

Sermon Text: Hebrews 11:1-3,8-16 Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen. ² For by it the elders obtained a good testimony. ³ By faith we understand that the worlds were framed by the word of God, so that the things which are seen were not made of things which are visible... ⁸ By faith Abraham obeyed when he was called to go out to the place which he would receive as an inheritance. And he went out, not knowing where he was going. ⁹ By faith he dwelt in the land of promise as in a foreign country, dwelling in tents with Isaac and Jacob, the heirs with him of the same promise; ¹⁰ for he waited for the city which has foundations, whose builder and maker is God. ¹¹ By faith Sarah herself also received strength to conceive seed, and she bore a child when she was past the age, because she judged Him faithful who had promised. ¹² Therefore from one man, and him as good as dead, were born as many as the stars of the sky in multitude -- innumerable as the sand which is by the seashore. ¹³ These all died in faith, not having received the promises, but having seen them afar off were assured of them, embraced them and confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth. ¹⁴ For those who say such things declare plainly that they seek a homeland. ¹⁵ And truly if they had called to mind that country from which they had come out, they would have had opportunity to return. ¹⁶ But now they desire a better, that is, a heavenly country. Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God, for He has prepared a city for them.

Sermon Theme: Examples of Faith from the Hall of Faith

In the name of Jesus Christ, who is not only our best role model, but also our Savior God, dear fellow redeemed;

Each year in the professional sporting world there are inductions into the hall of fame of different sports. Judging them on the basis of their exceptional performance, former players are enshrined in these places of honor.

Over the years it has been the hope of parents that such stand out performers could serve as good role models for their children. Professional athletes have had this distinction, because sports is one of those areas of life that children watch with great interest and aspire to. Some, but not all the hall of famers have proven to be good role models. For example, Harmon Killebrew of the Minnesota Twins, a great home run hitter, was a pretty decent person whom kids could look up. Whereas, while Babe Ruth was an even greater home run hitter and ball player, his personal life was far from exemplary. The same can also be said of present day stand out athletes who would like to someday be in the hall of fame. It is disappointing whenever it is reported in sporting news that baseball players or football players have been found guilty of unlawful behavior or not playing by the rules. They are not good role models to be sure.

The role models we look up to are not limited to the sporting world. For us as Christians the ultimate role model to imitate is Jesus Christ, for He lived a life of perfect love and righteousness. Besides Jesus, we also have the stand out believers in Bible times to emulate.

Hebrews 11, from which today's sermon text is drawn, has been referred to as the hall of faith. Scanning over this list of believers, we find Abel, Noah, Moses, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob,

and more. In the case of each of these believers, the Holy Spirit says of them that they lived by faith. This was their mark of distinction we are to take note of and seek to imitate with the help and blessing of God.

Before getting into the list of the hall of faith inductees, a definition of faith in the Lord is given. We find that definition in the first verse where it says, “Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen.” By the working of the Holy Spirit we are blessed with a confident faith and trust in God’s Word of truth and His promises. Even though we haven’t seen with our eyes what God tells us in the Bible about things that happened in the past or what He promises will take place in the future, even in eternity, we accept all of it as being true. Concerning God’s promises of the future, such as our place with Him in heaven, we possess a sure and certain hope that this will indeed be our future reality. We possess this conviction, because God saved us through His Son Jesus and has given us faith to accept and put our trust in His work of salvation. This is what the Bible calls faith.

Then in verse 3 of our text, an example of a past event recorded in the Bible is given which we accept by faith. We read there, “By faith we understand that the universe was created by the word of God, so that what is seen was not made out of things that are visible.” No human was present at the beginning of the world to serve as an eyewitness of how everything came into being. God was the only One present when time began. And He tells us how He made the world out of nothing through His almighty Word in the space of six normal 24 hour days. We have no physical proof of this. All we have is God’s word for it. And so, with the blessing of God we accept this testimony by faith.

Contrariwise, we reject the word of man that the world came into being all by itself through an evolutionary process by dumb luck and chance happenings over billions of year. Why do we reject this? It is because man has no reliable evidence for this and because he wasn’t there to witness it and most important of all, because God’s Word of truth trumps man’s speculative, nonsensical guesses.

Now for examples of faith from the hall of faith our texts cites Abraham and Sarah. It is especially noteworthy that Abraham is singled out in the hall of faith, because he is referred to in Holy Scripture as the spiritual father of believers. He was spoken of in this way, because of the exemplary faith Abraham exhibited again and again in his life.

One of those many instances of faith is when God instructed Abraham to move his family to a far distant land which the Lord in later years would give to his descendants as a lasting inheritance. This move required faith in God, because Abraham didn’t know anything about the place he was going—where it was and what it was like. All Abraham had was God’s command to go where the Lord would lead and God’s promise to go with him and bless him.

And so, living by faith and not by sight Abraham obeyed the Lord. Needless to say, his faith was not put to shame, for God did not disappoint him. The land which the Lord directed Abraham to was a grand place. It is described in Scripture as a land flowing with milk and honey. In other words, it was a very fertile and productive land.

In the holy Word of God, the Lord gives us direction and instruction as to where and how He would have us go in life. Like Abraham, it is important for us to put faith in God that He knows what is best for us and that He will be faithful in blessing us according His good and gracious will. If and whenever we don’t listen to God and obey His directions and instructions, we oftentimes end up learning the hard way what a big mistake it is to not have faith in the

Lord. May God have mercy upon us and forgive us for those times we neglected to follow God's lead simply because we lacked faith in Him.

Another important matter that required both Abraham and Sarah to have faith in God was the promise to bless them with the birth of a son. It is in this son that God tied up a number of other very special promises that would have a tremendous impact on Abraham's descendants and countless others throughout the history of the world.

The situation this couple was faced with here which required faith in God's power and faithfulness is that both of them were well up in years. Abraham was far removed from the prime of life, being 99 years old. Our Scripture text describes Abraham's lack of physical potency of fathering a child by saying of him, he was "as good as dead." And in regard to Sarah's ability to conceive a child, the Bible tells us she "was past the age." Sarah had gone through menopause when women can not naturally and biologically conceive children. With all this against them, how could this elderly couple expect to have a child? All they had was God's word for it.

Now, before we speak of the faith God worked in their hearts, we should mention that both Abraham and Sarah had their questions and doubts about how this would work. They even tried to help God out by trying another avenue in order to have a son. These shortcomings remind us that they did not always possess an unquestioning faith, just as we on various occasions and in different situations do not always trust God and His Word the way we ought.

But God did finally bless both Abraham and Sarah with faith that the Lord had both the supernatural power and the faithfulness to bless them with a son—with Abraham fathering and Sarah conceiving the child in her womb. Even though there were no lab tests to prove this would work or any kind of medical manipulation to circumvent the biological process, the indispensable factors in favor of this extraordinary conception and birth taking place was God's power and faithfulness. And so, Abraham and Sarah believed God could and would make it possible.

Once again, Abraham and Sarah's faith in God was not put to shame, because God did not disappoint them. Just as He had promised, God miraculously made it possible for Abraham and Sarah to have a baby boy named Isaac.

Not unlike with Abraham and Sarah, God has made promises to us in His sure and certain word. Upon first hearing various of His promises to us, humanly speaking the accomplishing of those promises sound impossible. How about the promise that on Judgment Day God will gather together the dust which our lifeless bodies turned into, reconstitute them into perfect human bodies and breath life into them. This sounds impossible according the laws and physics of nature. But God, who made Adam out of the dust of the earth and who is not subject to the laws of nature, possesses the almighty power to resurrect our lifeless remains. We have no scientific proof of this. But we do have God's true and powerful word for it. Also, since Jesus rose from the dead in glory, we are assured that we too will be raised in glory. Now, we weren't present to witness Jesus' resurrection. But God has blessed us with faith in the eyewitness accounts of those who beheld the risen Lord Jesus.

As Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob lived out their days in Canaan, their life was lived by faith in the Lord and His promises. And there were some truly wonderful promises that God made which their descendants would experience and benefit from. Among those promises was the Lord's sure word that their descendants would grow into a very large nation. In order to

impress the patriarchs with their countless number God revealed that they would be “as many as the stars of heaven and as many as the innumerable grains of sand by the seashore.” Still another promise of God was that the land of Canaan would become the possession of the Jews who came from the patriarchs. The most important promise of God was the coming of a Savior from this people. And because of Him, there would be countless children of God throughout the world and in every generation of time.

Here is where faith came in when it came to all these promises made to the patriarchs. They never saw the day when any of these promises were fulfilled. But as our text declares, “These all died in faith, not having received the things promised, but having seen them and greeted them from afar.” Consider once again here the Bible’s definition of faith, “Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen.”

As you and I know, the patriarchs’ faith in God keeping these promises was not misplaced, because according to the Old and New Testament Scriptures all the promises God made to them were fulfilled. In regard to having faith in what God promised about Jesus, we can say that we are somewhat in the same boat with the patriarchs. Even though they never saw the day of Jesus’ coming and the carrying out of His redemptive work, so also we didn’t see Jesus or witness His miracles that showed Him as true God or behold Him suffering and dying on the cross for our sins or cast our eyes upon the risen Lord Jesus. Still, like the patriarchs we accept all this by faith. We could also add to this that like the patriarchs we will not see with our eyes until Judgment Day the resurrection of all the dead, the separation of the believers from the unbelievers, and the transporting of all the believers to the new heavenly earth. And still, while our eyes have not seen this as yet, nevertheless we know by faith that this will indeed take place.

How did all this impact the kind of life the patriarchs and other Old Testament believers lived, and we could also add to this, how does all this impact the kind of life we live as Christians? In regard to the patriarchs our text reveals the following, “By faith he went to live in the land of promise, as in a foreign land, living in tents with Isaac and Jacob, heirs with him of the same promise. For he was looking forward to the city that has foundations, whose designer and builder is God.” And again we read, “and having acknowledged that they were strangers and exiles on the earth. For people who speak thus make it clear that they are seeking a homeland. If they had been thinking of that land from which they had gone out, they would have had opportunity to return. But as it is, they desire a better country, that is, a heavenly one.” Living by faith, the patriarchs lived their lives in this world as if they were strangers in a foreign land. They believed themselves to be on a pilgrimage heading toward their homeland of heaven. The same is also true of us as children of God and heirs of heaven through our Savior Jesus Christ.

Thanks and praise be to God for blessing us with faith so that we do not have the need to see with our eyes or handle with our hands before we accept something God tells us or promises us. Being blessed with faith, we have the sure and certain hope that the unseen world of heaven is our final destination and that Jesus has made this a future reality for us, because He is our Savior. May God ever help us to live by faith and not by sight. Amen.