**We Believe (Sermon Text)**

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**We Believe***Hebrews 11*

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What does it mean to say, “We believe?”, when we say the Apostle’s Creed. Does it mean that if we are given a test we can give the right answers--or if someone asks us if we believe these things, we respond yes? The story is told of a teen named Cassie Bernall who during the school shooting at Columbine High School in Englewood Colorado was allegedly asked if she was a Christian…as the shooter pointed a gun to her head. When she said yes, he shot her in the head, taking her life. She believed…but never dreamed that it would cost her life to believe when she went to High School that day. We don’t know if that story is true, but what we do know is that there are people every year who do die because they choose to publicly believe. Would you be one of those people if your life was threatened?

The story is also told of “The Great Wallendas” who allegedly walked a tight rope across the river right before Niagara Falls. After he made it from one side to the other, he supposedly yelled, “How many believe I can walk back across to the other side again pushing this wheelbarrow?”—the crowd cheered. He did that feat…and when he was on the original side with the crowd, he asked, “how many think I can walk back again across this dangerous river with the wheelbarrow? The crowd yelled, “Yes.”…and then he said, “who wants to get into the wheelbarrow?

I don’t know if that story is true—but I do know that it is a great illustration to show what it means to believe. To say we believe in the Apostle’s Creed and in Jesus should move us to action…to a life based upon that belief. It is not rational to say we believe these things, and not live a life reflecting those beliefs. **If I were to say** that there is a fire in this building (now hear me, there is no fire,) but if we came to believe that there was one, we would not finish the service as usual, or just stay here and enjoy the warmth for a while—no, we would get up and save every person, and everything that we could from the fire. And the gospel, the Apostle’s creed, is too important for our lives not to change our life because what we believe.

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**INTRODUCTION:**

*vv.1-2* ***faith is:*** *“…assurance…conviction…approval!”*

*v.3* ***creation:***  *“…prepared…not made out of…”*

*v.4* ***Abel:*** *“…through faith, he still speaks…”*

*vv.5-6* ***Enoch:*** *“…translated…pleased God…*

*…must believe He is/is a rewarder…”*

*v.7* ***Noah:*** *“…righteousness…according to faith!”*

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To illustrate this, I want us to consider this morning Hebrews, chapter 11, the great chapter of the Bible known as the **heroes of faith**. The people in this chapter not only had intellectual commitment but **applied it** to their very lives as an example for us how to follow Christ and apply our belief to our daily living and choices. As we think about the intensity of our belief, or perhaps the lack of intensity of our belief, we may be a lot like that father of the demon-possessed boy in **Mark 9:24**, who when Jesus said, “*all things are possible, if only you can believe*”…cried out to Jesus, “*I do believe, help my unbelief*!” It might be appropriate for many of us—perhaps all of us to ask Jesus to increase our faith…to help our unbelief.

As you look at this introduction to the chapter of Faith, notice what faith, what belief is--it is having **assurance** of things we can’t see, accepting as evidence and conviction of things we cannot see and prove. It is accepting that God is the God of creation when the whole world seems to want to believe something else. It is choosing to offer the sacrifice that God says to offer, even though it will make your brother Cain angry enough to kill you. It is walking with God in such a pleasing way, a close way, that God chooses to have you skip the process of dying and be translated up into His presence. **How many of us would choose that for the end of our earthly lives?** And wouldn’t you like to be as Noah was, in building an ark and by faith saving his family from the judgment of God on the earth? **This chapter goes on with the heroes of faith, but I want to share today that I have seen a progression in the witnesses of faith in this chapter. Let’s look at it:**

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***Luke 9:23***

***Proverbs 3:5-6***

***Psalm 37:3-7***

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This progression of the witness of faith that I have seen is what I have been trying to illustrate in my class, “Receive,” based upon Luke 9:23 **1) If anyone wants to come after Me. 2) he must deny himself. 3) and take up his cross daily. 4) and follow Me**.”I see that progression in Proverbs 3:5-6, **1) Trust in the Lord with all your heart. 2) And do not lean on your own understanding. 3) In all your ways acknowledge Him. 4) And He will make your paths straight.** & in Psalm 37:3-7,

**1) Trust in the Lord and do good. 2) Delight yourself in the Lord, 3) Commit your way to the Lord. 4) Rest in the Lord and wait patiently for Him.**

You may be thinking of other passages in the Bible that show progressions in the life of faith among God’s people. This morning’s sermon is an attempt to share with you how I see that progression in this chapter of Faith, Hebrews 11. The next verses of the chapter, **vv.8-16**, illustrate Abraham “coming after” God as he leaves his homeland and goes out to a place not knowing where he was going. The next verses, **vv.17-19**, illustrate the life of sacrifice…of denying yourself…as Abraham marches his only son up the mountain as a sacrifice. Next, **vv. 20-31**, show how the patriarchs endured hardships—a “cross” if you please—and were faithful even when it was not the life for which they had hoped. Lastly, **vv.32-40**, talks of many others who followed God, some that had wonderful success, and others who were even tortured—and that all of them were not made complete without our faith.

As we sit here today, in this beautiful sanctuary, think of the faith and obedience, the sacrifice that built this building, and this campus we enjoy. A group of people in the 1950’s believed God was calling them to relocate from Comstock and Bailey uptown…and bought this property on the edge of town at that time and built the long building we call Johnson hall. Then came the Sanctuary in 1960 and then the two—story building, Garman Hall. People believed and acted on their belief. We get to enjoy the benefits of their faith and action today.

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**Abraham (101)**

*“coming after…”*

***vv. 8-16***

*“…obeyed…went out…not knowing…”*

*“…lived in the land of promise…”*

*(Sarah) “…considered Him faithful…”*

*“…desire a better country…”*

And so, I ask you to think back to the time when you first started to follow Jesus, and ask yourself—what was it like? If you were a child, you probably did not know much except a parent, a teacher, or a friend invited you to accept Jesus as your savior, and you did… and is it not like going out into life not knowing too much of what was ahead, or having it described what it would be like? For me, as a teenager…although I had been around the church and known Christians all my life, I had some very inadequate ideas of what it was going to be like to be a follower of Jesus. The 12 disciples of Jesus surely did not know what was ahead when they began to follow. One pastor recently commented to me that if we had known what it was going to be when we followed Jesus, many of us might have chosen another path! It was a mercy to us that we did not know!

But look what happens in Abraham because he went out…was it hard or difficult, yes! But he walked in a land…a land that we now call the Holy Land… a land that he would never have seen if he had not obeyed and went out in faith. Sure, there were struggles and failures…but he dwelt in that land of promise with his family. And I am convinced that Sarah, his wife, would never have had the faith to believe what God had promised (v.11), or received strength to conceive seed although she had been barren…unless she saw her own husband believe, and go out not knowing where he was going. Many benefits to our life occur as we follow Jesus without understanding. We think we must understand to obey…but Scripture tells us that is not true. There is a special blessing in God’s eyes when He sees us obey and walk in faith even though we don’t really understand and cannot explain it to others. It is all part of desiring some life better than this life…desiring a heaven (v.16)…and God is pleased to be able to give us that promise and that reality as we obey in faith and go out not having all our questions answered.

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**Abraham (102)**

*“deny yourself…”*

***vv. 17-19***

*“…tested…offered up Isaac…”*

*“…in Isaac your seed shall be called…”*

*“…considered God was able to raise…”*

The second stage of development of our faith is denying ourselves what is normal and natural, and doing what seems unreasonable for God to ask us to do…to take our son and march him up the mountain as a sacrifice to God. Sometimes what God seems to ask even violates what He has said to us before—like in that son shall your seed be called. Denying yourself…even denying your right to make sense of it all, brings victory in the test…and a statement that has not occurred in Scripture before is given…that God was able to resurrect the dead!!!

Some of us who went to the jungles of Peru for a work and witness trip with Larry Garman---**Terry Bevin, Ron Patterson,** others…will remember that on our way home coming out of the jungle, Larry had us stop on the road for about thirty minutes while he went down a ravine and over to a hillside in the distance and prayed at a grave…the grave of Esther Carson Winans. She was the first one the church sent as a missionary to this jungle, and it cost her life. I am sure that Larry was telling God…I recommit my life for your call to me—even if it costs my life.

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**Patriarchs (103)**

*“take up your cross…”*

***vv. 20-31***

**Isaac:** *“…blessed Jacob and Esau…”*

**Jacob:**   *“…blessed each of the sons of Joseph…”*

**Joseph:** *“…gave orders concerning his bones…”*

**Moses:** *“…choosing rather to endure ill-treatment…”*

*“…they passed through the Red Sea!”*

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Just think of the ones we call the patriarchs…Isaac, Jacob, Joseph, Moses…and think of the lives they lived, the disappointments they had…how it cost them to believe and to follow. **Isaac** wanted to bless and give the spiritual inheritance he had received to his oldest son, Esau—but his wife and his son Jacob tricked him, trickery, Jacob received that blessing. Isaac went on to give **a blessing** to Esau, but it was a lesser blessing rather than what Isaac had wanted, Wouldn’t you have like to have listened to the discussion after that between Issac and his wife!!! There are some things God allows that we never understand and trust in His guidance.

The “cross” **Jacob** bears is having his sons lie to him that his son Joseph is dead, finding out that Joseph had been sold into slavery, tossed into prison unfairly, and had lived as an Egyptian all these years. One of Isaac’s sons had been disqualified, and now he must bless both the sons of Joseph—sons who were from an Egyptian mother—to complete the twelve tribes of Israel. Did he understand, was he a happy camper all the time? No way…but he kept believing, and following God.

Think of **Joseph**—did he ask for these dreams of sheaves bowing down, and stars bowing down to him? Did he want his brothers to think he thought he was better that they were? Yet he kept the dream alive…through the slavery, through the famine, through the reuniting with his brothers and family. And now he is left with the reality that he is dying, that he will not be a part of the return of Israel to the promised land—and all he can do is give commandment that his bones will be taken with his nation when they do return to the land that God had promised.

Think of **Moses.** Did he ask to be Pharoah’s daughter? What a challenge to a young man to have all the wealth of Egypt at his disposal and choose rather to suffer with the people of God than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season. Did he ask to see a burning bush, to be called back to Pharaoh and go through the ten plagues and finally lead the people of Israel across the red sea, and to lead them through the desert as they complained and were difficult? No, but it was the place God called him to be, and he took up his “cross,” his place of suffering and death.

What about you and me? Do we have to understand before we step out, before we take up some hard assignments that God gives us? Notice that in Luke 9:23, the cross we take up is **our cross**—it is not one that the church gives us, or some other well-meaning person gives us, but it is the cross that God gives. And it is **daily** that we take up our cross. One of the things that makes it difficult is that we know that we can set it down if we choose to be unfaithful. But God calls us to not only come after Him, and to deny ourselves, but to take the cross that He gives. A cross was not unfamiliar to those in the first century. Jesus was using an illustration that all knew was one of torture…not an emblem on a church, or a necklace one would wear. We choose to take it up. Would you bow your head and take a moment of silent prayer to ask God, what is your cross, and how should you take it up daily?

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**What More… (104)**

*“follow Me…”*

***vv. 32-40***

**Victory: (32-35a)***“…what more shall I say?”*

**Others: (35b-38)***“…might obtain a better resurrection!”*

**All These: (39-40)***“…apart from us they should not be…*

***…made perfect…”***

And the final segment is “what more can I say…” The author of Hebrews brings a whole host of persons that he has not yet mentioned who followed at their peril—some with great victories, some with torture and disgrace—all faithful witnesses of those who followed God. Don’t ever think you can judge who is faithful by the outcome of their life. The important thing that is said is….that these who have gone before will not be made complete without our lives following of Jesus.

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**Hebrews 12:1-2**

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And so, we close with those familiar words of the next chapter. Remember that the chapter divisions were not in the original documents. Verse 11:40 goes right into these words of 12:1-2 without a break…

**Therefore,** (when you see a therefore, what is it there for???)

**…since we also have such a great cloud of witnesses surrounding us,**

**…let’s rid ourselves of every obstacle and the sin which so easily entangles us,**

**…and let’s run with endurance the race that is set before us,**

**…looking only at Jesus, the originator and perfecter of the faith,**

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**…who for the joy set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame,**

**…and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.**

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**We Believe***Hebrews 11*

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What does it mean to you this morning to say, “we believe.” Is it something you just leave here in the sanctuary as an intellectual assent….or is it something that shapes your life…that challenges you to follow…to even take up a cross?

\*\*Would you bow your head this morning in prayer?

…as you think about your faith—and putting your faith into action….not just saying you believe with the worshippers this morning, but having it effect how you live and how you choose your path of life….how are you doing?

**On a scale of 1-10**…what number would you give yourself…

1 being little Faith, barely believing; or

10—great faith…totally believing?

…**If God would flash** a number on the screen of what He thinks about your faith….would it be a 1…a 5….a nine?

**…what would God like you to do to start making your number better…**so that next week, next month, next year…you would move forward in faith, in believing?