

Faith At The Dawn Of History

Hebrews 11:4-6

Introduction

The chapter began with an explanation of faith (vv.1-3) and now continues with several examples of faith (vv.4-35). The writer will explain what they did; what they endured; why they endured; and what they received. Abel gave the Lord an acceptable offering (v.4b); Enoch left the earth without dying (v.5b) and Noah survived a great Flood (v.7b). In the chapter some of the examples of faith will endure hardship; torture; ridicule, flogging, imprisonment, stoning, sawn in two (v.37b); death by sword (v.37c); extreme poverty (vv.37d-38). Others will see the invisible City of God (vv.10; 13-15; 16); believe that suffering for the sake of Christ was better than all the riches that this world has to offer (v.26); while looking forward to their own resurrection (v.35c). And what did they receive? In the past—the temporary and earthly approval of God—and in the future—the eternal approval of God (v.6).

The chapter began with the meaning of faith (v.1); the reward of faith (v.2) and our basic understanding of faith (v.3). By faith we understand that God made the worlds (aeons). Now the writer will speak about the spiritual power of faith and illustrate that power by Abel and Enoch. And what is the spiritual power of faith? “The power of faith is the message of the glorious gospel, the glorious hope that God has given from the beginning of time. The power is twofold and it is given in the most meaningful way possible, by showing how the power takes effect in the lives of believers” (*The Preacher’s Outline & Sermon Bible; Hebrews/James; pp.129-130*). In this passage you will see how faith gives the believer power to be counted righteous (v.4); how faith gives the believer power to walk with God and deliverance from death (v.5); and how faith gives the believer power to please God (v.6).

The Faith Of Abel (v.4)

Hebrews 11:4(NKJV) 4By 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.

The author appeals to the story of Cain and Abel in the book of Genesis (4:1-8).

The text doesn’t tell us why Abel’s sacrifice was accepted and Cain’s rejected. But we are given clues. Our text boldly tells us that Abel’s sacrifice was offered by faith! The sacrifice that Abel offered was accepted by God. God counts Abel as righteous. How did God accept people prior to the coming of Christ? By faith. Faith has the power to be counted as righteousness. But not just any faith—it would appear that it is the kind of faith proscribed by God. We must come to God on His terms. Abel approached God and worshipped God exactly as God instructed. Abel offered a blood sacrifice. The text calls it “a more excellent sacrifice than Cain.”

When Adam and Eve sinned in the Garden of Eden they became aware that they were naked. Their nakedness became a symbol of their conscious awareness of sin (Gen.3:9-10). Our Father

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and Mother attempted to cover their nakedness by sewing fig leaves together (an attempt to cover their own shame and nakedness). God loved them. God covered their nakedness by killing an animal, by shedding blood. This shedding of blood pointed to a greater shedding of blood, a future sacrifice. The death of Jesus. The sacrifice of Jesus. We are given a glimpse from the very beginning that sinful human beings must bear their own sin or have their sins carried by a suitable substitute.

Since of the dawn of human history people have approached God one of two ways; on God's terms or on their own terms.

Abel believed God. Abel accepted God's terms. Cain did not believe God. Cain did not accept God's terms. Cain would not approach God on the basis of a blood sacrifice.

How in the world did Abel know that sinful man must approach God on the basis of shed blood? Was it the slaughter of an animal by God in the Garden to cover his parent's nakedness? Did Abel receive some divine revelation or instruction from God? Did Abel listen to his parents who told both Cain and Abel that God restored them to fellowship by killing an animal and covering them with the animal's skin (Genesis 3:21)?

By faith Abel approaches God with the blood of a sacrifice. Cain approaches God with a bloodless sacrifice.

Some people might argue—well God accepted grain offerings in the Old Testament. And that is true—God saves people by grace—through faith—by blood. “And almost all things are by the law purged with blood; and without shedding of blood is no remission” Hebrews 9:22.

George Cutting points out; “. . .it was not the personal excellence of Abel that God looked at in counting him righteous, but the excellence of the sacrifice that he brought and his faith in it”.

Think about that. Jesus is our excellent sacrifice. Our faith is in Jesus' sacrifice. We are not justified on the basis of character—or good works—but exclusively on the sacrifice of Christ and our acceptance of Him.

But not just any blood. The blood must be innocent. “How much more shall the blood of Christ, who though the eternal Spirit offered himself without spot to God, purge your conscience from dead works to serve the living God?” (Hebrews 9:14).

The blood must be innocent and the blood must be shed. “For this is my blood of the New Testament, which is shed for many for the remission of sins” (Matt.26:28).

The blood must be innocent. It must be shed. It must be applied. “And from Jesus Christ, who is the faithful witness, and the first begotten of the dead, and the prince of the kings of the earth. Unto Him that loved us, and washed us from our sins in his own blood” (Rev.1:5).

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Salvation is always through a person. “But I will sacrifice unto thee with the voice of thanksgiving; I will pay that that I have vowed. Salvation is of the LORD” (Jonah 2:9).

“Neither is there salvation in any other: for there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved” (Acts 4:2).

“For God hath not appointed us to wrath, but to obtain salvation by our Lord Jesus Christ” (I Thess.5:9).

In Hebrews 5:9; “And being made perfect, he became the author of eternal salvation unto all them that obey him”.

Blood. Person. Grace. “For by grace are ye saved through faith, and that not of yourselves: It is the gift of God: Not of works, lest any man should boast” (Eph.2:8-9). “For the grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men” (Titus 2:11).

Jesus has appeared. We are justified by faith. We have peace with God through the Lord Jesus. We believe this by faith. The kind of faith that pleases God—we come to God—we believe God—we believe that he rewards those who diligently seek him” (v.6). Faith—that blood by a person—by grace—saves.

The text says something interesting; God accepted Abel’s worship; the context is that Abel’s offering is made by faith; and accepted by God. What happened? Cain murdered his brother. Cain spilled Abel’s blood. And yet even in death Abel still has something to say to us.

Does murder seem to you be the manifestation of saving faith? Why does Cain kill his brother?

Works will always seek to kill grace. Law hates grace. The self-righteous man hates the truth that he cannot save himself and that in order to be saved he must cast himself on the mercy—and grace and love—of His Creator. And Abel’s blood speaks.

On what basis did Cain approach God? Clearly Cain is religious. Cain performs a ritual. Cain offers the fruit of his labors. Cain offers a religion of personal sacrifice and works, of doing good and sacrificing to do good. But it is a religion that he has fabricated—cobbled together based on his own ideas, his own imaginations, his own ideas on how to approach God.

The author of Hebrews invites the reader to consider that the power of faith has the ability to make one righteous. In Genesis 15:6 we read “And he (Abraham) believed the Lord; and he counted it to him for righteousness”. In Acts (13:39) we read “And by him (JESUS) all that believe are justified from all things, from which ye could not be justified by the Law of Moses”.

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Now we understand what Paul wrote in Romans 3:23-24; “For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God; being justified freely by His grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus”.

The Faith Of Enoch (v.5)

5By 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.

We find Enoch in Genesis 5:18-24. We are told that Enoch’s father was Jared. Adam lived 930 years and died (5:5); Seth lived 912 years and died (v.8); Enosh lived 905 years and died (v.11); Cainan and Mahalaleel 840 years and 830 years and they died.

But something happened with Enoch. “Enoch walked with God three hundred years, and begot sons and daughters. (v.23) So all the days of Enoch were three hundred and sixty-five years. (24) “And Enoch walked with God; and he was not, for God took him”.

What in the world happened? It would appear that when God talked, walked and fellowshiped with Enoch—Enoch received some kind of promise. In the world—that Enoch lived in—everyone appeared to live a very long time—but all eventually died. Prior to Enoch—there was no record of anyone escaping death. The soul that sins shall die. But God apparently promised Enoch that he would not die! God promised. Enoch believed. What is more reasonable? What is more sane; that a creature should believe its Creator! Enoch with an invisible God for 365 years! **Before he was taken he had this testimony, that he pleased God! We soon find out that without faith—it is impossible to please God—and so Enoch by faith must have found some way to please God. And if faith comes by hearing and hearing by the word of God in fellowship God must have said something to Enoch—and Enoch believed what God said!**

And what is the point of this story? “Faith has the power to give us a day by day walk with God and deliver us from death” (*The Preacher’s Outline & Sermon Bible; Hebrews/James p. 131*).

Enoch believed God, walked with God, fellowshiped with God and God cared for him; protected him, and God took him. In what sense? We are left with the impression that Enoch did not die but rather translated or transferred into the very presence of God. Enoch experienced what every believer is promised;

“As you have therefore received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk ye in him” (Col.2:6).

John 3:36; “He who believes in the Son has everlasting life; and he who does not believe the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God abides on Him.”

John 11:25; “Jesus said to her, “I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in Me, though he may die (he may not), he shall live. (26) “And whoever lives and believes in Me shall never die. Do you believe this?”

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Clearly Mary and Martha died. All the apostles died. What did Jesus mean?

Enoch's faith gave him the longed for deliverance from death.
Enoch lived in a time of rebellion and apostasy.

Oliver Greene writes; "Enoch is definitely a type of the New Testament saints who will be translated when the church is caught up to meet the Lord in the air, in the midst of an age of wholesale death and in an hour darker than any yet known, to man! Surely that hour is upon us. Surely these are the days known as 'the beginning of sorrows,' The darkest hour is always just before the dawn, and surely the night is far spent. Surely Jesus will come quickly. We do not know the day or the hour of His coming, but we do believe He is coming soon" (*The Epistle of Paul the Apostle to the Hebrews; Greenville, S.C; the Gospel Hour, 1965 p.448*).

May I ask you a question? Do you think that God loves to be trusted?

The Faith That Pleases God (v.6)

6But 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.

What kind of faith are we talking about? We have already been given it's definition (v.1). This faith is living, active. This faith knows God and follows God and believes God. This is the kind of faith that says "yes to God" and "yes to Jesus".

The Greek scholar Kenneth Wuest writes; "The writer lays down an axiomatic truth. He uses the aorist tense in the infinitive 'to please'. The statement is universal in its application and timeless. The idea is, 'Without faith it is impossible to please Him at all'" (Hebrews, Vol.2, p.198).

Think for a moment on those who wish to force faith or fabricate faith or falsify faith.

Religion can never compensate for a lack of faith. William MacDonald writes; "Faith is the only thing that gives God His proper place, and puts man in his place too. "It glorifies God exceedingly," writes C.H. Mackintosh, "because it proves that we have more confidence in His eyesight than in our own"" (*Believer's Bible Commentary p.2196*).

The person who comes to God must believe at least two things; (1) that God exists. The expression 'must believe'—pisteusai dei—means necessary and essential—A.T. Robertson says it is a "moral necessity to have faith. . .The very Existence of God is a manner of intelligent faith. . .so that men are left without excuse (Ro.1:19f)" (Word Pictures in the New Testament, Vol. 5, p. 420f). This is the person who considers reality—earth—heaven—this is the person who

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considers what the Bible says about God, about Jesus the Son of God. and (2) the person believes that God rewards those who diligently seek Him.

Pause for a moment and consider that word—*diligently (ekzetousin)*. It means to seek out God—to diligently seek Him and follow Him. The Bible offers no reward—for the half-hearted, for the lazy, for the complacent, for the non thinker for the worldly minded or the pleasure seeker. We pursue the Lord earnestly and persevere in the face of hardship, setback or difficulty.

There is nothing about God—His character—His Son—His Word—that would cause us to doubt Him.

And what is the reward for those who diligently seek Him? It is the same reward given to Abel and given to Enoch. A right standing with God; righteousness and care in this life—and deliverance from death—and eternal life.

In Matthew's gospel we are told to hunger and thirst after righteousness (Matt.6:33)—not snack and sip! In Matthew 6:33 and Luke 11:9-10 we are invited to “Ask, and it shall be given to you; seek and you shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you. For every one that asks receives, and he that seeks finds and to him that knocks it shall be opened”.

We can grow, mature, in faith and power. We can practice hope (Hebrews 11:1) and diligently seek God. What does that mean? It includes hunger and thirsting after righteousness (Matt. 6:33) it includes asking, seeking, knocking (Matt. 7:7-8). It may mean fasting—but certainly means praying and persevering in prayer (Matt. 17:21). What happens to the person who diligently seeks God? Faith grows. Trust grows. Doubt disappears. Sinful and carnal living is replaced by righteous living and a believing heart.

Conclusion

W.H. Griffith Thomas:

“Faith rests on God, receives from God, responds to God, relies on God, realizes God, rejoices in God, and reproduces His life and character.”