

EXPOSITION OF HEBREWS 11

In this chapter we read of the wonders of faith; but I have never read a chapter setting forth the wonders of unbelief. Unbelief is barren, impotent, a mere negation, a dead and accursed thing; but faith bears fruit, faith produces good works, faith achieves marvels.

HEB. 11:1. Now faith ...

That is, belief, trust in God,-

HEB. 11:1. Is the substance of things hoped for,

It gets a grip of them, and holds them fast.

HEB. 11:1. The evidence of things not seen.

The sight of what we cannot see with our mortal eyes.

HEB. 11:2. For by it the elders obtained a good report.

So it was written, those believers who lived in the olden time gained fame and glory (a good report) from God Himself. This second verse shows that they obtained it by their faith. The best part of the report about them is, that they believed their God, and believed all that was revealed to them by His Word and His Spirit.

HEB. 11:3. Through faith we understand that the worlds were framed by the word of God, so that things which are seen were not made of things which do appear.

By faith, we know more about the creation of the world than philosophy can ever teach us; it has invented the most remarkable and ridiculous theories of how the worlds were made and men produced. We have the truth here; the worlds were framed by the word of God, not made of things which existed previously, but spoken out of nothing by the voice of the Almighty.

HEB. 11:4. By faith Abel offered unto God a more excellent sacrifice than Cain, by which he obtained witness that he was righteous, God testifying of his gifts: and by it he being dead yet speaketh.

Faith teaches us how to worship God aright. Faith brings the appointed sacrifice which is therefore accepted.

HEB. 11:5-6. By faith Enoch was translated that he should not see death; and was not found, because God had translated him: for before his translation he had this testimony, that he pleased God. But without faith it is impossible to please him: for he that cometh to God must believe that he is, and that he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him.

The way to please God, then, is to believe in Him; and if there be any possibility of entering heaven without seeing death, faith alone can point the way. You cannot be Enochs unless you please God, and you cannot please God unless you have faith in Him.

HEB. 11:7. By faith Noah, being warned of God of things not seen as yet, moved with fear, prepared an ark to the saving of his house; by the which he condemned the world, and became heir of the righteousness which is by faith.

Noah was the second great father of men as Adam was the first. In the flood, all died except Noah and his family. Faith made him build the great ship on dry land, into which he went, with his wife and family and all manner of living creatures; and when the rest of mankind were destroyed, they outlived the flood

HEB. 11:8-18. By faith Abraham, when he was called to go out into a place which he should after receive for an inheritance, obeyed; and he went out not knowing whither he went. By faith he sojourned in the land of promise, as in a strange country, dwelling in tabernacles with Isaac and Jacob, the heirs with him of the same promise: for he looked for a city which hath foundations, whose builder and maker is God. Through faith also Sara herself received strength to conceive seed, and was delivered of a child when she was past age, because she judged him faithful who had promised. Therefore sprang there even of one, and him as good as dead, so many as the stars of the sky in multitude, and as the sand which is by the sea shore innumerable. These all died in faith, not having received the promises, but having seen them afar off, and were persuaded of them, and embraced them, and confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth. For they that say such things declare plainly that they seek a country. And truly, if they had been mindful of that country from whence they came out, they might have had opportunity to have returned. But now they desire a better country, that is an heavenly: wherefore God is not ashamed to be called their God: for he hath prepared for them a city. By faith Abraham, when he was tried, offered up Isaac: and he that had received the promises offered up his only begotten son, of whom it was said, That in Isaac shall thy seed be called:

The great trouble of Abraham was not his fatherly instinct, hard as it was to overcome that, and to be the slayer of his only son; his great difficulty was, "How can God's promise be kept? He has given me a promise that in Isaac shall my seed be called, yet He tells me to offer up my son, how can this be?" But by faith he did it,-

HEB. 11:19. Accounting that God was able to raise him up, even from the dead; from whence also he received him in a figure.

The doctrine of the resurrection is a precious jewel that Faith weareth as in a ring on her right hand. "God can raise the dead, says Faith; and that is a most comforting truth. O you bereaved ones, wear that ring! O you who fear to die, wear that priceless jewel! It will be better than any amulet or talisman that the ancients ever wore.

HEB. 11:20-21. By faith Isaac blessed Jacob and Esau concerning things to come. By faith Jacob, when he was a dying, blessed both the sons of Joseph; and worshipped, leaning upon the top of his staff.

Faith can bless other people as well as the believer himself. It not only brings good cheer into a man's own heart, but it enables him to speak words of love and consolation to his children. Dying Jacob pronounces living blessings upon his sons, and upon their sons generation after generation.

HEB. 11:22. By faith Joseph, when he died, made mention of the departing of the children of Israel; and gave commandment concerning his bones.

He would not have his bones buried away from those of his godly ancestors, for he never forgot that he belonged to the chosen nation.

HEB. 11:23. By faith Moses, when he was born, was hid three months of his parents, because they saw he was a proper child; and they were not afraid of the king's commandment.

They were not afraid to brave the consequences of disobeying Pharaoh's command because of their faith.

HEB. 11:24-26. By faith Moses, when he was come to years, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter; choosing rather to suffer affliction with the people of God, than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season; esteeming the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures in Egypt: for he had respect unto the recompense of the reward.

Nothing but faith could have brought him to that decision.

HEB. 11:27-29. By faith he forsook Egypt, not fearing the wrath of the king: for he endured, as seeing him who is invisible. Through faith he kept the Passover, and the sprinkling of blood, lest he that destroyed the firstborn should touch them. By faith they passed through the Red Sea as by dry land, which the Egyptians assaying to do were drowned.

For faith can do what unbelief must not attempt to do; and when unbelief tries to follow in the footsteps of faith, it becomes its own destroyer. You must have real faith in God, or you cannot go where faith would take you; but with faith you may go through the cloud or through the sea, and find yourself safe on the other side.

HEB. 11:30. By faith the walls of Jericho fell down, after they were compassed about seven days.

You could not see faith at work on those solid walls. Those huge ramparts and battlements seemed to stand fast and firm yet they "fell down, after they were compassed about seven days" <Heb 11:30>. No battering rams played upon them, but faith can do better work than battering rams or dynamite.

HEB. 11:31-33. By faith the harlot Rehab perished not with them that believed not, when she had received the spies with peace. And what shall I more say? for the time would fail me to tell of Gideon, and of Barak, and of Samson, and of Jephthae; of David also, and Samuel, and of the prophets: who through faith subdued kingdoms, wrought righteousness, obtained promises, stopped the mouths of lions,

Remember Daniel in the lions' den, and then ask yourself, "What is there that faith cannot do?"

There are some names, in this chapter, which we should hardly have expected to see there, the characters mentioned having been so disfigured by serious faults, and flaws, and failings; but the distinguishing feature of faith was there in every instance, and especially in the case of Samson. Perhaps there was no more childlike faith, in any man, than there was in him; who but a man full of faith would have hurled himself upon a thousand men with no weapon in his hand but the jawbone of an ass? There was a wondrous confidence in God in that weak, strong man, which, though it does not excuse his faults, yet nevertheless puts him in the ranks of the believers. Happy is the man or woman who believeth in God. There were multitudes of others, beside those whom the apostle named.

HEB. 11:34. Quenched the violence of fire,

Think of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-nego, and remember how the fierceness of Nebuchadnezzar's fire was quenched for them.

HEB. 11:34-35. Escaped the edge of the sword, out of weakness were made strong, waxed valiant in fight, turned to flight the armies of the aliens. Women ...

For faith works equal wonders in women as in men: "Women"-

HEB. 11:35-38. Received their dead raised to life again: and others were tortured not accepting deliverance; that they might obtain a better resurrection: and others had trial of cruel mocking and scourging, yea, moreover of bond; and imprisonment: they were stoned, they were sawn asunder, were tempted, were slain with the sword: they wandered about in sheepskins and goatskins; being destitute, afflicted, tormented; (of whom the world was not worthy they wandered in deserts and in mountains, and in dens and caves of the earth.

This is the grandest roll of heroes that ever lived, and every one among them was a man or woman of faith. Faith made them so mighty. They were not greater, and in some respects not better than the rest of us, but they believed in God; they were firm in faith, and this became the basis of their conquering character, and thus their names are imperishably recorded here. They did not win the Victoria cross, but they bore the cross for their Lord, and He has honored them with an everlasting crown, which shall never be taken from them.

HEB. 11:39. And these all, having obtained a good report through faith, received not the promise:

They passed away before Christ's day, so they did not see the fulfillment of the promises concerning his coming.

HEB. 11:40. God having provided some better thing for us, that they without us should not be made perfect.

They are waiting up yonder for us; the choirs of heaven cannot be completed without you and me. Heaven's full complement, the perfect number of the divine family of love, can never be made up till we who have believed go up yonder to join all those who have had like precious faith. By God's grace, we shall all be there that they with us may be made perfect.

(From Spurgeon's Encyclopedia of Sermons)