

“The Baton Is Passed to Us” // Hebrews 11:32–40 // Hebrews 11: Broken People & Famous Faith #13¹

Introduction

If you have your Bibles, please open them to Hebrews 11:32. This is our final message, our grand finale, in our journey through Heb 11, the Great Hall of Faith.

I think if I were a TV show producer, I’d feel a lot of pressure bringing a show to conclusion. I’ve seen some good ones and some bad ones. Breaking Bad, the series finale of Friends, and the final episodes of the Office were some of the best. The conclusions of LOST and Seinfeld were a couple of the worst. There were a few series that just seemed to run out of money and had to abruptly end and tie off whatever loose ends there were. “Arrested Development” and “Newsroom” with Jeff Daniels were like that.

As far as movies go, *Inception* has to be the greatest ending for a movie in recent history: Does the top keep spinning or not? (The official answer, btw, is yes it does.)

In the music industry, one of the best closers of all-time was the Beatles’ final concert, given in January 1969. I wasn’t there for it, of course; Pastor Bryan told me all about it and showed me the T-shirt

he got while he was there. But the concert was essentially spontaneous, completely unannounced. The Beatles just set up on top of a building in downtown London in the middle of winter and started jamming. Neighboring office buildings and apartment complexes were startled by the sudden-though-familiar loud music. People walked out onto their balconies just to listen to how they all lived on a yellow submarine. The concert ran for 42 minutes before the police shut it down; a fitting end, many said, to the Beatles mold-smashing career in the music industry.²

Hebrews 11:32–40 is the author’s finale in his great hall of faith. All in all, he’s given us 16 individual stories of faith, and for the final episode, he’s got a special two hour season finale (but don’t worry, this message isn’t 2 hours... only 1.5). He begins:

32 And what more shall I say? For time would fail me to tell of **Gideon**, (In case you forgot, Gideon was the soft-spoken, somewhat cowardly guy who defeated a Midianite army of 100,000 w/ only 300 soldiers, some clay pots, and a few lighters). and then there’s **Barak** (he’s the guy who, with the help of a couple of women, defeated the mighty armies of King Sisera with a much smaller force, too.) Then there’s, **Samson** (he’s the ‘I-killed-1000-Philistines with just the jawbone of a donkey’ guy, and), **Jephthah** (who defeated 20 cities of the Ammonites), **of David** (of course you know him, the great king who as a teenager killed Goliath with just a sling) **and Samuel and the**

¹ Sources consulted: Tim Keller, “[A Better Resurrection](#)”, March 27, 2005, Redeemer Presbyterian; Loveday Alexander, *The Epistle to the Hebrews and Christian Theology*, edited by Richard Bauckham, Daniel R. Driver, Trevor A Hart and Nathan MacDonald; Levi Lusko, “[The Pressure Is Not the Problem](#)”, June 26, 2023, Fresh Life Church; Dr. Tony Evans, “[Others: The Triumph of Faith](#)”, December 24, 2021, Oak Cliff Bible Fellowship. Accessed July 31, 2024; John MacArthur, “[A Conquering,](#)

[Courageous Faith, Part II](#)”, February 12, 2010, Grace to You Ministries. And others as noted throughout.

² <https://ultimateclassicrock.com/famous-final-concerts/>

prophets— 33 who through faith conquered kingdoms, enforced justice, obtained promises, stopped the mouths of lions (Daniel and the lions' den), 34 quenched the power of fire (that's Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego who walked through a fiery furnace unharmed), escaped the edge of the sword, were made strong out of weakness, became mighty in war, put foreign armies to flight. 35 Women received back their dead by resurrection. (That's a reference to the widow of Zarephath, whose son Elijah raised from the dead).

But then, right in the middle of vs 35, the tone changes. Some were tortured, refusing to accept release, so that they might rise again to a better life. 36 Others suffered mocking and flogging, and even chains and imprisonment. 37 They were stoned (this happened to Jeremiah and Zechariah), they were sawn in two (this is a reference to the prophet Isaiah, who, according to the Jewish Talmud, was captured by evil King Manasseh and shoved him into a hollow tree trunk and King Manasseh ordered the tree trunk sawn in half), they were killed with the sword. They went about sheepskins and goatskins, destitute, afflicted, mistreated— 38 *of whom the world was not worthy*— wandering about in deserts and mountains, and in dens and caves of the earth.

Vs 39 is key: And *all these* (*all these*, that's a key phrase. ALL THESE), though commended through their faith, did not (fully) receive what was promised, 40 since God had provided something better for us, that apart from us they should not be made perfect.

In the last 9 verses of Hebrews 11, the author presents two distinct groups of great faith. Let's call them "Group A" and "Group B."

- **Group A** believers found themselves in some impossible situation, facing some insurmountable obstacle, and they asked God to do a

miracle, and God did it. He enabled them to sleep unharmed in a den of lions, to defeat armies 100 times their size, and literally to walk through fire.

- **Group B** found themselves in similar situations, and probably asked God for those same kinds of miracles, but, to them, God said "no." They showed their faith by trusting God in the midst of unanswered prayer and proclaiming that knowing God was better than any other answer God could give to their prayer.

Now, I know what you're saying. "Please, Lord, let me be in Group A." And that's how I feel, too. And I pray that way. But the writer wants to show us that God, at different points of our lives, calls us to membership in both groups, and the writer of Hebrews wants us to be ready to respond to whichever assignment of faith he gives us in that moment.

3 phrases I want to zero in on today:

- Vs. 39, "*All these* (were) commended through their faith" (v. 39)
- Also vs 39, "*All these... did not receive what was promised...*" (none of them, even the ones that saw the miracles) (vs. 39–40)
- And then, vs. 38, "*of whom the world was not worthy*"

OK, phrase 1...

1. "*All these* were commended through their faith" (vs. 39)

There are two ways these great heroes showed faith. I referred to them as "Group A" and "Group B" faith a minute ago; let's call

- Group A = "*God is Bigger*" faith and
- Group B = "*God is Better*" faith.

'God is BIGGER' faith is when we face some obstacle that is so much bigger than us and we have to trust God to overcome it for us.

We all have to exercise this kind of faith when we call on God to do a work in our hearts to save us and change us. Being saved means saying to God, "I can't save myself. I am dead in my sin. I can't pay my sin-debt. I can't change my dead heart. I need you to do that for me." And to every person that calls on God that way, God answers miraculously. For whosoever calls upon the name of the Lord shall be saved, and if any man is in Christ he is a new creation, old things have passed away and behold all things have become new. I have been buried with him by baptism into death...

Every salvation is a miracle of resurrection. God imputes Jesus' righteousness to your account and infuses the power of his resurrection into your heart.

But that's not the only time you show this kind of faith. Sometimes you need miraculous provision, or miraculous guidance, or miraculous healing, or you're asking God to do a work in someone's heart--a prodigal child, or someone you are sharing Christ with, or some unreached people group. And God answers in a way that can only be regarded as miraculous.

I hope you never lose sight of the fact that we serve a miracle-working God, and God hasn't ceased doing these things. The whole basis of our faith is that God intervened in history and in our lives miraculously with the power of resurrection. He brought life from death; peace in chaos; light in blindness. And, God hasn't ceased bestowing that power, as if that were a one-time thing and now he's just the moral policeman up there keeping score.

The writer of Hebrews says that Jesus is the same yesterday, today, and forever, which means that the same miracle-working Savior that walked the streets of Jerusalem years ago still listens to us when we pray *TODAY*. And often he answers with miracles.

In fact, just before he left, he said to his disciples:

John 16:14, (After seeing all those miracles, he says) *"Until now you have not asked for anything in my name. Ask and you will receive, and your joy will be complete."*

"In your name" means according to his will. This is not some kind of divine pinata God is offering to you that you can whack with a faith stick to get out whatever goodies you want. "Praying in his name" perceiving something God wants to do for his kingdom and then asking him to do the miraculous in pursuit of that.

Before he ascended, Jesus said to his disciples: *"All authority has been given to me in heaven and earth..."* Why would that be important? He's telling us he has the authority to do what it takes to get the job done. Then he tells us to go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature. Later in Matthew he says, *"I will build my church and the gates of hell will not prevail against it..."* (Overcoming the gates of hell takes more than natural talent, it takes supernatural gifting, so... *Ask of me, and I will give you the nations as your inheritance."* (Matthew 28:18; Matthew 16:18; Ps 2:8)³

Hudson Taylor was the British missionary whose bold, borderline reckless acts of faith opened up inland China to the gospel. When everybody else said it was impossible, Hudson Taylor said, *"Nothing is impossible with God."* He said (I love this), *"There are three stages to every great work of God; first it is impossible, then it is difficult, then it is done."*

Because he and others after him believed God for the impossible, get this: the church has grown faster in China in the last 150 years than it

³ Matthew 28:18, Ps 2:8; Matthew 16:18

has anywhere else in the world up to this point. Even with Mao and President Xi and all the Communism. Did you know this...

- This past Sunday more Christian believers attended church in China than in all the countries of Europe *combined*.
- The number of practicing Christians in China is equal right now to the number in the United States.⁴

We need another generation with Hudson Taylor kind of faith, believing God for the gospel's advance in unreached nations today. Or on college campuses. Or in career fields. Or in your neighborhood, or in your home. *It's why we're asking God to let us plant 1000 churches in our generation and send out 100 more to our overseas mission fields in the next 3 years.* Yes, these things feel impossible with us, but they are possible with God.

Here's what **Hudson Taylor** said: *"All God's giants have been weak men and women who did great things for God because they reckoned on God being with them."*

God is BIGGER than whatever obstacle stands in his way. Listen, Summit! Listen, Summit College: We need more of this kind of faith in our generation. Let's pray for it! People who trust God for impossible things. Who press into unreached people groups with the gospel. Or dark corners of our society--education, Hollywood, Nashville, Wall Street, and DC.

Matthew 13:58, to me, is one of the saddest verses in all the Gospels. It says, *"And (Jesus) did not do many mighty works there, because of their unbelief."*

- **"There"** was Nazareth, Jesus' hometown! His hometown! Of all the places in the world Jesus would have wanted to do miracles, it would have been there! That was where a lot of his childhood friends were. Family friends. Teachers he'd loved. But Jesus didn't

do miracles there. Why? Because he had sovereignly decided not to? No. *"Because of their unbelief."* The implication is that he would have, he wanted to, but their unbelief stayed the powerful hand of God.

- **May that never be said of us, Summit Church!** I don't want to get to heaven and have Jesus say, "I would have... I wanted to! But you just didn't believe me." I don't want it to be recorded up there: *Many mighty works Jesus did not do in Raleigh, or Durham, or Apex or Mebane, or Chapel Hill or Knightdale or at UNC or NCCU or NC State or Campbell or the Summit Church because there was just no one here to believe him.*

"All God's giants have been weak men and women who did great things for God because they reckoned on God being with them."
Hudson Taylor

Let that be us, Summit Church! Believing that Jesus Christ really is the same yesterday, today and forever, believing that the Lord's arm is shortened that it cannot save nor his ear heavy that it cannot hear; and that we HAVE not ONLY because we ASK not. AND let us ask boldly that our joy may be fulfilled.

You're praying for the son or daughter; you are praying for that unreached group; you are praying for that breakthrough. You are praying for those walls of Jericho to fall down. Keep walking and don't give up.

- Let me ask: ***Where do you need to trust God like this? Where is he putting it into your heart to trust him for a miracle?*** (Maybe it's a financial or a healing miracle. Something for his glory!)
- **God, give us more people with 'God is Bigger' faith!** Amen? Who's a volunteer for "God is Bigger" faith, raise your hand!

⁴ Mark Noll, *The New Shape of World Christianity*

Ah, but there's another type of faith. The faith of **Group B, 'God is BETTER' faith**

If "God is Bigger" faith is when God shows off that he's bigger than any obstacle, then "God is Better" faith is when God uses you to show off that he's better than any earthly outcome. In 'God is Bigger' faith, God shows off his power by giving you deliverance; in 'God is Better' faith you show off God's worth by your unflagging joy in the midst of suffering.

First, let's discuss the difference between happiness & joy, because a lot of people get these confused.

- **HAPPINESS** refers to a temporary emotional state, based on your happenings. In fact, that's where we get the world: *Happiness: Happiness = What you feel when what you want to happen, happens.*
- **JOY** is different. Joy = An abiding peace unrelated to your happenings.
- The Bible doesn't promise constant happiness, at least in this life; what it does show you is how to find joy, which is way better than happiness.
- Happiness ends up being hollow, elusive. That's what movie stars and rich people almost always tell us. I'm always quoting these stars to you: Katy Perry, Drake, Tom Brady, who say things like, "I found so much of what I was looking for, but it didn't satisfy me. It didn't take care of my deep angst. It didn't fix my relationships. It didn't take away my insecurity and self-doubt." That's because we sought happiness instead of joy.
- **The Puritan Jeremiah Burroughs said we're like kids chasing clouds.** A kid sees a cloud and thinks, "If I could just get up on that hill, I could grab that awesome, puffy, marshmallow-looking cloud. But then he gets to the top of the hill and realizes he isn't any close to that cloud at all. So he sees another hill and thinks, "If I get to the top of that one, I can get the cloud." But of course, it's the same there, too. And if you ever do manage to touch the

cloud, you see it really just empty vapor. This is our pursuit of happiness apart from God. *Always disappointed; always striving.* And that's because we mistake happiness for joy.

God offers us something better than happiness; he offers us joy, and here's the thing: the writer of Hebrews shows us that sometimes God withholds certain answers to prayer from us so that he can demonstrate to us that knowing him is more valuable and more joy-giving than anything else we might experience on earth.

And it's how God makes himself known to others through us, too.

Sure, a miraculous answer to prayer can amaze an unbeliever, and sometimes, I know stories of this, where a miraculous answer to prayer led to someone's faith. But can I tell you what I've observed now for many years, as a pastor? Quite often (in fact, more often than not), the unbeliever who was privy to the miracle (and I've seen this dozens of times) finds a way to write the miracle off; to dismiss it, to convince themselves it was a coincidence, or an exaggeration, or that the doctor misdiagnosed something, or they're missing some part of the story.

What I've seen over the years that is *more* convincing to the unbeliever is when a believer has joy in the midst of pain, an abiding and unshakeable hope in the midst of tragedy that shows them something better, something greater, something more permanent, than this temporary and decaying world. And that appeals to something deep in their heart that shakes them and makes them say, "I need this kind of hope. I need this kind of joy."

About a decade ago our church did this thing called a "**cardboard testimony**" service. It was pretty awesome, we should do one again sometimes. If you've never seen one, they work like this: To the backdrop of some worship song, various church members walk across a stage one at a time, each holding up like a 2'x2' square piece of

cardboard. On one side are a few words describing their life before Christ, something like: “Confused and afraid.” “Anxious, worried and lonely.” “Thought I was never good enough.” And then, after a brief moment, they flip their cardboard over, revealing a brief phrase describing their life since meeting Jesus: “Set free.” “Secure and joyful.” “Found real purpose in life.”

The best one I’ve ever seen was a young mom and an older, middle-aged man who walked out together on stage. On her card it says, “Diagnosed with MS.” Then the older man held up his sign, which said, “Doctor who diagnosed her. Unchurched” or “Atheist.” He then flipped his card over, which read, “Baptized this Easter.” Then, she flipped over hers, (PIC)⁵ which said, simply: “Worth it.” It wasn’t because of a miracle. She was never healed of MS. It was through her joy in suffering, her unquenchable hope, that he saw the reality of a God he’d been able to ignore and marginalize up to this point.

Sometimes God is glorified when sick people get well; sometimes he is glorified when sick people suffer well, even die well. I know we want God to give us the miracle, and I’ll pray with you for that. And I know you have the faith for that. But are you ready to show the faith that glorifies God if you don’t get the miracle--to say that “God, you

are better than anything else that life can give or anything that death could take away⁶?

The verse says (v 39) “*all these*” were commended for their faith. All these. It wasn’t that one group had faith and one group didn’t. Both the ones that got the miracle and walked through fire unharmed, AND ones who destitute, afflicted, and mistreated and wandered about the earth in sheepskins and goatskins saying they’d rather have Jesus than anything else on earth, and that he is enough. They were BOTH commended for their faith, because BOTH of them showed the faith that pleases God.

Some of us show faith by believing what God can do; some of us show faith by resting in WHO GOD IS.

But that leads me to the second phrase:

2. “*All these... did not receive what was promised... (vs 39)*”

Who does “all these” refer to? You might think that it refers to people in group B who didn’t get the answer to their prayer. “This last group didn’t receive what was promised, and they had to show faith.” But it says “ALL THESE.” *Nobody in this chapter fully received what was promised.*⁷

should not be made perfect.” There is something incomplete in the faith of everyone in chapter 11, not because their faith was insufficient, but because God is working together a larger salvation and it hasn’t been fully realized yet. We can only experience full salvation at the end, when we ALL surround the throne in worship. Another way to put it is that there’s an eschatological element to our salvation. (C) “All these” at the very least refers to the people he flew through in this list of vv. 32–40 (he offers them as 2 groups: “Some experienced this, some that, but ALL these have this in common...”) Thus, it can’t just be a promise for those who haven’t seen God answer a prayer. The chapter has people who got what they were promised (Noah, Sarah, Rahab) and some who didn’t (Abel, Joseph).

⁵ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RvDDc5RB6FQ> (see 3:14)

⁶ Though I can’t find the source, I think I owe this phrasing to John Piper

⁷ “All these” refers to the whole of chapter 11, not just the last half of the list starting in vs. 32, for 3 reasons: (A) The language here is identical to what the author says of Abraham in verse 13: “not having received what was promised.” The repetition seems to indicate that the author is applying this idea to everyone in the list. It at least applies to everyone up to verse 13. And if all of them, why not the entire list? (Basically, he tried landing the plane in verse 13, but then got carried away again and gave a few more examples ... and landed the plane again in verse 39.) (B) You can also look at what the author says next: “Apart from us they

And, at first, that might be a little confusing, since some of these people did seem to receive “the promise.” Vs. 33 literally says they “obtained promises.” I mean, Noah got delivered through the Ark; Joshua knocked down the walls of Jericho. Abraham got the Promised Land.

But here’s the question. You ready? What if “the promise” in view here was not a promise of temporary relief from pain or a temporary manifestation of power? **What if it was something more?**

Let me point out something obvious, but also kind of eye-opening, when you think about it. All of Jesus’ healing miracles on earth were temporary.

- Lazarus was raised from the dead. But.. is he around today?
Anyone know where Lazarus is hanging out? No. Which means... that joker died again! There came a point where Lazarus died a second time and was buried a second time. It was probably in the same family grave! And I bet he was probably even more nervous about it this second time. This second time he dies, he opens his eyes in heaven, and I imagine he was like, “Oh boy, this again.” And he calls an angel over and says, “Before I get all excited and start settling into my mansion, do you know if Jesus is planning on giving me another callback thingies? I just want to emotionally brace myself if I gotta go back again.”
- Every person Jesus raised from the dead, died again. Every blind eye Jesus opened went blind again--because when we die, we’re all blind.
- In the same way, all the miracles recorded in Hebrews 11 were just temporary, too.

The object of their faith was never a temporary miracle. No--All these temporary manifestations of power served a greater purpose: highlighting that God was coming to earth to take the penalty of sin and the curse of death into himself so that all could be saved through resurrection. God’s purpose has always been to show the world *that*.

And that’s what the writer means by “(for) apart from us, they should not be made perfect.” (vs. 40) “Made perfect” means “made complete.” “All these did not receive what was promised promised... for apart from us (apart from your faith and mine), they are left incomplete.” (vv 39–40).

How? How does my life of faith--J.D. Greear’s life of faith, *your* life of faith--make *Abraham’s* faith complete?

It’s because we’re completing God’s great purpose on earth--to show the nations of the world that **he is Bigger and **he is Better** and that he alone can save. Until his gospel is understood and **believed throughout the world, that purpose is still incomplete.****

And see, when you understand that as God’s primary purpose in the world, that changes everything. The point of faith is not just to make your life easier. The point of faith is pointing people to the power and worth of God revealed in the gospel.

And that means however God answers my prayer; in whatever role he calls me to play, my goal is to leverage that to display his power and worth. Whether in prosperity or in poverty; whether through popularity or through shame; whether in sickness or in health, rewarding relationships or dysfunctional ones, my primary question is: How can I use this to glorify God? How can I use this to point others to the gospel?

What if that was your first question in every situation--every opportunity, every blessing, every difficulty, every obstacle: “God, how am I supposed to use this direct people’s attention toward Jesus?”

You see, in order to embrace this, you’ve got to have what we call around here a “Copernican revolution of the soul.” Copernicus, of course, was the one who figured out that the earth was not at the

center of the universe. Up until him, almost everybody thought that the earth was in the middle of everything, and all the celestial bodies orbited around us. I mean, it's what it looked like every night. We stood still and everything moved around us. "Oh no," said Copernicus. "The sun is the center of our solar system, and we rotate around it."

That's a great metaphor for how we humans see life. We assume everything rotates around us. I'm the point. And I interpret everything that comes into my life based *on how it benefits me*. I can summarize your prayer life like this: "*Gimme gimme gimme gimme. God gimme this. Gimme that. God SMITE him for what he did to me, and God could you take her out of my life because she's a problem.*" Every blessing that comes into your life, you commandeer into the service of your personal little kingdom. And when something happens that doesn't serve the purpose of your little kingdom you're like, "God, what's the deal? Have you forgotten me?"

You need to have a Copernican revolution of the soul. You are not the center of history. Our little kingdoms, our little contemporary happiness, is not the point. ***God's glory, and the story of what he is doing to save the world, is the point.***

The analogy I've used over the years to illustrate that is to think of your life as a movie, and ask yourself, "If my life was a movie, who would the main character be?" Well, naturally, you say, if my life were a movie, the main character would be me."

But that's not the life of faith. The life of faith means that you, like these people in Hebrews 11, start to see yourself as a part of a larger story where you're not the main character. Your story plays a relatively small part of a much bigger plot, a plot about HIM.

And the movie example I use is this. I probably bring this up here every 3 years. I would guess that 97% of you have no idea who Biggs Darklighter is. Unless you are a devoted Star Wars fan—the kind who

dressed up as an extra-terrestrial to see the finale and who owns his own personalized light-saber; you didn't go to prom, you stayed home and played video games. Unless that's you, you've never heard of Biggs Darklighter. And yet, without Biggs Darklighter, Star Wars would have ended with the first movie. You see, Biggs Darklighter was the X-Wing pilot who flew his X-wing into the path of Darth Vader's laser that was about to take out Luke Skywalker. And because he did that, Luke was able to fire the shot that destroyed the first Death Star.

Without Biggs, the whole Star Wars saga—all 538 movies--would never have gotten off the ground. There would have been no successful rebellion, no reunion with Yoda, no Rey or Finn or Poe or redemption of Kylo, no baby Yoda, no wandering Mandalorian plot, no happy ending in a galaxy far, far away. All of that exists because of Biggs Darklighter. And yet, most of you have never even heard of him.

But I bet if we could talk to old Biggs (which we can't, because—spoiler alert—he died, and —extra spoiler alert—Star Wars isn't real... some of you need to hear that this morning)--but I bet if we could talk with him, he would probably say that he doesn't care that we don't know his name, because he's not the main character of the Star Wars saga, Luke Skywalker is. His small section of the story only matters as it contributes to the plot surrounding the main character.

The life of faith is an invitation to join with these great men and women of Hebrews 11 in a larger story about Jesus. It's a story in which you have a role, an important role--sometimes it's to shine and sometimes it's to suffer, but always to bring glory to Jesus and help others know him.

Christian, let me ask you this: What are you going through right now? What difficulty? What unanswered prayer? Have you asked yourself: *How might I use this to glorify God? How might I use this to show people I have joy in something better than what the world*

offers--something that is better than anything else life can give or death could take away?

There is a baton being passed here at the end of Hebrews 11. You can feel the writer handing it to us (hold up Bible). Apart from us, the race of none of these people in Hebrews 11 is complete. There's still so many people who don't know. It's how he starts chapter 12, saying that we've got a leg of the race to run.

Which leads me to the final phrase, vs. 38:

3. "...of whom the world was not worthy" (vs. 38)

Oh, I love that phrase, and I really want you to let it sink in for a minute. There is a generation of Christians of whom God's verdict on their lives is that "the world was not worthy of them." I really want that to be true of this church--that we live in such a way that God would say that Raleigh-Durham and Chapel Hill and Cary and Apex and Mebane and Garner and Fuquay-Varina and Knightdale are not worthy of us.

What characterizes those people? They've given up personal ambition in life and said "This is all about Jesus' story, and his glory, and everybody in the world knowing about it."

And they believe that in everything that happens to them, good or bad, God is fulfilling that good purpose of bringing salvation to the ends of the earth, and they yield themselves to that promise, come what may.

- They believe that God never wavers from that promise or pulls back his hand from their lives.
- They believe that in their prosperity, and they believe that in their pain.

- They believe it when their prayers are answered, and they believe it during those times of soul-crushing waiting when it feels like no one is listening. They keep their eyes directed upwards, onto the promise, saying, "I know he'll keep his promise. And I know his kingdom is real. And I know this life of faith is worth it."

VAMP

In Cairo there is a small, dusty grave in an out of the way location. I've never actually been there, though I hope to one day. I've heard that you'd never in a million years even know it was there—it's off of a small side-street, there's no signs; the little cemetery is all overgrown with grass. But in that grave lies the body of one of the richest Americans ever to live. His name is William Borden, and he was the heir of the Borden milk company.

William Borden was born right at the turn of the 20th century, and he had a life of luxury and power laid out for him. At the time, the Borden milk company was one of America's largest, most successful companies. Think Apple Computers, or something like that today.

William's parents were cultural Christians, but as a teenager William really got saved. And when he graduated high school, he took a gap year to travel around the world, and on that trip he became overwhelmed at the vast number of people around the world who had never even heard the name of Jesus. He came home and told his parents he believed that God was calling him to bring the gospel to Muslims, particularly the large Muslim population in the Western part of China.

His parents objected and insisted he take over the family business instead. They sent him to Yale. He graduated with honors, and went on from there to graduate school at Princeton, graduating with honors from there, too. But still, this calling wouldn't go away.

He gave away the vast majority of his inheritance. He wouldn't even buy a car for himself. And at the age of 24, he walked away from his inheritance entirely, and set sail for Cairo where he planned to study Arabic for a year and then head on to China where he planned to spend the rest of his life. As his ship pulled up to the shoreline of Egypt, and he saw all the minarets of the mosques, he dreamed of the day that steeples would cover the landscape of Egypt and China pointing people to Jesus.

Upon arriving in Cairo, however, he contracted spinal meningitis. People in America heard about his sickness and prayed for God to do a miracle, but young William never recovered and he died at the age of 25, only 4 months after he'd gotten to Egypt.

Someone asked him in those final moments before he died what he thought about his decisions now, given how things had turned out. His biographer famously summarized his answer, **"No reserves, no retreats, no regrets."**

On this out-of-the-way tombstone in Cairo, overgrown with grass, is a brief description of Borden's life-and then the simple phrase,

"Apart from faith in Christ, there is no explanation for such a life."⁸

Apart from faith in Christ, there is no explanation for such a life.

Would that statement be true of you?

This is the legacy of Hebrews 11.

But here's the thing apart from us, even William Borden's faith will not be made perfect. You see, there are still lots of unreached people groups in the world. There are still lots of people left to believe.

People sometimes ask me, "When will the Summit feel like they've grown enough?" Easy answer. When there are no lost people left in the Triangle. Until then, we keep working and going and striving.

There are still 6000 groups in the world, like the Muslims in China, that are regarded as unreached. They are called 'UUPG's,' which stands for "unreached, unengaged people groups." That means that as it stands now, the people there have no viable access to the gospel. Often, they have no Bible in their language. **(PIC OF 10/40 Window)**

We can't stop until the task is done. This is what it means to continue on in the legacy of Hebrews 11.

The people of Hebrews 11 were not perfect. They failed a lot. But they kept their vision on one thing: the promise that God would bring his salvation to the ends of the earth. The promise that people from every tribe and tongue and nation on earth would have the chance to hear and believe.

And now, Summit, it falls to us. For some of us, our faith will manifest as the chance to believe that God is bigger than some obstacle that stands in the way of his kingdom. For others, it will come in the form

⁸ See <https://www.ligonier.org/learn/articles/missionary-william-whiting-borden>, and Randy Alconr, *The Treasure Principle*

of quiet resolve to have joy in God even when your body is in pain, your career has fallen apart, or your reputation is in ruins.

That baton is handed to you. What are you going to do with it? Listen, I love the Olympics. I watched it literally every night... I think I am always the most nervous in the relay races, because if one person flubs it, the whole team fails. I think my favorite moment of the Olympics this year was the women's 4x100 swimming medley. Regan Smith jumped out to an early lead in the backstroke... but I was worried because both the Australian and Chinese teams had incredibly strong teams, with their strongest swimmers coming later. But the middle two American swimmers maintained, but I was so nervous going into the last leg, because Australia and China had their most famous all-star ready for the last leg. Torri Huske was the last swimmer, and I kept thinking, "She's going to blow it." She didn't blow it. They beat the silver medalists, the Australians, by more than 3 seconds and beat the Olympic record by a full second.

I want us to play our part... I want us to finish our lap well. Or let me change the analogy, though stay in the Olympics. Part of the lead up to the Olympics each year is the passing of the torch from person to person from Greece to wherever the Olympics are being held. It starts a year before the opening ceremonies and usually takes a rather circuitous route around the globe. This year that included going 20 yards underwater and being crip walked by Snoop Dogg. But the climactic moment always comes when that final runner touches the official Olympic cauldron and it bursts into flames. The most epic one of those ever done was in Barcelona, 1992, when a Spanish archer shot a flaming arrow into the cauldron from several hundred yards away and it lit up the sky in a fiery blaze. *(Talk about pressure, how'd*

you like to be that guy with one attempt to get that shot right?) Think of that bursting into flame as the nations all around the throne of God, Rev 5:9, people from every tribe, tongue and nation bursting into songs of glory, honor and praise to the lamb that was slain before the foundation of the world. We have a part in that. The torch has been passed to us.

Apart from us, the race is not complete. Will we be faithful like they were? Around that throne I'm going to see 25 year old William Borden, and a mother who died with MS, and Hudson Taylor. In that moment, I want to know that I've run my lap faithfully. To have done my part. And I want you to join me.

Without faith it is impossible to please God; that faith consists of believing that God is real, that his kingdom is real, that he always keeps his promises and seeking him is worth the effort.

Let's open the altar one last time in this series for prayer-- (4 prayer counselors)

- Some of you need to come and ask God for some miracle. You need a 'God is bigger' faith.
- Some of you need to ask for endurance to keep going, for a "God is better" faith.
- The altar is open for either.
- Maybe just to ask that God enable you to not drop the baton.
- Maybe you feel God is calling you to do something like William Borden did.
- Maybe you've never begun the life of faith, given your life to Jesus and received him as your personal Lord and Savior. If so, come and take the hand of one of these people and tell them you want

to do that. We had many do that last week and many are showing that through baptism. Join them.

Our worship teams are coming, you stand and come right now...