

Title: Ordinary Faith
Text: Hebrews 11.8-22
Theme: Ordinary Faith displays our extraordinary God
Series: Hebrews #40
Prop Stmt. Same as theme
Aim: I aim to convince my people that biblical faith reveals how unusual we are from this world.

If you were getting married this year, would you not be looking forward to this year? If you were graduating from college or getting your license or getting the job that you have dreamed of, would you not be excited for this year? If you were expecting a child or the birth of a grandchild or going on a special trip that you have planned for years, then, you would be anxious for this year to finally be here. If however, you have no certain joys, or no expectations of pleasure and therefore nothing to really look forward to, then you may be facing this New Year with some caution and hesitancy and even fear.

If you are a follower of Christ, then you have been given promises rooted in the gospel, that give you every reason in the world to look forward with great joy, with settled, confident, resolved hope, with a grateful, humble yet unshakable expectation of pleasure. This text, rightly understood does just that to us and for us.

Read Text:

Whenever I speak about faith, I have to be very careful to provide a biblical definition since there is so much confusion as to what faith is. For example, some people limit faith to being “confidence in God doing for me what I want.” This type of faith has one goal – getting the kind of life right now that I have always wanted, and that I think that I deserve. There is an element of truth in this, in that God does indeed bless his children and that God is good and does good things for us, but this type of faith misses the point. Another deficient view limits faith to a creed or doctrinal statement. I think that most of you are aware of how alarmed I am at contemporary Christianity’s aversion to doctrinal content and I have attempted to emphasize robust theology from the pulpit and from the diet of classes that are offered here. This is all very important, but true faith is not being able to answer all of the questions correctly on the test or being able to describe the differences between Arminianism and Calvinism. Another misconception of faith is that it is a blind leap in the dark. We often see faith portrayed as being a belief that everything is going to work out the way you want it to, even if that is contrary to truth. Faith is not a warm-fuzzy step into the black-hole of one’s own dreams. And neither is biblical faith, sincere devotion to spirituality, regardless of what defines that particular spirituality.

In contrast to these, faith, as demonstrated in the Scriptures and has defined in this book, is “*Faith is that which securely fastens the believer to the reality of the promise of God that has not yet been seen because it has not yet been fulfilled.*” Faith acts in confidence now because God has said it. And since God has said it, even though it has not happened yet, it will happen. The one who trusts in Him will never be put to shame. This is beauty of the book of Hebrews. God speaks to us through this book. God calls us to press on as

pilgrims, and in this book he gives us three major reasons why and they all have to do with the Kingdom of God.

1. God's Kingdom makes much of King Jesus— doctrinal emphasis (logic)

Hebrews champions the superiority and therefore the centrality of Christ in all things.

2. God's Kingdom involves a place – narrative emphasis (scope)
3. God's Kingdom involves people who believe Him – biography emphasis (personal)

Together, these three components provide the basis for God's promises and therefore for our confidence in them. The first ten chapters are doctrinal and the arguments are weighty because this allows us to see that God thinks of everything in astonishing detail. But the doctrine is interwoven with history. God has a plan for this world and he has been carrying this out from the very beginning of time. His plan covers every person, every situation and every detail. God's plan for this world is going to be fulfilled – no matter what. And then we come to chapter eleven. Chapter eleven is biographical. Here we are reminded of the people who did not know how everything fit together, but what they knew – they believed and acted upon. These were ordinary people who lived with ordinary faith. And through these ordinary people, simply embracing and acting upon what God had revealed and refusing to let go, God used them to accomplish some amazing things.

That is exactly what you need to grasp this morning. We are not amazing people. We are ordinary people. God has called us to have an ordinary faith and has given us clear and compelling reasons for it. And when we, ordinary people, chose to live on the promises of God, He does amazing things. God works this way because it places the attention on Him (where it belongs) instead of us (where we cannot handle it). That is what is so amazing about this chapter. It reveals how ordinary (in fact very, earthy in many cases) these people are. One is a simple farmer who gets murdered. Another gets drunk. One lies about his wife (twice), another gets into a fight and kills a guy. One was a prostitute, and another commits adultery and yet, these are the people that God uses to carry out his plan. He did not choose them because of their failures, but in spite of showing how un-saintly they are, these were people who believed him. They are not commended because of their sin, but because of their faith. There are plenty of people who consistently make sinful decision and refuse to change because they do not believe God's promises and who, as a result have no hope, but the expectation of God's judgment. There are also plenty of people who never murdered, committed adultery, engaged in prostitution or got drunk, but use their "morality" as the basis for their security instead of the promises of God and are under the same condemnation as the ones who did. The issue is do you really believe God's promises?

Hebrews 11 breaks down into two main sections with an introduction at the beginning, an interlude in the middle and a summary statement at the end.

11.1-3 – Introduction
11.4-12 – Stories of God’s People
11. 13-16 – 1st Summary (interlude)
11.17-38 – More Stories of God’s People
11.39-40 - Summary

The text that I am focusing on this morning covers the end of the first section of stories, the interlude and the beginning of the 2nd section of stories. But, here is what I want you to see. All three reasons for our persevering are woven together.

1. **The Certainty of the City compels us to Press On.**

The description of Abraham beginning in verse 8 is engaging and understanding of our place in this world. Abraham was called to leave what he knew, to go to what he did not know. He was called to leave what he was born into in order to experience what he was really made for. He was called to leave what he could see in order to go to what he did not see. He was called to walk away from the “city of man” and to go in search of the city of God.

He could see Ur. This ancient city held a position of great prominence. Major excavations have revealed some very impressive discoveries, which only add to our understanding of what Abraham walked away from. He left what appeared to be permanence and lived the wandering life of a nomad looking for a permanent home. Ur looked mighty and strong, but like all of the cities of man, it wasn’t. He left that to go to the land of promise, but when he was in the land of Canaan, and was in the land that was promised to him, he was not at home yet in that land.

That describes us exactly. This world was made by God in order to be the place, the land, the Kingdom for His Son, King Jesus. This world, rightfully owned by God is temporarily ruled by an imposter king. So, we see this world as it is; knowing that it is not as it should be. We look at our lives as they are; knowing that we are not yet living as we are designed and called. We are in this land, but we are not yet home. Like Abraham, we look around us and we see things that appear to be permanent, but in reality they are not. We look at our own nations’ capital and we see the marble, the granite, the columns, the historic structures, the security measures, the underground facilities for protecting our cherished documents and all of the attempts of man to make it look strong, mighty and permanent. We love our country, and we call her our home, yet realizing that we are not at home – really – yet.

A. A city with foundations

He was (v.10) looking forward to the city that has foundations.

Ur is an archaeological site. Egypt is littered with pyramids. Babylon had to be re-discovered. Athens and Rome are barely shadows of what they once were. One of the major themes of the Bible is the tension between the city of man and the city of God. The

city of man is symbolic of life, here and now. It speaks of what we can see. The city of man speaks to immediate gratification and calls you to live for yourself now, before you die and it's all over. The city of God is symbolic of the place where God will one day reign. It is not here yet, but when it comes, it will never, ever, ever, ever be destroyed. It has foundations.

B. A city designed and built by God (10b)

The architect and the builder are God, which means that the very nature, beauty, layout, and structure of this city are unlike anything that you can ever imagine. It is described in Hebrews 12.22 as the "city of the Living God." And this city that Abraham was looking for is the city that John describes in the end of the book of Revelation.

Now, think about that for a minute. The last two chapters of the Bible describe the end of all things as we know them. In the past I have described for you how the last two chapters of Revelation correspond with the first two chapters of Genesis. The creation is a foretaste of the new creation. The Garden of Eden and the river and the tree are all reflected in the city, which has a throne, a river and a tree. Throughout the Bible, we are given glimpses of this. The tabernacle that we studied in Exodus was a picture of the coming city. Then the Temple, in the city of Jerusalem, and now the church – you and me are a reflection of the life that is to come. It all comes together in this city. "Here we have no lasting city, but we seek the city that is to come." (Hebrews 13.14)

Revelation 21.1-8; 21.22-22.5

We do not see this yet. But, the image of this is stamped upon our very natures. We long for permanent relationships. We long for a security and stability, for peace, for rest, for trust. We work for it now, but it will not last. I saw a bumper sticker the other day that said, "War is not the answer" and I thought – you are right, it isn't. But until the king comes and takes back that which rightfully belongs to him, war is what we are stuck with. We, as a world are at war with ourselves because we are at war with God. In the midst of this world are a people who have made peace with God through the Lord Jesus Christ. These are the people of God who, because they are peace with God, are in conflict with this world, as it is, but not in conflict with what it will be. So, we, like Abraham, look for and live now as a taste of what life in the city will be like.

Beloved, that is how the story begins, and ends (and begins again). So, what does that mean? Some of you think that you are stuck, for the rest of your life with a crummy life. You have been dumped on. You have a lousy marriage, or lousy kids or a lousy job, or a lousy body, or a lousy car, or a lousy school – whatever. You look at how others appear to live and you dream that somehow that could be your life, which of course only fuels your discontentment. On the one hand – of course there are going to be things that are lousy. We are not home yet. But, on the other hand, stop! You are not stuck! This, as we know it, is not the end. This is not it. You are where you are to point to that which is coming. When you live with attitude that tells everyone in your world how miserable you

are, and how miserable you want to make them, you are simply acknowledging what God says about the city of man. It doesn't work. Living for yourself does not work.

The city of God is coming and when it comes, it will never end. The permanence of that city compels us to live now in light of what is to come. Without that, we are simply gerbils on a wheel who are going nowhere – really fast.

2. **The Example and Experience of others compels us to Press On.** (13-16)

Have you ever noticed how all of the promised pleasures of this world create within us a restlessness that prevents from fully engaging in and enjoying and experiencing even what we are doing right now? It is like we are always looking for the next thing, the next event, the next experience, the next meal, that we don't stop and take in what is ours – now. The reason behind that is because this world can only promise, but it cannot deliver. The donkey never gets the carrot.

The people of God know that. Our lives are not built on hype and buzz. We are not fooled by the advertising. We see that beneath the plastic surgery, are plastic lives and plastic relationships. Like Inception, those who live for the dreams, lose reality.

The experience of the people of God, described in this chapter, validate our sense of homelessness. We are not at home in the cities of man. But here, we live, for now. Here we live, on a mission to point others to the One for whom they were made and to the city that He has prepared.

But here is the tension. We live now in this city according to the rules of the city that is coming. In this city, man makes the rules. In the city that is coming, God does. When we live now, believing God's promises, we do not always make sense to our world and that can feel really lonely.

God told Abraham that he and Sarah were going to have a son in their old age. They were the objects of laughter. Think of it, Sarah was enrolling Isaac in Kindergarten after she had been collecting Social Security for over 30 years (know what I mean?). But, she (Sarah) considered him faithful who had promised. (v.11) and later, God called Abraham to offer up Isaac as a sacrifice to God (17). Abraham did not know who all of this was going to work. On the one level it made no sense to him, but this is what God said, so he proceeded with it, figuring that somehow God was able to his son from the dead. At the time, they had no idea of how the rather miraculous conception of Isaac would point to the absolutely miraculous conception of Christ. All they knew is that God had promised them a son and they believed God. Abraham did not know that when he went to Mt. Moriah to offer up his son, that he was doing so on the spot where Solomon, the Son of David, descendent of Solomon would build the temple, where, outside of its walls the Son of David, Christ would be offered as a sacrifice for the sins of the world. But when Christ was offered up on the cross, there was no last minute rescue. There was no substitutionary animal that took his place. Christ was the sacrifice. What these people did

in Hebrews 11 was by faith. And God used their faith-driven obedience to prepare the way for Christ. They made much of Christ in ways that they did not even know. And so,

3. **The Superiority of Christ compels us to Press On.**

The entire book of Hebrews lays out for us the superiority of Christ. We have seen that Christ is superior to the angels. Christ is superior to Moses. In fact, everything that Moses wrote about all pointed to him. The sacrifices were all about him. The OT Priesthood was all about him. The prophets were all about him. The Covenant was about him.

Melchizedek was about him. The Sabbath rest was about Him. The tabernacle was about him. And now we see that ever since God set it up, he has been preparing everything for a city that is all about Him too.

Notice v.21. (read)

Here is Jacob, grandson of Abraham, dying in Egypt. He is dying in a land that is not his. He is dying in a place where he has had to live out his days, but really is not his home. And though he dies there, he is not buried there. He is buried by faith in the land to which the people of God will return. He is buried by faith in the land where his grandfather searched for the city of God that has not come – yet. And before he died, he called his sons in to him and either blessed them or made some prophecy concerning them. Reuben, the firstborn, did not receive a blessing. Joseph, who was his favorite, who, saved their bacon did not get the big blessing either. Jacob, dying in Egypt, turned to Judah and said, “The scepter shall not depart from Judah nor the ruler’s staff from between his feet.” What was he talking about? He was talking about the King who was going to come from the line of Judah. Abraham was looking for the city, Jacob was talking about the King, and Revelation puts it all together. God made this universe for the glorious Kingdom of His Son, Jesus Christ. The focal point of the entire universe will be the city of God where the people of God enjoy God forever and ever and ever. Our guaranteed enjoyment of God then, is what drives us to enjoy God now. Now, it is by faith, then it is by sight.

As you start a new year and naturally take inventory of your life, there are for each of us issues that we need to address and areas of neglect that we need to roll up our sleeves and get busy working on. But what I want you to see is that every area of your life is like a spoke on a wheel and your relationship to Christ and the church is the hub. The certainty of the city, the influence of other believers, the superiority of Christ is foundational to how we view and work through personal habits, family and relational issues, physical and financial well-being. The certainty of the joy to come emboldens you to face the immediate challenges head-on.

Hebrews has taught us to press on as pilgrims. I think in view of this text and in view of what the rest of this book teaches we need to add two little words to that admonition. Press on pilgrims, press on with joy!