

Heb 11:13-16 The Perseverance and Reward of Faith

This morning I have two main truths and some applications from our passage: 1) Faith perseveres; and 2) Faith has a reward. And we need these truths as we live by faith in this world.

1. The Perseverance of faith. I think this is the overall application for the writer of Hebrews. In all the examples of Heb. 11, he is being a good pastor, reminding them of the examples of their fathers in the faith, particularly how they “pressed on” even in the most difficult of circumstances. And they continued on until the “end,” until they died, even without receiving the promises. Yes, Abraham and Sarah received the promised Son, Isaac. But, they did not receive the land in its fulness. And they were still small in number at the time of their death, compared to the promise of God to make their descendants like the stars of heaven or the sand on the seashore (Gen. 22:17). Look at vv. 13-15: “**These all died in faith, not having received the things promised, but having seen them and greeted them from afar . . .**” Let’s stop for a moment. Here, we see that the promise of God is the motivating factor in their perseverance. But, it is not JUST the promise. It is BELIEF (faith) in the promise. It is as 11:1 says, the “**assurance (substance) of thing hoped for, the conviction of things not seen.**” This is what the author means by “*greeted them from afar.*” They were looking FORWARD to something God had promised. And as they waited, no matter the difficulties, they persevered!

Did any of you read or see *The Voyage of the Dawn Treader* by C.S. Lewis? Do you remember Reepicheep. He is the big mouse. He is the smallest of all the characters. But, he is known as the one who has the most courage. He is always the first to do what is right, the first to go into battle, the first to pull out his sword, the first to take on the biggest foe. And at the end of the movie, Reepicheep, Caspian, and the kids, come to a huge wave of water that stays in place. And Aslan comes to them and says, “beyond is Aslan’s country.” And he gives the option for Caspian and Reepicheep to go into that land. Caspian chooses to stay behind. But Reepicheep lays down his sword and his hat, and says something like this, “*I’ve always longed for your country. I’ve always known it is there.*” And Aslan says, “*That land was made for those like you.*” The reason Reepicheep persevered with courage and patience and righteousness was connected with one day going to that land.” THIS IS FAITH, the “**assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen.**”

Now, back to the rest of verses 13-14: “**and having acknowledged that they were strangers and exiles on the earth. 14 For people who speak thus make it clear that they are seeking a homeland. 15 If they had been thinking of that land from which they had gone out, they would have had opportunity to return.**” Here, the emphasis is on looking forward to God’s promise as a means to perseverance. Their goal was God’s promise, and even more as we’ve seen . . . they looked to God Himself and his presence. And by faith in God and his promise they did not return to the land of Ur. They resided in Canaan as pilgrims and strangers (more on this in application in a moment). And this “looking forward” was for their entire life, at least with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. And even at the end of Jacob’s life as he lived in Egypt under the protection of Joseph, he made Joseph promise he would take his bones back to Canaan, the land of promise, which God would finally give to Israel. Yet, the writer of Hebrews tells us that the

Land of Canaan wasn't the ultimate promise they were looking for. They were looking forward to a city "*whose designer and builder is God*" (11:10). And because of this, they persevered!

2. The Reward of faith. Faith has a reward. Look at v. 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 for them a city.**" Here, the text says they were waiting (by faith) in God's promise for a "better country," that is a "heavenly one." And then it says, God has prepared for them a city (16b). In our context, the Jewish patriarchs of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob were looking forward to a city as their reward. And this city was not back in Ur of Chaldea. Otherwise, they would have returned (v. 15). And later, God will give Israel a city, an earthly city called Jerusalem which had a king and a temple. And at its height during the time of Solomon, Jerusalem was the most beautiful and glorious city on earth.

But, let me ask, "*What kind of city was that city?*" Hint: It was destroyed at least 2 times, the first around 586 BC with the Babylonians and the next 70 AD with the Romans . . . It was destroyed because man built that city. Think of the brick and mortar cities men build in this world. What happens to them over time? They do not last. Why? They are of the earth. How many cities were destroyed in the earthquake last week? Many. And yes, they may be built again. But, they also will not last. This means that God is giving his people of faith a reward that cannot be destroyed. It cannot be taken. Jesus says, "**Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal, but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal**" (Matt. 6:19–20). And in our context the reward of faith is a "city," also called a "better country," a "heavenly one," that cannot be destroyed! With this in mind, I have 3 truths to try and explain what I believe this means.

Truth #1. This promise is fulfilled in Christ. Through the timeline of history, ALL God's promises are fulfilled in Christ. From Gen. 3:15 to the consummation of all things (Rom. 8:22-23) Christ is the fulfillment. As we look back to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, the patriarchs, the fathers of the Jewish nation, we see God fulfill some of his promises even in their lifetime. The prime example is Isaac. And then we see God start to multiply his descendants. When we get to Moses, we have a great nation. With Joshua and the coming generations, God gives them the land. With David, we see a "righteous" king established. The nation does build a "temple" for the presence of God in the city of Jerusalem. So, we see in the OT, many promises fulfilled. And then we come to fullness of time when God sent forth his Son, in whom are found ALL God's promises. With his birth, sinless life, vicarious death (in our place), resurrection from the dead, ascension to the right hand of God where He now rules, the sending of the Holy Spirit, we look back on the person and work of Christ, in whom ALL God's promises are "yes" (2 Cor. 1:20). As the NT proclaims, Jesus is the true prophet, the great high priest, and the King who is ruling now. And Abraham and the OT saints, by faith, all looked forward to Christ (John 8:56; Heb. 11:26) where ALL God's promises are fulfilled.

Truth #2. Our reward is Christ Himself. In the context of Hebrews, the writer is telling them that they have come to Christ, the great high priest, who is the eternal God who took on flesh. Look over at 12:22: "**But you have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem . . .**" Here, he is saying, you have come to the heavenly city. And then he

equates coming to this city with coming to Christ. Look at v. 24: “**and to Jesus, the mediator of a new covenant . . .**” Jesus himself, in Matt. 12, tells the religious leaders, “*something greater than Jonah is here . . . something greater than Solomon is here*” (Matt. 12:41-42). “*Something greater than the temple is here*” (Matt. 12:6). He is speaking about himself. As Heb. 1:2-3 tells us: “**in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed the heir of all things, through whom also he created the world. He is the radiance of the glory of God and the exact imprint of his nature, and he upholds the universe by the word of his power. After making purification for sins, he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high . . .**” He is saying, “*Don’t go back to the old system, the new has come; God is with you. Your sins are forgiven. There is no other sacrifice.*” And there will never be another sacrifice! The Great High Priest is also the offering. And in Christ, God is building a heavenly city. So when you come to Christ, you come to the city of God. What an amazing truth!

Truth #3. Even though all God’s promises are fulfilled in Christ, we still wait for the consummation of all things. . . . We still wait for all the enemies of Christ to be made his footstool. Look over to Heb. 13:14: “**For here we have no lasting city, but we seek the city that is to come.**” Three other times in Hebrews we’ve the seen the author use the word “city.” And in the first three times, he is speaking of the OT saints looking forward to a heavenly city. And we know this city came in Christ. In other words, God came down from heaven in the person of the Son. And even today, He dwells with his people by the power of the Holy Spirit. Eph. 1:14 says, the Holy Spirit is “**the guarantee of our inheritance until we acquire possession of it . . .** We have the downpayment for what is to come. The blessings of God’s reward to his people in Christ are still ahead. In this way, we also, “**seek the city that is to come.**”

Satan is still active in this world. I still struggle with sin (and so do you). Death is still around us every day. Earthquakes are killing thousands (think of Turkey this past weekend). This means we are still waiting for the final return of Christ and for the final judgment and the consummation of the new heavens and the new earth. As our church confession says, “*Of the World to Come We believe that the end of the world is approaching; that at the last day Christ will descend from heaven, and raise the dead from the grave to final retribution; that a solemn separation will then take place; that the wicked will be adjudged to endless punishment, and the righteous to endless joy; and that this judgment will fix forever the final state of men in heaven or hell, on principles of righteousness.*” I believe in the timeline of God’s plan of redemption, we only wait for his final coming, when all his enemies are made his footstool (Heb. 1:13; 10:13). And in the meantime, FAITH perseveres as we wait for that day!

It will be the day our faith is made sight. It will be the day when we will hope no more. We will see our reward in FULL. And what is our reward? You know the answer. IT is still the same. It is God Himself . . . who has revealed himself in the Son. This is why we can say that God is our reward. We can also say that Christ is our reward. Let me now finish with some applications.

Application: As his child, you are special to God. God is not ashamed to be called our God (Look at v. 16b). As a child of God you are special. Now, God does not love everyone the same. We see this truth throughout Heb. 11 with those who have faith. Go back to 11:2 “**For by it the people of old received their commendation.**” In v. 4 God “**commended Abel.**” In v. 5 Enoch was also “**commended by God.**” In other words, God approves of some people in a way that he

does not with others. And v. 16 goes a bit further by emphasizing God is not ashamed to be our God. Let me say that all people are not “special” in this way. Yes, ALL are created by God. But, not all have faith. John 1:12-13 says, **“But to all who did receive him, who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God, who were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God.”** This means that if you have received Jesus, believed in him, look to him, you are God’s child. And you are special.

Application: When we live different than the world, we make it clear that we are seeking something better. a “better country,” a “heavenly one,” a city prepared by God. Look back at vv. 13-14 again: **“but having seen them and greeted them from afar, and having acknowledged that they were strangers and exiles on the earth. 14 For people who speak thus make it clear that they are seeking a homeland.”** When you look at Abraham’s life, there is no doubt where he stands. He lived as a stranger and an exile. I do not understand, nor do I have all the answers as to all the specifics of what is to come for us. But, one thing is very clear: Because of faith in the promises of God and the “city to come” we live differently. We live godly lives. We make different decisions than the world. We do not lay up for ourselves treasures on earth (as Jesus says).

Application: To persevere and wait for our final reward NOW is to follow Jesus. In Matt. 16:24 we read: “Then Jesus told his disciples, **“If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me.”** And when we continue following Jesus in this life (who now sits in heaven at the right hand of God), we live by faith.

Application: Seek those things which are above. This is exactly what we see in Heb. 11. And for us, look with me to Col. 3:1-10: **“If then you have been raised with Christ, seek the things that are above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. Set your minds on things that are above, not on things that are on earth. For you have died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God. When Christ who is your life appears, then you also will appear with him in glory. Put to death therefore what is earthly in you: sexual immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire, and covetousness, which is idolatry. On account of these the wrath of God is coming. In these you too once walked, when you were living in them. But now you must put them all away: anger, wrath, malice, slander, and obscene talk from your mouth. Do not lie to one another, seeing that you have put off the old self with its practices and have put on the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge after the image of its creator.”**

Application: Already, but not yet. In their time, Christ had not come yet. The true prophet, priest, and king had not come yet. But by faith, they did see him from afar. And then two thousand years ago, when the time was right, God sent forth his Son (Gal. 4:4). And we look back upon the person and work of Christ. And now, we are seated with him in the heavenly places . . . ALREADY! But, there is more to come. By faith we look forward to his 2nd coming and the completion of the new heavens and the new earth, which by the way has already begun with resurrection of Christ and is happening now through the power of the Holy Spirit. But, we still wait. Phil. 3:20-21 says: **“But our citizenship is in heaven, and from it we await a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, who will transform our lowly body to be like his glorious body, by the power that enables him even to subject all things to himself.”**

In summary Faith perseveres in this life. And, though we have come to Christ and to a “city” now, we wait for our the consummation of all things and a reward which is yet to come.