

Jesus is Better: A Study of Hebrews

The Same Faith (Hebrews 11:1-12:3)

Preached by Pastor Jason Tarn at HCC on August 31, 2025

Introduction

- ❖ For those of you who are new to our church, we've been in a series all summer going through the book of Hebrews. We paused last week for our missions weekend, but today we're picking up right where we left off. A couple weeks ago, we looked at chapter 10 starting in v19, and in the ESV, that section is titled *The Full Assurance of Faith*. **And it talks about how – because of Jesus's better ministry as our Great High Priest – Christians can enjoy an assurance of faith that is exponentially better than the saints of old.**
 - OT believers never thought it possible that they themselves could draw near to God in the midst of the temple. Only the high priest of Israel could do that. And only once a year. The most they expect is to enter the temple courts with a sacrifice in hand. Which you'd hand off to a priest. To the average Israelite, the temple wasn't just a building. It was a barrier. It barricaded sinful men from a holy God. There was no drawing near to God "*with a true heart in full assurance of faith.*" (10:22)
- ❖ **But now a "new and living way" has been opened for us through the torn flesh of Jesus on the cross. So that, now, Christians enjoy direct access to God.** The temple no longer serves as a barrier, keeping us distant from God. The temple is home. It's our abode where we dwell with God in his presence. That's what the section prior to Hebrews 11 emphasized.
 - And now the author gives us one of the best chapters in Scripture, commonly known as the biblical Hall of Faith. If you're not familiar with the OT, this chapter offers a beautiful summary of some of the most important OT characters and stories. But different than your typical hall of fame, this Hall of Faith is not just about enshrining historical accomplishments. **It's not just about commemorating heroes of the past. Hebrews 11 is primarily about encouraging believers in the present.** By strengthening our assurance. How does it do that?
 - By presenting us with the stories of – not perfect heroes – but fallen, flawed heroes. Who nonetheless finish the race set out before them. Not because of the strength of their will. Or the quality of their character. Or the degree of their devotion. **No, they were able to run with endurance the race that was set before them and finish well because of their faith.**
- ❖ **It's by faith, they persevered.** That phrase "*by faith*" is used fifteen times in this chapter. It's meant to underlined the point. That faith is the key. Their faith is what made the difference. Now some of you might be thinking, "Well, that's because their faith was so great. Their faith was so strong. My faith is weak and shaky. Nothing compared to Abraham or Moses or David." **But you're making the mistake of assuming these flawed heroes finished strong because of the *quality* of their faith.** If that's true, then, yes, none of us compare. If that's true, then this Hall of Faith might still inspire you, but it definitely won't assure you.
 - But that's *not* the point of Hebrews 11. **All of these biblical characters persevered – not by the *quality* of their faith – but by the *object* of their faith.** They all looked to the same God. That's the point of chapter 11.

- ❖ Then chapter 12 starts with a “*Therefore*,” connecting it to all that came before in the Hall of Faith. Listen to v1, “*¹Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight, and sin which clings so closely, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, ²looking to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith.*”
 - Hebrews 11 emphasized how the saints of old looked, by faith, to the same God. And now Hebrews 12 exhorts us to look to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of faith. **I take that to mean Jesus was the object of their faith all along.** They may not have known him personally, but they trusted in him prophetically. They trusted that God would, somehow, someway, through a Messiah, perfect them and make a way for them to draw near with confidence. That was the faith that made all the difference for Abraham, Moses, David, and the rest.
- ❖ **And the whole point is that that same faith is available to us today.** You can read Hebrews 11 and come away feeling comforted and assured. Not because you measure up to some biblical ideal. **But because you share the same faith as these biblical characters.**
 - In this series through Hebrews, you probably noticed that all our sermons have been titled a better *this* or better *that*. Compared to OT believers, we have a better high priest, a better salvation, a better blood, etc. But we don’t have a better faith. **The point of chapter 11 is to remind us that we share the same faith with them.**
 - And as we saw in the beginning of chapter 12, they now surround us as a cloud of witnesses, cheering us on to finish the race set before us. Exhorting us to run with faith. Biblical faith. Which can be described in four different ways in our text. I’ve arranged them as four exhortations.

Faith that Trusts in the Unseen

- ❖ Let’s consider our first exhortation: **To run with a faith that trusts in the unseen.** In other words, to live by faith and not by sight. That’s the key characteristic of a believer, whether in the Old or New Testament, under the Old or New Covenant. **They trust in a God they can’t see with their eyes and trust in his promises, even when they can’t see how those promises will come true.** This is stressed in that definition of faith found in v1, “*Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for; the conviction of things not seen.*”
 - **In other words, it doesn’t take faith to be convinced of something that took place if you were there to witness it yourself.** It doesn’t take faith; just a good memory. But none of us were there “*In the beginning*,” and yet “*³By faith we understand that the universe was created by the word of God, so that what is seen was not made out of things that are visible.*” It takes faith to believe that God made all things in the universe out of nothing. That he created it all by simply saying, “*Let there be.*”
- ❖ **It takes faith to walk in obedience to God’s words, especially when what he asks of you seemingly makes little sense.** Like how it took faith for **Noah** to construct a huge wooden ark in a location nowhere near the coast. I’m sure his neighbors ridiculed him. “How are you going to launch that? That boat is too big to transport. What are you doing, Noah?”

- ❖ He was believing. Believing in “*events as yet unseen.*” Look at v7, “*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 an heir of the righteousness that comes by faith.*”
- ❖ **Abraham walked with this same faith.** It doesn’t take faith to embark on a journey, when you know your final destination; when you’ve carefully mapped out your route; and when you foresee and prepare for the challenges ahead. That doesn’t take faith; just good planning. But look at v8, “*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.*”
 - That takes faith. He packed up all his possessions, said goodbye to family and friends, farewell to everything familiar, and started walking. Abraham didn’t know where he was going. But he trusted that God did. And that was enough. That takes faith.
- ❖ And let’s not forget **Sarah**. You could argue that it took her even more faith since, unlike Abraham, she didn’t hear God’s command. She had to trust her husband – to trust that he heard God and was trusting him. Later in v11, she’s in the Hall of Faith. It says by faith she conceived even in her advanced age, “*since she considered him faithful who had promised.*”
 - **By the look of things, a woman her age is *not* bearing a child. But she wasn’t going by looks.** She was walking by faith and not by sight. She was running the race set before her with a faith that trusts in the unseen.
- ❖ **And then after God gave them their miracle baby, he tested their faith.** He called Abraham to sacrifice Isaac. Which made no sense at the time. **Abraham couldn’t see the rationale, but he still believed.** If God said, “*Through Isaac shall your offspring be named,*” then he believed that even if he were to slay Isaac, God can and will raise him from the dead (11:17-19). That’s how firm his faith was. Abraham believed that the same God who brought life out of a barren womb can bring life out of death.
- ❖ **Now I know some will hear this and draw the conclusion that we’re basically saying faith is asking for you to embrace the irrational.** That it calls for a blind leap in the dark. You said we have to trust in the unseen, right?
 - Yes. But realize you’re not being asked to close your eyes, to close your mind, to stop looking, or to stop thinking. **Biblical faith expects you to walk with your eyes opened and mind engaged. But just don’t expect to always be able to see the big picture or to fully understand God’s mind or God’s ways.**
 - God might tell you to walk through “*the Red Sea as on dry land.*” Or to walk circles around Jericho until those walls come tumbling down. (11:29-30) None of that makes much sense. But it all takes faith.

- ❖ **To walk by faith means taking that next step forward even though you can't see the final destination.** You can't see all the steps it'll take to get there. You can't see all the challenges. You can't see how it's all going to happen. But do you trust that God does? **Do you trust that God can see all and that will guide you to wherever you need to go?**

Faith that Hopes in a Better Future

- ❖ That's what biblical faith does. The saints of old shared it. They ran with a faith that trusts in the unseen. They also ran with a faith that hopes in a better future. That's our second exhortation. **To run with one eye looking to the future, knowing that the fulfillment of God's promises won't take place until a future day, in a better country.**
 - This is so crucial to emphasize for those of us living comfortable lives in this fast-paced era of instant gratification. **We're used to getting what we want, when we want it.** Click a button, and it streams to your phone immediately. Or at most you have to wait two days. But it doesn't work that way in this race set before us. **God's promises are sure, but they don't come with a two-day delivery guarantee.**
- ❖ Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob all learned this lesson. They learned the utter necessity of faith. **Because they all died in faith without seeing the fulfillment of God's promises to them.** God had promised the land of Canaan. As far as their eyes could see, God promised it to them and their offspring forever (Gen 13:15). But by the time each of them were buried six feet under, the amount of that land that their family possessed was still so meager. A burial plot here. A well there. **In light of God's grand promises, there was very little fulfilled.**
 - But by faith, they pressed on. Look at v9, *"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. ¹⁰For he was looking forward to the city that has foundations, whose designer and builder is God."*
- ❖ Put yourself in the shoes of Abraham and his heirs. They were from the land of Ur. And they were wealthy and prosperous there. But they left it all behind to live in the land of promise. **And though they truly believed it was truly theirs by divine promise, they perpetually lived in tents, wandering the land as nomads.** They lived as foreigners in their own land. Never having the experience of finally settling down.
 - But that's what makes them perfect for your cheering section – to serve in that cloud of witnesses. **Because through their own testimony, they can encourage you to press on in faith even when there is so much of God's promises to you that won't be fulfilled until a future day.** That was their experience.
 - Look at v13, *"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. ¹⁴For people who speak thus make it clear that they are seeking a homeland. ¹⁵If they had been thinking of that land from which they had gone out, they would have had opportunity to return. ¹⁶But as it is, they desire a better country, that is, a heavenly one."*

- ❖ The saints of old were perpetual foreigners. No matter where they lived, they felt like strangers and exiles. Wherever they went, they never felt fully at home. **Which is why their eyes were always drawn to the horizon, looking to the future, awaiting a better inheritance in the kingdom come.**
 - By the time the storyline gets to Joseph, they were no longer even in the Promised Land. They're all the way over in Egypt. The fulfillment of God's promises couldn't have appeared any further from happening. It looked like the remotest of possibilities. And yet Joseph believed. Look at v22, *"By faith Joseph, at the end of his life, made mention of the exodus of the Israelites and gave directions concerning his bones."*
- ❖ Friends, if you expect to persevere in this race, you need this kind of faith. **Because what you'll quickly discover in the Christian life is that much of God's promises to you are already true but not yet fulfilled.** We're already saints, but we're not yet sanctified. We're already new creations, and yet we're still plagued with traces of the old self. We've been promised eternal life, and yet so much of life feels so mundane. We've been promised perfect peace, and yet we struggle with so much anxiety. All things are ours in Christ, and yet we live as strangers and exiles on the earth.
 - **Beloved, are you going to keep running the race set before you – even if much of what God has promised you as yet to be fulfilled?** Because that's what faith does. Faith doesn't hope in present day satisfaction. Faith hopes in a better future.

Faith that Counts Every Cost as Worthy

- ❖ Here's our third exhortation: Run the race set before you with a faith that counts every cost as worthy. That's the challenge. **Knowing that you will face trials and challenges of many kinds, will you press on and persevere?** The truth is that you probably won't if you're not sure if the reward in the end is worth it.
 - But that's what faith calls for. **Biblical faith believes in God and believes that God rewards those who seek him.** That's what makes all the suffering and loss worth it. Look at v6, *"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."*
- ❖ Now it's important to note that this belief in God rewarding us should *not* be viewed in a transactional sense. As if faith is like a token we drop into a claw machine, and we're just fishing for a reward. **No, this should be understood in a relational sense.** You see, we don't just believe that God exists – but that he's good and just and vindicates his people. So though we might experience hardship in this race set before them, it'll all be worth it in the end.
 - That was the kind of faith that sustained Moses. Look at v24, *"²⁴By faith Moses, when he was grown up, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter, ²⁵choosing rather to be mistreated with the people of God than to enjoy the fleeting pleasures of sin. ²⁶He considered the reproach of Christ greater wealth than the treasures of Egypt, for he was looking to the reward."*

- ❖ Moses chose to be mistreated with the people of God rather than enjoy the fleeting pleasures of sin, living a royal life of luxury. **He considered the experience of suffering for the sake of Christ to be of greater value than the treasures of Egypt.** Which means his eyes weren't focused on his difficult and challenging circumstances. They were set, looking forward. Looking, by faith, to the future. To the day God rewards him – and all who seek him by faith – with an inheritance greater in worth than all the treasures of the world.
- ❖ **This is an important point to make because many people have a misperception of biblical faith. They assume that the life of faith is a life merely driven by discipline and self-denial.** The real heroes of faith – it's assumed – are those who can bravely accept the costs of discipleship. Who embrace the suffering. Who eschew all earthly pleasures. Who reject their ambitions and renounce their desires. The life of faith is about denying yourself. It's about taking up your cross and suffering for Jesus.
 - Yes, those are Jesus's words. **He calls his disciples to deny themselves and take up their crosses. But *not* with a total rejection of pleasures and treasures.** You don't have to deny your innate desire for reward. Your human need for joy.
- ❖ Just look to Jesus. **Look at how he took up his own cross – with his eyes set forward, looking to the reward he'll receive beyond the cross, beyond the grave.** Look at chapter 12:2, *“let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, ²looking to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God.”*
 - **In other words, Jesus ran the race set before him by fixing his eyes on the joy set before him.** He didn't endure the cross by gritting his teeth and pushing through it. No, he was driven by faith in God's promise that he would gain a great reward. On the other side of that cross, there would be a blood-bought Bride. A great assembly of the Redeemed. All who trust in him, throughout all time, all with the same faith.
- ❖ **If Jesus was driven by the joy set before him, then we, as his disciples, should do the same.** We won't be able to run with endurance the race set before us – and finish well – if our eyes aren't fixed on the reward.
 - And let's be clear: **The reward we have in mind – the anticipated reward that makes every cost of discipleship worth it – is not monetary or material in nature.** Remember, Moses had access to all the earthly, material treasures of ancient Egypt. **So it's obvious that the real reward he was looking to was heavenly in nature and eternal in value.** Again, don't think transactionally. Think relationally.
 - Let me say this as plainly as possible: **The reward at the end of the race set before us is none other than Jesus himself.** You get to live in the joy of your Savior. He is the author and perfecter of our faith. The Alpha and Omega. The Beginning and the End. **He set us on this race from the start. And he'll be waiting for us there at the finish line.**

Faith that Centers on Its Author and Perfecter

- ❖ That leads directly to our fourth and final exhortation: Run with a faith that centers on its founder and perfecter. **In other words, look to Jesus.** “*Consider him ... so that you may not grow weary or fainthearted.*” That’s what the author stresses in chapter 12:2-3.
 - It’s been his main point in entire Hall of Faith. By the time he gets to v32, he realizes that he doesn’t have enough time to go through all OT examples of biblical faith. So he goes on to quickly recount a host of characters. Some by name. But mostly describing their experiences. How some triumphed and overcame. While others were overcome by their trials and tribulations. But all of them were commended by God because of faith. Because they all shared the same faith.
 - **Now what’s noteworthy is how chapter 11 ends by stating that none of these saints obtained the object of their faith.** They all died without receiving their reward. Because from their standpoint in redemptive history, Jesus had yet to come!
- ❖ That’s what vv39-40 are trying to say. “³⁹*And all these, though commended through their faith, did not receive what was promised,* ⁴⁰*since God had provided something better for us, that apart from us they should not be made perfect.*” The *us* in “for us” is referring to the Church, the NT covenant people of God. **So the “something better” that God provided to the Church is really Someone Better.**
 - The faith of OT believers was always centered on God’s Messiah, the coming Christ. They didn’t when he would arrive. They didn’t know his name. They didn’t know *how* he would save. But they all died believing God’s promises to send a Savior.
 - **They had to wait until the fullness of time, for the age of the Church, when the Messiah would be revealed to be none other than Jesus of Nazareth.** Who for the joy set before him endured the cross and despised its shame. He died the death we deserved to die. That we, by faith, might experience the newness of his resurrection life.
- ❖ **Friends, do you share in this faith?** Do you share in the same faith of Abraham, Issac, and Jacob; of Moses and David; of Sarah and Rahab? **Now I realize some of you might still be hesitant to agree.** Because it still feels presumptuous to compare yourself to these figures in the Hall of Faith. You still feel like you’re in another category.
 - **Because v1 said “faith is the assurance of things hoped for,” but you don’t feel assured of much when it comes to your salvation.** You still struggle with doubts. Your faith still feels so weak. You have little assurance of things hoped for.
- ❖ This is why we need to end the way we began. **Stressing that assurance was always intended to be found – not in the quality of our faith – but the object of our faith.** In the book *Reason for God*, Tim Keller says to imagine yourself tumbling down a cliff. You see a branch sticking out. And the truth about this branch is that, even if you don’t know it, it is strong enough to support your weight. It is your only hope of salvation.

- ❖ But maybe you're filled with doubts and have little assurance. Maybe you're unsure about this branch or generally just unsure about yourself. **But all that matters, in the end, is whether or not you grab the branch.** How you feel about it subjectively doesn't change the branch objectively. As long as you reach out and grab a hold of it – you will be saved.
- ❖ **Friends, it's not the strength of your faith but the object of your faith that saves.** That means, yes, even you, with the struggling faith, can have the assurance of things hoped for. As long as it's a faith centered on Jesus – the author and perfecter of weak faith in weak people like us – then rest assured that you're holding onto a strong branch.