

## **2.24.17 Hebrews 11:17-40**

### **O. Millennium Tower in San Francisco**

58 stories of condos, each costing millions of dollars.

Very swanky place, was in high demand...but the problem is the tower is sinking and tilting...17 inches down and 14 inches sideways in 11 years.

This is a problem for residents and the builders and the numerous lawsuits that they face.

One Google exec sold his apartment and lost 3 million dollars...not sure who would have wanted to buy it, even at a discount.

Residents are being assured it is safe, even at a 2 inch drop per year and the fact that you can put a marble down and it will roll across the floor...I don't know, a tilted house 58 stories high?

Here's what happened: For one they built it out of concrete which is cheaper than steel but also heavier.

The larger problem is they didn't go to bedrock to anchor the building...that was deemed unnecessary...by both the builders and the city inspectors.

Too costly, too much time, too much effort.

So what is the result? More cost, much more effort, time and pain.

The cost to fix the problem, not counting legal fees could be almost half the cost of the building.

### **A year of closing the gap on faith and love.**

Closing the gap is not just gathering more data and doing more deeds...we want to close the gap on who we are actually becoming on the inside.

Taking a look at the very things that support and undergird our lives.

If all we do is "stick" ideas into our brains and add "to does" to our lives can will remain unchanged on the inside.

Inside change is empowered by choices...but we have to keep the goal in mind...we want to become like Christ.

This takes more than a checking box...it is making the gospel foundational for our lives.

We need to be deeply challenged...there is going to be enormous pressure for us to settle for anything less than our faith going down to bedrock.

The idea of our ideas and choices being challenged is anathema.

Contemporary culture is working against being challenged...the controlling narrative is affirmation at all costs.

In 2015 a student at Oklahoma Wesleyan University complained to the president Everret Piper after a chapel service that he felt "victimized" by a sermon on 1 Cor. 13 about love.

It challenged the student's shortcomings in showing love to others so he blamed the sermon for how it made him feel.

Dr. Piper replied "Young man, this feeling of discomfort is called your conscience. You might want to pay attention to it."

We do not need to be told we are okay...we need to be challenged to change.

We are after belief that goes to bedrock...to get there...we must see and close the gap between where are and where we could be.

**We finish Hebrews chapter 11 today...one more week in our winter season, then we will begin the Easter Season.**

### **I. 11:17-19: Faith is playing the Odds**

Blaise Pascal(call) was a 17th century Christian mathematician and physicist who famously put forth what is called "Pascal's wager."

It posits that everyone is betting with their lives that God either exists or does not.

**Heb. 11:17 By faith Abraham, when God tested him, offered Isaac as a sacrifice. He who had received the promises was about to sacrifice his one and only son, 18 even though God had said to him, "It is through Isaac that your offspring will be reckoned." 19 Abraham reasoned that God could raise the dead, and figuratively speaking, he did receive Isaac back from death.**

This was not a contest between Abraham's love for God and his love for his son.

This was a conflict in Abraham's heart and mind between what seemed to be a word from God that Isaac would become a nation and a word from God that he was to be sacrificed.

How do you make sense out of that? How to you work that out in your mind?

The math just doesn't add up.

But it wasn't that Abraham had no idea how things would turn out...he was confident that if God said Isaac

would be the head of a nation **and** that he was to sacrifice Isaac **then** God was going to somehow make both happen.

Heb 11:19 we get a clue as to what was in Abraham's mind... Abraham reasoned, "**God can raise the dead.**"

You can see this indicated in Genesis as well.

**Gen. 22:5 He said to his servants, "Stay here with the donkey while I and the boy go over there. We will worship and then WE will come back to you."**

That's not how God did it...he could have...but he provided a sacrificial lamb instead...foreshadowing the gospel.

Abraham made a good guess as to HOW God was going to prove faithful, but he did not let the fact that he didn't **actually** know how stop him from obeying.

He had faith in the faithfulness of God.

He did not get there overnight...this kind of faith was learned over time.

We don't know when it started...maybe in Ur before God called him to leave his home.

But we do know that when God said "go to the place I will show you"...he went.

**There is a cost and a risk in obedience.**

The costs will vary but the risk is always going to be "Will God prove faithful or not?"

You can say "There is no risk there, of course he will."

I agree...in principle...but that doesn't mean I won't struggle to agree in practice when something I consider important is on the line.

**The risk is, "What if I give my life to faith and obedience and in end, it wasn't worth it...what if I get ripped off."**

**There is a cost and a risk in disobedience as well.**

The costs for rebellion also vary but the risk here is..."What if I **don't** give my life to faith and obedience and in the end...I wasted my life?"

Many here have made the decision, they are going to live following Christ, and are living trying to close the gap.

Probably some here have not made the decision...they are trying to figure it out...that's okay...

Just be sure you understand...in the end you are betting for or against God with your life.

What are the odds...do I bet on God or against him with my life.

What you decide becomes the foundation for how you build your life.

The writer then moves on from the faith of Abraham who believed the odds of God being faithful were 100%...to others whose faith also showed up in real world actions.

## **II. 11:20-31: Seeing the invisible**

**Heb. 11:20 By faith Isaac blessed Jacob and Esau in regard to their future. 21 By faith Jacob, when he was dying, blessed each of Joseph's sons, and worshiped as he leaned on the top of his staff. 22 By faith Joseph, when his end was near, spoke about the exodus of the Israelites from Egypt and gave instructions about his bones. 23 By faith Moses' parents hid him for three months after he was born, because they saw he was no ordinary child, and they were not afraid of the king's edict. 24 By faith Moses, when he had grown up, refused to be known as the son of Pharaoh's daughter. 25 He chose to be mistreated along with the people of God rather than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a short time. 26 He regarded disgrace for the sake of Christ as of greater value than the treasures of Egypt, because he was looking ahead to his reward. 27 By faith he left Egypt, not fearing the king's anger; he persevered because he saw him who is invisible. 28 By faith he kept the Passover and the sprinkling of blood, so that the destroyer of the firstborn would not touch the firstborn of Israel. 29 By faith the people passed through the Red Sea as on dry land; but when the Egyptians tried to do so, they were drowned. 30 By faith the walls of Jericho fell, after the people had marched around them for seven days. 31 By faith the prostitute Rahab, because she welcomed the spies, was not killed with those who were disobedient.**

**V. 27 is key..."Moses persevered through challenges because he saw him who is invisible."**

"Saw the invisible" This is a nice play on words but not a contradiction.

There are many things that are real but not visible to our physical eyes.

We often talk about "seeing" when we don't mean photons bouncing off of retinas.

If someone is trying to explain something to you and you understand you might say "Yes, I see."

The seeing is in your mind.

If you finally "see" that a certain way of doing something is good/right...then you begin to do it.

People will talk about "seeing the light" and making a change because of it.

Again....not photons...but an inner perspective...to see in your mind, your imagination, then your will.

In this passage three old men Isaac, Jacob and Joseph at the end of their lives...saw into the future.

Their lives of faith (ups and downs) gave them clear inner vision even as their physical eyes were growing dimmer.

You **don't** get this kind of "faith that sees" just because you get old.

End of life clarity is the result of a life lived closing the gap.

We will all have then, at the end...the kind of faith we are developing now.

Dallas Willard, was a man of great intellect and faith, he taught Philosophy at USC for 48 years and trained Christians to trust God for as long.

When he died his last words were "thank you"...I find that fascinating and motivating.

Some would say that was just the firing of neurons as his brain was shutting down...and he had trained his brain in a way that those were the words that formed at the end.

I would say, "Okay."...but if he did train himself to die with the words "thank you" on his lips...then God help me train like that as well.

Because he died like he had lived...training himself to trust God...training for gratitude.

**Then there are Moses parents, and Moses, and Israel in the exodus, and taking Canaan, and a Canaanite prostitute named Rahab.**

That's a diverse group...what do they have in common?

**In all of those circumstances the "odds" did not look good at all for them.**

Moses' parents putting a baby in a basket and floating it in a River...as a means of saving their son...what are the odds of survival?

Moses taking his chances with an enslaved nation versus the world's ruling power...what are the odds?

A large group of people walking up to the terror of a divided sea...army at their back...wilderness on the other side of the terrifying walk through the sea...what are the odds of their escape?

A rag tag army, that had not trained to be soldiers but slaves, going up against a fortified city(Jericho)...they are armed with trumpets and with a strategy that involved marching and shouting...what are the odds of success?

Finally a prostitute in that fortified city who decides to trust some spies from an enemy army with her life...who then goes on to be one of five women mentioned in the genealogy of Jesus...what are the odds of

that happening?

**On the ESPN app you can see a matchup predictor before basketball games that gives the odds for each team winning that game.**

Then if you are super curious or I guess if you bet money on the game and are super nervous there is a graph that shows the win probability that is updated as the game ebbs and flows.

But if you look at the final probability it is always 100% for one team...because the game is over.

The "odds" in all of these different scenarios we discussed was 100% because the final outcome was never actually in doubt...because God was in control.

I knew a man when I was in college who had suffered great trials in his life, and has since gone to heaven...he wrote a book called "God didn't promise you would be ahead at the half, but he did promise you would win the game."

Quite a long title for a book...but true.

**Faith is seeing what is unseen...often in spite of what you currently see.**

All those stories have that in common.

Photons don't bounce off stuff and strike your retinas forming images in your brain and so you can "see"..."This is how I should live my life."

You can't see the "how and why" with your physical eyes.

In fact the opposite is often true.

The stories mentioned in this passage...if they trusted photons and retinas...they would have made the wrong choices.

Because the images they saw were of a baby in basket in a river, an army, impending death...

They had to trust what they could not see with their physical eyes in order to see God be faithful.

**It is not about being foolish, or unscientific, or unrealistic.**

It is about understanding the true nature of the world...that much of what is actually real and true is available to our eyeballs?

We see what is currently happening around us...tv, internet...classrooms, roads, homes, workplace...the mirror...the calendar...the checkbook.

But if we make decisions mostly on retinas and human reasoning...we will make a lot of bad decisions.

Moses persevered...he was able to keep going...because he "saw him who is unseen."

**2Cor. 4:18 So we fix our eyes not on what is seen, but on what is unseen. For what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal.**

### **III. Heb. 11:32-40: Faith's bedrock foundation is the gospel not your own faithfulness**

**Heb. 11:32 And what more shall I say? I do not have time to tell about Gideon, Barak, Samson, Jephthah, David, Samuel and the prophets, 33 who through faith conquered kingdoms, administered justice, and gained what was promised; who shut the mouths of lions, 34 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. Heb. 11:35 Women received back their dead, raised to life again. Others were tortured and refused to be released, so that they might gain a better resurrection. 36 Some faced jeers and flogging, while still others were chained and put in prison. 37 They were stoned; they were sawed in two; they were put to death by the sword. They went about in sheepskins and goatskins, destitute, persecuted and mistreated — 38 the world was not worthy of them. They wandered in deserts and mountains, and in caves and holes in the ground. 39 These were all commended for their faith, yet none of them received what had been promised. 40 God had planned something better for us so that only together with us would they be made perfect.**

Abraham tried to take God's promise into his own hands.

Jacob was a liar and schemer.

Joseph as a young man was arrogant and spoiled.

Moses was a murderer and was afraid to speak for God and did not make the promised land because of his sin.

Israel was so faithless that every adult that left Egypt died in the desert

Rahab was a prostitute.

Gideon was faithless, so God had to prove himself several times.

Barak was a coward.

Samson was a carnal, brutal man.

Jephthah was a rash and foolish man.

David was a murderous adulterer.

These are the members of this so called "Hall of faith"

In fact, there is no one in the Bible, apart from Jesus, who was consistently "heroic."

This chapter has been misnamed; its not the "hall of faith" it should be the "hall of faithless people who saw God be faithful."

It's not that their lives did not contain demonstrations of faith; it's that their lives demonstrated inconsistent faith, while God demonstrated consistent faithfulness.

But the point of this passage, of the Bible, of life itself is that God is the faithful one.

**One great application is that...Failure is not fatal for you...or it need not be.**

Your faith is to be in the faithful God.

**Human faith is a powerful thing.**

There have been many people in human history who had faith in a cause, or in their own ability, or in a false god, or in another person...and because of their faith they were able to endure and accomplish much.

This can be confusing...if we don't think about this clearly.

"How can you say Jesus is the only way when many others have great faith that allows them to live good lives and endure great hardship with grace?"

I would say that human faith is a powerful thing and can help people in many ways.

**But the point of the Scriptures is not human faith but God's faithfulness.**

Look at this list of "accomplishments" and challenges

**conquered kingdoms, administered justice, shut the mouths of lions, quenched the fury of the flames, escaped the sword; routed foreign armies. received back their dead,**

**tortured, chained and put in prison. stoned; sawed in two; put to death by the sword.**

Amazing stuff...but again, this is not the point...what is the point?

**39 These were all commended for their faith, yet none of them received what had been promised. 40 God had planned something better for us so that only together with us would they be made perfect.**

They were all, in their manifold experiences commended for their faith...imperfect though it was.

**But they did not receive what was promised.**



Again, you see the "already/not yet" here.

V. 33 "Some gained what was promised"

-Temporary success and victory

V. 39 "None received what was promised."

-The final promise was out beyond their life spans.

**11: 40 God had planned something better for us so that only together with us would they be made perfect.**

The something better that God had planned was Jesus...the full experience of gospel.

They looked forward in faith to Jesus, we look back in faith to Jesus...we all together look ahead in faith to Jesus.

**For them the promise was already/not yet, for us the promise is already/not yet**

But the point of faith is not us, it is God's faithfulness.

You can have enormous faith in the wrong place or person...and accomplish much, but ultimately fail in the end.

You can have a little, faltering bit of faith in the right place, right person...and come out okay in the end.

**Closing the gap on faith is first about relationship with God.**

I appreciate the efforts aimed at making practical changes in your life and habits...those are key.

But remember the only reason to grow in more spiritual discipline is to be positioned to have deeper relationship with God.

We don't train to prove ourselves to God...we train to be near him and to be like him.

Closing the gap is not River's self-improvement plan.

It is a way of thinking about and talking about growing in love for God and others.

Growth in faith and love requires us to take actual steps of faith.

**Everyone is betting on or against God with their very lives.**

It is a sure bet...however day to day...it take the eyes of faith to see that.

It takes ongoing help, perspective...endurance takes eyes that see him who is invisible.

**1Tim. 1:17 Now to the King eternal, immortal, invisible, the only God, be honor and glory for ever and ever. Amen.**