

Messy All Saints

Hebrews 11 v 1-16

Context:

The first day of November marks the annual feast of All Saints. This festival, celebrated by Christians around the world, is an opportunity to remember and give thanks for the lives of faithful men and women in the past, particularly those mentioned in the Bible, and to take inspiration from the example of *their* lives to encourage us as *we* follow Jesus today. Hebrews 11 has been called 'God's Hall of Fame' – a long list of heroes of the faith, some named and others unnamed, who learned how to stay faithful to God in tough circumstances. The letter to the Hebrews was written to Jewish followers of Jesus living in Rome who were facing persecution for their faith and were wrestling with the temptation to deny their allegiance to Jesus and return to the safety of their former faith in Judaism. The writer makes it clear that they stand to lose everything if they drift away from Jesus and, in an attempt to keep them anchored, the author draws attention to all these characters from the long story of Israel in the Old Testament, the so-called Hall of Fame. So, in this season of All Saints, let's see what we can learn from the lives of just a few of them to encourage us to remain faithful to Jesus today.

Observation:

1. How does the writer define faith in v 1?
2. Who were commended for this kind of faith according to v 2?
3. What is the relationship between faith and creation according to v 3?
4. Whose faith is mentioned in v 4 and how did he demonstrate his faith?
5. Whose faith is mentioned next in v 5 and why?
6. What statement does the writer make about faith in v 6?
7. Whose faith is mentioned next in v 7 and how did he express his faith?
8. Whose faith is mentioned next in v 8 and why?
9. What else is said about him in v 9 and who else gets an honourable mention in that verse?
10. What were they looking forward to by faith according to v 10?
11. How did Abraham demonstrate his faith according to v 11 and why and what was the outcome of his faith according to v 12?
12. What does the writer say about all these people in v 13?
13. What does the writer say all these people were looking for according to v 14-16a?
14. What is the outcome of this according to v 16b?

Meaning:

1. How would you define 'faith' if someone asked you? What do you think the writer means by the definition in v 1 and do you like this way of describing faith?
2. Many people today don't believe God created the universe and many confidently assert that science has disproved the claim. How can we therefore have the kind of faith mentioned in v 3? Why is such a belief so important and what do you think should be the relationship between science and faith?
3. Read the story of Cain and Abel in Genesis 4 v 1-12 and discuss how the writer of Hebrews interprets the story in relation to the faith of Abel in 11 v 4.
4. Read about Enoch in Genesis 5 v 21-24 and discuss how the writer of Hebrews uses Enoch in 11 v 5 as an example of faith for us to follow.
5. Why is it impossible to please God without faith according to v 6 and what are the implications of this statement for people of no faith and people of other faiths?
6. Calling to mind what you know of the story of Noah (Genesis 6-9), what do you think the writer of Hebrews means at the end of 11 v 7: "By his faith he (Noah) condemned the world and became an heir of the righteousness that comes by faith." How do you think he wanted his readers to apply this truth in their day and us in ours?
7. Read about the beginning of Abraham's story in Genesis 12 v 1-9. What particular aspects of Abraham's faith does 11 v 8-9 draw attention to and what do you think he meant by the stunning conclusion in v 10?
8. What part of Abraham's story is the writer referring to in v 11-12 and, from what you know of the story, how was the faith of Abraham and Sarah both challenged and strengthened by God's promise and its fulfilment?
9. Why is the statement at the beginning of v 13 so important to the original readers of this letter and to us, and what does it say about the nature of true faith?
10. What do you think it means to be an 'alien and stranger on earth' (v 13)?
11. To what extent are you looking forward to your home in heaven and how does this hope and promise shape and influence your life?
12. How does it make you feel to know that, if you have faith, God is not ashamed to be called *your* God (v 16)?

Application:

1. Do you think biblical characters (whether the ones in Hebrews 11 or others) always demonstrated unwavering faith? Can you give any examples?
2. In what ways can we be encouraged knowing that God has chosen to write a Bible that contains the faults and failures of great heroes of faith as well as their faith and successes?
3. Who is your favourite Bible character and why? What can you learn from their life and faith to help and inspire you?