

# 9.1.2024 Sermon

## We are the Hall of Faith | Hebrews 11:33-40

### SUMMARY KEYWORDS

faith, faced, hebrews, faithful, god, hall, church, hill, author, weary, chapter, christ, pastor, loving, hand, promised, sophia, hear, run, daily lives

### SPEAKERS

Elder Matt Kistler

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Matt, so I guess I'm Matt Kistler the elder. I don't know who Matt Kistler the younger is, sorry, dual dad joke. I mean, that was a shout out to Sophia, you know. But you know, it's the dad. Hey everyone, it's good to be here. You'll hear me seeing that I have no slides. Part of that might have been that I was working on it yesterday, and I'm like, I just don't feel like doing slides. So, we're going to be following text. If you have your phone, feel free to get your Bible app out or a physical Bible. If you're pastor Tracy or one of the other people in the late 19th century.

What we're here for, just some intergenerational jabs. You know, think about who brought you here in faith, and then make all sorts of comments about them. This chapter that we've been looking at Hebrews 11, we've been we've kind of started our sermon series at the beginning of this year. So, it's been about eight months, and we've been looking at different characters. Some are well known, like Noah and Abraham and Moses and David. Others kind of left us searching a bit to understand how they represent faith, but we've been looking at their stories to see, to paint a picture of what faith is.

And now we're wrapping it up. Now we're coming to the end of this chapter, and I want to zoom out a little bit from the individual stories that we've looked at and try to put together a purpose, try to help us understand what is the mosaic that's being created by these different colorful pieces, colorful characters that we've been studying.

And so, to warm us up a little bit, I'm going to start with a question, which story of faith did you connect most with through Hebrews 11? Feel free to shout it out. Noah, okay, why? That's

what you get for shouting out. Sometimes you have to wait a long time. Samson, why? Because I never thought about perspective of, like, really, like a lot of dumb stuff, doing a lot of dumb stuff, you connect with that. Yeah. Yeah. Anyone else? Yeah, they're scared now, okay, let's go to this exercise.

I want you to answer this question by raising your hand. Do you think? Raise your hand if you think you belong in the Hall of Faith. Hey, we got one. We got a couple brave souls. Okay, now raise your hand if you think you do not belong in the Hall of Faith. Yeah, and some undecideds. We're going to have to have to continue the poll.

Let me start my sermon with the point I want to make. I believe the message of Hebrews 11 is that each of us who are centering on Christ are part of the story of faith, and ultimately, we all belong to that hall of faith. If you don't get anything else, that's the point. Can write that down in your app. Please don't fall asleep. You know, I'm going to be up here talking for a couple more minutes, so I see the hall of faith is what we call Hebrews 11, and I think it's not meant to be a list of perfect saints who are far above us all.

In fact, I think the purpose of giving us such a ragtag bunch of the frequently unfaithful is to point out that we can and must walk in their footprints. The story of faith requires our participation to be complete. God decided to eat. Of us to continue this lineage of faith that started from as early as the beginning and flows through us today and will continue into eternity. It never ends from generation to generation, faith only exists in how God's people act on it today and hand it on to those who can come after them.

So, my goal today is to convince some, all of you, that you do belong in this hall of faith. So okay, I got my work cut out for me. Let's look at chapter 11. We're going to start at verse 32 because that's when the sentence starts, even though, for some reason, Tracy started at 33 and we're going to go through chapter 12, verse three, which is kind of the end of the thought.

So, let's follow along. What more shall I say? I do not have time to tell about Gideon, Barak, Samson and Jephthah, about David and Samuel and the prophets who, through faith, conquered kingdoms, administered justice and gained what was promised, who shut the mouths of lions quenched the fury of the flames and escaped the edge of the sword, whose weakness was turned to strength and who became powerful in battle and routed foreign armies.

Women received back their dead, raised to life again. There were others who were tortured, refusing to be released so that they might gain an even better resurrection. Some face jeers and flogging, even chains and imprisonment. They were put to death by stoning. They were

sawed in two. They were killed by the sword. They went about in sheepskins and goatskins, destitute, persecuted and mistreated.

The world was not worthy of them. They wandered in deserts, in mountains, living in caves and in holes in the ground. These were all commended for their faith, yet none of them received what had been promised, since God had planned something better for us, so that only together with us would they be made perfect.

Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off everything that hinders us, the sin that so easily entangles, and let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us, fixing our eyes on Jesus, the author, the pioneer and perfecter of faith.

For the joy set before him. He endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. Consider him who endured such opposition from sinners that you will not grow weary and lose heart. Mm, hmm. Amen. In verses 33 to 38 as we dig into this, we see a whole list of what people of faith have achieved and what they have gone through, great victories of success and great sufferings and persecution.

But when we hear this, we might think that this is an entrance exam. We might think that this is the checklist of the types of things that real people of faith need to do or go through to be worthy of being called faithful. I think that's the opposite of what the author is intending. I think God is saying the opposite to us. And let me give you a little reason why the conditions the author was describing when I read them sound to me like the very conditions the people who were receiving that letter might have been facing in their daily lives. We're talking about AD 50 to 70, Rome, Roman Empire. Guess what? Life wasn't great for Christians at that point. There were lions. There was, you know, the whole it was just widespread persecution.

And so, to me when I hear this account, I don't think the author was saying the faithful was so much holier than you because of the trials they went through or because of the success they had. To me, the author and God, they're saying that the people of faith are just like you. You are the people of faith, even if you go through the deepest trials, people of faith even die something that right after Jesus, people the church wasn't sure, like, if Jesus came back to life, then will any of us die? Like there was a question of, am I? Faithful If I die, he's saying you are part of a lineage.

The faithful are just like you, and so if we rewrite that for us today, he might say the people of faith in West Chester faced racism, rejection from the church all forms of big bigotry. They were called heathens and kicked out of the church, even despised as less than human. They faced rising seas, isolation, pandemics and wars. We've gone through some stuff, people, the

people of faith, are just like us and so then it helps us put into context what comes next in 39 and 40, which are two verses that I think are really encapsulating the chapter, but we can read past them and just be one of those, like, I don't know, and then, okay, great cloud of witnesses that I can kind of at least picture. So, 39 these, the people of faith, were all commended for their faith, yet none of them received what the what had been promised.

Okay, since God had planned something better for us, for us, so that only together with us would they be made perfect. Okay, let's break that down. God planned something better for us. What does that mean? I think it can mean a lot of things. I think in Hebrews 11:10, through 16, there was this theme about the city of heaven, the City of Hope. We just sang about the author described Abraham's faith and explained how it wasn't for this life alone that he lived or that he had faith in he was looking forward to a city of heaven. I think in the same way we don't have faith only for now, because we can all acknowledge that things don't always work out in this life. They just don't. Verse 39 says none of those received what had been promised. So, there's something bigger. There's something greater, even though God, yes, does move in our daily lives. We see the miracles, we see provision, we see faithful God's presence. But there's something bigger that he's promised, a restoration of all things, bringing us fully back to God, making all things right and good, where death is gone and life lasts forever, we have a hope for the future, and it's a big part of our faith.

And who is that plan for? Is the plan only for those good enough to be listed in the hall of faith, the super spiritual saints, holy and generally above average people. No God plans something better for us. It says, this is the faith we have. Look at your neighbor and say, God has something better planned for us. Something better planned for us. I'm saying it to Tracy, what? And then, so then the next part, he has something better for us, so that only together with us. Let's just stop there. Who's together with us? Who are we together with? We are together with all of those who had faith. Janice kind of asked us to start thinking about that.

Who has put faith into your life, even from generations ago? There's a long lineage of people of faith that we are together with, and even into the future, we can see in the children and the next generations. We are together with them. What are we doing together? It says that only together with us would they be made perfect. You could think of that perfect also as being made complete or whole. Did you hear who would be made perfect? Not us, but them—David, Noah, Rahab, Sarah, and yes, even Jephthah. God bless his heart. They are made perfect in us. How? We don't usually think about how what we do today has anything to do with David or generations from before.

I think they are made perfect as we walk in faith. The faith we live out in our day today can bring to completion the faith of those who've gone before us. In the same way, it will pass down over time and over generations. Earlier today, we were talking about, as we were

praying, how even the idea of what faith could be, what the community of faith could look like. You know, the writers in the Old Testament might have dreamed that someday, the nation of Israel would get bigger, that maybe there'd be a larger nation, and that God might even help some of the other nations too. They had a vision for the future.

The early church might have imagined that the word of God would get spread to some of the world, even 100 or 1000 or 500 years ago, people had barriers in their mind. They might have seen the fullness of what the church could have been as a segregated Church of men, essentially. And here we are in a church that maybe none of those people before us could have even imagined could exist. I mean, even having a black man and a white woman together as pastors, us living out in faith today brings to completion, brings an expansion to the faith of those before in ways they couldn't have even guessed or imagined.

And in that same way, we only have a picture of faith. The faith of the future will be even bigger and better and more beautiful than what we can hope for. And so, our faith will be completed by those who come after us. Then you have Hebrews 12. How do we bear the weight of responsibility as we face all sorts of challenges, this gift that we carry to faithfully live out faith and hand it on? It says, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles, and let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us, fixing our eyes on Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of faith.

For the joy set before him, he endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. Consider him who endured such opposition from sinners so that you will not grow weary and lose heart. We have an unending cloud of witnesses, countless, innumerable, greater than the stars in the sky, cheering us on, loving us from beyond the bounds of time. They are fighting for us to keep going, to let go of the things we're distracted by, the things we fixate on, the broken down cars, the unfinished kitchens, the lost baseball games, the petty rivalries, the lack of fulfillment at work. They are surrounding us with their hope and their faith, cheering us on to do one thing, fix our eyes on Jesus. Don't grow weary and lose hope.

This reminds me of a cross country meet that I went to watch my daughter run. And even as I saw it, it just struck me. This is a picture of heaven. At the end of the course, there's a hill. It's not long, but it's steep. It's the kind of hill you would never really choose to run up unless you wanted to hurt yourself. And it's at the very end. It's the last leg of the race. And after running and running, just as you near the end, the finish line is almost in sight, you have this hill, and you can see on the runner's faces, they're just like, oh, what now? I cannot. I was not ready for this. So how do they get to the top?

The stronger runners who have gone before circle back after crossing the finish line, and they cheer as loud as they can do. They create a crowd of friends from every team at the meet, and they declare that this cannot defeat you. They drown out the lies working into the runners' minds that the finish line is impossible, and each runner who makes it up the hill joins into the cloud of witnesses. This is what we have in Christ. Christ leads the procession of the humble and the meek, of the generous and the loving, the faithful and the homeless. He gathers them to the brink of the hill to give us something to look toward. We cannot be defeated by death in its ruinous work over this world. Don't grow weary and lose heart.

Our Lord and our friend is standing there with us, reminding us that there's a promise He will fulfill for each of us. And so today, as Cornerstone Christian fellowship, we rise to the challenge of faith. Each one of us worthy, we rise not in fear or anxiety, not in perfection, but empowered by the legacy of faith we have been handed so that we may run by faith. Joanna Beske went to Senegal after years of feeling a passion for the Wolof people by faith. Robert Miller faced down discouragement, rejection, and a ravaging cancer to praise until his last breath, by faith. Sophia Foutres proclaimed that she was queer to a community uncertain what that even meant, by faith. James Bady went to Ghana and heard a call to be a pastor and accepted it by faith. When facing grief and desertion and the judgment of many, Tracy Saletta stepped up to be the lead pastor of Cornerstone Christian Fellowship, by faith. Cindy Outlaw joined a church filled with white folks who she didn't have a great reason to love, but loved them anyway, by faith. Brian Wall walks with us today after facing down the voice of death, by faith.

Each of you has decisions to make, people to love, relationships to restore, and by faith, we join together as the people of Christ, loving God and loving others fearlessly, by faith. The story continues from generation to generation. Faith flows like a river. By faith, we study Hebrews 11, and by faith, we trust that God is still at work in our midst today. As we understand what faith means to each of us, individually and as a body, know this, we are the hall of faith. We are the people called to represent Christ today, and as long as we have breath in our lungs, we have the privilege and joy to fix our eyes on Christ, spurred on by those who have gone before us and walk in faith, don't grow weary, dear friends, don't lose heart.

Before we leave this moment, before we move on with our lives, and forget about sermons, I want us to do one thing. I want you to take a minute or two before we go into communion, and I want you to listen to what God's saying and to let him remind you of what you have done by faith. What is your faith story? What has brought you here today? Who are those people who have spoken faith into your lives? Write that story on your hall of faith plaque. And if you don't know what that is, ask God. He will be faithful, and know that you are part of this story, together with us.