

The Family Trait

Hebrews 11:17-40

Rev. John Pennylegion

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Good morning.

Welcome to Christ the King. It's good to be with you. If you're a guest or a visitor, welcome. And I just want to reiterate what we said earlier. If you are visiting and you didn't know, well, if you're visiting, you didn't know that we're having a lunch. But if you showed up and you didn't realize it and you'd like to stay, we would love for you to stay. There is plenty of food. We would love for you to be able to stick around after the service and to eat with us and enjoy time with us. Maybe I shouldn't have reminded us of lunch because maybe now stomachs are churning a little bit, right? Can smell stuff wafting in, you know. But we would love for you to stick around with us and have lunch with us. And to be able to hear, you know, you can talk to some of our missionaries if you weren't able to be here during the Sunday school hour and hear more about what they're doing. But before we get to lunch and before we can have that time together, we come to God's word.

And the portion of his word we're going to look at this morning is the second half of Hebrews 11. So if you have a Bible, you can turn to Hebrews 11. Remember, this is that chapter that is sometimes referred to as the hall of faith, right? It's the most well-known chapter in the book of Hebrews. It's this chapter that it's like looking through an old photo album, right? Kids, you can ask your parents what a photo album is later. But, you know, it's flipping through an old photo album, right? And seeing our grandparents, our aunts, our uncles, right? Our cousins, our distant relatives. But Hebrews 11 is looking at our spiritual grandparents, right? Our spiritual cousins, those that are part of our spiritual family line. And so last week we saw Abel and Enoch and Abraham and Sarah and Moses, right? And as the author of Hebrews is flipping through these pages of this photo album, the thing he's pointing out to us is their faith. And at the end of our passage last week, we read in verse 16, "God is not ashamed to be called their God, for he has prepared for them a city." Now I have to tell you that verse, verse 16, it has taken up residency in my mind for a number of weeks now. It's just been living there. God is not ashamed. How can that be? Like, why would that stick with me? Why is it that God is not ashamed to be called their God? Well, I want you to keep that verse in the back of your mind because we're going to come back to it in a little bit.

But for now, let's read Hebrews 11, beginning in verse 17.

"By faith Abraham, when he was tested, offered up Isaac, and he who had received the promises was in the act of offering up his only son, of whom it was said, "Through Isaac shall your offspring be named." He considered that God was able even to raise him from the dead, from which, figuratively speaking, he did receive him back. By faith Isaac invoked future blessings on Jacob and Esau. By faith Jacob, when dying, blessed each of the sons of Joseph, bowing in worship over the head of his staff. By faith Joseph, at the end of his life, made mention of the exodus of the Israelites and gave directions concerning his bones.

"By faith Moses, when he was born, was hidden for three months by his parents, because they saw that the child was beautiful, and they were not afraid of the king's edict. By faith Moses, when he was grown up, refused to be called the son of

Pharaoh's daughter, choosing rather to be mistreated with the people of God than to enjoy the fleeting pleasures of sin. He considered the reproach of Christ greater wealth than the treasures of Egypt, for he was looking to the reward. By faith he left Egypt, not being afraid of the anger of the king, for he endured as seeing him who is invisible. By faith he kept the Passover and sprinkled the blood, so that the Destroyer of the firstborn might not touch them.

"By faith the people crossed the Red Sea as on dry land, but the Egyptians, when they attempted to do the same, were drowned. By faith the walls of Jericho fell down after they had been encircled for seven days. By faith Rahab the prostitute did not perish with those who were disobedient, because she had given a friendly welcome to the spies.

"And what more shall I say? For time would fail me to tell of Gideon, Barak, Samson, Jephthah, of David and Samuel and the prophets—who through faith conquered kingdoms, enforced justice, obtained promises, stopped the mouths of lions, quenched the power of fire, escaped the edge of the sword, were made strong out of weakness, became mighty in war, put foreign armies to flight. Women received back their dead by resurrection. Some were tortured, refusing to accept release, so that they might rise again to a better life. Others suffered mocking and flogging, and even chains and imprisonment. They were stoned, they were sawn in two, they were killed with the sword. They went about in skins of sheep and goats, destitute, afflicted, mistreated—of whom the world was not worthy—wandering about in deserts and mountains, and in dens and caves of the earth.

"And all these, though commended through their faith, did not receive what was promised, since God had provided something better for us, that apart from us they should not be made perfect." (ESV)

Friends, this is the word of the Lord. Let me pray for us.

Father, we ask that now as we come to your word that you would give us eyes of faith, that we would see your truth, we would behold your beauty, and that we would see what we cannot see with our physical eyes, and that we would have faith in you. So, grow our faith, deepen our hope, increase our trust, so that all that we say and do this morning and all our days would honor you. And we pray this in Christ's name. Amen.

So, I was thinking this week about family traits. Family traits, those characteristics, those qualities that are unique to a particular family, right? We all have them, family traits. Some of them are biological, right? The color of our hair, the height of our children, the facial features, right? We'll sometimes say, like, she's got your eyes, or I've been told that a biological trait that gets passed down is cauliflower tongue. So, you know, if you don't know what that is, you can ask me or my children afterwards, because we can do it. But that's a trait that gets passed down, right? Y'all have no idea what I'm talking about, okay? It's really interesting. It's kind of cool. But anyway, there are these biological traits, but then there are family traits that are traditions, right? We are taught them by our parents, right? Like to cheer for tech or UVA or we're families of readers or movie watchers or a family of musicians. Other family traits are behavioral, right? Mannerisms or sayings. It's interesting how, you know, sisters, they seem to kind of tilt their head the same way when talking, right? Or a son maybe smiles like his dad.

Or for instance, Kat and I, of course, not biologically related, right? We have a family trait that we have picked up from one another. You see, somewhere along the way, I don't know when and I don't know who started it, but when we hear something that's interesting, that's fascinating to us, we will automatically respond in the same way. And sometimes at the exact same moment with a, huh, I don't know if Kat started it, I don't know if I did, but we learned it from one another. So now it's a family trait of ours, right? Y'all are going to be looking for it and we're going to have to practice not doing it. But every family has these traits, these qualities, these characteristics. Every family does.

And so does the spiritual family of God. Now, of course, the family traits of God's family aren't biological because we all come from different families of origin. But instead, we have these traits that God has taught us through his Spirit, through his word, through one another. And so we might think, you know, the family traits are the Fruit of the Spirit, right? Love, joy, peace, patience, et cetera. And those are absolutely traits. Or we might think of what Jesus said when he said that they will know you by the way that you love one another, right? So we might think of love as being the family trait and absolutely that is. But in Hebrews 11, the trait that the author of Hebrews is pointing us to is that of faith. You see, Hebrews 11 isn't simply reminiscing about days gone by or how great Abraham was. No, you see, he's presenting us with these stories of faith as a way of implanting faith in us, that we would embody the family trait of God, that of faith, that we take this trait upon ourselves. Because faith is the family trait. And faith, we're to have faith in times of obedience, to obey. That's actually what we see throughout this passage, obedience on display.

Faith to Obey

We see it with Abraham, right? Abraham obeyed God when he told him to go to the mountains to sacrifice Isaac, right? We kind of left us hanging in the reading, didn't we? Y'all felt it, right? Don't worry, Isaac, you know, he lived, right? We know this story because God stopped him, right? God stopped Abraham from going forward with it. But before that, right, God was calling Abraham to obey, to have faith. And think about what that meant, right? Because the promise that had been made to Abraham was that generations would come from him, that his descendants would outnumber the stars of the sky and the sand on the seashore. And for that promise to come about, it had to start with a son. But now Abraham's supposed to sacrifice his son? With no son, there's no generations. With no son, there's no fulfillment of promise. But Abraham believed. He had faith in God's word. In verse 19, we're told that Abraham thought that God would resurrect him, right? That was the tradition, that Abraham was going to go along with it, assuming that resurrection was possible. We don't know for sure, but what we do know is that Abraham obeyed. And God provided, right, the ram instead of Isaac. He had faith to obey.

We see faith in the life of Moses and the Exodus people, right? By faith, they obeyed God rather than clinging to Egypt. Moses' family hid him and protected him when he was a child, preserving his life. He turned from Pharaoh and lived as an Israelite. They left Egypt and walked through the sea by faith. They followed God's word and obeyed. We see in verse 32 and following, "what more shall I say? For time would fail me to tell of Gideon, Barak, Samson, Jephthah, of David, Samuel, and the prophets who threw faith and that listened to what they did. Conquered kingdoms, enforced justice, obtained promises, stopped the mouths of lions, quenched the power of fire, escaped the edge of the sword, were made strong in weakness, became mighty in war, put foreign armies to flight, women received back their

dead by resurrection.” Y'all, that's amazing, right? Like, I just flew through that. But if we took our time and we thought of every single thing that they did by faith, I mean, it is remarkable.

I mean, the allusion to Daniel, right? Stopping the lion's mouth, right? Daniel and the lion's den, and the allusion to Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego with the quenching of fire. We know their story, right? Because of faith, they obeyed God and not their pagan king. All these people of faith, they obeyed because they had faith. Faith that God's ways are better than the world's. Faith that God's direction is right even when we're not sure where it will lead. Faith that God's word is truer than what we see.

Now, I have to tell you, as we read these examples of faith, it's easy to start to romanticize the life of faith, right? If we simply have faith, then we'll shut lion's mouths, and what's a little fiery furnace, and we'll become more than conquerors, right? But let's be honest, most of us aren't going to live lives that are faced with the incredible and the monumental, right? We're called to live ordinary, everyday, normal, mundane lives, and to live those lives by faith. You see, we're not just supposed to have faith when our life is on the line, right? Or when we're confronted by something incredible, right? We're actually called to have faith in the everyday aspects of life. Changing diapers, going to school, showing up at work, coming to church, being a neighbor, right? Those are the areas that we are called to have faith in, right? Of course, if the monumental comes, right? If it's time for you to hold firm, of course, we are to have faith and obey in those times. But more often than not, it's in the very earthy, everyday, mundane, simple, ordinary ways of life that we're called to have faith and obey. And y'all, those things are beautiful, and they're good. We do embody the family trait of faith in times of boredom, in times of ease, in times of blessing, and in times of success.

Faith in Difficulty

But we're also supposed to have faith in times of difficulty, because that's what we see in the life of these people, right? I mean, think about how hard it would have been for Abraham to take Isaac up to the mountain, or for Moses to abandon his life of ease and prosperity in Pharaoh's house to live like a slave. Or listen in verses 36 through 37, after the author of Hebrews talks about stopping lion's mouths and sending foreign armies away, he then writes, “others suffered mocking and flogging and even chains and imprisonment. They were stoned, they were sawn in two, they were killed with a sword, they went about in skins of sheep and goats, destitute, afflicted, mistreated, of whom the world was not worthy, wandering about in deserts and mountains and in dens and caves of the earth.”

Y'all, that's a very different picture than being mighty in war and putting armies to fight, isn't it? I mean, that's very different. So, these others, right? We don't know who the others are, but these others, do they have less faith than those who stop the mouths of lions? Is that why they're experiencing suffering and difficulty? If you were here during the Sunday school hour, you would have heard from our missionaries that there are places in this world, there are pastors, false pastors, who would teach that very thing. Who would say that the reason why you suffer, the reason why you have lost your job, the reason why you're sick, the reason why the relationship has failed is because you don't have faith or enough of it. But that surely can't be true. Not from God's Word. Right now, of course, our decisions, good and bad, have consequences, but faith doesn't mean a life of ease and peace and prosperity and Sunday strolls and singing birds, right? We may have seasons of those things, but for the people of faith, there's going to be seasons of pain and hurt, hardship and difficulty. I mean, Jesus

himself said to his disciples, you will experience tribulation. You will face trial. He didn't say you will face trial if you lack faith. He simply said you will. And we hear that in Hebrews, right? The mocking, the flogging, the killing, the affliction. And in those times of difficulty, that is when the family trait becomes evident, when all we have is faith.

So, some of you know the story of Polycarp, right? Polycarp was a disciple of the Apostle John. He was a bishop and he was arrested for his Christian faith. And when he was arrested, he was told that he could renounce his faith, he could recant his beliefs, and his life would be spared. And so, he stood before his executioner and he said, 86 years I have served Christ and he has never done me any harm. How then could I blaspheme my King who saved me? And he went to his death. When he was experiencing persecution and he was faced with death and he was confronted by difficulty, he had faith. Now, y'all, we don't have to look as far back as Polycarp to see faith in the midst of difficulty. Because the truth is, is that we can see it in many, many of the people here. I mean, I've witnessed it from y'all, the way that when times of pain and diagnosis, when the body is failing and a family member has rejected us, when we have been exhausted by grief and uncertain about tomorrow, I have heard many of you speak of God's grace. I have heard many of you speak of the strength that you have that comes only from the Lord. We have seen one another live with faith, haven't we? And y'all, that is beautiful. It is a gift to one another to observe people of faith walking by faith in our midst. Not perfect faith, but faith nonetheless. A faith that awaits a better life, right? And that's what gets us through that difficulty. That's what teaches us to have faith, right? That we have a belief that a better life awaits us.

That's what the author of Hebrews says in verse 35. Why is it that these people could persevere? Why is it that they could endure? Because they believed that they might rise again to a better life. They had the hope of resurrection, and the hope of resurrection is what fuels our faith. That because Jesus endured the cross and he was buried and rose again, we've been told in scripture that we too will rise. That we will rise with him. And that that resurrection, that is the end of our story. Not difficulty, not pain, not sadness, not even death, but instead resurrection is the end. That is where we place our faith. That is where our hope rests.

Faith for the Faithless

Now, I imagine that maybe there are some competing emotions that we might be experiencing. One, we might feel this motivation to have faith and obedience, right? In times of difficulty, right? Maybe you're one of those kind of people. It's like, all right, let's go take up the sword. Let's be strong. Let's have faith. Maybe some of you are that way. I can move into that realm. But then there's this other competing emotion I feel at the same time, and it's this realization that I haven't been faithful. Right? Like we've been talking about faith and Abraham and Isaac and all these great heroes of the faith, and I feel often I'm faithless, not faithful. Maybe some of you are feeling this as well. So, what do we do with that? Well, one, we need to remember these heroes of Hebrews 11. Yes, faith is highlighted, but they too were faithless. And that there is faith for the faithless. I mean, think about Moses, right? Moses, he struck the rock and wasn't allowed into the land. Or David, he abused his role as the king, the power that had been given to him, and he committed adultery and murder. Samson was a womanizer and disregarded God's word. Jephthah was the son of a prostitute and made an incredibly rash vow that had horrible consequences for his daughter. Gideon, Barak, Samson, Jephthah, they were judges. Like, have y'all read Judges? I mean, there are lots of examples of faith and many, many, many accounts of faithlessness. But again, we don't have to look back to them, do we? Because we can look at our own lives. And we remember the times we

held our tongues when we should have spoken truth, or the times we were self-righteous over another person's brokenness, or the times we exploited with rage when the situation called for patience, or when we raised our fist at God when humble contrition was required.

We've been faithless. So what do we do? What do we hold on to? Well, y'all remember that verse I mentioned at the start of this service that I said to hold on to, to file away? Well, verse 16, the author of Hebrews says, "God is not ashamed to be called their God." I have to tell you, for all the amazing things that are recounted in Hebrews 11, to me, that is the most remarkable. That God is not ashamed to be called their God. God is not ashamed to be called your God and my God. How can that be? How can that be? How is it that God cannot be ashamed to be called the God of faithless people? Well, it's not because of our great deeds, and it's not because of our incredible talents, and it's not because of our unwavering faith. No, God is not ashamed to call faithless people his people because of the faithfulness of his son. God has promised something better for us. Resurrection life, a city in which we will one day dwell with him, and he has made that promise through Jesus, who is the faithful one, right? He is the one who is faithful to obey all of God's law. He was the one who, in the midst of greatest difficulty, the cross and our sin, was faithful and took our sin upon himself. He was faithful to the point of death for a people who are faithless, for people like me and you. This is what Jesus has done. He has been faithful in all the ways that we have not, so that when we fail and when we falter, and in times of difficulty as well as times of obedience, we would put our faith not in ourselves or our strength or even in the strength of our faith, but we would put our faith in Christ, the faithful one. Amen.

Let's pray.

Heavenly Father, we thank you. Thank you that Jesus is the faithful one who has been faithful in all the ways that we have not, and because he has been faithful, we put our faith in him, trusting him, looking to him, resting in his work on our behalf. And so we pray, Father, turn our eyes towards Christ. Let us fix our gaze on him and make us a people of faith. And we pray all this in the name of Jesus and all God's people said together, Amen.