

TRIUMPHS
OF
FAITH

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Lesson one

The nature of faith

Hebrews 11: 1-2 “Now faith is being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see. This is what the ancients were commended for.”

The subject of the Book of Hebrews is faith. Hebrews 11:1 gives us a definition and declaration of the nature of faith. ***“Now faith is being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see.”*** The purpose of this letter was to strengthen the early Hebrew Christians, who felt that they had lost so much in turning from the splendid ritual and ceremony of the Hebrew faith to the simpler things that are in Christ Jesus. The letter was to stop them falling away from the faith.

Faith is a paradox, something contrary to reason and yet true. Faith sings in prison and not when it is released. Faith fights in chains. Faith works and accomplishes things without any of the tools upon which men seem so largely to depend.

Chapter eleven of Hebrews really commences in the previous chapter. The little word ‘Now’ links the two chapters. There, the writer quotes from Habakkuk when he declares one of the great principles of the victorious life, ***“my righteous one will live by faith.”*** We ask then: What is this faith. There is only one definition of faith in the Bible. There are explanations and application, but here is a clear-cut definition, the only one.

In this definition there are two very simple and self evident things. Firstly faith is being sure of ***“what we hope for”*** and secondly faith is the certainty of ***“what we do not see.”*** These are the two realms in which faith becomes operative.

“Things we hope for.” What are they? Things not yet attained, things not in our possession. Who hopes for that which he can see? We enter the realm of the future when we speak of things hoped for. We have all known times when all hope seemed lost, but, the things we hope for, the aspirations of the soul, that is the sphere in which faith operates.

The second phase, ***“what we do not see.”*** That is difficult. At least it seems to be so. It is easy to believe in things we can see. Faith does not operate there at all. We do not need any faith to believe in the things we can see. Believing is being sure without seeing. Faith operates there in the presence of things that the eye has not seen, things that have not entered into the understanding of the mind.

Seeing the invisible! That is faith. Faith operates in the spiritual world in the midst of where we are always living, in the midst of our material world. The unseen things, the hidden world, that is everywhere, if we could see it. Scripture illustrates this for us in 2 Kings 6 where Elisha can see into the invisible world but his servant cannot.

2 Kings 6: 16-17 “Don’t be afraid,” the prophet answered. “Those who are with us are more than those who are with them.” And Elisha prayed, “O Lord, open his eyes so that he may see.” Then the Lord opened the servants eyes, and he looked and saw the hills full of horses and chariots of fire all around Elisha.”

The servant had not seen the horses and chariots but they were there, unseen things. We cannot see these things but they are there.

When Jesus was arrested he said to Peter:

Matthew 26:55 “Do you think I cannot call on my Father, and he will at once put at my disposal more than twelve legions of angels?”

He did not ask for them, but he saw them, and saw the possibility. Faith entered into the realm of the unseen. When we cease to believe in unseen things, hope dies, and the song is silent, and the fighting ends, and the work is abandoned. To quote Moses, **Hebrews 11:26**. “he persevered because he saw him who is invisible.”

The “**what we hope for**” is the sphere in which faith operates; the realm into which we climb when thoughts become longings, longings become aspirations, and aspirations strong desires.

The Revised Version states that, “**faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the proving of things not seen.**” The Authorised Version puts it like this, “**faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen.**” The NIV, “**faith is being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see.**” The word that has been translated into assurance, substance and being sure is the Greek word “hupostasis,” simply confidence; “faith is the confidence of things hoped for.” Confidence! Certainty which produces action. A confidence that becomes a conviction that it is so. That is faith exactly, confidence, certainty of things hoped, certainty of the ultimate realisation of the vision.

What is the evidence? We give evidence, which means we offer proof. The revisers have translated this “proving”. If evidence is proof offered, proving is proof offered and accepted.

Here then is the mental process:

- Faith is a conviction of the reality of the unseen.
- Confident that the vision will be translated into reality

Unless faith enters that realm of the unseen things, and becomes conviction, there is no certainty about faith at all, there is no guarantee. It is faith that grasps the reality, reaches out to the unseen, and then focuses upon it, acts upon it; and that hope is no longer mere hope, in a speculative sense, but becomes a great certainty.

Lesson two

The faith of Abel

Hebrews 11:4 *“By faith Abel offered God a better sacrifice than Cain did. By faith he was commended as a righteous man, when God spoke well of his offerings. And by faith he still speaks, even though he is dead.”*

Faith has already been defined by the writer of Hebrews as to conduct; **“My righteous one will live by faith.”** It has been defined also as consciousness. **“Faith is being sure of what we hope for,”** based upon **“certainty of what we do not see.”** In addition to these **Hebrews 11:6** describes the creed of faith. **“God exists,”** and **“He rewards those who earnestly seek him.”** And finally it is by faith we discover the ultimate truth concerning human history. **“By faith we understand that the universe was formed at God’s command, so that what is seen was not made out of what was visible.”**

Turning to the stream of human history the writer has selected illustrations of the power of faith. He begins with Abel and ends with Jesus.

The story behind the particular reference to Abel is recorded in **Genesis chapter 4.** Jesus referred to him and to his death in **Matthew 23:35** **“from the blood of righteous Abel.”** He is a man of faith for two things. First **“by faith he offered a better sacrifice than Cain did.”** and secondly, by faith **“he still speaks, even though he is dead.”**

It is interesting that our first example to illustrate faith is a son of the fallen race. He did not mention Adam or Eve. There is no question about our first parents having faith in God because before the fall God walked with them in the garden. He began with Abel and he is seen at worship. Worship is the highest function of human life. Of man God said in

Isaiah 43:7 **“Everyone who is called by my name, whom I created for my glory.”** Man reaches the highest possible level of personality and possibility when he worships, not when he is working.

Here we see a man of worship **“by faith Abel offered God.”** The word “offered” literally means, carried into God’s presence. Where was this place of worship? Probably the gates of Eden, where cherubim guarded the entrance, man having been by his failure excluded by an act of God. Outside the garden yet in worship the family would draw near coming to the threshold and so coming into the presence of God.

We are told by faith **“Abel brought fat portions from some of the firstborn of his flock.”** Which means that he brought to the place of worship offerings that had been slain. Death was there. Death was acknowledged. Not so with Cain. When he brought gifts they were vegetables, beautiful gifts from the ground, but there was no element of death there, no suggestion of blood.

When we read of God providing “garments of skin” to cover Adam and Eve’s shame we recognise that they were provided through death and the shedding of blood. God would have made this clear and instructed them that sin could only be atoned for in this way through a sacrifice.

We are told that God accepted Abel's sacrifice and he did not accept the sacrifice of Cain. The sacrifice that Abel brought was a confession of sin, demanding sacrifice. Abel came into the presence of God acknowledging his sin and the need for a mediation in drawing near to God. There was no suggestion of sin in Cain's offering, no demand for sacrifice.

Abel came into God's presence seeking acceptance with God bringing his gift in faith. His blood offering was a recognition of the holiness of God and also faith in the mercy of God. Abel drew near to God letting his gift speak for him. The gift of Abel was a revelation of the man and was accepted because he was in himself expressed in the gift. Abel was a sinning man, and yet a man whose attitude to God was a true one, and whose gift proved his sense of the necessity for forgiveness in order that he might approach God. So Abel stands for evermore at the head of the long line of worshipping men and women, a revelation of what worship ever ought to be.

To come stridently, and without reverence into the presence of God, imagining we can worship through flowers and fruit, and things aesthetic, all the trivialities that are dying as we touch them, is to insult his holiness. Worship demands the approach based upon sacrifice. This is the meaning of the cross. We cannot worship, we can never come to God to worship, save by the way of the cross. By the way of the cross a great provision was made, atonement was made; and sin can be dealt with, and put away by a righteous God; and we may lift our faces and look into his face and call him "Our Father." That is worship and nothing else will suffice.

There is a second part to Abel's story, "***And by faith he still speaks, even though he is dead.***" His offering as an action of faith never ends, but goes on. A true action of faith always runs on beyond the lifetime of the one who acts in faith. He is still speaking even to us now.

What is Abel saying? ***Genesis 4:10*** tells us the blood of Abel cried to God from the ground. "***Listen! Your brother's blood cries out to me from the ground.***" Some suggest that Abel's blood cried for vengeance. I do not believe that. Vengeance has never been the nature or desire of faith. The voice of Abel's blood was screaming out to God. "What my brother has done to me is evil please God do something to atone for his sin and reconcile him back to yourself." In the shedding of his blood there was being voiced in the listening ear of God the shriek, the scream, the agonising calling of humanity.

In ***Hebrews 12:24*** we hear God's response to this cry. "***To Jesus the mediator of a new covenant, and to the sprinkled blood that speaks a better word than the blood of Abel.***" The blood of Abel cried aloud from the ground for salvation. The blood of Christ answered that cry and atonement was made. Man no longer meets God at the gates of Eden but a way was opened for him to come right into the Holy Place. So our worship, must be of that nature for evermore, offered because the blood of Christ for ever affirms the rent veil, the way of access made open.

Lesson three

The faith of Enoch

Hebrews 11:5. "By faith Enoch was taken from this life, so that he did not experience death; he could not be found, because God had taken him away. For before he was taken, he was commended as one who pleased God."

The New Testament statement about Enoch may be paraphrased: "By faith Enoch pleased God, and therefore God translated him that he should not see death." The Old Testament writer simply says in ***Genesis 5:24 "Enoch walked with God; then he was no more, because God took him away."***

The chapter in which Enoch's life is recorded stretches over fifteen hundred years of human history. It repeats man's common story. Birth and burial, passion and pain, living and dying. Only once over all these years did the recorder have to change his phrasing, and instead of telling the story of a man who lived and died, he told the story of a man who lived; but when he came to record the end of his life, he could not add "and then he died." He had to say, "He was no more, because God took him away." Upon that piece of history from the Old Testament there flashes the light of the New Testament, "By faith he was taken from this life as one who pleased God." We ask why is it for once in the long and monotonous process of history of burial upon burial a man is said to have been translated. The answer is self-evident; it was because he walked with God.

A change came over the manner of his life. We are told he lived for 65 years, and Methuselah was born to him. After the birth of the boy a change came, and from then to the taking away he did not live an ordinary life. After Methuselah was born he walked with God for three hundred years. It is a fascinating story. How the change came about we are not told. It may be that he then saw the darkness of the surrounding ages, and understood the divine movement, and so began to live by walking with God.

The story has two phases; first that Enoch walked with God, secondly he did not experience death because God took him.

We begin with the simple statement concerning his life. "***He walked with God.***" What does it mean? What does it mean when we say we walk with anyone? I will suggest it means four things. If a man walks with God, it means first he moves in a divine direction. Secondly, he is in agreement with God. Thirdly, there is mutual trust between the two. Finally, he keeps in step with God.

Enoch walked with God in a divine direction. Can we speak of God going anywhere? How can God decide to walk. Everything in the whole of creation is in a state of transition. God himself is not moving but in relation to his creation, humanity and everything in human history is moving, nothing is final, nothing is complete.

What is the line of the divine direction in human history? God's going is that of uncompromising, unceasing hostility to sin. Because God is love that creates his unswerving hostility to sin in every form, because sin ruins everything.

In *Isaiah 33:14* the prophet asks. ***“Who of us can dwell with consuming fire? Who of us can dwell with everlasting burning? The presence of God is everywhere, and at all times, in all human history is an everlasting fire. Isaiah asks the question: Who can dwell and live there? “He who walks righteously and speaks what is right, who rejects gain from extortion and keeps his hands from accepting bribes, who stops his ears against plots of murder and shuts his eyes against contemplating evil.”*** From the moment of the birth of his child he did not live an ordinary life. He was marching with God in hostility to evil. He walked with God by faith.

He walked in perfect agreement. Some walk in agreement with the general principles about God’s purpose but are not at peace with him within their own lives. Agreement means not a single moments opposition to God’s will. There are many who wholeheartedly agree with the scriptures but they are not living by them. They agree that the divine direction is true, but they are not walking with God. Enoch walked with God for 300 years and there was no controversy between them.

Enoch trusted God about himself and the ultimate issue of human history and human life. It is also true that God trusted Enoch. In the same way he trusted Abraham and Moses. *Psalm 25:14. “The Lord confides in those who fear him; he makes his covenant known to them.”*

Finally, he kept in step with God, which simply means he did not run ahead of God or lag behind. Our zeal can easily outrun our knowledge and on the other hand because the command puzzles us, we lag behind.

The supreme example of this was on the dark night of Peter’s betrayal. He struck with his sword in the garden but then dropped behind and followed from afar.

A man who walks with God will not run ahead or lag behind but will keep in step all the way. That is possible by faith, and faith only.

Enoch was translated, that he might not see death. When taken from this life into the life beyond, it was not through the common gateway of death. Does this have an application for us? It may have a literal application for some because at the end of time not all will see death.

But is there something more here, Jesus said in *John 11:25 “I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in me will live, even though he dies; and whoever lives and believes in me will never die.”* All down the Christian centuries men and women walked with God. Yes; they have died in our common acceptance of the term, and yet in the larger and truer outlook not one of them died. The spirit, ransomed realises his translation into the presence of God. ***“Enoch was no more, because God took him.”***

Lesson four

The faith of Noah

Hebrews 11:7. “By faith Noah, when warned about things not yet seen, in holy fear built an ark to save his family. By his faith he condemned the world and became heir of the righteousness that comes by faith.”

Taken as an illustration of faith, the story of Noah is remarkable, and indeed, unique. In it faith is revealed acting on the same principles as in other cases, but in circumstances previously unknown.

What sort of man was he? I repeat the Biblical description. **“Noah was a righteous man, blameless among the people of his time.”** Then comes the summing up of his life: **“Noah walked with God.”** A remarkable character, perfect among his contemporaries.

Like Enoch he **“walked with God”**. Only two men in all of Bible history are described in this way. I will repeat what this means. Noah moved in the same direction in which God was moving; he was in agreement with God; he had no controversy on the way and they kept in step with one another. To keep in step God did not hurry ahead. He adapted his going to Noah’s possibilities. He was always with him.

Let’s look a little more closely at the text. **“When warned about things.”** God was not admonishing Noah but revealing to him his purpose. And again, **“in holy fear.”** Fear was the motive of his life as he walked with God. That is not fear that is terrifying; but **“the fear of the Lord”**, the beginning of wisdom. It refers to his awe in the presence and majesty of God, and to his urgent attempt to obey. So we see him not only walking, but talking and listening to God and desiring one thing only the honour and glory of his name.

Noah lived in a time when the wickedness of man was great. Scripture describes it, **“that every inclination of the thoughts of his (mans) heart was evil all the time.”** Every imagination, every thought, every conception, was evil; and not on one day, but continually. That is the most appalling picture of the human race possible and those were the times in which Noah lived.

Jesus referred to these times. **Matthew 24: 37-29.”As it was in the days of Noah, so it will be at the coming of the Son of Man. For in the days before the flood, people were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, up to the time Noah entered the ark; and they knew nothing about what would happen until the flood came and took them all away.”** On the ordinary level it was “business as usual” and yet, every imagination of the thoughts of their hearts was evil continually.

“Noah, when warned of things not yet seen, in holy fear built an ark to save his family.” There was no evidence of the things God was telling him. They were things unseen. He walked with God, and God talked to him. He was a lonely soul. Look at the condition of human life around him; yet in the midst of it all, he walked with God, feared God, and was spoken to by God. Faith in God is seen and operating.

What did Noah see as a consequence of walking by faith? He was conscious of the evil in which he was living. And that was born out of his communion with a holy God. Evil is never seen, except from the standpoint of divine holiness. Here was a man walking with God and because of his walking he saw the evil corruption around him.

But we can go further, he was not only conscious of evil, but he had an understanding of its degradation. Faith gave him a conviction of the inevitability of divine judgement. Noah knew what God told him was about to happen. He felt the righteousness of it.

That brings us to the simple statement that by faith he built his ark. Faith brought him into active co-operation with God in his purpose and plans. Noah did not build the ark as the result of what he could see. Men were continuing as normal, indifferent to the dereliction of the nation and the corruption of the race.

Noah and his three sons could never have built the ark with their own hands. What became of the workmen who helped them? As Jesus said “the flood came and took them all away.” For one hundred and twenty years Noah was preaching righteousness. They had not listened. When the flood came they were swept away despite the fact they had been workmen preparing that which was to be God’s starting point for his movement in history.

Is there any application of this story to ourselves? Although there are some very dark and terrible things revealed in other periods of history, there is no description of a race having sunk so low that the record has to say that **“Every inclination of the thoughts of his heart was evil all the time.”** Why not? Because the work of God moved forward from that new beginning. But the same principle of evil is at work, and it has the same manifestations. Business is still as usual, eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage; busy about our work and material things. But the same God is supreme. The same testimony to righteousness is necessary. This supreme illustration should warn and admonish us.

In a day when the principle of evil is working, God is reigning; and he is always looking for Noah; to do things so utterly without reason when he commanded them; to build an ark for the coming flood, when there is no sign of the flood! Men will laugh and mock if we do this kind of thing. Noah walked with God by faith. He carried on by faith. He did the thing for which he could see no reason except that God commanded him. He fell into line with the divine order. He carried out the divine instruction. He built his ark, and gave God his starting point. For another movement in human history.

That is what he is wanting us to do: to witness by faith, when all things seem contradictory, when all the circumstances of the hour seems to show that the things we are doing are supremely futile. Believing in God, hearing his voice, believing his word, we march on, and by obedience condemn the world; and carry on the great march of righteousness towards its completion.

Lesson five

The faith of Abraham

Hebrews 11: 8, 9,17. “By faith Abraham, when called to go to a place he would later receive as his inheritance, obeyed and went, even though he did not know where he was going. By faith He lived in tents, in the promised land like a stranger. By faith, when God tested him, offered Isaac as a sacrifice.”

Of the greatness of Abraham there can be no question. He is claimed by Mohammedanism, by Judaism and by Christianity; and is held in profound reverence in each case. Through the Koran Abraham is mentioned 188 times. He stands out in human history as one of the great personalities - James in the New Testament said of him - **James 2:23. “Abraham believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness,” and he was called God’s friend.”** In the Old Testament on two occasions his relationship with God is recorded. Of Moses it is said he talked with God as a friend but of Abraham, **Isaiah 41:8. “But you, O Israel my servant, Jacob, whom I have chosen, you descendants of Abraham my friend.”**

In this classic passage on faith, the writer has more to record about Abraham than of any other. Beginning at verse 8 it continues to verse 19. This, of course is a condensed story. We can read the full version of his life of faith in **Genesis chapters 12-25**. In the Hebrew account of his life there are four great movements of faith. We will consider the three indicated in the above text. They reveal a deepening experience in the life of Abraham.

First faith obeying “By faith Abraham, when called, obeyed.” Abraham lived in Ur of the Chaldees a civilised society both materially and educationally but without any evidence of high spiritual or moral standards. That was Abraham’s background, and it was here he heard the call of God. **Genesis 12: 1-3. “The Lord said to Abram, “Leave your country, your people and your family household and go to the land I will show you; I will make your name great, and you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and whoever curses you I will curse; and all peoples on earth will be blessed through you.”** That was the call Abraham heard, a call to leave his family and country, and all the conditions there that he might be a blessing to all the world.

Now obedience to that call was only possible to faith, and in the surrender to that call faith was operating. We may ask, How did he know it was God’s voice speaking to him? I don’t know. What I do know is that Abraham was convinced that the call had come to him to turn his back upon Ur, and that it was God’s call. Of that he was perfectly sure. Was he disillusioned with life? Somehow he had come to a consciousness of God, he had come to know God, to know that God was speaking to him. When we see that we are no longer surprised by his actions, yet it was only possible by faith.

The next verse in chapter 12 tells us, **“So Abram left, as the Lord had told him.”** The writer of Hebrews says not only that he went, but he did so not knowing where he was going; but he is equally careful to say that though he did not know where he was going, he knew what he was going for, and why he was going. **“He was looking forward to the city with foundations, whose architect and builder is God.”**

Ur had foundations but they were material, they would pass away. He went out looking for a city, that had foundations, whose order of life, whose architect and builder was God himself; and he went because God told him to go, and by faith he obeyed. Marching without a map, progressing without a programme, but going with God that was a marvellous act of obedience.

“By faith he lived He lived in tents, in the promised land like a stranger.” Not a landowner but living in tents like his son and grandson after him. How long did this last? Just about one hundred years. At his death he owned just a small plot of land. Machpelah, the burying place of Sarah his wife and himself.

God’s word tells us the truth about these men and women of faith, of their failure as well as success. His was a wonderful life of faith, but there were some sad deflections from faith in the early part. He went down into Egypt and created difficulties for himself. He could not trust God wholly with his future. Yet, in those hundred years he obeyed, waited, trusting. Where he travelled pitching his tent there were cities full of material property and wealth; but Abraham was not lured by them. Lot was, and that was where Lot broke down. He was a good man, but he allowed himself to be seduced by the promise of a way by which wealth might be quickly accumulated. Abraham accepted the unsettled life. He was a pilgrim, travelling all the while. Faith manifested itself in the fact that he was a travelling stranger for one hundred years. Whatever the difficulties, he never went back to Ur.

So finally we come to that which is the climax and central fact. ***“By faith when God tested him, offered Isaac as a sacrifice.”*** When God said to Abraham, “Give me your son,” He yielded Isaac to him in the only way he knew, and that was by putting him to death. So Abraham went with Isaac to where God had directed him to offer up his son. Nearing the place he said to the men who accompanied them, ***“Stay here with the donkey while I and the boy go over there. We will worship then we will come back to you.”*** He was going to offer Isaac, to the uttermost limit, even to death. Yet there was a confident assertion that that was not going to be the end. He was coming back and the lad (young man) was coming back with him.

What is the meaning of this? He followed what seemed to him the only course to present his son in answer to God’s call. But he reckoned that God was able to raise him up, even from the dead. The writer in Hebrews tells us, ***“Abraham reasoned that God could raise the dead, and figuratively speaking, he did receive Isaac back from the dead.”*** Abraham yielded to God’s word while at the same time taking account of everything God had promised him.

Faith is not blind belief. Faith is not superstitious. Faith works by reason. It does the thing that seems contrary to expectation, but it does it, reckoning on God by faith, being sure of God; being sure that after Abraham had done his utmost, God was able to raise Isaac up. By faith Abraham offered up his son. That was the supreme activity of faith.

Lesson six

The faith of Amram and Jochebed

Hebrews 11:23. "By faith Moses' parents hid him for three months after he was born, because they saw he was no ordinary child, and they were not afraid of the king's edict."

The faith referred to here is not that of Moses but that of his parents, and that is our theme. When we read these brief cameos in the eleventh chapter of Hebrews we must always refer back to the original narrative in the Old Testament.

Exodus 2: 1-10 speaks only of the actions of the mother but the writer of the letter to the Hebrews says parents. Moses' father, I am sure, played his part in preparing the cradle of papyrus, daubing it with bitumen and getting it ready.

Now who were they? His father's name was Amram, and his mother's name was Jochebed. You will find his name mentioned fourteen times in the genealogical tables and hers twice, both times as the wife of Amram, once as the mother of Moses and Aaron: once as the mother of Moses, Aaron and Miriam.

Two of the common crowd of slaves, not outstanding personalities. Moses was born to them 64 years after the death of Joseph. The book of Exodus tells us in the first chapter, another Pharaoh had arisen that did not know Joseph. He resented the presence of these people in the land of Goshen, and their great success, and their rapid multiplications. The result was the whole of them had been reduced to slavery, and it was brutal slavery, too.

Although they were enslaved they still multiplied rapidly. Pharaoh to prevent this growth adopted the policy of killing every boy born. Interestingly the Egyptian midwives refused to carry out the king's command. Since they would not do it, it became a national order: when a boy was born, he should be thrown into the Nile and drowned. Moses was born under these conditions.

His parents hid him for three months. They believed he was no ordinary child and their love for him outweighed their fear of the king's edict. But the time came when it was no longer possible to hide him. It was then they took action.

What was the action? They committed him to the river of death. They put him in an ark of bulrushes, covered him over and put him down in the reeds. His sister was sent to watch what would happen.

When we read the Exodus story we imagine their action was one of pure love and affection for the baby. Of course it was that, but now we find something else. These two people believe in God. They believed somehow he was an over-ruling God. That he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him. And then when they placed their baby in the river of death and watched, it was an act of faith.

We can name four elements in the faith of these two people. First it was faith that inspired hope. Secondly, it was faith that created courage. Thirdly it was faith acting rationally. Finally, it was faith unconsciously co-operating with the purpose of God.

First, it was faith inspired by hope. ***“They saw he was no ordinary child,”*** but they knew the utter hopelessness of the situations. These two people knew, that in spite of an apparent hopelessness, God remained. I am not suggesting they knew what would happen. But they had faith and that inspired hope.

Again it was faith creating courage. The writer says: ***“They were not afraid of the king’s edict.”*** Why? They were convinced that there was an authority and a higher power than that of Pharaoh.

This story portrays faith acting rationally. All that they do is reasonable and carefully prepared. The watertight ark, the sister sent to watch what would happen. When the daughter of Pharaoh came and lifted the lid, and the baby cried. Miriam had the quickness of mind to say. ***“Shall I go and get one of the Hebrew women to nurse the baby for you.”*** Faith is never foolhardy. Faith is always rational. Faith believes in God, and does the thing that appeals to reason. Oliver Cromwell put it like this: “Trust in God, and keep your powder dry.”

Some suggest she took the child home and returned him to the palace when he was twelve. I believe it far more likely she was admitted into the palace to nurse the child for Pharaoh’s daughter. In those formative years his mother told him stories of Abraham, Isaac, Jacob and Joseph. How his people had travelled down to Egypt before the new Pharaoh arose.

We have looked at faith inspiring hope, faith creating courage and faith acting rationally; and now the greatest thing of all, faith unconsciously co-operating with God. What was the human part in all this. The cry of the baby admitted him to the heart of the woman. The woman admitted him to the court of Pharaoh. She adopted him, and moreover educated him. Stephen in his great apologia in Acts says: ***“Moses was educated in all the wisdom of the Egyptians and was powerful in speech and action.”***

When Moses’ parents put the child into the ark they had no idea how things would turn out, how esteemed he would be in the sight of God. ***Exodus 33:11. “The Lord would speak to Moses face to face, as a man speaks to his friend.”*** Amran and Jochebed believed he was no ordinary child and by faith prepared an ark, put the baby in it, committed it to the waters of death, and then waited.

The principle of faith operating, works mightier issues than we know. Many parents will have passed over before they see the result of their training. And the other thing is the lowliest slaves may be the way God brings about his higher purposes. In this marvellous chapter chronicling the triumphs of faith, the writer was led by the Spirit to include the actions of two people little known, hidden away among the crowds of slaves to act with such faith that it would affect the forward movement of God so greatly in the world.

Lesson seven

The faith of Moses

Hebrews 11: 24-27. “By faith Moses when he had grown up, refused to be known as the son of Pharaoh’s daughter. He chose to be ill-treated along with the people of God rather than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a short time. He regarded disgrace for the sake of Christ as a greater value than the treasures of Egypt, because he was looking ahead to his reward. By faith he left Egypt, not fearing the king’s anger; he persevered because he saw him who is invisible. By faith he kept the Passover and the sprinkling of blood, so that the destroyer of the firstborn would not touch the firstborn of Israel.”

We come to one of the most colourful, exciting characters in scripture, Moses. He has been described as “the greatest man amongst mere men in the whole history of the world.” This is what the author of Hebrews says. **Hebrews 3:3. “Jesus has been found worthy of greater honour than Moses.”** Until Jesus came he was the greatest man that ever lived. Moses was “a Messiah” a deliverer of his people. Jesus is “the Messiah” the deliverer of all people.

From the above verses we discover a very important principle of a life lived by faith. It is the result of a definite decision. And there are three distinct directives to help us. We will examine them in reverse order. First “he regarded.” God gives us time to look at the life of faith and to weigh up the advantages and disadvantages. Second, “he chose”. Following a period of evaluating you choose. Thirdly, “he refused.” Having decided to live by faith you refuse to be drawn back into a faithless way of life.

Moses could see the immediate result and the end result. **“By faith he regarded disgrace for the sake of Christ (or the sake of Messiah) as of greater value than the treasures of Egypt because he was looking ahead to his reward.”** The Hebrews, those in slavery, were looking for a Messiah. A prince who was to come as leader promising deliverance.

He regarded - he balanced things in order to come to a decision. We put things side by side. He weighed up the evidence on both sides. He looked at the treasure of Egypt - a remarkable civilisation. Untold wealth. The splendour of a royal court. Wealth and power. Learning and refinement. On the other side, the cherished hope of a coming Messiah. Baby boys thrown into the Nile. A brutal cruel life. Mocking tyrants who considered them stupid to believe one would come to deliver them. In his looking, **“he was looking ahead to his reward.”**

A life of faith is a life lived with hope for the future. It is not taken up with the here and now. Do you live by faith and please God or live by sight and please yourself? Do you live looking ahead to the next world or live for what you get in this world? Do you live believing in God’s promises or live with no regard for them?

He chose **“By faith he chose to be ill-treated along with the people of God rather than to enjoy the pleasure of sin for a short while.”** Accounting, watching, thinking and pondering, do I live this life of faith or not? We must come to a decision like Moses. Balancing the two outcomes. God’s love for you is not in question.

Your salvation is not at stake. But your freedom - freedom from the self life is at stake. A prisoner to fear and worry. Moses had to choose slavery to be free. You must choose to be Christ's slave to be freed from self.

Every believer has to choose the road mapped out for the people of God, the more difficult road of faith, that shines with hope against the more pleasant road of pleasure for a short while, that is, the road of short sighted impotent reality. Choosing is a quick thing it is definite, it is by faith. Moses took forty years accounting, then by faith he chose. God is patient, take as long as it takes but choose a life of faith.

He refused - ***"By faith when he was grown up he refused to be known as the son of Pharaoh's daughter."*** There comes a time in this Christian life when we should have grown up. Having made the choice he refused to draw back. He had to make the hard decision to break all emotional ties with his adopted mother. When he left Egypt on the second occasion he took his adopted mother with him.

Faith would now dictate his actions. When he saw an Egyptian beating a Hebrew slave he intervened. His decision, by faith, to refuse to go back was bearing fruit. His intervention resulted in the death of the Egyptian. When you decide to live by faith you will discover it is a daily way of life. He could no longer do what he wanted to do. His heart dictated he should do something to help his people but by doing so it stirred up trouble for himself. When later he sees two Hebrews fighting he discovers his secret is out. He could have cleared his name and gone back. He was face to face with his own disability - his faith was little. He was afraid of Pharaoh so he ran. When you first stand in faith you must confront your fears, stare them down, wrestle them to the ground.

God now undertook his programme to build Moses' faith. Don't let any thought of pity creep into your mind regarding Moses leaving the palace to spend forty years in the desert. It was a great life of discipline and meditation after forty years of an extravagant faithless life. God was training him on a daily basis to trust him completely. To live a life of faith will take years of training. A charmed life is the worse thing for a child of God. Anyway there is more splendour and majesty under the mountain of God and in the desert than in any king's court.

Once his training was complete God could send him to do his work. He calls him via a burning bush. After his hesitation, their communion, he is ready to go. ***Hebrews 11:27. "By faith, he left Egypt, not fearing the king's anger."*** On his first departure from Egypt he was afraid. After forty years personal training at the hand of God he is now fearless. The first time he killed an Egyptian. This time thousands of Egyptians will die on his say so.

His perseverance in faith was because ***"he saw him who is invisible."*** This is the contradiction of the life of faith. Faith sees the invisible. There is no more fear - he has seen God in the bush and the desert.

Before leaving Egypt he instituted the first Passover. An act of obedient faith. We see a man exercising faith who knew what it was to hesitate, to tremble, to make a mistake and finally to triumph.

At the end he was excluded from the land towards which he had been looking for forty years. He was excluded because ***“rash words came from his lips.”*** Is that it! Is that how God treats his servant? No! There is a sequel in the New Testament. Moses, Elijah and Jesus stood together on the Mount of Transfiguration. They talked about Christ’s Exodus. Moses wrapped around with glory, standing in the promised land, encouraging and inspiring the incarnate Son of God.

Men and women of God who live by faith will die without all their promises from God being realised in this lifetime. But faith will have its ultimate reward and vindication. God’s things are not measured by earths time cycles and centuries. The full meaning of our actions and life of faith will one day become evident.

Lesson eight

The faith of Jesus

Hebrews 12: 2-3. "Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy set before him endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. Consider him who endured such opposition from sinful men, so that you will not grow weary and lose heart."

Finally we come to our only true example of a life lived by faith. We are grateful for our Hebrew heroes of chapter eleven, who serve as a force and inspiration. But they do not serve as a pattern for a life of faith. Over the years listening to their stories, again and again, they have become our friends who have encouraged us but their lives have also displayed glaring inconsistencies. They displayed wonderful acts of faith but they did not live a life of faith.

What does a life of faith look like? It looks outwardly like any other life. Like your life or my life. But inwardly it is waiting on God. Waiting does not mean doing nothing but living life waiting on God. As a busy servant waits on his master. Waiting for prayers to be answered. Waiting for people to be saved, waiting for change in our own lives and those around us. Waiting for revival, healings, finances and his return. It is a life of patiently waiting upon God to act for us and through us.

Scripture gives us several pieces of good advice to help us live a life of faith as we journey with God.

1) Strip yourself of all that might rob you of a life of faith. ***Hebrews 12:1. "Throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles and let us run with perseverance."*** There are certain sins that slow us down, even hinder us from living a life of faith. It is these we have to throw off. Anxiety - the nervousness about something with an uncertain outcome. Worry - apprehension about an actual or potential problem. Fear - the terror caused by the threat of danger, pain or harm. Add to these impatience, indifference, busyness and control. Learn to sit tight because God is taking his time.

2) Accept the life God has designed for you to develop your faith. God has accepted the responsibility of your day to day, moment by moment discipleship programme. Learn to walk with God as in the case of Enoch not rushing ahead or lagging behind. Walking in step and in the same direction.

3) Fix your eyes on Jesus the author and perfecter of your faith. Be encouraged by the heroes in chapter eleven of the book of Hebrews but now Jesus is on the scene turn from them and look only to him. Jesus was focused on his Father. His timing was always perfect. When he stepped into ministry. When he turned water into wine. When he went up to Jerusalem and when he let them take him to be crucified.

4) Keep focused on the joy that is set before you. Jesus' focus was not to get back to the safety of heaven but to complete his divine purpose, that which his Father had given him to do. The apostle Paul reminds us of this when he says to Timothy in

2 Timothy 4:7. *“I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith.”* Like Jesus, like Paul our focus is not to get to heaven but to have accomplished the work given to us. To serve our generation in our day.

5) Endure scorning the shame. We must never let the ridicule or embarrassment of being a Christian stop us living a life of faith in God. God’s course for your life of faith will require patience, endurance, resisting and standing firm. To obey his Father and win salvation for us was far more important to Jesus than all the shame he bore. To lose everything and fail in the world’s eyes we must be prepared for that if that is the price God calls us to pay.

We have looked at what perfecting our faith looks like. What does perfect faith actually look like? First we recognise that Jesus has faith in his Father. His faith works by love. Knowing how much his Father loved him he could first wait on him and when he spoke act on his words. Second Jesus has faith in you and me. Regardless of our poverty of spirit, ruined by sin he waits patiently for us to change. He believes in us and thought us worthy to die for. We too must have faith in what God can do in people. Finally, Jesus has faith in the future. Jesus is always full of hope. He said that when he would be lifted up on the cross all men would be drawn to him. Always believing the cross would succeed because it was his Father’s plan.

In **Hebrews 11:39** we are told regarding the heroes of faith, *“They were all commended for their faith, yet none of them received what had been promised.”* The truth is neither has Jesus yet, he still waits at the right hand of God. We have been invited also to sit with him while we too patiently wait with him in faith in this world for the next.

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