

8.11.2024 Sermon

Faith Feeds Hope, Hope Feeds Life

Hebrews 11:32

SUMMARY KEYWORDS

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SPEAKERS

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Well, I was thinking about what I was going to say today. There are a number of versions of this. We're still in Hebrews 11, just in case you've been gone for a few weeks. Are we still in Hebrews? Yes, we are, and there's a lot there. We're getting close to the end. I don't know if that's a celebration or sadness, but we're nearing the conclusion. As I said, there are several versions of this sermon that I'm thinking about delivering to you. There's the weepy one that you kind of see all the time because there are some touching moments. And then there's the Pentecostal pastor version. I haven't used that one in a while. Usually, when I go down south, the room is full of black folks, and he comes out, and then there's something in between. I am as excited about what's going to happen as you are because I do not know.

At the same time, I want to open up right now that if throughout the sermon, you have the motivation or the call to say, "Hey, I just want to sit at the altar for a moment," go ahead and do that. It won't disturb me at all. In fact, it will give me insight on what God is calling to share, by how you are receiving what we're saying, because each and every one of the ministers that come up here and speak, they only want to speak based on how it feeds you. That's the only reason we do this because, without feeding you, there's no reason to speak.

I also want to invite you that if you come in on the middle of this series of sermons that you take advantage of listening to us online. If you are interested in some of the other topics that we have done, we have a podcast. Go ahead and listen to that. And even after service in the great room, we discuss what we've heard. Take advantage of all these different things that we

do to understand what you've heard and what you think about God. And let's test it with one another. Come and let us reason together. Amen.

So where are we? Hebrews 11:32, and like I said, I use the Brain Study Bible version of this. It's kind of a study Bible that uses a bit simpler language, and it says this: "And what more shall I say? Time would not allow me to tell of Gideon, Barak, Samson, Jephthah, David, Samuel, and the prophets." That's all it is. We on this journey, for months, have been talking about all the different ways that faith has been experienced and seen throughout history, through all these different people, so that we can understand how God moves in all these different ways and experiences of life that God shows up.

Some call this whole text, this chapter, the "heroes of faith." I can understand that. But I tend to look at it as an example of the faithfulness of God, and the only reason I make the differentiation between the two is that it puts less emphasis on how good I need to be and more on just how good God is. This is all about acknowledging that God has been, is, and will be good.

We get to this chapter, this verse 32, and the author, getting a little bit tired, starts clumping people together. We get to this point of clumping together, and we get to our friend, Samuel, the priest, the judge, the prophet. I start thinking about what his life was like. The interesting part about ending with Samuel is this: in a couple of weeks, in the next few weeks, we're going to talk about all the different sufferings you go through when you're in a faith moment. I know you all have been waiting for that part. What is it when I have faith about something? What is the pain that I go through? That's coming. What is the suffering? What is the emotional toll, the turmoil that I go through? It's coming.

But what makes Samuel interesting to me, almost not right, is that Samuel experiences none of the negatives. So, if you're going to put somebody in the hall of faith and a hero of faith, where you have all these great things and suffer none—oh, I'll take one of those. I'll take two. So, if you're the kind of person who looks at your life and you want to say, "Well, wait a minute, how do I align?" Maybe Samuel is not your guy. It got me thinking, and hopefully, you'll think about it too, well, if faith exists in all these different ways, and I know the journey I'm on, how do I find myself on this map?

There are all these different people that have gone through all these different ways. And now we have Samuel, and he seems to be very different. We had Samson, who, you know, he's a knucklehead. We had David. We had all these other people that I can kind of get with. Which am I? Am I a knucklehead? Alright, maybe, maybe not. But one of the things that we always talk about in our church to help us think about things spiritually is, are there any physical parallels, things we see in nature?

It got me thinking about blood, blood in our bodies, and are there any parallels there? It also got me thinking about this concept I want to share with you called Faith type. What type of faith do you have, and how does that align with blood? Some of you may know, maybe some nurses, doctors in the medical field. You know there are different types of blood. Blood does some very common or unified things. It takes nutrients to the cells of your body. It takes certain waste products away, and it makes sure that you can rejuvenate yourself and be healthy and all those other things. That's what blood does, generically. But even in that, there are some blood types. There's A, there's B, there's AB, there's O, and then there's the positive and negative of each blood type.

So, does faith live in that same way? Faith can rejuvenate itself. Faith feeds hope and hope feeds life. Faith allows us to move and be and grow, and through this thing called testimony, we can receive a transfusion of faith, just like in modern medicine, you can receive a transfusion of blood. If there is a blood type and there's a faith type, blood teaches a very important caution: you need to know your blood type because if you were ever to need a transfusion, you need to get blood that is compatible with you. Otherwise, the thing that was meant to help you will harm you.

In blood, you can get sick and still don't address the issue, but with faith, if I say, "I can be Miss Cindy and I go and do the things that Miss Cindy does, and then I get knocked in the head," then I'm going to say, "Hey, this thing, faith, doesn't work." Or, if I say, "Hey, I'm going to do a 'name it and claim it,'" for some people, that works. But then if I go out and build up a whole bunch of debt and then say, "I'm going to name it and claim it," and it doesn't work, and they come and take all my stuff—do I have the right faith type to go along with my life? Do I have the right perspective? Because if I don't have the right perspective, if I can't find myself within the examples of all these different people, I will start applying something, and then get disappointed with God because God has not delivered. And then I question, "Is God actually faithful?" When, in reality, God has given me examples, taught me about my life, and put the testimony of people in front of me. Can I now adjust and find myself on the map?

Like I said, if you compare yourself to Samuel, you're probably going to have some problems. Samuel had a good life. He doesn't fit any of the suffering. In fact, as a child, he was committed to the temple, and it was under a Nazarite vow he was committed to the temple and to the priest Eli. As he grew up, he gained favor with God, and back when a time when God was not audibly speaking to people, God spoke to Samuel. Samuel rose from being a servant to a priest, taking the concerns of the people to God. He then became a judge, settling disputes between the people, and then a prophet, hearing from God about the future of the people and telling them how they can make adjustments to their life. And he did none of all of that without any of the sufferings. So, if you have a Samuel mindset and you have a

perfectionist mindset, you're going to be very, very disappointed because he did everything right. God took care of him. I've had some challenges, have any of you?

So where do we look for faith in the story of Samuel? What's going on? And I am so happy that in the First Samuel verse, chapters one through 25, there is this woman called Hannah that is also a part of Samuel's story. She is Samuel's mother. I'm sorry, Hannah is Samuel's mother. I want to make sure I get these names right because it starts to get tricky. She is the second wife of Alcona. The first wife, Peninna, has children by Alcona. And if you know anything about culture in the old text, if you're a wife and don't have children, society frowns on you. So, we can kind of understand the turmoil and the suffering that Hannah is going through. She's married to this man who loves her. He gives her a double portion. When he goes to sacrifice, he shows his love to her all the time, wherever he can. And he's now confused about why she is disappointed in her life, but she says, "You know our culture, you know who we are, and I don't have a son to offer you."

So, that is her deep desire to one day have a son, and she goes to the temple and cries out to God, saying, "God, please bless me and provide a son. And if you do that, I will commit this son back to you in the temple. He will have a Nazarite vow. He will not cut his hair. He will not drink strong drink." Sound familiar? Samson, but Samuel is not going to have great strength. That is not the same. But Hannah says, "If you do this, God, I will commit him back to you, and he will have a Nazarite vow for the rest of his life, and he will be a part of the temple for all of his life." And God hears her, because I think about Hannah, and at times her faith is also confusing and difficult to grasp, because to be a mother and to have a son was her deep, deep, deep desire. And she says, "I, if you bless me God, with this son, I will turn this son loose. I will turn him back." So, I'm willing to embrace this desire. I'm willing to suffer for this desire, but God, I'm also willing to turn this desire loose.

So, what is Hannah's real prayer? If all she's going to do is get this thing and to give it away, what's going on here? What's deeper than deep? What's deeper than this deep desire? And so, Hannah prays this one thing that I think captures it all. She goes to the altar, and she prays to God, and God hears her say this, "Look upon your servant and my vexation, and remember me. I will do all of this if you just do one thing for me, remember me. I want to know that you're real. I want to know that you care. I want to know if all of this is worth it, but you have to show me that you remembered me. I can give away the riches. I can give away my status in society, in exchange for one thing, remember me."

Anybody ever been alone, anybody ever felt no one cared. Anybody ever felt like none of this matters. Anybody ever been a place where, why am I here and doing this? And the one thing I really get concerned about in Western society is this, we are very comfortable a lot of the troubles, let's say, of a developing nation that it has, of people starving to death, being bombed

like we have going on in certain places around the world, we don't experience those. And so, we and we think it's just us instead of the blessings of God.

And so, because life is so comfortable and we are living so well relatively, you know, we got complaints. We don't have real problems. We got complaints. We don't have real problems. Our problems are solvable in one generation. So as a result, we have this question, "God, are you real? God? What's going on, or is this just all my own creation? And if it's all my own creation, why should I suffer for anyone else? Why should I be benevolent to others?" These are different questions, and this is for you.

Alright, I look around and I understand that nobody's life is perfect. But will you be honest with yourself, your life's pretty good. Your life is pretty good, alright? Some people trying to pause. Some people like, "I don't know, Pastor, I don't know. Oh, come on. We're out here in West Chester, Pennsylvania. We are not even in the hood. Come. Come on."

Why is that important? Because as you start searching for things, you can always search for more things, and you're putting God through these litmus tests on things. But I rather you get to a point where you can search the deep desires of your heart. What is that? Is it really a new car? Is it really? Is it? Oh, come on. Is it you're comparing yourself to your neighbors and the house they have versus the house you have? What about your you know your family members, you know their bank accounts bigger than yours. Really. Is that your deep desire is that it is that all Christianity has become, is that all our faith has become, is that all of this experience has become. Because, let's be honest, the pressure that Hannah is feeling is societally given. I want to be a mother. The pressure comes from the people her husband has already told her, "I love you. I give you a double portion. And in fact, aren't I more to you than 10 sons?" Where's this pressure coming from?

And even in that moment, I love the faithfulness of God. And even though the pressures are self-given, God said, "I still hear you, because to you it is a misery, because to you, it is a vexation. I hear you, but you're going to have to dig deep into the deep desire and meet me there. Meet me there, because the surface stuff, we got to let go. The surface stuff was never meant to define our relationship with God. It was in the deep desires. God sacrificed God's son went for a relationship deep desire. God gave us free will so that we can openly and independently love them. Deep desire, God made it so that you could choose to serve and not serve. Deep desire. Relationship was God's deep desire by something that can either choose or not choose to love. God, it's the same when we have with our spouses and our mates. I don't want you here because you gotta be here. I want you because you want me. I don't want my child in my house because they have nowhere else to go. I want them there because they want me.

So, I say to our 21st-century Cornerstone Christian Fellowship Church in West Chester, Pennsylvania. Kind of suburbia, kind of city. You? It. What shall we say? Then? What are the desires of our hearts for this earth? Right? So, we're going to I know, I know everybody starts with faith for themselves. Me that I want to be healthy. I want my family healthy. I want my family to do well, blah, blah, blah, blah, blah, but eventually you gotta get beyond that. You gotta get beyond that. Hannah gave up her son that then changed the whole relationship between God and Israel. Samuel opens up the window where now they will be ruled by a king. He anoints Saul, and then David. He fundamentally changes everything. But Hannah had to give all of that up. She had to get beyond herself, because if she kept that son, none of this happens. So, it either doesn't happen this way. What I want each of us to get to is back to a fundamental question that most of us asked ourselves as a kid, and that is this, "Why am I here?" I know scholars are now to the point. That simply life is a set of random events, and that I am an eventuality based on all the different permutations of the earth. I don't believe that. I believe I'm here for a purpose. I believe that we jointly have a purpose, but we gotta get to deep desires before we can get to the point of experiencing them with God, because we need God's help in order to execute the plan.

Shall I say that again, slower this time, we need God's help so that we can fulfill the purpose and execute the plan of this earth. The elders and your leaders, the pastors of this church, we talk about, what would life be like in the original design called the Garden of Eden. What would that be, or where the lion lays down with the lamb, meaning no war, no conflict, where there's enough for all. And we knew how to work together. We can't even sit in church together. That is the marvelous work that we're trying to do here, even at Cornerstone where we have people of different backgrounds and beliefs come together and somehow get along. We are in a time, unfortunately, where we're going into a political season, where it's some conversations we can't have until December. Isn't that a shame. What is our deep desire, stuff, power, or God's plan?

I'll leave you with this. I don't want to talk long because I hope you've captured one thing that, just like blood, faith has a type, and it doesn't take much, right? So, for a baby newborn, all you need is about a cup. When they're born, they have about a cup's worth of blood. You know, you put on a little weight, you grow up, and you get about a gallon and a half. That's all you need. And at that, you can live a healthy life, nourishing you doing all the things that are necessary for your body. All you need is a gallon and a half. You don't need much for faith and all the things that you want to accomplish in life. All you need is a little bit the size of a mustard seed. That's all we need to create Eden. This is all we need.

Oh, come on, church. What are we doing? This is all we need. So where are we? I wish that we could get beyond the surface, and we could get like Samuel, which, when God spoke to them, said, "Speak Lord Your servant is listening. Speak Lord Your servant is listening?" It's

my question, are we still God's servant? A lot of questions today, a lot of questions today. But if we take even one of them and answer it for our life, I think we're a long way along the path to having the faith the size of the mustard seed that literally can change the world. Amen.