**Bethel Christian Fellowship**

**Fair Lawn, NJ**

**Hebrews (33): The Book Of Better Things**

**“The Nature Of True Faith”**

**Hebrews 11:1-7**

**February 2, 2025**

When we turn to Hebrews 11, we are at a high point in the Word of God. This is unquestionably one of the most famous portrayals of faith found anywhere in the Bible. In the words of one author, it’s “the Roll Call of Heroes and Heroines of the Faith” (Leland Ryken, Ryken’s Bible Handbook).

But contrary to how some have approached this chapter, it’s not a stand-alone treatise on the nature of faith. It’s imbedded within the overall argument and purpose of the book. To treat this chapter as if it was unrelated to what has preceded it – or what follows – would be a great disservice to our author. What he has written must be viewed within the context of Hebrews as a whole.

As we know, the people to whom this letter was written were under great pressure because of their Christian faith. Continued persecution had led some to think it would be safer if they defected from Christianity and returned to the ways of Judaism, as outlined in the Old Testament. Our author, therefore, has been laboring to explain why Jesus Christ is far superior to all that has come before Him. In a word, He is *better*.

We’ve also seen our author’s constant exhortations to persevere in the faith. Just a few verses earlier, he has exhorted them to remain loyal and not to give up: “*You need to persevere so that when you have done the will of God, you will receive what he has promised*.” (10:36) Then immediately following Hebrews 11, he has exhorted them to “*run with perseverance the race marked out for us*” (12:1).

So, tucked in between this call for perseverance at the end of chapter 10 and then again at the beginning of chapter 12, we find this amazing chapter on *faith*. **Q.** Why? **A.** Because the examples of faith that are found here are all encouragements for these first century Christians to press on in their faith, no matter what happens – even if they were publicly exposed to insult, and persecution and imprisonment. In the end, they will be richly rewarded, for those who *live by faith* will be saved (10:37-39). What follows are these encouragements to persevering faith.

Our author begins by describing the true nature of faith (11:1-3). Then, in verses 4-40, he cites a variety of men and women who lived by faith and demonstrated confidence in the promises of God. In doing so, he covers four historical timeframes; **(1)** the period before the flood (Abel, Enoch, Noah; vv. 4-7); **(2)** the age of the Patriarchs (Abraham, Sarah, Isaac, Jacob, Joseph; vv. 8-22); **(3)** the period of Moses and the Israelites (vv. 23-29); **(4)** the period after the Mosaic Law (vv. 30-40). Today’s study focuses on the meaning of faith (vv. 1-3) and the first three men of faith (vv. 4-7).

**A. The Meaning of Faith (11:1-3):** “*Now faith is confidence in what we hope for and assurance about what we do not see. This is what the ancients were commended for. By faith we understand that the universe was formed at God’s command, so that what is seen was not made out of what was visible*.”

In verse 1, the NIV uses the words “confidence” and “assurance” to describe the nature of faith. The ESV and the NASB use the words “assurance” and “conviction.” With that in mind, we can begin to see what faith is *not*:

* Faith is not wishful thinking.
* Faith is not a blind leap into the dark.
* Faith is not trusting in something or someone about whom we know nothing.
* Faith is not believing in our heart what our mind tells us isn’t true.
* Faith is not the enemy of reason, nor is it the opposite of knowledge.

**Q.** What then is faith? **A.** Faith is *warranted*, well-grounded, justified confidence and trust in some person or in some truth. This trust is justified because there are rock solid facts that make believing in something or someone a wise and reasonable thing to do.

Faith, therefore, is the bedrock assurance that what we hope for *will* come to pass. Faith is our reliance on God to do what He has said He will do – even when present circumstances suggest otherwise. In the words of C. S. Lewis; “Faith . . . is the art of holding on to things your reason has once accepted, in spite of your changing moods . .” (Mere Christianity).

In verse 2, “the ancients” are much the same as “the forefathers” to whom God spoke in the past (1:1). They are the past heroes of the Old Testament whom God “commended” for their faith (He declared them righteous because of their faith). They are “*the cloud of witnesses*” who “testify” that enduring faith is indeed possible (Cf. 12:1). We can look to them as a means of encouraging us to press on, despite our adversities. What God has enabled them to do, He can and will enable us to do (Cf. 11:4ff).

In verse 3, the author and all his readers are included in the “we.” Faith gives *us* convictions about creation. Faith is *not* believing that the world was made out of some existing formless matter. Faith is believing that when God spoke, the world came into existence out of nothing. The emphasis in Genesis 1 is its repeated use of the phrase “*And God said*.” The point of this first chapter in the Bible is that creation originated with God. For our author, it’s faith in that truth that assures him (and us) that God created it just as He said He did. What is visible didn’t originate with anything that was visible.

**B. The First Three Men of Faith (11:4-7).** The story of Abel is found in Genesis 4:1-15; the story of Enoch is told in Genesis 5:21-24; and Noah’s story covers Genesis 5:28-9:29. What’s important to note is that in none of these stories is “faith” ever mentioned. All that is said about these men is that they “pleased” God, or “found favor with God.” That’s how we know they had great faith.

1. The Example of Abel (11:4): “*By faith Abel brought God a better offering than Cain did. By faith he was commended as righteous, when God spoke well of his offerings. And by faith Abel still speaks, even though he is dead.*”

**Q.** What do we know about Abel? **A.** He was the second son of Adam and Eve; their first-born son was Cain. It was because of his “faith” that Abel’s sacrifice was “more acceptable” than the one offered by Cain. **Q.** Why? **A.** It wasn’t because he brought a better sacrifice. A sacrifice of animal life (Abel) is not inherently superior to an offering of plant life (Cain). The contrast is between the careless, thoughtless offering of Cain, who brought “some of the fruits of the soil” (Gen. 4:3) and the choice, generous offering of Abel, who brought the “the fattest of the firstborn of his flock” (Gen. 4:4). As a result, “the Lord looked with favor on Abel and his offering” (Gen. 4:5) as opposed to Cain.

That took “faith,” says our author. Why? Because Abel brought the best he had. Why? He believed that God would continue to cause his flocks to flourish. For that reason, God commended Abel as a ‘righteous’ man when He spoke well of him (Cf. Gen 4:6ff). And even though he is dead, his *faith* is a living voice; it still speaks to us.

2. The Example of Enoch (11:5): “*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*.” Enoch was the seventh generation after Adam. He had numerous brothers and sisters (Gen. 5:19) but none of them were so blessed so as to be translated into the presence of God without having to die physically.

But there is nothing in the Old Testament text that says anything about Enoch’s faith. Yet we know he had faith because of what we read in Genesis 5:24; “*Enoch walked with God*.”That’s what faith is: walking and talking and communing with God. It’s the difference between merely living versus living each moment in His presence, making each decision as if He were tangibly present!

What follows is our author’s basic principle: “*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*” (v. 6). The faith that’s in view is the faith which must first have an object (we must believe that God exists) and which leads us to action (he rewards those who diligently seek him). In the words of F. F. Bruce, “Those who approach Him can do so in full confidence that He exists, that His word is true, and that He will never put off or disappoint the soul that sincerely seeks Him. For all that He has revealed of Himself, whether through the prophets or in His Son, assures us that He is altogether worthy of His people’s trust” (The Epistle to the Hebrews).

3. The Example of Noah (11:7): “*By faith Noah, when warned about things not yet seen, in holy fear built an ark to save his family. By his faith he condemned the world and became heir of the righteousness that is in keeping with faith*.”

Noah’s faith is seen in his building of the ark. When God announced that He would do something *unprecedented*, Noah took God at His word. He and all his friends lived inland (modern day Turkey?), so it’s entirely possible that none of them had ever seen a flood – or a boat for that matter. It must have seemed entirely ridiculous to his neighbors when he took on this project. But that didn’t matter to Noah. God had spoken and Noah believed what God had said.

In the end, Noah “*condemned the world*.” His righteous obedience to God’s word showed how sinful the world was when they rejected God’s moral standards (Cf. Gen. 6:3ff). The flood waters came, the world was destroyed, and Noah and his family were preserved – just as God had said!

But once again, the word “faith” is never mentioned in this well-known story. Yet Noah’s faith was evidenced by his willingness to believe that God would surely do what He had promised He would do. That’s how we know that Noah had faith.

Before we close, I’d like us to think about this for just a few moments. We have begun a New Year. Some of us may be struggling in our faith. We’re not sure how we are going to hold up under the pressures and burdens that we are carrying. Things may get worse before they get better. So, what do we do? How do to gain greater faith as we move forward? The answer is not hard to find.

Paul says in Romans 10:17; “*So faith comes by hearing and hearing through the Word of Christ*” (ESV). The “Word of Christ” is the “*word about Christ*” (NIV), as we have been reading and hearing all through Hebrews. The more we hear about Him and learn about Him and reflect on Him, the more we will believe in Him and trust in Him. Here’s just a few things He wants us to believe.

**1.** He is the same yesterday, today, and forever. He will never leave us or forsake us, no matter how difficult or confusing our present circumstances may be (Hebrews 13:5-6).

**2.** We don’t need to be anxious about what we will eat or what we will drink or with what we will clothe ourselves (or how we will pay all our bills). If we seek first His kingdom and His righteousness, all “these things” shall be added to us. (Matthew 6:31-33).

**3.** No matter what 2025 may hold for us, our lives are safely in His hands. God sovereignly orders everything, and we can trust Him to do with us what is best for us. Not even a sparrow can fall to the ground apart from the will of our Father in heaven – and we are worth more than many sparrows! (Matthew 10:29-30).

When it is all said and done, Jesus Christ really is better than anything or anyone this world has to offer. Every promise He has ever made about our eternal future is more rock solid than Gibraltar. So, let’s keep on clinging to Christ! We’ve got everything to gain if we do.