

A Study of the Book of Hebrews

Jesus is Better

Sermon # 18

“What Faith Is and What Faith Does”

Hebrews 11:1-7

Faith is a common denominator. Every one alive daily expresses faith in something. No one can live a single day without exercising faith – faith in the physical world. When you awoke and went into the bathroom this morning you flipped a light switch and you had faith that it would work. When you get in your car you have faith that it will start. When you mail a letter you have faith the postal system will get it to the right address. When you go to the pharmacy you have faith that the pharmacist will give you the right drugs. Every time you walk into this building or any building you are expressing faith in the architect and the workmen.

Faith is also expressed in the spiritual realm. Each of us regardless of our back-grounds or educations, our social status or our talents can express faith. The difference between the faith we exercise in our daily routine and our religious faith is the object of that faith. Again everyone places their faith in something or someone. The Moslem puts his faith in the Koran and in Mohammed. The Hindu puts his faith in reincarnation and Nirvana. Some place their faith in them-selves, and their own good works. Yet, none of these can save, because in each case the object of faith is wrong. Your faith is only as good as the object in which you place your faith. The Bible insists that we personally put our faith and trust in Jesus Christ. Acts 4:12 says,

"Nor is there salvation in any other, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved."

This morning in our study of the book of Hebrews we come to the greatest teaching in the Bible on the subject of faith found here in eleventh chapter of the book of Hebrews. Today I want us to see two things; "What faith is and what faith does."

WHAT FAITH IS (11:1-3)

To understand what faith is we must get past certain misconceptions about faith.

The first misconception is that faith is the ability to manipulate God. Whether they realize it or not this is the approach of the proponents of the "health and wealth" prosperity gospel. This approach only sees faith as having one aim – one fruit – the ability to get from God what will make life easier and more satisfying for ourselves.

The second misconception about faith is that faith is merely adherence to the right set of beliefs. What you must do is believe the right doctrine. But Paul says in 2 Tim. 1:12, "*I know whom I have believed.*" Paul said he knew whom he had believed, not what he had believed. If your beliefs are not founded on the right person it does not matter what else you believe.

The third misconception about faith is that faith is a blind leap into the dark. To many unbelievers faith is the anti-thesis of science. To these individuals saying "*you just have to have faith*" is the same as saying "*just have to act contrary to everything you know and trust*

that it will all work out for the best." But as we will see this is not biblical faith.

The last misconception about faith is that faith is simply devotion to whatever god one happens to follow. It can be said, "He is a person of deep faith" about a follower of Mohammed or the Ayatollah or of a Christian. What matters is that they are sincere. But unfortunately it is possible to be sincerely wrong. It is possible to believe firmly in something that just is not true.

So what does real faith look like? Fortunate for us, Hebrews chapter eleven portrays what real biblical faith looks like.

"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."

True faith is confident obedience to God's word in spite of circumstances or consequences. Faith is described in a two-fold way. It is the *"substance of things hoped for,"* and *"the evidence of things not seen."*

First, the word translated *"substance"* (*hupostasis*) in the Greek, means literally 'to stand under or to support.' Faith is the foundation that gives the believer the confidence to stand. Dr. J. Vernon McGee says, *"Many folk... feel like the little girl who was asked to define faith. She said, "Well, faith is believing what you know ain't so." That is what faith means too many. They think it is a leap in the dark, an*

uncertainty, or some sort of a gamble. If that is what it means to you, then you do not have faith, because "faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen," which means that faith rests on a foundation." [J. Vernon McGee. Thru The Bible Commentary. (electronic ed. - 1997). (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1981)]

Dr. J. Oswald Sanders said: *"Faith enables the believing soul to treat the future as present and the invisible as seen."*

Secondly, word describing what faith is, is translated "evidence" and means "conviction." Evidence is something you take into court to prove your case. This inward conviction enables the believer to believe things not yet seen, that God will perform what he has promised.

Faith is *substance* and *evidence*—substance for a scientific mind, and evidence for a legal mind. If you really want to believe, you can believe.

I want to quote Dr. McGee one more time. He said, *"The question is whether you believe God or not. Don't come up with the "I've got intellectual problems" excuse, because that won't work. The thing that keeps men from the Word of God is sin. It is sin in your life that keeps you from coming to God. It is the heart that needs to believe—it is "the heart that believeth unto righteousness." When you are ready to give up your sin, the Holy Spirit will make real to you the Word of God."* [Ibid.]

WHAT FAITH DOES (11:4-7)

Somehow in our world today "faith" has come to mean something that we believe intellectually that can be divorced from the way we live our lives on a day to day basis. Faith is somehow suppose to be

something believed privately but does not touch how we relate to other human's who have their own frame work of faith. That is not what the Bible refers to as faith.

This morning I want you to see that this passage reveals three characteristics of real faith!

First, *True Faith Worships God!* – The Example of Abel (v. 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."

According to the account in Genesis chapter four, both Abel and Cain sought to worship God, bringing their gifts before Him. Abel's sacrifice was accepted by God but Cain's was not. But in spite of the fact that the account in Genesis (4:3-7) does not explain why Abel's offering was accepted and Cain's was not. There continues to be much speculation over why God accepted Abel's offering and rejected Cain. Some point out that Abel made an animal sacrifice, symbolic of the shedding blood for atonement for his sin while Cain's grain offering was unaccept-able since it contained no life and blood. Others point to the costliness of Abel's offering compared with the cheaper value of Cain's. Still others point to the fact that Abel offered the first of his flock and Cain's had nothing to do with the first fruits but may have been leftovers.

All we really know is that here in Hebrews we are told *"Abel offered a more excellent sacrifice."* It seems most probable the difference in the sacrifices was in that of the heart not of the sacrifice. In some way Cain held back from God in his heart.

We do not know the details of Abel's faith. We do not just how much had been revealed to Abel about how he was to worship. We do know that his faith caused him to respond to God in lavish unrestrained worship. He chose the choicest lamb as an offering and he brought it to the place of sacrifice.

When Jesus responded to a question about the kind of worship acceptable to God, he said "...those who worship Him must worship in spirit and in truth" (John 4:24). The "truth" refers to the revelation of God in his Word. It is not enough to be sincere and passionate in worship. We must worship the Lord according to the way he has revealed himself. Faith responds to this revelation in worship. It would seem significant that this chapter on faith begins with a word about worship!

I am no one's final judge, but I find it extremely hard to believe that a person whose faith never compels them to come into the Lord's house to worship is truly saved.

True faith looks for an opportunity to worship!!

Second, *True Faith Walks with God* – The Example of Enoch (vv. 5-6) "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."

Enoch is a fascinating biblical character whose story is found in Genesis 5. Enoch lived in one of the darkest periods of the history of the world. Enoch lived just before God had to destroy the earth

because of man's evil, yet Enoch managed to keep himself pure. Enoch walked with God.

There are several interesting things about Enoch's "walk with God."

First of all Enoch had not always walked with God. The Genesis record indicates Enoch had not always "*walked with God*" (Gen 5:21-24). For the first 65 years of his life, Enoch did not walk with God. Presumably he was a man of his times. But from the birth of his son, Methuselah, throughout the remaining 300 years of his life he "*walked with God.*" The Hebrew form of the verb means he walked closely and continually with God. The walk that Enoch experienced was one of deepening intimacy with God.

Secondly, other than fathering sons and daughters the only thing we are told about Enoch is that he "walked with God." There is no indication that was a great deliverer or statesman or prophet. As he faced every day and the demands that it brought - "*he walked with God.*" On bad days when everything seemed to go wrong - "*he walked with God.*" When he did feel like it - "*he walked with God.*"

Third, the hallmark of Enoch's life was that "*he pleased God*" (v. 5). What a wonderful description of a believer's life. Can that be said of your life? Is God pleased with how you use your time? Is God pleased with what you read? Is God pleased with the words you speak? Is God pleased with your plans for the future? Have you even bothered to consult God with your plans?

Enoch's walk of faith delivered him from the consequence of

death. Will yours? This verse does not say that faith is simply one way to please God: it is the only way.

Third, *True Faith Works For God* – The Example of Noah. (v. 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."

The story of Noah's generation is the story of the degeneration of humanity into sin. (Gen 6:5-7). *"The wickedness of man was great...every intent of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually... The earth was corrupt before God, and the earth was filled with violence."* (Gen 6: 5, 11) It is also the story of the marvelous grace of God, in saving believing Noah and his family. Noah stood alone against the whole world. Jesus used the *"days of Noah"* as representative of the condition of the world before his own second coming (Matt. 24:37-39) and indicated that his followers should be prepared to face the same kind of scornful hostility that Noah met day after day.

Noah built an Ark because he believed God. Every tree he felled shouted, *"I believe God!"* Every board he sawed shouted, *"I believe God!"* Every swing of his hammer, shouted, *"I believe God!"* Every seam to which he applied the pitch shouted, *"I believe God!"*

Do your works reflect your faith? Faith will make us work. Only his steadfast belief in God kept Noah faithful for the 120 years cutting the trees and planning the construction of the Ark.

The ark was 450 feet long, 75 ft wide and 45 ft. high (Gen

6:15), that means that it was nearly one and a half times the length of a football field and more than four stories high, it could hardly be hidden from the ridicule of the scoffers. Can you imagine the mockery and jeering that Noah must have faced on a daily basis as he built this huge ship? It was a hundred miles from the nearest ocean and far too big to move.

The majority of the people simply refused to believe Noah's witness concerning the coming flood. Yet, he in faith went right on working and witnessing, building the ark and warning of the coming judgment. Then as a final act of faith, he and his family stepped into the ark and closed the door.

Noah was a man of faith and his life continually showed his faith. Does yours? Noah worshiped God faithfully as Abel had, and he walked with God faithfully as Enoch had and he worked for God faithfully.

Conclusion

"The three year old felt secure in his father's arms as dad stood in the middle of the pool. But dad, for fun, began walking slowly toward the deep end, gently chanting, 'Deeper and deeper and deeper,' as the water rose higher and higher on the child. The lad's face registered increasing degrees of panic, and held all the more tightly to his father, who of course, easily touched the bottom.

Had the little boy been able to analyze his situation, he'd have realized there was no reason for increased anxiety. The water's depth in any part of the pool was over his head. Even in the shallowest part,

had he not been held up, he would have drowned. His safety anywhere in the pool depended on Dad.

At various points in our lives, all of us feel we are getting out of our depth – problems abound, a job lost, someone dies. Our temptation is to panic, for we feel – we’ve lost control. Yet, as with the child in the pool, the truth is we’ve never been in control over the most valuable things of life. We’ve always been held up by the grace of God, our Father, that does not change. God is never out of His depth and therefore we’re as safe when we’re ‘going deeper’ as we have ever been.” [Craig Larson. Illustrations for Preaching and Teaching. (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1993) p. 214.]

Perhaps God wants to move you ‘deeper’ than ever before. It is faith that will give you confidence and conviction to worshiped God faithfully as Abel had, walked with God faithfully as Enoch and to work for God faithfully as Noah did.