

Finishing Well

Lesson #13 How Then Shall We Live? April 14, 2021

Remember: The readers of Hebrews were Jewish Christians who were being tempted to go back into Judaism due to increasing persecution.

The author's exhortation at the conclusion of warning #3:

Heb. 6:11-12 And we desire that every one of you do show the same diligence to the full assurance of hope unto the end: That ye be not slothful, but followers of them who through faith and patience inherit the promises.

The author's exhortation at the conclusion of warning #4.

Heb. 10:36-39 For ye have need of patience, that, after ye have done the will of God, ye might receive the promise. For yet a little while, and he that shall come will come, and will not tarry. Now the just shall live by faith: but if any man draw back, my soul shall have no pleasure in him. But we are not of them who draw back unto perdition [waste]; but of them that believe to the saving of the soul.

Their confidence was in the visible things of this world and not the invisible realities of God. Instead of going on to perfection [maturity], many were going "back to perdition" [waste].

Between warning #4 and #5, the author inserts Hebrews 11 to emphasize: Live By Faith

"The Just Shall Live By Faith" [Hab. 2:4; Rom. 1:17; Gal. 3:11; Hebrews 10:38]

- Biblical Faith is based on and anchored in Scriptural Facts.
- There can be no steadfastness apart from immovable facts.

Heb. 11:6 "Without faith it is impossible to please God."

Rom. 10:17 Faith comes by hearing and hearing by the Word of God.

Key Truth: Faith or trust in God is at the foundation of a relationship with Him.

- Faith has nothing to do with my impressions, feelings or probabilities.
- Unless our faith is established upon FACTS, it is no more than conjecture, superstition, speculation or presumption.

Ron Dunn: "If you are limping around on the crutches of feelings, throw them away and walk on the legs of faith."

- Faith is not a force we exercise or a striving to believe that something will come to pass if we believe hard enough.

Key Truth: Faith is based on certainty. Must be definite knowledge of God's purpose and will.

Rom. 8:28-29 And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose.

²⁹ For whom he did foreknow, he also did predestinate to be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brethren.

- Faith standing on the FACTS of God's Word substantiates and gives evidence of things not seen. Evidence must be founded upon FACTS.
- Biblical Faith = genuine faith that endures

Confident obedience to God's Word in spite of circumstances and consequences

James 1:2-3 My brethren, count it all joy when ye fall into divers temptations;

³ Knowing this, that the trying of your faith worketh patience.

Heb. 6:12b but followers of them who through faith and patience inherit the promises.

Ron Dunn: "Faith is the channel through which all that God has promised becomes ours."

John Owen: This faith lays hold of God's promises and the reality of the unseen world, obediently applying those realities to present trials. [*An Exposition of Hebrews*]

The final question: Has God has spoken it in His Word?

Once we begin to reckon [count on] the FACTS, God begins to build us up in the faith.

Some of God's methods are not easy to accept. When He sends difficult trials into our lives, whether persecution, the loss of our health, or the loss of a loved one, we have to trust Him, believing that He is acting in love to form Christ in us. [Rom. 8:28-29]

If the enemy can get us to doubt God's love in a time of trials, we will draw away from God and disobey His Word of truth. For us to draw near to God...

Heb. 11:6 But without faith it is impossible to please him: for he that cometh to God must believe that he is, and that he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him.

Understanding these principles—*trust is essential for close personal relationships; truth is the basis for trust; and, truth must be expressed in love, which means, "seeking the highest good of the other person"*—shows why *faith (trust) is at the heart of a relationship with God.*

G. Mueller: "God delights to increase the faith of His children. We ought, instead of wanting no trials before victory, no exercise for patience, to be willing to take them from God's hand as a means. Trials, obstacles, difficulties and sometimes defeats, are the very food of faith."

George Mueller: The only way to learn strong faith is to endure great trials. I have learned my faith by standing firm amid severe testings."

George Mueller: "Where faith begins, anxiety ends. Where anxiety begins, faith ends.

It is true that the faith which I am able to exercise is God's own gift.

He alone supports it and He alone can increase it. Moment by moment, I depend on Him.

If I were left to myself, my faith would utterly fail."

Ron Dunn: "Faith puts man right where God wants him—in the place of total dependence."

James McConkey: "The Lord has to break us down at the strongest point of our self-life before He can have His own way of blessing us. Faith is dependence upon God. This God-dependence only begins when self-dependence ends. Self-dependence only comes to its end, with some of us, when sorrow, suffering, affliction, broken plans and hopes bring us to the place of self-helplessness and defeat. Only then do we find that we have learned the lesson of faith. We find our tiny craft of life rushing onward to a blessed victory of life and power and service undreamt of in the days of our fleshly strength and self-reliance."

Heb. 11:1-3 Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen.

For by it [faith] the elders obtained a good report [witness].

³Through faith we understand that the worlds were framed by the word of God, so that things which are seen were not made of things which do appear.

Substance = to stand under, to support - Faith is to a Christian what a foundation is to a house.

- Our foundation gives confidence and assurance that we will stand.
- Faith is the confidence of things hoped for. It is God's way of giving us confidence and assurance that what is promised will be experienced.

Evidence = conviction; the inward conviction from God that what He has promised, He will perform. Presence of God-given faith in one's heart is conviction enough that He will keep His Word.

Witness = "obtained a good report" > occurs in verse 2, 2x in verse 4, in verse 5, and verse 39.

- The summary in Hebrews 12:1 calls this list of men and women "so great a cloud of witnesses." They are witnesses to us because God witnessed to them.
- In each example cited, God gave witness to that person's faith.

This witness was His divine approval on their lives and ministries.

People laughed at these great men and women when they stepped out by faith, but God was with them and enabled them to succeed to His glory. Dr. J. Oswald Sanders put it perfectly:

"Faith enables the believing soul to treat the future as present and the invisible as seen."

A.W. Pink [An Exposition of Hebrews] uses the analogy of two men standing on the deck of a ship, looking in the same direction. One sees nothing, but the other man sees a distant steamer. The difference is, the first man is looking with his unaided eye, whereas the second man is looking through a telescope. Faith is the telescope that brings the future promises of God into present focus. Faith enables us to see the unseen world that the natural man cannot see.

J.C. Ryle: Faith is a telescope. It makes you see a good land afar off - rest, peace and victory. When dim-sighted reason could only see trial and barrenness, storm and tempest, weariness and pain.

Spurgeon: Your eyes cannot see the wonderful future. Borrow the telescope of faith. Wipe the misty breath of your doubts from the viewfinder. Look through it and behold the coming glory!

The best way to grow in faith is to walk with the faithful.

In each instance, you will find the same elements of faith:

1. God spoke to them through His Word.
2. Their inner selves were stirred in different ways.
3. They obeyed God.
4. He bore witness about them

Demonstrations of Faith

A. Abel Faith Worshiping Genesis 4:1-10

Heb. 11:4 By faith Abel offered unto God a more excellent sacrifice than Cain, by which he obtained witness that he was righteous, God testifying of his gifts: and by it he being dead yet speaketh.

Abel was a righteous man because of faith [Matt. 23:35].

God had revealed to Adam and his descendants the true way of worship, and Abel obeyed God by faith. In fact, his obedience cost him his life.

Cain was not a child of God [I John 3:12] because he did not have faith.

He was religious but not righteous.

B. Enoch Faith Walking

Heb. 11:5 By faith Enoch was translated that he should not see death; and was not found, because God had translated him: for before his translation he had this testimony, that he pleased God. [See Gen. 5:24]

Ron Dunn: But the thing that captivates me most about Hebrews 11:6 is not the fact that we should be pleasing to God, but that we can be. Just think of it: Fallen, sinful, selfish, finite people are able to please a thrice holy God, a God too pure even to look upon sin."

Heb. 11:6 But without faith it is impossible to please him: for he that cometh to God must believe that he is, and that he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him.

Enoch walked with God in the wicked world before the flood came; he was able to keep his life pure. Enoch was taken to heaven one day ("translated" = "carried across") and seen no more.

- We must have both the desire to please Him and the diligence to seek Him.

C. Noah Faith Working

Heb. 11:7 By faith Noah, being warned of God of things not seen as yet, moved with fear, prepared an ark to the saving of his house; by the which he condemned the world, and became heir of the righteousness which is by faith.

Noah's faith involved the whole person: his mind was warned of God; his heart was moved with fear; and his will acted on what God told him. Since nobody at that time had ever seen a flood, Noah's actions must have generated a great deal of interest and probably ridicule as well.

Noah's faith provided safety and deliverance from destruction for his family.

It also condemned the whole world, for his faith revealed their unbelief.

When you contrast the first three examples of those who lived by faith, you see that a life of faith results in very different circumstances, depending on God's sovereign purpose.

- Abel was the first murder victim; the first martyr of the faith.
- Enoch, one of only two men in all history who never died, was taken directly into heaven.
- Noah lived for 950 years and was delivered from the flood.

Most of us would sign up for the Enoch or Noah, but we're not interested in the Abel track!

The author of Hebrews wants us to realize the rewards of faith are not necessarily in this life.

He will shortly mention those who "died in faith, without receiving the promises" [11:13].

He gives a long list of those who won impressive victories by faith [11:33-35a].

But right in the middle of verse 35, without skipping a beat, he lists those who were tortured, mocked, scourged, imprisoned, stoned, sawn in two, put to death by the sword, who went about destitute, ill-treated, and homeless because of their faith!

Consider: If we are banking on a good life here and now, faith in God may not be the way to go. But, if we have God's eternal perspective, it is the only way to live.

Heb. 11:4 By faith Abel offered unto God a more excellent sacrifice than Cain, by which he obtained witness that he was righteous, God testifying of his gifts: and by it he, being dead, yet speaketh.

Note: We do not have any of Abel's words recorded, but his life and story speak to us.

1. Abel still speaks to us about the ultimate vindication of God's elect and the judgment of the wicked.

Genesis 4:10 God said to Cain, "The voice of your brother's blood cries to Me from the ground." God did not let that cry go unheeded!

Luke 18:7-8 "Now will not God bring about justice for His elect who cry to Him day and night, and will He delay long for them? I tell you that He will bring about justice for them quickly."

Rev. 6:9-11 John sees a vision of the saints in heaven who have been slain because of their testimony. They are crying out to the Lord, "How long, O Lord, holy and true, will You refrain from judging and avenging our blood on those who dwell on the earth?" The Lord gives them each a white robe and tells them to rest a while longer, until the number of martyrs yet to be killed is completed. Then He will bring judgment.

Abel's blood speaks to us about the fact that although we may be mistreated in this world, God is the righteous judge who will right all wrongs and bring justice on behalf of His elect.

2. Abel still speaks to us by his life, apart from any words.

This shows us the power of a godly life, not only in his lifetime, but also on successive generations. If the fruit of the Spirit—love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control— is evident in your life, then your words will connect with power. But if your life does not demonstrate these qualities, your words will be in vain.

3. Abel still speaks to us about the fact that the measure of a life is not necessarily its impact during the person's lifetime, but over history.

Viewed from his lifetime, Abel's life was wasted. He died young, without accomplishing anything. But countless generations have looked at his faith and learned that even if we suffer and die for the cause of righteousness, it is not in vain.

Gen. 4:16-17 Cain apparently lived a long and relatively prosperous life on earth. He built cities and fathered many children who were successful in worldly terms. But Cain's life was wasted. Luther observed that when Abel was alive, he "could not teach even his only brother by his faith and example," but "now that he is dead, he teaches the whole world." He concluded, "He is more alive than ever! So great a thing is faith! It is life in God" [in Hughes, p. 457].

ENOCH - Faith Walking

A. Faith Must Believe That God Is

11:6 But without faith it is impossible to please him: for he that cometh to God must believe that he is, and that he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him

Why does the author start with believing in God's existence with Jews, who obviously believed that? Even the pagan poet, Cicero, observed, "There is... no nation so barbarous, no people so savage, that they have not a deep-seated conviction that there is a God."

So why does the author start with this basic matter?

1. His readers were under the imminent threat of persecution.

When you have done what is right and get persecuted for it, the devil comes to you with doubts about God. He whispers in your ear, "You repented of your sins and trusted in God but look what has happened to you now! If there were a God in heaven, would He let you be treated in this way?"

Although Jesus did not yield to the temptation, Satan threw this at Him while He hung upon the cross. The chief priests, scribes, and elders mocked Him, saying,

- "He trusts in God; let God rescue Him now, if He delights in Him" [Matt. 27:43].

The enemy was trying to get Jesus to doubt God's love, His power, or even His very existence, because a God who is unloving and weak is not really God at all!

Consider: We must believe that "God is."

"We must believe that God is exactly who His Word reveals Him to be."

- People cannot know the living and true God apart from His revealing Himself to them.
- To believe in God "as you conceive Him to be" is to believe in an idol, a god of your own making and imagination.
- We must believe in the God who is not only the God of love, but also of judgment, because that is how He has revealed Himself.
- He is not only a God of mercy and kindness, but also of holiness and wrath.
- "Believe in the God who reveals Himself in His Word."

Why would he say that? When we are under persecution or severe trials, it is easy to invent a friendlier "god" who treats us more nicely! It is not so easy to bow before the God of the Bible, who is sovereign over every trial. When God permits your ten children to be killed in a common accident and strips you of your wealth and health, it is not easy to join Job in proclaiming, "The Lord gave and the Lord has taken away. Blessed be the name of the Lord" [Job 1:21]. Yet at just such times, we must believe, *God is!*

"How do you hang on to faith in God at such difficult times?" "What's the alternative?"

In John 6, Jesus taught some difficult doctrines that caused many of His disciples to turn away from following Him. [John 6:60-61; 65-66]

Rather than softening the teaching, He turned to the twelve and asked, "Will ye also go away?"

John 6:68-69 Then Simon Peter answered him, Lord, to whom shall we go? thou hast the words of eternal life. And we believe and are sure that thou art that Christ, the Son of the living God.

You may not like the trials or the teaching, but where else are you going to go?

The world certainly offers no satisfying answers! If you turn your back on God in times of trials, you have just robbed yourself of the only source of hope and comfort!

- Faith holds on, believing that *God is!*

B. Faith Must Believe That God Is A Rewarder Of Those Who Diligently Seek Him.

In times of trial, if Satan can't get you to doubt God's existence, he will try to get you to doubt God's goodness, His fairness, or His power. "If God loves you and cares about you, why is this terrible trial happening to you? Maybe God cares, but He can't do anything about it."

Faith takes a stand against this temptation, believing, "God will reward me because I have sought Him. God does love me and care for me, even though I'm suffering. God is able to deliver me if that is His purpose."

John Owen explains, "Faith alone is the gracious power which takes us off from all confidence in ourselves and directs us to look for all in another; that is, in God himself"

1. The Rewards Of Faith Are In Eternity, Not Necessarily In This Life.
 - Heb. 11:24-26 Moses chose to give up his comfortable situation as the son of Pharaoh's daughter and to endure ill-treatment with God's people, "for he was looking to the recompense of the reward."
 - Heb. 11:5 Enoch, noted for his godliness, had the shortest life of all the pre-flood patriarchs. Faith's reward is not necessarily a long life on earth, but eternal life with God.
2. Faith is a daily walk that extends over a lifetime.
 - A walk is not spectacular or impressive. Walking is not the flashiest or quickest way to get someplace, but it's a frequent description of the Christian life.
 - To walk with God means that our lives are *in step with God*, yielded in obedience to Him, headed in the direction He chooses.
 - Walking with God is a daily process of growing more intimate with Him as you share everything in your life with Him and learn more of His ways.
3. You must do your own walking. Just as a physical exercise program requires *discipline*, so spiritual walking requires discipline [I Tim. 4:7-8].
 - You must take the initiative, the time, and the effort that is required to walk with God. If you don't make frequent appointments to get alone with Him, it won't happen.
 - Faith is a daily dependence on God, step by step, that continues over a lifetime.

Noah: Faith That Escapes The Coming Judgment

Noah's obedient faith is commended in:

Heb. 11:7 By faith Noah, being warned of God of things not seen as yet, moved with fear, prepared an ark to the saving of his house; by the which he condemned the world, and became heir of the righteousness which is by faith.

Consider: How do people respond to hurricane warnings - - evidence they can see?

How do people respond to God's warnings in His Word? Are they clear?

Acts 17:31 Paul told the Athenians, God "has fixed a day in which He will judge the world in righteousness through a Man whom He has appointed, having furnished proof to all men by raising Him from the dead."

Revelation is largely devoted to the theme of future judgment. Allegory? Can't understand Millions have read with fascination the "Left Behind" series that portrays the coming judgment. But how many are fleeing from the wrath to come?

The author wants us to be imitators of this man, who through faith and patience inherited the promises [6:12]. Of all the examples in Hebrews 11, this is the only one in which the unseen future involves judgment, rather than rewards.

- Faith regards both God's warnings and His promises.

God only brings judgment after multiple warnings, but many will be surprised when judgment comes, because they ignored the warnings. But people of faith heed the warnings.

The Basis Of Noah's Faith: He Believed God's Word Regarding The Coming Judgment.

A. God's Word Of Warning Concerned Things Not Yet Seen.

- His warning would have seemed incredible. Before Noah's day, there had never been a flood and probably it had never even rained.
- The warning about a flood that would kill all life on earth was unprecedented and unseen.

Note: This ties in with 11:1, that faith is "the evidence [proof] of things not seen."

Faith hears the word of the unseen God regarding events that are not yet seen and brings them into present experience. Alexander Maclaren: "The far-off flood was more real to him than the shows of life around him. Therefore, he could stand all the gibes, and gave himself to a course of life which was sheer folly unless that future was real"

The world should be able to look at our lives—how we spend our time and money—and say, as they said about Noah, "This guy is nuts! He lives as if there *really is* a coming judgment!"

B. God's Word Of Warning Concerned Judgment That Was Delayed, But Absolutely Certain.

The earth was so wicked that, without apology, God could have judged it on the spot [Gen. 6:5]. But in His grace and patience, He delayed judgment for over a century, while Noah built the ark [I Pet. 3:20].

II Pet. 3:3-4, 9 Knowing this first, that there shall come in the last days scoffers, walking after their own lusts, ⁴ And saying, Where is the promise of his coming? for since the fathers fell asleep, all things continue as they were from the beginning of the creation.

⁹The Lord is not slack concerning his promise, as some men count slackness; but is longsuffering to us-ward, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance.

Note: God's longsuffering will end. [II Pet. 3:15] It did in the days of Noah. [I Pet. 3:20]

It will end for us as well. [II Pet. 3:10] Realizing that God's longsuffering will not last forever, what kind of person should you be... NOW? [II Pet. 3:11]

As soon as he heard God's warning about the coming judgment, he went to work building the ark. It took him over a century to complete, but he kept at it.

The Book of Revelation shows that this evil world will be going on full steam ahead, doing business, pursuing pleasure, and scoffing at the idea of a coming judgment. But in one hour, judgment will fall. It will be thorough and completely devastating [Rev. 18:8, 10, 17].

C. God's Word Of Warning Required Faith In The Face Of The World's Condemnation.

The bottom line for Noah was either to believe the evil people around him, who seemed to be having a great time sinning, or to believe what God said about the coming judgment.

Noah believed the word of God. That is the kind of faith that escapes the judgment that is yet coming on this evil world. You must stand alone, if need be, against the mockery of the world. Tozer: "God's Word is True whether we believe it or not. Human unbelief cannot alter the character of God." Even when we know God's Word is true, it is only OUR truth when it is something to which we are faithful.

The Effects Of Noah's Faith:

Out Of Reverential Fear, He Steadfastly Obeyed God's Directive About Salvation.

Heb. 11:7a By faith Noah, being warned of God of things not seen as yet, moved with fear,

A. Noah's Faith Changed His Affections (Emotions).

Noah did not just fear the impending judgment; he also feared the God who threatened such judgment, knowing that He is fully capable of bringing it about. The God who spoke the universe into existence out of nothing [11:3] is quite capable of commanding a flood to destroy all human life on earth. He is able to bring the terrible judgments described in the Book of Revelation.

➤ Faith in this omnipotent God should move our hearts to reverential fear.

God's truth should grip our hearts. Alexander Maclaren said, "Do not be afraid of feeling which is the child of faith. Be very much more afraid of a religion that leaves your heart beating just exactly at the same rate that it did before you took the truth into it."

B. Noah's Faith Changed His Actions [Behavior].

"In reverence [he] prepared an ark for the salvation of his household."

Noah set aside all excuses and persevered in obedience until it was done.

To save himself and his household from the flood, Noah had to translate his faith into what Eugene Peterson called, "a long obedience in the same direction"

A.W. Tozer: Unseen Realities

Let us not be shocked by the suggestion that there are disadvantages to the life in Christ. There most certainly are. Abel was murdered. Joseph was sold into slavery, Daniel was thrown into the den of lions, Stephen was stoned to death, Paul was beheaded, and a noble army of martyrs was put to death by various painful methods down the long centuries. And where the hostility did not lead to such violence (and mostly it did not and does not) the sons of this world nevertheless managed to make it tough for the children of God in a thousand cruel ways. Everyone who has lived for Christ in a Christless world has suffered some losses and endured some pains that he could have avoided by the simple expedient of laying down his cross. However, the pains are short and the losses inconsequential compared with the glory that will follow,...

II Cor. 4:17-18 "For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory. While we look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen: for the things which are seen are temporal; but the things which are not seen are eternal."

Johnny Hunt: I want to live in light of eternity. I want to do now what I'll be glad I did then.