

## LIFE Bible Study: Hebrews 11:1-40 – Part 2

### Faith's Cost & Faith's Commendation

**For Discussion:** Who are the people in your life whose approval you seek the most? Why does their opinion of you matter? How far have you gone to pursue that approval?

#### Read Hebrews 11:1-40

The accounts of faith listed in Hebrews 11 span the whole of the Old Testament and are grouped into four historical periods. These accounts show the importance of faith in the lives of God's people since the beginning.

**v.1-7** – Creation to Noah

**v.8-22** – Abraham to Joseph

**v.23-31** – Moses to Israel's entry into the Promised Land

**v.32-40** – Period of the judges, kings, and prophets

**For review:** Having established in the preceding chapters how eminently worthy Jesus is of our trust as the atoning sacrifice for our sins, the author dedicates the following section to showing how such a faith in God looked in the lives of those who lived before Jesus' day. The previous study in Hebrews 11 focused on the conviction of faith and the call of faith. Faith is characterized by a firm belief in what God has revealed and shows itself to be genuine by its willingness to answer His call to respond to it. The author also highlights in this section two additional facets of faith, its cost and its commendation. God's followers must be willing to pay the price required by their faith, which comes with the promise of an even greater reward for those who persist in it to the end.

**Some of the costs of faith are known and assumed at the outset, while others may be unseen and come later as a consequence of that faith and/or a cost to remain in it. What are some things that were surrendered or lost for the sake of faith in the accounts given by the author?<sup>1</sup> What costs have we been called to bear in order to follow Jesus (Luke 14:25-33, John 15:18-21)?<sup>2</sup>**

<sup>1</sup>**Safety/security (v.35b), comfort (v.36), material wealth (v.26, 37b), reputation/acceptance (v.36), sense of belonging (v.13b, 38), their life (v.37).**

<sup>1</sup>Abel simply lived a faithful life and was unaware of the risk of doing so before it was too late (Gen. 4:8). Similarly, David, when he was under the employ of King Saul, lived a faithful life and had to flee to survive (1 Sam. 18:10-11, 19:1-17ff).

<sup>1</sup>Noah gave up years of his life, material resources, and his reputation among the people to construct the ark (v.7).

<sup>1</sup>Abraham gave up his past in leaving his people and his homeland (v.8). He gave up his future in being willing to sacrifice Isaac (v.17-18) – Peter T. O'Brien

-Abraham's faith put his entire family's future on the line and had repercussions for generations to come. Being a sojourner meant having no permanence/security in the land and no rights among the people compared to citizens.

<sup>1</sup>Moses' faith led him to identify with the persecuted Jews rather than take advantage of his privileged position to enjoy temporary comfort (v.24-25). His actions provoked the anger of the king and risked incurring his wrath (v.27).

<sup>1</sup>Rahab committed treason against her own people because she recognized what God was about to do through Israel (v.31).

<sup>2</sup>There is always a cost to placing one's faith in God and following Him instead of the world. The nature of faith itself opens up the possibility of criticism for trusting in something foolish or without basis.

<sup>2</sup>We have to put aside the things we believe that do not accord with our faith => See reality as God reveals it (E.g., You and God cannot both be the ultimate determinant of your life; you cannot be OK/self-sufficient and also be in need of a Saviour).

<sup>2</sup>Jesus is to have our full and highest allegiance, the greatest place in our lives => Renouncing all we have.

<sup>2</sup>We need to be ready to undergo the same sufferings/persecution that Jesus faced because of our association with Him.

-The cost of following Him will be for naught for those who turn away before the end. The idea that it is better to not start than to start and not finish is consistent with the author's earlier warnings (Heb. 6:4-8, 10:26-31 & 37-39).

**Towards the end of the chapter the author changes from celebrating faith that led to victories and overcoming obstacles to celebrating faith that led to rejection, suffering, and even death (v.35b-38). What is the value of highlighting so prominently those who experienced great losses for their faith even to the point of giving up their lives?<sup>1</sup> How were they able to bear the costs that were asked of them?<sup>2</sup>**

<sup>1</sup>God does not always choose to deliver out of negative worldly circumstances, these accounts accurately represent that reality.

They are valuable for setting right expectations for believers – Daniel's friends had the right attitude (**Dan. 3:13-18**).

-The readers had themselves experienced what it was to bear the cost of their faith (Heb. 10:32-34). There were many who overcame far worse than the readers had faced (Heb. 12:4) – God was present in those situations as well.

<sup>1</sup>God can accomplish His purposes through loss and suffering (**Rom. 5:1-5**) – They are not meaningless.

-Testing reveals the genuineness of our faith (**1 Pet. 1:3-9**).

-Experiencing the persecution that Jesus experienced is an assurance of our union with Him (John 15:18-21).

<sup>1</sup>God's evaluation is opposite of the world's and takes precedence over it. Where the world may see wretchedness and unworthiness, God says that the world was not worthy of such people (v.38a).

-Those who suffered "successfully" are as much victors to God as those who triumphed over their circumstances.

<sup>1</sup>Accounts of people enduring hard times can be an encouragement for other believers and even embolden them (Phil. 1:14).

<sup>2</sup>They kept their focus on the reward of their faith in order to look beyond their immediate circumstances (v.10, 13-16, 26, 35b).

-Their greatest desires, as well as their criteria for evaluating what was of worth, had been transformed (v.26, Heb. 10:34).

<sup>2</sup>They did not pay the costs out of their own resources but gave to God what they recognized as having first come from Him (E.g., Abraham's sacrifice of Isaac) => God made them willing and enabled them to pay those costs.

**A commendation is an act of praise or word of approval, God's commendation is His good testimony about someone. How was this commendation expressed in the accounts the author mentions (v.4-5, 8-16, 39-40)?<sup>1</sup> What connection is there between these seemingly disparate rewards, and what makes them desirable?<sup>2</sup>**

<sup>1</sup>When God speaks, it is not to no effect. God's word is not empty praise but is powerful. Everything was created out of nothing by the word of God (v.3) and when He speaks to us, Scripture is the result (2 Tim. 3:16-17).

-When God speaks well of someone, there is blessing associated with it (E.g., Matt. 25:14-30 esp. v.21, 23, Luke 19:11-26). God's approval comes with all of the blessings that He reserves for His children.

<sup>1</sup>For Abel, God's commendation involved acceptance of his offering => He received Abel's worship (v.4).

-In his case as well as for many others, God's good testimony of them has been preserved in Scripture.

<sup>1</sup>For Enoch, God's commendation involved taking him from this life and bringing him into His presence (v.5) => He could see God face-to-face and walk more closely with Him.

<sup>1</sup>For Abraham and many others, it included a city built by God, a place of belonging where they will dwell with Him (v.10, 16).

<sup>1</sup>For all followers of God, it involves being made perfect in Christ (v.39-40, Heb. 10:14).

-We are all waiting to be changed into our "sinless selves in deathless resurrection bodies" (v.40, 1 Cor. 15:42-55) – ESV Study Bible

<sup>2</sup>There is a theme of God bringing people near to Him and removing barriers to fellowship and right worship of Him (E.g., Providing a place for people to be where He is, forgiveness of sins/purification, perfecting who we are – and permanence in all of these things).

-God's desire is for communion with His people, not just obedience (E.g., reliance, closeness, Christ as our Saviour and King). Conversely, God is people's greatest need; to be in right relationship with their Creator and fulfilling their divinely set purpose. The rewards of faith speak directly to this need and surpass anything the world can offer.

**What was, or continues to be, the most difficult cost for you to bear for your faith?<sup>1</sup> Why is the prospect of missing out in this area especially hard to accept?<sup>2</sup> How much of this difficulty is grounded in doubt over God's ability to satisfy?<sup>3</sup> We will only desire the things of God if we see their true value compared to what we currently have. Ask God to transform your desires so that you can have confidence, boldness, and joy in exchanging them for something of much greater worth.**

<sup>1</sup>Counting faith's cost is not a one-time event but involves an ongoing decision to remain in the faith as we encounter different situations, are faced with different costs, and have access to different resources that may be asked of us.

-Costs can extend beyond concrete things to priorities in life, where we place our confidence, and the plans and expectations we have for ourselves and others.

<sup>2</sup>We can only desire what God offers if He changes our values so that we can see the greater worth of it compared to what comes from the world (v.26).

<sup>3</sup>Even though faith can be very costly, God can still enable us to rejoice during those times (Heb. 10:34, Acts 5:27-31 & 40-41).

### Reflection and application

The value of a commendation is dependent on the person who gives it. Being infinitely greater than anyone, God's judgment is weightier and more significant than all others. He is eternal and unchanging, which means His commendation will, likewise, endure endlessly. God's commendation for faith does not guarantee a person a comfortable life. From the author's accounts, faith more frequently entails loss and suffering to varying degrees. However, in the end He will certainly vindicate the faith of those who have placed their trust in Him.

The two quintessential truths that the author conveys in this section as foundational for faith (and consequently for pleasing God) are that 1) God exists and 2) He rewards those who seek Him (v.6, Heb. 10:35-36). God's "well done, good and faithful servant" will be accompanied by His "enter into the joy of your master" (Matt. 25:21, 23). Consider the examples of faith that have been given for your benefit and ask God to enable you to trust in His ways, desire Him more than anything else, and be willing to put action to that desire to pursue Him, living in hope and anticipation of His great reward.