**God-Pleasing FAITH**

June 7, 2015

Hebrews 11:1-13
Key Verse 11:6 “And without faith it is impossible to please God, because anyone

who comes to him must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who

earnestly seek him.”

Everyone has faith. A Houston Pastor named John Bisagno put it this way: "Faith is the heart of life. You go to a doctor whose name you can’t pronounce. He gives you a prescription you cannot read. You take it to a pharmacist you have never seen. He gives you medication you

do not understand -- and yet, you take it." Now, that is living by Faith! Sometimes--of course-your faith might be misplaced. Because faith is only as valuable as the OBJECT of that faith. The same is true with Spiritual Faith. Buddhists have faith in Buddha. Muslims trust in Allah. Hindus believe in various Gods. Most religious people put faith in their ability to keep the rules … to be “good enough” to satisfy their god -- or reach Nirvana -- or build up good Karma.

Even when people claim no religion at all, they still live by faith. Every human puts faith in something. It may be in some notion of human potential. It may be in the supremacy of science or reason or political power. Or they may have faith in some vague concept like “oneness with nature.” But everyone lives by faith. Hebrews 11 is called “The Faith Chapter.” It would be easy to build an entire sermon series on this one chapter alone. But don’t worry --- today we’ll just skim the surface.

Hebrews 11:1 packs a huge concept into a few words: “Now faith is confidence in what we hope for and assurance about what we do not see.” A.W. Tozer had an interesting explanation for this verse. He said: “Faith is seeing the invisible, but not the nonexistent.” Some people think faith is believing in something that is not actually there. Biblical faith believes God when He tells us there is a reality, which we cannot see. Faith means that we keep our eyes on God who controls circumstances—not on the circumstances themselves.

2 Corinthians 5:7 puts it this way: We live by faith, not by sight. That sounds simple enough. But still it’s possible to have misconceptions about what faith is.

Let’s take a few minutes to look at what Biblical Faith is NOT:

For one thing: Faith is NOT a blind leap in the dark. Some people think you have to ignore logic and reason in order to believe in God. Let’s look at verse 3.

“**3**By faith we understand that the universe was formed at God’s command, so that what is seen was not made out of what was visible.”

The author gives the creation of the universe as an example: it’s something we can’t experience visually, and yet we believe that God is the creator. Why does the author cite creation? Well, many would say that what we believe about the origin of the universe is essentially irrelevant, groundless conjecture with no bearing on our lives today. On the contrary, we see in verse 3 that by faith in God as Creator we can *understand*. We’re empowered to *understand* who God is: the Creator, whose word has the power to make visible things out of the invisible. We can *understand* who we are as God’s precious creation, and are motivated to study and *understand* nature, knowing that we will find not randomness but order—masterful design pointing to a brilliantly creative God. In short, believing in the unseen truths of God’s word is not some groundless dogma, but is a key component of faith that leads to understanding.

Another misconception of faith is that we can make God do anything we want.

But Biblical faith is NOT the ability to manipulate God. One misconception is that having faith means praying a kind of arcane magic spell. If we say the right prayers then we can conjure up the answer or miracle we’re looking for.

That kind of faith won’t outlast the first major disappointment. When a loved one is not healed or a promotion doesn’t come through or unforeseen tragedy strikes, false faith will crumble. Biblical faith does not believe that God will do what WE say. Biblical Faith knows that God will do what HE says. By faith, we rest on the promises of God—no matter what happens.

D.L Moody has an interesting quote about faith. He says “I prayed for faith and thought that someday it would come down and strike me like lightning. But faith didn’t seem to come. One day I read in Romans that “faith comes by hearing and hearing by the word of God.” I had, up to this time, closed my Bible and prayed for faith. Now I opened my Bible and began to study ---and faith has been growing ever since.”

Another common misconception is that Faith means knowing all the right facts and learning all the right rules. But Faith is NOT adherence to a list of doctrines. Biblical Faith is a relationship with a personal God.

Let’s look again at the key verse 6: “And without faith it is impossible to

please God, because anyone who comes to him must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who earnestly seek him.” The last part of verse 6 emphasizes two beliefs that are necessary for us to come to God with pleasing faith.

First we see that we need to believe that God exists, that he is not an abstract idea, but a person; not some religious construct, but the living God. This kind of

confidence is an expression of the true faith we saw defined in verse 1—“assurance

about what we do not see.”

Second, when we come to God we must believe that he rewards those who earnestlyseek him. This relates closely to the other component of faith in verse 1: that faith

is “confidence in what we hope for”—the promises in God’s word. As Jesus

instructed in Luke 9, it is essential for us to understand Father God as one who

desires relationship with us, and thus deliberately waits to reward us until we ask,

seek and knock. He withholds a certain amount of blessing until we engage with himin prayer (cf. Isaiah 30:18).

For me personally, I tend to fall into one of two categories. I often feel like God doesn’t really want to answer my prayer—he might bless me, but only after a while, if

I really strive to earn it. The Lord’s been teaching me, though, that it is actually

out of graciousness that he waits (cf. Isaiah 30:19), and through waiting I can learn

persevering prayer. I also sometimes find myself thinking that rewards don’t really

matter, and in those seasons prayer is just one-sided monologue to God. But rewards are something Jesus emphasized a great deal. Without this relationship where I ask

God in faith, and he rewards, I would never develop real intimacy with him. This isprecisely *why we can’t please God without faith*, without faith we can’t persevere in

prayer, and we keep a wrong perspective of God. As a result we never enter into

the kind of relationship he desires with us.

That’s why Hebrews 11 gives a whole list of people who put their trust in God. These Heroes of the faith show us what real faith does. For one thing, Faith will always results in heart-felt *worship*.

WORSHIP: Abel

The first Biblical example of a Worshipper is Abel --- the younger brother of Cain, who was the first man born to the first parents. The text reminds us that: “By faith Abel offered God a better sacrifice than Cain did. By faith he was commended as a righteous man, when God spoke well of his offerings.” Abel worshipped in obedience and with a sincere heart. His faith pleased God. Unfortunately Cain’s offering was not pleasing to God. And out of envy, Cain killed his brother. But Abel’s honest worship stands as a testimony. Faith that pleases God will always lead to WORSHIP.

Are you drawn to WORSHIP God with all your heart, mind, and soul? When we come together, we worship in songs and scripture reading and sermons. But the part of our worship that follows the example of Able is our time of OFFERING. Do you give your tithes and offerings as an act of Worship? Do you give with a sincere heart of gratitude? Is your offering a sacrifice of praise and obedience? If so, your faith pleases God.

The next example in our list of Faith Heroes is a rather obscure character named Enoch. We don’t know much about him, but what we know is impressive. Genesis 5:24 tells us, “Enoch walked with God; then he was no more, because God took him away.”

WALK: Enoch

Hebrews 11:5 elaborates: “By faith Enoch was taken from this life, so that he did not experience death; he could not be found, because God had taken him away. For before he was taken, he was commended as one who pleased God.” Evidently Enoch walked so closely with God that God took him home without Enoch having to experience physical death. From Enoch we learn that to walk with God is to please God.

Does your faith cause you to Walk with God? In verse 6 the author correlates pleasing God with actively coming to him, emphasizing that believing he exists, and that he rewards enables us to approach him. (The Greek word for “come to” is *proserchomenon*, literally meaning to ‘draw near’.) Walking with God is expressed as a lifestyle of nearness to God. Coming to God is not just a one-time thing, but an ongoing expression of our faith in him. It means kneeling at his feet in the holy place of prayer and worship, leaning upon him as we step out in faith (witnessing to friends etc.), and seeking close encounter with him through the study of his word.

Do you walk with God each day? Do you talk with Him while you are doing your chores … while you are mowing the lawn … while you are brushing your teeth … while you’re on the road? This is the kind of faith lifestyle that pleases God.

The next Bible Hero–Noah—is much better known than Enoch. Noah is a man whose faith led to some long hard work!

WORK: Noah

Maybe you never thought about it, but building an Ark is no small task. It took Noah and his 3 sons over 100 years! Now that’s a project! Verse 7 says, “By faith Noah, when warned about things not yet seen, in holy fear built an ark to save his family. By his faith he condemned the world and became heir of the righteousness that comes by faith.” Most of us won’t be asked to build an Ark, but God has given every one of us work assignments. Do you have the kind of faith that leads you to work hard for the Kingdom of God? That is a faith that pleases God. Warren Wiersbe makes a good point in one of his commentaries: "Faith enables us to understand what God does. Faith enables us to see what others cannot see. As a result, faith enables us to do what others cannot do." (Wiersbe, p. 318)

The last Bible Hero we’ll talk about today is the best known of all. In fact, Abraham is called the Father of our Faith. His life teaches us hundreds of things about faith. But perhaps the biggest challenge Abraham faced was that his faith required him to WAIT.

WAIT: Abraham
Abraham waited for a home in the Promised Land. In fact, he spent his entire life living in tents. Now we’ve all had some fun camping trips, but can you imagine a lifetime in one? Let alone set-up and tear-down. Abraham also waited until he was 100 years old for the son God promised. And all along, he waited and waited … and waited … for the promised Messiah and the Eternal City of God.

Verses 9-10 say, “By faith he made his home in the Promised Land like a stranger in a foreign country; he lived in tents, as did Isaac and Jacob, who were heirs with him of the same promise. For he was looking forward to the city with foundations, whose architect and builder is God.” Does your Faith require you to WAIT? Do you sometimes feel like you are stuck in an eternal Waiting room?

· waiting for an answer to prayer;
· waiting for a job offer;
· waiting for the results of a medical test;
· waiting for… (fill in the blank)

When you’ve prayed all you can pray, and done all you can do --- sometimes the greatest proof of your faith is that you simply Wait. A faith that pleases God will enable you to wait with confidence. By faith, you believe … in fact, you KNOW … that God will come through in the end.

All of these Heroes of the Old Testament waited with Faith. Let’s look at verse 13:

“All these people were still living by faith when they died. They did not receive the things promised; they only saw them and welcomed them from a distance, admitting that they were foreigners and strangers on earth.”

With faith, they looked forward to the coming of the Messiah. With faith we can wait confidently because we know the day is coming when every knee will bow and every tongue shall confess that Jesus Christ is Lord. And while we WAIT in faith, we continue to WORSHIP, to WALK with God, and to WORK for His Kingdom. This is faith that pleases God. Let’s read the key verse, verse 6, together. “Without faith it is impossible to please God, because anyone who comes to him must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who earnestly seek him.”

Let’s pray.