

## LENT 5 - FAITH LIVED OUT...

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So far in our Lent Course... we've considered the question of What is Faith... and touched on the difference between faith and belief!! Then Teresa help us look at having faith in the Love of God... Followed by Steve and faith in the Sovereignty of God... and then last week Caroline helped us look at the Faithfulness of God...

Now this week, we look at the subject of Faith Lived Out...

And we are going to be encouraged by examples from just one chapter from **Hebrews... Chapter 11**, and you might like to have that open in front of you!

21 times in the NIV translation we have that phrase '**BY FAITH**', as the writer of Hebrews, who never identifies himself, seeks to show these Hebrew 'fulfilled Jews' examples of Faith being lived out from all these characters from the Old Testament. Now I use the phrase, 'fulfilled Jews' having done some recording with Helen Shapiro, we were finishing some vocal takes late one night, after which we had a break to refresh our ears before we listened back, and I asked her how long, at that point, had she been a Christian. Well, she very strongly rejected that word 'Christian' because of the horrendous things so called christians had done to fellow Jews over the centuries, so she only used the title 'fulfilled Jew' to describe her place in Christ's family of believers. Fulfilled, because she accepted Jesus as THE Messiah, as the Christ the people of Israel had been waiting for and so many had missed or rejected.

That showed me something of the long held hurt of a people persecuted by nations and people purporting to act in the name of Christ Jesus. So so sad!

But the letter to the Hebrews doesn't show that faith necessarily leads to an easy life, where there is talk of torture, and stonings, and death by the sword. It's what we believe about things - that matter most, and allows people to live, and act, and die for Christ Jesus, facing whatever life throws our way. Take that faith away and we have nothing left, certainly no hope. And the writer of Hebrews 11 would surely agree with that.

If what we believe makes any difference, then it has to change the way we live. That's what the phrase "by faith" (repeated over and over again in this chapter) is all about. It's all about pursuing (a great biblical concept) the one true God, and trusting Him to see us through life and into the eternalness of heaven.

But a first question for you to consider... do you/we take faith as seriously as we ought?

For George Carlin, an American comedian, like many UK comedians we see on the T.V, religion and God weren't high on his being 'IMPRESSED' list. He said this about God: "**Something is wrong here: War, disease, death, destruction, hunger, filth, poverty, torture, crime, corruption and the Ice Caps melting. Something is definitely wrong**". And perhaps he might add a COVID pandemic to that list if he were still alive... But he went on, "**If this is the best God can do, I'm not impressed. Results like these do not belong on the resume of a supreme being. This is the kinda thing you'd expect from an office temp with a bad attitude.**"

The truth is that God is not responsible for many of those things, but fallen man is. And yet a lot of people feel that same way? People often look at the state of the world and think there can't be a God to believe in because of the mess it's in!? Because of the state of the world around us, I often wonder if I would be a Christian if I hadn't been born into a Christian family, with Christian parents, surrounded by Christian friends. Would you?

But all too easily we take faith for granted. We think it's easy to believe and easy to keep believing, but it's not - not for most of us. I am sure there are some people to whom God has given such grace that believing is never a challenge, even in the midst of extreme circumstances. But the rest of us struggle to believe at least part of the time.

Think of what must be believed in order to become a Christian in the first place and we see faith lived out. That you are God's creature, that he is holy and you are a guilty sinner before him, that he sent Jesus Christ into the world to atone for sin, that by believing in Jesus his righteousness and the virtue of his death are imputed to you so that your guilt is swept away and you are accounted righteous in God's sight, that, if you believe in Jesus, you have been made a new creature in Christ, have been given a summons to

live a new life and the power to live it, that when you die and your body is laid in the ground, your soul will be immediately and gloriously in the presence of God in heaven, and Jesus Christ will come again to judge the living and the dead and to vindicate those who have trusted in him, and that the endless bliss of eternal life awaits at the resurrection, those who have trusted Jesus Christ.

You can't see any of this. You can't prove it in a laboratory. No one ever comes back from the other world to tell us of how things are. The evidence of our eyes is against all of this. We can't see sins forgiven, we have to believe it. We can't see the soul in heaven. We have to believe it. We have to believe it all on the strength of God's promise. Christ said he would return, and we must believe that he will keep his promise one day.

That's a lot to believe. And without God's help, we would never believe any of it. We couldn't. It's just not in us to believe those things. Faith comes down to us as a gift from God. And we must exercise the faith we have or it will begin to wither and die on the vine.

We have to take faith seriously, that we might live it. It has to make a difference. It has to change the way we live.

It did for three men from our reading: Abel, Enoch, and Noah. For them it was all about the faith.

### **Without faith you cannot be accepted by God (v. 4)**

The story of Cain and Abel, recorded in **Genesis 4**, is a tale that is so well known that many people who never read the Bible know that Cain killed Abel. This story is dark and tragic from beginning to end.

And it is the first murder in human history. One brother kills another in an outburst of rage and envy. Obviously sibling rivalry was present from the beginning. Cain farmed the soil while Abel raised livestock. Cain brought an offering from his crops while Abel brought a sacrifice of the best of his herd. God accepted Abel's offering because it was brought in faith.

There are many mysteries about this story. There is much we don't know that perhaps we wish we knew. What is the age difference between Cain and

Abel? What was their upbringing like? Why did one choose to be a farmer and the other a shepherd? How did they know to bring an offering to God? How did Cain know Abel's sacrifice had been accepted and his had not? What exactly had Adam taught his sons about the proper way to approach God? Certainly Cain represents all those people in the world who believe they can make up their own religion. Even within the Church there are people who seek to make up their own versions of Christian faith, modify what has been received over the centuries as biblical orthodoxy, often by worldly standards - making that influence!!

People are believing what they want and doing what they want and thinking what they want. And it's reflected in our giving, our truth-telling, our church attendance, and our integrity as Christians. Let me remind you that there is only one way to God and that is through faith in his Son, Jesus Christ. It is about the faith and that faith must be in Jesus.

Whatever we may say about the two offerings of Cain and Abel, the real difference was in the heart. Abel had faith; Cain did not. **Genesis 4:4** says that God looked with favour on Abel and his offering. God always looks to the heart first and foremost. When he looked at Abel's heart, he found faith there, and it was faith that he rewarded.

### **Without faith you cannot please God (vv. 5-6)**

If the story of Cain and Abel seems short, the story of Enoch is minuscule by comparison. In just four brief verses (**Genesis 5:21-24**), we have his entire life history. For 65 years he lived for himself, but when his son Methuselah was born, he began to walk with God. And for 300 more years he walked with God until "he was no more, because God took him away" (v. 24).

All of us are on a journey going somewhere. We are looking for something - meaning, purpose, identity, fulfilment, satisfaction - and many people spend a lifetime engaged in a literal journey from one place to another, and sometimes from one relationship to another, seeking something that seems just out of our reach.

**Ecclesiastes 3:11** says that God has **set eternity inside every human heart**. That is, God has placed in us a hunger to know who we are and where we fit in the universe. And all our striving after career goals, worldly success,

financial independence, and even our jumping from one relationship to another, those things are but symptoms of our deeper need to find our place in 'God life'.

The French philosopher Pascal said that there is a "**God-shaped vacuum**" inside every human heart. Since nature abhors a vacuum, if we don't fill it with God, we will fill it with something else. So many of us have filled our hearts with the worthless junk of the world. Augustine said, "**O Lord, you have made us for yourself. Our hearts are restless until they find rest in you.**" How true that is.

Enoch's journey led him to God, and when he found God, he walked with him. He began walking with God after the birth of his son. Perhaps he was like many men who don't get serious in life, until they look into the face of their firstborn child. Suddenly they realize the heavy weight of responsibility that is upon them. Perhaps that's what happened to Enoch. In any case he walked with God for 300 years.

One day Enoch and God had walked so far that God said, "**Why don't you come home with me?**" And Enoch walked beyond space and time, into eternity.

Enoch's story teaches us that death for the believer is not a traumatic event - though on earth it often seems traumatic. For the believer in Jesus, death is a transition from this life to the next. As John Stott remarked, death is a "**trivial episode**" to the believer. It is the doorway through which we enter into the presence of the Lord Jesus Christ.

### **Without faith you cannot stand against the world (v. 7)**

Finally I want to just consider the story of Noah (Gen. 6-9). All of us know the story of the great flood, the massive ark, and the gathering of the animals. And we know how Noah saved his family while the world around him perished.

The Bible calls Noah a preacher of righteousness but he didn't have much to show for his efforts. For 120 years he preached the truth and called for the society around him to repentance. When the flood finally came, only eight

people were saved: Noah and his wife, his three sons and their wives. He managed to save his own family - and no one else.

BUT - By faith he preached when no one would listen.

By faith he built when people ridiculed.

By faith he continued year after year to build as God instructed him to do.

By faith he believed God - regarding things he had not yet seen.

Noah was a righteous man who had great faith in God. His faith saved his entire family. But note this. Not one word is ever said about the faith of his wife or the faith of Shem, Ham or Japheth or their wives. But they must have had some faith. How do I know that?

When Noah entered the ark, his wife went with him.

When Noah and Mrs. Noah entered the ark, their boys went with them.

When the boys entered the ark, their wives went with them.

I don't know how much faith they had, but Noah had enough faith to inspire all of them to follow his example. That's the power of a godly leader. Noah's faith saved his entire family. He believed so deeply and obeyed so completely and walked so intimately with God that it was natural for his entire family to do what he did.

If you live out your faith every day, especially perhaps us as men, as dads, as husbands, you can have a powerful impact on those around you. When I was a curate, my training incumbent and I would talk about our sadness when Mums with their children would be regularly part of the church family, but without Dad being there, and often children would all too easily slip away! We realised that if you get the Dads committed to Church, you got the family!!

But for all of us, men and women alike, take heart from Noah's example. You can be godly in a very ungodly world. Let's stop complaining about the evil of the present day. As bad as things are, they were worse in Noah's day. Back then, there were only eight true believers in the whole world. We have far more spiritual advantages than Noah had. All we need is the courage to do what Noah did and to believe what God has said.

So what do we have when we stand back and look at these three men who lived before the flood?

Abel found the righteousness that comes by faith. He trusted in God.

Enoch walked with God and went straight to heaven. He had faith, and trusted in God.

Noah had the courage to stand against the unbelieving world. He had faith and trusted in God.

What they did, they did by faith. And God honoured them because of their faith.

Faith taken seriously makes a difference in our world and changes the way we live.

This leads me to ask two questions about faith:

**Do you have it? Will you live it?**

Will people comment on your life - that it was never perhaps perfect, but it demonstrated a faith lived out!! I hope so!!