



# The Voices of the Faithful

Brownsburg Church of Christ

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## Introduction:

The latest thing in technology is the “cloud.” I doubt I understand it well enough to explain to you what it is. It is basically a network of computers that stores information and programs and apps that your computer can access via the internet. It is the technology that allows you to make a note in Evernote on your iPad or Tablet and also find it on your laptop and desktop. It is the technology that allows you to save something to DropBox and access it on anyone else’s computer (as long as you have your DropBox username and password). While people who understand the technology know exactly what is going on and how all of this information is stored, to the rest of us, “the cloud” conjures images of our data simply being up in the sky, floating around us, waiting to be retrieved by our computers when we need to access it. It is almost like being surrounded by a cloud of data and information wherever we go. We can’t see it. We can’t feel it. But it is there, just waiting to be accessed. What a great cloud of information surrounds us. But it is not the original cloud. It is not even the most important cloud. There is another cloud that surrounds us, just waiting to be accessed. **Hebrews 12:1** says, “Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight, and sin which clings so closely, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, looking to Jesus...” (ESV). We are surrounded by a cloud of witnesses—a cloud of ancient people telling us their stories, encouraging us to run our race, cheering us on despite the struggles we face. As **Hebrews 11:4** describes Abel, the faithful son of Adam and Eve who died at the hands of his brother, all of these witnesses are dead, but they speak to us. Their voices encourage us. They tell us how to enter eternal joy and ultimately receive the promises of God. Let’s plug into this cloud and listen to their voices.<sup>1</sup>

## Discussion:

### I. Be convicted that God is.

- A. In **Hebrews 11:6**, the author provides commentary on all the stories of the faithful. Their lives and their voices cry out—God is. From recognizing the world around us was brought into being by the Word of God (**Hebrews 11:2-3**) to believing it was destroyed in the flood by His command (**Hebrews 11:7**), the faithful believe that God is.
- B. **Hebrews 11** was written to Jewish Christians who were facing hardships and persecution. **Hebrews 10:32-39** and **12:3-4** demonstrate the struggle these Christians were facing. Because they were facing that struggle, some were abandoning Jesus or at least the Hebrew writer was afraid they would. Can’t you imagine when people have devoted their lives to God and yet experience public reproach and affliction, get thrown in jail, have their property taken from them that they might start to think God is not there. Few of us have experienced any of these things and don’t know anyone who has. Yet, how many have we heard of that decided God must not exist because life is hard. They got sick or a family member died or their company downsized and they decided God must not be there. The voices of the faithful proclaim that we must not shrink back, God is there (cf. **Hebrews 10:39**).
- C. Abel believed that God is and sacrifice to him by faith (**Hebrews 11:4**). Noah believed that God is and built an ark (**Hebrews 11:7**). Abraham believed that God really is and followed His directions to the promised land (**Hebrews 11:8**). Moses’ parents believed that God is and hid their son from Pharaoh’s murderous edicts (**Hebrews 11:23**). Moses believed that God is and left Egypt under Pharaoh’s nose with all of Israel trailing behind him (**Hebrews 11:27**). Rahab believed that God is and saved her entire family (**Hebrews 11:31**). All of these believed God is. And all of these surround us in the cloud of witnesses, their voices crying out, “Things may be tough, but don’t abandon God; He is.”
- D. **Psalm 14:1** throws down the gauntlet. The fool has said in his heart that there is no God. And notice what happens when they say that. “They are corrupt, they do abominable deeds, there is none who does good” (ESV). Granted there are many who claim to be atheists who would be incensed at this charge. And that is because almost everyone has such a light view of evil. Many think they have done no abominable deeds because they haven’t done what the likes of Hitler and Stalin and Manson have done. And yet, if there is no God, then what they have done is not really abominable either. Who gets to decide what is right and wrong

<sup>1</sup> I was working on this lesson while holding a meeting in Johnson City, TN. As I discussed it with Kevin Kay, gospel preacher in that city, he shared a lesson he presented. I liked his breakdown of the four points and have used them in this lesson. Special thanks to Kevin Kay for his work and study that helped with this lesson.

if there is no God? The majority? What gives them the right? The powerful? Does might make right? The intelligent? How can we possibly know what intelligence is if our brain matter is nothing more than the random collision of energy and matter?

- E. But, granting that there is a God and He gets to determine what is right and wrong as the Creator of the universe, let's consider how we actually come out on His scale of abominable deeds. Have you ever lied? What do we call someone who has lied? A liar. Have you ever stolen anything? Taken something that wasn't yours? What do we call someone who has taken something that doesn't belong to him? A thief. Have you ever taken the Lord's name in vain? Using it as an exclamation, using it to express surprise, fear, shock? Do you know what we call those who take the Lord's name in vain? A blasphemer. So, here you are a lying, blaspheming, thief and you want to declare that **Psalm 14:1** doesn't apply to you?
- F. But here is the kicker. This conviction that "God is" implies something. It implies that you will want to find Him and connect to Him. Why wouldn't you? Can anyone believe God is there and not long to see Him, to know Him, to experience Him? In fact, isn't that the great craving in humanity? Isn't that what all world religions are trying to provide—a path to God? But what's the point. When we are such sinners, why would we want to seek and find Him? Surely all that awaits us is judgment and wrath. Or does it?

## II. Be confident that God rewards those who seek Him.

- A. Actually, the voices of the faithful tell us something completely different. We should naturally think that all that awaits us from God is judgment for our sins. However, the faithful cloud around us is crying out, "Seek God. He rewards those who seek Him" (cf. **Hebrews 11:6**)
- B. Again, consider this chapter in context. These Christians had "endured a hard struggle with sufferings" (**Hebrews 10:32**)—public exposure to reproach and affliction, watching friends being treated this way, imprisoned, plundered property (**Hebrews 10:33-34**). Can't you imagine how some of them might be thinking they had gotten the raw end of the deal? They've devoted their lives to God, and yet their lives are filled with hardship. If God really loved them, wouldn't life be easier? How many times have we thought this? How many times have we thought life's hardships meant there was no benefit to being a Christian? How many do we know that have abandoned the faith because life didn't go their way?
- C. Listen to the voices of the faithful. They suffered hardship. They went through toils and trials and tragedies. Yet they hung on. Why? Because as the Hebrew writer said in **Hebrews 10:34**, they were confident reward was coming. They knew they had better and more abiding possessions than the ones being taken. Listen to their voices. Then compare your sufferings to theirs.
  1. Abel was slaughtered by Cain, but because he was convicted that God is and that He rewards those who seek Him, Abel received the commendation that he is righteous (**Hebrews 11:4**). He is dead as far as this world is concerned, but he still speaks because his faith led him to eternal life. What a reward?
  2. We don't know what hardships Enoch faced, but we do know that because of his faith he was rewarded with missing out on death. He simply was not, for God took him directly to His presence (**Hebrews 11:5**). But perhaps this is most profound when we consider the other Enoch in **Genesis 4:17-18**. The Enoch of **Hebrews 11:5** is Seth's descendent. The other Enoch was Cain's. Cain's Enoch had a city named after him. How powerful he must have felt. How blessed. We have no indication that Seth's Enoch had any such fame or blessing in this life. But what happened to the city named after Cain's Enoch? It perished in the flood. What happened to Seth's Enoch? He didn't even die and we discover that he enjoyed an even greater city (**Hebrews 11:16**).
  3. Abraham lived in tents. He wandered from place to place. He never really even had a place to call his home. He had been promised great things about this land that he traveled on, but even when he died he only owned the grave his wife was buried in (cf. **Genesis 23**). But he tells us that God really does reward those who seek Him. He maintained his faith because he was actually "looking forward to the city that has foundations, whose designer and builder is God" (**Hebrews 11:10**, ESV).
  4. Further, Abraham was a bit of a reproach to all around him because he and his wife could have no children. How could he be called "exalted father" (the meaning of "Abram") or "father of a multitude" (the meaning of "Abraham") when he didn't even have one child? Yet God promised him descendants like the sands of the seashore and the stars of the sky. By the time he died, he had only eight children (cf. **Genesis 16:15; 21:1-3; 25:1-2**) and perhaps a handful of grandkids. But he did not have descendants like the stars in the sky. In fact, the Hebrew writer says he died in faith not actually having received the promise, but seeing it afar off (**Hebrews 11:13**). Though Abraham hadn't received the promise, he had confidence that God rewards those who seek Him. **Hebrews 11:12** explains that he did get that reward. Abraham's voice cries out to us that the promise is not necessarily for this life, but it is coming.

5. Moses was mistreated with the people of God (**Hebrews 11:25**). Why? Because he knew that the pleasures he would receive as an Egyptian were temporary, but the reproaches of Christ were a greater treasure. He was looking to the reward. When did it happen? Not in this life. He didn't even get to enter the Promised Land (cf. **Deuteronomy 34:4-6**). But have you ever considered the next time we see Moses? Was he bitter about this? In **Matthew 17:1-3**, when Moses appeared on what we call the Mount of Transfiguration, do you think Moses was complaining about how hard his life was and about not entering the Promised Land? Of course not. What is Moses telling us? He is saying that the reward doesn't come in this life, but be confident that God rewards those who seek Him.
  6. Then there are the countless others, some named, some not named in **Hebrews 11:32-38**. What did they endure in this life? Torture, execution, mocking, flogging, chains, imprisonment, stoning, sawn asunder, clothed in sheep and goatskins, destitute, afflicted, mistreated, wandering in deserts, mountains, and caves. Why did they do it? So that "they might rise again to a better life" (**Hebrews 11:35**).
- D. What is this great cloud of witnesses telling? They are telling us that God does reward those who seek Him. But that reward is not always evident in this life. Hang on. Don't let go. I don't know what you are experiencing right now. Perhaps you don't live in the house you always wanted. Perhaps you don't have the job you always wanted. Perhaps you don't have the financial life you always wanted. Perhaps you have been mocked and made fun of. Perhaps the kids at school belittle you. Perhaps your friends have betrayed you. Perhaps the person you'd hoped would marry you couldn't abide your spirituality. The voices of the faithful are telling us to quit being sidetracked by these momentary afflictions. "Do not throw away your confidence, which has a great reward" (**Hebrews 10:35**, ESV). A better life is coming. Be confident that God really does reward those who seek Him. Are you seeking Him? So, how do we seek him? How is it that our faith actually commends us as righteous, makes us heirs of the righteousness that comes by faith?

### III. Be compliant to God's way.

- A. Sadly, some today seem to think that the mental assent to the two previous points is the key. As long as we have an internal agreement to God's existence and His reward, we are commended as righteous and receive the reward. However, the voices of the faithful tell us otherwise. We are not rewarded simply because we mentally agree to some facts. We must actually seek God. How do we do that? The faithful cloud of witnesses explains we must be compliant to God's way. Do you want God's reward? Then understand that God is explaining the way to His reward. He is explaining the way to His presence. God has not established a lot of arbitrary rules to get us to jump through hoops to see if we can measure up. He is simply telling us the way to His reward. And His way works. The question is will we believe Him and seek Him on His ways?
- B. Consider the voices of the faithful.
  1. Abel was commended as righteous not simply because he mentally assented to God's existence, but because he offered the acceptable sacrifice. Though we cannot be completely certain why Cain's sacrifice wasn't in faith, we can be certain there was something he didn't believe and therefore didn't follow (**Hebrews 11:4**).
  2. Noah became an heir of the righteousness that comes by faith because he built the ark God commanded (**Hebrews 11:7**). Some today suggest that we must obey God, but really we are commended as righteous at the moment we have a mental commitment. But Noah shows us otherwise. Mental assent doesn't commend us as righteous apart from behavioral submission; rather faith commends us as righteous because biblical faith believes God to the point of actual submission.
  3. By faith Abraham obeyed, leaving his home country (**Hebrews 11:8-9**). Some get bogged down in the fact that Abraham was counted as righteous before he was circumcised and try to claim that somehow we are saved by our faith before we obey and try to use Abraham as an illustration of that. But the Hebrew writer puts that argument to bed. Abraham obeyed God's call to go to a new land, the land of promise and was commended as righteous by that faith becoming an heir of that promise.
  4. The Israelites crossed through the Red Sea by faith. They were delivered from the Egyptians by their faith. But how? Were they delivered simply when they believed mentally? No, they were delivered when they walked through the Red Sea. Have you ever considered the faith it took to walk between two walls of water? The Egyptians had no faith and the water crashed down on them (**Hebrews 11:29**).
  5. When did the walls of Jericho fall? When the Israelites believed and committed themselves to walk around the walls? No. What if they had decided to stop short of the full 7 trips around on that last day? Faith delivered Jericho into the Israelites hands because their faith led them to comply to God's direction (**Hebrews 11:30**).

6. Rahab was delivered by faith. But why? Because her faith in the God of Israel led her to give a friendly welcome to the spies (**Hebrews 11:31**). More than that, we know her faith led her to keep quiet about the Israelites plans and the spies and to tie the scarlet cord in her window (**Joshua 2:15-21; 6:22-25**).
- C. What is the point for us? What is the cloud of the faithful saying to us? Comply. Do you believe in God? Do you believe He rewards those who seek Him? Then seek Him. Seek Him His way? Listen to what He says about how to find Him and do that. Jesus said that those who believe and are baptized will be saved (**Mark 16:16**). Comply and be commended as righteous through your faith.

#### IV. Be committed to God's cause.

- A. For the Hebrews reading this letter, this was the most important point. In **Hebrews 10:35**, the Hebrew writer told them not to throw their confidence away. He told them to endure so they will receive the reward that comes through seeking God (**Hebrews 10:38**). He told them they must not shrink back otherwise they will be destroyed (**Hebrews 10:39**). You see, we must not think that the faith that commends us as righteous is a one-time moment of faith and obedience. We cannot simply rest on having once been baptized. We must be committed to God and His cause.
- B. Obviously, we all have failures and struggles. After all, Noah had gotten drunk. Abraham lied and had struggles in his faith. Sarah laughed when she heard God's promise of the coming child. Jacob lied to his father and took advantage of his brother. Moses killed a man and initially didn't want to go back to Egypt as God's spokesman. Do not misunderstand this commitment as perfection as if we can earn our way into salvation. But we must be committed. We must hang on to God no matter the consequences. We must pursue His ways no matter what others do.
- C. Consider the commitment of the unnamed faithful in **Hebrews 11:33-38**.
  1. "Stopped the mouths of lions"—do you remember Daniel who was so committed to God's cause that when it became illegal to pray to Him, he did it anyway? In **Daniel 6**, Daniel didn't rest on his **Daniel 1** faith. He was still committed to God even if it was going to mean his death by lions. But his commitment to God's cause brought him deliverance. Daniel says he completely committed.
  2. "Quenched the power of fire"—Do you remember Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah? Or perhaps you remember them by their foreign names: Shadrach, Meshac, and Abednego. In **Daniel 3**, Nebuchadnezzar threatened them with death by fiery furnace if they wouldn't bow to his golden image. But the three young Hebrews were committed to Jehovah God and his cause. Even though they were not certain God would deliver them from the fire, they knew God would deliver them from Nebuchadnezzar, even if it was by death itself (cf. **Daniel 3:17**). These three young men say he completely committed.
  3. "Escaped the edge of the sword"—Do you remember Elijah who spoke out against Ahaziah's idolatry in **II Kings 1**? Ahaziah sent three groups of 50 to capture Elijah. Two of them were swallowed up by the fire of God. The third captain begged for his life so God had Elijah go with him, but when it was all said and done, Ahaziah died, but Elijah lived. And ultimately, Elijah was just taken up in a whirlwind instead of dying (**II Kings 2:11**). Elijah says he completely committed.
- D. What are the faithful saying? Be committed to God's cause. Troubles will be coming, but keep surrendering to God. Endure by hanging on to Him in faith. His way works. Consider how this goes along with what Jesus said in **Matthew 28:18-20**. Jesus said we make disciples by baptizing them and teaching them to observe all that God commanded them. Someone recently pointed something about this passage out to me. The point is not that we aren't disciples until we have learned everything God has commanded us. We are disciples when we are baptized and committed to observing whatever God commands us. As we grow through the years, we'll learn more and more about what God commands. But right now, we need to be committed to doing whatever we learn. That is the disciple's commitment. And we need to be committed to that no matter the consequences—even if the consequence is being thrown to lions, tossed into fiery furnaces, or killed by the sword. When we have that commitment, God may deliver us from the death. Then again, He may deliver us through death into His eternal presence.

#### Conclusion:

Listen to the cloud. Get into the Word and learn these stories. Know them. Learn from them. Carry them with you wherever you go. Then, when you are put to the test you can access that cloud and hear their voices. Be convicted that God is. Be confident that He rewards those who seek Him. Be compliant to His way. Be committed to His cause. Don't throw your confidence away just because life is tough. Hang on to God. Live by faith and be commended as righteous by your faith.