June 18, 2023

Sermon 29

Hebrews 11:23 – 12:2

Brody Holloway

Let’s turn in our Bibles to the book of Hebrews and we’ll be in chapter 11. We will actually be going through chapter 12 verse 2. So, we will begin in 11:23 and then we will work our way through 12:2. So, as we dive into this, there are a couple of things that are happening. Last week and this week, I feel like they really go together. Last week, I think there are two things worth noting, and then follow up study. Last week, what we got was a working definition of faith. I think this important, because faith is a word that we talk about and it’s a foundational word in our faith, but specifically, what faith looks like for the Christian is different from what faith looks like in any other conversation.

 I really want to shine a light on this before we dive into the text. Because I’ve actually used the illustration with kids before that I think, now, falls short, after listening to Rob’s sermon last week. I’d say, “Everything that you do in life, there’s a faith component, or most everything you do.” For instance, I’d illustrate this to a kid, where I would say, “When you flip the light switch, by faith you are trusting that the light is going to come on. You can’t see the electricity moving around.” The problem with that – I think that illustration falls short, and I’m not criticizing if you’ve used it, because I’ve used it a bunch. It’s kind of like when people are trying to describe the Trinity, and how we worship a trinitarian or Triune God, and they’re trying to come up with an illustration for that, it’s real hard. So, sometimes somebody might say that the Trinity is like water, where water can be ice, or it can be steam, or it can be liquid. They will try to use that to describe the Trinity, but that doesn’t work. That falls way short. Sometimes, I think we work really hard to try to illustrate or to come up with tangible, graspable ways to understand deep, spiritual truths. What we got last week was a working definition of faith that says that the Christian faith is different than anything else because of the apologetic of our faith, because of the reality of our faith. So, I feel like last week we got a good, working definition, and then we started to see what I would call portraits of faith. Then, tonight, we’re going to get a bunch of portraits of faith, or examples of faith.

 So, there are two components to last week and this week that I think are important. One, we are getting a working definition of faith. As a Christian, we have faith. I’ll tell you this. At Snowbird, we have several activities that we do where there are swings, there are zip lines, there are big towers, and climbing structures, and we never take those activities and then try to give an example to kids, like, “Faith is like when you go off the swing and you put your trust in the cable.” We don’t draw those parallels, because it would fall short. We just want them to scream, and have a good time, and ride the swing. We’re not trying to over-spiritualize it. But the Christian faith is woven into the fabric of being human. It answers the questions that the natural human mind will ask. Everybody that’s ever born and breathes is going to ask certain questions. Some people will go down a path of philosophical pursuit. Some people will become very existential. Some people will become very material. But what the Christian faith does is it answers the questions that no other system of belief can answer. We got a good, working definition of that last week and we got a few portraits, or examples, but tonight we’re going to get a bunch more portraits, or examples.

In a lot of your homes, maybe you’ve got a wall or multiple walls that are covered in family portraits. I remember Little’s Grandmother had one whole wall that had pictures that went back to the 1940s. In our home, we have pictures that go back even before that. I have an aunt, and when you go through her house there are maybe six, seven, or eight generations of portraits. Each one kind of tells a story. There are a few pictures I love. One is of Little’s granddad, Big D. This is right after WWII, and he’s leaning up like this on one of those old hand push lawnmowers. I’ve only ever seen them in cartoons, really. It had all the blades and it would spin, and he’s leaning like this on it, and he has a big stogie in his mouth. He’s in bibbed overalls and that picture sort of encapsulates the man I knew him to be. There’s another portrait in our house and it’s Little’s great-granddad, I think, and this picture is probably taken in the 40s. He’s wearing bibbed overalls and he’s behind a mule. It’s kind of like a period picture of the stories I’ve heard about him. There’s one of my granddad, right after the war, where he’s on a military base somewhere. You know what I’m saying? You have these portraits, and you’re not there but they kind of go to stories that you’ve heard and the characters that they represent.

What we are getting in this text tonight are portraits of the faith that was explained last week. This is really helpful for us. We got the working definition and now we get examples of how this looks in real time or in real people’s lives. Then, it’s going to culminate with Jesus as our ultimate example of what it looks like to put our faith and our trust in Jesus. So, we have a working definition followed by working examples, or portraits. So, we will pick up in verse 23 of chapter 11 and just work through it.[[1]](#footnote-1)

23 By faith Moses, after he was born, was hidden by his parents for three months, because they saw that the child was beautiful, and they didn’t fear the king’s edict.

This is interesting. I want to read to you the four verses where Moses is hidden by his parents. This is the story of Moses as a baby. If you remember this story, he was born at a time where the Israelite people were in service to the Egyptians, and there was an edict from the Egyptian king that said that any little boy that was born to the Israelites had to be executed. They were trying to purge the influence of the Israelites but they let the daughters live, because then they could intermarry them to the Egyptian boys. It was a crazy time in history. So, Moses, this kid, is born at a time when that’s happening. Listen to how they handle it. Exodus 2:1,

Now a man from the family of Levi married a Levite woman. 2 The woman became pregnant and gave birth to a son; when she saw that he was beautiful, she hid him for three months. 3 But when she could no longer hide him, she got a papyrus basket for him and coated it with asphalt and pitch. She placed the child in it and set it among the reeds by the bank of the Nile. 4 Then his sister stood at a distance in order to see what would happen to him.

I was thinking about this example, because as Moses is one of the portraits of faith, it’s a crazy story, because first off she recognizes that he’s beautiful. Now, most mothers think that their infant babies are beautiful, but a lot of spectators would probably say, “That’s not a good looking kid.” Actually, most kids resemble something between an alien and a rodent. I’m going to get stuff thrown at me, but when a newborn baby comes out of there, that face is smashed. But it says that this child was really beautiful, but there’s something more going on with the parents than just, “Our kid is beautiful. We don’t want him to be killed.” Well, no parent wants their kid to be killed. But the act of faith is that they put their child in a basket and set it in the Nile River. I’ve seen the Nile River. They were letting go of control of the situation. The point being made is that they acted in faith and God delivered. I think this is important, going back to our working definition of faith. Faith is not, “I act in faith but I still kinda maintain some control of the situation.” Do you know what lives in the Nile River? Crocodiles and hippos. I was talking to Kilby not long ago, and on the Ugandan side of their ministry she said nobody goes in the water because of how many die to hippos and crocs. They put this baby in this basket. It’s an act of faith. Don’t miss that point. It's an act of faith. Then, the Lord ultimately came through.

Verse 24,

24 By faith Moses, when he was grown up, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter, ~~25~~ choosing rather to be mistreated with the people of God than to enjoy the fleeting pleasures of sin. ~~26~~ He considered the reproach of Christ greater wealth than the treasures of Egypt, for he was looking to the reward.

So, it moves on into the life of Moses and his stories. If you don’t know the stories in these portraits, go back and read them this week. But that little baby is rescued out of that basket. It's a fascinating story. He’s rescued by the king’s daughter, who finds him, and takes him, and raises him as her own child. So, he’s raised in the house of the king. So, he goes from being a lowly, Hebrew child to being raised like the king’s grandson. But then, when he gets old enough to embrace his Israelite identity, he walks away from his Egyptian security. It's a picture of him not leaning into what this world provides materially, philosophically, in terms of comfort; he’s willing to walk away from that. One thing that’s important to understand is that faith always drives us towards God’s redemptive plan of the Gospel. It's not just that we accept and embrace the Gospel; it’s that we want to be a part of what the Gospel is doing. True, active, Christian faith is not just that I believe for salvation; it’s that I believe for salvation and now I’m on mission to advance that Gospel. So, you see the action that Moses was taking. I also think, for parents, that there is a really good picture here. His parents’ active faith, what that must have meant for Moses and his siblings when they would talk about it later. As parents, there’s a good lesson, especially if you have younger children, how active your faith is, is going to have a huge bearing on the way their faith forms. You can’t save your kid. You can’t get your kid baptized, or take him to church enough, to transfer your salvation.

I remember, years ago – if you’re not from here, welcome to the mountains. I bought a suppressor. If you don’t know what a suppressor is, it goes on a firearm and it makes it silenced. It silences it. But there’s this huge process that you have to go through with the federal government to get it. When I went through the process and paid for the license – it has to stay in your possession and it’s non-transferrable. But you can put it into a trust and then it can be transferred to your estate, and then passed through a will. There is a crazy bunch of hoops to jump through. I remember thinking that salvation cannot be transferred under any circumstances. Every person’s faith is their personal issue between them and God. But as parents, we can lean into the promises of God that if we raise our children in the nurture and admonition of the Lord, but also living our lives by faith, that God is going to use that example. I think you see some of that with Moses and his family.

Verse 26 says that Moses was basically willing to be persecuted to abandon the wealth and treasures of Egypt. Whatever the world offers is temporary, and what Moses was striving for was a greater treasure.

Verse 27 – this is the verse I want to really zero in on.

27 By faith he left Egypt behind, not being afraid of the king’s anger, for Moses persevered as one who sees him who is invisible.

Let me read that again.

27 By faith he left Egypt behind, not being afraid of the king’s anger, for Moses persevered as one who sees him who is invisible.

I love verse 27. It's one of the greatest messages we see throughout the book of Hebrews - the idea that the believer is going to persevere. And Moses persevered, ultimately seeing Jesus with his own eyes. A great wonder of our faith is that one day our faith will be sight. We live by faith now but it is not eternal faith. It is eternal, temporal faith, that has eternal repercussions and implications. It is a temporary faith that will give way to eternal substance, indeed, eternal reality! Moses lived by faith but his faith is now sight. He has now beheld the One that was invisible in his life, and we will all one day behold the One who is invisible.

Verse 28,

By faith he instituted the Passover and the sprinkling of the blood, so that the destroyer of the firstborn might not touch the Israelites. 29 By faith they crossed the Red Sea as though they were on dry land. When the Egyptians attempted to do this, they were drowned. 30 By faith the walls of Jericho fell down after being marched around by the Israelites for seven days. 31 By faith Rahab the prostitute welcomed the spies in peace and didn’t perish with those who disobeyed.

So, more portraits. We looked at the portraits of Moses and now there are more portraits. These are associated with Moses. Moses acted in faith when he smeared the blood over the doors of the Israelite people, so the Passover was an act of faith. The Red Sea crossing was an act of faith. Imagine the faith that it took to walk down to the Red Sea with the entire Egyptian war machine bearing down. You see these examples and the faith is moving forward, even though they don’t know where they are going to go from here. You go back and read that story and there is this moment of panic when they’re facing the Red Sea. The Egyptian army is bearing down on them, and then by faith God delivers them through the Red Sea.

Jericho fell and was taken by faith. For seven days, the Israelites obeyed the Lord, marching around the city. Then, Rahab’s rescue was by faith. She declared that the Lord was the giver of salvation. She put her faith in Him and she was rescued, but the men who rescued her were also acting in faith and obedience to the Lord. The Passover provided salvation. The Red Sea provided salvation. The march around Jericho provided salvation. And Rahab’s rescue provided salvation, and that through Jesus. Because Rahab was the prostitute in Jericho who became the great-great-great-great-great-great---grandmother of Jesus. Rahab was the mother of Boaz, who was the father to Obed, so was the father to Jesse, the father of King David. Rahab would become the great-great-grandmother of King David, the one whom God would make a covenant promise to and say, “I’m going to send One in your line who will sit on a perpetual throne that will never end.” He was talking about Jesus. Rahab’s deliverance by faith was all about Jesus. Faith is always about Jesus. For the believer, it’s about driving us toward Jesus and the work of Jesus.

Verse 32,

32 And what more can I say? Time is too short for me to tell about Gideon, Barak, Samson, Jephthah, David, Samuel, and the prophets, 33 who by faith conquered kingdoms, administered justice, obtained promises, shut the mouths of lions, 34 quenched the raging of fire, escaped the edge of the sword, gained strength in weakness, became mighty in battle, and put foreign armies to flight. 35 Women received their dead, raised to life again. Other people were tortured, not accepting release, so that they might gain a better resurrection.

These are more stories of people who were not perfect and who oftentimes were better known for their failures than their successes. So, he lists this group of people here. Something I would encourage you to do, and I did this, this past week in preparation – I read the stories of each of those people. So, I went back and read the story of Gideon.

You know, the story of Gideon is that Gideon was this young guy from this really obscure family in the smallest tribe in Israel. They were poor, and God called him out to lead Israel to freedom against an opposing and oppressive enemy. The story of Gideon is a really crazy story, but one of the things that kind of glares back at you is Gideon’s doubt. Then, Gideon doesn’t finish strong. He kind of goes off the rails at the end of his life.

Then, you have mention of a guy named Barak. I don’t know if you remember the story of Barak, but Barak was like a mighty man of valor. And this lady named Deborah is judging the Israelites and she’s sitting in the position of judge. Before the time of the kings was the time when God ruled with judges. She goes to Barak and she’s like, “I want you to put together a mission and go against our enemies,” and he’s like, “Uh, I’m only going to go if you’ll go.” It's really funny, because she says, “Okay. I’ll go, but you just need to know that the Lord is going to deliver the enemy into the hands of a woman.” She prophesies, and sure enough, this woman delivers Israel. So, Barak is known for this moment when the judge of Israel, Deborah, says, “Lead my people,” and he says, “Okay, but will you go with me?” That’s more of what he’s known for but it doesn’t look like faith. It doesn’t look like bold faith.

You have Samson and what is Samson most known for? Probably the fact that he failed to be the man of God that he could have been. Even in the fact that in the last act of Samson’s life, by faith, God uses him to deliver Israel.

He’s laying out these portraits. The guy, Jephthah – he’s the guy who basically sacrificed his own daughter by making a rash vow to God so that he could go have this military deliverance.

There are layers and depths to these portraits, because I think what the author is doing is he is laying out a list of people – every one of us can identify with different aspects of these examples of faith. Go back and look at last week. We saw Joseph as an example. When we study that life of Joseph, he’s just faithful. We don’t see moments of faithlessness with Joseph. I’m sure they were there, but he’s faithful.

Gideon – train wreck. Jephthah – rash vow. Barak – knees shake in the moment of battle. So, we have these examples where you go, “Okay, I can identify with this guy.” Samson pursued the pleasures of this world and abandoned his faith and God’s will for a season. I can identify with that. Ultimately, he uses these people as examples of faith because every one of them, when it came down to the ultimate act of obedience, they did it. A lot of them, it cost them their lives. So, he’s given us these examples we can study. I’d encourage you to study them, even this coming week.

We get to verse 36, and he gives us some more portraits and these are more obscure.

36 Others experienced mockings and scourgings, as well as bonds and imprisonment. 37 They were stoned, they were sawed in two, they died by the sword, they wandered about in sheepskins, in goatskins, destitute, afflicted, and mistreated. 38 The world was not worthy of them.

That’s such an intense line. These people who lived by faith and were willing to die for the Gospel, the world is not even worthy of these people.

I don’t know if you’ve read this. I read this morning, where just in the last week or so, 46 Christians have been martyred and executed in Nigeria, by this radical Muslim group. And what the writer of Hebrews would say is, “It's okay. The world is not worthy of those martyrs.” It's a really powerful statement about what active faith looks like in the face of persecution.

38 The world was not worthy of them. They wandered in deserts and on mountains, hiding in caves and holes in the ground. 39 All these were approved through their faith, but they did not receive what was promised, 40 since God had provided something better for us, so that they would not be made perfect without us.

So many unnamed who have paid the ultimate price. Hebrews 11 would say that the blood of the martyrs is the evidence of their faith. The persecution gives evidence of true faith; the fact that they stood firm in the face of persecution. I like to use the quote by an Early Church father named Tertullian. The quote is,

The blood of the martyrs is the seed of the Church.

The Church has grown and flourished any time she’s been persecuted. This is a good word for us right now, because we’re living in a time of, if not great persecution, great ridicule of those of us who would hold fast to the orthodox, historic teachings of the Bible. If you’re going to take a stand and say, “I believe that the Word of God is just that, it’s the Word of God, and to disobey it or to defy it is to disobey or to defy our Creator,” we’re living in a day and age where, if you do that and you take that stand, you will at least be ridiculed, and what that will look like is being cancelled, losing a business, if could affect your livelihood, and at worst it could cost you your life. He’s laying out examples for us that God has used those who would be willing to be persecuted and do whatever it takes. That second layer of portraits is not people who are providing history-shifting examples of faith, like Samson, like David, but he’s saying there are people and we don’t even mention their names, people whose blood has been spilled so that the Gospel would advance, and the Gospel has advanced. People who go to bed praying that they don’t get bitten by a snake, and the Gospel has advanced. People who wonder if they’ll be cast in prison for their proclamation of the Gospel in a hostile world, and the Gospel has advanced. He’s like, guess what? The Christian’s call to action is not always going to be comfortable, and faith is always going to drive you towards Gospel activity. Because the Gospel doesn’t call us into static Christianity; it calls us into dynamic movements of faith, where we act on what we say we believe. We move forward, we impact the world, we shine the light. Whatever platform you’ve been given, God’s going to give you from that platform, whether it’s work, or family, or whatever; He’s going to give you that platform and you’re going to be faithful with it by using that platform to advance the Gospel. May we live with such faith that we see the Lord come through in our own lives and use us in ways we could never imagine, to advance the Gospel in our generation.

We come to chapter 12 and our final two verses, and he says this,

Therefore, since we also have such a large cloud of witnesses surrounding us, let us lay aside every hindrance and the sin that so easily ensnares us. Let us run with endurance the race that lies before us, 2 keeping our eyes on Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of our faith. For the joy that lay before him, he endured the cross, despising the shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.

So, he says “therefore,” which we know is always a connector word. He’s saying, “Based on these portraits of faith…” We’ve got this working definition of faith and all of its characteristics that we unpacked last week. Then, tonight, we’ve seen portraits of faith; some very prominent and well-known and some more obscure, that give us working examples of faith. Then, he says, “Therefore,” which tells us there’s going to be something to respond to or to apply in our lives. It's this: In response to these two big things, there is another picture being painted. The picture is this in verse 1: We are surrounded by this large cloud of witnesses. What he's saying to us is this; because we’re surrounded by this cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside the things that trip us up, or hinder us, or keep us from moving forward. Let us lay those things aside and do our part to advance the work of the Gospel in our generation. He paints the picture of the great cloud of witnesses and a lot of commentators will point that to the gladiatorial arena. They’ll say that this is like how Christians in the arena would have been surrounded. A lot of times the picture is painted where you have this arena full of the martyrs and the witnesses. It's this imagery of us living out the Christian life and we are surrounded by this cloud of witnesses.

But I think that illustration falls short. I want to tell you an illustration that I think makes more sense to me. It's this. A few years ago, we went to the state track meet. I think it was Tuck’s sophomore year and it was the 4x100. Our boys finished 5th or 6th and I think it was the highest that the team had ever finished. Then, the next year Tuck transferred schools and there was a team that had been faster than us in the 4x100 all season. We never had times that we posted ahead of them. Then, at the state meet we beat them. And I remember that what made the difference was the smooth execution of the handoff of the baton. Y’all have seen how the relay works, right? You’ll have a 4x100, 4x200, 4x400, but it’s four people and they take this little, lightweight aluminum, maybe, or titanium baton, and they run, and there is a window in which that baton has to be handed to the next runner. What he is saying is that the baton has been handed from Joseph to Moses, from Moses to the people of Israel, to the judges, and the kings, and the prophets, and David has been faithful, and Samson has done his part, and the martyrs in the Early Church have done their part, and now our generation is being handed the baton. Are we going to run by faith and do our part to advance the Gospel and be faithful as the Church of Jesus Christ? Are we going to do our part as we run our race? He says that Jesus is the One who will perfect our faith. We heard last week that He gives us faith. Now we will see that He also preserves it, and grows it, and He even finishes it. He says that Jesus endured everything and took His place in the throne of Heaven. Jesus finished His own earthly race, declaring it to be finished. Would He finish or compromise that by not finishing what He started in you and what He started in me?

Jesus is called the Pioneer, or the One who went before us, as the ultimate and supreme example of faith, but also as the One in whom we place our faith. We trust in the finished work of Jesus but we also look to the finished promised work of Jesus. And it says He sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. This statement tells us two things about Jesus. Number one, to be seated, we’ve learned in our study of Hebrews, means the work is completed. He sat down, signifying that the work is completed. Salvation is provided. The promises are intact. The future is secure. The second thing that it tells us is that His is a position of authority. His is a position of authority. So, we put our faith in our Savior who has authority over all things. All things.

So, I’m going to give you a final application and conclusion, in our last five minutes. A final application and conclusion. To live by faith means to keep your eyes on Jesus. Simply be faithful. This week, I would challenge you and I would challenge myself that every single day you have a chance, you have an opportunity, when you get up in the morning, to fix your eyes on Jesus and to be faithful to Him. Be faithful to Him. It's so simple even a caveman can do it, right? This is caveman theology. I like to call it tailgate theology. Drop the tailgate, sit down, and let’s talk about Jesus. Where’s the complexity in it? Just look to Jesus, read the Word of God, and study the person and work of Jesus. Talk to Jesus, understand who He is and what He’s done, and just be faithful to Jesus. Don’t make it harder than it’s got to be. At the end of the day there is undeniable proof for the resurrection of Jesus and the creation of the universe. This is much greater than evidence for Darwinian evolution or any other pagan religious answer for the universe. That’s another conversation for another time, but just rest assured and test that assurance through deep study, that Christianity offers the only sensible, only historically accurate, only scientifically accurate, only philosophically accurate proofs for the origins of man in the universe and the redemptive story of salvation provided by a God who interacted with man by becoming one of us, and conquering sin, and death, and Hell, and the grave, and doing so by resurrection, and we have proofs of that resurrection. But…we ultimately live by faith in all of that. We live by faith, unashamedly. Faith in what is unseen and what the writer of Hebrews calls, here, “invisible.” The examples laid out for us, the portraits of Hebrews 11, inspire, and encourage, and motivate us.

The agnostic, and the atheist, the Darwinian evolutionist, and the existentialist, the pagan, and the Christian, and I mean you and I, and every other faith, I mean all people live by faith. They all live by faith in something that can’t be seen. So many questions are left unanswered in every humanistic or secular worldview. Each of those worldviews demands that a person live by faith, or they live by confusion. The question for you and I tonight is what will we place our faith in? What will you place your faith in? May we place our faith in the sufficient and authoritative Word of God, and in the completed work of the cross, and the resurrection of Jesus, and His covenant promise to return one day, so that we might rule and reign with Him in and eternal reality.

Let’s pray.

Lord, I pray that tonight you’d take the examples of faith, the realities of faith, the authority of your Word, and you would give us hope in your promises, confidence in what you’ve done, and help us to live by faith with clarity and boldness, the same way that the examples we saw tonight in the text did; the same way that for some of us, godly parents, or friends, or mentors have. I pray that we would run our leg of the race with the baton of the Gospel in hand, with the Word of God advancing the message of the Gospel, so that people might know the hope that they have available to them through Christ Jesus. Thank you for the eyewitnesses to the resurrection. Thank you for people who were willing to die for what they had seen to be true. Thank you for the evidences laid out in creation, that the heavens declare the glory of God, and the skies above show forth your handiwork. Thank you that you’ve proven so much through the imprinting of a moral understanding in the heart and mind of every human. But Lord, ultimately, please give us the faith to walk not by sight but by what we know to be true because of what you’ve woven into our hearts and minds. I pray that the Gospel would be the great motivating, driving factor in our lives this week. And I pray that if there is anybody here tonight, and there certainly must be, who doesn’t have a personal relationship with you, that by recognizing who you are and what you’ve done, and putting their trust and their faith in that, I pray that you would draw men and women to yourself tonight. We sing to you tonight because you’re worthy. In Jesus’ name, Amen.

1. Brody uses the Christian Standard Bible version in tonight’s sermon. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)