understand what that second line meant until I started thinking about it this week.

It means that crime hangs like a mist in the city. Its everywhere. It affects everything. Like a mist will make everything wet even though its not raining, the evil of Gotham is so pervasive that even as the City appears quiet and peaceful as Batman looks at up from a distance- all he can hear are the loud cries of people for justice.

He goes on to sing about how in the middle of all the sorrow- what people find hope and solace in the mist of Gotham's evil is the Bat signal.

But remember, this is Batman singing it. So while others may be uplifted by the Bat signal- every time Batman sees it- its calling HIM. He's the solution. That can be overwhelming. To see a city with so much evil...and you are everyone's hope?

Which is why I love the line in the second verse.

We need a place where we can go A land where every one will have a hero, (even me)

That "even me" is so faint. It's a background vocal. It's the part that Batman can only sing quietly to himself- because the people he has to save can't hear about his weakness or his limitations.

Batman. The big, strong, Batman- - knows that he is powerless to deliver Gotham City from evil- Even though he is committed to trying.

So he admits his weakness in those 2 words (even me).

Even Batman needs a hero. Even Batman needs rescue in the face of overwhelming evil.

So- what kind of place will this be? Where can EVEN Batman go to escape the evil of Gotham City?

Well- that's what the chorus is about.

A city of justice, a city of love, a city of peace

**For everyone of us
We all need it,
can't live without it
A Gotham City**

Wait a second- THAT'S IT? I thought Gotham City was the problem?
How can the city covered in a mist of evil and sorrow-- also be a city
of peace and love and justice that we can't live without.

How is Batman BOTH mourning the evil of the city...while he ALSO
celebrates what its going to be?

That, my friends, is called vision. (And they say bats are blind).

In this Song- Batman is imagining what Gotham will transform into... A
city of justice, love & peace...for everyone of us. Even for Batman
himself.

...and that's what fuels him in his battle against Mr. Freeze, Poison
Ivy...and **this ridiculously stupid version of Bane.**



Title Slide **"Gotham City Church: How to See Resurrection in the
Mist of Death"- Hebrews 11**

I've thought a lot this week about the writer of Hebrews and how he
relates to this song.

If you think of the people he's writing to as the citizens of Gotham....he's watching criminal injustices be done to them. They have been abandoned by their families because of their choice to follow Jesus- and they are surrounded by a Roman culture of consumption and decadence that persecutes them for their commitment to Jesus as the only God.

This writer is trying, with his words, to keep the people of this ancient Gotham City from retreating or being swallowed up by the evil around them.

And you can imagine the sense of helplessness. He doesn't even have a utility belt... just some parchment and a quill.

In chapter 11, to persuade them to stick with Jesus- he looks backwards to the heroes of the past- their own versions of Batman...so that he can give them a vision of better city. A city of justice. A city of Love. Literally a city of peace- the New Jerusalem. Because that's exactly what Jerusalem means (City of Peace). The new Gotham.

We all need it. Can't live without it.

Hebrews 11:1-3

Now faith is the reality of what is hoped for, the proof of what is not seen.

2 For by this our ancestors were approved.

3 By faith we understand that the universe was created by the word of God, so that what is seen was made from things that are not visible.

11:8-10

8 By faith Abraham, when he was called, obeyed and set out for a place that he was going to receive as an inheritance. He went out, even though he did not know where he was going. 9 By faith he stayed as a foreigner in the land of promise, living in tents as did Isaac and Jacob, coheirs of the same promise. 10 For he was looking forward to the city that has foundations, whose architect and builder is God.

11:13-19

13 These all died in faith, although they had not received the things that were promised. But they saw them from a distance, greeted them, and confessed that they were foreigners and

temporary residents on the earth. 14 Now those who say such things make it clear that they are seeking a homeland. 15 If they were thinking about where they came from, they would have had an opportunity to return. 16 But they now desire a better place — a heavenly one. Therefore, God is not ashamed to be called their God, for he has prepared a city for them. 17 By faith Abraham, when he was tested, offered up Isaac. He received the promises and yet he was offering his one and only son, 18 the one to whom it had been said, Your offspring will be traced through Isaac. 19 He considered God to be able even to raise someone from the dead; therefore, he received him back, figuratively speaking.

11:23-27

23 By faith Moses, after he was born, was hidden by his parents for three months, because they saw that the child was beautiful, and they didn't fear the king's edict. 24 By faith Moses, when he had grown up, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter 25 and chose to suffer with the people of God rather than to enjoy the fleeting pleasure of sin. 26 For he considered reproach for the sake of Christ to be greater wealth than the treasures of Egypt, since he was looking ahead to the reward.

27 By faith he left Egypt behind, not being afraid of the king's anger, for Moses persevered as one who sees him who is invisible.

Hebrews 11:32-40

32 And what more can I say? Time is too short for me to tell about Gideon, Barak, Samson, Jephthah, David, Samuel, and the prophets, 33 who by faith conquered kingdoms, administered justice, obtained promises, shut the mouths of lions, 34 quenched the raging of fire, escaped the edge of the sword, gained strength in weakness, became mighty in battle, and put foreign armies to flight. 35 Women received their dead, raised to life again. Other people were tortured, not accepting release, so that they might gain a better resurrection. 36 Others experienced mockings and scourgings, as well as bonds and imprisonment. 37 They were stoned, they were sawed in two, they died by the sword, they wandered about in sheepskins, in goatskins, destitute, afflicted, and mistreated. 38 The world was not worthy of them. They wandered in

deserts and on mountains, hiding in caves and holes in the ground.

39 All these were approved through their faith, but they did not receive what was promised, 40 since God had provided something better for us, so that they would not be made perfect without us.

Transition: This is a 2 part sermon. Pt 2 is coming up on the Sunday after Thanksgiving- It will be called "The Dark Knight Rises" or "Batman Returns"...

Either way- I'm going to talk more about this City that comes up so often and what that means specifically for how we live now. So that's for when we get to Chapter 13 in a couple of weeks.

Today, we're going to especially focus on the first 3 and last 9 verses of chapter 11.

1) When you can see the unseen City, you don't settle for comfortable-and you won't quit in the hard.

- This chapter is pretty clearly about "faith".
- Its mentioned 24 times. In 40 verses.
- Look how the author defines it.
- **11:1**
- He says it's the reality of what is hoped for and the proof of what is not seen.
- Without picking this apart too much- the basic idea is faith is the ability to look at Gotham City- torn apart by evil and injustice- its people in fear and mourning and sorrow- and to sing a song about Gotham as a City of justice and love and peace.
- That's faith. The ability to see what is not yet. The ability to reach into the future with your heart and mind...grab hold of your hope...and then live it out in the present.
- Faith is like Fog Lights shining through the Mist of Death.
- It's a Bat Signal. A signal of solution the sky.
- That's faith.

- But the thing about faith...is that it must be connected to something. It has to have a REALITY. A PROOF. You can't just "BELIEVE". You have to BELIEVE SOMETHING. Faith needs a direct object.
- That's why faith is so related to Vision. For faith to sustain you when the mist of death or evil has you reeling with anxiety...Faith pictures the future and allows you to live out a present that isn't reactionary to what is happening around you.

• **11:3**

- The writer starts by saying- the whole universe was made from the invisible. In other words, the way God works- is he always starts with the unseen- and then brings about the seen.
- So- you have to have Gotham City Vision. In the mist of death- you have to see resurrection.

• **11:10 & 16**

- Specifically- there is this discussion of a City. An unseen city. That all of these ancient Hebrew saints saw- and it allowed them to do things like Abraham- to go where God called him- even when he didn't know his final destination.
- There was this promise from God that he was preparing a City of Justice, and Rest, and Peace for them...and even though they couldn't yet live there- they could see it from far away- and it kept them fighting...moving forward in faith.

• **V 13**

- In fact, he says they were all resident aliens.
- They were foreigners, temporary residents on the earth.
- Here's what that means. On one hand, they were residents. They lived where they lived. They were full participants in the communities and people they lived among.
- On the other hand- they knew they belonged to a higher, better transcendent city.
- Think how important this message is to these Hebrew Xians.
- That's exactly the position they are in.

- They are starting to lose sight of the future. They are forgetting the City God has promised. And they are thinking only temporarily. We have to fix this pain and persecution and loneliness right now. Because if this is as good as it gets...we need to go back to our old Hebrew faith and ditch this Jesus who has only brought us trouble.
- So the writer now goes through Jewish history and lists all these people that the Hebrews respected and held up as heroes....and he's telling them- what you are forgetting and leaving behind- is what all these OT saints were straining to look forward to. If you go back now- you are disrespecting their Faith...not honoring it.

• **11:40b (start at "they would not" & 12:1a (end at "surrounding us"))**

- He even goes as far in the last verse of this chapter and the first verse of chapter 12 to say, "These saints of old are waiting on you...to join them in their faithfulness. If you leave Jesus and go back to your Jewish faith- you are actually turning your backs on these Saints who don't want to find the City of Peace without you."

- The last 9 verses of Hebrews are in my top 10 favorite passages of the Bible.
- Let me show you why.

• **V 33-34**

- He gets to the end of all these specific and somewhat detailed examples of faith...and then at the end he does what I call "machine gunning".
- This where he just rapid fires and list of names and actions that all were done by seeing the unseen City.
- Specifically, look at where he says by faith they shut the mouths of Lions and quenched the raging fire.
- That's a reference to the book of Daniel. Daniel is a prophet to Israel who lived in Babylonian captivity. So there is a ton that these Hebrew Xians would identify with being under Roman rule. Daniel was thrown into the lions den because evil men plotted against him to make his prayers to YHWH illegal. But he continued to pray...and trusted God with the results. So the lions didn't eat him. He survived and his enemies were killed by the same lions meant to kill him.

- And the quenching of the fire is a reference to Daniel's friends. Shadrach, Mescach, and Abednego- who were thrown in a fiery furnace because they refused to worship a statue of King Nebuchadnezzar. And the flames didn't burn them up. They walked out unsigned and healthy.
- And that's the story of every one in this first rapid fire list of saints. They are all winners.

• **V 35**

- Something strange happens.
- It starts off well enough. It's a reference to women who's children died, but then resurrected.
- Specifically- there are 2 in the OT, the son of the widow of Zarapheth- raised by the prophet Elijah..and the son of the Shunamite woman- who was raised to life by Elisha.
- Then, write in the middle of v 35- it says...there were others.
- And the story shifts.
- Same God.
- Same faith in that God.
- Different results.
- Tortured, not accepting release so they might gain a better resurrection.
- You know what the author is referencing here?
- He's talking about something else these Hebrews would have been very familiar with. Hes talking about a story in the book of 2 Maccabees. From the Apocrypha. These are Jewish writings that occurred during time between the OT and the NT. Over the course of 400 years.
- In 2nd Maccabees, Antiochus Epiphanes, the Syrian King- has conquered Israel. And he was an evil tyrant.
- Here's his picture

• **Put up Bane pic**

• **V 35**

- He'd bring prominent families into the public square and would call them to disobey God- eat unclean meat...if they didn't do it, he would torture and kill them right in front of everyone.

- So in 2 Maccabees 7, he pulls out this mother and her 7 seven sons and tells them one by one to eat parts of a pig- or die a gruesome death.
- One by one, the sons refuse to deny their God and eat unclean meat...even though people are advising them to take some clean meat and pretend like they ate pig flesh...they refuse.
- And one by one- they are killed. Tongues cut off. Hands cut off. Scalped. Literally they are fried in a pan.
- Finally, the last son to be tortured is up, and he's feeling unsure of himself. He doesn't want his mother to endure the death of all of her sons. But the mother wants him to be true to YHWH and his law. Look what she tells him.

• **My son, have pity on me. I carried you nine months in my womb, and nursed you for three years, and have reared you and brought you up to this point in your life, and have taken care of you. ²⁸ I beg you, my child, to look at the heaven and the earth and see everything that is in them, and recognize that God did not make them out of things that existed. *(note that is the line that opened up Hebrews 11)* And in the same way the human race came into being. ²⁹ Do not fear this butcher, but prove worthy of your brothers. Accept death, so that in God's mercy I may get you back again along with your brothers." 2 Maccabees 7:27-29**

- Do you see what she's done? Her mind is on the City. In the mist of death- she sees a better resurrection. She doesn't just see the temporary resurrection that the Widow of Zarephath and the Shunamite woman got....She sees the eternal resurrection. When she would get all her sons back again.

• **V 35**

- They'd get their hands back. Their tongues back. Their scalps. Their dignity. They'd get it all back. But to endure the mist of evil and death...she had to have the faith to see Gotham City differently. At the end of Batmans' Gotham City song. After a choir sings the chorus...its all children's voices. It makes me think of this mother...getting all her boys back.

Back to 1)

- Now lets talk about what this means for us.
- It means if we have faith in the same resurrection...the same Heavenly City, the same NEW JERUSALEM. THE SAME GOTHAM CITY that this mother could see....and all these OT saints could see...
- It means, on one hand, we **won't settle for comfortable.**
- Like the people in the first half of this list- there will be no job, no position in society, no amount of money, no beach houses, or championships, or home remodels, no sports cars, or magna cum laude diplomas...no scholarships or lottery jackpots that we will cause us to forget that the world is broken...and that we don't belong in a broken world full of evil. We will be residents- (more on that on Thanksgiving weekend when we get to chapter 13) but we are also aliens. Strangers. Pilgrims....looking to a city much better than this.
- If our faith does lead us in the successes of this first half of the list, we will be Bruce Wayne. A millionaire, sure...but looking over the skyline of the city- we'll long for justice for those who haven't received it. We'll care and empathize for the broken..and we'll suit up to do something about it...even as we confess our own need for a hero.
- We won't be hypnotized by comforts that can come from being on top. Rather, we will know that nothing we can have now will compare with the glories that are to come in the New Jerusalem. And we'll use our resources to help others see that too.
- On the other hand, that we won't quit in the hard.
- The second half of this list is full of people who were tortured, marginalized, killed. They were all waiting for a better city.
- And this is the beautiful part of faith.
- In the middle of stormy weather, we won't stumble and we won't fall, I know a place that offers shelter.
- We look ahead in the storm, in the darkness, to the Gotham City we know is coming. A city of Justice. A city of love. A city of Peace for everyone of us.
- And, like that mother in 2nd Maccabees- we know we'll get it ALL BACK. There is no bucket list. We lose nothing when we await a resurrection into a better City.

Transition: Which is why its so important that...

2) In the mist of death, trust the resurrected Jesus, not your agenda for Jesus.

- For a lot of folks- for faith to pay off- they have to be in the first half of this list.
- We love underdog stories. The stories of David slaying Goliath.
- RUDY! RUDY! RUDY!

• V 34

- The author of Hebrews describes these folks as gaining strength in weakness.
- And that's the way a lot of us talk about the actions of God.
- When God heals the disease. When he comes through us to save us from financial disaster, when we get the job, find the check in the mail, or find a spouse.
- We say things like "It was a God thing."
- Please never say that. God literally made the world from nothing and is deeply and beautifully at work even when mothers watch their sons fried in a pan in front of them. It's all "a God thing".
- See a lot of us don't trust Jesus...we trust our agenda for Jesus.
- "Here Jesus...here's what I need you to do for me. I need to be in verses 32- 35. I don't want to be the others. I want to glorify you by winning the lottery. God trust me with a beautiful family and lots of money and a comfortable life..and I'll show everyone how good you are."
- But then- when we end up...even for a short time, counted as one of the others...we don't see ourselves as blessed anymore...we see ourselves as abandoned by God...and we lose faith.

Back to 2)

- Don't you see, though? That isn't faith in Jesus...that's faith in your agenda for Jesus. That only sees Gotham City as it is, not as it can be.
- That's not a resident Alien... that's just a full fledged citizen of this world.

- If you need your life to go a certain way, or history to go a certain way...in order to keep your faith in God...you aren't trusting God...you are trusting your own agenda.
- We want to be strengthened in our weakness...but not many of us welcome God to weaken us in our strength.
- And that sounds really strange, I know.
- Unless you follow a God who put on flesh, and died a humiliating death on a cross...in order to get all his children back.

• **V 39-40**

- What the writer of Hebrews is getting that we all have faith in, is God's ability to make Good on his promise of resurrection. That the heavenly city of Jerusalem will descend. That heaven will reunite with earth...and that we will eternally live in the City God has prepared for us. The New Jerusalem. The New CITY OF PEACE.
- And as beautiful and admirable as the saints listed here are...we have something even better than they had.
- See they had a cloudy and general promise from God. That he would resurrect.
- But we now look back, on a savior that died on a cross...and resurrected for us.
- Near the time that Jesus was approaching the cross...there is this Gotham City moment he has.

• **Matthew 23:37-39**

- **37 "Jerusalem, Jerusalem, who kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to her. How often I wanted to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, but you were not willing! 38 See, your house is left to you desolate. 39 For I tell you, you will not see me again until you say, 'Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord'! "**
- Jerusalem literally means "City of Peace"
- And like Batman looking over Gotham- Looking over Gothams skyline...Jesus mourns the sin and evil and injustice. And he looks forward to his own death.

- When he would ride into Jerusalem on a donkey, and people would say HOSANNA Blesse is he who comes in the name of the Lord.
- But Jesus didn't do what they thought. They thought that he was going to take them from the weakness of Roman Oppression to the strength of getting their City Back.
- But Jesus- God himself- goes from strength to weakness. He dies on a cross. Killed by the very people who sang his praises. See, they didn't have faith in the Messiah, only their agenda for the Messiah.
- Then he resurrected..and said "this is a preview of your future". Follow me and you'll get it all back. Even in death- you won't have lost. I'm giving you life in the mist of death. I'm giving you the Gotham City you've sung about.
- See, these folks believed all the way forward to the future resurrection, the new heaven and new earth. The New Jerusalem. They had a faith that doesn't require success, doesn't need success, and therefore is the ultimate success.
- One commentator put it like this. He essentially says, "The greatest challenge of the book of Hebrews is to cultivate such a deep and satisfying relationship with God that we rest in him whether living or dying, whether comfortable or miserable. The great challenge of the book of Hebrews is to cultivate the unshakeable confidence that God himself is better than anything life can give us or that death can take away from us."

Lords Supper Slide

- Jesus points to his worst moment in death...and then beyond it to the New Jerusalem