

When I was in high school, my brothers and I visited the NFL Hall of Fame in Canton, Ohio. My brother was doing his pastoral internship at a church in Ohio that summer and the Hall of Fame was pretty close so we went and checked it out. The Hall of Fame is like a football museum. It has pictures and plaques and busts of all the best NFL players throughout the years. They include guys like Troy Aikman, Jerry Rice, and Randy Moss. Being a football fan and a football player in high school and college, the Hall of Famers were an inspiration to me. I wanted to be like them. I wanted to catch passes like Jerry Rice. I wanted to jump over people and catch touchdowns like Randy Moss. Both pictures on the website show me trying to be like the Hall of Famers.. The first picture shows my brothers and I pretending we are the NFL greats on the football field they have outside, and the 2nd picture shows my head among all the busts of the players and coaches, pretending my bust was there in the Hall of Fame.

Hebrews 11 gives us a Hall of Faith. Hebrews 11 honors the incredible men and women of our faith. But they are not evaluated by how many touchdowns they scored or by how many football games they won, they are evaluated by their faith in God.

What exactly is faith? If someone asked you to define faith what would you say?

Verse 1 gets us started: "Faith is confidence in what we hope for and assurance in what we do not see." Professor Fanning of Dallas Theological Seminary describes faith this way. Faith is a steady conviction. Faith is a spiritual perception. Faith is an inward attitude. Faith is insight into the unseen.

How do we get faith? Is faith something we do? Or do we just need to believe? Yes and no. We are called to believe that the Lord God is real and to obey him, but the Word of God teaches us that grace and faith are gifts from God. John Calvin rightly teaches that "Faith is the principal work of the Holy Spirit." We have faith because of what the Holy Spirit is doing inside of us. The Holy Spirit leads us to the light of the gospel. The Holy Spirit reveals to us hidden realities of our existence. The Holy Spirit fills us with faith that relies on the promises of God, leads us to obedience of God's Word, made possible by God's grace through Christ. The Holy Spirit shows us we cannot fulfill God's law, that it is

outside of our abilities as humans, and that the only liberation from the dreadful sentence of eternal death is Christ the Redeemer, sent by the Heavenly Father who has willed to help us. The Holy Spirit helps us embrace this mercy of God. All we must do is submit to the leading of the Holy Spirit. This is what the ancients did, and were commended for.

How did the Hall of Faith-ers live out their faith? Abel sacrificed. Enoch lived. Noah built. Abraham left. Sarah conceived. Isaac blessed. Jacob worshiped. Joseph taught. Nothing too crazy. They didn't do anything outside of human capability. God did miraculous acts around them but they weren't the Avengers. They didn't have super powers. They simply believed in God and obeyed His Word.

I want us to briefly focus our attention on Noah. Look at verse 7. "By faith Noah, when warned about things not yet seen, in **holy fear** built an ark to save his family." God spoke to Noah, and how did Noah respond? "In holy fear." The rest of the world was indulging in sinful desires. They did what they wanted to do and could care less about Yahweh or what he said. But Noah was uncommon. While everybody else made fun of him and mocked him for believing in God and His Word, Noah lived by faith and holy fear. Noah endured insults with an unshakable spirit. Noah had a fixed resolution to obey God even if nobody else was doing it. Faith led Noah to obedience, to building the ark which was the salvation for him and his family. We can be inspired by Noah's example today as we live by faith today.

Hebrews 11 speaks of our ultimate and eternal home. Verse 16 says that all the Hall of Faith-ers "were longing for a better country—a heavenly one." The Greek word for country describes a motherland, a native country, a place where someone belongs.

My wife and I bought a house in Bloomington and we love it. We are very thankful to God for the ability to purchase a house and call it "home." It's not perfect, but we have enjoyed doing house projects since the day we moved in. We have painted walls, installed new flooring, redesigned closets, replaced a vanity, regraded the backyard, and the list goes on and on. With each project we complete, the house feels a little more like our home. Every hour we spend

working on the house and living in the house, I feel like the more I belong. For example, when I turn on the sprinkler to water the new grass in the backyard, I look at my backyard and I'm thinking, "I love this place." When I drive home after work and pull into my driveway, I look at our house with the newly installed gutters, and I think, "I love our house." I belong here. There's nothing quite like that good sense of "being home."

Sadly, many people in this world do not have that sense of belonging in a home. Maybe they don't have stable housing, maybe their family is fragmented and suffering through broken relationships. Their hearts ache because they want to belong. They want to have a place of peace and joy they can call "home."

Hebrews 11 describes a place where anyone who lives by faith in the 1 true God will experience that sense of belonging, that sense of wholeness, completeness, peace, joy, and truth. Verse 16 says God "has prepared a city for them." Verse 10 says more about this city prepared by God. It says Abraham, "was looking forward to the city with foundations, whose architect and builder is God."

We all currently live in the Twin Cities, and hopefully we all enjoy living in the Twin Cities. I know I do. I hope each of you loves the city or suburb you live in. We live in Bloomington and I love Bloomington. If you live in Minneapolis, I hope you love Minneapolis. But no matter how much people love their cities, every city in the world will fail to fulfill that deep sense of belonging. Every city run by humans will be corrupt in some way. Every city run by humans will disappoint. Tim Keller says cities are a concentration of humanity that reveals the very best and the very worst of humans. I believe God calls us to be involved in our cities and to work for the peace and prosperity of our cities, but we must understand no earthly city can fulfill our ultimate desire of belonging, only the City of God can do that. The city of God is built on firm foundations. God is the builder of that city. God is the king of that city. God is the mayor, legislative, and supreme court of that city. God will reign over that city with perfect truth and justice and mercy. That's the city I want to live in in someday!

God has built a city for all his people and Jesus himself has prepared a room for each one of you. Jesus says in John 14, "Do not let your hearts be troubled. You

believe in God; believe also in me. **2** My Father's house has many rooms; if that were not so, would I have told you that I am going there to prepare a place for you? **3** And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with me that you also may be where I am." Jesus blazed the trail back to God by carrying the curse of sin on his shoulders to the cross. And now by his victorious resurrection out of the tomb, Jesus has prepared a place for all of us in the city of God.

Abel, Enoch, Noah, Abraham, Sarah, Isaac, Jacob, and Joseph believed this. They knew God would bring them into the city he had made for them. They knew they had a heavenly home. That's what kept them going in this life. That faith is what motivated them to risk their lives for God and his glory. Faith was the means or the instrument that allowed them to do all those amazing things.

And faith is the instrument God is using to do amazing things through us. The Holy Spirit is building faith in us to live out God's plan for our lives. We believe our ultimate and eternal home is in the City of God, where Christ is King and truth and justice does roll down like a river and an ever flowing stream. Since we have insight into this spiritual reality, and we hold this steady conviction that God is alive, we know that we will be strangers and exiles in this world, like Abraham was, like Sarah was, like Noah was. But that's a good thing. A poet describes our Christian identity as exiles this way:

We are the odd
 The outcasts
 The peculiar
 The strangers
 And they say
 We don't fit in
 But I say we are exactly
 Who God created us to be

I have 2 questions I want all of us to think about this week.

1) Who is in your Hall of Faith?

Who is someone you know personally, or have read about, that inspires you in your faith? This person lives by faith. This person trusts God and you can see

the fruit of the Holy Spirit in this person's life. This person understands the role of an exile in this world and longs for the City of God, and you can tell by their lifestyle, the decisions they make, the priorities they have.

Augustine, John Calvin, Abraham Kuyper, Dietrich Bonhoeffer, Kirk Cousins

- a) An example I know personally is Steve and Anna Freise. They are family friends that Hannah has known since living in New Ulm. She used to babysit their kids. They have been Christian mentors for us, showing us how to serve the church and they raise their kids in a Christian family. They had 4 kids. Now they have 3. Tragically, about 5 years ago now, their baby girl, Ivy, got sick and died. They had the funeral in New Ulm and the entire town was there. I have never cried more at a funeral or seen so many other people cry at a funeral as I saw that day. The whole town was grieving. But through it all, Steve and Anna Freise demonstrated incredible faith in God. I remember when we saw them standing in front of their baby girl in the small casket, they were heartbroken, but they had a sense of peace that is unexplainable except that it was the peace of Christ in their hearts. When we hugged them and their kids, they said, "Ya know how as parents, we get to show our kids around this world and teach them as these new things about this world? Well it will be reversed in the City of God. Ivy is already there. And when we go, she will be able to show us around in the New Heavens and the New Earth. Now that is living by faith. Anna published a book about it if you want to cry, but also be amazed at the faith the Spirit has given them.

2) My 2nd question is this, "Whose Hall of Faith will you be in?"

Who are you inspiring by your faith in God? Are you inspiring your kids? Your siblings? Your friends? Your neighbors? Your co-workers? When people see you and your life, do they see the Holy Spirit at work? Do they see the fruit of the Spirit in your life?

Hebrews 11 is teaching us to evaluate our lives by faith. It's easy to evaluate our lives through the culture's eyes, but we are called to something greater.

Those NFL Hall of Famers memorialized in Canton, Ohio, are evaluated by touchdowns, tackles, and games won, but as people of God I hope we evaluate ourselves by our faith in God, our obedience to God, and by fulfilling our calling

to love God more than anything or anyone and to love others as ourselves. A life lived by faith is a life well lived.