

Sermon Notes of Rev.Dr.I.J.W.Oakley (1-4-1979 Strandtown Baptist Church)

Hebrews 11

Introduction

Chapter 11 of Hebrews concentrates on faith. Some call it “the Westminster Abbey of the New Testament”. A long list of heroes of Old Testament, and allusions to great Jewish heroes between the testaments, some named, some un-named. Mentioned here that they might be an inspiration to those alive now. Statesmen, soldiers, prophets, men of God, patriarchs, shepherds, widow women and martyrs. At different times, with different tasks, but all characterised by faith, fitted for their tasks by faith, lived their lives by faith, mighty achievements wrought by faith.

Not able to deal adequately with this chapter in this short series, but will see what faith is as defined by this book. Drawing from the examples found in this chapter, we will see how it affects every aspect of life. Finally, heed the summons to faith, and seek to understand what it can do for us.

Faith defined in Hebrews

Need to let each writer speak for himself when we study the scriptures. Tendency to assume they always mean exactly the same when they use the same word. Not so. For example, when Paul uses the word “faith”, he means personal trust and commitment to Christ for salvation. James uses the word for believing certain things about God. But in Hebrews the writer refers to faith in these terms: **Faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen** (Hebrews 11:1), i.e. assurance of things hoped for, conviction of things not seen. Faith makes the unseen world of God real, and it becomes the primary object of life. Faith makes us treat the present world around us, which we can see, as transitory and of secondary importance.

The great world of spiritual reality, which centres in God and His word, though unseen by human eye, is the really important thing. Faith has absolute certainty and unwavering conviction about eternal and spiritual realities. Living and effective power in life. Firmly holds God’s promises and word. Walks by faith and not by sight. Absolute certainty, not wistful longing. Not a “perhaps”, but unshakable conviction. Whole of life is shaped by this conviction about the unseen God, and the truth and reliability of His promises.

In the early days of persecution, a humble Christian was before the judges. He said nothing the authorities could do could shake him, because he believed his God was the true God, and He would be true to him. When the judge asked him “Do you really think that the like of you will go to God and His glory?” he confidently replied, “I do not think, I know.”

When John Bunyan was going through days of doubt and was tortured by uncertainty, he wrote, “Everyone doth think his own religion rightest – Jews, Moors, pagans. And how if our faith and Christ and the Scriptures should be a “think so” too?” But when light broke, he ran out crying “Now I know! Now I know!”

Faith believes in God against the world – even if it means discomfort, loss and unpopularity. Better to suffer with God than prosper with the world. In terms of eternity, a man cannot lose by being true to God. Sure that in the long run no man can hang or exile the truth. Future is not uncertain because it belongs to God. God's promises are true and therefore the Christian acts on this belief.

Heroes of faith in Hebrews 11 – refused greatness of what the world calls great career, refused the safety of what the world calls a safe decision, and staked all on God – and history has proved them right.

### Influence of faith

List of heroes - every aspect of their life was touched, moulded and affected by faith. It was not just faith in the mind, but it affected everything.

- (a) Mental life. **Through faith we understand that the worlds were framed by the word of God, so that things which are seen were not made of things which do appear** (Hebrews 11:3). At the time Hebrews was written, the prevalent belief was that God created the world out of already existing matter. But according to Hebrews, the world was created from nothing. This is God's world, and therefore we should use it as God would have us use it. Also God is in control whatever the appearances. Therefore new sense of responsibility and new power of acceptance because all belongs to God and is in His hands.
- (b) Moral life. **Abel offered unto God a more excellent sacrifice than Cain, by which he obtained witness that he was righteous** (Hebrews 11:4). **By faith, Noah, being warned of God of things not seen as yet, moved with fear, prepared an ark to the saving of his house... and became heir of the righteousness which is by faith** (Hebrews 11:7). Noah believed God's message because of his faith. Might have seemed foolish to him with little chance of it coming true, but Noah accepted it and staked all on it. Took God's message as most important thing in the world. Not deterred by the mockery of others. All thought he was a fool, but Noah took God at His word, he obeyed God's commandments when everyone else was breaking them, and he listened to God's warnings when everyone else turned a deaf ear.
- (c) Physical life. **By faith Abraham, when he was called to go out into a place which he should after receive for an inheritance, obeyed; and he went out, not knowing whither he went. By faith he sojourned in the land of promise as in a strange country** (Hebrews 11:8-9). Because of his faith, Abraham was willing to leave home and family and the kind of life he was living. He went out into the unknown. We all fear what will happen when we take God at His word, we are naturally cautious, safety first. But faith means adventure into the unknown, not demanding to see every step of the way. Step out in obedience to God's will without knowing consequences. Especially true in case of those leaving ordinary career for special service.
- (d) Religious life. **By faith Enoch was translated that he should not see death.... He had this testimony, that he pleased God** (Hebrews 11:5). **Enoch walked with God** (Genesis 5:24), in the LXX manuscript it says

“Enoch pleased God”. Fellowship with God, friend with friend. Kept in step with God, referred everything to God, sought the blessing of God in everything.

- (e) Family life. **By faith Jacob blessed both the sons of Joseph** (Hebrews 11:21). **By faith Moses, when he was born, was hid three months of his parents** (Hebrews 11:23). Faith in the family life means that God comes first. He influences the way we regard our children and seek their best interests.
- (f) Social life. Moses refused to enjoy the honours and luxuries of the Egyptian court. He was prepared to **suffer affliction with the people of God, rather than enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season** (Hebrews 11:25). Prizes of earth not to be compared with ultimate reward of God. Threw in lot with down-trodden people of God who were slaves. Turned back on riches, ease and comfort which he enjoyed hitherto.
- (g) Faith works in the hour of suffering and death. **These all died in faith** (Hebrews 11:13). **Others had trial of cruel mockings and scourgings, yea, moreover of bonds and imprisonment; They were stoned, they were sawn asunder, were tempted, were slain with the sword... destitute, afflicted, tormented** (Hebrews 11:36-37). Reference to treatment of men of God in the Old Testament, especially the prophets, and also Maccabean heroes (attacks by Syrian king Antiochus Epiphanies, 170BC, 80,000 Jews killed, 10,000 taken into captivity, desecrated Temple). And deliberate attempt to destroy Jewish religion (Freedom regained under Judas Maccabeus). These all died in faith. Messiah had not come but they had faith in God’s purposes.

So here in Hebrews we read that faith affects every part of life. What you believe about the world, how you behave, where you go, relationship with God, family life, social life, attitude to death. Some would say, keep religion out of these things, its only for Sunday and church. But we cannot keep religion out of these aspects of life. If God is real, if His words are important promises to be held onto, if unknown world of spiritual reality is more important than present transitory world, then whole of life will be transformed and touched because of our faith.

#### Summons to faith

How important it is to have faith, how important to believe in Him and enjoy what He has for us. **Without faith it is impossible to please him: for he that cometh to God must believe that he is, and that he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him** (Hebrews 11:6). If we have no faith we cannot please God, and cannot have communion with Him, because the things of God are spiritual and invisible. Only by faith can we hear Him, speak to Him, and feel His presence.

Even in human relationships, we cannot please one another if we have no confidence in one another. Must believe that He is real and that He loves and is concerned. Let Him be real to you. Let consideration of Him enter into everything that concerns you. Let Him be great practical factor in your life. You have never seen Him – but you may not have seen Australia, but evidence exists. There is evidence that Christ is the Son of God. Must believe that He is the rewarder of those who earnestly seek Him.

Half-heartedness finds nothing. Must have real whole-hearted desire. Genuine desire for a certain and solid blessing. εκζητουσιν "Seek him out", seek Him till you find Him.

Do we desire God? How earnest is our desire? If He makes Himself known to us, are we willing to do what He bids? Do we desire to know Him above anything else in the world? Prepared to do anything as long as we find Him?

He is a rewarder. We do find what we are looking for. Best reward when God gives Himself. The more we come in quiet communion with God, like Enoch walk with Him, then we know there is nothing comparable to knowing the presence in our own quiet hearts of God who has found us and whom we have found. Joy of sins forgiven. Assurance of eternal life. **I am thy shield and thy exceeding great reward** (Genesis 15:1).

### Conclusion

Step to be taken of confidence in Him. Ask aid because faith is a gift of God. Ask for faith to be enlarged. Growth and more reward when keep on seeking Him. The act needs to become an attitude. This is secret of maturity.