

Faith and Its Footsteps

by John Nelson Darby

Faith involves trusting in God's testimony and power, and recognizing the impending judgment of the world.

Scripture: Hebrews 11:1-13

Topics: "Trust in God", "Faith"

Description

John Nelson Darby emphasizes the significance of faith in the life of believers, illustrating how faith has been a source of both trial and triumph throughout history. He discusses the opposition faced by people of faith, as seen from Abel to the present, and how God does not intervene in worldly matters, allowing believers to walk by faith in an unseen God. Darby highlights the importance of trusting God's promises, even in the face of impossibility, and encourages believers to live as 'strangers and pilgrims' in a world that is not their home. He uses examples from the lives of Abraham, Enoch, and Noah to demonstrate how faith leads to obedience and a deeper relationship with God. Ultimately, he calls for a faith that is active and public, reflecting a commitment to God's kingdom over worldly concerns.

Transcript

FAITH AND ITS FOOTSTEPS

HEBREWS 11

It is impossible to deny that there is some principle livingly working in the world which has signally called out the hatred and opposition of man. It has been so from Abel downwards to the present day.

The "course of this world" has gone on. It is now going on around us. But in the midst of this there has been, and there is, a motive acting, which calls out the hostility and proud judgment of the world. That history is the history of the town in which we are, as well as of Cain and Abel. In every age and in every country it has been so. We find the people of faith the objects of the hatred of man. But God owns this people. "Others," we read here, "had trial of cruel mockings and scourgings, yea, moreover of bonds and imprisonments: they were stoned, they were sawn asunder, were tempted, were slain with the sword: they wandered about in sheep-skins and goat-skins; being destitute, afflicted, tormented, of whom the world was not worthy" (v. 36-38). Here God gives His history of them. He does not interfere. He leaves them "destitute, afflicted, tormented." He does not meddle with the world, and the world goes on. It will not be always so, but that is the present fact. "Because sentence against an evil work is not executed speedily, therefore the hearts of the sons of men are fully set in them to do evil." They go their own way, "

the course of this world," Eph. 2 : 2. It is not God's world. So little does He meddle with it, that, when His own children-those whom He owns-are " destitute, afflicted, tormented," He does not interfere. It has departed from Him and He will not own it.

We find the same thing in the message to the angel of the church of Smyrna, in the book of Revelation: " The devil shall cast some of you into prison, that ye may be tried, and ye shall have tribulation ten days." How came that ? could He not interfere ? " Be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life." There is hope in another scene. If a person will walk with God, he must walk by faith; he is walking in the midst of a world where God is not owned, and where God does not interfere-a world ripening for judgment. He sends a testimony; and just in proportion as we are faithful to His testimony, the prince of this world will torment us. " I say unto you," the Lord Jesus tells His disciples, " that Elias is come already, and they knew him not, but have done unto him whatsoever they listed. Likewise shall the Son of man suffer of them." That is the character of the " course of this world." God may control by secret providence and overrule, but that is its character. Faith has its testimony, and goes on with it, recognising that God does not own the world. " We give thee thanks, O Lord God Almighty, which art, and wast, and art to come ; because thou hast taken to thee thy great power, and hast reigned : and the nations were angry, and thy wrath is come, and the time of the dead, that they should be judged, and that thou shouldest give reward unto thy servants the prophets, and to the saints, and them that fear thy name, small and great ; and shouldest destroy them which destroy the earth," Rev. II : 17, 18. Until then they must live by faith of that which is unseen.

This was specially a trial for the Hebrews. Their very religion was one of sight. They had a system to walk by, a visible temple, sacrifices, priesthood, and the like. Messiah they expected to see. When they did see Him, they hated and put Him to death; and this Messiah was gone to heaven. In becoming Christians they lost all they had possessed, and gained nothing-nothing that was tangible to the flesh. There was therefore the constant temptation to deny an unseen Messiah, and to turn back to things seen.

The apostle sums up in this chapter, and shews that all through man's history, no matter who had obtained a " good report," it was by faith. Men will count us fools. We may give as a definition of folly, a man's acting most consistently for an object that nobody sees, and nobody believes to be true. The saint's warrant is the word of God. The moment he acts upon any object seen, he ceases to act as a Christian. Christ lived, in that sense, the life of faith. It is the life of faith we get here, not salvation, or the finding peace in the way of faith. There is a single exception (Abel), or which may be so in measure. Faith is looked at as the power by which they walked.

There are these two things in faith : as it regards, first, peace . of soul ; second, power for walk. If I talk of faith, I may mean belief of a testimony-a person tells me a thing, and I believe him. But there is another sense in which I may have faith in that man ; that is, I may put my trust in him. We often confound these things. There is the testimony of God, which I have to believe, and a trusting in God, which is the power of my walk. That which gives me peace is, receiving the testimony of God: I do want confidence in God for power of walk, but I must not confound this confidence in God with His testimony.

We shall find the two things in Abraham. God called Abraham, and shewed him the stars of heaven, and said, " So shall thy seed be," and Abraham " believed God." In the offering up of Isaac (v. 9) there was not the receiving of a testimony, but " believing in God."

Here I am, a sinner, with the consciousness of sin: how can I trust in God ? I know Him to be a holy God, a hater of sin : how can I trust in Him ? I dare not be in His presence with sin upon me ; what can meet that ? it is not denying the holiness of God ; it is not my putting away my sin; but God tells me my sin is put away. I believe Him. This is not trusting in His power. The thing that gives me peace is my receiving a testimony. My spirit cannot rest, when I am conscious of sin, unless I know that it is not imputed to me : it is God who has seen it just as it is ; my being content with myself will not do ; I must have God content about me. There is a wrestling going on in the soul that wants to be content with itself. Believing God's testimony, it would be at peace. It has never yet been brought to feel itself a thoroughly worthless sinner. The question is, not as to my not having sin, but do I believe what God says when He says it is put away ? There is really a work of the Spirit of God in this, not in producing what will satisfy me, but in bringing my soul to say, It is all over with me. God often allows it to struggle on, trying to get better ; He lets it, and, like a man in the mire who pulls one foot out to get the other in, its case is only worse. The answer to this comes in, the blessed truth of the gospel by the work of the Lord Jesus Christ, that " by him all that believe are justified from all things," Acts 13 : 38, 39. I find God perfectly at rest : He is resting in Jesus, perfectly satisfied. Christ says, " I have finished the work which thou gavest me to do " ; and God says, " Sit thou on my right hand." I get rest to my soul, because I find that God has not one single thing against me. There is often this struggling under the sense of conviction before the soul gets peace.

Another thing is the walk of faith. Come sifting, come trial, come what may, the ground of my peace is never touched. If it were not completely settled-done, it never could be and why ? because God says that " without [not 'sprinkling but] shedding of blood there is no remission," Heb. 9 : 22. Therefore, if not perfectly done, Christ must die again, shed His blood again. But it is finished. The Spirit of God will make me see it ; but it is done. I take this word of Jesus, " I have glorified thee on the earth, I have finished the work which thou gavest me to do " ; and I say, " It is finished."

Now I find the path of faith opened before me. I am sure God loves me, and is nothing but love ; I can therefore trust in Him. I know His love. He has saved me as a sinner, I can trust in His love as a saint. Mark the order in which things are presented here. To faith that which is unseen becomes as near and as real as though present to sight (v. i) ; yea, much more so; because there is deception in seen things; but there is no deception in things communicated by the Spirit to the heart. Through faith we know that creation was by the word of God (v- 3). Then (v. 4) we come to the great basis on which a fallen creature can have to say to God. Let us look a little at the distinctive character of Abel's sacrifice.

Cain offered to God what cost him more. His was not the case of a thoroughly irreligious man ; he offered to God, worshipped God, and was utterly rejected. He was not an infidel or an irreligious man ; but a worshipper, and a rejected worshipper. His worship was founded on unbelief. A sinner, one out of paradise, he thought to go to God as though nothing had happened! So with man ; they think they can go and worship God, paying a compliment to Him. And what did he bring ? The very thing that had the stamp of the curse upon it. God had said, " Cursed is the ground for thy sake ; in sorrow shalt thou eat of it all the days of thy life ; thorns also and thistles shall it bring forth to thee ; thou shalt eat the herb of the field ; in the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat bread." That is what comes of a person thinking he can worship God (" do his duty," as he terms it) ; it is the denial of the whole truth of his condition.

What does Abel ? Quite another thing: he brings a slain lamb, he comes through death (in principle, through the atonement of Christ). He sets between himself and God the testimony of a provided sacrifice. " By faith he offered." Before the work of the Lord Jesus Christ, the revelation had been that such a thing would be done ; as though I were to say to a debtor in prison, I will pay your debts. All that we enjoy as a

finished work was a subject of hope. " Whom God," it is said, " hath set forth to be a propitiation through faith in his blood, to declare his righteousness for the remission of sins that are past, through the forbearance of God ; to declare, at this time, his righteousness : that he might be just and the justifier of him which believeth in Jesus," Rom. 3 : 25, 26. We are not looking onward to a future sacrifice ; I have not a promise of getting out of the prison-I am out. We have a testimony that the thing is done, and the Holy Ghost is the seal of the testimony. The Holy Ghost cannot testify anything to my soul otherwise than that the work is done, the debt paid, the door opened, all finished. Two things are spoken of in i Peter i : i i, "the sufferings of Christ, and the glories that should follow " : we are between these two things. The believer stands upon one-half done. The Old Testament saints looked for both; we come after the sufferings, and look for the glories. The Holy Ghost has been sent down meanwhile to testify of accomplished redemption. This is not my hope. I am not waiting for my sins to be put away : they are put away. This is the basis on which we rest. God rests in the accepted work of His Son, and there I rest.

Next (v. 5), we come to the walk of Enoch. Here I find another thing. Of course everybody is not translated as Enoch and Elijah were. Not only can I approach God (faith does not merely tell me this), but that has come in which has set death altogether aside. Death belongs to me now ; it is not (as it is called) a " king of terrors " : all things are ours ; life is ours ; death is ours ; for we are Christ's and Christ is God's ; i Cor- 3 : 22, 23. In Enoch we find a walk with God; a power of life with God, and such a power that death is not seen. We have the life of the Son of God, and not only His death ; the blessed truth, not simply of a made sacrifice, so as to give my soul peace, but that all the power of Satan in death has been destroyed. God allowed Satan to do his worst : all that " the prince of the world " could do was brought to bear upon His Son, and it is gone for ever. " I am crucified with Christ, nevertheless I live ; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me." " We are always confident, knowing that whilst we are at home in the body, we are absent from the Lord ... confident, and willing rather to be absent from the body and to be present with the Lord," 2 Cor. 5. What I am looking for is not to be " unclothed " but to be " clothed upon " ; but if I die, the life that I have is untouched, and I am " present with the Lord."

Here I find two things which faith recognises : first, the blood of atonement, by which sin was put away ; and secondly, a power of life, by which we walk (not merely as His people, but) with God. The result will be that the power of death is entirely gone. We are identified with a living Christ-as we are saved by the death of Christ.

We do not hear anything about " condemning the world in the case of Abel, or in that of Enoch. God " bears testimony to the gifts " of the one ; and the other " walks with God." But I find another thing * 7). We are going through the world, and God has given us a testimony about the world, and about what is going to happen to the world-infallible judgment. He has " appointed," it is said, " a day, in the which he will judge the world in righteousness by that man whom he hath ordained; whereof he hath given assurance unto all men, in that he hath raised him from the dead," Acts 17 : 3 1 - " By faith Noah, being warned of God of things not seen as yet [prophetic testimony], 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." Warned of what is coming on the world, he owns and recognises the judgment, and falls in with God's revealed way of salvation; and he condemns the world. Mark this : faith " condemns the world " ; not merely is it belief in a sacrifice that saves, and power for walk with God ; but it says of the world, that it is altogether departed from God, and is going to be judged.

We have the testimony of the word of God, that the thing that is coming upon the world is judgment. There is many a person who, as a saint, would rest in a saint's walk with God, but who shrinks from breaking with the world. The saint is so to act upon this testimony as to the judgment of the world as practically to condemn the world. Had we Noah's faith, as well as Abel's and Enoch's, we could not go with the world. If His people are saved by Him, He is coming to judge the world ; and therefore they have their portion with Christ, and in Christ , so that when He comes they will be with Him. As sure as Christ rose from the dead, He is " the man " God has ordained to judge the world-" this present evil world " ; and so sure there is no judgment for you and for me, if we believe in Him. That by which I know there will be a judgment is that by which I know there will be none for me. How do I know there will be a judgment ? Because God has raised Him from the dead. What more has God told me of His resurrection ? That my sins are all put away.

There is another thing which we cannot enlarge upon now (v. 8). The apostle turns to another point, the practical active manifestation of the power of faith. It was this strengthened Abraham. He trusted, so to speak, blindly in God. God called him by His grace, and he went out, not knowing whither he went. There comes in confidence in God ; not simply the receiving a testimony, but blind, implicit confidence in God. A person might say, If I only knew what would be the consequences of my doing so, I could trust God. Then you will never go. Look at Adam ; how did Adam act ? He had present external things, but he took the devil's word in faith. God turns round and says, You have believed the devil, when you had all My good things ; now you must trust Me. You go out not knowing whither you go, because of trusting in the person that is leading you. God will give light enough to say, God wills this, and I do not see another step. When you have turned the corner, you will see what is round the corner.

Further, when we have taken a step, we shall find that the Lord never satisfies us : He blesses, but He does not satisfy. When Abraham comes into the place which he should afterwards receive for an inheritance, what has he got ? Nothing. He is still a stranger. This the heart dislikes. Hence the disappointments often experienced. As regards our prospects, we have our own thoughts about them; we are thinking perhaps of what we are going to make them twenty years hence. God is going to bring us into His rest.

He brings Abraham into the land ; and then He begins to lead his thoughts to another country. He gets near God, and is placed upon a high enough platform of faith to see it is all before him yet. The Lord reveals Himself to him in communion; speaks with him, unfolds to him His purposes ; and Abraham worships. He has his tent and his altar. And this is what God does with us ; He makes Christians of us, brings us into the land of promise, and makes us see it is all before us yet. This is not the time for rest. The eye becomes clear in the ways of God ; and we have the privilege of being strangers and sojourners with God, and we shall be strangers and sojourners until we get home in the home of God.

Beloved friends, how is it with you as regards this ? Can you really say, My home is in God's home (the home of your hearts, that is) ; I have no home till then, and I do not want one. There is not anything between us and God, no sin between us and God, or Christ is not there (He is there because He has put it all away) ; both cannot be there. Are your souls then resting on the Lord Jesus Christ ? or are you working to settle something that has been settled already ? The Lord give us to believe His testimony, and to trust in His power.

It is characteristic of faith to reckon on God, not simply spite of difficulty, but spite of impossibility. Faith concerns not itself about means ; it counts upon the promise of God. To the natural man the believer may seem to lack prudence ; nevertheless, from the moment it becomes a question of means which render the

thing easy to man, it is no longer God acting; it is no longer His work where means are looked to. When with man there is impossibility, God must come in; and it is so much the more evidenced to be the right way, since God only does that which He wills. Faith has reference to His will, and to that only ; thus it consults not either about means or circumstances, in other words it consults not with flesh and blood. Where faith is weak, external means are beforehand reckoned on in the work of God. Let us remember that when things are feasible to man, there is no longer need of faith, because there is no longer need of the energy of the Spirit. Christians do much, and effect little-why ?

Verses 13-17. Not only were those spoken of here " strangers and pilgrims," but they " confessed " it. People sometimes wish to be religious in the heart, and not to speak of it : there is no energy of faith there. To see the world to be lost and condemned, to have our hopes in heaven-such facts must, of necessity, produce a proportionate result, that of making us think and act as " strangers and pilgrims " here. And it will be manifested in the whole life. The heart already gone, it remains but to set out. This evidently involves open and public profession of it; and herein is a testimony for Christ. Who would be satisfied with the friend that owned us not when circumstances were difficult ? The concealed Christian is a very bad Christian. Faith fixed on Jesus, we embrace the things we have seen afar off ; we are not mindful of the country from whence we have come out, we have at heart that which is before us. Where difficulties are in the path and the affections not set on Jesus, the world rises again in the heart; Phil 3 : 7-14. Paul had not acted in a moment of excitement to repent forthwith ; his heart filled with Christ, he counts all but " dross and dung." Perseverance of heart marks the Christian's affections to be onward, his desires heavenly. And God is not ashamed to be called his God.

It is either the flesh, or faith ; impossible that, at bottom, there can be a stopping half-way. The aim of the Christian must be heavenly things. The appetites, the necessities, of the new man are heavenly. Christians may be used for bettering the world, but this is not God's design. The seeking to link ourselves with the world, and the using Christianity for world mending, are earthly things. God's design is to link us with heaven. You must have heaven without the world, or the world without heaven. He who prepares the city cannot wish for us anything between the two. The " desire " of a " better country " is the desire of a nature entirely from above.

Verses 17-19. Abraham held to the promises more than to natural affection. The strength of the trial to him was in this, that God had pointed out Isaac as the accepted seed, the one connected with the promises. Faith counts on God. God stops Abraham, and confirms His, promise to the seed. In obeying we get an acquaintance with the ways of God, of which otherwise we should have had no conception. Unbelief causes us to lose joy, strength, spiritual life ; we know not where we are.

Verses 24-26. The carnal heart uses the providence of God against the life of faith. Providence brings down Pharaoh's daughter to the child Moses. In the midst of the world's wisdom, at the court of Pharaoh, providence has placed him (as it might seem) to use his influence in Israel's favour. The first thing faith makes him do is to leave it all. He might have been able to succour Israel through his influence, but Israel must have remained in bondage to Egypt. Faith is " imprudent " ; yet it has that eternal prudence which counts on God, and nothing but Him. It discerns that which is of the Spirit; and what is not of the Spirit is not of faith, and not of God. To hold to providence thus is at bottom the desire to "enjoy the pleasures of sin." The world is loved, and there is the wish to lean on circumstances, instead of God ; it is not a "good providence" when a man is ruined.

Moses appeared to be weakening himself in preferring the reproach of the people of God, and of the people of God in a bad state. He might see them in a sad condition; but faith identifies the people of God with the promises of God, and judges of them, not according to their state, but according to His thoughts. Energetic against evil, he counts upon God as to the people.

Verse 27. The world would persuade us to be "good Christians," whilst acting and walking as others. Called to glory, faith of necessity quits Egypt ; God has not placed the glory there. To be well off in the world is not to be well off in heaven. " All that is in the world is not of the Father." To leave the world, when the world has driven us out, is not faith ; it is to shew that the will was to remain there as long as we could. Faith acts on the promises of God and not because it is driven out by the world. Moses " sees him that is invisible." This makes him decided. When we realise the presence of God , Pharaoh is nothing. It is not that circumstances are the less dangerous ; but God is there. In communion, they become the occasion of tranquil obedience. Jesus drinks the cup, Peter draws the sword ; that which brings out obedience in Jesus is a stumbling-block to Peter. Where there is lack of communion, there is weakness and indecision.

Verse 30. At the blast of rams' horns, after they have been compassed about seven days, the wall of Jericho fall down. Things which appear base and contemptible are not so when done before the Lord; 2 Sam. 6. To faith Jericho's walls are not any more than the Red Sea, or the Jordan. Verse 3 1. Who would have thought of Rahab ? yet by faith she acknowledges God. Faith makes nothing of distinctions amongst men ; it says that God is rich in mercy towards all that call upon Him. There is no difference, for that all have sinned. In the midst of difficulties she sides with the people of God.

The confidence of faith is manifested in the Christian life as a whole. Christians are often brought to a stand, through measuring their own strength with temptation, instead of exclusive reference to God. They go on well up to a certain point. One man talks Of his family, another of the future (if any have not faith, all we can do is to pray for him) ; in the various concerns of life our reasonings means but this, I have not the faith that counts on God. Faith has reference entirely and exclusively to God. Duty ever leads into difficulty ; but I have the consolation of saying, God is there, and victory certain ; otherwise, in my apprehension, there is something stronger than God. This demands a perfect practical submission of the will.

When the children of God are faithful, God may leave them in trial and difficulty to bring out that in them which is not of the Spirit. He may also allow evil to have its course and test us, in order that we may that the aim of faith is not here at all, and see that, in circumstances the most difficult, God can intervene, as in the sacrifice of Abraham and the raising of Lazarus.

Man looks not beyond the circumstances which surround him. To tarry in circumstances is unbelief; affliction springs not out of the dust. Satan is behind the circumstances to set us on ; but, behind all that, God is there to break our wills.

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We shall find the two things in Abraham. God called Abraham, and shewed him the stars of heaven, and said, " So shall thy seed be," and Abraham " believed God." In the offering up of Isaac (v. 9) there was not the receiving of a testimony, but " believing in God."

Here I am, a sinner, with the consciousness of sin: how can I trust in God ? I know Him to be a holy God, a hater of sin : how can I trust in Him ? I dare not be in His presence with sin upon me ; what can meet that ? it is not denying the holiness of God ; it is not my putting away my sin; but God tells me my sin is put away. I believe Him. This is not trusting in His power. The thing that gives me peace is my receiving a testimony. My spirit cannot rest, when I am conscious of sin, unless I know that it is not imputed to me : it is God who has seen it just as it is ; my being content with myself will not do ; I must have God content about me. There is a wrestling going on in the soul that wants to be content with itself. Believing God's testimony, it would be at peace. It has never yet been brought to feel itself a thoroughly worthless sinner. The question is, not as to my not having sin, but do I believe what God says when He says it is put away ? There is really a work of the Spirit of God in this, not in producing what will satisfy me, but in bringing my soul to say, It is all over with me. God often allows it to struggle on, trying to get better ; He lets it, and, like a man in the mire who pulls one foot out to get the other in, its case is only worse. The answer to this comes in, the blessed truth of the gospel by the work of the Lord Jesus Christ, that " by him all that believe are justified from all things," Acts 13 : 38, 39. I find God perfectly at rest : He is resting in Jesus, perfectly satisfied. Christ says, " I have finished the work which thou gavest me to do " ; and God says, " Sit thou on my right hand." I get rest to my soul, because I find that God has not one single thing against me. There is often this struggling under the sense of conviction before the soul gets peace.

Another thing is the walk of faith. Come sifting, come trial, come what may, the ground of my peace is never touched. If it were not completely settled-done, it never could be and why ? because God says that " without [not 'sprinkling but] shedding of blood there is no remission," Heb. 9 : 22. Therefore, if not perfectly done, Christ must die again, shed His blood again. But it is finished. The Spirit of God will make me see it ; but it is done. I take this word of Jesus, " I have glorified thee on the earth, I have finished the work which thou gavest me to do " ; and I say, " It is finished."

Now I find the path of faith opened before me. I am sure God loves me, and is nothing but love ; I can therefore trust in Him. I know His love. He has saved me as a sinner, I can trust in His love as a saint. Mark the order in which things are presented here. To faith that which is unseen becomes as near and as real as though present to sight (v. i) ; yea, much more so; because there is deception in seen things; but there is no deception in things communicated by the Spirit to the heart. Through faith we know that creation was by the word of God (v- 3). Then (v. 4) we come to the great basis on which a fallen creature can have to say to God. Let us look a little at the distinctive character of Abel's sacrifice.

Cain offered to God what cost him more. His was not the case of a thoroughly irreligious man ; he offered to God, worshipped God, and was utterly rejected. He was not an infidel or an irreligious man ; but a worshipper, and a rejected worshipper. His worship was founded on unbelief. A sinner, one out of paradise, he thought to go to God as though nothing had happened! So with man ; they think they can go and worship God, paying a compliment to Him. And what did he bring ? The very thing that had the stamp of the curse upon it. God had said, " Cursed is the ground for thy sake ; in sorrow shalt thou eat of it all the days of thy life ; thorns also and thistles shall it bring forth to thee ; thou shalt eat the herb of the field ; in the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat bread." That is what comes of a person thinking he can worship God (" do his duty," as he terms it) ; it is the denial of the whole truth of his condition.

What does Abel ? Quite another thing: he brings a slain lamb, he comes through death (in principle, through the atonement of Christ). He sets between himself and God the testimony of a provided sacrifice. " By faith he offered." Before the work of the Lord Jesus Christ, the revelation had been that such a thing would be done ; as though I were to say to a debtor in prison, I will pay your debts. All that we enjoy as a finished work was a subject of hope. " Whom God," it is said, " hath set forth to be a propitiation through faith in his blood, to declare his righteousness for the remission of sins that are past, through the forbearance of God ; to declare, at this time, his righteousness : that he might be just and the justifier of him which believeth in Jesus," Rom. 3 : 25, 26. We are not looking onward to a future sacrifice ; I have not a promise of getting out of the prison-I am out. We have a testimony that the thing is done, and the Holy Ghost is the seal of the testimony. The Holy Ghost cannot testify anything to my soul otherwise than that the work is done, the debt paid, the door opened, all finished. Two things are spoken of in i Peter i : i i, "the sufferings of Christ, and the glories that should follow " : we are between these two things. The believer stands upon one-half done. The Old Testament saints looked for both; we come after the sufferings, and look for the glories. The Holy Ghost has been sent down meanwhile to testify of accomplished redemption. This is not my hope. I am not waiting for my sins to be put away : they are put away. This is the basis on which we rest. God rests in the accepted work of His Son, and there I rest.

Next (v. 5), we come to the walk of Enoch. Here I find another thing. Of course everybody is not translated as Enoch and Elijah were. Not only can I approach God (faith does not merely tell me this), but that has come in which has set death altogether aside. Death belongs to me now ; it is not (as it is called) a " king of terrors " : all things are ours ; life is ours ; death is ours ; for we are Christ's and Christ is God's ; i Cor- 3 : 22, 23. In Enoch we find a walk with God; a power of life with God, and such a power that death is not seen. We have the life of the Son of God, and not only His death ; the blessed truth, not simply of a made sacrifice, so as to give my soul peace, but that all the power of Satan in death has been destroyed. God allowed Satan to do his worst : all that " the prince of the world " could do was brought to bear upon His Son, and it is gone for ever. " I am crucified with Christ, nevertheless I live ; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me." " We are always confident, knowing that whilst we are at home in the body, we are absent from the Lord ... confident, and willing rather to be absent from the body and to be present with the Lord," 2 Cor. 5. What I am looking for is not to be " unclothed " but to be " clothed upon " ; but if I die, the life that I have is untouched, and I am " present with the Lord."

Here I find two things which faith recognises : first, the blood of atonement, by which sin was put away ; and secondly, a power of life, by which we walk (not merely as His people, but) with God. The result will be that the power of death is entirely gone. We are identified with a living Christ-as we are saved by the death of Christ.

We do not hear anything about "condemning the world in the case of Abel, or in that of Enoch. God "bears testimony to the gifts " of the one ; and the other " walks with God." But I find another thing * 7). We are going through the world, and God has given us a testimony about the world, and about what is going to happen to the world-infallible judgment. He has "appointed," it is said, " a day, in the which he will judge the world in righteousness by that man whom he hath ordained; whereof he hath given assurance unto all men, in that he hath raised him from the dead," Acts 17 : 31 - " By faith Noah, being warned of God of things not seen as yet [prophetic testimony], 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." Warned of what is coming on the world, he owns and recognises the judgment, and falls in with God's revealed way of salvation; and he condemns the world. Mark this : faith "condemns the world " ; not merely is it belief in a sacrifice that saves, and power for walk with God ; but it says of the world, that it is altogether departed from God, and is going to be judged.

We have the testimony of the word of God, that the thing that is coming upon the world is judgment. There is many a person who, as a saint, would rest in a saint's walk with God, but who shrinks from breaking with the world. The saint is so to act upon this testimony as to the judgment of the world as practically to condemn the world. Had we Noah's faith, as well as Abel's and Enoch's, we could not go with the world. If His people are saved by Him, He is coming to judge the world ; and therefore they have their portion with Christ, and in Christ , so that when He comes they will be with Him. As sure as Christ rose from the dead, He is " the man " God has ordained to judge the world-" this present evil world " ; and so sure there is no judgment for you and for me, if we believe in Him. That by which I know there will be a judgment is that by which I know there will be none for me. How do I know there will be a judgment ? Because God has raised Him from the dead. What more has God told me of His resurrection ? That my sins are all put away.

There is another thing which we cannot enlarge upon now (v. 8). The apostle turns to another point, the practical active manifestation of the power of faith. It was this strengthened Abraham. He trusted, so to speak, blindly in God. God called him by His grace, and he went out, not knowing whither he went There comes in confidence in God ; not simply the receiving a testimony, but blind, implicit confidence in God. A person might say, If I only knew what would be the consequences of my doing so, I could trust God. Then you will never go. Look at Adam ; how did Adam act ? He had present external things, but he took the devil's word in faith. God turns round and says, You have believed the devil, when you had all My good things ; now you must trust Me. You go out not knowing whither you go, because of trusting in the person that is leading you. God will give light enough to say, God wills this, and I do not see another step. When you have turned the corner, you will see what is round the corner.

Further, when we have taken a step, we shall find that the Lord never satisfies us : He blesses, but He does not satisfy. When Abraham comes into the place which he should afterwards receive for an inheritance, what has he got ? Nothing. He is still a stranger. This the heart dislikes. Hence the disappointments often experienced. As regards our prospects, we have our own thoughts about them; we are thinking perhaps of what we are going to make them twenty years hence. God is going to bring us into His rest.

He brings Abraham into the land ; and then He begins to lead his thoughts to another country. He gets near God, and is placed upon a high enough platform of faith to see it is all before him yet. The Lord reveals Himself to him in communion; speaks with him, unfolds to him His purposes ; and Abraham worships. He has his tent and his altar. And this is what God does with us ; He makes Christians of us, brings us into the land of promise, and makes us see it is all before us yet. This is not the time for rest. The

eye becomes clear in the ways of God ; and we have the privilege of being strangers and sojourners with God, and we shall be strangers and sojourners until we get home in the home of God.

Beloved friends, how is it with you as regards this ? Can you really say, My home is in God's home (the home of your hearts, that is) ; I have no home till then, and I do not want one. There is not anything between us and God, no sin between us and God, or Christ is not there (He is there because He has put it all away) ; both cannot be there. Are your souls then resting on the Lord Jesus Christ ? or are you working to settle something that has been settled already ? The Lord give us to believe His testimony, and to trust in His power.

It is characteristic of faith to reckon on God, not simply spite of difficulty, but spite of impossibility. Faith concerns not itself about means ; it counts upon the promise of God. To the natural man the believer may seem to lack prudence ; nevertheless, from the moment it becomes a question of means which render the thing easy to man, it is no longer God acting; it is no longer His work where means are looked to. When with man there is impossibility, God must come in; and it is so much the more evidenced to be the right way, since God only does that which He wills. Faith has reference to His will, and to that only ; thus it consults not either about means or circumstances, in other words it consults not with flesh and blood. Where faith is weak, external means are beforehand reckoned on in the work of God. Let us remember that when things are feasible to man, there is no longer need of faith, because there is no longer need of the energy of the Spirit. Christians do much, and effect little-why ?

Verses 13-17. Not only were those spoken of here "strangers and pilgrims," but they "confessed" it. People sometimes wish to be religious in the heart, and not to speak of it : there is no energy of faith there. To see the world to be lost and condemned, to have our hopes in heaven-such facts must, of necessity, produce a proportionate result, that of making us think and act as "strangers and pilgrims" here. And it will be manifested in the whole life. The heart already gone, it remains but to set out. This evidently involves open and public profession of it; and herein is a testimony for Christ. Who would be satisfied with the friend that owned us not when circumstances were difficult ? The concealed Christian is a very bad Christian. Faith fixed on Jesus, we embrace the things we have seen afar off ; we are not mindful of the country from whence we have come out, we have at heart that which is before us. Where difficulties are in the path and the affections not set on Jesus, the world rises again in the heart; Phil 3 : 7-14. Paul had not acted in a moment of excitement to repent forthwith ; his heart filled with Christ, he counts all but "dross and dung." Perseverance of heart marks the Christian's affections to be onward, his desires heavenly. And God is not ashamed to be called his God.

It is either the flesh, or faith ; impossible that, at bottom, there can be a stopping half-way. The aim of the Christian must be heavenly things. The appetites, the necessities, of the new man are heavenly. Christians may be used for bettering the world, but this is not God's design. The seeking to link ourselves with the world, and the using Christianity for world mending, are earthly things. God's design is to link us with heaven. You must have heaven without the world, or the world without heaven. He who prepares the city cannot wish for us anything between the two. The "desire" of a "better country" is the desire of a nature entirely from above.

Verses 17-19. Abraham held to the promises more than to natural affection. The strength of the trial to him was in this, that God had pointed out Isaac as the accepted seed, the one connected with the promises. Faith counts on God. God stops Abraham, and confirms His promise to the seed. In obeying we get an acquaintance with the ways of God, of which otherwise we should have had no conception. Unbelief

causes us to lose joy, strength, spiritual life ; we know not where we are.

Verses 24-26. The carnal heart uses the providence of God against the life of faith. Providence brings down Pharaoh's daughter to the child Moses. In the midst of the world's wisdom, at the court of Pharaoh, providence has placed him (as it might seem) to use his influence in Israel's favour. The first thing faith makes him do is to leave it all. He might have been able to succour Israel through his influence, but Israel must have remained in bondage to Egypt. Faith is " imprudent " ; yet it has that eternal prudence which counts on God, and nothing but Him. It discerns that which is of the Spirit; and what is not of the Spirit is not of faith, and not of God. To hold to providence thus is at bottom the desire to "enjoy the pleasures of sin." The world is loved, and there is the wish to lean on circumstances, instead of God ; it is not a "good providence" when a man is ruined.

Moses appeared to be weakening himself in preferring the reproach of the people of God, and of the people of God in a bad state. He might see them in a sad condition; but faith identifies the people of God with the promises of God, and judges of them, not according to their state, but according to His thoughts. Energetic against evil, he counts upon God as to the people.

Verse 27. The world would persuade us to be "good Christians," whilst acting and walking as others. Called to glory, faith of necessity quits Egypt ; God has not placed the glory there. To be well off in the world is not to be well off in heaven. " All that is in the world is not of the Father." To leave the world, when the world has driven us out, is not faith ; it is to shew that the will was to remain there as long as we could. Faith acts on the promises of God and not because it is driven out by the world. Moses " sees him that is invisible." This makes him decided. When we realise the presence of God , Pharaoh is nothing. It is not that circumstances are the less dangerous ; but God is there. In communion, they become the occasion of tranquil obedience. Jesus drinks the cup, Peter draws the sword ; that which brings out obedience in Jesus is a stumbling-block to Peter. Where there is lack of communion, there is weakness and indecision.

Verse 30. At the blast of rams' horns, after they have been compassed about seven days, the wall of Jericho fall down. Things which appear base and contemptible are not so when done before the Lord; 2 Sam. 6. To faith Jericho's walls are not any more than the Red Sea, or the Jordan. Verse 3 1. Who would have thought of Rahab ? yet by faith she acknowledges God. Faith makes nothing of distinctions amongst men ; it says that God is rich in mercy towards all that call upon Him. There is no difference, for that all have sinned. In the midst of difficulties she sides with the people of God.

The confidence of faith is manifested in the Christian life as a whole. Christians are often brought to a stand, through measuring their own strength with temptation, instead of exclusive reference to God. They go on well up to a certain point. One man talks Of his family, another of the future (if any have not faith, all we can do is to pray for him) ; in the various concerns of life our reasonings means but this, I have not the faith that counts on God. Faith has reference entirely and exclusively to God. Duty ever leads into difficulty ; but I have the consolation of saying, God is there, and victory certain ; otherwise, in my apprehension, there is something stronger than God. This demands a perfect practical submission of the will.

When the children of God are faithful, God may leave them in trial and difficulty to bring out that in them which is not of the Spirit. He may also allow evil to have its course and test us, in order that we may that the aim of faith is not here at all, and see that, in circumstances the most difficult, God can intervene, as in the sacrifice of Abraham and the raising of Lazarus.

Man looks not beyond the circumstances which surround him. To tarry in circumstances is unbelief; affliction springs not out of the dust. Satan is behind the circumstances to set us on ; but, behind all that, God is there to break our wills.

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