

EXPOSITION OF HEBREWS

Message #25

Hebrews 11:4-6

All religions in this world have faith and all religions in the world think they are right. So what is right faith and what is the kind of faith God truly does honor? What is the kind of faith that pleases God? What is the kind of faith that really does have access to God? That is what Hebrews 11 is all about.

It is obvious that the starting point of a faith that pleases God is that it believes the written Word of God starting with the book of Genesis. The beginning point of a faith that pleases God is to believe in the Creation of God as recorded in the book of Genesis (Hebrews 11:3). Then when we examine the illustrations that God gives from **verses 4-22**, they all come from the book of Genesis. **So we may conclude that real faith that pleases God believes the written Word of God starting with Genesis. To have a relationship with God, you must believe the Bible.**

We come now to the beginning of a list of faith heroes who kept their faith focused on the Word of God regardless of what they faced. God's revelation was progressive. He revealed truth to various people at various times and they were responsible to believe His Word. Hebrews 11:4-38 gives us a list of men and women who finished award winners because of their faith in the Word of God.

The list in Hebrews 11 specifically references 19 different persons and or episodes (Abel, Enoch, Noah, Abraham, Sarah, Isaac, Jacob, Joseph, Moses' parents, Moses, Jericho and the episode with Joshua, Rahab, Gideon, Barak, Sampson, Jephthah, David, Samuel, and the prophets).

This is a tough chapter to dissect. It seems that the breakdown of the chapter may be seen in two distinct parts: **1) The first group of illustrations runs from 11:4-16; and 2) The second group of illustrations runs from 11:17-40.**

The climactic point of the first listing (11:13-16) is that all of the people mentioned ended their lives on earth believing what God had said concerning the future, even though they did not get to see all of the promises come true in their lifetime. All of them believed that they were heading to a better existence that had been prepared for them by God, even though they did not get to see that existence before they died.

The second listing is of those who gained the approval of God by maintaining their faith in the face of various tests, challenges, and intimidations.

Now this study begins the first section of faith heroes, and any who will follow the example of faith of these heroes will ultimately earn a great name for themselves in the sight of God. There are five people mentioned from the book of Genesis who demonstrate at least five qualities of an heroic faith:

Quality #1 - An heroic faith believes the blood sacrifice like Abel . 11:4

Quality #2 - An heroic faith walks with God like Enoch . 11:5-6

Quality #3 - An heroic faith reverently works and witnesses for God like Noah . 11:7

Quality #4 - An heroic faith follows and waits on God like Abraham . 11:8-10

Quality #5 - An heroic faith believes God can do impossible things like Sarah . 11:11

The main point of this massive section is this:

GOD'S PEOPLE WHO WILL RECEIVE GREAT PRAISE AND REWARD FROM GOD WILL BE THOSE WHO BELIEVED GOD'S WORD AND BY FAITH KEPT THEIR FOCUS ON JESUS CHRIST.

If we will purpose to follow these examples of faith, we too will end our lives with an heroic faith. It will become obvious as we journey through these illustrations that these were not perfect people. Noah as a believer got drunk (Genesis 9:21). Abraham as a believer lied (Genesis 20:9). Sarah as a believer doubted God and lied about it (Genesis 18:12, 15). Sampson as a believer had all kinds of moral problems as did David. So these were not sinless super saints; but in the big scheme of things, they had a faith in God and His Word.

One other thing needs to be pointed out. **All of this for us centers on Jesus Christ (Hebrews 12:1-2). God wants us to keep our faith-focus on Jesus Christ.** Heroic faith is a faith that focuses on Jesus Christ from start to finish. It keeps its sight on Him as the author and finisher of our faith.

ILLUSTRATION #1 – Heroic faith begins by believing in the proper blood sacrifice for a relationship with God like Abel . 11:4

Now if we keep in mind that the purpose of this book of Hebrews is to show the superiority of Jesus Christ, specifically in giving us access to God, it is very appropriate and logical that the first faith hero that would begin the list would be Abel, because Abel's offering was the kind of offering that made it possible for sinners like Adam and Eve and their children to have a relationship with the Holy God.

We need to go back to Genesis 4 in order to understand what is being developed here. **The writer jumps over Adam and Eve and begins by presenting the faith of Abel because Abel's faith shows the importance the fact that our relationship with God only comes by shed blood.** This is a key point of the book of Hebrews. The story comes from Genesis 4:1-7. Now we need to carefully understand this story and the background of it because here is where heroic faith begins. **This faith of Abel illustrates how we actually get into a relationship with God that is acceptable to God.**

When Adam and Eve sinned, God made garments of the skin of an animal for them so they could have a relationship with Him (Genesis 3:21). **What this theologically meant is that in order for a sinful man and woman to have any relationship with God, it had to be based on the shedding of blood.**

God had also promised Adam and Eve that the seed of a woman would be born who would crush Satan's head (Genesis 3:15-16). As Genesis 4:1-2 opens, Eve gives birth to two sons, Cain and Abel. Abel tended sheep and Cain tilled the land.

When Cain was first born, it is very likely that Adam and Eve thought that this son would be the one who would crush Satan's head, which is something God had specifically said would happen. They probably believed that this first son could be the Savior which had been promised by God. But they would soon learn he was anything but that. Truth is, Cain was Satan's son (I John 3:12).

Genesis 4:3 says "in the course of time," which we may assume refers to the time when both of these men realized the significance of having a relationship with God via some type of offering sacrifice.

Although the text does not specifically say this, but since both boys were the offspring of Adam and Eve, and since this story shows up in Hebrews, we may assume that both sons knew and were aware of the fact that the relationship with God that their parents had was due completely to the grace of God and to the shed blood of an animal.

We may surmise, as Kent Hughes said, that "both understood the substitutionary atoning nature of the blood sacrifice, because when God provided the skins to clothe their parents, he established the principle of covering sin through the shedding of blood" (*Hebrews*, Vol. 2, pp. 68-69).

Abel obviously realized this. He believed in the necessity of blood atonement and brought a first sheep and fat sheep and offered it to God. Cain apparently knew the same thing, but he believed that he could worship God his own way by offering his own fruit.

One was God's prescribed way for having a relationship with Him and the other wasn't. Genesis 4:4 says "the LORD had regard for Abel and his offering." It does not say just exactly what God did to show that He approved of Abel's offering and not Cain's, but many Bible commentators believe that God probably sent fire to consume Abel's offering and He did not when it came to Cain. Now in **Hebrews 11:4** we learn **three facts** about Abel's sacrifice:

Fact #1 - Abel's sacrifice was a better sacrifice. **11:4a**

What made the sacrifice better? **The answer is it conformed to the revealed will of God and the revealed Word of God and God accepted it.** In order to approach God, one must go God's way which is what this book of Hebrews has been saying. Abel's sacrifice was better because it went God's way.

Fact #2 - Abel's sacrifice gave him a righteous status. **11:4b**

This blood sacrifice that Abel offered gave him a righteous status in the sight of God. God's testimony of Abel is that he is righteous. Why? Because Abel believed that by shedding that animal blood, which is what God demanded, his sins would be forgiven and he would have a relationship with God. It is the shed blood that enables God to declare one is righteous, and without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness of sins.

Fact #3 - Abel's sacrifice still speaks today. **11:4c**

Now how does Abel, who is long dead, speak to us today? He speaks to us powerfully because his is the first example of one who believed in the blood sacrifice for a relationship with God even when it cost him his life. God just graciously shed the blood in behalf of Adam and Eve, but Abel came to realize that if he were to have a relationship with God, it had to be through the shed blood of the lamb.

That point still speaks to us today. We live in a world that stresses the works and achievements of men, and Abel says you do not get into a relationship with God by your works but by faith in Jesus Christ and His shed blood.

Abel started his life by believing that the manner God prescribed of a sacrifice was the only way one could have a relationship with God. By faith he offered the blood sacrifice.

What is the point of this in the Hebrews 11 context of heroic faith? **Heroic faith is faith that trusts totally and completely on the blood sacrifice of Jesus Christ to give us access to God.** It does not rely in any way, shape, or form on the work of our hands. It totally and completely relies on the sacrificial work of Jesus Christ.

If we are going to have a faith that God views as heroic, then it will totally and completely rely on the sacrificial work of Jesus Christ to give us a relationship with God in the midst of a world that stresses the works of your own hands. It does not matter how many works a person does; without a faith focus on Jesus Christ, they mean nothing and God does not accept them.

ILLUSTRATION #2 – Heroic faith develops by believing in walking through life with God like Enoch. **11:5-6**

The story of Enoch basically comes out of five verses from the book of Genesis - Genesis 5:18, 21-24. From Genesis we want to observe three main Enoch facts:

Enoch Fact #1 - Enoch came from the line of Seth after Cain had killed Abel.
Genesis 4:25-26; 5:8-18

Enoch was born at a time when men "began to call upon the name of the LORD" (Genesis 4:26). What this means is that Enoch was born at a time and into a family that prayed to God, worshipped God, and testified for God. Life was taking a new twist spiritually-speaking and people could have a very personal relationship with God.

Enoch Fact #2 - Enoch's relationship with God changed when he was 65 years old.
Genesis 5:21-22

It would appear that the birth of a son, Methuselah, prompted Enoch to rethink life and he started to focus on God and walk with God. The idea of "walking with God" is that of living life in a righteous way that is accepted and approved of by God for having a close relationship with Him. Walking with God is being concerned about living all areas of life God's way.

When Enoch had a son and then other children, it made him as a father realize the importance of giving his children an example of a father who walked with God. I believe it pleases God when a father looks at his children and says - I need to show these children that I believe the Word of God to the point where I am going to apply it to my life.

Now this was not a quick, overnight relationship. In fact, Enoch walked with God and governed his life by the Word of God for 300 years. Step by step, hour by hour, day by day, week by week, month by month, and year by year Enoch walked with God.

According to Hebrews 11, Enoch so walked with God by faith that he pleased God. We know from Jude 14 that Enoch so walked with God that he actually prophesied concerning the Second Coming of Jesus Christ. Think of this, he is in the book of Genesis and is preaching about something clearly revealed in the book of Revelation. **He walked with God and he knew God's Word and he believed and communicated God's Word.**

Enoch Fact #3 - Enoch was raptured by God when he was 365 years old. Genesis 5:23-24.

Now the main repeated phrase that shows up over and over again in Genesis 5 is "and he died." The main theme of Genesis 5 is the theme of death (5:5, 8, 11, 14, 17, 20, 27, 31). When you walk through Genesis 5, you walk through a cemetery. It is a Biblical "Boot Hill."

Death tracked Adam down at age 930 (Genesis 5:5). It tracked Seth down at age 912 (5:6-8); Enosh at age 905 (5:9-11); Kenan at age 910 (5:12-14); Mahalalel at age 895 (5:15-17); Jared at age 962 (5:18-20); Methuselah at age 969 (5:25-27); Lamech at age 777 (5:28-31). One by one they all died.

But when you come to Enoch, he did not see death. **According to Hebrews, God took Enoch up to heaven; that is He raptured him because he pleased the Lord by his faith.** Prior to this event and even after this event all others died. But Enoch was so focused on God and His Word that God took him to heaven.

Dr. S. Lewis Johnson said that he knew of a little girl who went to church and heard truth about Enoch taught and she went home and told her mother that she had heard a wonderful story about a man whose name was Enoch. He took long walks with God for a long time and finally one day God decided he had walked so far with God for so long that he just might as well come on home with God (*Hebrews 11:5-6*, p. 7).

Now if we look carefully at **Hebrews 11:5**, it says that Enoch “was not found.” What this indicates is that when Enoch disappeared, people went looking for him. They sent out search parties. This great man of God was missing and people wondered where did he go?

Verse 6 gives us two key ingredients to Enoch’s faith: 1) He came to God believing in God; 2) He believed that by walking with God he would be rewarded.

Now what does the idea of “coming to God” assume? It assumes there is a great gap between Holy God and sinful man. How do we remedy this gap? By faith and not by works. **Without faith it is impossible to please God and have a relationship with God.** Enoch apparently knew that he could have a relationship with God via a blood sacrifice, and then after offering it by faith, he started walking and living in the ways of God.

Now if we place this event in Hebrews chronologically before Noah (Hebrews 11:7ff), which is also true in Genesis, then this rapture of Enoch occurs before God pours out His wrath on the rest of the world. This is exactly the same chronology of events before God will pour out His wrath again. He will rapture all those “in Christ” before the Great Tribulation.

Now the point of Hebrews is that God wants us walking by faith in a way that pleases Him as we wait for the Rapture.

Two faith questions worth answering tonight:

- 1) Do I totally and completely believe in the blood sacrifice of Jesus Christ to give me a relationship with God like Abel?
- 2) Do I sense the need to, by faith, walk through life with God by focusing on His Word like Enoch?