

Lesson 31
Real Faith
Hebrews 11:4-7

The eleventh chapter of Hebrews is sometimes referred to as the “Believer’s Hall of Fame” or “The Parade of the Heroes of Faith”. This is a marvelous chapter on many of the great saints in the Old Testament.

Today we are going to deal with three of these Old Testament believers - Abel, Enoch and Noah. These were three different personalities with their own life styles and they lived hundreds of years apart in distinct cultures. Yet, they all had one thing in common - they operated on faith in the one, true and living God. People change, life styles change and cultures change, but God never changes, and He deals the same way in every generation with His people.

Faith is the key to this chapter. Faith has been defined as ***“the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen”*** (Heb. 11:1). Faith believes God and faith opens up a whole new dimension to life not known to any of the physical senses. Faith in God is the key to experiencing the infinite blessings of the spiritual kingdom. Faith knows God exists and that He has stepped over the boundary of human history and revealed Himself in creation and the Bible. All the deepest questions of life are answered in the spiritual kingdom as one lays hold of God by faith.

BACKGROUND

Remember that these Hebrew-Christians were suffering severe social persecution. They were beginning to waver in their stand for Christ and compromise the truth. They were also slackening up on their witness for Christ.

This chapter is about “persevering faith” and stresses the fact that faith enables man to live. This chapter is written to prove that in any age, under any circumstances, the man of faith can live. We are not told in this chapter how to get faith but how to live by faith.

Usually, when we talk about the life of faith today, we think in terms of money. We say a fellow lives by faith because he has been blessed with money. The life of faith is a lot more than trusting the Lord for money, although it includes this. It is trusting the Lord for everything in life. It is trusting God under any and all circumstances.

THE CORRECTNESS OF FAITH - Hebrews 11:4

“By faith Abel offered to God a better sacrifice than Cain ...” -- This verse tells us about the world’s first brothers, Abel and Cain, who were sons of Adam and Eve. They lived in a time when the world was young, when most everything was different from the way we know it today. They lived before income tax, air pollution, atomic bombs, Watergate and jammed highways. These brothers had the “simple life” but they both still had a need for God. The simple life will

never take away our spiritual needs for God. No matter how good life might be, it is never good enough without God. We assume from the account in Genesis that these boys were taught by Adam and Eve the type of sacrifice that was acceptable to God. God is only pleased with a blood sacrifice, for “without the shedding of blood there is no remission of sins.” Abel obeyed God and his parents’ teaching and brought an animal sacrifice, but Cain offered the Lord “the fruit of the ground”.

What was wrong with Cain’s sacrifice? He and his brother both came to the same altar, both came to the living God, both came at the right time and both came to sacrifice. What was wrong with Cain’s sacrifice? He was certainly religious and sincere, but he did not sacrifice God’s way. Cain, in his natural and rational mind, reasoned that one way was as good as another. He chose to believe that the type of sacrifice was unimportant, but the important thing is the sincerity of the heart. Cain was rejected and Abel was accepted because he had the right kind of sacrifice and a sincere heart. There is only one way that is acceptable to God and that is His way. We can only approach God through the shedding of blood. There is only one way of salvation and that is through the blood of Jesus Christ alone and this is appropriated through faith in Christ and His work for sin.

“... through which he obtained the testimony that he was righteous. God testifying of his gifts ...” -- The correctness of faith does things God’s way and not man’s way. Abel was not made righteous nor was he justified by his works, he was justified by faith and by his correct sacrifice he showed his faith by his works.

“... and through faith, though he is dead, he still speaks.” -- Abel believed God and came to God the exact way God had outlined. Abel’s faith still speaks to us today of the absolute necessity of doing things God’s way. We, today, can learn the same truth that Abel learned and this makes a tremendous difference in life.

The record of Abel, then, teaches us that real faith approaches God in a correct manner as it is revealed in the Bible.

THE WALK OF FAITH - Hebrews 11:5-6

“By faith Enoch was taken up so that he should not see death; and he was not found because God took him up; for he obtained the witness that before he was taken up he was pleasing to God.”

This event of ancient history, recorded in Genesis 5, tells us twice that “Enoch walked with God.” The record tells us that for 65 years this man lived like anyone else in his day, no different from the rest of his age. But at the age of 65, something marvelous happened to this man. He began to walk with God. He began for the first time to enjoy the continuous presence of an unseen Person, and he related his life daily to that Person who was with him. He found a fellowship that death could not interrupt. According to the record, Enoch never died but he was taken bodily to heaven in rapture.

Enoch had a witness or testimony before God because of his deep, abiding walk with God.

Enoch's walk with God made a tremendous impact upon his culture. He pleased God and he did it with his walk with God. Enoch was not known for his activity or service, but for his fellowship with God. How did he walk with God? By faith! In his daily, common, regular duties, Enoch trusted God. He loved, adored and intimately knew the one, true and living God.

Real faith walks with God and the result is a spirit-directed activity that makes an impact on one's culture.

So close was Enoch's walk with God that one day God did a startling thing. He took Enoch to heaven without death. The Old Testament says, "Enoch was not" and Hebrews says, "He was not found." One day Enoch just disappeared and was not. It seems that God enjoyed fellowship so much with Enoch that God wanted him for Himself. Enoch did nothing spectacular; he just walked with God and this is the most spectacular thing one can do.

A little girl in Sunday school told the story of Enoch her way. She said, "Enoch was a man who learned to walk with God, and they used to take long walks together. One day they walked so far that God said, 'Look, Enoch, it's too far for you to go back; just come on home with me.' So he walked on home with God."

"And without faith it is impossible to please Him ..." -- Apart from faith in God it is impossible to please Him in any way. God is not impressed with our education, our financial worth, our status in society, but is looking for our faith in Him. Faith believes in God and puts the commands of God to work. Faith is the key that unlocks the mysteries of the spiritual kingdom.

"... for he who comes to God must believe that He is ..." -- Faith acknowledges that God is real and does exist. Faith believes that the God of heaven and earth is in control of history and working out His plan in time. Faith is more than assenting to the fact that God is the "First Cause" or to believe that there is a "Supreme Being". Faith is to believe in the character of God as He has revealed Himself in His works, in His Word, and in Christ. Faith is to believe that God is sovereign, holy, almighty, just, merciful, wrath and loving and that He rules and reigns in accordance with these characteristics.

"... and that He is a rewarder of those who seek Him." -- God rewards those who seek Him with wonderful spiritual blessings, and the single most important reward is God Himself. God becomes the intimate companion of all who walk by faith.

THE WORK OF FAITH - Hebrews 11:7

"By faith, Noah being warned by God about things not seen, in reverence prepared an ark for the salvation of his household ..." - Noah believed that God was in control of human history.

Noah had never seen God, but he knew God was real and he was willing to obey God's command to build an ark at all costs to his own pride. God gave Noah what seems, from a human perspective, a foolish command. However, before we look at the foolish command, we must understand that Noah's world was very wicked; that world willingly disregarded God and refused to worship Him. ***"Now the earth was corrupt in the sight of God, and the earth was***

filled with violence” (Gen. 6:11). The pre-flood world was filled with corruption and violence. Therefore, God made a decision to destroy the antediluvian world because of its sinfulness.

“And the Lord said, ‘I will blot out man whom I have created from the face of the land, from man to animals to creeping things and to birds of the sky; for I am sorry that I have made them’” (Gen. 6:7).

“Then God said to Noah, ‘The end of all flesh has come before Me; for the earth is filled with violence because of them; and behold, I am about to destroy them with the earth’” (Gen. 6:13).

With this revelation of impending judgment, God gave Noah a command to build an ark. *“Make for yourself an ark of gopher wood ...”* (Gen 6:14a). Because God was planning to destroy mankind, He told Noah to build the ark because there was a great flood coming. If Noah would build the ark according to the detailed specifications given by God, Noah and his family would escape the judgment.

What was so foolish about this command? First, there was probably no rain on the earth before the flood because the earth was watered by a **“mist that came up from the earth and watered the whole face of the ground.”** Secondly, the world had probably never seen a flood. God made a revelation and gave a command, and Noah had to make a decision. Should he accept God’s Word despite its apparent foolishness or should he do what his rational, intellectual abilities would suggest and disregard such a revelation as ridiculous? Noah believed God and obeyed the command and built the ark. *“Thus Noah did; according to all that God had commanded him, so he did”* (Gen 6:22). With reverence, respect and awe of the one, true God, he worked out his faith by building the ark.

“... by which he condemned the world ...” -- Noah’s faith resulted in action and the building of the ark was an object lesson to the world that all were condemned because of their unbelief and headed for judgment. It took Noah 120 years to build the ark and all that time no one responded to God. Noah worked and preached without success and his ministry only condemned the world more. The people of Noah’s day prided themselves on their humanism and the rejection of the supernatural. The people of Noah’s day laughed at him and regarded him as a fool, just as the people of our day regard those who accept God’s Word as foolish. It was not unusual to build a boat in those days, but Noah built the ark 500 miles from the nearest ocean, a thousand times too big for his family, and when he finished it he filled it with animals. They must have called him “Nutty Noah”.

Probably most every day some rank rejecter, skeptic or pessimist from the local university or the school of pre-flood scientists would ask him, “Hey, Noah, what are you doing?” “I’m building an ark.” Well, I can see that, but why are you building such a big boat here? There isn’t enough water in the whole world to float that thing.” “I’m building it because God told me to, for a great flood is coming to destroy the world.” “What? You believe in God! Why that passed off the scene with those superstitious people like Adam, Eve, Abel and Enoch. Nobody any more believes in a real God. Ha, you mean to tell me God told you to build this monstrosity?” “Absolutely, God is going to judge the world with a flood, and unless you change your mind

about the way you are living and confess your sin and seek God, you will die in this judgment.”
“Nutty Noah, you superstitious old geezer, there is no hope for you. Go on back to your foolish task of building an ark.”

Noah was willing to be foolish for God in his generation. The people rejected him, but he was faithful to God. Noah, however, had the last laugh for the flood came as God said it would and Noah and his family were saved because they believed God.

Even men in the secular world have been thought foolish for the things they believed. This is true of Benjamin Franklin, who in the course of his lifetime was a master printer and journalist, an ingenious inventor, founder of the first library and one of the framers of the Constitution of the United States. One day this brilliant man decided to fly a kite - in a thunderstorm no less. Now wasn't that foolish - a grown man and a responsible leader taking his son and going out to fly a kite in a thunderstorm. Franklin's neighbors, peering out of their windows, must have said to themselves, "What's wrong with that Ben Franklin? Doesn't he know that boy of his will get pneumonia in weather like this? Look at him - one of Philadelphia's leading men, and he doesn't have enough sense to come in out of the rain."

Actually, this wasn't a foolish waste of time. It had a purpose behind it. On the end of the string, which was attached to the kite, there was a key. And when the sky was filled with lightening, sparks came from the key. For the first time in history, man proved that lightening was electricity in the air. In reality, this was one of the most important scientific experiments of all time. But, to a passerby, to someone who did not know what was going on, it looked like a foolish waste of time.

Many times facts look foolish to those who don't understand them - even though they should. When the Royal Society of London, the leading scientific body of that day, heard of Franklin's experiment with electricity, they laughed. They thought he was a kook. But with the passing of time, their laughter turned into admiration, and they gave him a gold medal in recognition for his work.

Scientists laughed at Franklin because they had not yet discovered the truth of electricity for themselves and the people of the world will laugh and mock the Christian when they have not yet discovered the secret of faith in the one, true and living God for themselves.

“ ... and became an heir of the righteousness which is according to faith.” -- By his obedience to God, Noah proved that he was an heir of righteousness by faith. Noah had an enduring faith. His faith persevered; it was a working faith.

CONCLUSION

Benjamin Franklin looked foolish when he flew a kite in the thunderstorm. But he wasn't foolish. In reality, he was one of the wisest men of his day. Often truth, when not understood, looks foolish. This is especially true in the spiritual realm. Noah looked foolish in his day. But he wasn't foolish; he was right. God is always right and we must remember that God's ways are not our ways.

God declares in the Bible that another judgment is coming to all men and that is the judgment of eternal destruction of the soul. How can a person escape this judgment? He must believe God and receive Christ. It may seem foolish that men will perish in their sins without Christ, but God says it is so and it will happen. Do not trust your natural, rational understanding, but abandon yourself to Christ by faith and then you will know God and get real answers to life.