

“FAITH”
by Rom A. Pegram (8/20/17)

Do you remember having birthday parties when you were younger? Do you remember how it felt—the time leading up to those celebrations? You were both excited and anxious. You knew that you would receive gifts or other special treats, for sure; but, there would also be some surprises...

My grandson, Henry, is really into birthdays now—his 3rd birthday coming up in November. But it doesn't really matter whose birthday it is, Henry's going to be a part of it. He's going to help whoever the birthday person is ... open their presents. He likes that part! He can always be assured it'll be exciting ... and can always anticipate some surprises behind those gift wrappings. So, birthdays combine both ... *assurance & anticipation*...

...and *so does our faith!* When we live a life of faith, we're *assured* of the reality of God's presence; our experience has taught us God'll be there for us... as we put our faith in him. But, we can also *anticipate* some surprises along the way, too ... as we walk with God by FAITH! Listen to these definitions in Verse 1 of Hebrews:

- KJV – “Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen.”
- NLT - “Faith is the confidence that what we hope for will actually happen; it gives us assurance about things we cannot see.”
- MSG – “The fundamental fact of existence is that this trust in God, this faith, is the firm foundation under everything that makes life worth living. It's our handle on what we can't see.”

So, faith is being *assured that what we hope for will happen, always anticipating the things we know to be true*—though we can't always see 'em right now! Faith is both *assurance & anticipation!*

Verse 1 *also* tells us that faith begins with believing in God's character; *God is who he says he is!* And the end result is believing in God's promises; *God will do what he says he'll do!* When we believe that God will fulfill his promises—even *though we don't see those promises materializing yet*, we demonstrate true faith, as evidenced in the stories—the *witnesses (to use the author's language)*—from Hebrews 11. Let's pick up with some examples of faith from this chapter, beginning with verse 7. Listen (Hebrews 11:7-16, NLT)...

It was by faith that Noah built a large boat to save his family from the flood. He obeyed God, who warned him about things that had never happened before. By his faith Noah condemned the rest of the world, and he received the righteousness that comes by faith. ⁸ It was by faith that Abraham obeyed when God called him to leave home and go to another land that God would give him as his inheritance. He went without knowing where he was going. ⁹ And even when

he reached the land God promised him, he lived there by faith—for he was like a foreigner, living in tents. And so did Isaac and Jacob, who inherited the same promise. ¹⁰ Abraham was confidently looking forward to a city with eternal foundations, a city designed and built by God. ¹¹ It was by faith that even Sarah was able to have a child, though she was barren and was too old. She believed that God would keep his promise. ¹² And so a whole nation came from this one man who was as good as dead—a nation with so many people that, like the stars in the sky and the sand on the seashore, there is no way to count them.

¹³ All these people died still believing what God had promised them. They did not receive what was promised, but they saw it all from a distance and welcomed it. They agreed that they were foreigners and nomads here on earth. ¹⁴ Obviously people who say such things are looking forward to a country they can call their own. ¹⁵ If they had longed for the country they came from, they could have gone back. ¹⁶ But they were looking for a better place, a heavenly homeland. That is why God is not ashamed to be called their God, for he has prepared a city for them.

So, what has God done for us in the past? What is God doing for us right now? And what will God be doing for us in the future? GOD HAS GIVEN TO US THE INCREDIBLE GIFT OF FAITH—yesterday, today, and forever... Today, we're going to be talking about *that reality*, so let's begin here:

BY FAITH ... WE CAN EXPERIENCE THE POWER OF OBEDIENCE! Faith moves us to obedience; *faith & obedience, folks, always go together*. The writer of Hebrews concurs with other NT writers in this ... and it reminds me of the old song that goes: "THERE IS NO OTHER WAY TO BE HAPPY IN JESUS, BUT TO TRUST AND OBEY!" Verse 6 says, "...it is impossible to please God without faith..." So, we have to have faith ... and *obedience* together! "THERE IS NO OTHER WAY TO BE HAPPY IN JESUS, BUT TO TRUST AND OBEY..." *Let's take a quick look at the reality of this life with God:* First, let's look at...

NOAH (v. 7), "It was by faith that Noah built a large boat to save his family from the flood. He obeyed God, who warned him about things that had never happened before. By his faith Noah condemned the rest of the world, and he received the righteousness that comes by faith." Has anyone ever seen the movie 'Evan Almighty'?

Imagine building an ark—a huge sea-going vessel—in your back yard ... because you sensed God wanted you to! It's obvious there's no way to transport this thing to water, because of its bulky size. Folks, when Noah did this, his friends began to make fun of him: "Hey, Noah, what are you doing—building a boat? How are you going to get it to the water?" My guess is that harsh laughter was probably mingled with a whole lot of snide comments... (*Expect rejection with obedience!*) *Then*, when the headwaters came, I'm guessing their laughter turned to cries of pleading anguish, as they faded away into the swirling waters of judgment...

Noah's faith and obedience became judgment to those who would not listen or believe! But, his obedience was received by God as righteous—obedience against all common sense, I might add. Do you have that kind of faith—a faith that will lead you to obedience no matter what God asks? Noah's was an incredible faith! Then we come to...

ABRAHAM (vv. 8-10) – “It was by faith that Abraham obeyed when God called him to leave home and go to another land that God would give him as his inheritance. He went without knowing where he was going.⁹ And even when he reached the land God promised him, he lived there by faith—for he was like a foreigner, living in tents. And so did Isaac and Jacob, who inherited the same promise.¹⁰ Abraham was confidently looking forward to a city with eternal foundations, a city designed and built by God.” Folks, *it's only through obedience that we'll ever experience God's very best for our lives ... and Abraham found that out!* God said ‘go’ and Abraham went ... and the world was changed forever—the 3 most prominent world religions stemming from his obedience...

Folks, here's what made the difference: *The One saying ‘go’ was God—all Abraham needed! Are you willing to go to the unknown ... when God says ‘go’?* Obedience may mean a move to a new land, but more likely it'll just be doing something God asks that you've never done before! Next ... we move to...

SARAH (vv. 11-12) – “It was by faith that even Sarah was able to have a child, though she was barren and was too old. She believed that God would keep his promise.¹² And so a whole nation came from this one man who was as good as dead—a nation with so many people that, like the stars in the sky and the sand on the seashore, there is no way to count them.” Sarah, Abraham's dear ol' wife, having long passed the time of being able to have kids, *receives a message that she's going to have a son! Any women here, over 80, who might find themselves in the same boat, have enough faith to believe that message if it came to you?* (Sarah was 127 years old when she died, so actually around 90 when she would have given birth.) I can almost hear the reactions like Sarah's—laughter ... but then, hopefully, *faith & obedience* to follow! Just like Noah and Abraham, Sarah's *faith & obedience* went way beyond common sense! She found *the power to conceive* a child by FAITH! And you and I can find power to do *whatever God asks us to do* by FAITH!

Let's go to the final verses. Not only do we find power to obey God by FAITH, but also...

BY FAITH ... WE CAN EXPERIENCE THE POWER OF VISION! What does our future hold? As followers of Christ? As the Body of Christ right here at Trinity? *This is a faith that can move us to vision—to see a future only God can see!* So, I challenge you to go back and read Hebrews 11—about what the gift of FAITH can do in the lives of those who are obedient. What you'll see is this: *Everyone mentioned from V. 16ff were driven by a vision of a future only God could see.* They had faith to believe ... *because* it was God who was giving them a vision—showing them their future as *He* sees it...

Moses is a good example of having what I like to call ... 'a faith to hang on.' He was called to speak for God, but he stuttered. He was called to lead the Hebrew people out of Egypt, but he'd never done anything like that before. He was called to shepherd this unruly people, even after they'd been rescued from their perilous life in Egypt. Yet, because of the vision God had given him for the People of God, Moses had 'a faith to hang on'. *Have you ever needed a faith like that—a faith powerful enough for you to experience God's vision for your life, for a better future?* Now, that's a vision that will keep you going...

Let me share these brief thoughts about these visionaries of faith: Those in these passages were to be 'living stones of foundation'—knowing their faithfulness to God would be built upon in future generations; today, we are some of the 'completing stones'—built upon the foundation they began ... by FAITH! Also, each of these visionaries looked into the future with eyes of faith and caught a glimpse of the promise God had for them *and* for their children; they weren't willing to satisfy themselves with short-term gain, at the cost of long-term fulfillment of God's very best (*for them & their kids*)!

So, what does this mean to us now? What does it mean to us that God has given us *an incredible gift of faith*—a faith that can empower us to obedience and to help us see God's vision for our future? Well, let me ask you this ... *with the understanding that this is why God gives us the gift of FAITH*: Are you willing to be obedient to all God calls you to, even if it goes against all common sense? Are you willing to go do things you've never done before (or thought about doing before) if God so nudges you? Are you willing to have faith in the impossible ... if God's the one asking (no matter what your friends or family think)? And, do you sometimes need 'a faith to hang on?' God's already given it to you; so activate the faith God's given you to believe in his vision for your future ... *and your church's future*—a future that, right now, maybe only God can see!

Folks, as you read and reread this 11th Chapter of Hebrews, know there is a great cloud of witnesses sitting in a heavenly stadium, cheering us on as we now run God's races in our lives! May God grant us ears to hear their shouts! And may God grant that we also be those who are obedient to all God call us to, including God's vision for our future ... in Him! FAITH is the wonderful gift God gives us yesterday, today, and tomorrow...