

The Gospel of John (86) The Departure and Return of Jesus (3)

Today is the third Lord's Day on which we will address the passage of John -- John 14:1-11. Let us again read the first 11 verses of John 14.

“Let not your heart be troubled; you believe in God, believe also in Me. ²In My Father's house are many mansions; if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. ³And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you to Myself; that where I am, there you may be also. ⁴And where I go you know, and the way you know.”

⁵Thomas said to Him, “Lord, we do not know where You are going, and how can we know the way?”

⁶Jesus said to him, “I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me.

⁷“If you had known Me, you would have known My Father also; and from now on you know Him and have seen Him.”

⁸Philip said to Him, “Lord, show us the Father, and it is sufficient for us.”

⁹Jesus said to him, “Have I been with you so long, and yet you have not known Me, Philip? He who has seen Me has seen the Father; so how can you say, ‘Show us the Father’? ¹⁰Do you not believe that I am in the Father, and the Father in Me? The words that I speak to you I do not speak on My own authority; but the Father who dwells in Me does the works. ¹¹Believe Me that I am in the Father and the Father in Me, or else believe Me for the sake of the works themselves.

The outline that we are employing to address this passage contains three divisions. There is (1) first, *the promise of a place where Jesus was going* (14:1-4), (2) secondly, *Jesus is the only way to God the Father* (14:5-6), and (3) thirdly *Jesus as the revelation of God the Father* (14:7-11). Today we will address the third section of this outline. Here we read of the person of Jesus Christ, who is one in essence with His Father. Jesus is the second person of the blessed Holy Trinity. We may see that believing this biblical truth is essential to saving faith. These verse will also help us to understand more clearly the kind of faith that pleases God.

III. Jesus as the revelation of God the Father (14:7-11).

Last Lord's Day we addressed the “golden text” of John 14:6, in which Jesus declared, “I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me.” One point that I did not make last week was regarding the initial words of our Lord in verse 6. Jesus declared, “**I am** the way, the truth, and the life.” This is another occurrence of many in John's Gospel in which Jesus declared His deity. He is the “I AM”, the God of the Holy Scriptures.

This is the sixth of seven formal “I AM” statements in the Gospel, each containing “I am” (Ἐγώ εἰμι, *ego eimi*) and a predicate. These seven formal “I am” statements are emphatic descriptions of the person and ministry of Jesus and cumulatively form a detailed picture of Jesus Christ.¹

John Owen (1616-1683) wrote of the deity of Christ set forth in this passage:

¹ Edward W. Klink, III, **John**. Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Zondervan, 2016), p. 617.

So He testifieth of Himself, “I am the truth:” John 14:6. He is so *essentially*—as He is one with the Father, the God of truth: Deut. 32:4. He is so *efficiently*—as by Him alone it is fully and effectually declared; for “no man hath seen God at any time; the only-begotten Son, who is in the bosom of the Father, He hath declared Him:” John 1:18. He is so *substantially*—in opposition unto the types and shadows of the Old Testament; for in Him dwelt “the fulness of the Godhead bodily:” Col. 2:19. “The body is of Christ:” verse 17. He is so *subjectively*—for all divine truth, relating to the saving knowledge of God, is treasured up in Him. “In Him are hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge of God”: verse 3.²

We next arrive to **verse 7**, which reads, “*If you had known Me, you would have known My Father also; and from now on you know Him and have seen Him.*” Our Lord concluded His “I AM” statement of verse 6 with a conditional sentence in verse 7, in which He connected Himself and His work with His Father. The first portion of this conditional sentence, the “if” clause, is called the protasis of the conditional sentence—“*If you had known Me*”. He was not saying that they had not known Him. He was saying they had not *fully* known Him. They had not known Him as they should have known Him. Essentially Jesus was saying to them, “If you had truly known Me...”

In a sense, of course, they had known Jesus. They had known Him well enough to leave their homes and friends and livelihood to follow Him wherever He went. But they did not know Him in His full significance. Really to know Him is to know His Father.³

John Calvin (1509-1564) expressed it this way:

Christ, therefore, blames the disciples for not acknowledging that the fullness of the Godhead was manifested in Him. “I see,” (says He) “that hitherto you have not known Me in a right and proper manner, because you do not yet acknowledge the lively image of the Father which is exhibited in Me.”

The second portion of the conditional sentence, which is called the apodosis, reads, “*you would have known My Father also.*” This states that all that He was and had done before them, had been a revelation of the Father. Had they truly known Him, they would have also known the Father. The Father had been revealed to them all along through Him, although they had been unaware of the fact.

The Lord then stated that their future understanding of the identity of the Father and their relationship with Him would be based on their knowledge of Jesus and the time and experiences they had with Him. Jesus said, “*and from now on you know Him and have seen Him.*” Jesus was telling them, “Everything must be different “from now on,” for the revelation of God has been dramatically declared by the Word-become-flesh.”⁴ In the prologue of John’s Gospel, it was announced that Jesus would reveal the Father: “No one has seen God at any time. The only begotten Son, who is in the bosom of the Father, He has declared Him” (John 1:18). And *now here* in John 14:7 Jesus declared that all that He was, all that He had taught them, all that He had done before them, had indeed revealed the Father to them. In short, Jesus declared to His disciples that the better they know Him, the better they would know the Father. What Jesus is asserting was that He and His Father, are a singular object of faith—one God.

It would seem that His disciples were not understanding the meaning and implications of what He was telling them. This is suggested by Philip’s request in **verse 8**. We read, “*Philip said to Him, ‘Lord, show us the Father, and it is sufficient for us.’*” It would seem that Philip understood rightly that Jesus could reveal the Father to them, but he was wrong in the manner in which Jesus does reveal Him. He had still distanced

² John Owen, **The Works of John Owen**, vol. 1 (The Banner of Truth Trust, 1965), p. 80.

³ Leon Morris, **The Gospel According to John** (William B. Eerdmans, 1971), p. 642.

⁴ Klink, p. 617.

Jesus from His Father as if they were two entirely separate entities.⁵ Philip had a too low view of Jesus even after being with Him for the previous 3½ years.

At one level Philip and the others truly do know Jesus, and therefore in the Son they have seen the Father. But they do not recognize this yet. As highly as they think of Jesus, they do not yet grasp that in Jesus God has made Himself known. To the extent that this is still beyond them, they do not know Jesus Himself very well.⁶

Philip asked for a direct revelation or access to God the Father. Philip rightly understood that the greatest blessing that is possible for a human being is to come into the presence of God. He was as the psalmist, who addressed God, “You will show me the path of life; in Your presence is fullness of joy; at Your right hand are pleasures forevermore” (Psa. 16:11). And he was as King David who said to God, “As for me, I will see Your face in righteousness; I shall be satisfied when I awake in Your likeness” (Psa. 17:15). It is as **Matthew Henry** (1662-1714) wrote,

We have been made in His image, and however much we have defaced that image, we still yearn for the *visio Dei*, the vision of God. Moses had begged, “Now show me Your glory” (Exo. 33:18, in the LXX, ‘Show me Yourself’). But the most he was allowed to glimpse was the trailing edge of the back of God’s glory. The Evangelist (John) has already made it clear in his Prologue that however mitigated God’s gracious self-disclosure was in former times, in Jesus He has made Himself known, definitively, gloriously, visibly.⁷

But had Philip truly “seen” Jesus, he would have known that he had truly “seen” God the Father.

We then read in **verse 9**, “Jesus said to him, “*Have I been with you so long, and yet you have not known Me, Philip? He who has seen Me has seen the Father; so how can you say, ‘Show us the Father?’*”

Our Lord seemed to be rather astonished with Philip’s question. His disciples should have known more than what they knew, or so it would seem. Jesus declared that to have seen Him was to have seen God the Father.

Jesus now emphasizes afresh the mutual indwelling of the Father and the Son (cf. John 10:38); He claims that the words He speaks are those given Him by the Father to speak (cf. John 12:4) and that the works He does are those given Him by the Father to do (cf. John 5:19f). The oscillation between the words and the works in verse 10 is anticipated in John 8:28: ‘I do nothing on My own initiative, but as the Father has taught Me, so I speak.’ The appeal to the testimony of the works themselves has been made in John 5:36; 10:37f. But whereas formerly these things were said to the incredulous ‘world’, now they are repeated to disciples who, however uncomprehending they may be, are most willing to believe.⁸

In order to correct the defective and deficient understanding of Him by His disciples, Jesus asked Philip in **verse 10a**, “*Do you not believe that I am in the Father, and the Father in Me?*” Here we read that Jesus was “in” the Father and the Father was “in” Him. This is one of the clearest, fullest, expressions of the deity of Jesus Christ that we have in Holy Scripture. How can the Son and the Father be at the same time and to the same degree *in* one another? How can the eternal, infinite God, who is spirit in His essence, be *in* Jesus in His fulness? And how can Jesus be *in* the Father in the same way and to the same degree? Jesus Christ must be God. [Later in John’s Gospel we will read much about the Holy Spirit as the third Person of the Holy Trinity.]

⁵ Jesus and the Father are two different Persons, but are of one essence—one God.

⁶ Donald Carson, **The Gospel According to John** (William B. Eerdmans. 1991), p. 494.

⁷ *Ibid.*

⁸ F. F. Bruce, **The Gospel of John** (William B. Eerdmans, 1983), p. 300.

J. I. Packer (b. 1926) wrote about the biblical declaration and revelation of God the Holy Trinity:

The basic assertion of this doctrine is that the unity of the one God is complex. The three personal “subsistences” (as they are called) are coequal and coeternal centers of self-awareness, each being “I” in relation to two who are “You” and each partaking of the full divine essence (the “stuff” of deity, if we may dare to call it that) along with the other two. They are not three roles played by one person (that is *modalism*), nor are they three gods in a cluster (that is *tritheism*); the one God (“He”) is also, and equally, “They,” and “They” are always together and always cooperating, with the Father initiating, the Son complying, and the Spirit executing the will of both, which is His will also. This is the truth about God that was revealed through the words and works of Jesus, and that undergirds the reality of salvation as the New Testament sets it forth.⁹

It follows that because all three persons of the Trinity are all one God, that each of the Persons of the Trinity are due equal honor and glory. It must be so, if Jesus could say that He was “in” the Father and the Father was “in” Him. Again, Packer wrote of this:

The practical importance of the doctrine of the Trinity is that it requires us to pay equal attention, and give equal honor, to all three persons in the unity of their gracious ministry to us. That ministry is the subject matter of the gospel which, as Jesus’ conversation with Nicodemus shows, cannot be stated without bringing in their distinct roles in God’s plan of grace... All non-Trinitarian formulations of the Christian message are by biblical standards inadequate and indeed fundamentally false, and will naturally tend to pull Christian lives out of shape.¹⁰

We read next in **verse 10b**, “*The words that I speak to you I do not speak on My own authority; but the Father who dwells in Me does the works.*” Whereas in verse 10a Jesus speaks of the equality of Him as the Son with His Father, here in the second portion of verse 10 we read that there is a distinction between the Son and the Father.

This mutual indwelling is a ‘linguistic way of describing ... the complete unity between Jesus and the Father (Schnackenburg, 3. 69), articulated elsewhere in a statement such as ‘I and the Father are one’ (10:30). This does not obliterate all distinctions between them: the words and works of Jesus are given to Him by the Father (5:19ff; 8:28; 12:49), though the reverse cannot be said. Indeed, it is precisely this degree of unity that ensures that Jesus reveals God to us.¹¹

In other words, here we see a distinction between the persons of the Father and the Son. The Father gave Jesus the Words to speak and the works to do, but the Son does not give words to the Father to say or works for Him to do. They are two distinct persons, even as they are of one essence, one God.

Notice how the Lord Jesus alludes to the “words” that He spoke as being the “works” of the Father. Every word that our Savior spoke, was a work of the Father that He was doing through His Son.

Throughout this Gospel the deeds are the “signs”, and the words are God in action. The words and the deeds of Jesus are alike a revelation of God. Alike they proceed from the Father and reveal what the Father is like. Notice that though from a human point of view Jesus does them they are said to be done by the Father and they are called “His” works.¹²

We then read **verse 11** in which Jesus said, “*Believe Me that I am in the Father and the Father in Me, or else believe Me for the sake of the works themselves.*”

⁹ J. I. Packer, **Concise Theology; A Guide to Historic Christian Beliefs** (Tyndale House Publishers, 1993), p. 42.

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Carson, p. 494.

¹² Morris, p. 644.

The faith of the disciples was there, but it was rather weak and unformed. It was a true faith, but it was still somewhat of an unformed faith (cf. 14:7). But here the Lord Jesus exhorted them to continue to believe on Him, even as He was stretching them to believe more. Specifically, they were to believe that He was in the Father and the Father was in Him. And so, whereas in verse 10 Jesus had asked His disciples if they believed this truth, here in verse 11 Jesus *commands* His disciples to believe and embrace this truth. Jesus urged them to take Him at His Word, that He was telling them the truth of the matter.

Taking Jesus (or the triune God) at His Word is the highest degree and form that the faith of a believer can attain and exhibit. It is not when there is physical sight of God performing some great miracle or answer some great prayer that faith is perfected, but it is when there is no physical evidence, there is nothing tangible or temporal which may assure us or convince us that God can and should be believed. God desires that His people acquire or grow into this kind of faith, even a life of faith in which one's own actions based on what He has asserted and promised.

Jesus was about to be taken from His disciples. Even though He had told them on a number of occasions of His impending death and departure in order to prepare them for this event, they would soon be left with nothing tangible, "reasonable", or physical that would assure them they could continue to believe on Him. He would be taken from them by force, and cruelly maltreated, compelled to go to His cross to be crucified in misery and ignominy. Would they then believe as they had been exhorted to believe? Yes, they did believe when the risen Jesus Himself appeared to them. And it was Thomas who, again, would reveal his own weakness, as he had done in verse 5 of this chapter, when He would say to his disciple brethren, "Unless I see in his hands the mark of the nails, and place my finger into the mark of the nails, and place my hand into his side, I will never believe" (John 20:25). Jesus had graciously showed Himself to Thomas. We read of this in John 20:

And after eight days His disciples were again inside, and Thomas with them. Jesus came, the doors being shut, and stood in the midst, and said, "Peace to you!" ²⁷Then He said to Thomas, "Reach your finger here, and look at My hands; and reach your hand here, and put it into My side. Do not be unbelieving, but believing."

²⁸And Thomas answered and said to Him, "My Lord and my God!" (John 20:26-28)

And the Jesus said to Him, "Thomas, because you have seen Me, you have believed. *Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed.*" (John 20:29).

If you are a Christian, you are the blessed one, for you have believed although you have not seen Him as a basis of your faith or in confirmation of your faith. You have believed Jesus that He is indeed in the Father and the Father is in Him. You have believed that the words He spoke, were the words of His Father that He had given to Jesus to speak. You are blessed.

But again, what God would have people of faith believe is what He has declared in His Word though they have no visible, physical evidence to undergird or assure them that His Words are true. This is how true faith, faith that pleases God, is set forth in the great chapter on faith, Hebrews 11. Let us turn there to consider several matters.

The nature of true faith is set forth in **Hebrews 11**. Let us read the first 7 verses of this chapter of Hebrews.

¹Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen. ²For by it the elders obtained a good testimony.

³By faith we understand that the worlds were framed by the word of God, so that the things which are seen were not made of things which are visible.

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.

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. 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.

⁷By faith Noah, being divinely warned of things not yet seen, moved with godly fear, prepared an ark for the saving of his household, by which he condemned the world and became heir of the righteousness which is according to faith.

We have in Hebrews 11 the faith of the Old Testament elders displayed. The commentator of Hebrews, **F. F. Bruce**, summarized well the writer’s message:

“In Old Testament times, he points out, there were many men and women who had nothing but the promises of God to rest upon, without any visible evidence that these promises would ever be fulfilled; yet so much did these promises mean to them that they regulated the whole course of their lives in their light. The promises related to a state of affairs belonging to the future; but these people acted as if that state of affairs were already present, so convinced were they that God could and would fulfill what He had promised. In other words they were men and women of faith. Their faith consisted simply in taking God at His word and directing their lives accordingly; things yet future so far as their experience went were thus present to faith, and things outwardly unseen were visible to the inward eye.”¹³

The accounts of faith in Hebrews 11 depict the truth regarding the nature of faith in Hebrews 10:38, “The just shall live by faith.” Saving faith is a life that dictates the way one lives. If one’s faith does not govern one’s life, one’s faith is not of the saving kind. First, we read the...

1. Prologue: the nature of faith (11:1-3)

Here is one of the most clear biblical definitions and descriptions of the nature of true faith. **Verses 1 and 2** read, “*Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen. ²For by it the elders obtained a good testimony.*” “Faith” gives substance, or makes real to a person that in which he has placed his hope. In other words, faith makes real to a person those things that are presently unseen, but are objects of future hope. Through faith God assures us of promised things that we have never seen--the resurrection, eternal life, even Jesus Himself (cf. 1 Peter 1:8). By “it,” that is faith, men gained approval by God. It was not their works that approved them; rather it was their faith which generated their works.

The ESV translation of the verse is: “Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen.” It renders the word, “assurance” (or “confidence”) for “substance” in the NKJV, and “conviction” rather than “evidence.” The ESV Study Bible has a good explanation of this verse,

By defining faith (Greek, *pistis*) as “assurance” and “conviction,” the author indicates that biblical faith is not a vague hope grounded in imaginary, wishful thinking. Instead, faith is the settled confidence that something in the future—something that is not yet seen but has been promised by God—will actually come to pass because God will bring it about. Thus biblical faith is not blind faith in the face of contrary evidence, not an unknowable “leap in the dark”; rather, biblical faith is the confident trust in the eternal God who is all-powerful, infinitely wise, eternally trustworthy—the God who has revealed himself in his word and in the person of Jesus Christ, whose promises have proven true from generation to generation, and who will “never leave nor forsake” his own (13:5). Such faith in the unseen realities of God is emphasized throughout chapter 11 (e.g. 11:7, 8; cf. v. 3) and has provided confidence and assurance to all who receive Christ as Lord and Savior

Now before the writer speaks of the promise of future things that moved men and women of faith, he cited an illustration of something that occurred in the past when seen things were made by something unseen-

¹³ F. F. Bruce, *The Epistle of the Hebrews* (Eerdmans,), p. 277

-the spoken Word of God. God created space and time out of nothing. **Verse 3** reads, *“By faith we understand that the worlds were framed by the word of God, so that the things which are seen were not made of things which are visible.”*

This is a description of what is recorded in Genesis 1. There the narrative records that God, who was alone in the beginning, took the initiative to create the physical universe. From nothing through the power of His spoken Word and the agency of His quickening Spirit, over the course of a six day period of time, God called into existence the heavens and the earth and all living things, including man and woman, who were the supreme object of His creative work. Creation was by fiat--an authoritative verbal decree. God issued the words, and the results were immediate and complete.

We believe in the eternal nature of God, not the eternal existence of matter. We reject the philosophy of the materialists, which include evolutionists, which teach or assume that matter is eternal. No, only God is eternal. God purposed and then acted when He created all that exists, having created out of nothing.

We next read of...

2. The faith of the antediluvians, that is, those who lived before the flood (11:4-7)

a. The faith of Abel (11:4)

The writer begins to cite various people of faith, first of Abel, who was the second born son of Adam and Eve. **Verse 4** reads,

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.

This story is recorded in Genesis 4. Let us read of the event from that passage:

¹Now Adam knew Eve his wife, and she conceived and bore Cain, and said, “I have acquired a man from the LORD.” ²Then she bore again, this time his brother Abel. Now Abel was a keeper of sheep, but Cain was a tiller of the ground. ³And in the process of time it came to pass that Cain brought an offering of the fruit of the ground to the LORD. ⁴Abel also brought of the firstborn of his flock and of their fat. And the LORD respected Abel and his offering, ⁵but He did not respect Cain and his offering. And Cain was very angry, and his countenance fell.

We read that God had accepted Abel’s sacrifice, but that He had rejected that offered by Cain. Why was Abel’s sacrifice accepted and Cain’s was not? It is commonly said that it was because Abel had offered a blood sacrifice but Cain had only offered a grain sacrifice, that is a bloodless sacrifice, and without the shedding of blood, there can be no remission of sins. But this is probably not the case. The Old Testament makes provision for the offering of grain sacrifices. It would have been an appropriate and good thing for Cain to offer what his hands had wrought, the fruit of the harvest of his fields. And so, it was not because Abel’s sacrifice was a lamb/sheep and Cain’s was of grain; rather, God had accepted Abel’s sacrifice because Abel had offered it in faith, a faith that moved him to live in a righteous manner before God. Cain’s sacrifice was not accepted because his life was not one of righteousness. As God said in verse 7, “If you do well, will you not be accepted?” And so, God accepted Abel’s sacrifice because God had accepted Abel; God had rejected Cain’s sacrifice because God had rejected Cain. Abel had faith, Cain did not have (saving) faith.

The case of Cain and Abel is mentioned elsewhere in the New Testament. Our Lord made the statement, “from the blood of righteous Abel”, in which He described Abel as righteous. And then the apostle John describes Cain and Abel in 1 John 3:11 and 12,

“For this is the message that you heard from the beginning, that we should love one another, not as Cain who was of the wicked one and murdered his brother. And why did he murder him? Because his works were evil and his brother’s righteous.”

God only regarded a sacrifice with favor if it was offered in faith, a faith that moved the sacrificer to live righteously. This has been God's way of salvation from the very beginning. He saves people from their sin, saving them unto Himself, through the instrument of faith.

b. The faith of Enoch (11:5)

We then read of Enoch, the seventh generation from Adam and Eve. **Verse 5** reads,

By 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.

All that is said of Enoch in the Old Testament is found in **Genesis 5:21-24**.

²¹Enoch lived sixty-five years, and begot Methuselah. ²²After he begot Methuselah, Enoch walked with God three hundred years, and had sons and daughters. ²³So all the days of Enoch were three hundred and sixty-five years. ²⁴And Enoch walked with God; and he was not, for God took him.

Enoch was a man who walked with God. Walking with God is a description of godliness. It reveals the fact that Enoch, though a sinner, was reconciled to God, "for two cannot walk together except they be agreed" (Amos 3:3). To walk with God is to set God always before you, to live knowing that you are always under His watchful eye. It is a walk characterized by the fear of God, living so that you might please God and do nothing to offend Him or alienate yourself from him. This was Enoch's constant concern. This was Enoch's character. Enoch delighted himself in God. He walked with God. He enjoyed fellowship with God.

And apparently God enjoyed Enoch's company. One day as they walked together, God took him home with Himself. Their fellowship was thereafter continuous, unbroken, and undiminished. One described him:

Enoch was removed to a better world. As he did not live like the rest of mankind, so he did not leave the world by death as they did. He was not found, because God had translated him. He had lived but 365 years, which, as men's ages were then, was but the midst of a man's days. God often takes those soonest whom he loves best; the time they lose on earth, is gained in heaven, to their unspeakable advantage.¹⁴

Enoch was no longer of this world. He was changed. In the same manner we all will be changed, we who believe on the Lord Jesus, who possess a faith like Enoch's. Those who walk with God in this life will walk with God in the life to come. Some He will perhaps take sooner, others will tarry here, according to His purposes. But we shall all one day be with Him.

Now after describing the faith of Enoch, the writer describes...

c. The absolute necessity to possess true faith. (11:6)

Verse 6 reads, ***"But 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."*** It is clear that it is the faith that moves one to seek God that pleases God; thus to "believe" here is to believe that the invisible God exists, and to believe in the blessedness which is assured to those who "walk" with Him, that is, live godly and righteously. God is the rewarder of all such who believe. The "reward" is God Himself or the "joy of finding Him."¹⁵

Now notice *first*, that *true faith involves believing certain truths that God has revealed in His Word*. True faith is not a feeling. True faith is not an experience. True faith is belief in truths that God has revealed

¹⁴ Matthew Henry

¹⁵ F. F. Bruce

through His Word. God's Word has told us that He created the world and all that is in it and did so in six days. We believe what God has said respecting His creation of all things. This is the nature of faith, believing what God has said.

Secondly, we see that true faith "must believe that He is." In other words, it is essential to true faith for one to believe in the true God. There are many people in the world who are people of "faith", so-called, but their faith is not in the true God; therefore, their faith is not true faith. **"For he who comes to God must believe that He is."**

Now, an important question that must be asked is, "If one must know that God is God, what specifically must be known and believed about God?" That is a very difficult question to answer, and we have done so on other occasions. But considering our passage of John 14, we would say that one of the foundational truths about God is set forth by our Lord Jesus when He commanded His disciples, **"Believe Me that I am in the Father and the Father in Me, or else believe Me for the sake of the works themselves"** (John 14:11).

d. The faith of Noah (11:7)

⁷By faith Noah, being divinely warned of things not yet seen, moved with godly fear, prepared an ark for the saving of his household, by which he condemned the world and became heir of the righteousness which is according to faith.

The "things not yet seen" were the events of the flood, which was God's judgment upon the wicked. God had told Noah ahead of time that the flood would come and that he needed to prepare himself and his family in order to escape the condemnation of the world. In a sense Noah had "condemned the world" by his faith; that is, Noah, due to faith, regarded the whole world as condemned, and therefore moved to save his household. He was obedient to God's Word, having believed God and the truthfulness of His word to Him. He spent the next 120 years building an ark in anticipation of the certain coming judgment of God.

We read that Noah became an "heir of the righteousness." That is, he would one day receive the "reward" or the "inheritance" that is given to those who live righteously. On the great Day of Judgment he will stand in the righteousness of Jesus Christ, the righteousness that he had inherited through faith. Why did he live righteously? Because he **believed** that God was going to judge the unrighteous and that God had intended to save him through that ark. In the same way we know that one day the Lord Jesus will return to judge the world. He will damn the unrighteous to their just punishment; He will reward people of true faith with the gift of everlasting life, which is theirs through faith in Him. In Noah's day the world lived for the present only, each day as it came; Noah lived with his eye of faith on the future. He believed in "unseen things", because He believed God who told him about these things. This is what governed his attitudes and actions; this faith governed his life. May the Lord enable each of us to follow his example.

3. The faith of the Patriarchs who lived after the flood (11:8-29)

a. The faith of Abraham and Sarah (11:8-12)

Verse 8 reads, **"By faith Abraham obeyed when he was called to go out to the place which he would afterward receive as an inheritance. And he went out, not knowing where he was going."** Abraham's faith led to his obedience. He left Ur not knowing where he was going. His inheritance was "unseen," but because God's word had promised it to him, he believed (obeyed). God told him to do something and Abraham believed Him and so he did it, in that he left his family, his home, and his homeland. And so, the **first** way that Abraham exhibited faith was in **his willingness to leave Ur**.

We next read of Abraham's faith after he had arrived in the land of promise. **Verses 9 and 10** read, **"By faith he sojourned in the land of promise as in a foreign country, dwelling in tents with Isaac and Jacob, the heirs with him of the same promise; ¹⁰for he waited for the city which has foundations, whose builder and maker is God."** Once Abraham arrived in the land which was promised him, he did not settle

down to city life. He lived in tents, temporary dwelling places. The earthly “Promised Land” was not his true home or inheritance. This is why Abraham lived as a sojourner in the land of promise; he “saw” the land as actually foreshadowing something as yet “unseen.” He anticipated that God would one day build the New Jerusalem, a city in which he and all of his promised children would dwell in fellowship with God. In summary, the *second* way in which Abraham exhibited faith was *in the manner that he lived once he arrived in Canaan*.

Next we read of the faith of Abraham’s wife, Sarah. **Verse 11** reads, *“By faith Sarah herself also received strength to conceive seed, and she bore a child when she was past the age, because she judged Him faithful who had promised.”* What Paul attributed as faith to Abraham in Romans 4, the writer here states of Sarah; however, Abraham remains in view. Although Sarah was past the age of bearing she believed God’s promise, because of her faith, she was enabled to conceive a child. We then read in **verse 12**, *“Therefore from one man, and his as good as dead, were born as many as the stars of the sky in multitude -- innumerable as the sand which is by the seashore.”* Abraham was dead as far as his ability to bear children; nevertheless, God gave Abraham what He had promised him, as we read in the following verses:

Then He (God) brought him outside and said, “Look now toward heaven, and count the stars if you are able to number them.” And He said to him, “So shall your descendants be.” (Genesis 15:5)

“By Myself I have sworn, says the LORD, because you have done this thing, and have not withheld your son, your only son— ¹⁷blessing I will bless you, and multiplying I will multiply your descendants as the stars of the heaven and as the sand which is on the seashore; and your descendants shall possess the gate of their enemies. ¹⁸In your seed all the nations of the earth shall be blessed, because you have obeyed My voice.” (Gen. 22:16-18)

What moved these people to persevere in faith was the prospect of what they would inherit one day. Their hope was not fixed on anything earthly, rather they looked for a heavenly city. Beginning with **verse 13** we read,

¹³These all died in faith, not having received the promises, but having seen them afar off were assured of them, embraced them, and confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth. ¹⁴For those who say such things declare plainly that they seek a homeland. ¹⁵And truly if they had called to mind that country from which they had come out, they would have had opportunity to return. ¹⁶But now they desire a better, that is, a heavenly country. Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God, for He has prepared a city for them.

“These all” refer to Abraham, Sarah, Isaac, and Jacob. Even the certain prospect of death did not discourage these people of faith for they foresaw that God was faithful who promised. Even death would not prevent God from fulfilling His word.

They viewed themselves as “strangers and pilgrims on the earth.” They saw themselves as journeying throughout this life in this strange world, anticipating arriving to their promised homeland and city. This pilgrimage idea is conveyed in their own words. For example, Abraham described his life in this way even after having lived in Canaan many years. We read in **Genesis 24:1ff**.

¹Sarah lived one hundred and twenty-seven years; these were the years of the life of Sarah. ²So Sarah died in Kirjath Arba (that is, Hebron) in the land of Canaan, and Abraham came to mourn for Sarah and to weep for her. ³Then Abraham stood up from before his dead, and spoke to the sons of Heth, saying, ⁴*“I am a foreigner and a visitor among you. Give me property for a burial place among you, that I may bury my dead out of my sight.”*

We also read of Jacob describing his life in the same way:

⁹And Jacob said to Pharaoh, “The days of the years of *my pilgrimage* are one hundred and thirty years; few and evil have been the days of the years of my life, and they have not attained to the days of the years of the life of my fathers in the days of *their pilgrimage*.” (Gen. 47:9)

In the same way we should view ourselves as “strangers and exiles” in this life on this earth. We are citizens of another realm. It is imperative that a child of God to walk as a citizen of heaven, as we read in **Philippians 3:17-20**:

¹⁷Brethren, join in following my example, and not those who so walk, as you have us for a pattern.

¹⁸For many walk, of whom I have told you often, and now tell you even weeping, that they are the enemies of the cross of Christ: ¹⁹whose end is destruction, whose god is their belly, and whose glory is in their shame -- *who set their mind on earthly things*. ²⁰*For our citizenship is in heaven*, from which we also eagerly wait for the Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, ²¹who will transform our lowly body that it may be conformed to His glorious body, according to the working by which He is able even to subdue all things to Himself.

Indeed, the patriarchs desired a homeland, but it was nothing that this world offered them. Earthly Canaan was no more their home than was the wilderness for those who would later come out of Egypt. Lest the readers think that Abraham and his descendants regarded themselves as pilgrims only because they were homesick for having left their homeland of Ur, the writer says that they had no concern for returning. **Verse 15** reads, “*And truly if they had called to mind that country from which they had come out, they would have had opportunity to return.*” No, they saw their homeland as in heaven, awaiting them after they had completed their journey through this life. **Verse 16** records, “*But now they desire a better, that is, a heavenly country. Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God, for He has prepared a city for them.*” They took God at His word and He would not disappoint them.

“The earthly Canaan and the earthly Jerusalem were but temporary object-lessons pointing to the saints’ everlasting rest, the well-founded city of God.”¹⁶

The writer was making it clear that the Old Testament saints, including the patriarchs of Israel, looked to inherit the same promises that God has promised New Testament Christians.¹⁷

These people were rich in faith because they believed God although there seemed to be nothing they could tangibly look to or handle that confirmed what God had promised them would come to pass. And so it is the same with us today. The Lord will take us through experiences in this life, some of which may be prolonged in nature, when it seems that nothing happens, nothing can be seen, that might “prop” us up in our faith, or confirm what God has promised will come to pass. But it does not matter. His grace has brought us and taught us to believe, and that grace of God sustains our faith so that we persevere in our faith. And our faith will not disappoint us. God is glorified in His people believing on Him solely based upon His Word. May He enable us to continue to do so, to His glory.

“When Christ who is your life appears,
then you also will appear with him in glory. (Col. 3:4)

¹⁶ F. F. Bruce, **The Epistle to the Hebrews** (Eerdmans, 1964), p. 305.

¹⁷ Ibid., p. 307. “Words could hardly make it clearer that the patriarchs and the other men and women of God who lived before Christ have a share in the same inheritance of glory as is promised to believers in Christ of New Testament times.”

