

CAN YOU MAKE THE FAITH HALL OF FAME?

Today's Text: Heb. 11

Extracts:

Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen... But 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 diligently seek Him...By faith Noah, being divinely warned of things not yet seen, moved with godly fear, prepared an ark for the saving of his household...By faith Abraham obeyed when he was called to go out to the place which he would receive as an inheritance. And he went out, not knowing where he was going... By faith the harlot Rahab did not perish with those who did not believe, when she had received the spies with peace...And what more shall I say? [Heb. 11: 1,6-8; 31-32]

*Chinua Achebe (1930-2013) is one of the best-known writers on African literature.¹His **Things Fall Apart** (1958) sold over 20 million copies worldwide and has been translated into 57 languages, making him the most translated African writer of all time. Yet, Achebe could not win the Nobel Prize in Literature before his death! Four Africans have won that prize- Nigeria's Wole Soyinka (1985), an Egyptian (1988) and two South Africans (1991 and 2003).*

What does it take to win that prestigious prize? According to Dr. Sara Danius, "The Nobel Prize in Literature is awarded to someone who has done outstanding work in an idealistic direction that adds the greatest benefit to humankind."² So, it is not based on popularity or volume of work, among other things. Making the faith hall of fame is also like that. It has nothing to do with the size of your congregation or the popularity of your denomination or for how long you have been a believer!

*In Chapter 11 of the book of **Hebrews**, some believers all through history have been listed and commended in what can be called the Faith Hall of Fame. Can you as a modern believer make that list? Let us find out from today's study.*

¹ Story is based on the following sources: "Chinua Achebe (1930-2013)-from Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Chinua_Achebe ; "List of Nobel Prize Winners in Literature, from Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia, https://simple.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_Nobel_Prize_winners_in_Literature;

² Sara Danius, "How to win a Nobel Prize in Literature," <https://today.duke.edu/2017/04/how-win-nobel-prize-literature>

1. Background: The Faith that leads to fame before God!

According to the *Merriam Webster Dictionary*, Hall of Fame can be defined as a structure housing memorials to *famous or illustrious individuals* usually *chosen by a group of electors*; a group of individuals in a particular category (such as a sport) who have been selected as particularly *illustrious*.³ Look at the buzz words: famous or illustrious individuals in a particular field, chosen by a group of electors. Therefore, it is not meant for everybody! Membership is *earned* and highly appreciated by society. However, the electors are human beings who are themselves seasoned members of the Hall of Fame from much earlier times. The “Faith Hall of Fame” as presented in the Eleventh Chapter of the book of *Hebrews* is different from and superior to the human types that we are familiar with.

Let us begin with a beautiful story on faith from the book of Jeremiah. For prophesying “bad news” to Zedekiah king of Judah that he and his people would not escape from the Chaldeans who would deliver Jerusalem and the people into bondage and exile in Babylon for seventy years, Zedekiah locked up Jeremiah in prison in the palace. That was the eighteenth year of Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon. Just then, the word of the LORD came to Jeremiah that his uncle’s son was on the way to offer him a piece of land to buy and that he should not refuse the offer. Soon after, the man indeed came and the deal was done and executed with witnesses [**Jer. 32: 1-13**]. The prophet was confused and sought understanding from God. Did He not say that the children of Israel were going into exile in Babylon and their land would be desolate? Most of the people were already in exile and the rest would soon join them. Why then was God asking him to buy land in a forsaken country? The LORD replied, “Houses and fields and vineyards shall be possessed again in this land...Behold I am the LORD, the God of all flesh. Is there anything too hard for Me?” [**vv. 14-27**]. The prophet’s fears were assuaged. That is faith in action.

The word of God states that *believers walk by faith, not by sight* [**2 Cor. 5: 7**]. By sight, Jeremiah would not buy that piece of land. By faith (in God), he did. Therefore, election to the Faith Hall of Fame does not depend on human judgment but on God Himself. The Bible text for today’s study [**Heb. 11**] reinforces this point. Let us pay attention to the following points:

a) *God alone is the Selector/Elector!*

We are told, “But *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 diligently seek Him” [**Heb. 11: 6**]. That suggests that God alone is the One that selects or chooses who can be elected to the Faith Hall of

³ <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/Hall%20of%20Fame>

Fame. Your church rank or family or colour of skin has no place. Your spiritual gift does not matter. All God is interested in is your faith in Him, defined as “the substance of things hoped for; the evidence of things not seen” [v.1].

In the law courts, only facts (what you can prove empirically through the five senses-sight, hearing, feeling, smell and touch) are admissible in evidence. But truth is bigger than facts, especially as some facts can be false! That is why there are false witnesses. So, what is faith?

It has two parts: *substance* of things hoped for; *evidence* of things not seen. Hope is invisible, so is what you have not seen. But when you trust God and His words, you hang on to the “substance” of hope and the “evidence” of the invisible as the empirical evidence of your faith. As in our opening story of Jeremiah above, the only one who knows what is hoped for or not seen is God. *Therefore, faith means acting today on what God has told you to expect in due course.* That is why we are told, “Faith comes by hearing and hearing by the word of God” [Rom. 10: 17].

Take the case of Paul and two hundred and seventy-five other passengers who faced imminent shipwreck on their way to Rome. It was prisoner Paul who came forward boldly to assure the shipping experts that there would be no loss of life among them but only the ship “for there stood by me this night an angel of the God to whom I belong and whom I serve, saying, ‘Do not be afraid, Paul; you must be brought before Caesar; and indeed God has granted you all those who are with you.’ Therefore take heart, men, for *I believe God that it will be just as it was told me*” [Acts 27: 1-25]. Therefore, *God is the object and controller of our faith.*

b) *You need not be illustrious or famous!*

Look at the people mentioned in the chapter under examination. It began with people of faith at the dawn of history-Abel, Enoch and Noah [Heb. 11: 4-7]. It gave good space to Abraham, the father of faith [Rom. 4: 11] and Sarah his wife, the patriarchs, Isaac and Jacob, and Joseph [Heb. 11: 8-22]. The law-giver, Moses, got a few verses [vv. 23-29]. Rahab the harlot got one full verse whereas Gideon, Barak, Samson, Jephthah, David, Samuel and the prophets received only one verse [vv. 31, 32]. Only the Old Testament people are listed, possibly because Jesus the visible Son of the invisible God has made faith easier for us to understand and appreciate!

What does that suggest? *Since God is behind the list, you need not be illustrious or famous by human standards to make it! All that is required of you is to live by your faith* [Hab. 2: 4]. Remember when the apostles asked Jesus to increase their faith, He replied, “If you have faith as a

mustard seed, you can say to this mulberry seed, ‘Be pulled up by the roots and be planted in the sea,’ it would obey you” [Lk 17: 5-6].

c) *So, you must have the faith that can take you all the way!*

In closing the Parable of the Persistent Widow, Jesus said, “When the Son of Man comes, will He really find faith on the earth?” [Lk 18: 8]. All those listed in the Faith Hall of Fame took their faith all the way to their death. For example, even though she was still called, “the harlot Rahab,” [Heb. 11: 31], she became a woman of profound faith when she stopped her trade after helping the two spies to safety before the attack on Jericho [Josh. 2: 1-11]. When she and her family were relocated to Israel [Josh. 6: 25], she married Salmon and bore Boaz [Matt. 1: 5], the great grandfather of David [Ruth 4: 18-22]. Thus, Rahab is in the genealogy of Jesus!

From the forgoing, we can see that we all have great hope to make that list. It has to do with your faith in God and His only begotten Son, Jesus. Through history, believers have by faith “subdued kings, worked righteousness, obtained promises, stopped the mouths of lions, quenched the violence of fire, escaped the edge of the sword, out of weakness were made strong, became valiant in battle, turned to flight the armies of the aliens” and much more [Heb. 11: 33-40]. *When Christ returns soon, will He find faith on the earth? Will you be among such people of faith?*

2. Lessons for the modern believer

Temptation and persecution have taken a turn for the worse as we approach end-times, with many believers “giving heed to deceiving spirits and doctrines of demons” [1 Tim. 4: 1-2]. If the just shall live by his/her faith, then, we need to pay serious attention to the following lessons that we can learn from today’s Bible text:

a) *You must first take the test before you can learn the lesson!*

We have been told that without faith, it is impossible to please God [Heb. 11: 6]. That suggests that you must first take the test of faith before you can learn your faith lesson! At school, we first study the lessons before we take the tests. How can you know how much faith you have unless/until you first face a faith challenge?

For example, on one occasion, it was in the evening, Jesus and His disciples were in a boat crossing to the other side of the Sea of Galilee. Jesus was in the stern, asleep on a pillow. There was a great storm and the waves beat into the boat such that it was already filling. They woke Him up and said to Him, “Teacher, do You not care that we are perishing?”

Jesus arose, rebuked the wind, and said to the sea, “Peace, be still.” The wind stopped and there was a great calm. He turned to the disciples and said, “Why are you so fearful? *How is it that you have no faith?*” They feared and said to one another, “Who can this be, that even the wind and the sea obey Him!” [**Mk 4: 35-41**]. They failed the test before they learned what faith was all about!

Many of us are living in “protective” bubbles, provided by family, congregation or the state. Then, one day, unexpectedly, storms of life confront us. Electricity and water supplies fail. We are hungry but there is no food and the banks are not accessible because ATM cards cannot work. At such moments, God may also ask you, “Where is your faith?”

See the faith of the children of Israel in the wilderness where God fed them with manna. Despite such grace, the people yielded to “intense craving” and wept, saying, “Who will give us meat to eat? We remember the fish which we ate freely in Egypt, the cucumbers, the melons, the leeks, the onions and the garlic; but now our whole being is dried up; there is nothing at all except this manna before our eyes” [**Num. 11: 1-6**]. People of faith like Paul would give thanks in everything and rejoice evermore because that is the will of God in Christ Jesus concerning them [**1 Thess. 5: 16-18**]. That should be your attitude to spiritual tests and challenges.

b) You cannot pass the test that you are reluctant or scared to take!

Faith comes by hearing the word of God [**Rom. 10: 17**]. How can you hear when you will not listen? How can you make progress when you are reluctant to learn or move forward?

Take the case of some disciples who were looking for Jesus after He had miraculously fed five thousand people with bread and fish from a lad’s lunch box [**Jn 6: 1-14**]. As He preached about Himself as the bread from heaven, “the bread of God ... who comes down from heaven and gives life to the world” [**vv. 22-40**], many of them said, “This is a hard saying; who can understand it?” From that time on, many walked away and walked with Him no more. Jesus turned to the twelve and asked them, “Do you also want to go away?” *Peter replied, “Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the word of eternal life. Also we have come to believe and know that You are the Christ, the Son of the living God”* [**vv. 60-68**]. In the New Jerusalem which will be descended after the great white throne judgment, the wall of the city would have twelve foundations, “and on them were the names of the twelve apostles of the Lamb” [**Rev. 21: 14**]. Except for Judas Iscariot who betrayed Jesus and was replaced with Matthias [**Acts 1: 15-26**], those apostles who were not scared to take the risk of faith with Jesus

are the ones referred to in the New Jerusalem honour list. God had listed them in the Faith Hall of Fame.

You must choose what you are actually looking for. Do you want a user-friendly church or a God-fearing one? The word of God says that “all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will suffer persecution” [2 **Tim. 3: 12**]. In the words of Jesus Christ, wide is the gate and broad is the way that leads to destruction. Understandably, there are more people on such a route. But the road that leads to life (salvation) has a narrow gate and it is difficult to take [Matt. 7: 13]. So, keep moving forward on it! That is the only way leading you to the Faith Hall of Fame.

c) *Your election is at the end of your life on earth*

Even though those listed in the Hebrews chapter under consideration “had a good testimony through faith, [they] did not receive the promise.” But God has provided “something better for us, that they should not be made perfect apart from us” [Heb. 11: 30-40]. That is, until Jesus came in flesh to die for us and open direct access to heaven, those saints listed in this chapter had to wait after death in “Abraham’s bosom” (called Limbo in some denominations) [Lk 16: 22; Lk 24: 43; Matt. 27: 51-53; Rev. 1: 18]. Jesus is now in heaven to “appear in the presence of God for us” [Heb. 9: 24]. Therefore, your election is assured at the end of your life on earth!

The world may have billions of people but each of them answers his/her distinct name. God knows each of us by name. How will you feel on the day you are called home to see your name in the Lamb’s Book of Life [Rev. 20: 11-15]? When you make the Faith Hall of Fame, you have also made the Lamb’s Book of Life! You have been faithful to the end [Heb. 3: 14]. Alleluia!

3. Conclusion: Jesus is the Author and Finisher of your faith!

The time has come for you to lay aside every weight and run with endurance the race set before you, “looking up to Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith” [Heb. 12: 12: 1-2]. Your faith journey may be long and rough but never give up. You may fall several times along the way but always get up each time. Then, one of these days, when you are called home, the Lord Jesus will be there at the gate, saying to you, “Come, you blessed of My Father, *inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world*” [Matt. 25: 34].

Congratulations!