

27—Hebrews 11:1-7—The Outcome of Those Who Had Faith

I. Introduction

- A. Over the past week or so, a famous atheist from the UK has spoken publicly about the Christian faith. He said this and I quote, "I call myself a cultural Christian. I'm not a believer, but there's a distinction between being a believing Christian and being a cultural Christian. And so, I love hymns and Christmas carols, and I sort of feel at home in the Christian ethos. I feel that we are a Christian country in that sense." He also said, "If I had to choose between Christianity and Islam, I choose Christianity every single time. I mean, it seems to me to be a fundamentally decent religion in a way that, I think, Islam is not."
1. Some people are not as aware of their beliefs as this man. They may or may not know if they have genuine faith while loving all the same things.
 2. Since faith is the means by which we have access to all of God's promises, we should therefore, consider if we, in fact, have faith in Christ.
 3. The major question is—do you have faith in Christ and will you endure in that faith to the end by God's grace?

II. Main Point

- A. The main point of our previous text was the need for enduring faith.
B. This week, we look at what faith is and that it commended the people of old. The examples of those who had faith are to help us endure in faith.

III. Outline

- A. What Faith is
B. Seeing Faith in Others

IV. Exposition

- A. As we move on to this famous chapter 11, the connection to the previous chapter cannot be overlooked. It's placement after verse 39 connects us to the need of enduring faith for the preservation of the soul. This chapter is encouraging us to persevere in faith by showing us the outcome of those who went before us. This is a common way to encourage others to press on in faith but first, what is faith. That's where verse one begins.
1. It is clear that faith is at the center of this chapter. It is emphasized in various ways. Therefore, let's take note of what it is and what it does for those who have it.
 - a) If faith is what we live by, then it's extremely important that we know what it is so that we know if we have it.
 - (1) When the Centurion who had a servant lying paralyzed at home and suffering terribly and Jesus offered to go with him and heal him. But the centurion said in Matthew 8:8-9 "Lord, I am not worthy to have you come under my roof, but only say the word, and my servant will be healed. For I too am a man under authority, with soldiers under me. And I say to one, 'Go,' and he goes, and to another, 'Come,' and he comes, and to my servant, 'Do this,' and he does it."
 - (a) As you know, Jesus healed his servant but what stands out in this story is what he says to the centurion in the next verse—When Jesus heard this, he marveled and said to those who followed him, "Truly, I tell you, with no one in Israel have I found such faith."
 - b) So, what is faith? The preacher gives us two parts: "Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen."
 - (1) Or, some translations say, "Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, and proof of what is not seen."
 - (2) Which one of these reflects what faith is?
 - (a) Let's think about the first word—(*hypostasis*). Does it mean assurance or confidence or its counterpart in Hebrew—hope? Or does it mean substance or reality?
 - i) Let me illustrate this: it would be odd for me to say there seems be people in this room vs. there are people in this room.

- (1) In other words, I don't just have confidence that people are here but I can see you and know that you are in this room.
- (2) However, let's ask what is it that we have faith in? What things are we hoping for?
 - (a) Are they not God's promises—promises to forgive and remember our sins no more (eternal redemption), to make us perfect by Jesus's blood, to have an eternal inheritance, and for God to never leave us nor forsake us.
 - (b) Can you see those things? No. You can't see them.
- (b) Before we further explain this, let consider the second part—(elegchos). Does it mean conviction or evidence?
 - i) How do you have proof of something you cannot see? Or is it the conviction of the unseen things?
 - (1) Some people describe faith as a crutch for holding to something without reason.
 - (a) Another popular atheist named Sam Harris once wrote this about faith: "Faith is generally nothing more than the permission religious people give one another to believe things strongly without evidence."
 - (b) But faith is not without reason is it?
 - (2) But I can't see God. He is invisible. I can't see his promises. I can't see beyond the grave. Or can I?
 - (a) What does Jesus mean when he says, "For those who have ears to hear may they hear"?
- (c) Let's think about verse 3 before we sum things up which says, "By faith we understand that the universe was created by the word of God, so that what is seen was not made out of things that are visible."
 - i) Kids have asked the question, "Where did God come from?"
 - (1) Of course, God is uncreated. He has always been and always will be.
 - ii) We look at this amazing creation and we want answers about its origin. Where did this come from?
 - (1) We see the sun and moon and stars above.
 - (2) We look at ourselves with wonder that we can see and smell and touch and hear and think and love and talk and laugh and feel happy.
 - (3) But it is unreasonable to think that all that we see has always been here. Isn't true that you cannot have an uncaused cause? So, what caused it to be?
 - (4) However, if I see this creation and think something or someone caused this to happen then that's reasonable.
 - (5) I recalled a quote by a scientist named Charles Misner who was talking about what Einstein thought of the preaching in his day—"I do see the design of the universe as essentially a religious question. That is, one should have some kind of respect and awe for the whole business . . . It's very magnificent and shouldn't be taken for granted. In fact, I believe that is why Einstein had so little use for organized religion, although he strikes me as a basically very religious man. He must have looked at what the preachers said about God and felt that they were blaspheming. He had seen much more majesty than they had ever imagined, and they were just not talking about the real thing."
 - (a) If we consider things like this—Isaiah 40:12 Who has measured the waters in the hollow of his hand and marked off the heavens with a span, enclosed the dust of the earth in a measure and weighed the mountains in scales and the hills in a balance?
 - (b) Or that "light travels 186,000 miles per second." To give that some perspective—"A traveler, moving at the speed of light, would circum-navigate the equator approximately 7.5 times in one second." (NASA)

- (c) The sun is approximately 93 million miles away from the earth and it would take 1.3 million earths to fill the sun's volume.
- iii) Verse 3 says we understand by faith that the universe was created by the word of God.
 - (1) He said, let there be light and there was light.
 - (2) God's past acts in creation, calling into existence the things that are now visible, should, by faith, be understood that his future promises will be just as he says.
 - (3) Paul says in Romans 1:19-20 For what can be known about God is plain to them, because God has shown it to them. For his invisible attributes, namely, his eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly (same word as understand in Hebrews 1:3) perceived, ever since the creation of the world, in the things that have been made. So they are without excuse.
 - (a) It's entirely possible to see the revelation of God through his creation and yet deny it...suppress it. Why? Because they don't like God. They might like some of his benefits but they do not like everything about him.
- (d) I'm going to take an imperfect swing at illustrating reasonable faith. A faith that does not see the promises of God but we know they will be there when we need them.
 - i) On Palm Sunday we had a meal in the basement. I'm sure you could smell the aroma of the food drifting through the halls. But let's imagine you had not seen the food but the aroma says that food is present.
 - (1) It's unreasonable to think that the smell of food does not come from food.
 - (a) In the introduction, I quoted the famous atheist from the UK. He sees the beauties of God but says that he is not the source of those beautiful things he likes. He sees life but doesn't think the source of life is God. It's like saying I smell food in the basement but there's no food down there.
 - (b) The aroma of the food that you cannot see should give you confident assurance that food is there.
 - (c) Creation itself stands before us everyday reminding us that God created the world out of nothing.
 - (d) God's promises are the aroma of his goodness and though we cannot see them, we know they will be just as he says.
 - ii) "Faith is not a blind leap into a dark room hoping there a floor." (Erik Raymond)
- 2. Faith doesn't say there seems to be some promises available to us but rather we are sure of what we hope for, and are convinced of what we do not see. And because of that faith there in verse 2, the people of old received their commendation.
 - a) In other words, they gained approval with God by their faith.
 - (1) Because of their assurance of things hoped for, they lived their lives in light of that coming reality.
 - (2) They had tasted and seen that the Lord was good. They knew he was its source and therefore longed for the fullness of joy and pleasures forevermore in him.
 - (3) They could smell the food of the feast of the bridegroom and they longed to sit at his table and eat.
- B. All of that was setting us up to see this kind of faith in the people of old because this book was written that we might imitate the faith of those who went before us and receive the same outcome as their faith.
 - 1. Here's what the preacher desired for those who were struggling and for us—back in 6:11-12 is said — And we desire each one of you to show the same earnestness to have the full assurance of hope until the end, so that you may not be sluggish, but imitators of those who through faith and patience inherit the promises.
 - 2. The first example we are shown is the faith of Abel.
 - a) All the way through, the author emphasizes faith by setting it at the beginning each time. It is describing how they did these things.
 - (1) In other words, their actions...their obedience...were done by faith.

- (2) This is extremely important because the absence of faith changes everything. So much so, that Paul makes this statement in Romans 14:23 For whatever does not proceed from faith is sin.
- (a) You could do all kinds of “good deeds” without faith and those “good deeds” are sin.
 - (b) If I were to build an orphanage and care for those impoverished kids without ever acknowledging my need and dependence and strength and all the things needed to accomplish that task were from God then I’ve just made a name for myself with a lot of resources that are not even mine.
 - i) But it was my idea. Who gave you a brain to think with?
 - ii) But I served those kids with my own hands! Who made your hands?
 - iii) But I spoke kindly to them! Who made your mouth?
 - (c) I’ve mentioned the kids who used to come to the hardware store and buy their dad a gift but then charge it to his account.
 - i) Who should the dad thank for the gift?
- b) So, we are told that Abel had faith. He offered a sacrifice to God by faith.
- (1) Verse 4 compares how Abel offered his sacrifice to God with his brother Cain.
- (a) God receives Abel’s sacrifice and is commended as righteous but Cain’s sacrifice was not accepted.
 - (b) So, some people think the reason God accepted Abel’s sacrifice over Cains was because Abel offered an animal sacrifice while his brother offered vegetables.
 - i) But there were no laws about sacrifices yet. There’s no reason to think that God rejected Cain’s produce because he doesn’t like pumpkins.
 - ii) But the difference is simply faith. Faith changes everything. Faith is our access to God and the righteous live by faith.
 - (1) Abel’s sacrifice was more acceptable because he had faith in the Lord.
 - (a) His act of obedience that flowed from faith, pleased God.
 - (b) Verse 6 confirms that for us—it is impossible to please God without faith.
 - (c) Abel had assurance in things hoped for, and the conviction of things not seen.
 - (d) He had not guarantee that God would be pleased with his sacrifice. But he believed God. Trusted God. Hoped in God. Loved God.
 - (e) Neither of these two brothers are not superior to one another. They both do the same act. But one obeys with faith and the other does not.
 - (f) The same can be true of any of us. None of us are different or superior before God. We offer up praise or we bring our tithes and offerings. We can all do the very same acts and if we have faith, God accepts them.
- (2) And because of Abel’s faith, though he died, he still speaks.
- (a) How does it still speak? Well, we are still talking about it even today. From the beginning of creation until now, Abel’s faith continues to be an example for people of faith to imitate.
3. The second example of enduring faith is that of Enoch.
- a) If you are reading along there in Genesis 5 about the generations of Adam, every person follows that same pattern.
 - (1) So and so lived this many years, he fathered a son. The days of this person was this many years. So and so lived to be this old and he died.
 - (a) Enoch follows the same pattern except he doesn’t die. It says he was taken.
 - i) Why was he spared from death? In the words of Genesis—because he walked with God.
 - ii) In the words of Hebrews—by faith.
 - (1) He obeyed the Lord even though they were separated and he could not see him.
 - iii) This language of walking with God is the same language used of Adam and Eve while in the Garden of Eden.
 - iv) How can someone walk with God outside of Eden? The answer? By faith.

- v) What happened for Enoch holds out the promise that there's a way back to the Tree of Life. Access as we've already heard comes to us by faith in Christ.
 - b) The pattern continues. Those who are accepted by God are those who have faith.
 - (1) Enoch was commended as having pleased God.
 - 4. And to clear up any confusion—verse 6 states plainly how one pleases God—by faith alone.
 - a) For one to draw near to God, which we have already been commanded to do because we have confidence to enter by the blood of Jesus, that one must believe that God exists.
 - (1) Like the atheist in the introduction, he can love all the nice things about Christianity but if he doesn't believe that God exists then he will not receive the promises of God.
 - (a) It like smelling the aroma of food but saying the food doesn't exist.
 - (b) The psalmist is right when he says—the fool has said in his heart there is no God.
 - (2) Again, he promises reward for those who seek him and believe.
 - 5. And now our final example this morning—Noah. This one is so clear and helpful too.
 - a) Noah is warned by God concerning the events of the flood.
 - (1) Events as not yet seen.
 - (2) However, Noah in reverent fear constructed an ark for the salvation of his household.
 - (a) This story that is recorded in Genesis 6 and 7 is a major event.
 - (b) “The main purpose of the story is not to show why God sent a flood but rather why God saved Noah.” (Sailhamer)
 - i) “In other words, God saved Noah because he walked with God.” (Ibid)
 - ii) Or to say it with the words of Hebrews—by faith.
 - b) By his faith, he condemned the world.
 - (1) The rest of the world did not obey God nor heed his warning.
 - (2) They were not in a right relationship with God through faith and were therefore condemned.
 - (3) Noah's faith stands in contrast to the entire population of his day. He alone had faith alone.
 - (a) Through faith, he becomes an heir of righteousness that comes by faith alone.
- C. How might we think about this and respond?
1. This text is very relevant for us.
 - a) Continue in faith! I will not deny him!
 - b) You might respond like another did—I believe, help my unbelief.
 - c) God wants you to have confidence that he can do anything but the first thing you might need to see is that I can't do anything to please God.
 - d) Maybe you have complicated things. Maybe you are just going through the motions. Maybe you like the benefits of God but you are not really sure of God's love for you. Maybe because of your own personal sufferings or the suffering of your loved ones you are angry with God.
 2. Christ is the only one who pleased God. He obeyed the Father perfectly.
 - a) If you have put your faith or will put your faith and hope in him, you will be accepted on his merits not yours.
 - b) And like Enoch, we will be taken up someday to be with him forever on that glorious shore.
 3. But we must have faith in Christ and we must continue to have faith or those promises are not ours.
 - a) Do you have faith, right now, in Christ?