FIRST (SCOTS) SERMONS

"ENOCH: THE MAN WHO DID NOT TASTE DEATH"

Scripture Lesson: Hebrews 11: 5-6

This sermon was preached by The Rev. Dr. L. Holton Siegling, Jr. on Sunday, August 17, 2025 at First (Scots) Presbyterian Church in Charleston, South Carolina.

Hebrews 11: 5-6

5 By faith Enoch was taken so that he did not experience death, and "he was not found, because God had taken him." For it was attested before he was taken away that "he had pleased God." 6 And without faith it is impossible to please him, for whoever would approach God must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who seek him.

Enoch: The Man Who Did Not Taste Death

Leader: The word of the Lord.
People: Thanks be to God.

Once again, we have the blessed privilege of turning our attention to the Word of God. While for most of us this is certainly not our first encounter with the stories of the Bible, it may be the first time that we have enjoyed the freedom and responsibility of exploring one of the Bible's shorter but more remarkable biographies. I have found myself drawn of late to some of the, shall we say, not-so-well-known members of the cloud of witnesses in light of our theme for this year's fall kickoff—our Rally Day. You may have already seen it: "Built on Witness, Bound to Christ," and that theme helps us better understand how to "run the race" of faith. The Biblical underpinnings for that theme come from Hebrews 12:1, which reads in part, "Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses… let us run with perseverance the race that is set before us." We'll talk more about that passage on Rally Day, which is Sunday, September 7th, but for now, let me say that it speaks to a heritage of faith that has brought us to this moment in time, as well as the cloud of witnesses who have contributed to our heritage. Enoch was one of those people! I must admit that I feel somewhat vulnerable—not due to the complexity of the subject, as it is not like the Book of Revelation that some of us are studying on Tuesdays and Thursdays—but because there's so little information available. What's more, I am quite certain that I don't come anywhere close to measuring up to this faithful child of God that we first meet in our Old Testament Lesson this morning.

The information really is limited. In the fifth chapter of Genesis we are given just a few brief lines about him—they can be read in a single breath, and then that's it. His name is Enoch, and he was Adam and Eve's great, great, great, great, great, great, great grandson. That's seven generations after Adam and Eve when Enoch came along—and he lived to the ripe old age of 365. But if we think that's old, consider this: of his several sons and daughters, one of them holds the record for the longest documented lifespan in the Bible. His name was Methuselah, and he lived to be 969 years old.

This morning's reading from Genesis, however, tells us only two things about Enoch, but we need to keep in mind that they are significant, for what is said about Enoch was never said about anyone who came before him. First, we are told that "Enoch walked with God." That's the first time that phrase appears in the Bible. Before the fall, Adam and Eve walked in the Garden—and God also walked in the Garden—but even their initial closeness with God seems to pale in comparison with how Enoch walked with God. Right away, a spotlight is shone on Enoch's life—it functions for us much like a signpost and invites us to stop and think about what it means to walk with God. The second thing we learn about

Enoch is how his walk with God ended. About that, the Bible simply says this: "And he was not, for God took him." And that's it. That's basically the whole of Enoch's Old Testament biography. By the time the New Testament Lesson comes along, his story is obviously well known. Where our Rally Day theme begins in Hebrews chapter 12, with the words, "Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses…," one of those witnesses here in Hebrews chapter 11 is Enoch. Listen again to the two verses that are dedicated to Enoch in the New Testament: "By faith Enoch was taken from this life, so that he did not experience death; 'He could not be found because God had taken him away.' For before he was taken, he was commended as one who pleased God. And without faith, it is impossible to please God, because anyone who comes to Him must believe that He exists and that He rewards those who earnestly seek Him." Those two verses help us to understand that Enoch's relationship with God was characterized by faith—not by perfectionism or flawless living, but faith.

Not surprisingly, when the Scriptures provide less than a complete account of a person or an event, it is natural for the imagination of God's people to go into overdrive. Jewish tradition, along with apocryphal texts such as the Book of Enoch and the Book of Jubilee, provide helpful insights. Still, because they are not a part of the canon of Scripture—canon coming from the Greek word meaning "measuring rod"—Protestants do not consider them to be Biblical standards by which we measure our lives. While we may take them seriously, we don't count them as authoritative for understanding what the Bible says on the matter. Beyond the apocryphal books and Jewish tradition, there are also various Arabic legends. Some material even claims that Enoch invented writing and mathematics, while others say he returned to Earth after being taken into heaven to preach repentance. There are even fanciful tales of chariots and fiery ascents, perhaps influenced by the only other character in the Bible who did not taste death: when Elisha was preparing to receive the prophetic mantle from his mentor, the prophet Elijah, he saw what was recorded in 2 Kings 2: "As they continued walking and talking, a chariot of fire and horses of fire separated the two of them, and Elijah ascended in a whirlwind into heaven." All that said, for our discussion this morning, we'll set aside these legends and focus on the simple and beautiful record: "Enoch walked with God, and he was not, for God took him."

This leads us to an important question: What does it mean to walk with God? When is a person walking with God, and when are they not? What are the signs along this journey, and if someone walks long enough with Him, where might it lead? One of the oldest mistakes in religious history is the belief that a holier life must be an isolated one. This kind of thinking often results in retreats to monasteries or cloisters, fostering a lonely piety that views the crowd as a distraction rather than a mission field. However, there's nothing in the Genesis account to suggest that Enoch avoided people. In fact, if he had sons and daughters, and we can assume grandchildren, he must have spent considerable time engaged in daily life, at the marketplace, at the city gates, and in everyday commerce. Enoch walked with God among people, not apart from them. It can be tempting to think we draw closer to God by hiding from the world or retreating to quiet corners, surrounding ourselves only with the "holy." But Jesus Himself never shied away from the crowds. He moved toward the hurting, the needy, and the broken-hearted. To walk with God means to engage with the world, not to run from it. That said, solitude has its place. When utilized correctly, it can be like refined gold for the soul. Jesus often sought solitude for prayer. However, when solitude becomes an excuse to avoid serving others, it ceases to be holiness and instead becomes self-absorption disguised as piety.

I think of the little story about a boy, perhaps nine years old, who was carrying his younger brother on his back. Someone asked him, "Isn't he too heavy for you?" The boy replied, "No, mister—he's my brother." This illustrates how we can carry one another's burdens; the load doesn't feel heavy when love does the lifting. Walking with God never means ignoring the wounded person in the ditch. To walk with God is to walk with humanity in all its mess, pain, and glory. The Hebrew concept encompasses two ideas: God as a traveling companion beside you and God ahead of you, just in sight, calling you forward. Sometimes He's close enough to hear your whispers; at other times, you may feel like you're almost running just to keep Him in view. Regardless, walking with God means moving in His direction through obedience, trust, and perseverance. It is an ongoing journey, a daily decision to follow the path that God sets before us. This doesn't mean achieving sinless perfection. Even if we could eliminate every visible sin from our lives, we would still face the greatest

sin of all—pride. Enoch was not taken because he achieved flawless piety; he was translated because God wanted to send a message to the early world: immortality is possible, and death is not the end. Walking with God means acknowledging that you may stumble but choosing to keep moving forward regardless. It involves learning to trust even when the path ahead is unclear, obeying even when it comes at a high cost, and hoping even when the night feels long.

Let's remember some of the saints we know from Scripture—David, Peter, Paul, and women. None of them were perfect; they all grappled with doubts, failures, and fears. Yet, they continued to walk forward, and that is what truly matters. Theologians may use grand terms like fusion, synthesis, koinonia, or the marriage of heaven and earth, but the idea is simple: the more you walk with God, the more His ways become your ways, and His heart aligns with yours. The perfect absorbs the imperfect, and the eternal reshapes the temporal. This transformation happens to a soul that remains in close company with God over time. It's a gradual process, much like water slowly eroding stone, but the transformation is profound. Walking with God changes us from the inside out. It creates a deep communion that reshapes our identity, desires, and purpose.

Regarding Enoch's departure, we may wonder how it happened. Was it through a chariot of fire like Elijah, or did God simply take his hand and guide him across that final threshold without allowing him to experience death? Scripture does not provide those details, and that's okay. The essential question is not how but why, and Genesis provides the answer: because Enoch walked with God. This is the good news we need to hear: God's presence is not distant or indifferent. He walks with us, encourages us to move forward, and ultimately invites us into a union that even death cannot touch. I sometimes imagine Enoch's life as one long day—365 years represented as 365 days. In the morning, he began walking with God in the freshness of youth. At noon, amid the heat of trials and temptations, he continued to keep pace. In the afternoon, as age began to slow his steps, he didn't stop. By evening, when the sun dipped low and the shadows stretched long, he and God had become so accustomed to each other's company that there was no awkwardness or distance left to cover. Then I imagine God saying something like this: "Enoch, it's a lot farther back to your house than it is to mine. Why don't you come home with Me tonight?" And Enoch was not, for God took him.

Friends, in one way or another, that is the invitation extended to every believer who walks with God until the end. When your day's work is done and the sun sets on your journey, He will take you by the hand and say, "Come on home." Maybe some of you feel like you're just starting your walk with God. Or perhaps you feel you've wandered far off the path. You might be weighed down by grief, guilt, or uncertainty. Hear this: walking with God doesn't require perfection, only persistence. It's about taking steady steps, turning back when you stray, and being willing to keep company with Him day after day. Enoch's story is brief, but its message is life-giving. To walk with God is to live in hope, to live in relationship, and to live with the promise that death does not have the final word. May we all, by God's grace, learn to walk with Him more closely, more faithfully, and more joyfully until the day He calls us home.

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.