

CHRIST COVENANT CHURCH
Sermon Transcript
Aaron Andrade
Hebrews 11:4-7
Unshrinkable Faith for Life's Pivotal Moments
Date of Sermon: 07-21-2024 PM

Well, good evening, everybody. We are continuing our series on Hebrews chapter 11, the hall of faith. So if you'll turn with me in your copy of God's Word to Hebrews chapter 11, we'll be focusing on verses 4 through 7, looking at the lives of Abel, Enoch, and Noah. So if you'll turn with me in your copy of God's Word to Hebrews chapter 11, verse 4 through 7. Here's what it says.

"By faith Abel offered to God a more acceptable sacrifice than Cain, through which he was commended as righteous, God commending him by accepting his gifts. And through his faith, though he died, he still speaks. By faith Enoch was taken up so that he should not see death, and he was not found, because God had taken him. Now before he was taken he was commended as having pleased God. And without faith it is impossible to please Him, for whoever would draw near to God must believe that He exists and that He rewards those who seek Him. By faith Noah, being warned by God concerning events as yet unseen, in reverent fear constructed an ark for the saving of his household. By this he condemned the world and became an heir of the righteousness that comes by faith."

Let's pray. Lord God Almighty, there is no God in heaven or on earth like You, Lord. We pray this evening that You would slow us down, slow me down, Lord, to notice the treasures that You've laid before us in Your Word. Give us the spirit of wisdom that the eyes of our hearts would be enlightened and that we may see wonderful things from Your Word tonight. I ask this in the name of Your Son Jesus. Amen.

When the Son of Man comes, will He find faith on earth? This is the pointed question that Jesus asked at the end of Luke chapter 18. When the Son of Man comes, will He find faith on earth? In His earthly ministry, it's fascinating the fixation that Jesus has with faith. Think about how often that comes up. You've got the disciples who He calls out for their little faith, or the centurion's faith, which He calls greater than anything He'd ever seen in all of Israel.

We get the sense reading the gospels that the measure and the quality of your faith, that's what catches Jesus's attention, like nothing else really.

There is a spectrum that we see. There's the little bit of faith, there's the great faith. I want to introduce another category tonight, suggest a different category, and that is cute faith. Cute faith.

A few weeks ago my family and I took a bike ride together up in Cape Cod. Our convoy got going. We've got three kids, so they went out in front, of course, and we're pulling up the rear. Just cruising along and all of a sudden we noticed that the kids pulled off to the side. So we pull over, stop, try to see what the commotion is. Flat tire? Nope. The reason we had to stop the convoy was because they had spotted a turtle on the side of the road, side of the path. I don't know what it is about turtles that makes everyone feel like they have to stop and pick them up. Am I the only one that's had this happen? I mean, I've been driving in a car before on the road in a mini traffic jam, wondering what's

going on. I find my way up, and you guessed it, somebody has stopped their vehicle in the middle of the road to rescue a turtle.

I have a theory about this. I feel like the reason that that happens is because of what I'm going to call the cuteness factor. Turtles have a very high cuteness factor. Because you don't see people doing that for possums, raccoons. I mean, I can't remember the last time I saw someone assisting a snake to get across the road. I mean, that just low cuteness factor. But for turtles, very high cuteness factor. I don't know if it's the little legs or the head that pops in there.

Anyway, so they pick up the turtle, everyone gathers around the turtle, everyone gazes at the cute turtle, and then after a while of gazing, they put it back into the woods where it came from and we get on our way with our bike ride.

Well, I'm convinced this is exactly how people perceived the faith of many Christians they crossed paths with. They see a faith that's cute, that's small, non-threatening, at the first sign of being noticed will quickly retreat back into its shell where it can easily be redirected out of sight and into the background where it belongs. A faith that's cute but nothing more.

Well, that's not what we're aiming for as Christians. The heart-pumping, all-in, stop you in your tracks faith that Jesus was impressed with was not a cute faith. We don't aspire to this turtle-like faith. Yet, if we're not careful, even the most seasoned of believers can shrink back into our shells and cower in the big moments of life.

This contrast between a true faith and a faith that turtles is exactly how the author of Hebrews sets the stage for chapter 11. Even in the language that he uses.

So if you still have your Bibles open and you just go back a couple of verses, chapter 10 verse 38. Here's what it says, the Lord speaking: But my righteous one shall live by faith, and if he shrinks back, My soul has no pleasure in him.

Then the author of Hebrews expounding: But we are not of those who shrink back and are destroyed, but of those who have faith and preserve their souls.

Did you notice the words repeated there, shrink back? It says if he shrinks back, I have no pleasure in him. We are not those who shrink back and are destroyed.

The word in the Greek literally means to shorten, hupostello. The sense is that someone gets intimidated, they pull back, they lose their nerve, they cower, kind of like a turtle.

Another example of this happening in the Scripture, this word being used, is do you remember the passage in Galatians where Paul gets upset with Peter for being a hypocrite? Peter was eating just fine with the Gentiles one day but then he drew back, it says, when certain Jews came to town, deciding he can't eat with Gentiles anymore because he was afraid. Well, Paul uses this same word to describe Peter in that moment. Paul says basically he cowered, he got intimidated, he shrunk back. The moment of truth came and he turtled.

Now wait. Is this the same Peter from Acts chapter 4? The one who gave a speech so bold for Christ that the rulers and the elders and the chief priests were astonished? Yeah. It's the same guy.

This tells us that we're all prone to this kind of thing.

So the message today is for all of us. It's for the seasoned saint who's shown their faith many times in the past. It's for the new believer who's afraid to show her faith maybe for the first time. It's for someone watching, someone here right now, who's seeking God from the fringes, afraid to be all in on Jesus, even though your conscience is telling you it's time. We are all prone to shrink back at any given moment.

But we don't have to. I've titled my sermon Unshrinkable Faith in Life's Pivotal Moments. We'll be looking at the very real faith that responds in tense situations. Not a turtling faith but a real faith and how that responds in tense situations. In particular, faith for three types of moments, three D's. Moments of danger, moments of daily life, and moments of darkness. Moments of danger, moments of daily life, and moments of darkness.

So first faith in moments of danger. The story of Abel is the first major narrative after the fall of man. You think, well, maybe we'll get a plotline that's a little less intense than what we saw in Genesis 1 to 3. Nope. We read about the first murder not even five chapters in to the Bible. Cain murders his brother Abel in the field, in cold blood. Talk about dangerous when you make someone so mad they literally want to kill you. It's a scary thing, anger.

How did it get to that level? Well, it got there because Abel showed a certain kind of faith. He refused to compromise his best, even when it would make his brother look bad. Let me unpack that a little bit. You see, both sons Cain and Abel brought an offering to the Lord. Cain was a worker of the ground, Abel was a keeper of sheep, so Cain brought fruit for his sacrifice and Abel brought a sheep. We learn that Cain's sacrifice was not accepted but Abel's was.

As we see from verse 4 of our passage, we actually read it in our Old Testament reading here, it talks about Abel's faith and it talks about God commending him by accepting his gifts. The Old Testament passage, though, gives us some insight into why, why did God accept Cain's gifts and not, sorry, why did God accept Abel's gift and not Cain's? Well, the Bible gives us a clue in Genesis 4. It says this: In the course of time Cain brought to the Lord an offering of the fruit of the ground and Abel also brought of the firstborn of his flock and their fat portions, and the Lord had regard for Abel and his offering but for Cain and his offering He had no regard.

Notice it says Cain brought an offering of the fruit of the ground, no descriptors there, yet the description of Abel's offering is different. It says Abel brought of the firstborn of his flock and of their fat portions. So what can we gather from that? God accepted Cain's sacrifice, God accepted Abel's sacrifice because Abel offered the firstborn of his flock while Cain did not offer the first of his fruits.

Now there's some obvious reasons based on place and time and culture why it would take faith for Abel to do this. I mean, animals were very valuable, far more valuable at that point in time than they are today for us in our society. Unblemished firstborn from the flock were also very valuable. I mean, you don't know whether you're going to get a second, third, and fourth born.

But here's another reason we don't often think about for why it took faith for Abel to do what he did. Abel's actions, his refusal to give anything but his first and his best, would have definitely created relational tension between him and Cain. Now why do I say that?

Well, they were brothers and so when we think about what we see there, this wasn't just a one-time fit of rage. Abel knew what kind of man Cain was. Abel knew that he was somebody that really was not a godly person.

We see from 1 John chapter 3 that Cain is described as someone evil. He was an evil, angry man, likely volatile. This was a pattern of life for Cain. So with Abel offering up that sacrifice, he needed to do it by faith because looking at his brother over there he knew his brother wasn't going to do the same thing and there would be much anger there, and wrath. So being faithful to God and exercising faith, Abel willingly puts himself in the path of his brother's hatred and this is exactly what led to his murder.

Now maybe we won't be called to give our lives the way Abel did and maybe the danger we face tomorrow might not be at life and death levels. But we might face moments that feel dangerous to us. Right? Our reputation, our image, our popularity, our relationships. You know the feeling. You're in a conversation and there's that moment, that moment when something gets brought up and you know you have an opportunity there, an opportunity to stand in faith or to shrink back. Maybe for you it's a lump in your throat. Maybe your palms get a little bit sweaty or you start breathing a little heavier. Right? It's dangerous to your reputation to stick yourself out there, put yourself out there, and have some faith.

So we look here and say if you're a true Christian, you will face moments like that. Moments that take faith in the face of danger. The question is when everyone else is turtling, are you going to do the same thing? Or will you have the bold faith to say no, no, I won't just take one sip; no, I won't take just one look; no, I won't do that just one time. It takes real faith to not chicken out in those moments.

That's what Abel teaches us here, to give God your best, even when it feels dangerous.

Now this is easier said than done, you might say. I want to, I see those moments coming, and I back down and I don't have the faith that I want to in those moments. So how, how do we get better in those moments when we need to show courageous faith even when it's tough?

Well, one way is to practice. Practice. Some of you know that I was in the military as a staff sergeant in the US Army. When I was deployed overseas to Iraq, one of the main weapons used by the enemy was something called an IED, improvised explosive device. Every day they were hidden along the roadways that we traveled. The goal of the insurgents was to remotely detonate it just as we drove by. So as you can imagine there was a very high need for soldiers who knew how to disarm these, a very high need. I often thought this, how do you prepare yourself for that kind of work? Right? Literally you're disarming bombs on a regular basis.

Well, I did some research and I came across a story that I think helps to shed some light on this. It's from a psychologist who studied what the military training is like for soldiers actually in Northern Ireland who do the same thing. They call it training for courage. They actually call it training for courage. What happens is these new bomb disposal operators, they go through simulation trainings of exactly what they would do in the field. He said the effect was striking. So much so that when they finished all the simulation training, they surveyed the confidence of these new bomb disposal operators and found that they had 80% of the confidence of experienced operators. A huge level of confidence for people that had never done it even once in the field.

What would this look like for us as Christians, to practice bold faith like this? Could we find ways of rehearsing in advance, role playing scenarios that might feel dangerous to us. Right? I've got a conversation that I continue to draw back, to turtle, when I'm with my coworker. I'm afraid to go to O Night with Pastor Russ because I don't want a door slammed in my face. Right? Well, what if we as Christians were able to practice courage, to practice that faith beforehand?

This is something that we can do in a practical way and the Scripture urges us to be ready, to be ready with an answer when someone asks us for the hope that is in us. So this is one way that we can be demonstrating that faith in moments of danger.

So that's how we can have faith in moments of danger.

Next let's see faith for moments of daily life. For that we're going to look at Enoch.

Now Enoch may just be the biggest surprise of chapter 11. He can feel a little out of place at first pass because here's a man we know very little about. If we look back into Genesis and we look at chapter 5, actually we can turn there now, Genesis 5, if you want to turn in your Bibles, Genesis 5. We'll look at verse 21. You'll see what we know about Enoch from Genesis.

So this is what we read in Genesis chapter 5, verse 21: When Enoch lived 65 years, he fathered Methuselah. Enoch walked with God after he fathered Methuselah 300 years and had other sons and daughters, thus all the days of Enoch were 365 years. Enoch walked with God, and he was not, for God took him.

So that's all we get about Enoch. Those four verses. So why is he included in our list of faith heroes? Well, I think our first reaction is, of course, to say, well, because God took him up to heaven and he never had to experience bodily death. He's the only one that we see in Scripture besides Elijah that never experienced bodily death, just whoop, right from this life to the next.

Yes, I do think that that's definitely a part of it. But I think there's more that we're meant to see. It's captured in the phrase "walked with God." Did you catch it? His walking with God is mentioned twice in those verses, which I think is significant. Until that point the last time anyone walked with God was when Adam and Eve walked with God in the garden. So after the exile from the garden, separation from God, this is our first clear indication that a personal walking with God is even possible. Did you notice he was here on earth 365 years? A detail that I also don't think is insignificant.

Here's the picture of Enoch – 24/7, 365 days a year, 365 years, just walking with God. It's a picture of a life unbroken, constant, special communion with God, connecting with Him, walking with Him, growing with Him.

This does require a different kind of faith. These might not be moments of danger that you need in these moments when you're walking with God, but they're still moments that require faith.

So what was Enoch's secret? Let's look at verse 5 in Hebrews chapter 11 if we flip back to Hebrews chapter 11. In verse 5 it says, "By faith Enoch was taken up so that he should not see death, and he was not found, because God had taken him. Now before he was taken he was commended as having pleased God."

Now let's look at verse 6: For whoever would draw near to God must believe that He exists and that He rewards those who seek Him.

Now right there that is the secret to the kind of faith that we need for these daily moments. We have to believe, really have to believe, that there's a reward to be had. There's a lot of things you could be doing with your time. There's a lot of things that we could wake up and do. Right? There's kids to attend to, there's our work, there's friends, there's studies. I mean, we've got more things to do with our time now than we've ever had.

As you're thinking about what faith looks like in the daily moments, what Enoch's faith had to have looked like, you have to make a choice in those moments. Is my time that I'm going to invest in seeking God, is there going to be a reward to it? You've got to really believe that.

Now I can't preach a sermon on Hebrews without mentioning my good friend Wade Byrum. You know him as an elder here at the church. I've gotten to know him better as a patriarch of our Friday morning men's group that we're a part of. So I sit down next to Wade at the table 6:00 am on a Friday. We're just wiping the sleep from our eyes and he's got a little extra giddy smile on his face, a little extra enthusiasm. So I'm thinking what's going on here? Then I remember it's getting close to summertime and he's getting excited. You see, for every summer for years, Wade has read through which book? The book of Hebrews. Every summer. Year after year. It hasn't been quite 365 but he's getting there. He's moving his way through.

If you look at his Bible, this thing is so thick and so puffy with turning the pages because he's in the Word. Well, the question is what would cause someone to want to read over and over and over the same book each and every summer? I think I have the answer and I think it ties in to this passage here. I want to remind you of an image from the gospels. It's a short, one-verse story that Jesus tells about His kingdom. He says the kingdom of heaven is like a treasure hidden in a field which a man found and covered up and then in his joy he goes and sells all that he has to buy that field.

Can't you just see this guy out there digging for treasure? Finds it, opens it up, closes it real quick. Anyone see this? Then he goes and buys the field. Sells everything he has to buy the field. Right?

What's going on when you see somebody who's demonstrating that everyday faith? The faith where their Bible pages have been turned so much that it looks like the Bible's ballooning? Right? I'm going to tell you what's going on. It's a treasure hunt. That's what that is. Wade, many of you, what we're trying to do there is we're trying to demonstrate faith, that despite the things that we could be doing, whatever those things could be, and there's some good things, we're demonstrating faith in those everyday moments that this is going to be worth my time, that I'm going to dive in again into this book that I've read ten times. Why? To find some treasure. Right?

You go up to Wade, you ask him, "Hey, what are you doing this summer?" "Treasure hunting, treasure hunting."

And I hope the same is true for us because we need to have, it does take faith in those moments, on that Monday morning or that Tuesday afternoon, to say, "You know what? I believe that me seeking God and drawing near is going to bring a reward." That's exactly what we see here in this Scripture. When we do that, when we have faith in

those daily moments, believing and expecting those rewards for our diligent pursuit of God, let me tell you He will reward you. He will reward you.

That's what happened to Enoch. He kept pursuing God, every day, 365 days a year for 365 years and eventually he became so close with God, knowing Him so well, that the transition from this life to the next was seamless. He was here and then he was not. It's a perfect example of someone who showed faith in moments of daily life.

So faith in moments of danger, faith in moments of daily life, and now finally faith in moments of darkness.

Of these three men that we're studying in these verses, Noah is likely the person we're all most familiar with. You'll remember that God instructs Noah to build an ark but it was at a very, very dark time in human history. In Genesis we're told God's heart was grieved. God's heart was grieved and the wickedness of man was so great on earth that every intention of the thoughts of his heart was only evil. It doesn't really get much worse than that. God's heart is grieved, every intention of the hearts of the people at that time was evil. This is darkness.

So Noah in that moment, in the midst of that awful time, Noah had to do something that required profound faith. He had to believe that God was really going to wipe out every living thing on earth. Imagine having to come to grips with that reality. On top of trying to sit with that, he had to build a container for the purposes that no one else had ever conceived of before at the time. It wasn't just a container, it was a container, what Lord, that's 450 feet long with 95,000 square feet of deck area. Oh, and then needing to figure out how to collect food for all the species of animals, get them inside before this event takes place. But he did.

In verse 22 of Genesis 6 his response is so straightforward it's almost unbelievable. Here's what we read in Genesis about that. God goes through all the details of everything He wanted Noah to do and we're told simply Noah did this. He did all that God commanded him. Period. End of chapter.

That's what the author brings out here in Hebrews 11, verse 7. It says by faith Noah, being warned by God concerning events as yet unseen, in reverent fear constructed an ark for the saving of his household. By this he condemned the world and became an heir of the righteousness that comes by faith.

In the midst of all this darkness, I'm sure the solution didn't make complete sense to him. Nothing like a worldwide, catastrophic flood had ever happened, but that didn't matter. In bold faith and reverent fear, Noah refused to disobey God. That's what it's like to have faith in dark moments.

I wonder how many discouraging moments Noah had to endure in those years building the ark. Because you know it happened. Right? This was an unprecedented, almost inconceivable thing in this darkness and Noah had to have faith to continue building. How many of you know about this firsthand? Right? Maybe it's leading your families, maybe it's leading your ministries, maybe it's leading your companies. Maybe it's a small scale, just leading your Bible study or leading your class group. There's many places where we can find a sense of darkness.

Obedying God in those tough circumstances is difficult. When what's being asked of us doesn't really have a precedent, it's one of the loneliest places in the world.

Winston Churchill, the Prime Minister of Great Britain during World War II, knew something about having to exercise faith and his convictions during dark times. The movie *The Darkest Hour* depicts this heavy burden well. A scene unfolds with Churchill contemplating the grim reality that his 300,000 British soldiers, the country's entire professional soldiery, are trapped on the beaches of Dunkirk. As he gets news that Belgium has fallen and France won't be far behind, leaving nothing but a small waterway between him and Hitler's formidable German armies, as he tries to withstand the hopeless mood of his war cabinet, some of whom are threatening to resign if he doesn't negotiate a peace deal with Hitler, we peer into a dimly lit room. It's cluttered with dusty trunks and dingy stacks of books, scattered all over the floor, and there at midnight, in the middle of the room, sits Churchill. He's slumped over, sitting on the edge of a messy daybed, with a thousand-mile stare in his half-opened eyes, trying desperately to hold onto hope despite uncertainties so incredibly grave it's truly hard to fathom.

Now we have the benefit of knowing exactly what happened next. How the story ended. We know that almost all the 300,000 soldiers were rescued from Dunkirk, incredibly. We know that five years later Hitler would be defeated and Great Britain would win World War II, but in that moment Churchill didn't know that.

The same is true for Noah. We know that the flood waters came. We know the entire world was covered with water for 370 days and everyone perished. But Noah didn't. He didn't have the benefit of knowing that that would happen for sure. What did he do? He demonstrated faith in those moments of darkness.

None of the great patriarchs and prophets of old knew for sure what the future was actually going to hold, and we'll read through them throughout Hebrews 11. But what did they do? They obeyed God and they trusted Him and they showed that bold faith, not shrinking back, but having bold faith in those moments of darkness.

Now I can't tell you what's going to happen in your future, but what I can say is this – if you want unshrinkable faith in life's pivotal moments, you need a faith that's bold, a faith that's bold in moments of danger, a faith that's bold in those moments of daily life, and a faith that's bold in those moments of darkness. That's what the author of Hebrews was preaching to his readers then and that's what God is teaching us now.

But there is one more thing. Go back to the scene with Churchill sitting on the bed by himself. The weight of the world is on his shoulders. Something very unexpected happened in that moment that I forgot to mention. He receives a visitor. The door opens and in walks the King of England himself. The King sits down next to Churchill and speaks a few carefully chosen words that change everything. He says to him, "You have my support. You have my support."

In a sermon like this the goal is for us to be inspired by testimonies of people like Abel, Enoch, and Noah, and I hope you are. But we can't leave it there. The temptation is too strong for that inspiration to turn into self-reliance. Do better, be like them. But if that's how we respond, it won't be long before we fail. We forget something, don't we? We forget that there's a King who stepped into our darkest hour and He whispers into our ears, "You have My support. You have My support."

But it's even better than that, isn't it? He supports us not really by coming alongside us as we struggle to be the hero in our own story. That's not the Gospel. No, the support He gives us is a new hero altogether, better than any hero that came before. It's Jesus.

Moments of danger – Jesus never cowered. Never for even a second did He shrink back in all those moments of danger they faced. Moments of daily life – read the gospel of John. Jesus communed with the Father every single moment of every day without one hint of distraction. Jesus, He obeyed the Father in what was the world's truly darkest moment, fulfilling His will perfectly, even unto death, and then resurrecting on your behalf.

You see, it's the object of our faith, it was the object of their faith, of Abel and Enoch and Noah, it was the object of their faith that saved them. They looked forward to it, to Jesus coming. That's what the Word says.

So where we fail, He succeeded. To all those who believe, hear this now, to all those who believe, who have this faith, He gives the right to be called a child of God. That's the good news.

So maybe it's time for you to revitalize your faith in some way today. To be bold. Let this be the moment. Don't shrink back, don't turtle. Draw near to Him and He will draw near to you and reward you beyond your greatest imagination.

Let's pray. Lord, we thank You for Your Word. We thank You, Lord, for the point of Your Word, the Gospel message. It's not about us, it's about Your Son Jesus. Help us not to miss that, not to miss that from the book of Hebrews and not to miss that generally speaking, Lord, with Your salvation. We pray for anyone here who needs to revitalize and refresh their faith, whatever it is. We pray, God, that You would embolden them, give them the hope that they need that they might put their faith and their trust in Your Son Jesus. We ask this in Your name. Amen.

CCCHURCH/pti:kc