

# *“The Faith of Abraham’s Descendants”*

## **Fixing Our Eyes Upon Jesus, Our High Priest**

Hebrews 11:32-40

Dr. Jeff Stivason

March 8, 2019

**Jeff:** Okay. Don, why don’t you lead us into prayer?

**Don:** Before that, Jeff, I just wanted to say that I have a tribute to you since you did so well last week with the experience at the Walnut Grill. It was so great that I have a tribute to you today.

**Jeff:** Okay.

**Transcriber’s Note:** Don plays “Somewhere Over the Rainbow. *(Laughter)*

**Jeff:** Is that “Over the Rainbow?” *(Laughter)*

**Ted:** It’s “A Mighty Fortress.” *(Laughter)*

**Sig, in a mock tone:** Well, let us pray! *(Laughter)*

**Jeff:** Go ahead, Don.

**Sig:** Please! *(Laughter) (Music)*

**Jeff:** Gracious and merciful God, we are so thankful that You have redeemed us. Lord, as we reflect upon who we once were under Your wrath, and prior to knowing the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, prior to that time when you opened our eyes by the power of Your Spirit, bringing about a resurrection in us, when we reflect upon that time we think about how dark life was. We think about how hopeless it was. And we think about our destination now in light of our new destination. And we stand and tremble. And yet, as we stand reflecting upon the past, we have a great hope in the future that affects our present. And so, Father, thank You for the Lord Jesus Christ, for Your Spirit who did a great work in us. Thank You for the great love that You had for us when we were yet sinners, sending Your only-Begotten to be an atoning sacrifice for our sins. Father, these simple truths are something that stand and cause us wonder and awe. And yet they are the simple truths that cause us to weep and to laugh and to rejoice, and to know the place that we have beside You in Christ.

Father, we pray that today, as we come and as we open Your word, that these truths will be fresh to us, that we’ll hear these things in the way that we need to hear them by Your Spirit working in us, that we might be Your servants better today than we were tomorrow, and know that we do not earn anything before You, but that it is only by the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ that we stand. So Father, we pray that You would open our eyes to the truth of Your word. Feed us on it. We pray it in Jesus’ name. Amen.

**Brave Men:** Amen.

**Jeff:** All right. Well, today we’re going to finish up Hebrews chapter 11. And we’re going to look at verses 32-40 of Hebrews chapter 11. So let me read that to you. It’s Hebrews 11:32-40. Hear the word of God.

*“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*

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*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, 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. This is the word of God.*

**Brave Men:** Thanks be to God.

**Jeff:** Did I get it right? *(Laughter)*

**Ted:** Almost. You’re almost an Anglican. *(Laughter)*

**Jeff:** Mark it, men! Mark it down! *(Laughter)* I’m telling you! Just don’t tell any of my Presbyterian brothers that I say that. *(Laughter)*

**Don:** Hey Jeff, that was “Rock of Ages” that I played, wasn’t it?

**Jeff:** I thought it was “Over the Rainbow.”

**Don:** Okay, all right. Never mind. *(Laughter)*

**Jeff:** What was it? Really, what was it?

**Don:** Before we prayed I played “Rock of Ages,” the original “Rock of Ages.”

**Jeff:** Okay. *(Laughter)*

**Ted:** That’s obscure. *(Laughter)*

**Jeff:** We’re going to move on. *(Laughter)* Let’s go on to our outline. I want to look at five things today. I want to say something about how we look at the text and how we ought to approach it by way of introduction. I want us to see a certain flow of logic. And it may not be evident in the points themselves, at least at first. But hopefully, as we work our way through, it will become at least clear. But we’re going to see that there is help for Abraham’s descendants who have a mix of experiences, who need eyes to see in the midst of their trials, and they need to be encouraged in their faith. So I think that’s the flow of the logic that we see coming out of some of the things that I want to say to you this morning. Whoa, what was that? I don’t know why I had that slide up there.

But I want to say something introductory to you. I want to say something to you about *tone*. Now you know how it is. When you have a certain tone you communicate something, even when you don’t mean to communicate it, right? So for instance, take this. “Did you clean your room?” You can say it any number of ways, right? “Did you clean your room?”

**Transcriber’s Note:** An abrupt tone.

**Jeff:** You can say it angrily. Now if you’re Chuck Norris, it would be “Did you clean your room?”

**Transcriber’s Note:** Attempting to imitate Chuck Norris with voice and mannerisms.

**Jeff:** Okay, never mind. *(Laughter)* You could say, “Did you clean your room?”

**Transcriber’s Note:** An angry tone.

**Jeff:** You can say, “Did you clean your room?”

**Transcriber’s Note:** An exasperated tone.

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**Jeff:** Or you could say, “Hey, did you clean your room?”

**Transcriber’s Note:** A pleasant tone.

**Jeff:** Any number of ways, and you can communicate something by your tone in the very sentence that you say. Now I want to ask you a question. Did you ever think about the tone of that statement in Genesis 3:9? *“Where are you?”* You know, you can tell a lot by a minister when he’s up there and he’s reading the Genesis account in chapter 3 and he gets to God coming to Adam in the cool of the garden, and he says, *“Where are you?”*

**Transcriber’s Note:** An angry tone.

**Jeff:** You know? (*Laughter*) Right? You can tell something about the minister’s idea of what’s happening here. Is there grace about to be expressed or is there wrath about to be rained?

And I think that’s the danger, isn’t it, when you start to think about how you read Scripture. I’ve always been a little perplexed by it, frankly, because I know that in the way that I read I’m interpreting. And we have to do that, right? But I think that it behooves us as ministers of the gospel and as teachers, if you’re a teacher of the gospel and of the Scriptures, to really study, so that even when you read you can get some of the tone down. Now I’m not great at this. But I think that one of the valuable things about reading the Scriptures is to try to communicate in your reading of it something that you’ve studied when you’ve studied it.

So that’s an example. But what I’m really heading to is this question here in Hebrews 11:32. *“And what more shall I say?”* How would you read that? I mean, what kind of tone would you use when you read that? Would you say that in an exasperated tone? “What more can I say?” Or would you say it in an excited tone? “What more can I say!” Or something else.

What’s going on here? What’s he saying? How does the Preacher feel as he asks that question? He communicates something. And I have a tendency to think that it’s not exasperation because of the pastoral bent of this man. I have a tendency to think that there’s excitement. And there’s excitement because he adds all these other names. *“And what more shall I say?”* “There’s Gideon, there’s Barak, there’s Samson, there’s Jephthah, there’s David, there’s Samuel and there are even the prophets.”

So I think that he is excited. And I think there’s a reason for his excitement. I think that everyone he’s been telling us about has faith. Every person that he’s been talking about has had eyes to see what is unseen. And that ability to see what is unseen is the evidence that what they see is actually there.

So I think that’s really what’s happening here when you look at this. But I want you to know something. It’s not the names that we’re going to look at today. We’re not going to look at the names. We’re going to look at the logic of the text. And I want you to notice something as we move forward. It isn’t about the names. But it is about a couple of names.

I said this to you the last time. And I think that if you look at the breakdown of Hebrews chapter 11, you really see that there are two names that are prominent. There’s the name of Abraham and the way in which he is put forward, and there is Moses.

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Now there are plenty of other names in this text. But I think these guys are the prominent guys.

Now I think that one of these guys steps over above the other, and that’s Abraham. I think Abraham is the guy who really steps to the fore. And I think that what I want to do is to remind you of that. And I want to show you that that’s even the case in this text, if you read it carefully.

So that’s by way of introduction. Any questions that you have so far, as we warm up to this text before we get into it?

**Ted:** They all have faith. But is it saving faith or moving mountains faith?

**Sig:** They all have faith. But is it saving faith or moving mountains faith?

**Jeff:** What’s the difference, in your estimation?

**Ted:** Well, I think moving mountains faith is more like an existential experience, while saving faith is essential. I mean, you either have it or you don’t.

**Jeff:** So would you say that assurance would characterize the moving mountains faith, and that a lack of assurance would characterize the saving faith? I mean, I’m just asking. Go ahead.

**Ted:** Fair enough. I hadn’t thought about it.

**Jeff:** Because I think—

**Sig:** He’s looking for help here! (*Laughter*)

**Jeff:** No, that’s a good question. Go ahead.

**Ted:** I just want to say this. Are you saying that the Old Testament saints had saving faith?

**Jeff:** Yes.

**Ted:** In essence, when they died, they went to be with Jesus?

**Jeff:** Oh yes, yes. And I do believe that they had saving faith. And I do believe that they could have assurance of that salvation. And I do believe that they could have a lack of it, just like us. And I believe that their experience was consistent with the amount of revelation that they had been given at the time, because—and I want you to think about this,—it’s a great thing to remember, Ted, because today we always think about the difference being not necessarily like my faith tank being full or empty. And so I’m almost sort of out of it. My tank is low and I’m feeling a lack of assurance. I’m almost out of faith and in danger of running out and then falling out, right? It’s not that, because it’s faith in Christ. And therefore it’s a faith that comes from my union with Christ. And so whether my faith is much or little, it’s the same Christ to whom I’m connected. It’s the same Christ to whom I’m united. And so I may feel less confident, but I should never feel less confident. I should feel less confident in me, but I should never feel less confident in the Christ who holds me by faith.

**Ted:** That’s very important.

**Jeff:** Yes, that’s very important. Okay? All right. Well, let’s talk about *the help that’s provided to Abraham’s descendants*.

Now I want you to know, like I’ve said before to you in the past, that this is one long message. It’s really a struggle when you teach through a book, because you know, this book takes what? Less than an hour to read it. But when you walk through it, how long

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have we been in this book? Quite a while right now. So it’s hard to remember what came before. And yet it’s essential that you remember what came before, because there’s one long consistent message in the book.

Now because of that I want you to understand that when we think about the help provided to Abraham’s descendants that I’m going to talk about, we need to go back to chapter 2 and verse 16. It’s probably a good idea to flip back there. The Preacher told us that “God gives help to the descendants of Abraham.” *“Fur surely it is not the angels that He helps, but He helps the offspring of Abraham.”*

Now I want you to see the two different ways that can be translated. But I want to rest on one of the ways. He helps. But there’s a stronger way of translating this same word, and it’s *to take hold of*. In fact, some translations will say, *“He took hold of the seed of Abraham.”* He took hold of it.

Now how did He do that? Well, He did that in the Incarnation. And that text tells us that. In other words, He takes hold of the seed of Abraham by taking on the flesh of Abraham, so as to help the seed of Abraham. And I think that’s really important.

Now you have to keep that in mind, because when we come back to Hebrews chapter 11, we notice that there are two people. There is Abraham and there is Moses. But the one trumps the other. In other words, Abraham has a more prominent place than does Moses.

Now I want to stop before we answer the question, how do we know? I want to stop and I want to say that this is important because when you read the book of Hebrews, one of the things that you could do, (and I said this to you before when we were in 7:8), what you could do is that you could come away from this having an inadequate covenantal structure. And the reason I say that is because he calls the Mosaic covenant *“the first covenant”*, and then the covenant of fulfillment in Christ *“the second covenant.”* And you could come away thinking, “Well, there are just two covenants.” And if you were inexperienced in the Scriptures, you might come away with that.

But you also know from studying the Scriptures that there are a number of other covenants. There’s the Noahic covenant which preserves the stage of redemption. There’s the Abrahamic covenant that calls out the characters onto the stage of redemption, and promises what? To be a nation of people, to give them a land in which to live, and to be a blessing to the whole earth.

And then what happens? Moses comes along. And in Moses God takes the people of Abraham down into Egypt, and Egypt becomes a national incubator. And so the nation of Israel grows up in Egypt to the point that they can come out and take the land that was promised to them. Now they’re a nation. Now they’re a people. Now it is for them to be a blessing.

And then what’s the next covenant? The next covenant is the Davidic covenant, where God sets a king over them and promises that One will rule over them. And then what’s the next covenant? The next covenant is the covenant of climax, fulfillment in Christ, where Christ takes all of these things and He brings them together in Himself.

And so there are more. There’s one covenant of grace. But there are a variety of unfoldings to that covenant. It’s sort of like somebody saying, “That’s a wonderful piece of origami.”

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And they say, “Well, let me show you.” And then they begin to unfold it and unfold it and unfold it. And it’s just a big piece of paper. It’s one sheet of paper. But as they fold it and do all the things they do to it, it’s this beautiful whatever.

And that’s the way it is with the covenant. It’s one covenant with all kinds of folds in it that looks beautiful. But it’s one covenant. And so Abraham is really foundational in that covenant, because he is the first character that God calls out onto the stage of redemption after He promises to preserve the earth.

Now there are other people in that covenant as well. I think Adam is in that covenant and there are descendants of Adam. But when we think about it in terms of its unfolding nature, Abraham is a key figure.

Now how do we know that Abraham is a key figure in that? Well, I think that there’s one answer to that. Did you notice in the rendition of Egypt—and I showed you the last time we were together how you could put the two narratives of Moses’ life and Abraham’s life together,—did you notice that there is only one set of parents mentioned, and they are Moses’ parents?

And what’s the point of that? The point of that is that Moses is of the seed of Abraham. I think Abraham’s father is intentionally left out because he is the beginning of the Seed. It is through Abraham’s Seed that the world will be blessed. It is Abraham’s seed that God helps. And Moses is part of that seed.

And I think that there’s a subtlety. Today in the text we’re going to look at a number of subtleties. But this is a subtlety that I think we cannot miss.

Now there’s something else, and it’s this. I want you to go to Galatians chapter 3 for just a second. And Galatians chapter 3 is a really important text, especially to sort of bring this up to our present moment. If you notice, it says in verse 7 of Galatians 3, *“Know, then, that it is those of faith who are sons of Abraham. And the Scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, preached the gospel beforehand to Abraham saying, ‘In you shall all the nations be blessed.’”*

That’s the Abrahamic covenant, remember? “I’ll make you a people. I’ll give you a land to live in, and you’ll be a blessing to the nations.” *“So then, those who are of faith are blessed along with Abraham, the man of faith.”*

So the point that I’m making is this. The point I’m making is that this isn’t simply other people that God has helped when he talks about Abraham’s descendants. He has promised to help those who have faith. And those who have faith are children of Abraham because they’re in Christ, because the promise given to Abraham climaxes in Christ.

How do I want to say this? You know, oftentimes we think to ourselves, *Well, how does this really help me?* The God of heaven and earth has said to you, “I have laid hold of your flesh to help you.” Think about that. I just don’t know how much more powerful a statement like that could be. And if you’re struggling with sin and you’re battling it, and you’re seeking to put something to death in you that you just can’t seem to get dead, then this is a help. What questions do you have? Yes?

**Jim:** As you’re saying that word, it reminds me of the very first thought that crossed my mind the day I came to the Lord. I was in a bar on Ash Wednesday delivering beer, and the waitress came up and put ashes on my forehead. *(Laughter)* And I was an atheist

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at that point. I’d long since fallen away. And I walked back rolling a barrel of beer in there, and the thought crossed my mind. I wonder if there is a God. And I’m wondering if He will help me.

**Brave Men:** Wow!

**Ted:** That’s good.

**Jim:** And the Lord did something that very day.

**Jeff:** Wow! You know, I pictured you doing a lot of things. *(Laughter)* But never rolling a beer keg in the back of a bar. *(Laughter)* That was one of the things that I’ve never pictured you doing. Thanks for that image. *(Laughter)* Anybody else?

**Brave Man:** Never home beer.

**Jeff:** Never home beer? Okay. All right. Let’s go to the next point, then. If God in Christ helps the seed of Abraham, the question I think that these people who were in Rome might have asked is “Then why are we being persecuted?” And that’s really the issue, isn’t it, at least in this particular text. And so we have to talk about *the mixed experiences of Abraham’s descendants*.

Now that’s pretty readily available to us. We’ve read through it. There were some *who “conquered kingdoms, acted righteously, obtained promises, shut lions’ mouths, quenched fire, escaped the sword, were made strong, became mighty in war, and routed foreign armies.”*

Now when you think about those, all you have to do is go back through it. You can put names to those things, right? It’s not that hard. I mean, the easiest one is “shut lions’ mouths.” All you have to do is think of Daniel and the lions’ den. “Quenched the fire.” All you have to think about is Shadrach, Meshach and Abed-Nego. You could think about people who’ve experienced the things with the names behind these events.

But these were not the only ones. There were others. He goes on to say that there were others who were “tortured, mocked, scourged, imprisoned, stoned, sawn in two, murdered, destitute, ill-treated, lived in caves and in holes.” So there are others.

Now the thing you have to ask yourself is this. What’s the point? Well, I think that the point that we can come to is that *no matter who you are, The God of Abraham has helped you*.

**Brave Man:** Amen.

**Jeff:** Now when you think like that, first of all you have to say to yourself, “Then this is not really about me.” This is not whether I’m on the triumphal list or I’m on the tortured list. This is really about God.

Now that’s the hardest thing in the world to come to grips with. But I want to tell you something. If you go to Ecclesiastes 3:14, you notice something really important.

**Ted:** Where was that? What was that notation? Ecclesiastes?

**Jeff:** Ecclesiastes 3:14.

**Ted:** I must not have looked.

**Jeff:** It’s okay. I had to do a second take because I wasn’t sure I put it up there.

**Ted:** I confess that my mind is somewhere else.

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**Jeff:** Okay. Look at what he says. This is all the way back in verse 1. *“For everything there is a season, and a time for every matter under heaven.”* And then he talks about *“a time to be born, “to plant, to kill, to break up,”* and so on.

**Don:** “Turn, Turn, Turn.”

**Jeff:** Yeah, that’s right. *(Laughter)* But notice what he goes on to say. In verse 14 he says, *“Then I perceived that whatever God does endures forever. Nothing can be added to it, nor anything taken from it.”*

Now I want you to think about that for a second, because, you know, as men I think we all have this internal question that we ask ourselves. And that is this. I’ll speak for myself. As I approach 50, I’m thinking to myself,--

**Sig:** What?

**Jeff:** What? *(Laughter)* Well, not this year.

**Sig:** Oh! *(Laughter)*

**Jeff:** I’ve got one more year. *(Laughter)* Did I mention, though, that my wife is in her 50s? Did I mention that? *(Laughter)* It’s not nearly as fun when she’s not here. *(Laughter)* But I will play the recording for her later. *(Laughter)*

**Brave Man:** You’re not makin’ fifty. *(Laughter)*

**Jeff:** What was that?

**Brave Man:** You’re not makin’ fifty.

**Jeff:** Yeah, I’m not makin’ fifty. *(Laughter)* There is a good chance that I will make fifty. She reminds me of that and says that to me frequently. *(Laughter)*

Anyway, I asked myself. You know, if I have 20, 25 years left in the ministry, I’ve already had over 25 in the ministry. If I’m halfway through, what have I done that will last? And what am I going to contribute in this final leg? And you know, that’s a challenging question. And we ask ourselves, what am I going to leave behind? That’s really what we’re asking.

And you know, Ecclesiastes reminds us. He says that the guy who has money will leave it to somebody else. He talks about that. He says, “What does it matter?”

**Brave Man:** Yes.

**Jeff:** What does it matter? And here he says, “What does that matter?” What matters is what God has done.

**Brave Man:** Amen.

**Jeff:** What God has done, that will last.

**Brave Man:** Amen!

**Jeff:** That will be remembered. And you know, it’s the hardest thing in the world to come to grips with existentially, as a person who is living life day in and day out, to ask yourself, “What am I going to leave behind?” And then Ecclesiastes 3:14 catches up with you and you say, “You know what? Whatever God does in me I’ll leave behind. And God will be remembered.” You know, that’s the way you have to look at life.

So when you look at this list of those who triumphed and those who failed, or failed to receive the promises, you have to look at it in light of the fact that in one sense it really doesn’t matter what list you’re on. It really doesn’t matter. What matters is what God has done.



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And if you’re on the list that’s not receiving the promises, or struggling to realize the promises, you need the same thing that those who are on the triumphal list need. You need what? You need faith.

Did you notice that it says, “*who by faith?*” So regardless of the list you’re on, you need faith. In other words, you need to see what others cannot see. And what you see has to be, in a sense, the evidence that provides you with assurance that what others cannot see and you see is really there.

And that leads me to the next thing I want to talk to you about, and that is *having ability, having eyes to see better than people around us see*. But before I go on to that, let me ask you. Is there anything that you want to just touch on with regard to that list? Yes?

**Bill:** As you’re going through that list,--

**Jeff:** Say that again.

**Bill:** This thing doesn’t work so good. This also applies to our existential point of view. When you read romans 8, the bottom line is that no matter what, nothing can separate us from the love of God.

**Jeff:** Yes, absolutely. Yes, go ahead, Ted.

**Brave Man:** Oh, Ted again!

**Ted:** Sorry. (*Laughter*) It seems that the point you raised is really critical for getting a right view of things, because both the secular world and the church world will focus on that if you’re being tormented, God is here to deliver you from that. And if you’re on the triumphant list, then God is going to prosper you. And in the end, your experience, either tortured or triumphant, is only secondary to God and what He’s doing.

**Jeff:** Yes.

**Ted:** And I think that both the church and the secular world focus on my experience of it. It’s almost like there’s a whole component missing in the message in many churches.

**Jeff:** Yes.

**Ted:** That wasn’t really profound, was it?

**Jeff:** Well, you actually caused me to think of my own experience and how it is that God actually—You know, the book title *Your Best Life Now* is indicative of what you’re talking about.

**Ted:** Yes.

**Jeff:** And yet I can remember that I thought of that book title when you were talking. And I also thought about how God introduced me to a guy when I was first converted at 18 who owned the gospel bookstore in the city in which I lived. And there was always a noise coming out of the back room. And somebody described it as like an animal, a lamb. And you always heard it, right? But you never knew what it was.

And I became friends with this guy and his mom and dad who also owned the store, and his wife who was there. And they told me that this was their daughter, and she was severely handicapped. And they talked to me about, and really helped me to understand, faith in Christ and what that means. And you know, they helped me get a grip on what that list of failings looks like, not receiving the promises.

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He had been with his brother when he was a small boy. A log rolled on his brother and killed him in the woods. His older brother had been killed by heavy equipment when he was home working from college.

And the minister came to talk to his family when he was a boy. And his mom said, “When my second son died, I said to myself, ‘I’m done playing around with God.’” And she said, “The minister asked me to pray.” And she said, “I got down on my knees right there.” And she said, “The minister looked at me as if I had lost my mind. Maybe I had been pushed over the edge because of the second loss.”

And she said, “Then I just had enough. I was going to be God’s, because I wasn’t.”

And I thought to myself that that family, who was on the list of people who had not received the promises in that sense, they taught me how to experience life when I wasn’t experiencing the promises. When my wife and I were told about my son, we were told that he didn’t have a tail bone and that he was missing seven vertebrae, that sort of thing in the pictures. I was ready for that, because these people had taught me what it meant to be on that list.

**Ted:** Right.

**Bishop Rodgers:** But the main point at the very end of this text is that none of us on either list receives the full promise.

**Jeff:** Yes. You’re getting ahead there, Bishop. *(Laughter)* You know, when you’ve got the bishop in here, he’s always kind of moving ahead. *(Laughter)* But yes; you’re right.

**Jeff:** All right.

**Transcriber’s Note:** Jeff shows a slide.

**Jeff:** This guy is not my intern, but I had an intern like this.

**Don:** Whoa, whoa, whoa!

**Jeff:** This is a guy on a mountain bike who has taken a bite of dirt. *(Laughter)* And I had an intern like this. And he went mountain biking with another guy in my congregation. And he came back with his face all skinned up and his arms all skinned up. And I said to the guy in my congregation, “What happened to my intern?”

This guy is seven feet tall and he’s got all kinds of energy. And he said, “His trouble is that he looks right at the ground! He doesn’t look ahead of himself!” *(Laughter)* You know, when you look right at the ground, you’re probably going to take a bite out of it, right? *(Laughter)* And so eyes that see better are eyes that see at a distance.

And the question is what did Abraham see? Well, John 8:56 tells us that Jesus says, “Abraham saw My day.”

**Transcriber’s Note:** John 8:56, ESV. *“Your father Abraham rejoiced that he would see My day. He saw it, and was glad.”*

**Jeff:** Now the question is what did Abraham see when Christ says that “he saw My day?” And I think that question is answered for us in Hebrews 11:17. In 11:17 what do we have? We have the story of Isaac. And notice what it says in verse 19. *“He considered that God is able to raise people even from the dead, from which he also received him back”,* (that is, Isaac), *“as a type.”*

As a type of what? Well, last time I told you: a type of the resurrection.

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Now that becomes crucial for thinking about the list, the list of triumphs and the list of failures, or failing to receive the promises in the present moment.

Why do I say that? Because what do you find at the end of the triumphs and at the beginning of the sorrows? You find resurrection. Resurrection closes out the first list and heads up the second list.

What do I mean? Well, verse 35. *“Women received back their dead by resurrection.”* And then *“some were tortured.”* So that’s the end of the triumphal list and the beginning of the failure list. *“Some were tortured, refusing to accept release, so that they might rise again to a better life.”*

**Jeff:** So the triumphal list ends with resurrection, and the list of sorrows begins with resurrection. And what both of those lists have in common than is this. If you have sight like Abraham, you’ll see better things. You will see like he saw. So says Jesus. And that resurrection that he saw and that we ought to see, and that all of those others saw, is based upon what we already learned about, the indestructible life of Jesus Christ in Hebrews 7:16.

**Transcriber’s Note:** Hebrews 7:15-16, NKJV. *“And it is yet far more evident if, in the likeness of Melchizedek, there arises another priest who has come, not according to the law of a fleshly commandment, but according to the power of an endless life.”*

**Jeff:** He’s already told us about that. He’s already explained it to us. And we know that on the basis of His indestructible life that we too have an indestructible life.

So before we move on, I just want to ask you. Is that clear? Do you have any questions about that, or do you want to talk about anything there? Yes, Don?

**Don Maurer:** If I’m getting ahead, let me know.

**Sig:** You’re getting a microphone.

**Don:** All right. Jeff, if I’m getting ahead, let me know. But it says at the end that *“all those, though commended for their faith, did not receive what was promised.”*

**Jeff:** Yes.

**Don:** Didn’t they go to heaven?

**Jeff:** Yes. But I think that he is certainly talking about something that’s temporal. It’s like what Psalm 27 says. *“I experienced Your goodness in the land of the living.”* The first on the list experienced His goodness in the land of the living. You might say that the latter on the list experienced His humiliation in the land of the living.

**Don:** That’s true. But it says, *“All these, though commended through their faith, did not receive what was promised.”*

**Jeff:** Are you in the final verse?

**Don:** Yes.

**Jeff:** You’re in the final verse with the Bishop. *(Laughter)*

**Don:** All right, all right.

**Brave Man:** Verse 39.

**Jeff:** Yes, verse 39.

**Don:** Okay.

**Jeff:** So we have Don and the Bishop. *(Laughter)* I’m glad you’re anticipating them.

**Jim:** Their spirits are in heaven, but they haven’t yet been resurrected.

## *“The Faith of Abraham’s Descendants”*

**Jeff:** Yes. So let me just jump here, because the bishop and Don are pressing me into that.

**Brave Man:** We have a Don Bishop here. *(Pointing to Don Bishop) (Laughter)*

**Jeff:** Wow! *(Laughter)* You know what? I’ll tell you what. I have two guys on my session. One is named John and one is named Wayne. *(Laughter)* And when they both send me a group text, and it says that John Wayne emailed me, I just love it. *(Laughter)* I say, “This is great!” *(Laughter)*

So let me jump ahead for a minute and say this to you. One of the things that I think we’re being taught in verses 39 and 40 is this. It’s the same thing in 1 Corinthians 15. There is a general harvest of which Christ is the first-fruits. And here is the great hope that we have, seeing others receive the promise as a reminder. And those others can’t receive the fullness of what they actually have faith in unless we receive the same object of our faith in its fullness. And this is what faith is, right, regardless of which direction we’re looking, that if we have faith in Christ, we all receive fullness. And we can’t receive fullness apart from each other, because we’re one harvest. And I think that’s what’s being said here.

So there’s a sense in which that if you look at those who are prospering in the Christian life and experience blessing and fullness, it’s not that they’re ahead of us. They’re of the same harvest with us. And the consummation will come, and we’ll receive the same fullness of that same harvest along with them. It’s not like if you get on the a. list you receive better first, right?

In one sense, temporally, you do. But let’s face it. I’m just going to say this, and you can feel free to disagree with me. But let’s face it. If you’re walking in the humiliation of Christ, you’re receiving an enormous blessing. An enormous hardship, but let’s face it. The cruciformed life, the cross-shaped life, forms Christ in us.

**Brave Man:** Amen.

**Jeff:** And sometimes it has a way of doing it pretty quickly. So that’s what I make of 39 and 40.

**Ted:** What do you mean by doing it pretty quickly?

**Jeff:** Well,--

**Jim:** Change.

**Jeff:** I think it’s change. I think that when you’re in the crucible there’s a quick moment of decision that you face, whereas in a moment of prosperity that crucible doesn’t look like a crucible. That’s what I think. Anybody else?

**Sig:** So when I hear Joel Osteen talk and preach about my best life now, or give good advice about being optimistic and hopeful in God, I’m really only seeing half of the story.

**Transcriber’s Note:** Jeff imitates Osteen.

**Jeff:** Well see, I wanna tell ya! I wanna just let ya know! *(Laughter)* That yoo co-ould be-ee-- *(Applause)* Yes, thank you; I appreciate that. *(Laughter)*

**Sig:** Can you do his wife, too? *(Laughter)*

**Jeff:** No, I don’t think so. *(Laughter)* What’s your question?

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**Sig:** My question is that my wife will listen to some of that. And she suffers from migraines, she has kidney stones, she has low stamina. She’s in a lot of discomfort a lot of days.

**Jeff:** Yes.

**Sig:** And she’s fed up with it. And she listens to this guy and he says some optimistic, positive things. She’ll say, “I’m fed up with God. I’m fed up with Him.”

**Jeff:** And I think that’s the danger of that teaching.

**Sig:** From what you said today I agree wholeheartedly.

**Jeff:** Yes. I’ll tell you what. I’m being self-referential today and I’m sorry if it’s too much. But when my son was in a wheelchair when he was a little boy, we used to go around places. And we used to have people come up to us and ask us to pray for him. And when that first happened I thought, *Oh, how nice!* And so they would pray for him.

And the very first time this happened, the man who prayed prayed that his parents would have enough faith to get him out of this chair.

**Brave Men:** Sighs.

**Jeff:** That’s basically what he prayed. And after that I thought to myself, *No!* (*Laughter*) Because my son was young at the time. He wasn’t really thinking about what was being prayed. And I thought, *No, no, no; that’s not going to happen again.*

So, you know, when I would have people come up and say, “Can I pray for your son?”, I would say, “You can pray for us at home if you want to, and we’d appreciate those prayers. But right now we’re going to move on.”

But that theology is destructive. It’s destructive to the individual who believes it. And it’s destructive to the people that they teach it to.

**Sig:** But what you taught this morning is so huge, and I know it’s clear. But when I hear it, it’s like what Jim was saying when he was rolling a barrel of beer, and this girl puts ashes on his head and God does something. It’s that kind of thing where it really isn’t about us.

**Jeff:** Right.

**Sig:** And it’s hard to get beyond that and say, “Well, I would like my best life now. What’s the matter with that?” But when you put it in this perspective, it matters what God is doing with all of this. That’s a game changer; that’s huge!

**Jeff:** Yes.

**Sig:** That’s the story we need to hear when we talk about Christ. And people say, “Well, I’m going to have to give up all the things that I like if I become a Christian.” Yeah, okay. So what? What’s that doing for you, you know? How good is that going?

**Jeff:** And I think you’re right. And I think that when somebody asks that kind of question, it either indicates that they don’t understand the gospel at all, or that they’re very young in the Lord, right? It could indicate that. Yes? Anybody else? Don Bishop back there?

**Don Bishop:** David Jeremiah was preaching on trials a couple of years ago. He said this. When do we learn the most in life.

**Brave Man:** In our trials.

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**Don:** On a very practical level, spiritually, we don’t learn when everything is going nice. We learn through trials.

**Jeff:** Yes, that’s right. Who was over here?

**Brave Man:** Yes, I was going to say pretty much the same thing, because I know in my own life that I grew so much more in trials than in the blessings. In fact, in the blessings I sometimes say, “Okay, God, I got this; don’t worry about me.” And I need to be careful that I don’t go there. You need God in the blessings and in the trials. In the trials I naturally cry out to God. You do have a choice. You can either turn against God or for God. By His grace, it drives you to God.

**Jeff:** Yes, that’s right.

**Sig:** Ted! Oh gee, wow, that’s a surprise! *(Laughter)*

**Ted:** I think that the bar maid who imposed ashes on your head was an Episcopal priest. *(Laughter)* I’ve been waiting to say that. *(Laughter)*

**Jeff:** I was hoping you had more than that. *(Laughter)*

**Ted:** But once again I’m getting back to something that I’ve come to realize. People say, “I went through a trial and I learned a lot.” It still comes back to me.

**Brave Man:** Right.

**Ted:** That is a secondary effect to a greater effect or a greater truth. It’s what it says in Ecclesiastes. What did you say?

**Jeff:** What God does endures.

**Ted:** Yes. It’s what He wants to do, and He’s going to be God. So if you go through trials and you don’t learn a thing, God is still at work, and He’s still doing something.

**Jeff:** Yes, and here’s how that practically—

**Ted:** That’s primary. Secondarily I learn stuff from Him or I get blessed or I get delivered, or whatever. But I just wish that once I could go through churches and just wipe out all the black memory of Christians who say that. You’ve got everything turned upside down. Let’s start from scratch. The first thing is that God is God. He’s going to do what He pleases to do. And if He uses you, that’s tremendous. If He doesn’t, that’s fine too.

**Jeff:** Yes.

**Sig:** And you’re no less of a Christian if He doesn’t use you.

**Ted:** Exactly, because it’s all about Him.

**Sig:** Amen.

**Brave Man:** The verses that have been going through my mind during this discussion are in Romans 9, when Paul is talking about the potter having the power with the clay, to make from the same lump to make one vessel for honor and another for dishonor. So he says, “*What if God, wanting to show His wrath and to make His power known, endured with much long-suffering the vessels of wrath, prepared for destruction, that He might make known the riches of His glory to the vessels of mercy, which He has prepared beforehand for glory, even us, whom He called, not of the Jews only, but also of the Gentiles?*” It just brings home that point. Before that, Paul says, “*Who are you, O man, to answer back to God?*” He’s making the point that it’s all about God; it’s all about Him. And whether people are prepared for destruction or vessels of His mercy, it’s all to reveal

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that it’s about Him. And if people have problems with these things, I think it is because they say that it’s not fair for us humans. But it’s about God, not about us.

**Brave Man:** That’s very good.

**Jeff:** You know, let me say this and then we’ll wrap up and pray. You know, this goes back to something I talked to you about when I talked to you about faith, when I drew the head on the board and I said that there’s mind and there’s emotion and there’s will. And I said to you that if we’re functioning properly, all of those function together. The mind thinks what the heart wants, and the will chooses. And that’s when we function best.

The problem is that oftentimes we know what God wants. Logically, that’s not a problem. All you have to do is read your Bible and you know what God wants. The problem is what my heart wants. And our world tells us that the heart wants what it wants. And the heart often wants what it cannot have.

And that’s where the conflict comes in, because all of a sudden my head wants what God wants. My heart wants what my heart wants. And what am I going to choose? Well, oftentimes I’m going to be God in that situation, and I’m going to get what I want.

And so here it is right in front of us. This is how it works out is suffering, because it works out practically like this. Okay, I know God wants me in this situation, and I’m suffering in it. I don’t want to be in this situation. I want this instead. And yet I know that this might be contrary to God’s will.

Take this, for example. I mean, this is our day, right? There is a ton of young single people. A young single person says, “I want to be married. I know that God says, ‘Don’t marry outside the faith. Be equally yoked.’” But I meet this person. I like him. I know he’s not a believer. My heart wants him. My head knows that I should wait for a believer. But I want him,” right?

That’s it right there. I’m in this trial, I’m experiencing this. I don’t want to experience this anymore. I don’t want to be under it. Here’s a way out of it. I know it’s not what God would want me to do. Who’s going to win? Who is going to be God in that situation? All right, let’s pray. Yes, Don?

**Don Maurer:** So would you summarize Hebrews 11:39?

**Jeff:** Summarize Hebrews 11:39?

**Don:** Yes. I’m still not clear as to what it means.

**Jeff:** *“And all these, though commended through their faith, did not receive what was promised.”* Then you have to go on to verse 40. *“Since God had provided something better for us, that apart from us they should not be made perfect.”* In other words, you can’t take 39 in isolation from 40. They did not receive the consummation of all things apart from us. In other words, at the consummation of all things, they will receive what we will receive, because they can’t receive the blessing of consummation apart from us.

**Don:** Okay, that’s good. Thank you.

**Jeff:** That’s like the 1 Corinthians 15 harvest idea.

**Don:** Right.

**Jeff:** The first-fruits of the harvest is Christ. But it’s a whole harvest idea.

**Don:** Okay.

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**Jeff:** And some of that harvest gets a lot of sun and good water, and some of it doesn’t, right? But it’s a whole harvest.

**Sig:** Boy, you stirred me up now, Jeff.

**Jeff:** I did, I did. *(Laughter)* You know, I never fear what he’s going to say, though.

**Sig:** You don’t have to.

**Jeff:** Because I’m either going to acquiesce to it and be corrected and bettered by it, or I’m going to be affirmed. So I have no fear. *(Laughter)*

**Bishop Rodgers:** I was just thinking that even in Christ, right now we cannot receive all that we yearn for. We want to be perfect in Christ, and we’re not. And we want that. That’s a good thing. But we just have to live in that tension. And I think that’s part of the meaning of this text.

**Jeff:** Yes.

**Ted:** We won’t receive it until we all receive it together. That’s critical.

**Bishop Rodgers:** Yes, that’s right.

**Ted:** It’s not every individual doing his own thing.

**Bishop Rodgers:** They are made up of the church.

**Ted:** Amen; preach it!

**Don:** So what have they received now? What about the Old Testament saints who died? What have they received now?

**Brave Man:** It doesn’t matter.

**Don:** What about those who have died before the resurrection?

**Jeff:** Well think about it, though.

**Brave Man:** They’re waiting for it like everybody else.

**Jeff:** They are not receiving the new creation, right? They’re still in a disembodied state.

**Don:** But they’re perfect.

**Jeff:** They’re not perfect.

**Don:** Spiritually.

**Jeff:** Well, think about it. They were never intended to be separated from their bodies. So as wonderful as it is to be with Christ, they’re still in an unnatural state, waiting for the consummation.

**Don:** Yes, okay.

**Jeff:** That’s what I think. I mean, obviously they’re not struggling with the body of sin anymore. And in one sense half of them is still living under the curse of death.

**Don:** Yes.

**Jeff:** But the other half is enjoying the promise. It’s an unnatural state. That’s how I look at it, Don. I’m not—

**Ted:** Is that what you’re learning at Providence Presbyterian Church? *(Laughter)*

**Jeff:** Oh, look out! Over here; get this guy a microphone.

**Jim:** That’s more like a Greek view of things without the body. It’s spiritual. But the Jewish view is much more complete.

**Jeff:** Yes, that’s right. Don, you get the last word after that retort.

**Sig:** We’ve got a hand back here.



## ***“The Faith of Abraham’s Descendants”***

**Jeff:** Okay, we’ll get Don last. So you have a little bit longer to think about it, Don.

**Don:** You’re right.

**Jeff:** No, not yet, Don. *(Laughter)*

**Rich:** Okay. I apologize if this is in left field. But Jesus said that *“the last shall be first and the first shall be last.”* Does that have anything to do with this?

**Jeff:** Well, I think though that in that context He’s really pointing to Himself, because when I think about that, at least from, Mark’s Gospel, as that arises from Mark’s Gospel, it’s kind of in the context of, if I’m remembering rightly, chapters 9-12. When does He enter into the city? Is it 12?

**Ted:** Yeah, sure. *(Laughter)*

**Jeff:** 9-12? And that section has three individual statements about what He will experience. And then it culminates with the idea that “The Son of Man came to save the many.” How does it go? 10:45.

**Sig:** It’s 7:42. *(Laughter)* So what you’re pointing out, Jeff, though, is that it’s about Him.

**Jeff:** Hold on. Let me just say this really quickly. Mark 10:45. *“For even the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give His life as a ransom for many.”* I often think about that idea that the first shall be last and the last shall be first in the context of Mark’s Gospel and his presentation of what He’s about to endure. And then he climaxes that with this statement about serving the many. And I think about that in relation to his Gospel. Now He is teaching His disciples through His example. But I think that’s the primary aim, at least as I think about it in Mark’s Gospel. Don, do you want to . . .

**Don:** No, what you said was right. *(Laughter)*

**Brave Man:** Woo-hoo! *(Laughter)*

**Jeff:** And that’s recorded. And I want you to embolden that in the transcript in large print. *(Laughter)* Oh, brother! *(Laughter)* Cut that out, though. Cut out the “oh, brother!”

**Ted:** That stays. *(Laughter)*

**Jeff:** Just put in parentheses, “heckling in the back.” *(Laughter)*

Well, let’s pray. Heavenly Father, thank You for this day, for the time You’ve given us. Thank You, Lord, not only for the fact that we can come together and study Your word, but that we can come together and have such a good time doing it. And we pray, Father, that Your Spirit would take it up in our lives, using it for our good and for Your glory. And we ask it in Jesus’ name. Amen.

**Brave Men:** Amen. *(Applause)*