

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? What costs have we been called to bear in order to follow Jesus (Luke 14:25-33, John 15:18-21)?

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? How were they able to bear the costs that were asked of them?

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)? What connection is there between these seemingly disparate rewards, and what makes them desirable?

What was, or continues to be, the most difficult cost for you to bear for your faith? Why is the prospect of missing out in this area especially hard to accept? How much of this difficulty is grounded in doubt over God's ability to satisfy? 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.

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.