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Faith Works!

Hebrews 11:1-40 - Part 2
The Evidence of Faith

Introduction

Faith is the "evidence" of things that cannot be seen. It is the visible part of trust and belief. The word translated "evidence" is the Greek *elegchos elegchos* "evidence, proof." It is paired with another Greek word *pragmatwn pragmaton* from which we get the word "pragmatic." It is used in papyrus manuscripts to describe "evidence" as in legal proof of things not seen. See 2 Thess 1:5 (3-5ff). As translated here, it signifies that faith also is "the pragmatic proof" of those things we believe when we place our faith in Christ. The Geneva Bible says that this is "An excellent description of faith by the effects, because it represents things which are but yet in hope, and sets as it were before our eyes things that are invisible." What we hope for are the things we know are coming but have not seen except by faith, the Word of God, and the witness of the Holy Spirit, Rom 8:23-26.

The "evidence" *elegchos*, or certainty of our hope is the inner conviction that what we cannot see is in fact real. Our assurance is not based on sentiment but on the Word of God. Faith accepts what God has revealed, and then it acts upon it with an absolute confidence upon His promises. Therefore, faith is taking God at His Word and accepting as true what God has revealed to us. So Abraham believed God and therefore left Ur of the Chaldees, even though he did not know his final physical destination. He received the promises of God and acted upon them. The text says it with simple but powerful elegance, "Now the Lord said to Abram, *Get out of your country . . . So Abraham departed as the Lord had spoken to him . . .*" Gen 12:1-4, and that is faith. Faith is not believing the unbelievable, or believing contrary to the facts. It is not a set of propositions to which we agree. Faith is receiving the Word of God, and acting upon its principles.

1. **Faith is Acting on the Promises of God, in His Power, and According to His Will, 11:8-31.** So how can we be sure of God's power? We can see it at work in the life of every person listed in 11:4-32. Each one of them is an example of faith that works and of men and women who believed God's promises and acted on the promises. The lists that follow are formidable.

First, the writer of Hebrews calls four inanimate witnesses to the stand. Let us call these inanimate witnesses to ask the question, "How can you be sure of the power of God?" These inanimate witnesses are at least four:

- **Creation** itself is called as a witness of God's power, 11:3. This also is part of the New Covenant passage in Jeremiah 31:35-37; Rom 1:20.
- **Jerusalem**, the restoration and rebuilding of the Holy City will be a witness to God's power, Jer 31:38-40; see Amos 9:18-21.
- **Restoration of cities and ruins** Ezekiel predicts will be a witness to God's faithfulness in promises and power, Ezek 36:33-38.
- **Resurrection of the dead nation** that is restored and reunified Ezekiel predicts will affirm God's power and Word, Ezek 37:1-23.

Second, the writer of Hebrews gives a roll call of the faithful to affirm God's power. Let us ask them the question, "How can you be sure of God's power to save?" There are more than thirty-six witnesses called forth as follows:

- **Abel** - He, by faith, obtained a witness that he was righteous by offering himself first, and then his sacrifice. He being dead yet speaks, 11:4.
- **Enoch** - He walked with God. He knew the Word and acted upon it, so God loved him and took him to abide in His presence, 11:5-6.
- **Noah** - He walked with God and found grace in the eyes of the Lord, 11:8-9.
- **Abraham** - He consistently believed God and it was accounted to him as righteousness, 11:8-10, 12, 17-19.
- **Sarah** - She bore Abraham a child in her old age because she judged Him faithful who had promised her a son, 11:11.
- **Isaac** - He, by faith, blessed Jacob and Esau with the blessing of their future, 11:20.
- **Jacob** - He blessed his sons and worshipped God even in his old age, 11:21.
- **Joseph** - He knew God's promise to return the Hebrews and asked to be taken with them, 11:22.
- **Moses** - miraculously preserved was chosen to deliver the Hebrews from bondage, receive the Law, and establish worship, 11:23-29.
- **Joshua & Hebrews at Jericho** - they marched around the city and received the victory by the power of God, 11:30 [undetermined number].
- **Rahab** - She believed God and asked for deliverance thus becoming an heir of faith in the line of the Messiah, 11:31.
- **Gideon** - He led the nation but refused to have himself made king and endorsed God alone as the King of Israel, 11:32.
- **Barak** - He and Deborah defeated the armies of the king of Hazor, 11:32.
- **Samson** - Samson subdued the Philistines and appealed to God for renewed strength to win the victory, 11:32.

- **Jephthah** - He subdued the Philistines, the Ammonites, and the Ephraimites and called his nation back to serving God, 11:32.
- **David** - He was a man after God's own heart and the sweet psalmist of Israel, 11:32.
- **Samuel** - He was the last judge, the first of the formal prophets, a leader par excellence, and king maker, 11:32.
- **The Prophets** - Samuel, Elijah, Elisha, Nathan, Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Daniel, Hosea, Joel, Amos, Obadiah, Jonah, Micah, Nahum, Zephaniah, Haggai, Zechariah, Malachi, nineteen in all, each of whom served God faithfully in their time, 11:32.

All these and more comprise for us a great cloud of witnesses who demonstrate that **faith works** if we are willing to put it to the test in our lives. None of these men or women was perfect. All of them were sinners saved by grace like you and me. These men and women were recipients of great promises from God. They were ordinary people with like passions and like trials as we. It was their faith in God that made them excel. That faith is the same kind that is available to every believer. This is a great testimony to the fact that if God effectively could use any of those on this great list of the heroes of the faith, He can use any one of us as well!

2. Faith is Esteeming the Reproach of Jesus, 11:26

Moses Esteemed Christ's Reproach. Moses esteemed the reproach and reviling because of Christ. In what sense would Moses have esteemed the reproach of Christ? He looked to his reward. He saw God face to face and spoke to Him face to face, see Ex 33:11; Num 12:8; Dt 5:4. So when did Moses "esteem" the reproach of Christ to be greater than the riches of Egypt? When he refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter, 11:24? It was the day he made the decision to defend the Hebrews against the oppression of the Egyptians, Ex 2:11-15.

What does it mean to esteem the reproach of Christ rather than the riches of Egypt, 11:26? There is no way to evaluate the riches of Egypt's treasury, but it would have been substantial. But it was more than the money. Moses also refused the position and the power of being the son of Pharaoh's daughter, 11:24. He chose to identify himself with the people of God who were the object of oppression, suffering, and enslavement by the Egyptians, 11:25. Instead he embraced the reproach of Christ, 11:26. Jesus endured the reproach of his own family, of the Jewish leaders, and the Roman leaders as well. It included the rejection of the Jews, the arrest, the trial, the physical abuse, the mocking, the cross with its pain, suffering and death, Rom 15:3. They weren't rejecting Him; they were rejecting God who sent Him, Ps 69:9.

Moses Expressed Contempt for the World. Moses, like Jesus, expressed both a rejection of and contempt for the things of the world and the ways of the world. Here in Hebrews 11:24-26 the Holy Spirit mentions three examples of Moses' contempt for the world. **First**, he rejected its honors by abandoning position and power by refusing to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter, 11:24. **Second**, he rejected the pleasures of life in the court of Pharaoh and chose to suffer the same affliction as his own people suffered by identifying with them, 11:25. **Third**, he rejected the wealth of Egypt in favor of the reward of serving God, 11:26, see Pink, *An Exposition of Hebrews*, pp. 796-802. Moses weighed these issues in his mind and decided that the temporal wealth and his position of power in Egypt were far less valuable than the "stigma that rests on God's anointed." Bruce, *The Epistle to the Hebrews*, p. 320. Perhaps B. F. Westcott, noted New Testament Scholar says it best:

The reproach of the Christ is the reproach which belongs to Him who is the appointed envoy of God to a rebellious world. This reproach which was endured in the highest degree by Christ Jesus (Romans 15:3) was endured also by those who in any degree prefigured or represented Him, those, that is, in whom He partially manifested and manifests Himself, those who live in Him and in whom He lives, B. F. Westcott, *The Epistle to the Hebrews*, p. 372.

Moses Saw Jesus' Exodus. It is significant to note that when Jesus was transfigured, Matthew tells us that with Him on the mountain were Moses and Elijah, Mt 17; 3-4. There is a mystery surrounding the understanding Moses had in the Old Testament concerning Christ. The writer of Hebrews suggests that Moses had, in some sense, seen Christ from afar by faith just as did Abraham, Jn 8:56-58. We can only surmise that because of Moses' unique relationship with God as the mediator of the Old Covenant, there was a time and a place where he was allowed a small glimpse of what he would one day see face to face on the Mount of Transfiguration. He saw the glorified Christ who Luke says, spoke with Peter, James, and John about His own "decease" which is the Greek word *exodos* or *exodus*, Lk 9:30-31. It may well be that Moses was given a preview and glimpse of the coming day when he would stand on the mountain with the transfigured Christ and he and Elijah would there meet with Jesus and His three disciples.

Moses Chose Suffering. It was not easy for Moses to choose a life of suffering, rejection, misunderstanding, and hardship. Yet Moses was a man of bold and daring faith. He believed that the way of faith and obedience was better, even if it meant severe hardship. So, he would gladly bear any reproach for the sake of Christ, so that by enduring and suffering with Him,

he might also reign with Him!, see 2 Tim 2:12. This is a reminder that "All who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will suffer persecution," 2 Tim 3:12.

3. Faith is Overcoming Trials by the Promises and Power of God, 11:33-40.

The following is a representative list of twenty trials overcome by faith (33-40) in all those heroes of the faith that are mentioned in 11:4-32.

- Some through faith subdued kingdoms, 11:33
- Some through faith worked righteousness, 11:33
- Some through faith obtained promises, 11:33
- Some through faith stopped the mouths of lions, 11:33
- Some through faith quenched the violence of fire, 11:34
- Some through faith escaped the edge of the sword, 11:34
- Some through faith were made strong though they were weak, 11:34
- Some through faith became valiant in battle, 11:34
- Some through faith turned to flight the armies of the aliens, 11:34
- Some women through faith received their dead to life again, 11:35
- Some through faith were tortured accepting no deliverance, to obtain a better resurrection, 11:35
- Some through faith faced trial of mockings and scourgings, 11:36
- Some through faith faced chains and imprisonment, 11:36
- Some through faith were delivered by being stoned, 11:37
- Some through faith were delivered by being sawn in two, 11:37
- Some through faith were tempted but stood strong, 11:37
- Some through faith were delivered though slain with the sword, 11:37
- Some through faith wandered about in sheepskins, destitute, afflicted, tormented, of whom the world was not worthy 11:37-38
- Some through faith wandered in deserts, dens, and caves, 11:38

How does faith help us to face suffering?

These all obtained a good testimony through faith, but did not receive the promise (Christ and the New Covenant), 11:39. God having provided something better for us, that they should not be made perfect apart from us. Successfully facing suffering is a witness of the power of Christ and the cross this side of Calvary.

First, success in facing suffering is dependent on our ability to recognize that God is in control of all the circumstances in life. He sees and knows everything that happens to us. Jesus said He knows if a sparrow falls to the ground, so He knows all the problems you face, see Mt 10:27-31.

Second, God is able to overrule any circumstance, no matter how unwelcome or difficult, and turn it into blessing and benefit for those who love Him and are the called according to His purpose, see Rom 8:28. Look at the life and

testimony of Joseph. He is the perfect example of God's overruling power, see Gen 45:5-8; 50:19-21. The essential ingredient in both of these two examples from Jesus and the life of Joseph is FAITH. The hymn writer said it so well in the great hymn "Have Faith in God!"

Eight Positive Purposes of Human Suffering

Suffering in the Christian life is not without meaning and purpose. Even through suffering we have the opportunity to glorify God, see 1 Pt 4:12-19.

1. Some suffering is for our purification. Mal. 3:3; 2 Tim 1:12
2. Some suffering is for our maturity. 2 Cor 1:6; Phil 1:29; 1 Pet. 5:10
3. Some suffering is for the glory of God. Jn 9:1-34
4. Some suffering enables us to achieve humility. Gal. 2:20; Phil. 1:21
5. Some suffering enables us to bear fruit. Jn. 15:2, 8; 2 Tim 1:3-5
6. Some suffering is for our chastening. Dt 8:5; 2 Sam 7:14; Job 5:17; Ps 6:1; 38:1; 118:18; Prov 3:11; 19:18; Isa 26:16; 1 Cor 11:32; Heb. 12:6-11.
7. Some suffering equips us for greater service. 2 Cor. 1:4; 1 Thess 3:4
8. Righteous suffering is a prelude to glorification. Rev 2:10

Conclusion

Have Faith in God!

Have faith in God when your pathway is lonely,
He sees and knows all the way you have trod;
Never alone are the least of His children;
Have faith in God, have faith in God.

Have faith in God when your prayers are unanswered,
Your earnest plea He will never forget;
Wait on the Lord, trust His word and be patient,
Have faith in God. He'll answer yet.

Have faith in God in your pain and your sorrow,
His heart is touched with your grief and despair;
Cast all your cares and your burdens upon Him,
And leave them there, oh, leave them there.

Have faith in God though all else fall about you;
Have faith in God, He provides for His own:
He cannot fail though all kingdoms shall perish.
He rules. He reigns upon His throne.

Refrain:

Have faith in God, He's on His throne,
Have faith in God, He watches over His own;
He cannot fail, He must prevail,
Have faith in God, Have faith in God.