Heb. 11: 39-40; I Peter 1:10-12; True Faith Has a Proper Focus I. True Faith Looks Forward II. True Faith Looks Up III. True Faith will be Perfected

Congregation of our Lord Jesus Christ, today we bring to a close our series through Heb. 11. We started our series by looking at the definition and parts of true faith- which is a knowledge, conviction and assurance. True faith hopes for something- believes in someone that cannot be seen. For who hopes to receive what they already have? So what then does true faith look forward to? What are we waiting for? Added to this- what were these OT heroes of the faith looking forward to? To ask this another way- did the OT saints look forward to the same things that we are looking forward to? Today our sermon will focus on a promise. Now there are many promises given in the Bible- but there is one key, central promise that rings through the ages! The gospel promise which focusses on the coming of a specific person. Perhaps I can illustrate this connection between the many promises found in the Bible and the one key, central promise that holds it all together. This past week some of us attended a wedding. Now husbands and wives make many promises to each other- I promise to take out the trash or I promise to wash the dishes later. But of all the promises that husbands and wives make to each other- there is one promise that holds central place! All of the promises found in a marriage spring form the promise that started the marriage! I promise to be your husband- or I promise to be your wife- until death parts us! Well, today we consider not the promise of marriage but rather the promise of the covenant of grace! So as we bring Heb. 11 to a close for now, we consider this theme: Jesus Christ reveals that true faith focusses on the gospel promise.

**I. True Faith Looks Forward**

In our first point, we see that true faith is a faith that looks forward. As we have seen, Heb. 11 starts by saying that faith is a conviction of things not seen. So true faith has an expectation for something that is not yet present- faith believes that something is coming or some event will happen that has not yet happened. As Heb. 11:39 puts it- those of the faith did not receive what was promised. They had a good report- they were commended by God as faithful- and yet they died without receiving the very thing that they were looking forward to! So let’s review how this plays out in the life of the saints. So Abraham was promised a child- but he did not receive the child of the promise! So Isaac was not the child that Abraham’s faith was looking for! Moses and the Israelites were promised inheritance in the promised land- they longed to find a home in the land of rest- but this rest was not found in the land of Canaan. As we found back in v. 10- they were looking forward to a city whose designer and builder is God. Moses was promised a reward in v. 26- but the fleeting wealth of the Egyptians was not the reward that his faith was looking for! David was promised a son who would sit on his throne who would build a temple. But David did not receive what was promised- because Solomon was not this son! Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego were promised safety through the fire. And although their bodied were spared from the earthly flame, the fact remains that deliverance from the fire was a future event that their faith saw from afar! Daniel would be rescued from the lion- not the ones in the den but the prowling lion who seeks to destroy! And from last week, these women received back their dead, but there is a better life that they were still looking forward to! By faith they were looking forward to being raised to a greater and fuller life! So all of these OT believer whom we find in Heb. 11 had a faith that was looking ahead. And even through they may have received a partial fulfillment, they never saw the object of their faith made sight! They were given preliminary glimpses- shadows of the coming reality! There was a promised reality that always remained just out of reach- they did not receive what was promised- not yet! The full completion would remain a future reality! So the OT saints- starting with Adam and Eve- and running all the way to John the Baptist- had a faith that hoped for things yet to come! Rest, victory, the promised child, rescue from the foe, and eternal life in the flesh as they stand in God’s presence remained out of reach. None received the blessing that they longed to- they perceived it from afar! They would catch glimpses- flashes of light- it always seemed like the sun was just beyond the horizon! So then, the writer of Hebrews is making it clear that the OT saints and their faith was decidedly future orientated! They were always looking ahead- trusting that God would do what He said- that He would provide the answer to the promise in His good time! Theirs was a time of anticipation and preparation. The shadows would be the closest they could come. And yet, they were commended for their faith! Remember- that even though they did not yet receive what was promised- still they were justified by faith! The salvation they received remains a gracious gift- even as it was based upon the future work of Jesus Christ! And even though they lived hundreds- if not a few thousand years before the promised One would come- they still saw His coming with gladness! They saw the coming day when the Promised Salvation of God would arrive on earth- and they rejoiced! And for this faith they were commended! Remember that the word “commended” here is linked to the word “martyr.” They were martyrs for the faith- each one died without seeing the day when the Savior would come and die for their sins! There is a long line of martyrs- from righteous Abel all the way to John the Baptist- who died for their faith while they looked forward by faith! They counted the cost- the blessings of the future are worth more than any loss today! They would let go of all this world had to offer- even laying down their life as a martyr- in the hope of a future, better life! So true, OT faith was a faith that looked forward. These all did not live to see the historical accomplishments of their promise. But true faith is also a faith that looks up!

**II. True Faith Looks Up**

As v. 40 begins, since God! So who was the one who gave them promises in the OT- who was the one who commends them for their faith- who was the one who gave them Thee promise? Well, true faith looks up! True faith looks to the God of the promise- the God of the living- the God of the patriarch- the God who has covenanted with His people! God the Father had delivered this promise to His people. Sometimes delivered by angels as we find with Abraham and his guests- or Moses on the mountain- or Jacob who wrestled by the water, Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego in the fire and Daniel in the lion’s den. Each blessed with an angel who brought a promise from the Father. Even as Heb. 1 opens by saying- long ago at many times and in many ways, God spoke to our fathers by the prophets. So God revealed His promise in various ways and at various times. And again in Heb. 6:13- when God made a promise to Abraham, He swore by himself because He had no one greater by whom to swear. So the God of the covenant made a promise and sealed that promise with an oath- God is the guarantor of His own promise! But what is this one, key promise that God has given? Well, the covenant promise is found in Gen. 17 and again in Acts 2 is this- repent and be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ and you will be saved. For this promise is for you and your children for all who are far off. Did you catch that- the promise of the covenant is clear- repent of your sins and believe in God’s messiah- and you will be saved! This is God’s promise to you- and it is the promise that God has revealed to His people throughout the ages! So who fulfills this central promise of the covenant? Clearly, Jesus is the one who will fulfill this promised word. Heb. 12:2- Jesus is the author and perfector of our faith. II Cor. 1:20- Jesus is the yes and the Amen to God’s promises. All the promises of God find there Yes in Him! And again in Luke 24:44- the Law, Prophets and Psalms are fulfilled in Christ! So the person and work of Jesus remains the only way to properly understand the OT- and His salving work is the answer and fulfillment to Thee promise of the covenant! Even the Mother Promise given in Gen. 3 makes this clear- the seed of the woman would crush the head of the serpent. To be clear, faith in God’s appointed Messiah is shared by both the OT and NT believers! They were looking forward- we now look back- but the subject and object of our faith remains! True faith looks UP! Trusts in the God of the covenant to keep His promise! As summarized in Heb. 8:6- Christ’s work as a priest is better than the Levites because He mediates a better covenant enacted upon better promises! As A. W. Pink puts it, Christ Himself is the prime promise, not only because HE was the substance of the first promise given after the fall, but also because He is the accomplishment of all the promises of God.

**III. True Faith will be Perfected**

But what exactly has God provided- and to whom? If the OT saints were living in a time of preparation and shadow, what about the saints of today? As 11:40 continues, God provided something better for us. Well then, how are we better- or how is the provision God has given us better than that of the OT administration? This verse is really getting at the heart of the entire book of Hebrews. This book’s central theme is to show how the NT believers are better off than the old- how the shadows of the Old Covenant must give way to the reality found in Christ! The Hebrew Christians were tempted to cling to the shadows and types of the OT- but what they had been given was so much better! Why should they cling to the spark and flame of the old covenant when the sun of righteousness has risen in all His glory? The fact is- they and we are living in a time of great privilege, clarity and blessing! Back then, in the OT, they looked through a glass into a dimly lit room. They could not make out the meaning of everything- and yet they had faith that God would do what He says! We now see clearly- living after the coming of Jesus Christ- we can see how all these OT shadows have pointed to His coming, person and work! We live in a time of fulfilment- and what a blessing it is! God has provided something better for us! Consider Matthew 13:17- many prophets and righteous persons longed to see what you see and they did not see it! For to us have these things been revealed! Abraham and Moses saw the coming of Jesus from afar- and they rejoiced at it! Again, in Luke 7:28 we find that John the Baptist was the greatest of those born of a woman. John was the last and the greatest of the prophets in the OT strain- the last to be a martyr before the Son of God would die, rise and be glorified! And yet, Jesus said, the least in the kingdom of God is greater than he! The blessings we have living after Christ’s ascension put us in a privileged position- higher than even John! One more- I Peter 1 which we read earlier. I Peter 1:12- it was revealed that the prophets were serving not themselves- but us! The message that they received and recorded were for our good- so that we might acknowledge God’s Word as true! The OT prophets longed to understand- to see- but they were told that they were ministering to us! They longed to see- so they inquired about the suffering of Christ and His glory. But they were not able to see it- they simply recorded it without fully grasping it! But upon us has come the time of fulfillment- we can read in the pages of Scripture how all these things worked together for our good! So we are provided something better! The Holy Spirit also gives us a clarity that the OT saints did not enjoy- the types and foreshadows of the OT find their perfect meaning in Jesus Christ now revealed!

But like the OT saints, we too are waiting for something! As 11:40 concludes, apart from us they should not be made perfect! The OT saints were waiting for Jesus to come- but they were also waiting for us – the NT church- to arrive! Together- they with us- we are all waiting for the perfect to come! Even today, the church is living in the already and not yet! The “not yet” part is that for which we wait! The things they hoped for- the perfection- is the very same thing that we still hope for! The blessings of the covenant will be applied to us all- together! There is one church- one bride of Christ! The OT church looked forward- and we look back to see Christ. But together- we as one church look forward to the perfect that is coming! As we saw last week- looking forward to a better life! On that day, the entire church- everyone from Abel to John the Baptist as OT martyrs- and on from Stephen the first NT martyr and on to the time when Christ returns. Together the souls of the martyrs cry out in Rev. 6- how long, Lord? How long until you destroy every foe and vindicate your church? How long until you give your people better life and make them perfect? One day Jesus will respond- today you will see my salvation! And on that day- when the trumpet sounds and the angel calls, we will all be raised and glorified! All of the saints listed here in Heb. 11 will stand before their Savior- in the glorified flesh! And all the believers in the Hebrew church- added to all the saints living today- we will all behold the beauty of our Lord- together made perfect and like Christ our glorious head! All who have believed in Him will have their faith made sight- as they are raised to a better life!

To conclude, Heb. 11 sets the aspects of faith clearly before us. Faith is not just something you know- but it is a conviction that changes how you live! Faith reorients our lives as we look forward and look up! Jesus Christ reveals that true faith focusses on the gospel promise. So may we be found faithful as we learn to trust in the Lord with all our heart- as we believe in the Lord Jesus Christ alone for our salvation! May our faith be strong and steadfast- looking to the author and perfector- as we wait for Him to make us perfect and grant to us a better life!