

(Hebrews) ch.11:1-22

by Zac Poonen

Faith is more than intellectual belief; it is a living, active trust in God that is manifested in obedience and works.

Duration: 1:19:44

Topics: "Faith And Works", "False Teachings"

Description

In this sermon, the preacher emphasizes that many people misunderstand the concept of faith in Christianity. He argues against the belief that intellectual belief in certain facts is enough for salvation. He criticizes false prophets who have turned the grace of God into a license to sin. The preacher highlights the importance of faith in understanding the creation of the world and the story of Adam and Eve. He warns against the deception of false teachers who claim to be evangelical but do not lead a life free from sin.

Transcript

We come now to Hebrews chapter 11 and verse 1. In the last three verses of Hebrews chapter 10, we saw something of what faith involves. It involves a patient endurance, waiting expectantly for the coming of the Lord, being willing to endure until that time to receive the promise. Hebrews 10 verse 36.

And not drawing back, not shrinking back, but willing to go all the way in the footsteps of Jesus. And continuing on the same theme of living by faith, which is spoken of in chapter 10 verse 38, the righteous one shall live by faith. This is a quotation from the Old Testament, Habakkuk chapter 2 verse 3 and 4. If you read the Old Testament, you know that this matter of faith is very little mentioned in the Old Testament.

But we have this promise in Habakkuk chapter 2 verse 3 and 4, my righteous one shall live by faith, and that is quoted three times in the New Testament. Romans 1 17, Galatians 3 11, and here in Hebrews 10 38. The righteous one shall live by faith.

It is by faith that we are made righteous. But to understand what that faith means, we must see what is mentioned in chapter 11. Perhaps some of the most commonly misunderstood words among Christians today are the words grace and faith.

And yet we cannot afford to misunderstand these words because we are told in Ephesians 2 8, it's by grace we are saved through faith. Our entire salvation is by God's grace and through our faith. So if we

misunderstand these two words, we stand in great danger of not experiencing the salvation spoken of in the New Testament.

Take the matter of faith. So very much misunderstood, many people think of it almost as though it is just an intellectual belief in certain facts. It's almost as though God takes people into heaven merely because they intellectually believe certain facts, irrespective of the way they live.

This is a tremendous travesty, a gross travesty of the teaching of scripture. This is what false prophets have done throughout centuries in Christianity, coming under the guise of evangelical Christian preachers and leaders. Have turned the grace of God, like Jude says, into license.

It's almost as though people are taught, well, you can't but sin, but the grace of God is there to forgive you. This is a travesty of God's grace. This is the very thing that James speaks against.

He says your faith is no better than the devil's faith if all you have is an intellectual belief in certain facts. If you believe that Jesus died for the sins of the world, the devil believes that. If you believe he's the son of God, the devil believes that.

If you believe the Bible is God's word, the devil believes that. All these things that you can have in a doctrinal statement, the devil could sign every one of those statements because he believes it. He believes it more than most Christians do.

But it doesn't save the devil and it won't save anybody on earth because faith does not mean merely intellectual belief. Yes, we need to know what God has done. We need to know the facts of Jesus having died for our sins, etc.

But faith is more than that. Faith is, verse 1, chapter 11, Hebrews 11.1, the assurance, the substance. It's not imaginary.

It's not vague. It is real. It's an assurance.

It's a substance of things hoped for. The conviction of things not seen. And then he goes on to say, it was by faith that the men of old gained approval, obtained a testimony before God.

By faith. It was not by anything else, but by faith. And he goes on to say in chapter 11, verse 6, without faith it is impossible to please God.

And that begins with the time of Adam. No one could please God, even under the old covenant, right from Genesis to Revelation, the story is the same. No man is accepted by God who does not have faith, which is more than intellectual belief.

When it speaks about Abel having faith in verse 4, it's not certainly intellectual facts about God that Abel believed. No, he did something. What about Enoch, whose faith is mentioned in verse 5? It wasn't that he intellectually believed certain facts about God, but that he did something.

He walked with God. Noah, by faith, he did something. He built an ark.

Abraham, verse 8, by faith, he obeyed, he did something. And like that, right down the list in Hebrews chapter 11. And you find one thing, right through Hebrews 11, that in none of these cases is faith a passive intellectual acceptance of certain facts.

That is as far removed from genuine biblical faith as hell is from heaven. And a mere intellectual acceptance of facts is found even in hell. By the devil and all his legions of evil spirits, and by the multitudes of deceived Christians, who've been deceived by professing evangelical preachers, who've themselves gone there and led others into an eternal hell, because they thought they could live as they like, and merely intellectually believe certain facts about God and about the Bible.

No, dear friends, faith is manifested in obedience. Abraham is the father of faith, and it's said about Abraham in verse 8, by faith, Abraham, when he was called, obeyed. That is the mark of faith, and that's what James is at tremendous pains to prove in his letter.

Faith without works is dead. That's the type of faith the devil has, he says in James chapter 2. A very worthwhile study to read the last few verses of James chapter 2, James 2, 14 to 26, where he says that that type of intellectual faith is exactly the same as the faith of the devil. But he contrasts the faith of Abraham in that passage and says, Abraham's faith was manifested in the fact that he obeyed.

When God asked him to do something, to offer up his only son Isaac, he did it. He obeyed. And therein the scripture was fulfilled, which said Abraham believed God and was accounted to him for righteousness.

It is this type of faith that's spoken of in Hebrews 11. It is the conviction of things not seen. It is that which alters the course of my life in relation to a conviction based on things not seen.

For by this type of faith the men of old gained approval. They did not gain approval by believing certain facts, but by acting on the conviction of facts that they knew. By faith, verse 3, we understand that the worlds were prepared by the word of God so that what is seen was not made out of things which are visible.

How do we know how creation came into existence? How do we know whether creation is true or this commonly accepted hypothesis of evolution? It's not by intellectual argument. It's not by studying rocks. It's not by scientific arguments to defeat the hypotheses of evolution.

But essentially, it's by faith. It's so clear. By faith we understand, verse 3, that the worlds were prepared by the word of God and that what is seen was not made out of things visible.

How do we know how a man was made? By faith. As we read Genesis chapter 1, 2, and 3, the Holy Spirit quickens faith as he gives us revelation and understanding of what's written there. And we believe.

And it's very clear that the natural mind cannot understand this. For it says in 1 Corinthians 2, 14, the natural man or the natural mind cannot understand, cannot accept the things of the Spirit of God. They are foolishness to him.

What's written in Genesis 1, 2, and 3 is foolishness to the natural mind, whatever his IQ may be, because he needs revelation. It's by revelation that we know that evolution is false. It's a theory of the devil.

But that creation is mentioned in 1, chapters 1, 2, and 3 of Genesis is true. And by faith we understand that the worlds were prepared by the word of God so that what is seen was not made out of things which are visible. God grant that our faith will be genuine.

And verse 4. Commencing from this verse and on through to the end of the chapter, the writer is speaking about men of old who gained the approval of God by their faith. This is what is mentioned in verse 2. By

faith the men of old, that is, those who lived in Old Testament times, gained approval. Now, even though the word faith itself is hardly ever mentioned in the Old Testament, yet Hebrews chapter 11 shows us very clearly beyond any shadow of doubt that even under the Old Covenant, even from the time of Adam right through to the time of Christ, people were accepted by God on the basis of their faith.

It was faith which made the difference. It was not that under the Old Covenant people were accepted because of their righteousness. No, Isaiah himself, one who lived under the Old Covenant, saw very clearly, as he says in Isaiah chapter 64, verse 6, our righteousness is like filthy rag.

And certainly Isaiah was under no illusion that his own righteousness would be accepted by God. No, not at all. He was sure that his righteousness was like filthy rag.

It was by faith. He himself says, the Lord God, Isaiah 61, clothed me with the garments of righteousness and of salvation, the robe of righteousness. He knew what it was to be clothed with the robe of righteousness.

Abraham believed in God and it was accounted to him for righteousness. Righteousness came even to men under the Old Covenant by faith. That's what Paul points out in Romans chapter 4, that even David speaks of the blessedness of the man whose sins are forgiven.

He knew it was by faith. So with Abel. Abel offered to God a better sacrifice than Cain.

What was it that made the difference between Abel's offering and Cain's offering? Abel's sacrifice and Cain's sacrifice to God. Abel was a keeper of the sheep. Cain was a tiller of the ground.

We read in Genesis chapter 4 that they both brought an offering to God. One of the fruit of the ground and the other of the first fruits of his flock. Each brought the best of that in which they were engaged.

The Bible says, Honor the Lord with your substance. Cain's substance was the fruit of the ground. Abel's substance was sheep.

It was not in the thing they brought before God that there was a difference. What was it that made Abel's sacrifice a better sacrifice? We read in Psalm 51 that the sacrifices of God are a broken spirit. A broken and a contrite heart.

That is the eternal word of God. It was true when David wrote it a thousand years before Christ. It was equally true four thousand years before Christ.

For God never changes. And in the time of Abel and Cain as well, the sacrifices of God were a broken spirit. Verse 16 of Psalm 51 says, Thou dost not delight in sacrifice.

Thou art not pleased with burnt offerings. He does not want bulls and goats. That is not what he is looking for.

He is looking for a broken spirit. Verse 17. And a broken and a contrite heart, O God, thou wilt not despise.

And when that is there, then, verse 19, Thou wilt delight in sacrifices of righteousness. In burnt offerings. And whole burnt offerings.

When there is a broken spirit and a broken and a contrite heart, then, verse 19, young bulls or sheep or cattle can be offered on the altar. So the thing that made Abel's sacrifice acceptable was not the fact that he shed blood, the blood of a lamb, but that he had a broken and a contrite heart when he came with that offering. Because we read in Isaiah chapter 1 of people who offered offerings unto God, and God says in Isaiah 111, I have had enough of the burnt offerings of rams.

I take no pleasure in the blood of bulls, lambs or goats. Why? Why? Because there is sin in your life. Verse 16.

Wash yourself, make yourself clean. Remove the evil of your deeds. Learn to do good.

And then, he can accept the offering. We must remember this, because otherwise, we shall be deceived by the false teaching which says that all that we have to do is come before God and plead the blood of Jesus. And the example used is of Abel, that the thing that made him acceptable before God was he slew a lamb.

And it's almost as though it doesn't matter whether you've got a broken or a contrite heart, it doesn't matter whether you're broken in spirit, it doesn't matter whether you're humble, it doesn't matter whether you've got faith, all you do is plead the blood of Jesus with an intellectual acceptance of the fact that Jesus died on the cross for your sins. Dear friends, this is a great deception. The devil comes as an angel of light, and his ministers claim to be ministers of righteousness.

They will have a Bible in their hand, they will claim to be evangelical, but the evidence of their false teaching will be that they do not cease from sin, and they do not lead you into a life where you cease from sin. It's almost as though you can live in sin and plead the blood of Jesus. Then you have considered the blood of Jesus an unholy thing.

This is the very thing that we've been warned against in chapter 10, verse 29. You count the blood of the covenant as an unclean thing to sin willfully, but Abel didn't come before God like that. It says in verse 4 very clearly, by faith Abel offered to God a better sacrifice.

What was it that made his sacrifice better? Very clear. The answer is right there. His faith.

His brokenness of spirit, without which we cannot have faith. His emptiness. His total lack of confidence in the flesh, and his utter dependence upon God.

That is faith. No confidence in the flesh. Acknowledging our emptiness and brokenness of spirit before God, and saying, Lord, I trust in you.

That faith made Abel's sacrifice a better sacrifice. If Abel did not have faith, dear friends, listen to this. If Abel did not have faith, even if he had killed a lamb, it would have been like those people who killed lambs in Isaiah's day, about whom Isaiah had to say, God says, I'm not interested in your sacrifices.

There's no faith. There's no brokenness of heart. There's no turning from evil.

By faith, Abel offered to God a better sacrifice. And through that, he obtained the testimony that he was righteous. Through his faith.

Yes, it is only through faith that people are declared righteous. Verse 2 is very clear. By faith, people had a testimony from God.

And by that faith, he obtained testimony that he was righteous. And God testified about his gifts. Yes, his gifts were acceptable because they came from a heart of faith.

And through faith, though he is dead, he still speaks. What does he speak to us? The first man declared to be righteous by God. The absolute necessity of faith, that humble dependence upon God that comes in brokenness of heart and spirit, that God will never despise, but will always accept.

Jack Ponan. We come now to Hebrews chapter 11 and verse 5. By faith, Enoch was taken up so that he should not see death. And he was not found because God took him up.

For he also, like Abel before, whom we considered last week, verse 4, it's written about Enoch too, he obtained the witness that before his being taken up, he was pleasing to God. God didn't take him up merely because Enoch believed certain intellectual facts about God. It's not enough that Enoch believed that God created this world, that there is a God up in heaven.

That was not the reason why God took Enoch up. No. It's very clear in verse 5 that he obtained the witness, a testimony from God that his life had been pleasing to God.

God gave a testimony concerning Jesus. At Jesus' baptism, this is my beloved son in whom I am well pleased. God was pleased with Enoch's life.

Why? Because it says in Genesis 5 and verse 22 and 24 that Enoch walked with God for 300 years and he was not, for God took him. God could take him because his life was pleasing to God. There were a lot of other people who lived in Enoch's day and from the testimony we read in the book of Jude, the people who lived in Enoch's day were ungodly, evil, living for themselves, living in licentiousness, speaking wicked things, doing wicked things, and Enoch was a man who walked with God and not only walked with God but testified against all that evil we read in Jude verse 14 and 15.

He testified about the Lord's coming. His second coming. And he said that God would judge all ungodly people of their ungodly deeds which they have done in an ungodly way and all the harsh things which ungodly sinners have spoken against him.

Their speech and their actions were evil. In the midst of that evil world, Enoch walked with God by faith and so God took him up. It's a picture of those who in the last days will walk by faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, walk with God in the midst of ungodliness, testifying against the ungodliness there is in the world, testifying about the Lord's coming in judgment, who will also be taken up without seeing death.

And so Abel and Enoch, who head the list in chapter 11, are symbolic of two categories of disciples. One, those who die in faith, like Abel, and the other, those who do not die, like Enoch, who are taken up alive to meet the Lord in the air. But both of them have a testimony while they are living on earth that their life was pleasing to God.

They had that broken, contrite heart and spirit that enabled them to walk with God, enabled them to offer up sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ our Lord. We are commanded to offer up sacrifices that are acceptable to God and the sacrifices of God are a broken spirit. Having said that about Enoch, it says in verse 6, without faith it is impossible to please Him.

Whatever else we may have, if we don't have faith, this verse settles it. It is impossible to please God. We may have a hundred and one other qualifications, but it is impossible to please God.

Think of that rich young ruler who came to Jesus. We read in Mark chapter 10. What did he lack? We read that he kept all the commandments and Jesus didn't deny that fact.

Jesus loved him. He was a rich man, he was a young man, he was earnest to seek eternal life. But there was one thing he didn't have.

That was faith. He did not have faith. He did not have that broken heart of emptiness, no confidence in the flesh, forsaking of material possessions.

If he had that, then he would have had faith. And the manifestation of that faith would have been that he would have gladly given up the riches which Jesus told him to give up and he would have taken up his cross and followed Jesus. When a man has faith, James says, the evidence of it is he has got works.

This man did not have works. He was not willing to give up his riches. He was not willing to take up his cross and follow Jesus as Jesus asked him to in Mark 10 verse 21.

And that was the evidence that he didn't have real saving faith. And so he could not follow. He went away grieved for he had many possessions, sorrowful, and Jesus was sorrowful too, that this man would choose his riches rather than choose eternal life.

And with how many people the Lord is grieved today and sorrowful that they choose the temporal things of earth that pass away instead of eternal life. Without faith it is impossible to please God. Take the case of Zacchaeus whom we read of in Luke chapter 19.

Salvation is by faith. And that was true even before Zacchaeus' time. We read in Hebrews 11 about all these people who lived before Zacchaeus lived.

They were saved by faith. And so if salvation was to come into Zacchaeus' house it was only going to come by faith. And when Jesus came into the house of Zacchaeus, Zacchaeus said, Lord, to paraphrase his words, what he said to the Lord was, Lord, I've been a cheat.

I've cheated people of a lot of money. But I've turned from that now. And I'm going to give back fourfold what I have taken.

And I'm going to first of all, before that, give half of my goods to the poor. And give fourfold what I have stolen from others. And Jesus said, Behold, salvation has come to this house this day.

Why? Because Zacchaeus had faith. How do we know he had faith? Because of his works. He was willing to make restitution.

He was willing to give back what he had taken wrongfully. He had faith and therefore his life pleased God. How do we know Enoch had faith? He did not walk in the way of ungodly people.

He walked with God. How do we know Abel had faith? Because God accepted his gifts. He had a broken and a contrite spirit that came and offered up a sacrifice to God.

He didn't have the jealousy and envy and anger that Cain had in his heart. Without faith it is impossible to please God. For he who comes to God must believe that God exists and that he is a rewarder of those who seek him diligently.

This is the evidence of faith. That we seek God diligently with our whole heart. The promise in the Old Testament was, You shall seek me and find me when you search for me with all your heart.

Jeremiah 29, verse 12 and 13. When we seek God with all of our hearts we find him. Otherwise we don't find him.

And to that agree the words of Hebrews 11, 6. He is a rewarder of those who seek him diligently. That's the evidence of faith. That we seek him diligently.

If we don't seek him diligently, it's obvious we don't have faith. And this is the reason why multitudes of Christians do not enjoy the promises of Scripture. They don't have faith.

They think they have faith. When they are sick they try to work up a faith for healing. But they cannot have faith because they do not have a humble, broken heart.

Which is the only soil on which faith can grow. They have not forsaken all their attachment to material things. And so they cannot have faith.

Whereas all the people mentioned off here had faith that led to obedience. Faith that led them to walk with God. To offer up to God a sacrifice that was acceptable.

A broken and a contrite heart. Remember this word. Without faith it is impossible to please God.

You can't please God by your righteous activities. You can't please God by attending meetings and reading the Bible and saying prayers and 101 other things that the Pharisees did, for example. Typing, fasting.

If you don't have faith, an all-night prayer meeting, for example, is of absolutely no use if there is no faith. Five minutes of prayer with faith is far better than 12 hours of prayer without faith. It's faith that makes the difference.

Jesus said it's faith that brings results. All things are possible to him who believes. And nothing is possible to him who does not believe.

Oh, how important it is for us to have a proper understanding of what biblical faith is. We turn again to Hebrews chapter 11 and verse 7. We have looked at Abel in verse 4, who by faith offered a more excellent sacrifice. And there we find the sacrifice of faith, or the offering of faith that is acceptable before God.

Then we read about Enoch in verse 5. By faith Enoch was taken up. And he had this testimony before he was taken up that he was pleasing to God. He walked with God.

And there we have the walk of faith. And now we come to verse 7, Noah. And we have the work of faith.

So in these three people, Abel, Enoch and Noah, who head the list in Hebrews 11, we have that which should characterize our own Christian life. First of all, beginning with the sacrifice of faith, we begin our relationship with God only as we come on the basis of the sacrifice of Jesus Christ on the cross of Calvary offered from a broken heart of faith. And we go on from there to walk in the footsteps of Enoch, who walked with God, a walk of faith.

The sacrifice of faith is to lead on to the walk of faith. And it is from the walk of faith that we can have or do a work of faith that we see in the life of Noah. By faith, Noah being warned by God about things not yet seen.

You see, Abel offered up a sacrifice and his broken heart, which people could not see, was accepted before God. Enoch walked by faith in a God whom people could not see. Noah believed that there was going to be a flood which he could not yet see, but in fear, in reverence, he prepared an ark for the salvation of his household, by which he condemned the world and became an heir of the righteousness, which is according to faith.

How did Noah condemn the world? How did he testify to the world? I have no part in your wickedness. It was by standing aloof from them and being different, building that which would remain even after the flood had come and gone. That ark of salvation is symbolic of the Lord Jesus Christ.

And it's also symbolic of his church, which we are to build today. Salvation is only through the Lord Jesus Christ. And Noah demonstrates faith in the fact that what God had said he would perform.

What did God say? There was going to be a judgment upon all sin. And Noah was a preacher of righteousness. You read that in 2 Peter chapter 2, that Noah was a preacher of righteousness.

What did he preach? He preached righteousness, 2 Peter 2.5. God preserved Noah, it says, a preacher of righteousness along with his family. And it was that righteousness that the world around him did not have and did not want and did not accept when Noah offered it to them. They did not want to turn from their sin.

But Noah was not only a preacher of righteousness, he was a practicer of righteousness too. He practiced righteousness in his own life. He and his family stood aloof from a world of ungodliness alone.

Think of that, dear friends. When you feel you're alone and you don't have much fellowship, take courage from the example of Noah. Take courage from the example of Daniel who stood alone in the midst of Babylon, alone for God.

Take courage from Noah who stood alone for God in the midst of an evil generation, alone with his family. After years and years of preaching righteousness, nobody was converted outside his own family. And I believe that even his own family would not have been converted if they had not seen righteousness in his life.

If Noah's children had seen that Noah only preached righteousness but he was unrighteous in his home life, they would have turned away. That's the condition of many preachers today. Their children turn away from their faith because they see that their father only preaches righteousness but never practices it at home.

But Noah's children saw that he not only preached righteousness, he practiced it at home. And he was wholehearted about building the ark. He preached that this ark which I'm building is the only thing that's going to save you.

This is the only thing that will take you right through the flood. If you want to be saved, get into this ark. And so we preach that salvation is only through the Lord Jesus Christ who is the antitype of that ark of salvation that Noah built.

And we preach Christ and Him crucified and Him risen from the dead who is today building His body. That body is also called the Christ in 1 Corinthians and chapter 12 and verse 12. And we preach that it's only as you come in proper relation to the head, the Lord Jesus Christ, that you can be saved and thus you become a member of the body of Christ, the church.

This is what we preach. And this is what we are to live for if we believe what we preach. If you really believe that this is the way of salvation, then you will give all of your life for the building of the church.

That does not necessarily mean that you leave your job and become a full-time worker, as it is called. No, you can support yourself like the Apostle Paul did. The Apostle Paul was a businessman.

He was a Christian businessman. He made tents and supported himself. But he preached the gospel.

He was an apostle. But he didn't live on the offerings collected in the church. No, he supported himself and served the Lord.

And we can follow in the footsteps of the Apostle Paul. He says, follow me, follow my example, he told Timothy. And I'm sure Timothy followed his example.

And he tells us today, follow my example. We can follow his example of not being dependent on others, supporting ourselves, but giving our whole life, everything, for the building of the church, for the preaching of the gospel, for building the church, for preaching the gospel to every creature, for making disciples in every nation, and building the church. This is what gripped Noah.

And this is what should grip us if we really have faith. But if a man says he has faith and does not have works, James says, can that faith save him? The answer is no. Faith without works is dead.

Here is the work of faith. That we give ourselves for the building of the church. We give ourselves for walking in righteousness and preaching righteousness.

We do not give ourselves for great numbers. Noah saved his family. There were only eight people who were saved.

Jesus said, the way to life is narrow and few there be that find it. We don't make the narrow gate broader so that we can push a few more people in. Think, if Noah had lowered the standards, if he had lowered the standards of righteousness below God's acceptable standard, he could have got a few more people in, but they wouldn't have got inside the ark.

God wouldn't have taken them in. They would have been judged, and Noah himself would have been judged for lowering the standard, and nobody would have been saved. But Noah stood firm.

He stood true. He kept the standard as high as God intended it to be. He made the narrow gate as narrow as God said it should be.

The result was only eight people got in, but they were all saved, not half saved. How different from preachers today, who broaden the gate and get multitudes in, but only half converted, and the result is they all end up in judgment. It's far better to get eight people in, thoroughly saved, than to get a multitude in, half converted, who will all end up in judgment.

The work of faith, where to follow the example of Noah, was a preacher of righteousness, a practitioner of righteousness, who built what would endure even after God's judgments had come. We turn to Hebrews chapter 11, and verse 8. In this chapter, we read of the great heroes of faith in the Old Testament. We've seen Abel, Enoch, and Noah, and now we come to Abraham.

By faith, Abraham, when he was called, obeyed by going out to a place which he was to receive for an inheritance, and he went out, not knowing where he was going. By faith, he lived as an alien in the land of promise, as in a foreign land, dwelling in tents with Isaac and Jacob, fellow heirs of the same promise. For he was looking for the city which has foundations, whose architect and builder is God.

Now, here we read of the obedience that characterized Abraham's faith. We've seen in verse 4, the sacrifice of faith, and in verse 5, the walk of faith that Enoch had, the work of faith in verse 7, Noah building the ark. Now we come to Abraham, concerning whom it is said, by faith, Abraham obeyed.

When he was called to go to a place which he was to receive for an inheritance, obeyed. And that is the thing that's spoken of concerning Abraham's faith, even by James, in James chapter 2, where he speaks of Abraham, our father, being justified by works, James 2.21, when he offered up his son Isaac on the altar. God told him to offer up his son Isaac, and he obeyed.

And it says there in James 2.22, you see that faith was working with his works, and as a result of the works, faith was perfected. Verse 24, you see that a man is justified by works, and not by faith alone. And so, it says here too, in Hebrews 11.8, that Abraham's faith was characterized by obedience, long before he offered up Isaac on the altar.

He started with God calling him, in Ur of the Chaldees, to leave that country, to leave all his relatives, when he was 75 years old, and to go out into another land, to sell his property there, and to go out to live as a pilgrim. And we read here that Abraham obeyed. And, verse 9, by faith, he lived as a pilgrim, as an alien, as a foreigner, in the land of promise, dwelling in tents with Isaac and Jacob, fellow heirs of the same promise.

For he was looking for the city which has foundations, whose architect and builder is God. He had revelation concerning the city that God was building, the new Jerusalem that we read of in Revelation 21. And he wanted to have a part in that.

He wanted to live for those things that would be eternal. And therefore, he walked on this earth as a pilgrim. Now, this would also be the characteristic of all those whom God calls today.

We're told in Galatians chapter 3 that Abraham is the father of those who have faith. And his example is what we are to follow. Like God called Abraham out of Ur of the Chaldees, today he is calling out a people for his name from the world.

We read in Acts chapter 15 that Simon Peter says, Acts 15.14, Simeon has related how God first concerned himself about taking from among the Gentiles a people for his name. And this is what God is doing in the world today. Like he pulled Abraham out of Ur of the Chaldees, out from among that idolatry, to walk by faith in an unseen God.

Today, from the midst of the world, God is calling out a people to walk by faith, trusting him. And what will be the characteristics of these people? The same things that characterized Abraham. One, he obeyed.

And two, verse 9, he lived as a stranger, as a foreigner, in the land of promise, as in a foreign land. And this will characterize all who are true believers, that they will live in this world as in a foreign country. This is not their home.

And they are not settling down here. And therefore our attitude to material things will be very loose. One who is attached to material things is obviously not living by faith.

To live by faith we are to live as aliens in this land. And symbolically, metaphorically, dwelling in tents, looking for the city which has foundations, for that city which cannot be shaken. We read in verse 11 about Sarah, and there we see faith in God's faithfulness, and the joint faith of husband and wife together.

By faith, verse 11, even Sarah herself received ability to conceive even beyond the proper time of life. Since she considered him faithful who had promised, it was not through her own ability that Sarah produced a son, Isaac. It's very clearly written she considered him faithful who had promised.

God had promised a son. And she did not consider her own inability. This is another mark of faith, that when God promises something, the man or woman of faith does not look at his or her own weakness or inability or insufficiency.

They are strong in faith glorifying God because they believe that God is faithful and is able to do what He has promised. These same words are said concerning Abraham in Romans chapter 4 where we read that when God told him that he was going to be the father of many nations Romans 4 19, without becoming weak in faith, he contemplated his own body now as good as dead since he was about a hundred years old in the deadness of Sarah's womb, yet with respect to the promise of God he did not waver in unbelief but grew strong in faith, giving glory to God, being fully assured that what God had promised God was able to perform. Exactly the same words we see concerning Sarah in Hebrews 11.11 She considered him faithful who had promised.

So the joint faith of husband and wife was in a God who was able to do what He had promised. No confidence in self and total confidence in God. Now this is something that we need to understand concerning faith.

We read in verse 12, Therefore also there was born of one man that is Abraham and Sarah being one with him and him as good as dead. Both Abraham and Sarah as far as producing children were concerned, they were just as good as dead people because they were both incapable anymore of having children. And yet there was born of this one man and him as good as dead at that as many descendants as the stars of heaven in number and innumerable as the sand which is by the seashore.

Now him as good as dead. In that lies a clue concerning the ground from which faith can sprout and grow. We have to come to the place where we are totally impotent and consider ourselves to be just as good as dead.

Nothing good in us. We cannot produce anything for the glory of God. Abraham tried once in his own strength to produce a son that would please God.

That was Ishmael. But God said that's unacceptable to me. What we produce in our own strength is not the product of faith.

And it's unacceptable to God. But when Abraham came to the place where he was as good as dead, Sarah as good as dead, then they were both ready to have faith. And then they could trust in God alone.

Not God plus themselves, but in God alone. Faith is not trust in God plus me. It's trust in God alone.

And when we come to that place of impotence, helplessness, then we can trust in God alone. We turn now to Hebrews chapter 11 verse 13. Speaking about these men, Abel, Enoch, Noah and Abraham, whom he's referred to in the previous verses, he says all these died in faith without receiving the promises.

But having seen them, and having welcomed them from a distance, and having confessed that they were strangers and exiles on the earth. For those who say such things make it clear that they're seeking a country of their own. And indeed, if they had been thinking of that country from which they went out, they would have had opportunity to return.

But as it is, they desire a better country that is a heavenly one. Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God, for He has prepared a city for them. Now there are some things very instructive that we can learn from this passage.

Because certainly concerning all these men whom he has just spoken of, Abel, Enoch, Noah and Abraham, there was a difference between them and the rest of the world in which they lived. Abel, for example, was different from Cain. We don't know about any of the other people in the world at that time, but certainly what we are told concerning Abel and Cain, there was a distinct difference between Abel and Cain.

His heart was not like Cain's heart. He had a broken and a contrite heart unlike Cain. So God accepted him.

And in that sense he was different. He had a heart for God. He had a heart of faith, of trust in God, that separated him from the worldliness that there was in his brother Cain.

The same thing concerning Enoch. Enoch lived at a time when there was a lot of ungodliness in the world, and it says he walked with God in the midst of this ungodly world. We're told in Jude that he preached against this world.

And so he must have been a lonely man too, just like Abel. Lonely because he was following God. He was in the minority.

Abel too was in the minority. When Cain was rejected by God, Cain could go out and marry and settle down. There were other people who went that way, but Abel was in the minority.

The same with Enoch. He was in the minority. We do not know if there was anyone else in the world in Enoch's time.

But he was a lonely man, walking with God in the midst of an ungodly world, and his life was a living testimony to the fact that he had nothing to do with the ungodliness of this world, and he walked in this world as a stranger and a pilgrim, one who didn't belong to this world. The same thing with Noah. He and his family stood apart from the rest of the world, as different because of their godliness and their righteousness and their faith in God.

And thus he too was as it were separate, as a fish out of water in a sense, as one who is in a strange country, one whose aims and motives and ambitions are totally different from the world around. The same thing with Abraham. Ur of the Chaldees was a highly developed place in Mesopotamia, and obviously Abraham could have had a very comfortable life there, as all his other relatives were having.

But he came out from that at the call of God, and he forsook many of the advantages of Ur of the Chaldees, to go out as it were into a desert, as a pilgrim and a stranger, live in tents instead of the permanent house he had in the Ur of the Chaldees. And so, there again you find faith brings a separation. For Abel it brought a separation from Cain, for Enoch it brought a separation from the rest of the world, for Noah and his family it brought a separation from the rest of the world, and for Abraham it brought a separation from his relatives.

And even though he took his father and his nephew Lot with him, God couldn't really lead him on to the fullness of his purpose until his father had died and his nephew Lot had been separated from him. And so there's a lesson we learn here that separation is necessary for faith. Just like we saw last week that impotence, verse 12, to come to the end of ourselves, having no ability in ourselves, is necessary for faith, in the same way we see here that separation is also necessary for faith, being separate from the rest of the world.

Being separate, not in the way we dress, but in our aims and ambitions, in our attitudes, in our attitude to material things, for example, in our attitude to money and pleasure and the honor of this world, many things like that. We'll see that more concerning some of the other men described in Hebrews chapter 11, that they stood out as distinct, and this should characterize all who are children of God even today. If our aims and ambitions and our way of life is exactly the same as the world around us, then really there is no difference.

And we cannot say that we are walking by faith. We may have certain doctrines that we believe in our head, but the very thing that Hebrews chapter 11 points out is that faith is more than believing certain doctrines. Abraham didn't just believe certain doctrines and live in Ur of the Chaldees.

Noah didn't just believe certain doctrines and live like the rest of the world. Enoch did not believe certain doctrines and walk like the rest of the world. No, there was a difference between them and the rest of the world that came as a result of their faith.

And dear friends, this is what we need to see, that faith is not merely an intellectual belief in certain doctrines. Those doctrines that are precious to us from Scripture are important, and we would not devalue their importance. But, we would say what James says, that if it's merely belief in doctrines that we have, then the devil has the same type of faith as we have.

That's not faith. Faith produces works, and that is the clear, ringing testimony of Hebrews chapter 11. It brought a separation from the rest of the world in their way of life, in their attitude to things, and they made it very clear, it says in verse 14, that they sought a country, and that country was not in this world.

They were not seeking a country in this world. They were not seeking possessions and honor and fame and pleasure here in this world. But, they desired a better country.

As it says in verse 10, a city which has foundations, whose builder and maker is God. And, because they desire, verse 16, a heavenly country, because they were separated from the world, because they were

strangers and pilgrims, because they came out from the world and didn't want to have anything to do with the uncleanness and the filthiness that there was in the world around them, it says here that God is not ashamed to be called their God, for He has prepared a city for them. For whom has He prepared this city? For those who desire it.

For those whose heart is set on the city above. Those whose heart is set in heaven. Those whose mind is set on the things that are above.

Those who are not seeking anything in this earth. It is for them that God has prepared a city. It's not for any odd person who calls himself a believer, who's living for this world.

Think of a man who loves money. Whose mind is preoccupied with how he can make more and more money. Obviously, his home is in this world.

No matter how much he may say he's a believer, no matter what he may say he is. He may be a full-time worker, he may be one who is very zealous in Christian activity, but his heart and mind are in this world. He's preoccupied with material things.

God hasn't prepared a city for such a man. Certainly not. It says here, God has prepared a city for them.

For those who desire a better country. For those who have lived as strangers and exiles on the earth. Verse 13.

And concerning them it is written, God is not ashamed to be called a God. This is in line with what we read in 2 Corinthians chapter 6 and verse 14 to 18 where it says, Be not unequally yoked together with unbelievers and come out from their midst. Verse 17.

And do not touch what is unclean and then I will welcome you. And I will be a father to you and you shall be my sons and daughters says the Lord Almighty. See that promise is not for anyone and everyone.

It's for those who obey the exhortation to come out and be separate from the attitudes and the way of thinking of the world around them. And when they separate themselves from the world in their attitude and their thinking and come out from all that's unclean then God says I will be a father to you. And this is the mark of the true man of faith.

We turn today to Hebrews chapter 11 and verse 17. We have seen concerning the men of faith described in the previous verses how they without receiving the promises verse 13, died in faith but they saw the promises welcomed them from a distance and as it were ran to meet them and embrace them. Now verse 17 we read by faith Abraham when he was tested offered up Isaac and he who had received the promises was offering up his only begotten son.

It was he to whom it was said in Isaac your seed shall be called. He considered that God is able to raise men even from the dead from which he also received him back as a type or figuratively speaking he received him back as it were from the dead. Now when it comes to giving up things that are obviously evil or things that are outside God's will, things that are a hindrance, things that are worldly we can understand that the Bible is very clear we are to be separated from all that is of the world.

We saw that last week. This is the characteristic of the man of faith that he does separate himself from all that is unclean, comes out from among them and being separate is received by the father, he becomes

the son of the almighty God. But here is a step further which many Christians do not understand.

And they do not understand this because they have not taken the first step. That's something like saying a child cannot understand what is taught in standard two if he cannot get past standard one. And so if we don't get past first of all being separated from what is worldly we cannot understand Abraham's faith in offering up Isaac.

Now before Abraham received Isaac he had a son called Ishmael. That was the product of his own strength. That is a symbol of the flesh as much as Isaac is a symbol of that which is produced in the power of the spirit.

Ishmael is a product of the fruit of the flesh. Now God asked Abraham in Genesis 21 to send away Ishmael. And Abraham obeyed.

He sent away Ishmael. That is symbolic of our giving up that which is fleshly. We give it up because that is not acceptable to God and we can understand it.

But in the next chapter Genesis 22 we read that God asked Abraham to give up Isaac too. And it is here where many Christians do not obey, do not understand, do not realize that God asks them to give up even the very gifts that he himself has given them. Ishmael was not God's gift to Abraham.

It was the product of his own strength. God said send him away. But Isaac on the other hand was completely different.

He was the direct result of God empowering Abraham supernaturally. And if there was any child about whom it could have been said by any set of parents, this is God's direct gift to us, it was Isaac. Because the parents themselves were incapable of producing a child.

But the power that conquers death had worked in Abraham's body and Sarah's body, overcome the deadness of their body as it were, and given them the ability, the life to produce a child and they got Isaac, God's gift. And now God asks them to give up even that. And there we see Abraham's greatness.

God was testing him. And he gave up his son. If he had not given up his son, he could have said, this is God's gift, I don't have to give him up.

And he would have missed out on God's highest for his life. When God gives us a gift, there is always the danger of our getting attached to the gift rather than to the giver. This is the lesson here.

Abraham was in all likelihood getting attached to Isaac rather than to God himself. And when God saw that, God wanted to detach Isaac from Abraham. And so he said, offer him up.

And therein, God brought Abraham back to the place where the giver, God himself was greater and bigger in Abraham's eyes than the gift, Isaac. Now whenever God gives us a gift, there's always this present danger of our getting taken up with the gift rather than the giver. It may be a gift of material things, or it may be a gift of healing, when we were sick.

And we can be taken up with the health God has given us instead of being taken up with God himself for whom we are to use that health. Or it may be something more spiritual, like a gift of the Spirit. There are many throughout the world today who claim to have the gifts of the Spirit, and many of them are genuine gifts of the Spirit.

There is the outpouring of the Spirit upon many people throughout the world today, and people are getting many of the gifts of the Holy Spirit. But they need to do what Abraham did with those gifts. What did Abraham do with Isaac? Lay him on the altar.

We need to take those gifts of the Spirit, not get attached to them, not think that they are our possession, but lay them on the altar and say, Lord, they are yours. You can use them as you like. And with many people, this is what God has to do, to detach them from their gifts so that their heart is taken up with the giver.

He tells them, lay your gifts on the altar. He doesn't do it himself, but he asks us to do it. God didn't slay Isaac.

He could have done that. No. He asked Abraham to slay Isaac.

And God can take away our gifts, but He doesn't do that. He says, you lay it on the altar. And it's at that point that many people say no.

When Abraham said yes, they say no. Their faith does not go up beyond that point. And therefore, they stagnate spiritually.

And the gifts exalt them, and they miss out and many fall away from the grace of God and lose out completely like King Saul and Lucifer, many others that we read of in Scripture. But Abraham, he gave up what God had given him. And even though God's promise was bound up with Isaac, he considered that God is able to raise men even from the dead.

For after all, in his own body, he had experienced a resurrection, power in his own body. So, God was certainly able to raise up Isaac from the dead. He didn't give up faith in God's promise.

He didn't feel that, well, God has perhaps changed His mind now, and perhaps it's not through Isaac that God is going to fulfill His purpose. No, he didn't have any such idea. He was absolutely sure that it was through Isaac that the promise would be fulfilled.

But, he gave up Isaac believing that the promise would still be fulfilled. It was not in a fatalistic attitude that Abraham gave up Isaac to God. It was not with grumbling and complaining.

It was not saying, oh well, God's so hard, if He wants it, I'll give it. No such thing. He gave up Isaac in faith.

It says in verse 17, it was not just an act of obedience, it was the obedience of faith again. By faith, Abraham offered up Isaac. Where was the faith involved in offering up Isaac? In the fact that he believed that God is able to raise Isaac from the dead and fulfill His promise.

He was absolutely convinced that God is able to do what He had promised. And so, when He offered up Isaac, He was absolutely sure that He was going to slay him. He didn't think that God would stop Him before He put His knife into His own son.

He didn't know that. He didn't know there was a ram caught in the bush behind Him whom God wanted to offer up as a sacrifice instead of His son. No.

He spoke in faith to His son, saying when Isaac asked Him, where is the lamb? He said, God will provide a lamb. And when His servants asked Him, we read in Genesis chapter 22, that when Abraham's servants

asked Him how and what He was going to do on top of the mountain to which He was going, His answer in Genesis 22 was, verse 5, stay here with the donkey, and I and the lad will go yonder, and we will both worship and return to You. Notice there He says, we will return to You.

He was sure that Isaac would come back with Him down the mountain, even though He was sure that Isaac would be slain as well. And there, in obedience to God, though His heart was torn, He obeyed, gave up Isaac, and as it were, received Him back from the dead. And it was on that day, I believe, that Abraham saw the day of Christ, saw as it were in faith the day when the Father would take His only begotten Son up Calvary's hill and offer Him up as a sacrifice.

This is what Jesus spoke of. Thus it is that we too can walk in faith, believing in the God of Resurrection. We turn to Hebrews, chapter 11.

We were looking last week at verses 17 to 19, where we are told about Abraham, that by faith he offered up Isaac, His only begotten Son. He is called His only begotten Son because He had already sent away Ishmael, the product of His own flesh, and this was the only one whom He had now that Ishmael had gone, the only one who was the result of God's working supernaturally in His body, and a type of Christ. And He offered Him up in faith when God called Him to do that, believing that God was able to raise Him up from the dead.

Now, in 2 Corinthians 4, we are told concerning Paul's own experience, He who had a treasure in an earthen vessel, 2 Corinthians 4 7, the reason why God has kept the great treasure of His glory in an earthen vessel is so that the greatness of the power may be evidently of God and not of us. And so the earthen vessel, we are told in 2 Corinthians 4 8, is afflicted, perplexed, persecuted, struck down, and verse 10 is always carrying in it the dying of Jesus, that the life of Jesus also may be manifested in that body, in that earthen vessel. For we who live, verse 11 of 2 Corinthians 4, are constantly being delivered over to death for Jesus' sake, so that the life of Jesus also may be manifest in our mortal flesh.

These verses indicate very clearly that there's only one way by which the life of Jesus can be manifested in our mortal bodies, and that that is through bearing in them the dying of Jesus. But we must have faith for this. That's what Paul says in verse 13, having the same spirit of faith according to what is written, I believe, therefore I spoke, that we also believe and therefore we speak.

Knowing that he who raised the Lord Jesus will also raise us up and present us with you. Unless we are sure that there's going to be a resurrection, we will not give ourselves over to death. It's only when we are convinced that God will raise us up that we will gladly give ourselves over to death.

Jesus gave himself over to death because he knew there would be resurrection. He gladly obeyed the Father and gave himself to death to self right through those 33 years of his life, long before he died on Calvary's cross. For the joy set before him endured the cross.

And so it is with us too. We follow in the footsteps of Abraham who believes in a God of resurrection. Jesus believed in his Father and in resurrection.

And we are also to believe that God is able to raise us up from the dead. That if we accept the cross that God places across our path each day and die to ourself on that cross, in situations where we are provoked, where we are irritated and tempted to anger, tempted to lust or tempted to grab for ourselves and we die to those desires in our flesh, we accept and joyfully bear in our body the dying of Jesus when

we are delivered over to death by God. Each day, if we accept it, there will certainly be a resurrection.

Otherwise there will be no manifestation of the life of Jesus in us. Very often we don't realize what we are losing by not accepting the cross that God puts across our path. We have then no opportunity to know God as the God of resurrection.

How can we know him as the God of resurrection unless we give ourselves over to death? Think of the privilege that is ours as Christians that many, many people are missing altogether because they do not accept the cross. Dear friends, see that the only way you can know God as the God of resurrection right now in your life is if you will accept the cross that God places across your path and if you take up that cross and die like Jesus did saying, knowing that he who raised up Jesus will raise us up also. We believe and therefore we give ourselves over to death.

Then we follow in the footsteps of Abraham, believing in God's almighty power. Further we read in Hebrews 11 verse 20 By faith Isaac blessed Jacob and Esau, even regarding things to come. Here we see faith blessing the children.

Faith has many, many manifestations. Its works are many. Faith works by love and the works of love spread into all spheres.

And as we read through this chapter we find very ordinary things like blessing the children and some fantastic things like the splitting of the Red Sea, like the raising of the dead and we find some difficult things like suffering, imprisonment and stoning and persecution. All these are the manifestations of faith. Faith is not manifested only in miracles and in raising the dead and splitting open Red Seas and pulling down the walls of Jericho.

Faith is manifested in very ordinary things as we see in the following verses. By faith Isaac blessed Jacob and Esau concerning things to come. How did he bless Jacob and Esau concerning the things to come? Because he believed in the promise God had made to him and to his father.

Now Jacob followed in his footsteps too. Verse 21. By faith Jacob as he was dying blessed each of the sons of Joseph and worshipped, leaning on the top of his staff.

He blesses the children by faith. But that was the result of Jacob having gone through many years of discipline under God's hand. He had accepted chastening under God's hand and finally we read in Genesis chapter 32 that God had broken the strength of Jacob and when God had broken Jacob's strength his hip was put out of joint and then he had to use a staff.

He was a broken man, he was a lame man he had to lean upon a staff and we read here in Hebrews 11 in the great list of men of faith Jacob leaned upon his staff. What is the significance of that? The significance of that is that God changed Jacob into an Israel by breaking his natural strength and that was a greater miracle than even raising the dead. It's easier for God to split open a red sea than to break the natural strength of a man and make him depend wholly upon God.

Jacob leaning upon the top of his staff was symbolic of a life that had now come to lean upon God alone no longer leaning upon himself. This is the work God wants to do in us too. He has to break us before we can have faith.

Break the strength of self. That's what he had to do with Abraham. Make him impotent.

That's what he had to do with Jacob. Make him helpless and break his natural strength and that's what God has to do with all of us. Then we can prophesy like Jacob prophesied in Genesis 49 concerning his children including the sons of Joseph.

What he prophesied was true. This is how the gift of prophecy is to be manifested in its fullness through us if God can lead us through a history of being broken under his hand in the different circumstances of life. We read also concerning Joseph verse 22.

By fake Joseph when he was dying made mention of the exodus of the sons of Israel gave orders concerning his bones. Joseph did not want even his bones to remain in Egypt. What a man of faith he was that he believed even though he was the ruler in Egypt he believed that he belonged to Canaan's land.

He belonged to the people of Israel and he said when you go away from here God is going to take you out from here one day. When you go away take away even my bones I don't even want my bones to be in this world in Egypt. That is how these men lived.

They too confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims in this world. They lived for the land of promise and thus they walked by faith whether it was Abel, Enoch, Noah, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob or even Joseph who did not live in tents. How did he manifest his faith? He lived in Egypt in the royal palace and even living in the royal palace he manifested the fact that he did not belong to Egypt by asking the children of Israel to take away his bones when he when they were going to be taken out of Egypt by God.

And so we see in the example of all these men that they lived for the things of eternity. They lived for the things which are not seen like it says in verse 1. They had an assurance of the things hoped for. The conviction of things not seen.

And it is in the footsteps of these men that God calls us to walk today.

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