

## ***Jesus the Rewarder of our Faith***

Sermon Series on Hebrews

Kenwood Baptist Church

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**TEXT:** Hebrews 11:17-40

This morning, on this glorious day, we turn our attention again to God's Word in the book of Hebrews. We have been moving through Hebrews this spring, learning to fix our eyes together



on Jesus. When we look to Jesus, we find Him who is not only the object but is the rewarder of our faith, and when we put our faith in Jesus Christ, we join in the company of tens of thousands of people throughout history who have found Jesus Christ to be trustworthy and utterly reliable. Faith, I want to remind us from the Scriptures, is an active verb;

faith is trusting the power and the love of our heavenly Father; faith sees enough to be sure that God's intentions are good; and faith trusts that God's purposes will prevail even when we are in situations where we cannot yet see the full realization. I often pray: "Father show me enough of what You are doing to keep my heart encouraged, but hide most of what You are doing less my heart become proud." Faith stands in the posture of active trust in God, and that is the point of this whole sermon, I'm going to tell you upfront. I am letting all suspense out of this message, and yet there is a battle in our souls on this very point of living a life that trusts in God.

Pastor Scott taught us last Sunday from God's Word that Hebrews 11:1-2 says that: "Faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen." Faith is the evidence; it is the assurance of what is yet to come. It is the down payment, the engagement ring, if you will. It is seeing enough evidence that God is for us and not against us so that we go through this life in a posture of growing trust in the living God, and this will determine the shape and nature of our lives. Hebrews 11:2 says it is precisely by this orientation of faith and trust that the people of old, our ancestors, received their commendation. They were attested and recognized as genuine. This summons to faith from the Scriptures, this invitation to join in the great multitude of people throughout history who have found God trustworthy, is actually a problem for us. It is more difficult than many of us realize. Faith is not the default setting of the human heart.

Actually what we find within us is that it mistrusts. We find doubt; we find uncertainty. Paul Ricouer has coined a phrase, and I asked the early morning prayer group if they had heard this phrase, and it was new to them, so I think it's going to be new to most of us. Paul Ricouer made this expression, identifying the "Masters of Suspicion." He said there are masters of suspicion that have wreaked havoc on the modern heart. He described the impact of three significant thinkers that have really affected you and me, whether we identify this or not: Sigmund Freud, Karl Marx, and Frederick Nietzsche. Most of us don't read their works directly, and yet their thinking has affected the modern heart in dramatic ways. Karl Marx's thinking affected the world to think that behind what you observe there is really a real economic motivation that is driving people's behavior. Frederick Nietzsche said that behind the actions you can observe, there is actually a hidden agenda, and that hidden agenda is the will to power. Sigmund Freud's writings describe that underneath human behavior that you observe are these other drives that are shaping how we act, and we need psychoanalysis or an understanding that deep down people are motivated by their sexual drives. These "Masters of Suspicion" have conspired to create a context for us where we find it difficult to trust. Some of us find it difficult to trust because of very concrete experiences in our own lives, and yet these thinkers have shaped the culture around us in such a way that we don't need to be instructed in their writings, because they permeate the culture. I read one college syllabus and the title of a course, a course taught at a significant school in the United States last spring, was called the "Masters of Suspicion," and I quote from syllabus: "Freud, Marx, and Nietzsche are the three greatest critics of religion in general, and of Christianity specifically. All three of them hold religion to be false, but their critique is not that of classic skepticism. Rather, they sow suspicion." Each of these thinkers attempts to uncover religious belief as serving a social, political, or psychological function—a fancy way of saying that God cannot be trusted, that religious faith and religion, especially Christianity, masks people's real intentions, which are our sexual drives, our will to power, or economic motivation. So whether you identify these masters of suspicion explicitly, these thoughts swirl around us and cause you and me not to trust.

The Scriptures, though, tell us in Hebrews 11:6, that:

*"And without faith it is impossible to please Him, for whoever would draw near to God must believe that He exists and that He rewards those who seek Him."*

What God finds most satisfying in us is a disposition of trust in Him. Faith, then, can feel like a minority report in a majority world of suspicion, and this is why we need Hebrews 11. We need Hebrews 11, because it takes us from the very beginning of the Scriptures and leads us straight through to say: "No, this apparently minority report is in fact the true way to live as a human being. Men and women of old have trusted God, and that trust is not been misplaced. God has been found utterly reliable and trustworthy." So, this great chapter has a powerful rhetorical

effect to lead us through the Scriptures and to invite us in the end, as we'll see, to join our names to this roster of those who have found God faithful.

Last Sunday, Pastor Scott took us through the beginning, from creation—of trusting that God is the Creator of the world—and then lead us through Abel, Enoch, Noah, and the beginning of Abraham. This morning, beginning in Hebrews 11:17, we continue with Abraham and move forward. Hebrews 11:17 says:

*“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.’”*

Abraham trusted God, offering back to Him in worship the promised son that he had received in his old age. Hebrews 11:19 tells us how Abraham was able to do that:

*“He considered that God was able even to raise him from the dead, from which, figuratively speaking, he did receive him back.”*

Even though he was in the act of offering Isaac, Abraham had grown over many years to trust in the unswerving commitment of God to keep His promises, and so he trusted God, a great act of obedience and faith. Hebrews then takes us further to Isaac's own life. In Hebrews 11:20, we read:

*“By faith Isaac invoked future blessings on Jacob and Esau.”*

When these sons were first born, when he could not see the outcome, he had God's word and promise that the older one would serve the younger, which is atypical, and yet Isaac blessed the sons by faith. By faith, the writer tells us, Jacob, when he was dying, blessed each of the sons of Joseph and bowed in worship, looking ahead that his descendants would go down to Egypt and that God would preserve them through a devastating famine. In Hebrews 11:22, we read:

*“By faith Joseph, at the end of his life, made mention of the exodus of the Israelites and gave directions concerning his bones.”*

Joseph looked ahead, experiencing God's reliability, His trustworthiness, and near the end of his life looked ahead and made mention of the coming Exodus and that God would act again. He gave directions concerning his bones. He said: “When you all leave here, make sure you carry my bones out.” He had seen enough to know that God could be trusted, so that when he looked ahead for what he could not yet see, he trusted Him in that. That is the challenge before us this morning—to summon the evidence of God's trustworthiness in our lives to this very point so that our disposition facing forward is confidence, trust in the power and love of our heavenly Father.

The writer of Hebrews gives the most attention to where the first five books of the Bible give greatest attention, that is to the great events of the Exodus and the figure of Moses. He deals with this beginning in Hebrews 11:24. He says:

*“By faith Moses, when he was grown up, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter.”*

Now, that's a great calling card. Some people, if they just say they are from a distinguished family, opportunity seems to open up. Others say: “I graduated from this school,” and privilege seems to open up. Can you imagine saying: “Well, my dad is Pharaoh,” which in Egyptian, *pharaoh* is the *big house*. Can you imagine that? My dad is the house! He refused the privilege and chose instead to identify himself with the people of God who appeared to be mistreated, harassed, and downtrodden, and yet they were the bearers of the promise and were the ones that God would lead out with a mighty and victorious outstretched arm. Hebrews 11:27 tells us:

*“By faith he left Egypt, not being afraid of the anger of the king, for he endured as seeing Him who is invisible.”*

He remained strong. He showed great fortitude, as seeing Him who is invisible. Remember, the Lord appeared to him in Exodus 3 and revealed His name and His sovereign, saving purpose, and Moses went forward leading the people, seeing Him who is invisible. By faith, he kept the Passover and instructed the people to do so, never having experienced before the miraculous deliverance that could come. They could not draw on past experience to say, “Yes, in our experience growing up, if we applied the blood of a lamb over our door, we would be saved and protected.” No one could say, “Our ancestors experienced that,” but they had seen, they had seen enough of the reliability of God to trust when the Lord said: “Slaughter the Passover Lamb and put the blood over your door, and the Angel of death will pass by you and you will be saved.” They had no idea that God was setting up the template of redemption, the very same thing that He would make of you and of me—to look to the Lamb who was slain at Passover and the Angel of death will pass over you if you trust and obey.

By faith, likewise, the people, having come to the edge of the Sea, trusted God. They had no prior experience to say when the most powerful nation of the world is driving at you, streaming with advanced weaponry, and God pins you in at the boundary of a sea, and most of you cannot swim, they had no prior experience to say: “Oh, yeah, whenever this happens the sea just splits open and we walk out and our enemies are drowned.” No, they were brought to that place banking on the God that they had come to know, whose presence, power, and love were at work, to trust Him enough, when He opened up the sea, to walk through. By faith, the people crossed the sea as on dry ground. The writer of Hebrews takes us further into Scripture mentioning in passing the great event of Joshua's life when the walls of Jericho fall down. The Israelites had had no prior experience, so that when they came into the Land of Promise and there were powerful people dwelling there with walled cities, they couldn't say to each other:

“Ah, we know what to do. We just walk around seven times and blow trumpets and then the walls come down and God hands us the city.” No, but they had seen the faithfulness of God, and so when the Lord said to walk around the city and blow the trumpet, they trusted Him.

Brothers and sisters, I plead with you this morning to let the weight of Scripture fill your heart and mind. This life is filled with moments when you will have to rely on the experience of God that you have had. You will face a future that only He can see and the disposition of your heart will be summoned to move away from the masters of suspicion and orient your heart to say: “Heavenly Father, I have seen enough evidence of Your presence and power and love that I am facing the future confident in what You are going to do, even if I can't see it.” You see, faith is not blind; faith is riveted on a Person, Jesus Christ, and faith is summoning the evidence of His faithfulness to point us forward, not with doubt, not with suspicion, but with confidence. That is why the opening verses say it's the assurance, the substance, the conviction of what you cannot see.

Yesterday, with our daughter Salome's graduation recital, was one of the top 10 days of my life. It really was. It's hard to describe how you feel as a father to see your daughter play beautiful music together with her peers here in our church surrounded by friends and family. I calculated that she had practiced 6000 hours in her lifetime. We faced the big decision of college as a family and used it as an exercise in discerning God's will, because I know what she doesn't know, and that is that deciding where to go to college isn't the last big decision that you will make. Most of you know this. Life is filled with recognizing God's will, isn't it? And you learn to do it. What a gift to be here with so many of you and so many of her friends from school, and what a joy to take the gifts that God has given, to cultivate them and then to use them for worship. That's what we are supposed to do with our gifts of music, speaking, writing, painting, engineering. Whatever your gifts, use them so that God be praised. You engineers, I'm in the humanities, but I have deep respect for engineers. Let me tell you, if you're in engineering, one of the ways that engineers cause God be praised. They do amazing work. They do the calculations that no one else can understand. When they're going through school, they get Cs and Ds and feel good about it. Their tests are so hard that most people fail them, and yet they build bridges and design roads that people drive over, and they praise God for wonderful things, that they're safe. So whatever your gift, cultivate it. Let God be praised.

Back to Hebrews 11. The writer of Hebrews knows that the Scripture is filled with faithful people, and he is going at a pace that could take us into maybe 2020, but he knows the sermon has to tighten up. The writer says: “I've got you up to Joshua; let's talk about Judges. You know what? I'm out of time.” Hebrews 11:32:

*“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—*

“I don’t have time to tell you, so sidebar application—you are going to have to read the book yourself.” Literally he says: “The time is insufficient. It has escaped me. Somehow I didn’t pace myself well on the sermon. Time would escape me to tell of Gideon, Barak, Samson, and Jephthah.” These are faith-filled figures from the book of Judges. Of David, Samuel, and the prophets. Can you imagine, he just rips through the whole rest of the Bible in one verse? He said in Hebrews 11:33-35, all of these victorious things:

*“. . .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.”*

They celebrated the triumph of faith, and sometimes we will trust in God and the immediate outcome will be things like these. This is the outcome of faith, the triumph of faith, and yet in God’s sovereign economy, sometimes faith appears to be the wrong choice. Sometimes faith appears to be the wrong decision, like for Abel. Sometimes faith, an active trust in God, will get you slaughtered; it will get you fired; it will bring you up for peer review and you’ll be passed over. Hebrews 11:35, says:

*“Some were tortured, refusing to accept release, so that they might rise again to a better life.”*

In Hebrews 11:37, we read:

*“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—”*

Nobody wants to be sawn in two, and yet we read that is how the prophet Isaiah died, that he was sawn in two. This is the trial of faith, but whether God be glorified in closing the mouth of lions; whether God be glorified in extinguishing the power of the flame; or whether God be glorified by our being faithful and resolved to serve Him through the flames, glory be to God. Remember what Daniel’s companions said to Nebuchadnezzar? His companions said: “Okay, our God is able to deliver us from the fiery furnace, but if not, we’re going to serve Him anyway. If He chooses to be glorified in our flaming death, to God be the glory, great things He has done!”

Hebrews 11 draws to a great conclusion by saying in Hebrews 11:39:

*“And all these, though commended through their faith, did not receive what was promised,”*

This seems initially like a letdown, and that is why you have to read to Hebrews 11:40:

*“ . . . since God had provided something better for us, that apart from us they should not be made perfect.”*

They didn't receive what was promised for one profound reason. God had a better plan—to include you and me. You see, if He had ended the whole thing and given the promised inheritance, and if He had lowered the City of God from of ancient times, then we wouldn't be there. God had a better plan, and that plan was to go through history. He had provided something better, and the better thing is that apart from us they wouldn't be made perfect, and the writer runs this little prepositional phrase that is so wonderful. He says: “The better thing is that He wanted us to be there.” Isn't that amazing? God waited to bring the glorious ending, and He is still waiting. Tens of thousands of people will trust Jesus Christ today. Five young lives prayed last Sunday to receive Christ as Savior at Kenwood. That was worth coming to church for, wasn't it? Praise God—apart from us! That means the application is sort of obvious.

The application for us this morning is to join in to this great company of people who are trusting Christ, who are banishing the masters of suspicion and stripping them of their credentials. I want to ask in conclusion: “How do you join in?” This is not as easy to answer. How do you join in saying, “I trust God”? The first thing you need to do is to fix your eyes on Jesus. I mean really pay attention to Jesus and push the distractions away. When you do so, you will see a reliable, trustworthy Savior standing at the head of an innumerable company of redeemed. You will see Him who is the object and rewarder of faith, and when you look at Him, then I want to invite you to ask God to give you faith. Faith is a gift that comes from God. Faith is not something that you summon up on your own power, so look at Jesus and then say: “Would You give me faith?” He will answer that prayer. The third thing that you must do is to surround yourself with faith-filled people. I don't mean not to be in relationship with a non-Christian, but the people that you are close to, your closest friendships at home, at school, at work, at church. Let people in close to you and be around faith-filled people who are directing your gaze to Jesus. If someone is sowing doubt or suspicion or directing your gaze away from Him, don't let them into your closest circle. Surround yourself with people who are pointing you to Jesus. Praise God we can do this with many of our contemporaries, and many of us at Kenwood are people like that. I am so encouraged by your faith. It moves me further than I would go alone.

We need our contemporaries, but occasionally we also need to wander up into the stands where the men and women of Scripture reside and where faithful people who have gone before us are alive and still speak today. One of the best places that I know, and I have been strengthened to find this, is a set of talks that is called: “Men of Whom the World was not Worthy.” I would ask you to write this down. This has had such an effect on me. It was taken from this passage. You can find it at <http://www.desiringgod.org/biographies>. It is a set of talks,

and each one of them is about an hour or a little longer. You can listen to these as you drive. You can listen to these on your way to school. You can listen to these as you cut your grass. You can listen to these while you are serving with Go Local. This set of talks has so affected me. A few years ago, a team from Kenwood went to Thailand. We served in Thailand together, and we were used of God to encourage the missionary community. That was our mission. As we were finally preparing to go, I knew that ministry can be hard; ministry can be lonely; ministry involves giving out constantly and sometimes not have a chance to replenish. I thought: "What is something that I have been strengthened by so much?" and it was these talks. So I reached out to *Desiring God* and told them we were going and that we would love to give those to everyone. This was way back in the day when people used CDs. Imagine that. Now those are called *coasters*. But you had to buy those talks, and we needed 70 sets. I called *Desiring God* and told them we were going to encourage missionaries, but we really don't have the budget to buy 70 sets. They said, "No problem, we will overnight them to you. Give them away." One of the miracles of the Internet now is that you can listen to them all for free. I want to challenge you to do that. The first of the talks is based on the life of Jonathan Edwards. It is stirring. Many consider him to be the greatest mind born on the North American continent, and want to end with something I learned from listening to that talk. Jonathan Edwards, when he was a teenager, wrote a list of 70 resolutions and he read these every week. I am going to read you just three.

Number one: Resolved: I will do whatever seems to most be to God's glory as long as I live.

Number four: Resolved: Never to do anything, physically or spiritually, except what glorifies God.

Number twenty-five: Resolved: To examine carefully, and constantly, what that one thing in me is that causes me to doubt the love of God, even the least little bit, and then to direct all my forces against it.

Isn't that a great resolution: banish suspicion and replace it with trust in the sovereign King who has given us evidence of His power and love. We have strong evidence that God is for us and not against us. We have strong evidence that He is trustworthy and will keep all of His promises. We have the words and actions of our Lord Jesus, who on the night in which He was betrayed, took bread and broke it in the presence of His disciples and said: "*This is My body, broken for you. Do this in remembrance of Me.*" He took the cup of thanksgiving and said: "This cup is the New Covenant in My blood poured out for you. Do this in remembrance of Me." This is not the table of Kenwood Baptist Church. It is the table of the Lord Jesus Christ, and if you have trusted Him, even right now for the very first time, then partake with us and proclaim His death until He comes.

Lord Jesus, we praise You and we magnify You and we remember what You have done and place our trust in You this day. In Jesus' Name, Amen.