

Hebrews 11, let's get there. Does anyone want to guess off the top of their head how many e-mails I got this week with dogs dressed in human clothes? Anybody want to guess? Maybe in the hundreds. My favorite one being the weenie dog dressed as a vampire. It's my favorite. If you don't know what I'm talking about in here, I'm okay with that.

So, we're in Hebrews chapter 11. We've been in the book of Hebrews for seventeen weeks now. And last week, all we did was defined what faith is. Alright, the Bible is going to come straight out and define what faith is. And here's what we said, faith has three pieces. The foundational element of faith is discontentment. And I know that doesn't sound right in church because you're supposed to say, "We're all supposed to be content." But discontentment is the thing that leads us towards health and healing, and here's where we get that. We get that because faith is the assurance of things hoped for. And if you have hope, your current reality is not what you wanted it to be. Therefore, you possess hope. So, if you are hoping that your marriage is one day this, it means currently, it is not. If you are hoping to one day have money, you're currently broke. So, the foundational element of faith is discontentment. Without discontentment, there is no faith. There is not faith without discontentment. It is the thing that stirs us.

Now, this creates all kinds of holes in modern day evangelical thought. And the reason being because if this is true, then one of the greatest, most horrible things that could ever happen to us is for us to be content. Because if discontentment leads to faith, and you're perfectly content living the life of a cultured animal. You know, you eat, you sleep, you don't attack your own, then that's a really dangerous place to be in. Discontentment then leads to us pressing into God. Discontentment leads us into knowing and walking with Jesus. And there, we find assurance that what we hoped for to begin with can be answered in Christ. And that's how the Scriptures define faith.

Now, from there, what's going to happen is he's going to begin to outline kind of the "who's who" in Christian history, specifically Old Testament Christian history. And then what I want to show you is the characteristics of faith, and then we'll move on from there. So, we are going to read a lot of Scripture tonight, alright. And so just follow along with me. Hebrews 11, we're going to start in verse 8 all the way to verse 40. Stretch your eyes out. Here we go:

"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. 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..."

Now, if you get around guys who like to talk the Bible, there are a lot of guys I've met who have said that Abraham having a child when he was older really wasn't that big of a deal because everybody lived longer back in those days. Well, Scripture just said he's as good as dead. I don't know how old that is, but it's old, alright. When you're walking out of his tent, and you're going, "Anytime now," he's old, okay. When the Scripture testifies about him, that he's seriously on the clock, he is old. God Himself, in the text, just said, "I'm about to take him home."

So, here we go back to the text. "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." Now, listen to verse 13. 13 is very hard, very difficult, and we're going to spend some time unpacking it tonight. "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. 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. By faith Abraham, when he was tested, offered up Isaac, and he who had received the promises was offering up his only begotten son;..." Have we heard that anywhere else? Only begotten son? Okay, keep following me, because there's going to be some more here. "...it was he to whom it was said, 'In Isaac your descendants shall be called.' He considered that God is able to raise people even from the dead..." Do we know another begotten son that was raised from the dead? Okay, so once again, we're back to this shadow idea, this picture idea. In fact, this one's going to call it a type of one to come. So, look there with me, "...even from the dead, from which he also received him back as a type." There it is again. Once again, God's always painting pictures. Once again, God's always revealing through other things. "By faith Isaac blessed Jacob and Esau, even regarding things to come. By faith Jacob, as he was dying, blessed each of the sons of Joseph, and worshiped, leaning on the top of his staff. By faith Joseph, when he was dying, made mention of the exodus of the sons of Israel, and gave orders concerning his bones." Let me tell you why that one's so big: because Joseph is alive around 300 years before the Exodus. So, Joseph goes, "In several hundred years, we're going to get out of here. Don't leave my bones in Egypt." Talk about foresight. I mean, he's going, "Alright, I'm going to die now. A couple hundred years from now, we're getting out of here in a land of our own. I don't want to be buried in Egypt. Dig up my bones, bury me on the other side." Verse 23:

"By faith Moses, when he was born, was hidden for three months by his parents, because they saw he was a beautiful child; and they were not afraid of the king's edict. By faith Moses, when he had grown up, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter, choosing rather to endure ill-treatment with the people of God than to enjoy the passing pleasures of sin, considering the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures of Egypt; for he was looking to the reward. By faith he left Egypt, not fearing the wrath of the king; for he endured, as seeing Him who is unseen. By faith he kept the Passover and the sprinkling of the blood, so that he who destroyed the firstborn would not touch them. By faith they passed through the Red Sea as though they were passing through dry land; and the Egyptians, when they attempted it, were drowned. By faith the walls of Jericho fell down after they had been encircled for seven days. By faith Rahab the harlot did not perish along with those who were disobedient, after she had welcomed the spies in peace."

Do you know how I know that Jesus has a heart for women who have been taken advantage of? Because Rahab the harlot is in whose bloodline? Jesus' bloodline. Alright, verse 32:

"And what more shall I say? For time will fail me if I tell of Gideon, Barak, Samson, Jephthah, of David and Samuel and the prophets, who by faith conquered kingdoms, performed acts of righteousness, obtained promises, shut the mouths of lions, quenched the power of fire, escaped the edge of the sword, from weakness were made strong, became mighty in war, put foreign armies to flight. Women received back their dead by resurrection; And now, the text is going to turn. It's going to turn, and by faith, all these glorious things happen, now by faith, sorrow and hardship."

"Women received back their dead by resurrection; and others were tortured, not accepting their release, so that they might obtain a better resurrection; and others experienced mockings and scourgings, yes, also chains and imprisonment. They were stoned, they were sawn in two, they were tempted, they were put to death with the sword; they went about in sheepskins, in goatskins, being destitute, afflicted, ill-treated (men of whom the world was not worthy), wandering in deserts and mountains and caves and holes in the ground. And all these, having gained approval through

their faith, did not receive what was promised, because God had provided something better for us, so that apart from us they would not be made perfect.”

Okay, there's three things that we see here in this text that are connected to faith. And here, I'm just going to kind of list them out for you just really simply. Here's the first one, the first one is simply this: faith, by definition, is always anticipating a better day. Faith has somehow seen the future and now believes that future is coming. Without that anticipation, that there is something better, then faith does not exist, because that is by definition what faith is. Faith anticipates that the promises of Christ will come true, no matter how long we have to fight for them or wait for them. It's one of the reasons why I'm always pleading with you to be in the Scriptures. I'm pleading with you, because there, you'll find and you'll read the promises of God, and it creates in us an anticipation that God will accomplish what He says He will accomplish. And what happens when you don't know what God has said He's going to do in you, is you get stuck in this faulty religion, almost always based on external rules, hoping to somehow obtain something that you can't name. By being in the Scriptures, we see the promises of God. We begin to hope for them. There's this anticipation birthed with faith.

But faith not only anticipates, it moves. Faith acts. It is not stagnant. Let's say it like this, faith never twiddles it's thumbs. Faith doesn't go, "Well, God's going to take care of this. I read that somewhere. Just going to wait on that to happen." Let me show you what I mean here. Probably the best place to see this would be in verse 32. "And what more shall I say? For time will fail me if I tell of Gideon, Barak, Samson, Jephthah, of David and Samuel and the prophets" who by faith started moving. "...who by faith conquered kingdoms." How do you think that happened? Because he sat down and said, "God will conquer this kingdom? Go get 'em. I'll be here." No, in fact, remember last week when we said faith frees us up to follow the absurd? Is there more absurd story in all of Scripture than the battle of Jericho? Is there? I mean, here's what happens, the Scriptures are very clear that among Israel, there was not one sword, there were no fighting men. So Joshua, in his first act as the leader of Israel, goes in and convenes with God, and God goes, "Do you have a marching band? Okay, here's what we're going to do, here's the plan. Walk around their junk seven times, blow the horns and then make camp. And the Joshua's going to come out and tell them, "I know Moses has died and I'm the new guy, but here's the plan. I want the band. Can you fight? No? You play the flute. Get up here. I need you guys to march across and circle..." And they do it. I mean, it's an absurd, absurd, absurd battle plan, and by faith, they move on it. It's just a great, great story. "...who by faith conquered kingdoms, performed acts of righteousness, obtained promises, shut the mouths of lions, quenched the power of fire, escaped the edge of the sword, from weakness were made strong, became mighty in war, put foreign armies to flight." Faith moves. It is not static. It does not terminate on itself. It moves. It grows. It shakes. It fires off. It moves. Faith moves or it's not faith. It's not. Faith is not static. It is moving. So listen, because you gotta be careful here. Because here's what defines, here's one of those defining moments where biblical Christianity and American Evangelicalism split from each other. We talk so much in here about this being a safe place to handle our issues, handle our junk, handle our past. And if you know you've got issues, you've got hurt, you've got wounds, and all you do is keep coming here week after week learning the language of what that is, but not moving on it at all, you don't have faith, you have something else. You have church; you don't have faith. Because faith moves. Faiths says, "Christ can heal me. He commands me to confess. I'm confessing. Because I have faith that in obedience to Christ, I will be healed. That's how faith works." If faith is not, "I believe Christ can heal me. He's asked me to confess it. I'm not going to."

"Why? Why wouldn't you?"

"Well, because it's embarrassing."

"Okay, that's top level. Let's peel that back. Why won't you?"

"Well, because I have pride"

"Okay, peel that back. What's under that?"

"Well, because I don't know that He can really heal me."

It's a lack of faith. Faith moves.

This is the entire James 2 debate. Now, keep your finger here in 11, because we're coming back, but flip over a couple of pages to James, chapter 2. I don't know what you know about Christian history, but the reformers hated James, chapter 2. In fact, Luther called the book of James "the epistle of straw." He said, "It's the epistle of straw. We should burn it." Now, I feel blasphemous for saying this, but Luther just read it wrong. That feels weird for me to say that. I feel a little dirty after that, because you're talking Luther, alright, and then me. There's a discrepancy in intellect here, and I'm on the losing end. But I want you to read this with me, because what's going to happen here is there is an interchange of the word here, so that "faith" and "works" is used interchangeably here, not because faith produces works, but because it's kind of the same thing. If there's faith, there's movement, alright. Watch this, starting in verse 14, "What use is it, my brethren, if someone says he has faith but he has no works? Can that faith save him? If a brother or sister is without clothing and in need of daily food, and one of you says to them, "Go in peace, be warmed and be filled," and yet you do not give them what is necessary for their body, what use is that?" And I would add, "you should be punched in the face." I mean, the guy's starving to death and freezing, you're like, "You stay warm buddy, and get something to eat." I keep pushing to the elders that we should have a ministry here called "The Ministry of Pain." It keeps getting shot down. Oh, I'll get it through.

Alright, here we go, "...what use is that? Even so faith, if it has no works, is dead, being by itself." Okay, so let's unpack this. If I had a skeleton up here, hanging from a hook like you did in biology class, is that skeleton a human being? No, it's not, because the human being has long since died. Now, you've just got its bones. What he's saying here is that faith without works isn't faith at all, because faith is dead. Faith does not exist if there's not works with it. Now, always notice that it puts faith first. Why? Because works does not bring faith. If you get that confused, you're going back to the tabernacle, and while there's any standing in the tabernacle, you will not see Jesus. That's what Hebrews says. Yeah, so you gotta be careful. Faith creates works; works don't create faith. That's opposite. You got it backwards if you're living, thinking, walking that way, alright. So, this is the same argument here, that faith without works is dead, that faith creates movement, faith creates action. Where there is no movement, where there is no action...

Now, here's why I think we get confused. I think we get confused because we've defined "works" improperly. I think what we've done is, we've said, "Here's what works are, works are..." And we've used the illustration from James, "Works are that we feed the poor, and we clothe the naked dude." And that's how we've kind of defined what works is. But what if I told you tonight that maybe works is becoming aware of the wickedness of your heart and being obedient unto Christ when you realize it? What if works is becoming aware that you need some help and going and get it? What if that's works? What if works is you finally living honestly? What if works is you finally coming clean? What if that's works? I think it is. I think faith produces that kind of works.

Alright, so faith, it anticipates, faith moves, and here's the third one, and I think it's a hard one. Faith always perseveres. And let me show you why this is hard. We've already read, and I pointed it out while we read it. Go back to Hebrews 11. We'll read them both. This is going to be hard on us because we've had a lot of historic bad preaching that makes you believe the cross is all about you. And so, it makes this really hard to hear. Because Jesus loves you very much, but the cross was way more than just about you. Alright, and that's hard for us. It's hard for us because everything in our culture

says it's about us. And there have been really, really horrible songs written over the years, theologically flawed songs. "God loves people more than anything." That's not true. Maybe you don't know that song. If you don't, don't worry about it. It's bad, horrible theology. Alright, verse 13, faith perseveres, "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." So, here's what He's unpacking for that first group of men, that God comes to Abraham and says, "I'm going to make a city with you. I'm going to build a city, and out of that city, I'm going to bless the ends of the earth." And Abraham dies in a tent, not in a city, in a tent. God promises him a city, he dies in a tent.

Alright, one more time. Just in case you're like, "Oh, what about all those other names?" Verse 39, "And all these, having gained approval through their faith, did not receive what was promised, because God had provided something better for us, so that apart from us they would not be made perfect." Okay, you and I find ourselves caught up in a story that began long before us and will play out long after us if Christ tarries. You and I, on God's time line are a two second sound bite. Doesn't that just make you warm inside? So that our lives serve both the purposes of God in our generation and the purposes of God in the next generation. So that we find ourselves caught up in the whole of the story.

Maybe I can explain it better to you personally. Jerry Meade's in here tonight. I've gone to see Jerry Meade several times. I think he smiles when he listens to me preach. I've gone to see Jerry several times, and before that, I went to another counselor called Bob Hamp because I have issues. The last hundred years of Chandler men have been pretty wicked. And everything from a guy getting hung because he robbed a train to everything from sexual abuse to physical abuse to emotional abuse, you can track it down over the last hundred years. And it's created in me, issues. Self hate, lust, anger. It's created in me, those things, and I seized the opportunity for those things. And so, every once and a while, I get hung up and I have to go get some help. That's why I'm always telling you, "Man, you swallow up your pride and go. You don't have a pastor that's trying to wear the cape." I wore the cape once, got shot in the chest, bleeding everywhere, alright. This don't work! So, I ain't wearing the cape, man. Thirteen years, I've been following Jesus. And you know what? I've experienced a lot of freedom from my junk, but let me be completely, completely honest with you. Sometimes, I really still have to wrestle with it. So let me talk to you, because I'm trying to unpack what this is saying. And some of you are going to like it, and some of you aren't going to, but if the gospel's being veiled, it's being veiled to those who are perishing is what 1 Corinthians says. So, let me say this to you. What if I have to struggle with and fight these things for the next 50 years? What if I never fully get whole, but my son does, because I fought? What if I have to plead with Christ in the middle of the night, what if I have to wrestle the dark things in me for the rest of my life, but my son doesn't have to and neither does my daughter? Healing will be mine, on this side or the next. That's not for me to decide. There's no magic combination for me to scroll through to get there. In fact, we pray this prayer at Celebrate Recovery every Thursday night at the end that says, "...that I might be reasonably happy in this life." And I always kind of cringe when I say that. I'm like, "I don't want to be reasonably happy." But what if my lot struggle, wrestle, hurt so there would be a new legacy of Chandler men born? I'm okay with that...most of the time. I was saying that, and I was like, "Crap! I have to be honest." Most of the time, I'm okay with that. It perseveres. It clings to the fact that we have not been abandoned. It anticipates. It acts. It perseveres. It sees the promises out in the future and hopes for them.

Now, let's go to Hebrews, chapter 12, and let me say this to you. Always beware of anyone who tries to preach Hebrews 12 without preaching Hebrews 11 first. Because it doesn't make any sense without Hebrews 11. So, let's look at this. Hebrews 12: 1, here we go, "Therefore..." Therefore what? Therefore since chapter 11. Therefore, since faith anticipates, since faith moves, it acts, since it perseveres. "Therefore, since we have so great a cloud of witnesses surrounding us, let us..." Alright, here's what just happened. We gotta stop there, we can't go any farther. He says this, "Okay, there was Abel, and there was Enoch, and there was Noah, and there was David, and there was Abraham and Isaac and Joseph and Jacob..." And he lists this whole lineage of this great faith. And now, he turns and he goes, "And now, it's our turn. It's our run. You and I are here because of the blood and faith of the generations before us. And now, it's our turn. It's our 40 year

block. It's our time on earth. Let us, let you, let me, let us run our race now. He includes us with this unbelievable group of men and says, "Now, it's your turn. These men ran, they ran well; these women ran, they ran well. They were faithful, and now, it's your turn. Since you're surrounded by these men and women who have been so faithful, since they cry out to you from the grave, let us..."

Okay, now we can finish it. Since it's our 40 years, "let us also lay aside every encumbrance and the sin which so easily entangles us,..." Can I tell you what is significant about that? According to the text now, there are things that are not innately sinful that encumber you. And the reason I know that is because he separates them out. He says, "There's two things you've got to throw aside: one are morally neutral things that you wouldn't call sinful that are slowing you down, and other is sin." So, that means that there can be things in your life that are cumbersome to God's fullness in your life that you can't say, "See that? That's sinful." It just simply weighs you down. I don't know what that is for you; I know what it is for me. There are things that are morally neutral that weigh me down. You got to cast those aside. "...and the sin which so easily entangles us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, fixing our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of faith, who for the joy set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. For consider Him who has endured such hostility by sinners against Himself, so that you will not grow weary and lose heart." Let us fix our eyes on Jesus. 2 Corinthians 3:18 says that you and I now with unveiled faces beholding the glory of Christ as in a mirror are being transformed from one degree of glory into the next. So, that by beholding Jesus, we're transformed into His image. You got to catch that, because too many of us think that being transformed in His image, we'll behold Him. So, so many of us are caught up in this work-based junk that gets us no closer to Jesus, that cleans up our outsides. If you'll remember this whole series we've been teaching here, God ain't taking offerings anymore. He's not taking them. So, you're little behavioral modification that you lay down at His altar, He's like, "Aw, it's so cute. I'm not taking those. Christ did it on the cross. Shop's closed." Yeah, probably the old hymnist said it well. I don't know how many of you had church background, "Turn your eyes upon Jesus. Look full in His wonderful face." Anybody with me here? No? All alone? "And the things of this earth go strangely dim, in the light of his glory and grace." We behold and then we become; we don't become and then behold. That's backwards.

Okay. So, I'm a west-coast kid. And I miss it. I'm an exile here. Texans always get offended when you say stuff like that. "There's no other place but here. You dog." No, there is. I always thought we'd get back there. In fact, before Lauren and I were called by God here, we were actually interviewing with a church out in Redwood City that was really close to where I grew up. And God has made it unbelievably clear that we're here. Like, I used to just say, "Hey, when are we getting out of here? When are we going to California? When are we heading back to the west coast?" He's like, "Quit asking Me. You're not. You're in Dallas...forever!" I'm like, "Forever? I don't even get to come to heaven?" He's like, "You know what I mean." I wonder, you see, I wonder what our 40 years will be marked by. See, the reason I love this text is it says "let us" and "we," that us and we being us, you and me, here, now. That you and I have been placed here by God, for God, that here is our season. Let us run our race with perseverance. And whatever reason, you and I have been sewn together to run this thing together. Now, I'm only talking to those of you who are Villageites. If you're a part of another congregation, God's got you there, running. But for the Villageites, here we are: Flower Mound, Lewisville, Highland Village, Denton, Corinth. I love...thank God for UNT. I love that university flavor that's sprinkled into this church because of what Christ is doing there and drawing you here. Here's my hope. My hope is that you won't run off, but you'd get jobs around here and just run this thing for the next 40 or 50 years, so we can drink coffee as men as good as dead and talk about how those young punks like their music so loud, don't have any respect, tucking in their shirts wearing suits. Shame, shame.

Okay, so here we are, you and me. You and I, Dallas, Texas. Here we are. What will we do with our lives? What will we spend our money on? What's our line going to say? Because Noah, by faith, built his boat. Abel, by faith, he offered his sacrifice. Abraham, by faith, he just got up and left. He didn't even know where he was going. Joseph, by faith, said "In a couple hundred years, you're getting out of here. Take up my bones. Take them with you." What will they write of us?

I've always been intrigued, I used to talk about it all the time here, by this passage of Scripture in Revelation that says, "In heaven, they will sing the songs of Abraham and Moses and the songs of their great God and king." I was intrigued that they'd be singing the songs of Noah and Moses. Why are they talking about other people in heaven? I thought we'd all just be talking about Jesus. I think what's happening is these men get up, and Noah goes, "I was minding my own business, and God said, 'Hey, I want you to build this boat a thousand times too big for you, and I want to stock it with animals.' And I was like, 'We live 500 miles from the ocean.' And He's like, "I know. Build the boat." And so, I built the boat, and sure enough, it started to rain. And it flooded, and here's how God delivered us, and here's how He saved us." And I think the applause of heaven will erupt with the millions of us who are His children. I wonder what we'll say when it's our turn. I wonder how we'll spend our lives.

Therefore, since faith anticipates, since it moves, since it always perseveres, since we are surrounded by a great cloud of witnesses, let's throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles, and let us run this race with perseverance, this race that He marked out for us. And let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy set before him endured the cross, scorning the shame, and then sat down at the right hand of the throne of God, where, according to the Scriptures, He still remains, making intercession for you and me and the race He marked out for us.

Let's pray, "Father, I thank You for these men and women, and I thank You for the race You have marked out for them. I thank You for whatever reason our paths have crossed tonight. Some will do life together for 20 or 30 years, some will never be back in here. And I pray, either way, that You might build in us an anticipation of what You can do, because I think we get bombarded with a lot of bad theology that says the whole world's going to pot, so we should just hunker down and try to survive it. I pray that we would anticipate the fact that there is no one who can out run You if You're after them. That You would give us the faith to believe that You save, that You heal, that You make whole. That we would anticipate that no matter deplorable the past, forgiveness and grace can be enacted in the souls of men and women, so we might be agents of Your love. I pray that that anticipation would cause movement here, whether that be attending Celebrate Recovery or calling the Center for Christian Counseling or finally coming clean to a small group. I don't know how it will look, but I just pray that You would create movement in our hearts, that faith, being by definition what it is, would move. And I pray for my brothers and sisters in here tonight who are just so exhausted....wrestling. I pray, Father, that they would remember they are not abandoned, but that You who began the good work will be faithful to complete it. And I pray that we would take joy, even if our lot is struggle. I mean, even according to the definition of what faith is, the struggle should push us closer towards You. And so, I pray for perseverance, knowing that the saints possess it. And so, I pray, Father, that You would stir the deep waters of the soul, so that we would lay aside our encumbrances and let go of the sin that might have us all tangled up and that You would teach us and help us to fix our eyes on You. That You would protect us from bad preaching and teaching that would continually make us think it's about what we do for You. Increase our faith. We are saved by grace alone through faith, so increase our faith. And it's for Your beautiful name I pray. Amen."