

The Hall of Faith
Sermon by Pastor Joe Davis
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I. INTRODUCTION

Well, I want to invite you this morning, as we finish our faith journey, to take a tour with me of a majestic hall within a castle unlike any you've ever seen before. This castle, which was not built with human hands, makes the grandest castle in Europe look insignificant and small. I need to warn you though, that when you enter it, you'll feel very humbled and small as you gaze up to its lofty ceilings and examine its architectural details and as you look at the impressive portraits of those who have dwelt here throughout the ages. And yet the amazing truth is: you don't enter this castle as a tourist passing through, but you enter it as a son or daughter of the eternal King who lives here. And even more amazing is the fact that your portrait could one day be up on the wall, bringing glory and honor to the King, when you learn to walk like the men and women whose portraits are already on display in the hall we're going to tour this morning.

Today, we're going to let Scripture speak loud and clear and provide us with a powerful conclusion to our faith study...a conclusion filled with life changing insights about walking by faith and many practical examples of people throughout the ages who did just that. I'd like to invite you to turn with me in your Bibles to Hebrews chapter 10, verse 19, where we'll begin our tour. Our focus today will be Hebrews chapter 11, a passage of Scripture known as the Hall of Faith, but we're also going to cover some related verses on either side of chapter 11. This Hall of Faith is the majestic hall we're going to tour together today. No study of faith would be complete without it.

Now we're going to cover quite a bit of Scripture today, so in a moment I'm going to pause and ask God to open our hearts and prepare our minds to hear his words as fresh and new and applicable to our lives right now...to keep us from getting bogged down in the sheer volume of information, but rather allow us to glean a few key truths that we need in our journey to become effective faith walkers.

The approach we're going to take today is similar to the approach you would take if you only had two hours to spend at the Smithsonian Institute. You could probably spend a lifetime absorbing all the information and examining every detail at the Smithsonian Institute, but if you only had two hours you're going to want to keep a steady pace and probably have a guide leading you to the most significant displays that you simply must see. And I promise, I'll have you out of here in no more than 2 hours! 😊

Let's talk to the King for a moment. PRAY.

Well, as I mentioned a moment ago, you and I enter this castle as sons and daughters of the King...if we've placed our faith in Jesus Christ as our Savior and Lord and trusted in his work on the cross. This truth is made clear in Hebrews chapter 10, verses 19 to 25, where we'll begin our tour:

19 Therefore, brethren, since we have confidence to enter the holy place by the blood of Jesus, 20 by a new and living way which He inaugurated for us through the veil, that is, His flesh, 21 and since we have a great priest over the house of God, 22 let us draw near with a sincere heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water. 23 Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for He who promised is faithful; 24 and let us consider how to stimulate one another to love and good deeds, 25 not forsaking our own assembling together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another; and all the more as you see the day drawing near.

Notice first that the blood of Jesus is what allows us to come into the very presence of the King with confidence, not because we're good enough, but because Christ's work on the cross has made the way for us. Through faith in Christ, we become children of the King, forgiven and made new, and can come confidently into his very presence. We now belong in his castle. We aren't going to enter the majestic Hall of Faith as tourists taking pictures and trying to remember all we've seen, but as those who are now living full-time at the castle and are ready to start exploring all its nooks and crannies.

And in this new identity as children of the King living in his castle, we're instructed to do 3 things continually in verses 22 to 25. And I want you to notice their similarity to that trinity of listening, believing and acting we looked at last week:

- 1) Let us draw near to God with a sincere heart in full assurance of faith
- 2) Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering
- 3) Let us consider how to stimulate one another to love and good deeds, encouraging one another as we gather together.

To live as children of the King, walking in his authority and power, we are first to draw near to him, seeking him sincerely and with confident faith in his goodness. We draw near to listen and have fellowship with him. Secondly we are to hold fast to his words and instructions and guidance without wavering...in other words believing the message he tells us and holding tightly to it like a precious jewel we don't want to lose. And finally, we are to take action on what he tells us, encouraging and stimulating ourselves and the other sons and daughters of the King to live as faithful representatives of him by leaving behind our old way of living and moving into love and good deeds.

And in verses 26 through 31 we're given a pretty severe warning about not going back to our old ways of living. Imagine how dishonoring it would be to the King if, after being adopted by the him and given our own room in the castle, we left every morning to go hang out on the streets, stealing food, lying, and doing all the wrong things we used to do when we were trying to survive on our own. What if we did that every day and then just returned to the castle to sleep at night? You can imagine that the King wouldn't be pleased and that you would be dishonoring him and misrepresenting him every day since people now know you've been adopted as his child.

Listen to the warning from the King in verses 26 through 31.

26 For if we go on sinning willfully after receiving the knowledge of the truth, there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins, 27 but a terrifying expectation of judgment and THE FURY OF A FIRE WHICH WILL CONSUME THE ADVERSARIES. 28 Anyone who has set aside the Law of Moses dies without mercy on the testimony of two or three witnesses. 29 How much severer punishment do you think he will deserve who has trampled under

foot the Son of God, and has regarded as unclean the blood of the covenant by which he was sanctified, and has insulted the Spirit of grace? 30 For we know Him who said, "VENGEANCE IS MINE, I WILL REPAY." And again, "THE LORD WILL JUDGE HIS PEOPLE." 31 It is a terrifying thing to fall into the hands of the living God.

Wow! This is a sobering wake-up call to those who have moved into the castle and are now members of the King's household, representatives and ambassadors of him at all times. We need to make sure we're not deliberately living in sin. We all make mistakes and sin from time to time, don't we? But hopefully when we do, we recognize that it was wrong, confess it the King, and work on not letting it happen again by his power. When we approach sin this way, we're not sinning willfully.

Instead, this idea of sinning willfully speaks of those who continue to live in pretty much the same way they lived before coming to faith in Christ. If the only difference other people can see in your life since you came to Christ is that you usually go to church on Sunday, something's wrong. Sinning willfully is the idea of just continuing to do things that are clearly sinful according to Scripture with no intention or effort or prayer to try to get rid of them...no guilt and confession and desire to change when mistakes are made. Sinning willfully can also be taking place when we know we have an area of sin in our lives and we refuse to work on it or allow God to help us defeat it and put it behind us.

If we're going to grow our faith and walk as children of the King, sinning willfully should have no place in our lives. The King disciplines and corrects those who are his own, and the consequences for those of his children who continue to willfully live in sin are much more effective and life-impacting than any consequences our earthly parents were able to give us. Keep a healthy, reverent fear of our holy King before you at all times, and you'll be much more able to deal appropriately with any sin in your life.

OK. We're beginning to approach the Hall of Faith now, so I want you to prepare yourselves and keep your eyes open and your senses on full alert as we enter. But before we go in, Verses 32 through 39 remind us that those whose portraits are hanging in the Hall of Faith didn't have problem-free lives; far from it in fact.

However, their faith in the King and their hope in his promises gave them what they needed to thrive in the midst of the most difficult challenges and pain and injustices they could every experience.

32 But remember the former days, when, after being enlightened, you endured a great conflict of sufferings, 33 partly by being made a public spectacle through reproaches and tribulations, and partly by becoming sharers with those who were so treated. 34 For you showed sympathy to the prisoners and accepted joyfully the seizure of your property, knowing that you have for yourselves a better possession and a lasting one. 35 Therefore, do not throw away your confidence, which has a great reward. 36 For you have need of endurance, so that when you have done the will of God, you may receive what was promised. 37 FOR YET IN A VERY LITTLE WHILE, HE WHO IS COMING WILL COME, AND WILL NOT DELAY. 38 BUT MY RIGHTEOUS ONE SHALL LIVE BY FAITH; AND IF HE SHRINKS BACK, MY SOUL HAS NO PLEASURE IN HIM. 39 But we are not of those who shrink back to destruction, but of those who have faith to the preserving of the soul.

We're reminded as we enter the Hall of Faith that having faith doesn't take away our problems, but it does give us everything we need to walk through those problems with joy, stability, power, confidence, courage, hope, fruitfulness, and so much more. And the King takes pleasure in us when we live by faith in him.

OK. Here we go. Are you ready? Let's open these heavy doors and enter the Hall of Faith together. As we do, notice the inscription above the door in verses 1 and 2:

1 Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen. 2 For by it the men of old gained approval.

Faith is the confident assurance that having come to know and trust the King, we can continue to trust him through all the mysteries and complexities and pain and unanswered questions of life. Having heard his perfect Word and amazing promises and experienced his forgiveness and adoption and new life, we can walk out confidently in his power and trust him no matter what challenges come our way. And we can know that as we walk by faith in him, he is pleased with us.

OK. Here we are in the Hall of Faith. Take a moment and look around. Doesn't it just take your breath away? As we begin walking down the hall, I want you to notice first, over here on the right, this beautiful portrait of creation, when God spoke the world into being out of nothing by the word of his power. The inscription reads:

3 By faith we understand that the worlds were prepared by the word of God, so that what is seen was not made out of things which are visible.

You might ask: why do we need faith to understand the creation process? Well, no one was there at creation to witness the process, except perhaps the angels. However, the King has given us his Word and a vast amount of evidence within us and in the world around us to give us confidence that we can trust his explanation of how it happened, which is that he created it all out of nothing...out of thin air you might say. He didn't take materials already in existence and form them into the earth and planets and animals and humans, but instead he spoke it all into existence out of nothing by the word of his power.

Now over here on the left, we see our very first portrait of a person who walked by faith, a man we've all heard of: Abel, son of Adam. The inscription on his portrait says this:

4 By faith Abel offered to God a better sacrifice than Cain, through which he obtained the testimony that he was righteous, God testifying about his gifts, and through faith, though he is dead, he still speaks.

So why is Abel our first portrait? Because Abel walked in faith by listening to God and acting on what he heard. Abel offered his sacrifice to God with the firstfruits of his flock, rather than Cain who thought he had a better idea about how to sacrifice. Abel listened to God and trusted that God's way was best, while Cain listened to himself and thought he had a better plan than God. Have you ever felt that way?

Now over here on the right, I'd like you to notice this beautifully painted portrait of Enoch. And notice the inscription here at the bottom of the frame. It says this:

5 By faith Enoch was taken up so that he would not see death; AND HE WAS NOT FOUND BECAUSE GOD TOOK HIM UP; for he obtained the witness that before his being taken up he was pleasing to God. 6 And without faith it is impossible to please Him, for he who comes to God must believe that He is and that He is a rewarder of those who seek Him.

So what was Enoch's defining characteristic? He walked with the King. He drew near to him allowed the King to guide and direct his life. He knew and trusted and walked through life in close relationship with the King. And the King was very pleased with Enoch's life and invited him into his forever presence without having to face the death of his body first, like the rest of us.

Now on the left over here I want you to notice that really big boat in the background and I'm pretty sure you'll figure out who this is. He was the first recorded boat builder in Scripture, and he built his boat by listening to King and following his instructions. This portrait, of course, is of Noah, son of Lamech. His inscription reads:

7 By faith Noah, being warned by God about things not yet seen, in reverence prepared an ark for the salvation of his household, by which he condemned the world, and became an heir of the righteousness which is according to faith.

Interesting tidbit of information on Noah: Did you know that Noah had the same defining characteristic that Enoch had? We're told that he walked with God. And as Noah walked with God, God talked to him and gave him an important message. Noah was warned about the coming judgment on earth and given specific plans on how to escape it. And guess what? He listened and acted on what he heard and so entered the Hall of Faith. He also escaped the judgment God was pouring out on the earth by choosing the one way of salvation provided through the door of the ark.

And Noah reminds us that when we trust God and take action on his instructions, the world and people around us will often think we're crazy or maybe even delusional. Imagine what it must have been like to spend many years building a boat where there was no water and no rain. God also asked Noah to be a preacher of righteousness in a world that was completely corrupt and evil. We're

told that every intention of the thoughts of people's hearts was only evil continually, and the earth was filled with violence. Yet in the midst of this, God called Noah to preach righteousness and build a boat where there was no water to float it on and no history of floods. Can't you just imagine people saying, "Oh there's old crazy man Noah, building that boat he'll never use and babbling on with a message nobody's listening to."

So if you think what God's calling you to do is difficult, remember Noah and realize that God probably hasn't called you to do anything that difficult yet. But the key here is that Noah was able to do what God called him to do, enduring hard work and ridicule and a world full of people ignoring his message, because he chose to listen to and trust God and act on his instructions. He drew near to God with a sincere heart in full assurance of faith and found all that he needed to endure and glorify God in the midst of all the difficulties. And he was vindicated in a big way when the flood actually came as God had promised.

OK. We've got to pick up the pace a little bit so we don't run out of time and miss some key things I want to show you. Over here on the right is a familiar face: the man known as Father Abraham. Let's read his inscription:

8 By faith Abraham, when he was called, obeyed by going out to a place which he was to receive for an inheritance; and he went out, not knowing where he was going. 9 By faith he lived as an alien in the land of promise, as in a foreign land, dwelling in tents with Isaac and Jacob, fellow heirs of the same promise; 10 for he was looking for the city which has foundations, whose architect and builder is God...17 By faith Abraham, when he was tested, offered up Isaac, and he who had received the promises was offering up his only begotten son; 18 it was he to whom it was said, "IN ISAAC YOUR DESCENDANTS SHALL BE CALLED." 19 He considered that God is able to raise people even from the dead, from which he also received him back as a type.

I won't spend a lot of time talking about Abraham today on our tour, since we've already talked quite a bit about him already in our orientation over the past weeks to your new way of living here in the castle by faith, but suffice it to say that Abraham is our prime example, other than Jesus Christ, of someone who walked through life listening to God and showing his faith by acting on the instructions he received from God...most of which were extremely difficult and

would have sounded crazy to other people: leaving his comfortable home, gathering up his whole household, and setting out with no idea where he was going...living in tents and on the move for most of his life...offering up his one and only son for whom he had waited for 100 years as a sacrifice to God. Yet through it all he chose to trust God and God was faithful and brought blessing and the gift of his presence through it all.

Now this next portrait is of Abraham's wife, Sarah. Let's read her inscription:

11 By faith even Sarah herself received ability to conceive, even beyond the proper time of life, since she considered Him faithful who had promised. 12 Therefore there was born even of one man, and him as good as dead at that, as many descendants AS THE STARS OF HEAVEN IN NUMBER, AND INNUMERABLE AS THE SAND WHICH IS BY THE SEASHORE.

Now I know a lot of us tend to think of Sarah as a doubter because she laughed in disbelief when she first heard that she was going to have a baby at her very old age. Yet according to this verse in Hebrews she must have reached a point where she began to believe God's promise that it was really going to happen, because it was by faith that she received the ability to conceive. This gives each of us hope as well as we struggle with doubt from time to time. We can take comfort in knowing that just as God walked Sarah from a point of doubting to a point of confidence in him, he can also walk us through our doubts as we seek him. As Jesus helped the unbelief of the man with the demon possessed son, he can also give us the faith we need and the ability to work through our doubting to a point of peaceful, confident trust in the promises of God.

Now before we move quickly through the rest of the portraits, let's read the inscription on this monument here in the middle. It says:

13 All these died in faith, without receiving the promises, but having seen them and having welcomed them from a distance, and having confessed that they were strangers and exiles on the earth. 14 For those who say such things make it clear that they are seeking a country of their own. 15 And indeed if they had been thinking of that country from which they went out, they would have had opportunity to return. 16 But as it is, they desire a

better country, that is, a heavenly one. Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God; for He has prepared a city for them.

This reminds us that Abraham and Sarah didn't see the fulfillment of God's promise to make their descendants through Isaac as numerous as the stars in the sky. They saw the beginning of its fulfillment with the birth of Isaac, but they had to trust that God would be faithful to fulfill the rest of the promise. And they did. And God did fulfill his promises perfectly, didn't he?

In this inscription we also discover a key principle necessary for successful faith walking. Walking by faith involves loosening our grip on all the God-substitutes the world is constantly trying to offer us. To walk in faith and do what God's calling us to do, we need to defeat that worldly lie that tells us we need "things" and "toys" and constant entertainment to be happy. Here in America, where pursuit of the American dream has been thrust upon us for our entire lives as the path to happiness, we have a really big idol to tear down. But tear it down we must if we want to walk by faith and operate in the realm of the impossible.

This doesn't necessarily mean we need to sell our house and all our toys and start living in tents. But it does mean that pursuit of the American dream should not be the focus of our lives and what we're spending most of our energy on. It does mean that our search for hope and meaning and joy and fulfillment should not be centered around the next toy we can get, or the new promotion we're hoping for at work, or the dream house we hope to get someday. Instead our search for meaning and purpose in life should be focused on walking with and knowing God.

And when we've truly loosened our grip on the things of this world, we'll be able to follow God's instructions and call on our life because our hope and fulfillment will not be tied to our possessions or our status in the eyes of the world. We'll be desiring a better country, a heavenly one, and when God calls, we'll be ready to answer in obedience. And he'll take pleasure in us and be pleased to be called our God.

OK. Let's pick up our pace a little now as we finish walking through the Hall then we'll finish up by examining a final monument that shows us how these people were able to walk by faith. And we'll hopefully learn how we can do the same. We're just going keep walking slowly now as we pass these next few portraits and

one huge wall mural depicting many other people who chose to trust God and watched as he accomplished miraculous things through them. So here we go. We'll start with Isaac over here on the left and then move quickly through the others:

20 By faith Isaac blessed Jacob and Esau, even regarding things to come.

21 By faith Jacob, as he was dying, blessed each of the sons of Joseph, and worshiped, leaning on the top of his staff.

22 By faith Joseph, when he was dying, made mention of the exodus of the sons of Israel, and gave orders concerning his bones.

23 By faith Moses, when he was born, was hidden for three months by his parents, because they saw he was a beautiful child; and they were not afraid of the king's edict. 24 By faith Moses, when he had grown up, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter, 25 choosing rather to endure ill-treatment with the people of God than to enjoy the passing pleasures of sin, 26 considering the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures of Egypt; for he was looking to the reward. 27 By faith he left Egypt, not fearing the wrath of the king; for he endured, as seeing Him who is unseen. 28 By faith he kept the Passover and the sprinkling of the blood, so that he who destroyed the firstborn would not touch them. 29 By faith they passed through the Red Sea as though they were passing through dry land; and the Egyptians, when they attempted it, were drowned.

30 By faith the walls of Jericho fell down after they had been encircled for seven days.

31 By faith Rahab the harlot did not perish along with those who were disobedient, after she had welcomed the spies in peace.

And now, take a close look at this beautiful wall mural showing many others who walked by faith and began to operate in the realm of the impossible:

32 And what more shall I say? For time will fail me if I tell of Gideon, Barak, Samson, Jephthah, of David and Samuel and the prophets, 33 who by faith

conquered kingdoms, performed acts of righteousness, obtained promises, shut the mouths of lions, 34 quenched the power of fire, escaped the edge of the sword, from weakness were made strong, became mighty in war, put foreign armies to flight. 35 Women received back their dead by resurrection; and others were tortured, not accepting their release, so that they might obtain a better resurrection; 36 and others experienced mockings and scourgings, yes, also chains and imprisonment. 37 They were stoned, they were sawn in two, they were tempted, they were put to death with the sword; they went about in sheepskins, in goatskins, being destitute, afflicted, ill-treated 38 (men of whom the world was not worthy), wandering in deserts and mountains and caves and holes in the ground. 39 And all these, having gained approval through their faith, did not receive what was promised, 40 because God had provided something better for us, so that apart from us they would not be made perfect.

All these gained approval and were pleasing to God not because they never made mistakes or were able to perfectly keep a list of rules, but rather they gained approval through their faith, as they listened closely to God, believed in him and his message, and showed their belief in him by taking action on his instructions and guidance.

So what have we learned from this walk through the Hall of Faith? What are the essential truths we need to keep with us as we learn to follow these examples and walk by faith? Well, first of all, faith is not usually convenient. It involves loosening our grip on the things this world has to offer and getting out of step with what the rest of the world is comfortable with...even doing things that people around you may think are crazy. Walking by faith involves sacrifice and courage and risk and the real possibility of ridicule.

Secondly, faith always involves walking. In all of these portraits, people took action based on their faith in God. They walked by faith. They didn't stand still by faith or sit by faith or stay safe in their houses by faith. They took courageous action after listening and believing God's instructions and trusting that he would show up and provide them everything they needed to accomplish his will.

Thirdly walking by faith doesn't ensure that we'll be successful in the eyes of the world. It doesn't mean that we're going to get everything we think we want if we

just have enough faith...or that when we trust God we'll be showered with material blessings. Sometimes that does happen, but whether it does or not is up to God. Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Joseph and David are people who definitely experienced significant material blessings as they walked by faith. But sometimes those material blessings ended up being distractions and traps that led them astray from the simplicity and purity of their devotion to God. And, as we just read, there are many others who did not experience material blessings as a result of their walk of faith.

But what walking by faith does ensure is that we will experience the fruits of faith walking and be forever carried in the arms of our great King, experiencing his peace, lovingkindness, protection, power and constant presence with us at all times. And we'll see the glory of God as he powerfully works through us and enables us to operate the realm of the impossible.

And I'd like to wrap up our tour today with what the author of Hebrews concludes after taking us on this walk through the Hall of Faith. It's written above these two doors we need to go through as we leave the hall and is found in Hebrews chapter 12, verses 1 through 3. This final inscription begins with that key word, "Therefore," giving us a clear clue that we're about to be told what we should take away from this walk through the Hall of Faith. This is what it says:

12 Therefore, since we have so great a cloud of witnesses surrounding us, let us also lay aside every encumbrance and the sin which so easily entangles us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, 2 fixing our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of faith, who for the joy set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. 3 For consider Him who has endured such hostility by sinners against Himself, so that you will not grow weary and lose heart.

As we consider these amazing portraits of men and women who walked through their lives by unwavering faith in God, let's turn our eyes to the One who grew faith in the lives of each of these people and will do the same for each of us as we seek him. Jesus Christ is the author and perfecter of faith and the one we each need to turn to in order to grow our own faith. Jesus invented faith and perfected it. Turning our eyes to him and keeping them there...knowing him...delighting in

him...being his apprentice...following his example...this is how we learn to walk in such a way that our own portrait will one day be hanging in the Hall of Faith, bringing great glory to God because it will show that we didn't walk in our own strength and wisdom and human abilities, but rather chose to draw near to listen, believe what we heard, and show we believed it by taking action on what we heard.

Have you ever considered all the suffering and injustices and false accusations and ridicule and pain that Jesus Christ experienced during the short time he was walking on this earth? And have you ever compared that to what you've experienced in your life? Have you ever considered how Jesus responded to injustice and lies about him and ridicule and people constantly trying to work against him and destroy his ministry? And have you then considered how you tend to respond to injustice and ridicule and false accusations and pain and people working against you? What did you find there? Did you see anger, bitterness, resentment, and ill will taking root within you? Or did you see confident security in your identity as God's child that enabled you to resist bitterness and anger and spend your time praying for those people and lovingly trying to resolve the issues?

Jesus is our example here, my friends, and he endured extreme hostility and injustice without resorting to bitterness and anger and spending his time complaining to God or talking to others about how terrible other people were. His walk of faith gave him security and confidence and grace toward others no matter what kind of abuse he faced. So when you're feeling abused and mistreated and falsely accused, or when the pain of life is tempting you to be angry with God or others, rather than resorting to human methods of dealing with it, consider what Christ endured and how he responded and release these things to him. Choose to trust yourself and your circumstances to him. Don't allow Satan to create a root of bitterness and cultivate it into a full grown tree. That's what he loves to do and that's how he tries to keep us from being effective faith walkers.

So as we close, with these great portraits of faith hanging all around us, Jesus himself being the greatest, let's draw near to him, listening closely to his Word...loosening our grip on what the world has to offer, leaving behind the ways of our old self...and let's begin moving out in confident faith...running with

endurance the race that God has set before us. He's chosen the path, he's given us the map and he promises to be with us and guide us and give us the strength we need to finish the race strongly as we choose to trust in him. Let's pick up the shield of faith and start walking!