

Lesson 14 – “A Call to Faith”
Chapter 11:1-16

“For we walk by faith, not by sight.” 2 Corinthians 5:7

The first 10 chapters of Hebrews have dealt with a lot of doctrine. The writer was, no doubt, attempting to develop a good, solid foundation for the Hebrews and justification as to why they should not return to their original religious beliefs and practices. They had made the decision to follow Christ, but Christianity had turned out to be a real challenge for them. After centuries of tradition which included following the Law of Moses, worshipping in the temple, making animal sacrifices, they just weren't sure, and they had become discouraged. The author's message here is don't rely on only those things which you can see, hear, taste and feel, but look towards that which cannot yet be seen. Open your spiritual eyes to that which you know is coming. And as believers today, we, too, put our faith in what we know is coming .. the return of our Savior. It's time now for the Hebrews, beginning in this chapter, to put their foundational truths into practice. And we begin with faith.

Faith complete trust or confidence in someone or something

Vss. 1-3. While the above is a definition of what faith is, we begin our study with a description of what faith is ... *“things hoped for ...evidence of things not seen”*. It would be better to say evidence of things not YET seen, because as believers, we are to take God at His word and stand on His promises. The most wonderful and encouraging promise we have from Him is found in Matthew 14:2-3 where He says, *“In my Father's house are many mansions; if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you to Myself; that where I am, there you may be also.”* It takes faith to believe that, and if we do not, then we may as well put the horse back in the barn, because we're not going any further. In V. 3, we're also reminded of the invisible God who created this visible world for us. It takes faith to believe this in the face of the popular big bang theory and the arguments of Darwinism. But again, those who are unable to believe in the creation of this world by the spoken word of God may prefer to believe in the science of their intellectual minds; they have become spiritually blinded.

Vss. 4-7. Now we are given examples of people of great faith from the Old Testament. We begin with the account of the sacrifices by Cain and Abel. Abel's sacrifice was offered in faith, as a sinner hoping for God's mercy, and this pleased God. Cain, on the other hand, offered his in pride ... a pride which would lead to jealousy and, ultimately, murder.

The taking away of Enoch by simply removing him from this earth so that he would not see death, gives us a picture of what it will be like when Jesus comes again. If we follow the lineage in the fifth chapter of Genesis, we see that Enoch is mentioned as the father of Methuselah. This is the account of Enoch in Genesis 5:21-24: *“Enoch lived sixty-five years, and begot Methuselah. After he begot Methuselah, Enoch*

walked with God three hundred years and had sons and daughters. So all the days of Enoch were three hundred and sixty-five years. And Enoch walked with God, **and he was not**, for God took him.” So at Jesus’ second coming, those who are alive at that time, those who have walked with the Lord as Enoch did, will be taken in the same way ... one moment they’ll be here on earth and the next, taken to heaven with all the saints.

And then we have the example of Noah, who really put his faith into practice. At a time when the world was full of wickedness, perversion and man’s love of self (oh, wait, that kinda sounds like today, doesn’t it?), Noah chose to obey God and build an ark for a flood that he could never imagine, but that God said would come. Even in the face of unbelieving mockers, Noah stood firm and faithful to God. It was his faith and obedience that allowed him to save himself and those dearest to him. As Paul said in 2 Timothy 1:12, *“For this reason I also suffer these things; nevertheless I am not ashamed, for I know whom I have believed ...”* I believe God is calling us to be Noahs today. We need to stand firm in our beliefs, and we need to know in Whom we have believed. We need to teach our loved ones to do the same, and we need to share the message of the gospel to anyone God puts in our path.

Vss. 8-12. Many times, believers in Jesus Christ are called to leave the comfort of things familiar to them. Abraham was called to leave the surroundings of everything he’d known all of his life. *“Now the Lord had said to Abram: ‘Get out of your country, from your family and from your father’s house, to a land that I will show you. I will make you a great nation; I will bless you and make your name great; and you shall be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you and I will curse him who curses you; and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed.’”* (Genesis 12:1-3) Abraham received this wonderful promise from God and set out in obedience, not knowing where he was going, or how long it was going to take, or what he would find once he got there. He went based on the fact that the great God Almighty, Himself, the Creator of the universe, the everlasting and infinite God had specifically called him, and promised to guide him and bless him. Romans 4:17 tells us that this promise made to Abraham was not through anything but the *“righteousness of faith.”* In other words, it was not based on any kind of ritual or ceremonial rite, but on pure faith and the grace and favor of God.

So Abraham lived in a foreign land as he waited for the city with a foundation. Many scholars believe this refers to the New Jerusalem which, we know, is our future home as believers. It reminds us that just as Abraham was a stranger in the foreign lands where he dwelt, so are we just passing through here on earth. Peter spoke about this in 1 Peter 2:11: *“I beg you as sojourners and pilgrims, abstain from fleshly lusts which war against the soul.”* We have to constantly remind ourselves that we are IN this world, but we are not OF this world ... we have faith in our eternal home.

Abraham’s wife Sarah received a promise, too. The Lord promised her a child, a promise she heard the Lord and the two angels tell Abraham about in Genesis 18. She laughed when she heard it, and this is so human on her part, much like many of us who may initially scoff at something we know God can do, because nothing is too difficult for Him, but we may feel just a tad doubtful. We can certainly relate to Sarah; after all, having a child past the age of childbearing. But again, as she was told in Genesis 18:14: *“Is anything too hard for the Lord?”* How ironic that when the Angel of the Lord appeared to Mary in

Luke 1:26=37, and told her she was to give birth to Jesus, Mary questioned how this could possibly happen. The angel told her, *"For with God nothing will be impossible."* So, in spite of Sarah's disbelief and denial that she had laughed, God had mercy on her, as He so graciously does with us, and He did indeed fulfill His promise to her. The son He sent her, she named Isaac, which means "laughter."

"Commit your way to the Lord, trust also in Him, and He shall bring it to pass." Psalm 37:5

When we read that from Abraham *"were born as many as the stars of the sky in multitude – innumerable as the sand which is by the seashore"*, it is referring to Genesis 22 where the Lord tells Abraham right after he had passed the ultimate test of faith by offering his beloved son Isaac to the Lord, the Lord tells him, *"... By Myself I have sworn, says the Lord, because you have done this thing, and have not withheld your son, your only son—blessing I will bless you, and multiplying I will multiply your descendants as the stars of the heaven and as the sand which is on the seashore, and your descendants shall possess the gate of their enemies."* (Genesis 22:16-17)

While we may never be called to take the kind of journey Abraham did, we are sometimes called to leave our comfort zones. It can be something life changing like moving to another state or pursuing a different career, but it can also be something as simple as giving a stranger at the grocery store a word of encouragement or walking across the street to check on a neighbor and offering prayer in times of need. What is God calling us to do? Will we answer the call?

Vss. 13-16. These verses refer to Abraham, Sarah, Isaac and Jacob not living to see the promised land. Even so, they persevered in faith. They fulfilled what Paul said in Romans 1:17: *"The just shall live by faith."* We're told here that if Abraham and those with him had allowed themselves to dwell on the things they had left behind, they might have returned. But this was not God's will for them, just as it is not God's will for us to return to our former lives before we met the Lord. This is what is being conveyed to the Hebrews in this epistle ... do not return to something that does not offer you salvation. And it's the same message for us today ... do not be lured back into a life without Jesus. Our desires and our goals should not be the attractions of this world ... we're destined for heaven!

While we marvel at the stories of these heroes in the faith, there are modern day heroes from whom we can also learn from example... people like Martin Luther, John Wesley, Charles Spurgeon. One of my favorites is a man named George Mueller from England, who lived in the 1800's. He was an evangelist and the founder of children's orphanages. Throughout his life, he dedicated himself to teaching the word of God and to Christian education. He was called the "Pastor of Faith". I'd like to share with you just two examples of how he earned that title.

"The children are dressed and ready for school. But there is no food for them to eat," the housemother of the orphanage informed George Mueller. George asked her to take the 300 children into the dining room and have them sit at the tables. He thanked God for the food and waited. George knew God would provide food for the children as he always did. Within minutes, a baker knocked on the door. "Mr. Mueller," he said, "last night I could not sleep. Somehow I knew that you would need bread this morning. I got up and baked

three batches for you. I will bring it in." Soon, there was another knock at the door. It was the milkman. His cart had broken down in front of the orphanage. The milk would spoil by the time the wheel was fixed. He asked George if he could use some free milk. George smiled as the milkman brought in ten large cans of milk. It was just enough for the 300 thirsty children.

Once, while crossing the Atlantic on the [SS Sardinian](#) in August 1877, George Mueller's ship ran into thick fog. He explained to the captain that he needed to be in Quebec by the following afternoon, but Captain Joseph E. Dutton said that he was slowing the ship down for safety and Mueller's appointment would have to be missed. Mueller asked to use the chart-room to pray for the lifting of the fog. The captain followed him down, claiming it would be a waste of time. After Mueller prayed a very simple prayer, the captain started to pray, but Mueller stopped him; partly because of the captain's unbelief, but mainly because he believed the prayer had already been answered. Mueller said, "Captain, I have known my Lord for more than fifty years and there is not one instance that I have failed to have an audience with the King. Get up, Captain, for you will find that the fog has gone." When the two men went back to the bridge, they found the fog had indeed lifted, and Mueller was able to keep his appointment. The captain became a Christian shortly afterwards.

The Apostle Paul tells us in Romans 4:17 that God *"gives life to the dead and calls those things which do not exist as though they did."* This, then, brings us back to our initial scripture: *"faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen."* God calls us to have faith during those times of desperation when the possible seems impossible. In Mark 9:23-24, when a father in the crowd of people asked Jesus to heal his son, Jesus said to him, *"If you can believe, all things are possible to him who believes."* The father tells Jesus, *"Lord, I believe; help my unbelief!"* The Lord knows our hearts, and he knows that we are sometimes plagued by doubt and fear. We are not without resources, however. We serve a mighty God Who is ready to stand with us through any storm if we will keep the faith and live by it. And He's always just a prayer away.