

What Is Faith?
Hebrews 11:1-3

November 23, 2014

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^A Hebrews 10:27; Acts 2:26; Luke 11:1, 21:26

^B Ephesians 6:12; 1 Corinthians 2:9; 2 Corinthians 4:17-18

^C Psalm 19:1

^D Revelation 21:1-5, 23, 27; see also Revelation 22

A. Introduction

1. A Certain Uncertainty

- a. one verse that we considered last week, Hebrews 10:27, says that for those who reject Christ's sacrifice, there is **'... a certain terrifying expectation of judgement ...'**
 - (A) in the original language, that word 'certain' is not the one found in Acts 2:36, **"Therefore let all the house of Israel know for certain that God has made Him both Lord and Christ—this Jesus whom you crucified."** where **'for certain'** means **'for sure.'**
 - (B) rather it is the word found, for example, in Luke 11:1, **"It happened that while Jesus was praying in a certain place, after He had finished, one of His disciples said to Him, 'Lord, teach us to pray just as John also taught his disciples.'"**, meaning an indefinite place
- b. so that part of the terror of the expectation of judgement is that the details are not spelled out; it carries with it the fear of the unknown
- c. that is what many people are faced with in this world today
 - (A) Jesus speaks of this in Luke 21:26, **"men fainting from fear and the expectation of the things which are coming upon the world; ..."**
 - (B) how that describes the modern world!
 - (C) medical science labours to find cures for major diseases; then a plague such as ebola reappears slaying thousands in a few weeks; or people take flu shots but fear a new strain of flu
 - (D) we worry that interest rates will climb, and make our mortgages impossible; or if seniors, go down, and reduce income
- d. the only thing of which many can be certain, is the uncertainty of life

2. The Answer of Faith

- a. the readers addressed by the book of Hebrews lived in uncertain times
- b. that persecution was coming they knew – but when, where, how?
- c. could they escape it by reverting to Judaism? ... or, perhaps, by renouncing their faith altogether: denying their God and their Christ
- d. the writer of Hebrews has just encouraged them to remain steadfast by looking back at their history, at how they had victory to continue in the Way of Christ in spite of being then facing oppression
- e. now he turns to another aspect of the Christian life which is part of the Christian's arsenal – faith

- (A) that is what this eleventh chapter of Hebrews is all about
- (B) how faith makes a difference in a person life
- (C) it is a commentary of the verse just quoted in chapter 10 from the book of Habakkuk: *'... but my righteous one shall live by faith...'* or in the more familiar translation, *'... the just shall live by faith ...'*
- (D) faith is not only the means by which he comes to salvation, but it is the context in which the Christian is to carry out his life

B. Faith Defined 11:1

1. *'Faith Is'*

- a. this verse begins with the classic formula for a definition
- b. but this definition does not deal with the whole of faith but rather on one aspect that is given particularly for the Christian's encouragement
 - (A) it is not simply a Christian virtue
 - (B) nor intellectual assent to what the Gospels tell
 - (C) it doesn't deal with faith as the instrument of justification
 - (D) nor with faith as a miracle-working spiritual gift
 - (E) it has nothing to do with reciting a creed: *'I believe in ...'*
- c. this faith is that by which a man who has been justified lives, that which carries him through life to the consummation of his salvation
- d. so then, in this chapter faith is shown to be the motive – that which gives motion and direction – to Christian living

2. In Terms of Hope

- a. *'Faith is the assurance of things hoped for ...'*
- b. over time the word *'hope'* has taken on a wistful flavour – *'I hope'* has come almost to mean, *'I wish'*
- c. but that is not the emphasis in either the original language or the Bible
 - (A) rather, hope was used to express an expectation or anticipation
 - (B) in a legal sense it was used of property one was due to receive
 - (C) in the Bible more particularly of the fulfilment of promise
 - (D) in Hebrews 11, this last emphasis is predominates
- d. in simplest terms, it is faith that underlies our hope of God's promises; our expectation that God will indeed carry out what He has said

- e. which brings us to that word 'assurance' or, 'substance' in some translations: it is, literally, that which is placed under something to cause it to stand firm – a foundation, if you will
 - (A) faith can be that foundation in terms of how it affects us, how we are made to regard that hope – assurance
 - (B) faith can be that foundation in terms of fact, that upon faith depend the results of that hope – it is their substance
- f. in either case it is faith that makes God's promises very real
- g. the second part of the verse is very much akin and parallel to the first

3. In Terms of the Future

- a. 'Faith is ... the conviction of things not seen.'
- b. there are all sort of things which we cannot see
 - (A) that is true in the sense that our lives are filled with uncertainty
 - (1) we do not know what each day will bring
 - (2) not all of the surprises of life are pleasant
 - (3) and our imaginations often dwell more on the negatives
 - (4) our short term future so often troubles us that we give little thought to the long term future – despite being Christians
 - (5) so this verse tells us that faith deals with the entire gamut of events that are cloaked from our view by being in the future
 - (B) but there is another arena which is invisible to us
 - (1) which is the world of unseen, spiritual forces
 - (2) "For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the powers, against the world forces of this darkness, against the spiritual forces of wickedness in the heavenly places." (Ephesians 6:12)
 - (3) for these enemies of God a place has been prepared for them in the future, a place the Bible calls hell
 - (4) that is the negative, but there is the other side to this, that our Lord Jesus has gone away to prepare a place for us in His Father's house – a place called heaven
 - (5) and for us that is still in the future – it is something that we cannot now see – "But as it is written: 'Eye has not seen, nor ear heard, Nor have entered into the heart of man The things which God has prepared for those who love Him.'" (1 Corinthians 2:9 NKJV); and "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.” (2 Corinthians 4:18)

- c. faith provides a ‘conviction,’ ‘persuasion,’ ‘proof’ or ‘evidence’ concerning this future – whether it be tomorrow or in eternity
 - (A) faith convinces the believer that what God has foretold us in His Scriptures will indeed take place
 - (B) so we can rely upon it, make our plans accordingly, and trust
- d. to further our reliance in this matter, let us now consider ...

C. Faith’s Activities

1. In Fact Rather Than Theory

- a. in the parlance of the world, faith has been set in opposition to science
 - (A) science is viewed as solid facts, resting on unchanging foundation
 - (B) faith is regarded as nebulous, wishy-washy, ephemeral
- b. the truth is somewhat different
 - (A) science gives knowledge using the reasoning ability of man – imparted at creation of man in God’s image – along with the laws that God established at creation which govern the universe
 - (B) faith gives knowledge which is unavailable from mere reason, because it deals with matters outside the physical universe
- c. so the writer of Hebrews now turns from the definition of the faith (theory, as it were) to what faith has done in specific instances in the realm of history (that is, in fact)

2. In Relationship to God 11:2

- a. “For by it the men of old gained approval.”
 - (A) literally, ‘For in this the elders received testimony’
 - (B) it is this kind of faith, the faith whose nature is described in verse 1 – faith that gives hope, that opens the perception to that which cannot be seen by the eyes: the spiritual realities, the future
 - (C) this faith was the means whereby the elders – the rest of the chapter defines elders as including people of all ages distinguished by their relationship to God by faith
- b. last week, in looking at Hebrews 10:39, I finished with this statement: “faith is the eternal, trust relationship between sinful man and the holy God which will enable you and I to persevere to the very end”
 - (A) it is eternal because the relationship transcends mere death
 - (B) looking through this eleventh chapter of Hebrews, we shall discover that there is no list of virtues and good works which earned for these heroes an acceptance with God

- (C) indeed, we shall probably have occasion to mention that they were men with marked weaknesses in areas of their lives
- (D) but it was 'by faith' that they were moved and enabled in their lives; faith linked their human weakness to God's strength
- c. for this, they 'received testimony', a witness was made on their behalf – a testimony can be for or against a person, but in this verse, as in those that follow, there is no doubt that the witness was one for them, an approval
 - (A) it was not an approval of their works – however good
 - (B) but an approval on the account of their faith
- d. from whom did this approval come?
 - (A) though not specifically stated
 - (B) it came from the only One whose approval matters: the Lord God
 - (C) for faith had established them in a relationship of trust in God

3. In Relationship to Knowledge 11:3

- a. "By faith we understand that the worlds were prepared by the word of God, so that what is seen was not made out of things which are visible."
 - (A) Greek philosophers of NT times thought the universe had formed from some prior form of matter
 - (B) modern man has advanced theories of origins
 - (1) postulated upon the physical laws of the universe
 - (2) applying the mathematics of physics
 - (3) to attempt explanations of the origin of the universe
 - (4) going back to a Big Bang – matter formed from energy
 - (C) these views consider that in one form or another, the universe has always existed – but such a premise ultimately explains so little
- b. the Scriptures paint another picture
 - (A) instead of an eternal universe, there is an eternal God
 - (B) instead of a chaos of matter, there is a wise and holy Being
 - (C) this is not a fact that can be reasoned out – although there are philosophical arguments to show it is a reasonable fact
 - (D) it is an understanding that comes on the basis of faith
 - (1) faith sees all the evidences of God's creation in a new light

(2) "The heavens are telling of the glory of God; And their expanse is declaring the work of His hands."
(Psalms 19:1)

(3) faith recognizes that all material existence is at the express command of the invisible God

c. but the real point in this case is not all the detail involved in the explanation of the physical laws that bind together our universe of countless stars and immeasurable size and matter

(A) it is rather an outcome of faith as our trust relationship to God

(B) that instead of our living in a meaningless universe, in which there is no underlying purpose, where there is neither right nor wrong, where everything happens by chance

(C) faith opens our eyes to the fact that there is a purpose in this world, there is an end and objective, that in this uncertain world you can have certainty

(D) God had a plan that He should bring out of this seen world, a people for Himself, to dwell in that eternal unseen world

D. Conclusion

1. John recorded these words,

a. '1 Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth; for the first heaven and the first earth passed away, and there is no longer any sea. 2 And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, made ready as a bride adorned for her husband. 3 And I heard a loud voice from the throne, saying, "Behold, the tabernacle of God is among men, and He will dwell among them, and they shall be His people, and God Himself will be among them, 4 and He will wipe away every tear from their eyes; and there will no longer be any death; there will no longer be any mourning, or crying, or pain; the first things have passed away." 5 And He who sits on the throne said, "Behold, I am making all things new." ...' (Revelation 21:1-5)

b. and later these, "And the city has no need of the sun or of the moon to shine on it, for the glory of God has illumined it, and its lamp is the Lamb." (Revelation 21:23)

c. and these, "and nothing unclean, and no one who practices abomination and lying, shall ever come into it, but only those whose names are written in the Lamb's book of life." (Revelation 21:27)

2. it is by faith that your name can be written in that book of life, and what you can now see by the eye of faith, will in that day be seen, illuminated by God's glory.

a. what a wonderful hope; expectation for every believer in Jesus Christ!

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ASV	American Standard Version of 1901
AV	Authorized (King James) Version of 1769
NAS	New American Standard version © 1960, 1995 The Lockman Foundation (usually the 1995 edition)
NIV	New International Version © 1984 by the International Bible Society
NKJV	New King James Version © 1979 Thomas Nelson Inc., Publishers
WEY	The New Testament in Modern Speech © 1902, 1912 R. F. Weymouth

Some of the commentaries and resources used in the preparation of this message are identified as follow:

- Barnes – *Notes on the New Testament, et alia*, by Rev Albert Barnes, Gall & Inglis, Edinburgh
BM – *Biblical Museum*, Editor James Comper Gray, ca 1870
EBC – *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary*, © 1986 Zondervan, Grand Rapids, 49530, Michigan
Hebrews, by Leon Morris
EGT – *The Expositor’s Greek Testament*, Hodder & Stoughton
Hebrews, by Marcus Dods
Gill – *Exposition of the Old Testament, Exposition of the New Testament*, by John Gill, D.D.
Kerux – The sermon & illustration data base compiled by Rev. David Holwick at the web-site, www.holwick.com.
NICNT – *The New International Commentary on the New Testament*
The Epistle to the Hebrew, by F. F. Bruce
RWP – *Robertson’s Word Pictures of the New Testament*, by Dr. A. T. Robertson
TYN – *The Tyndale New Testament Commentaries*
Hebrews, by Donald Guthrie