

Hebrews 11 (briefly unpack where we have been) → the chapter of faith, the honor roll of the faithful. The cloud of witnesses meant to encourage our faith, spur us on, inspire us to endure. Forward looking, invisible seeing, enduring (hardship), bold and confident. And this is what pleases God.

Our text starts with these words: *“These all died in faith.”* How do you die in faith? That’s what I want to explore today. How do you die in faith? How do you get to the end of your life and die well? I remember several years ago I heard John Piper say that one of the primary aims of his pastoral and preaching ministry was to help his people die well. Something about that struck me as beautiful and I’ve always remembered it. And here is why? Everyone here is going to die. Some unexpected and sooner than you thought. Some, perhaps later than you thought. For all of us, it will happen. And death is the final and most severe test of faith. Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob (and Sarah) all died in faith... and we want to as well!

Well, one commentator said, *“Death is the final test of faith, and these all passed with flying colors.”* These all died in faith, not having received the things promised. They did not die, dejected and discouraged because the things promised weren’t received. They held onto the promises and died in faith. They believed all the way to the end and then died still believing. Spurgeon said:

It matters nothing how else they died, whether of old age, or by violent means; this one point, in which they all agree, is the most worthy of record, they all died in faith. In faith they lived-it was their comfort, their guide, their motive and their support; and in the same spiritual grace they died, ending their life-song in the sweet strain in which they had so long continued. Faith is as precious to die by as to live by.

So how do we live so that when we die, we “die in faith”? This is the question before us today. We need this, because it will give us confidence, courage, and endurance all the way to the end, even when life is hard. Hebrews 10:36 says, *“You have need for endurance so that when you have done the will of God, you may receive what is promised.”*

How do we die in faith? Three things: 1) Firmly fix our hope on eternity and 2) Live now like a pilgrim (think Pilgrim’s Progress). I get all of this from verse 13 and most of the rest is support.

Let’s step through these verses. I want you to see this. If I can’t substantiate what I say from the bible, don’t believe a bit of it. My words mean nothing. God’s words are everything and can change your life!

**** To die in faith, firmly fix your hope on eternity**

Look at verse 13:

These all died in faith, not having received the things promised, but having seen them and greeted them from afar.

Fix it. No passivity. God's promised future in Christ must be BIG and REAL - as opposed to small and imaginary. They didn't receive the things promised, but they did NOT let the promises go. They knew the promises were future and they looked out over the horizon and said, "There they are! How are you promises? I see you! I can't wait!!" They saw them... and they greeted them from afar. Like sailors on a ship for a month and they finally see land on the horizon. The word translated "greeted" means to draw to one's self.

We know that it has something to do in the future, even for us, because of the progression of three phrases that are used, all of which point to an eternal dwelling with God.

Verse 14: *"Those who speak thus make it clear that they are seeking a homeland..."*

Verse 15: *"They desire a better country, that is, a heavenly one."*

Verse 16: *"God has prepared for them a city."*

A homeland, a better and heavenly country, and a city. What do these things speak of? Not mainly streets of gold and mansions. They speak of a dwelling place. A place where we will dwell with God.

I recently heard someone tell how he was describing to his granddaughter what heaven would be like. And he said, "It is like being at church forever." Oh no, he ruined heaven for this little girl. Now listen, I love being here with you at church, singing, fellowshiping, and hearing the word preached. But we won't be just singing endlessly. And I don't think there will be any preaching. Paradise will be restored. And God will be there in the full, resplendence of his glory. And we will be in awe of Him!

What is this city he's preparing like? We get a glimpse in Revelation 21:1-4, 10-11, 21:22-22:5 (READ). We need to develop an appetite for this now.

17th Century pastor Richard Baxter, wrote a book entitled *The Saints' Everlasting Rest*. He practiced meditating on heaven a half hour each day and it had a tremendous impact on his life. He commended the same practice to others. He wrote:

If you would have light and heat, why are you not more in the sunshine? For want of this recourse to heaven, your soul is as a lamp not lighted, and your duty as a sacrifice without fire. Fetch one coal daily from this altar, and see if your offering will not burn . . . Keep close to this reviving fire, and see if your affections will not be warm.

How do you die in faith? Fix your eyes on eternity, and specifically your eternal dwelling with God.

**** To die in faith, we need to live now like pilgrims now on earth**

Look at the last part of verse 13:

And having acknowledged that they were strangers and exiles on the earth.

They acknowledged they were strangers and exiles on the earth. This is important. The word acknowledged could be translated confessed, declared, or admitted. But each of these words doesn't quite say all that the Greek word "homologeō" means. Two words "homo" which means the same as, and logeo which means "to say or speak". So this word means to say that same as another. In other words, to say the same as God. Did you know that God says you are a stranger in the world? You are an exile. And because he says that you should say it. And even more than just saying it, you should believe it and live like it.

Now it's interesting that the author uses two words instead of just one. He says they confessed they were strangers and exiles. He doesn't just say strangers or exiles. He says strangers and exiles. And I think for an important reason. The word strangers (xenos) means to be a foreigner. To be someone in a foreign land. And the word exile means to be acutely aware that you are away from your homeland. Those who first read this letter no doubt remembered the history of the Jews who were taken from Israel into exile in Babylon. An exile longs for his home (verse 14). So there is the strangeness of being in a foreign land and also the feeling of missing your homeland. This is what Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob confessed. And this is what we are to confess as well and how we are to live. This is a consistent theme in the book of 1 Peter:

"To those who are elect exiles" (1:1)

“Conduct yourselves with fear throughout the time of your exile.” (1:17)

“Beloved, I urge you as sojourners and exiles to abstain from passions of the flesh which...” (2:11)

Exiles. Strangers, Sojourners. Paul reminds us of what we hope for as pilgrims, exiles, strangers on the earth:

“Our citizenship is in heaven, and from it we eagerly await a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ.” (Philippians 3:20)

And so we seek a better country, a heavenly one don't we? If that is what you seek and you desire, look at what verse 16 says about you: *“God is not ashamed to be called their God.”*

God is not ashamed to be called their God

In Exodus 3:6, God tells Moses who he is, “I am the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob.”

No greater honor can be given to a mortal than for the sovereign God of the universe to say, “I am your God.”

Amazingly, all who truly trust Christ may insert their name into the glorious pronouncement and hear God say,

“I am the God of Josh DeGroot, _____, etc. There are two reasons given as to why God is not ashamed to be called the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob: One, he has prepared a city for them and two, they desire it.

Do you want God to be unashamed to be called your God? Of course you do. You don't need to do some great, massive work that he'd be proud of. You don't need to accomplish some impressive moral feat so that God says, “Well look at that!” No. Here's how: You desire the city of God's everlasting joy. You desire the city he's prepared. Seek it with all your heart.

Think of it this way. 2 Corinthians 1:20 says, “all of the promises find their yes in Christ.” All the promises... every one of them come to us through Christ. He is God's “YES and AMEN” to all his promises. The best is yet to come. So it is like this. Through Jesus, God gives us the keys to the heavenly city. We will enter it in the future. But through Jesus, we've got the keys. Do you want the keys? Do you desire the city? Then through Christ, it's all yours!

How do you die in faith? Fix your hope on your eternal dwelling with God and live like pilgrims now on your way to paradise with the keys to the city.

A pandemic, a shrinking stock market?

So we have this present virus that is spreading throughout the world - the coronavirus, now recognized as a pandemic. The stock market has shrunk quite a bit in the past two weeks. We can fall into a ditch on either side of the road (one - hysteria and the other - unconcerned and foolish). How are we responding? In faith, by faith, and through faith? I hope so. In 1854, there was a cholera outbreak in London and Charles Spurgeon was summoned to comfort the dying day and night. He once said, "*The Christian need not dread sickness, for he has nothing to lose and everything to gain by death.*"

What we should dread is the plague of an unbelieving, faithless heart. What we should dread is a shrinking faith. That is what we should dread. We should be careful that we don't have an "evil, unbelieving heart that leads us to fall away from the living God" (Hebrews 3:12). This is why Hebrews 11 was written, so that we would not "shrink back and be destroyed, but have faith to the preserving of the soul." And die in faith, so that when you face death (Lord willing, at a ripe old age), you can say "to die is gain" (Philippians 1:21).

I believe it was DL Moody who once said that some people are so heavenly minded that they are of no earthly good. I don't know the context in which he said that. There may have been a good reason - a particular situation he was speaking into. But I think the message of the NT is that we need to be more heavenly minded so that we can do the greatest earthly good possible.

Let's go! Fixing our eyes on Jesus, the Author and Finisher of our faith. Let's pray.