



Living a Life of Faith

An ABF Series on Hebrews 11

An Introduction to the Hall of Faith

Introduction: Have you ever felt like quitting? In 2014 Admiral William H. McRaven gave the commencement address at the University of Texas. A former Navy SEAL McRaven gave 10 life lessons that he had learned during his training for the SEAL program. The entire speech is inspiring, reasonably short, and definitely worth a read. But it is the 10th and final lesson that really caught my attention.

“Finally, in SEAL training there is a bell. A brass bell that hangs in the center of the compound for all the students to see.

All you have to do to quit—is ring the bell. Ring the bell and you no longer have to wake up at 5 o'clock. Ring the bell and you no longer have to do the freezing cold swims.

Ring the bell and you no longer have to do the runs, the obstacle course, the PT—and you no longer have to endure the hardships of training.

Just ring the bell.

If you want to change the world don't ever, ever ring the bell.”

<http://www.businessinsider.com/bill-mcraven-commencement-speech-at-ut-2014-5>

The book of Hebrews was written to a group of Christians that were tired, exhausted, and were thinking about ringing the bell. They had been persecuted, had lost much, and were about to go through even greater persecution. They were beginning to wonder if it was really worth it. And so the author of this book pleads, reasons, threatens, encourages, and exhorts his listeners to not quit.

In this study we will be studying the 11th chapter, where the author attempts to inspire his weary audience with example after example of faith-filled and faithful living and see how we too can live a life of faith

Overview of the Book of Hebrews

Author

Who wrote Hebrews? We don't really know. Many different people have been suggested. Paul is probably the most common, but there are several problems with a Pauline authorship.

1. There is no self-identification. Paul introduces himself in every other letter.
2. The way the author quotes Scripture is different than Paul. Paul normally begins Scripture with “It is written” but Hebrews often introduces quotations by saying that a member of the trinity “says.”

3. Paul normally spends the first half of his letter laying out doctrine (Ephesians 1-3, Colossians 1-2, Romans 1-11) and the second half applying it (Ephesians 4-6, Colossians 3-4, Romans 12-16) but the author of Hebrews weaves doctrine and application all throughout.
4. Paul was emphatic that he did not receive the gospel from anyone other than Jesus Christ Himself (Galatians 1:11-12; 16b-17) but the author of Hebrews identifies himself as receiving the gospel second hand (Hebrews 2:3). This in my view is the strongest argument against Paul.
5. There is mixed tradition about who wrote the book. Many sources have Paul as the author, and many do not. Tertullian suggested Barnabas. Apollos is a very good candidate, except that no one suggested him until Martin Luther. Origen, a second and third century scholar, perhaps summed it up best when he said, "But who wrote the epistle, in truth only God knows."

Although we don't know who wrote the epistle, several things are clear. He was **inspired** by the Holy Spirit. This book bears all the marks of divine inspiration and ambiguity of the author is no cause for concern. The author clearly was a very gifted **expositor**. His extensive quotation of the Old Testament, his tight reasoning, his impassioned pleas, and his strong warnings and carefully woven arguments all point to someone who was very knowledgeable and very passionate about his topic. The author describes his work as "a word of exhortation" (13:22) and sums up well the **pastoral** concern the author demonstrates.

Audience

The audience was Jewish. This is fairly obvious from the extensive quotations of Scripture, the appeal to Old Testament examples, the nature of quitting that the author was concerned about (returning to Judaism), and the title of the book itself. They had endured tough persecution (10:32-34) but the author feared they were growing weary (12:3, 12-13).

Message

The message of the book of Hebrews is “Since Jesus Christ is **better**, you must hold on to Him in **faith**.” The author of this letter begins with doctrine. He argues from OT Scripture for the superiority of Christ, that Christ is “better.” If you take the time to read through the whole book, you will find that Jesus is better than the prophets, the angels, Moses, the high priest, and the Old Covenant including the sacrifices and the priests. 12 times the author describes Jesus and His covenant as “better,” twice as “greater,” and once as more perfect.

But like every good preacher, the author is not content to merely give us doctrine. He pauses at multiple points throughout his letter to exhort us based on the truth he has just presented (37 commands in the book). And his logic goes something like this.

- Jesus Christ is far better than anything in the Old Covenant and has spoken finally and fully for God.
- In the Old Covenant, people who ignored and rebelled against God faced severe punishment.
- *If God severely punished those who disregarded his Word through Moses, the prophets, and angels, I shudder to think what will happen to us if we ignore the Word given to us by His Son.*

- So don't quit! You must not give up! You think it's bad now, it will be far worse if you rebel against your God, just read the Scriptures you claim to love so much!

Structure

As was mentioned above, the author weaves together doctrinal and practical sections. There are several "warning sections" noticed by commentators

Jesus is better than the prophets (1:1-4)

Jesus is better than the angels (1:5-2:18)

Warning passage: 2:1-4

Jesus is better than Moses (3:1-4:13)

Warning passage 3:7-4:11

Jesus is better than the high priest (4:13-7:28)

Warning passage: (5:11-6:20)

Jesus is better than the Old Covenant (8:1-10:39)

Warning passage: (10:19-39)

Faith in the Old Covenant (11:1-12:4)

Further Instruction on Endurance (12:4-29)

Warning passage: (12:25-29)

Final Exhortations (13:1-19)

Conclusion (13:20-25)

Side Note – The Relationship of the Old and New Covenants

Books like Hebrews and Galatians, if not studied carefully can lead to the misunderstanding that the Old Covenant was somehow bad. The Bible actually teaches that God's covenant with Israel was a great blessing (Deuteronomy 5:32-35), but. . .

- *The Old Covenant was **temporary**; it never truly dealt with the sin problem. (Hebrews 10:1-4)*
- *The Old Covenant was **typical**; it foreshadowed what was to come. (Hebrews 10:21)*
- *The Old Covenant was **foundational**; it pointed to the true source of the problem. (Romans 7:7)*

Just because something is better (Hebrews 7:22), doesn't mean the other thing is bad. Engagement, for example, is a good thing that is intended to be temporary. Someone who only wants to be engaged has a problem.

Overview of Chapter 11

The author has done most of the doctrinal teaching that he will do. He has made some application, but is about to make a lot more. He now takes a break to both motivate his listeners and at the same time challenge some of their assumptions.

Having shown the **differences** between the Old and New Covenant, the author now shows the **overlap**, reminding his listeners about things they didn't really want to think about. Both the Old and New Covenant required people to live a life of faith.

What is faith?

Faith throughout the book of Hebrews is a very **active** term. We often think of faith as a **mental** activity, but Hebrews presents faith as an

act of both the mind and the **will**, and refuses to allow us to separate these two. So faith is first of all a belief in God. . .

- Faith believes in the **goodness** of God's **character**
- Faith believes in the **truthfulness** of God's **promises**
- Faith believes in the **purpose** of God's **actions**

. . . but it is a belief in God lived out when we **endure** in the face of great hardship and trial.

Faith is believing who God is, what God says, and what God does even and especially when life doesn't make sense.

What does faith do?

While Hebrews 11:1 is often called a **definition** of faith, it isn't technically a definition. It's more a **description** of the effect faith has on our lives. Much like someone who says "Variety is the spice of life" doesn't mean that if you look up the word variety in a dictionary you are going to find a definition that says "the spice of life." So Hebrews describes the effect that faith has on us.

- Faith is the **substance/essence** of things hoped for
"Faith gives substance to the things we have been promised and are hoping for." It is almost as if we they are possessions we already have through our faith.

"Faith 'lays hold of what is promised and therefore hoped for, as something real and solid, though yet unseen.'" -P.E. Hughes

- Faith is the **evidence/proof** of things not seen

"Faith proves to us the reality of what we cannot see." Faith allows us to take God at His Word because we have become convinced about things we have not even seen.

The rest of chapter 11 plays out this idea. People acting as if the things they have promised are already real because they have been convinced by faith that they are and that they already possess them. And this perspective, that they have already obtained these promises they have been given, allows them to endure unimaginable opposition, because they are convinced it will all be worth it.

It was faith that caused Noah to build an ark, even though he and his family were the only righteous people left in a wicked and corrupt culture. It was faith that convinced Abraham to leave everything he knew to go to a land he hadn't seen yet, and to be ready to sacrifice his son of promise. It was faith that caused Moses, one of the wealthiest, most powerful men in the world during his day to throw his lot in with a bunch of slaves and wander in the desert for 80 years. It was faith that was going to get these Hebrew Christians through the next, stronger wave of persecution.

And it is faith that is still needed and still seen today. It is faith that allows a holocaust survivor to forgive and shake hands with one of her guards who is now a brother. It is faith that allows parents to lose a child to cancer and then say to a dumbfounded world, "My God is still good." It is faith that causes an Eric Liddell to give up running to share the gospel, or convinces a wealthy, successful engineer to give up his career and go back to seminary because he feels God calling him to the pastorate. It is faith that will allow you to look at the darkest and hardest and most confusing moments of your life and to say I trust Him, I trust His promises, and I trust what He's doing, no matter what happens.

Oh friend, we need faith, and in this study, we are going to study exactly what that life of faith looks like.