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Hero of the Faith: Faith beyond Belief
Hebrews 11:31 - 12:2
September 2, 2018, James Ryan Davis

Good morning everyone, for those of you who are new here and may not know me, My name is Ryan and I head up the Senior High youth group here.

This summer we have been going through Hebrews chapter 11 and we have had some amazing people come up and lead us. I have to be honest with you and say that I am intimidated to follow in their wake. We've had Brian Down, Jaden Welsh, Chris Coon, Adrian Moskal, Leora Sawatzky, Benny McGrath and Derek Bird.

For me, I look up to each of these people in a different way. Brian has this amazing stage presence. Jaden is quick-witted and wise beyond his years. Chris is brilliant and funny and he has the amazing ability to make a story come alive. I get to work alongside Adrian, so I see his heart and his enthusiasm the people every day.

Leora is deeply passionate about what she does and those she serves. Benny is a good friend and he's got this awesome quirky, exuberant personality that shines when he preaches. Derek holds a close place in my heart. Derek and his wife, Jenn, were something of a support and guidance couple for me and my wife before we got married.

Each of these people that went before me this summer, I hold in pretty high esteem, and each and every one of them absolutely knocked it out of the park during their time preaching. So for me, as I was going through the summer, getting my sermon together and trying to prepare myself for today, I kept thinking about how well they did and it unnerved me. I look at the list of people who went before me and I know that I'm not the most passionate or the most scholarly. I'm not the best presenter or the most quirky. I am quiet, I'm shy, I'm nervous and I always seem to forget how to breathe when I get up on stage. It's the weirdest thing.

[2]

For most of July and August, I struggled and wrestled with this idea; who am I in the face of all these other amazing, gifted people?

It's easy for me to look at Derek or Benny or Chris and want to preach like them. It's easy for me to compare my preaching style to theirs and to feel inadequate. The struggle sometimes with reading through a chapter like Hebrews 11 is that we can do the same thing. Just like how I look at those that preached before me this summer and how I feel intimidated, it is easy for us to read through Hebrews 11 and feel small in comparison to these giants of faith that went before us. We read this massive list of faithful people and we hear the titles like the hall of faith, the chapter of faith or the heroes of faith and it can make us feel like we need to measure ourselves against these guys and gals.

I'm going to pause that thought there for now because we have a big job this morning! Not only do we have several verses to cover, but today is also the final wrap up for our summer Hebrews 11 series.

Hebrews 11 is a very interesting section for us to look at, because ultimately the core message of Hebrews 11 is actually found in Hebrews 12:1&2. The verses that we're looking at this morning are Hebrews 11:31-12:2. I think it would be good for us to read through quickly and see the whole passage together and then we can break it down and look at it more closely.

[3]

Hebrews 11:31-12:2 (NLT)

³¹ It was by faith that Rahab the prostitute was not destroyed with the people in her city who refused to obey God. For she had given a friendly welcome to the spies.

³² How much more do I need to say? It would take too long to recount the stories of the faith of Gideon, Barak, Samson, Jephthah, David, Samuel, and all the prophets.

[4]

³³ By faith these people overthrew kingdoms, ruled with justice, and received what God had promised them. They shut the mouths of lions, ³⁴ quenched the flames of fire, and escaped death by the edge of the sword. Their weakness was turned to strength. They became strong in battle and put whole armies to flight. ³⁵ Women received their loved ones back again from death.

[5]

But others were tortured, refusing to turn from God in order to be set free. They placed their hope in a better life after the resurrection. ³⁶ Some were jeered at, and their backs were cut open with whips. Others were chained in prisons. ³⁷ Some died by stoning, some were sawed in half, and others were killed with the sword.

[6]

Some went about wearing skins of sheep and goats, destitute and oppressed and mistreated. ³⁸ They were too good for this world, wandering over deserts and mountains, hiding in caves and holes in the ground.

³⁹ All these people earned a good reputation because of their faith, yet none of them received all that God had promised. ⁴⁰ For God had something better in mind for us, so that they would not reach perfection without us.

[7]

Chapter 12

Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a huge crowd of witnesses to the life of faith, let us strip off every weight that slows us down, especially the sin that so easily trips us up. And let us run with endurance the race God has set before us. ² We do this by keeping our eyes on Jesus, the champion who initiates and perfects our faith. Because of the joy awaiting him, he endured the cross, disregarding its shame. Now he is seated in the place of honor beside God's throne.

There we go, this summer we have now officially gone through all of Hebrews 11. Throughout this chapter, we have looked for and followed the common thread of who the true hero of faith is, that is Jesus Christ.

[8]

It is super important for us to see that no matter who is in that list, and no matter who we feel like comparing ourselves against, in the end it is only our personal walk with Jesus that make any difference to our lives. We can do everything in our power to be more like Abraham or David, but we're just burdening our selves with more weight than we need.

This summer we have looked at a few different areas of walking with Jesus, we've spent time looking at faith in waiting, faith in action and faith in obedience to name a few. As we went along I started asking;

[9]

What **is** faith?

I know that may seem like a strange question to some of you, but what actually is faith?

If you have been here over this last year, then you may have heard parts of my story. I wasn't raised in a Christian household. I didn't hear about faith growing up. I didn't meet Jesus personally until I was 19 years old. I'm now 28 and over the last 9 years that I have been walking with Jesus and learning to study His word, I have encountered this word 'faith' many times. This may seem a bit rough, but the reality is, for the most part, I simply adopted 'faith' as a word. I didn't understand it as anything more than a synonym for belief. Don't get me wrong, I read and understood what the Apostle Paul wrote when he said

[10]

Ephesians 2:8 (NLT)

⁸ God saved you by his grace when you believed. And you can't take credit for this; it is a gift from God.

Or as most versions like to translate that verse

[11]

Ephesians 2:8 (NIV)

⁸ For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith

As the years past, I began to form a rudimentary understanding of 'faith' based around experiences, but I never took the time to dig in and find out what faith meant beyond just belief.

For most of my years as a "Christian", 'faith' has simply been a word that "Christians" were supposed to use, and it translated into believing harder. (not you Irwin, sorry) I started saying things like "just have a little faith" when someone was struggling because it sounded good. In other words "dig in, suck it up and try harder."

Unfortunately, in one form or another, that idea held true until this summer. My perceptions of 'faith' have been really challenged by our time studying Hebrews 11, and I have come to see that there is so much more to 'faith' than just simple belief.

So today I want to see if we can explore faith in a tangible way, and I want to make a quick side note to say that the English language is very limited in comparison to biblical Greek. Our understanding of a word is often limited to a single definition. This is been part of the struggle for me in trying to see 'faith' as more than just belief.

So to start us off on our journey, let's back up to Hebrews 11:1

[12]

Hebrews 11:1 (NLT)

Faith shows the reality of what we hope for; it is the evidence of things we cannot see.

Or as the KJV states it:

Hebrews 11:1 (KJV)

Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen.

Does anyone here like word studies? I do!

We are going to look at three different words in greek that are used and translated into what we see as faith in the main verses that we're looking at today.

I bring these up because I think it's important for us to see how the author of Hebrews defines faith.

The first variant word for 'faith' that we see is in Hebrews 11:31

[13]

Hebrews 11:31 (NLT)

³¹ It was by faith that Rahab the prostitute was not destroyed with the people in her city who refused to obey God. For she had given a friendly welcome to the spies.

[14]

The Greek word used in this passage is πίστις **pistis**, **pis'-tis**; Strong's #4102; *belief, assurance, and fidelity.*

There it is, belief! But it goes further than that, assurance and fidelity. Now if we read that through,

[15]

Hebrews 11:31 (NLT) - revised

³¹ ***It was by belief, assurance, and fidelity that Rahab the prostitute was not destroyed...***

[16]

Belief is an acceptance that a statement is true or that something exists

Assurance is a positive declaration intended to give confidence; a promise.

What does fidelity mean? Why does that word jump out?

[17]

Fidelity is most often used as a marital term meaning, trustworthiness, dependability, or singular relational devotion to a spouse or partner, demonstrated by continuing loyalty and support.

I think this is so cool, so follow with me! If you're not familiar with the story of Rahab, it goes like this; (short version) Some of Israel's spy's come into Jericho and Rahab the prostitute helps them out by hiding them from the guards and then giving them a safe exit from the city.

[18]

See Rahab chose first to believe in the God of the Israelites. She chose to accept that what the spies said was true and that God was the one and only true God over all.

[19]

Second, she chose to give the spies assurance. She promised to provide them safety in their escape and she believed their promise of safety when they returned to attack the city.

[20]

Third, she showed **fidelity**. The woman who was known in Jericho for having no fidelity is also remembered for the change of heart that God stirred in her. She demonstrated fidelity by her continued loyalty and devotion to God above all else.

Now for anyone who may not be familiar with the lineage of Jesus. Rahab is the great great great great great great great great grandma of Jesus (probably a few more greats in there). We get to see this mention of Rahab the prostitute, who is recorded among the so-called Heroes of faith because of her belief, assurance, and fidelity to God!. So that is our first definition. πίστις pistis, pis'-tis; Strongs #4102; belief, assurance, and fidelity.

Our next mention of faith and our next variant is in verse 32

[21]

Hebrews 11:32 (NLT)

³² ***How much more do I need to say? It would take too long to recount the stories of the faith of Gideon, Barak, Samson, Jephthah, David, Samuel, and all the prophets.***

[22]

The greek word used this time is περί pēri, per-ee'; Strongs #4012; excess, completeness.

[23]

Excess means beyond necessary

Completeness is the state or condition of having all the necessary or appropriate parts

I want us to pause and consider this list for a second. Gideon, Barak, Samson, Jephthah, David, Samuel. I look at that list and think of their stories, and honestly, most of those guys really did not have it together. At first glance, they don't seem to have an excess of faith or a faith I would look at and think was complete. How many people here are familiar with these stories?

Let's look at few quick points in Gideon's story. The story of Gideon is great, but Gideon didn't seem to have an excess of faith when he was called by God. In all actuality, it seems like he had very little faith at the time he was called.

[24]

Judges 6:11 (NLT)

11 Then the angel of the Lord came and sat beneath the great tree at Ophrah, which belonged to Joash of the clan of Abiezer. Gideon son of Joash was threshing wheat at the bottom of a winepress to hide the grain from the Midianites.

Has anyone here ever threshed wheat before? Threshing is part of the process of separating out wheat. What you would do was take and throw the wheat up in the air (after getting the grain off the stocks and drying it out for a bit) and if there was a breeze, the heavier wheat grains would fall straight back to the ground while the lighter and useless chaff would blow away. Typically this was done on a threshing floor which was at the very top of a hill or in a space designed to take advantage of the breeze.

Gideon, on the other hand, is trying to do this while hiding at the bottom of a wine press.

[25]

This is a picture of what an ancient wine press looks like. Notice the recessed well into the ground. Probably not great for getting a lot of breezes down in that pit to help Gideon with this process.

I look at this and I get this picture in my head of Gideon, hiding from his enemies, throwing the wheat up and then it's all falling straight back into his face. This poor kid has got wheat strewn all through his hair and it's down his back.. And it is in this state is when God calls out to Gideon.

Ok, carrying on;

[26]

Judges 6:12-15a (NLT)

12 The angel of the Lord appeared to him and said, "Mighty hero, the Lord is with you!"

13 “Sir,” Gideon replied, “if the Lord is with us, why has all this happened to us? And where are all the miracles our ancestors told us about? Didn’t they say, ‘The Lord brought us up out of Egypt? But now the Lord has abandoned us and handed us over to the Midianites.’”

[27]

14 Then the Lord turned to him and said, “Go with the strength you have, and rescue Israel from the Midianites. I am sending you!”

15 “But Lord,” Gideon replied...

[28]

Judges 6:22-23 (NLT)

22 When Gideon realized that it was the angel of the Lord, he cried out, “Oh, Sovereign Lord, I’m doomed! I have seen the angel of the Lord face to face!”

23 “It is all right,” the Lord replied. “Do not be afraid. You will not die.”

The story of Gideon who had a ‘complete’ faith starts with him hiding in a wine press, arguing with an angel, testing God and then being maybe just a touch dramatic. Now I don’t know about you, but I would not normally include those kinds of points when defining complete faith.

Then there is Barak. His story is relatively short, found in Judges 4. Barak was a warrior called by the Judge Deborah to step up and deliver Israel from King Jabin of the Canaanites, and Barak responds to this call by saying to Deborah in Judges 4:8

[29]

Judges 4:8 (NLT)

8 Barak told her, “I will go, but only if you go with me.”

The mighty Barak who is remembered for his complete faith was actually putting his trust in having God’s judge by his side, instead of trusting that God was going ahead of him into battle.

Next is Samson. His story is found in Judges 13 - 16. Samson had many great qualities, one of which was actually complete trust. Unfortunately for Sampson, he completely trusted in Dalilah instead of God. Delilah was a foreign woman who had a track record of deceiving him, and it ultimately leads to his downfall.

Jephthah is a guy with a seriously sad story that is found in Judges 11. He was the eldest son to his father, but he was also the son of a prostitute. After being run out of town by his younger brothers, the nation of Israel was attacked by the Ammonites. Jephthah was begged to come back home and lead Israel to victory against their oppressors because he was known as a great warrior. In agreeing to come back and fight for Israel, Jephthah makes this vow to God;

[30]

Judges 11:30-31 (NLT)

³⁰ And Jephthah made a vow to the Lord. He said, “If you give me victory over the Ammonites, ³¹ I will give to the Lord whatever comes out of my house to meet me when I return in triumph. I will sacrifice it as a burnt offering.”

Has anyone here ever tried to bargain with God before? I know I have. If I'm not careful, it can often be my go-to move, at least at first. You know, the classic prayer of “God if you can just do this little thing for me then I'll... (fill in the blank with whatever works...) for you.

The story of Jephthah is a crazy example of what can happen. As the story goes, Jephthah prays his prayer and God comes through with delivering the Ammonites into Jephthah's hands. As Jephthah comes home from battle, who should run out of his house to meet him but his one and only daughter.

Now I'm a dad. I have 2 beautiful little girls who I love more than words can explain. When I read Jephthah's story, it stops my heart. I can almost feel Jephthah's pain in these next verses.

[31]

Judges 11:34-35 (NLT)

³⁴ When Jephthah returned home to Mizpah, his daughter came out to meet him, playing on a tambourine and dancing for joy. She was his one and only child; he had no other sons or daughters. ³⁵ When he saw her, he tore his clothes in anguish. “Oh, my daughter!” he cried out. “You have completely destroyed me! You've brought disaster on me! For I have made a vow to the Lord, and I cannot take it back.”

As I read Jephthah's story, I struggle to see how bartering with God to achieve a goal constitutes having an excess of faith! It is worth making a side note about Jephthah's story though. It is a rather stark and shocking story, and at first read it seems like God is condoning Jephthah killing his daughter. So what I want to do is quickly look at two passages out of proverbs to help bring in some context.

First:

[32]

Proverbs 20:25 (NLT)

²⁵ Don't trap yourself by making a rash promise to God and only later counting the cost.

And second:

[33]

Proverbs 6:2-5 (NLT)

**²if you have trapped yourself by your agreement
and are caught by what you said—
³follow my advice and save yourself,
for you have placed yourself at your friend's mercy.
Now swallow your pride;
go and beg to have your name erased.**

[34]

**⁴Don't put it off; do it now!
Don't rest until you do.
⁵Save yourself like a gazelle escaping from a hunter,
like a bird fleeing from a net.**

Jephthah made a crazy, rash vow to God because he felt he needed to give something back to God in order to win God's blessing. He made a vow and didn't count the cost. Upon coming home and seeing his daughter run out to meet him, Jephthah had the choice to swallow his pride and beg God to erase the vow that he had made, instead he let his pride win out and he followed pride up with the terrible sad act of sacrificing his daughter.

[35]

A price that God never asked him to pay.

The next one on our list is David. King David is known as a man after God's own heart, so at first glance, he might actually fit into the description of having 'complete' faith. After all, David had a solid belief in God's ability to grant him victory over Goliath. He seemed to have an excess of loyalty and devotion as he waited, hiding in a cave, watching King Saul rule for years and years after David had been ordained the new king over Israel by the prophet Samuel.

However, David's story is also fraught with intrigue, conniving, and murder. After he seduced his friend Uriah's wife (who we know as Bathsheba) and got her pregnant, David tried repeatedly to convince his friend Uriah to abandon his war-time responsibilities to go home to sleep with his wife. David tried to cover his tracks, but after a few failed attempts, he realized that his friend Uriah was too much of an upright man to abandon his responsibilities. So David hatched a new plan, had Uriah killed, and then once he was out of the way David took Bathsheba as his own wife.

Real nice David.

That brings us finally to Samuel. From what we see of Samuel he really does seem to have been a very upright person. He obeyed God even from a young age. In the book of 1 Samuel, we see Samuel speaking a brutal hard truth to Eli his mentor when he was still just a boy. When he was in his old age and when Israel is demanding a king instead of following God, Samuel did exactly as God instructed. Samuel seemed to follow God pretty faithfully.

Why are all these guys listed as having a 'complete' faith when almost all of them were so messed up? Almost every one of them seems to have had some major pitfall and shortcoming in his life. At a first glance, most of them seems to have missed the mark for having complete faith, at least to me. And yet, God still found a way to use each and every one.

I'm going to briefly jump from verse 32 all the way down to Hebrews 12:1a because that's where our final greek variant is found.

[36]

Hebrews 12:1a (NLT)

Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a huge crowd of witnesses to the life of faith..

[37]

This time the word used is **μάρτυς martus, mar'-toos**; Strongs #3144; martyr, witness.

What does that word make you think of? What more common word is this the root of? Martyr!

[38]

A martyr is someone who gives their life for something they believe in. Someone who devotes everything.

This doesn't always mean death, even though we do often associate being a martyr with having died for your beliefs. What it means, is having a conviction strong enough to stand up even in the face of death.

The writer of Hebrews shows us the life of a martyr in verses 11:33 - 38.

[39]

Hebrews 11:33 - 38 (NLT)

³³ By faith these people overthrew kingdoms, ruled with justice, and received what God had promised them. They shut the mouths of lions, ³⁴ quenched the flames of fire, and escaped death by the edge of the sword. Their weakness was turned to strength. They became strong in battle and put whole armies to flight. ³⁵ Women received their loved ones back again from death.

[40]

But others were tortured, refusing to turn from God in order to be set free. They placed their hope in a better life after the resurrection. ³⁶ Some were jeered at, and their backs were cut open with whips. Others were chained in prisons. ³⁷ Some died by stoning, some were sawed in half, and others were killed with the sword. Some went about wearing skins of sheep and goats, destitute and oppressed and mistreated. ³⁸ They were too good for this world, wandering over deserts and mountains, hiding in caves and holes in the ground.

These people believed so fully in what God had promised them that no matter the circumstance they remained loyal and devoted. They showed true fidelity in the face of victory and death.

[41]

Hebrews 11:39 - 40 (NLT)

³⁹ All these people earned a good reputation because of their faith (belief, assurance, fidelity), yet none of them received all that God had promised. ⁴⁰ For God had something better in mind for us, so that they would not reach perfection without us.

A few weeks ago, my good friend Benny was preaching. As I sat there listening to him and considering this chunk of scripture that we just covered, I started to consider the list the author of Hebrews puts forward in chapter 11. All the way from Abel right up to and thru the judges and on to Samuel and the prophets, and I started to see anew how each of them struggled with that concept of “who am I in the face of those who went before”. They were all flawed, they were scared, they were timid, they were weak, they were desperate, they were human. And yet God used every one of them and saw it fit to remind us of their stories and of their struggles.

For me, as I read through Hebrews 11 and into Hebrews 12, that is what the author is trying to say to us;

[42]

Hebrews 12:1 (NLT)

Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a huge crowd of witnesses... let us strip off every weight that slows us down, especially the sin that so easily trips us up. And let us run with endurance the race God has set before us.

We get to look at this amazing list of people running through Hebrews 11 and we get to be reminded that God loves to use broken and messy people.

[43]

God loves to take people who think they are disqualified or too far gone and then turn them into beautiful examples of faith to inspire future generations.

My good friend Benny is someone God has used in my life and in the lives of many others here in Campbell River. Yet Benny is someone who struggles. He struggles with his desire to do big ministry and to be out in the center of all the action versus the need to be home and minister to his family.

I'm someone who comes from a broken family, I've struggled with many addictions in my life and yet God has taken me and my story and found a way to redeem it. In fact, I know that if you took the time to talk to any one of the people who stepped up here to preach this summer, you would find that each and every one of them have broken and tattered stories.

We're all messy and struggling. That's the beautiful story we see unfold in Hebrews 11. It's the wonderful tale of God using unlikely people. Because it's not about them or us or our stories. It's about Jesus.

[44]

So, What **is** faith?

Faith is belief, assurance, and fidelity; It means believing that Jesus Christ lived, died and rose again. It means having confidence that His sacrifice paid the high price of sin for us, and it means showing loyalty and devotion to Jesus even in the midst of challenges and trials.

[45]

Faith means that we are complete in Christ and yet we are being completed throughout our lives. Faith means that we live our lives as martyrs. We live our lives in a way that points to Jesus. We are witnesses of Jesus in our victories and our defeats. In life or death, we show and we speak the love of Jesus to those around us.

Just like it says in Hebrews 11:35

[46]

Hebrews 11:35b (NLT)

³⁵ ... ***They placed their hope in a better life after the resurrection.***

We don't have to try and believe harder.
We don't have to have it all together.
We don't have to be perfect for God to use us.

Our part in this whole business of faith beyond belief is to actively, authentically and humbly walk with Jesus in our everyday lives.

At the start, I talked about how it is my natural inclination to compare myself to those around me. I often disqualify myself because I feel inadequate in the presence of those I look up to or because I feel like my past is too tainted.

I think at one time or another, most people here will have struggle with that kind of thought.

God can't use me because im...

[47]

Too shy

[48]

Too loud

[49]

Too nervous

[50]

Too anxious

[51]

Because my doubts are too big

[52]

Because my faith is too small, but I want to tell you that Jesus wants to redeem your story. From this moment forward and even the years that might feel lost. I am young (probably in some of your eyes at least) but I have lived with the regret of years wasted. I have felt the pain and remorse of bad decisions and missed opportunities. But Jesus is restoring and using those years, those stories, to bring healing and victory in their place.

Jesus wants to do the same in each and every heart here today.

[53]

He is inviting us to shed the fear and the hurt. He is inviting us to strip off the weight and the burden of comparing ourselves to those around us.

[54]

Matthew 11:29-30 (NLT)

²⁹ Take my yoke upon you. Let me teach you, because I am humble and gentle at heart, and you will find rest for your souls. ³⁰ For my yoke is easy to bear, and the burden I give you is light.”

[55]

Hebrews 12:2 (NLT)

² We do this by keeping our eyes on Jesus, the champion (the HERO of faith) who initiates and perfects our faith. Because of the joy awaiting him, he endured the cross, disregarding its shame. Now he is seated in the place of honor beside God’s throne.

[56]

Lets pray.