

In the summer of 2017 while Hannah and I were living in Chicago for seminary, we road tripped out to Washington DC. We met up with my brother and his wife and we toured the major sites of our nation's capital - Supreme Court, Smithsonian, and the Capitol building. In the capitol building, the tour guide brought us to the National Statuary Hall. It's this big shiny room with a bunch of statues in it that honor important figures in American history. Each state gets to choose what individual they want in the Statuary Hall. Thomas Edison, George Washington, John Winthrop, Roger Williams, Rosa Parks, Sacagewa, Billy Graham, Johnny Cash, and Prince are in there. Yes, Minnesota is replacing the statue of Henry Mower Rice, the fur trader and politician, with Prince the pop music star. Each individual is honored for their contribution to American society. Are these people perfect? No. There's not a single statue in there that represents a perfect person, but each of them did some good things in life. George Washington owned, traded, and whipped slaves, but he also led the army and the young nation with wisdom and service. Prince died of a drug overdose, but depending on your musical preference, made some great music. Even the great evangelist Billy Graham made mistakes in his life.

Like we talked about last week, Hebrews 11 highlights some men and women who lived by their faith in God. I call it the Hall of Faith. And this Hall of Faith is not selected by their contribution to American society, or their touchdowns and tackles like the NFL Hall of Fame that we talked about last week, they are selected by their faith in God and their obedience to God based on the promises of God. They were God-centered people and they can tell they were God-centered people based on their priorities and their life decisions. Hebrews 11 highlights these individuals to inspire us to live by faith in our lives, to be God-centered people by our priorities and our life decisions.

The Hall of Faith reminds us how awesome Moses was. He gets a full paragraph! Verse 25 says, "**25** He chose to be mistreated along with the people of God rather than to enjoy the fleeting pleasures of sin. **26** He regarded disgrace for the sake of Christ as of greater value than the treasures of Egypt, because he was looking ahead to his reward."

Let's think about that life decision. Moses could choose to stay in Egypt - with all the power, the wealth, the prestige, and the comforts that came with it. He was adopted into the royal family of Pharaoh!

Or, Moses could choose to align himself with the poor, beaten, mistreated Hebrew slaves. No safety. No money. No guarantee of success.

In the world's eyes, that's an easy decision! Take the money! Take the fame! Take the easy life! But the Hebrews had something the Egyptians did not. If Moses made a pros and cons list about this decision, there was 1 pro on the Hebrew side that outweighed all the others. The Hebrews had the promises of Yahweh Almighty, the Creator, the Lord of Hosts, the God of Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and Joseph. By faith, Moses entered into oppression. He risked his life. He risked his reputation. He risked his future. He saw everything Egypt had to offer and he said, "You know what, I'm going with Yahweh. I believe he is the 1 true God and my obedience to him matters more than any comforts of this life. I am willing to suffer any persecution or ridicule for the Lord."

Turns out, Moses was right. God does what God said he would do. Yahweh sent the 10 plagues. Yahweh delivered the Hebrews from Egypt. Yahweh drowned the Egyptian army in the Red Sea. Most of the Egyptians probably thought Moses was crazy for following the Lord and believing God's promises, but in the end, Moses was right.

It's important to notice that the Hall of Faith does not only include men AND it does not include only Israelites. A life lived by faith is possible for men AND women of any ethnicity of any type of background. Rahab! Rahab was a woman! Rahab was a Canaanite! Rahab was a prostitute! And Rahab is in the Hall of Faith.

She makes this incredible statement of faith to the Israelite spies after she sent the soldiers away. Joshua 2:11 When we heard of it, our hearts melted in fear and everyone's courage failed because of you, for Yahweh your God is God in heaven above and on the earth below."

And what happens? God does what God said he would do. The walls of Jericho fall. The Israelites are victorious. Rahab, her parents, and her brothers and sisters are spared.

Rahab experienced a life transformation by the grace of God. Rahab was a prostitute. Selling herself with money. Not exactly a pure “church girl.” But God had big plans for Rahab. God never gave up on Rahab. God revealed his power to Rahab through the stories of the Exodus and the Conquest, and Rahab had a change of heart. She professed her faith in God and demonstrated her faith by her actions. The Lord frequently utilizes individuals that people wouldn’t expect.

Some years ago, a Presbyterian missionary was working among prostitutes in Korea. But no matter how hard he tried, the women in that culture could not believe that God would extend grace to them. They were disgusted with themselves. They had 0 self-esteem. The missionary told them the stories of Jesus’ love and forgiveness, but nothing was connecting. So the missionary tried something different. He decided to teach the prostitutes of the doctrine of predestination. This is how the story went:

So he told the prostitutes about a God who is a King. And this great divine King chooses to select people out of the human race to serve him, simply because it is his sovereign will to do so.

This made sense to the women. They had no problem with the idea of authority figures acting in this way — it seemed natural and right to them. They asked my missionary friend a question that a non-Christian in the West would never ask: “How can I know if I am chosen?” He answered that if they heard the gospel and they wanted to accept and believe it, this was a sign that the Holy Spirit was working on their hearts and that God was seeking them. And some of them responded.

Our Reformed theology believes God’s sovereignty over salvation, that according to Romans 8, the Lord predestines, calls, justifies, and glorifies his people. God was seeking Rahab. God was seeking the Korean prostitutes despite their background or past life, and out of God’s grace he gave them the ability to live by life.

Hebrews 11 highlights more members of the Hall of Faith. Gideon, Barak, Samson, Jephthah, David, Samuel, and the prophets. The Hall of Faith briefly references the stories of more members. Who shut the mouths of lions? Daniel! Who quenched the flames? Shadrach, Meshach, and Abendego. Who escaped the sword? Elijah and Elisha. Who received their dead back? The widow at Zarephath and the Shunammite woman. Who was stoned to death? The prophet Zechariah. Who was sawed in 2? Church tradition says it was Isaiah the prophet. The author of Hebrews says he could go on and on and tell more stories about more people who lived by faith.

Hebrews 11 says about these individuals in verse 38 "the world was not worthy of them." Many of them were tortured or killed by the authorities who thought they were not worthy enough for this world, and the Holy Spirit inspired Scriptures say the opposite about these men and women, the world was not worthy of them. They were too good for this place. They deserved better. They deserved to be made perfect by the perfecter of faith, by the pioneer of faith, by Jesus Christ.

The Hall of Faith includes big names like Moses, Abraham, David, heroes of the faith, but the greatest of all time is Jesus. Jesus is the GOAT. GOAT, G-O-A-T stands for Greatest of All Time. You can argue about who the best basketball player is in the history of the NBA - Is it Michael Jordan? Is it Kobe Bryant? Is it LeBron James? And you could make an argument for each. But Jesus is clearly the greatest in the Hall of Faith. Hands down. No discussion.

Hebrews 12 says Jesus is "the pioneer and perfecter of faith." Some translations have "the author and perfecter of faith." What do these words mean? What do these 2 nouns teach us about Jesus?

To fully understand these words, we need to go back to the original Greek the New Testament was written in. And these 2 Greek words are too awesome to be passed over. The Greek words are in the sermon notes and on the website under the notes file.

The word pioneer or author is translated from the Greek ἀρχηγός. Everyone say ἀρχηγός with me ἀρχηγός. This word means the originator, the predecessor, the chief leader, the pioneer. The English word archetype comes from this Greek root. ἀρχηγός is used 4 times in the New Testament, all 4 of which are describing Jesus.

Jesus is the originator and sustainer of life. All things were created through him and for him. He is the King of the Kosmos. Even though he had joy set before him, he was experiencing the harmonious relationship of God the Father and God the Spirit, he humbled himself as a human and surrendered himself to a horrific, painful death. He was the strongest and most powerful being to ever walk this earth, yet he suffered to complete our salvation and to bring many sons and daughters to glory.

The word for perfecter comes from the Greek word Τελειωτήν. Everyone say Τελειωτήν with me Τελειωτήν. This word comes from the word "telos" which means completion, fulfilled goal, matured, or perfected. This is the only time in the New Testament this word is used. Jesus is the one who completes our salvation, who perfects our faith, who brings our faith to its full maturation.

So how does all this impact us? The short epilogue in Hebrews 12 gives us 2 applications.

- 1) Verse 2 says Fix your eyes on Jesus, the **ἀρχηγός** and the Τελειωτήν, the pioneer and perfecter of our faith. Verse 3 says "consider him." Think about him. Meditate on him. Pray to him. Worship him. Trust in him. Live for him. Be perfected by him.
- 2) Be inspired by the great cloud of witnesses.
 - a) Read the Scriptures and be encouraged by Moses and Rahab and David and all the others who lived by faith. Learn about their struggles and their questions and how they fulfilled their calling. So we can discern our calling from God in our lives and fulfill it by faith.
 - b) Be inspired by each other. Notice the collective faith of the people of God in Hebrews 11:29 "29 By faith the people passed through the Red Sea as on dry land." The people! Calvary Christian

Reformed Church, along with every other Christ-centered church, is the people. Be encouraged by each other.

If you haven't read The Proclaimer yet, I strongly encourage you to do so. The Proclaimer is our church newsletter and you can find it on our website, calvarytwincities.org, under the "What We Do" tab. I was inspired in my faith by reading the articles written by members of this church.

By faith Sue DeYoung teaches at Hope Academy and is committed to listening and repenting during this time of societal injustice.

By faith Matt and Lisa DeKam adopted Asher into their family and brought him forward for baptism into God's family.

By faith Heiko Veldman served as elder through the retirement of 1 pastor, the call of 2 new pastors, and the stay at home order caused by COVID-19.

By faith Nelson and Phyllis Nibbelink volunteer at VEAP and World Renew in their retirement, in addition to exploring God's creation and loving their family.

By faith Neva DeVries served as a missionary nurse in Nigeria and was determined to come to church into her 90s.

Just like the statues in the US Capitol building, and the people mentioned in the Hall of Faith, none of us are perfect. We have all sinned. But we can live by faith thanks to Jesus, the Pioneer and Perfecter of faith. Amen. Let's pray.