

## Series introduction: The Others

### Hebrews 11:1-40

#### By Faith We Understand

**1** Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen. **2** For by it the elders obtained a good testimony.

**3** By faith we understand that the worlds were framed by the word of God, so that the things which are seen were not made of things which are visible.

#### Faith at the Dawn of History

**4** By faith Abel offered to God a more excellent sacrifice than Cain, through which he obtained witness that he was righteous, God testifying of his gifts; and through it he being dead still speaks.

**5** By faith Enoch was taken away so that he did not see death, "and was not found, because God had taken him"; for before he was taken he had this testimony, that he pleased God. **6** 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.

**7** 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 which he condemned the world and became heir of the righteousness which is according to faith.

#### Faithful Abraham

**8** 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. **9** By faith he dwelt in the land of promise as *in* a foreign country, dwelling in tents with Isaac and Jacob, the heirs with him of the same promise; **10** for he waited for the city which has foundations, whose builder and maker *is* God.

**11** By faith Sarah herself also received strength to conceive seed, and she bore a child when she was past the age, because she judged Him faithful who had promised.

**12** Therefore from one man, and him as good as dead, were born as *many* as the stars of the sky in multitude—innumerable as the sand which is by the seashore.

#### The Heavenly Hope

**13** These all died in faith, not having received the promises, but having seen them afar off were assured of them, embraced *them* and confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth. **14** For those who say such things declare plainly that they seek a homeland. **15** And truly if they had called to mind that *country* from which they had come out, they would have had opportunity to return. **16** But now they desire a better, that is, a heavenly *country*. Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God, for He has prepared a city for them.

### The Faith of the Patriarchs

**17** By faith Abraham, when he was tested, offered up Isaac, and he who had received the promises offered up his only begotten son, **18** of whom it was said, "In Isaac your seed shall be called," **19** concluding that God was able to raise *him* up, even from the dead, from which he also received him in a figurative sense.

**20** By faith Isaac blessed Jacob and Esau concerning things to come.

**21** By faith Jacob, when 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 departure of the children of Israel, and gave instructions concerning his bones.

### The Faith of Moses

**23** By faith Moses, when he was born, was hidden three months by his parents, because they saw *he* was a beautiful child; and they were not afraid of the king's command.

**24** By faith Moses, when he became of age, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter, **25** choosing rather to suffer affliction with the people of God than to enjoy the passing pleasures of sin, **26** esteeming the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures in Egypt; for he looked to the reward.

**27** By faith he forsook Egypt, not fearing the wrath of the king; for he endured as seeing Him who is invisible. **28** By faith he kept the Passover and the sprinkling of blood, lest he who destroyed the firstborn should touch them.

**29** By faith they passed through the Red Sea as by dry *land*, whereas the Egyptians, attempting to do so, were drowned.

### By Faith They Overcame

**30** By faith the walls of Jericho fell down after they were encircled for seven days. **31** By faith the harlot Rahab did not perish with those who did not believe, when she had received the spies with peace.

**32** And what more shall I say? For the time would fail me to tell of Gideon and Barak and Samson and Jephthah, also of David and Samuel and the prophets: **33** who through faith subdued kingdoms, worked righteousness, obtained promises, stopped the mouths of lions, **34** 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. **35** Women received their dead raised to life again.

**Others were tortured, not accepting deliverance, that they might obtain a better resurrection. 36 Still others had trial of mockings and scourgings, yes, and of chains and imprisonment. 37 They were stoned, they were sawn in two, were tempted, were slain with the sword. They wandered about in sheepskins and goatskins, being destitute, afflicted, tormented— 38 of whom the world was not worthy. They wandered in deserts and mountains, in dens and caves of the earth.**

**39 And all these, having obtained a good testimony through faith, did not receive the promise, 40 God having provided something better for us, that they should not be made perfect apart from us.**

What were the names of the others? The Bible does not tell us. I came to the conclusion many years ago that I would never be famous. When I die, CNN will most likely not report on it. I will be among the billions who have died before and will be forgotten. I will be an 'other.'

However, the 'others,' in Scripture are the most fascinating people. Without them, many of the stories in the Bible would never be possible. For the next three weeks, I want to share with you their stories—stories that you did not learn in Sunday school and stores that you probably can relate to more than stories about David, Moses, and Paul.

Tonight, we will look at the rope holders. Next week, we will look at the Levite's concubine, and the following week, we will look at the other 70 that followed Jesus.

## ROPE HOLDERS

### Lives of Support

**Acts 9:23-25**

#### Preview

**Have you ever had to make a quick getaway?**

Here is a quick summary of **Acts 9:1-22**:

- Saul is converted on the Damascus Road (**Acts 9: 1-9**)
- Ananias loves Saul (**Acts 9:10-19**)
- Saul preaches (**Acts 9:20-22**)

Most commentators think that there is a three-year gap between these two verses where Saul went to Arabia (see **Galatians 1:17-18**). **David Guzik: Luke skips the three years (perhaps) because he is writing a history of the church, not a history of Paul.**

**Read & Explain (What does it mean?): Acts 9:23-25 (Author = Paul)**

**23** Now after many [literally, 'sufficient'] days were past, the Jews plotted [counseled together, deliberated] to kill [literally, 'lift up'—can mean anything from, 'take him away,' to, 'kill'] him. **24** But their plot [plan, plot] became known to Saul. And they [the Jews] watched [to stand **beside** and watch carefully; **Robertson's New Testament Word Pictures: watching . . . on the sly**] the gates day and night, to kill [same word as before] him. **25** Then the disciples took him by night and let him down [send/let down from a higher place to a lower place by slackening or **loosening** something (rope)] through the wall in a large basket [a reed basket or hamper]. [The parallel passage for this text is **2 Corinthians 11:32-33: In Damascus the governor, under Aretas the king, was guarding the city of the Damascenes with a garrison, desiring to arrest me; but I was let down in a basket through a window in the wall, and escaped from his hands.**]

Biblical Architecture: Houses were built on the outsides of the walls (or in the walls themselves if it was a casemate wall—parallel walls with a space between). Lowering Saul down was ingenious, but it was simply the work of copycats—it happened in **Joshua 2:15** (to the two spies that Joshua sent to spy out Jericho) and in **1 Samuel 19:11-12** (to David who was spared by his wife Michal).

Sneaking out the back door might not seem like the spiritual thing to do, but it's exactly what Jesus told His disciples to do in **Matthew 10:23a: When they persecute you in this city, flee to another. Barnes' Notes: Christianity requires us to sacrifice our lives only when we cannot avoid it without denying the Savior, or abandoning the principles of our holy religion.** Sometimes it is OK to run away.

Let's picture the scene: Saul is trapped in a city and needs to get out. He's at the house of a believer. This house is literally the space between two walls. He's not between a rock and a hard place—he's between two rocks. Somebody gets the bright idea to learn from the past and remembers the story of the spies at Jericho or David escaping. They decide to put Saul in a basket, tie a rope around it, and lower him over the wall.

Somebody had to have a hold of that rope. In fact, it was a group of somebodies. Moreover, we don't even know their names, but they were tasked with keeping the man of God safe. This would have been a heart-pounding escape with a garrison looking for them. I don't know the last time you picked up a fully-grown man, but they're typically heavy. Somebody had to love Saul enough to hold that rope. What do you think was probably going through Saul's mind? "Don't let go of that rope. Hold on with everything you've got. Hold on. Don't let go of the rope."

Performing this task successfully (which they did) took a few things from those unnamed disciples:

1. **Choice**: They chose to go there and risk their lives. They chose to get up in the middle of the night and to stay up all night. I asked Charles Alexander one time what the most powerful thing in the world was and he said it was choice.
2. **Courage**: They risked their lives for Saul's sake. If they were caught, they would have been executed. They were putting their lives on the line for the gospel. Saul didn't have the reputation for being the ultimate Christian yet—he doesn't become Paul for four more chapters. They had the love mentioned in **1 John 3:16: By this we know love, because He laid down His life for us. And we also ought to lay down our lives for the brethren.**
3. **Physical** strength: They were not too tired to do the work. They did not burn themselves out on their own work so that they had no strength left for God's work. God wants to use your body, not just your spirit. Be in shape enough to do the work that God has called you to do. I'm not saying you have to be ready to run the Chicago marathon (that was earlier today and we have an SHBCer that was in it). But have the strength to server. And I'm not talking to you if you're going through a period of illness—I just got over having mono for the second time in two years—and this last bout was for five months. I was literally unable to serve the way I wanted to serve—but now I'm back!
4. **Cooperation**: This happened by night, so they had to have a set time to meet. They had to meet at a specific place. Someone had to get the supplies. Someone had to plan. They all had to coordinate lowering the rope—all of them working together. They brought simple, but effective things: rope, and a basket. Sometimes the simplest things are the best things. I know many times in my life I try to overcomplicate things, but these disciples made use of what God had put in their hands—and they saved the greatest evangelist the world has ever known. And we don't even know their names—but we will meet them one day!

### Application (What is the point?)

Here are a few reasons to not let go of the rope:

1. You don't know who is in the **basket**. You might have a Saul in the basket. I have no clue what God is going to do with you, but I am not letting go of your ropes.
2. You might be the **only one** holding the rope. If you are the only one holding on, and you let go, it makes it harder on everyone because letting go of the rope makes a mess. When someone is at the end of her rope, you better bet at the other end not letting go.

**Personalization (What do I do with that?)****1. Remember that my rope holders **love** me**

I love faithful hands. Faithful hands that loved those on the other end. Faithful hands that were at risk of being caught themselves. Faithful hands that often go unnamed. Faithful hands that stayed true to the task until the job was done. You didn't read that Saul broke any bones because they dropped him, did you?

I love faithful hands. Faithful hands that prepare for those that come. Faithful hands that serve those that arrive. Faithful hands that clean up when all are gone. Faithful hands that hold the ropes so men and women can serve God in the roles to which they have been called. You've probably heard that behind every good man is a good woman. Behind every good man are people that are faithful at holding ropes. Faithful at holding the rope of daily prayer. Faithful at holding the rope of having a regular time with God. Faithful at holding the rope of regular giving. Faithful at holding the rope of Christian community. Faithful at holding the rope of love to a lost and dying world.

However, rope holding is not without pain. Rope holding causes blisters if you don't hold the rope tight enough. Rope holding causes cramped hands if you hold the rope too long. Rope holding rarely is noticed and vastly underappreciated. Rope holding is not glamorous or the quick way to the top. But rope holding is critical. Everything God calls you to do is important—no matter how big or small you think the rope is.

**2. Acknowledge that my rope is **worth** holding because of the people in the basket**

Who has God put in your basket? Who do you need to hold the ropes for? Everybody needs help some time or another. I know that many of you have my ropes. Many of you work tirelessly to make this church the place Jesus wants it to be. Many of you pray for me and I cannot begin to express how grateful I am. Many of you get here early to set up and to welcome people as they come in. Many of you come up after services and ask what you can do to help. Keep holding those ropes. Don't let go. Keep holding those ropes. I am counting on you to do your part. Don't let go of the rope. Be an encourager. Be a helper. Don't let go of the rope. It's not about holding the pastor's rope for fame or glory. Hold the rope for Jesus. Don't let go because Jesus loves those in the basket. Jesus came to seek and to save the lost. If you've got someone you are praying for to come to know Jesus Christ, don't let go of the rope. Keep holding on. You will get tired and your hands will hurt, but we are all here today because we are people that have been in the basket. We have experienced someone holding our ropes. Don't let go of the rope. Don't let go of the rope. Don't let go of the rope. Somebody loved you enough to not let go of your rope. Don't let go of the rope.

**POINT TO PONDER: DON'T LET GO OF THE ROPE!**