

23. The Hall of Faith

May 24, 2015

Chapter 11 of the Book of Hebrews which we are going to study for the next couple of months is known as the chapter of Hall of Faith. The Holy Spirit inspired the author of this Book to list several of the great men and women of faith from the OT, because He knew that the best way for people to grow in faith is to learn from the examples of the other faithful.

The studies we are going to do might have a flavor of biographical studies of individuals with great faith. It is great to see how faithful these people were in spite of all the difficulties they faced. But we also must notice that these were the same people who failed miserably one time or another like the rest of us. In other words, chapter 11 can also be known as the "Hall of Failures", not just a collection of super faithful Christians. If we stay close to Jesus, we, too, can be like these people.

James 5:17 Elijah was a man with a nature like ours, and he prayed earnestly that it would not rain; and it did not rain on the land for three years and six months.

Before we get into the text, we must get this right. Faith is only as good as its object. If I put my faith in a snowman and somehow I think that it will make me cool during the summer time in Southern Arizona, my faith will soon melt away. The object of our faith should be the Almighty God, Him alone. It has nothing to do with how I feel or what I see. It has everything to do with who He is; how He is going to keep His promises in the Bible; and what He is willing to do for me.

One of my favorite Christian authors, A.W. Tozer wrote this in his book "The Root of the Righteous" that describes faith in God:

"A real Christian is an odd number anyway. He feels supreme love for One whom he has never seen; talks familiarly every day to Someone he cannot see; expects to go to heaven on the virtue of Another; empties himself in order to be full; admits he is wrong so he can be declared right; goes down in order to get up; is strongest when he is weakest; richest when he is poorest; and happiest when he feels the worst. He dies so he can live; forsakes in order to have; gives away so he can keep; sees the invisible, hears the inaudible, and knows that which passes knowledge."

Christian faith should not be a blind leap into the pitch darkness, rather it should be more like a child taking a confident step toward the loving arms of his mother or father.

A. FAITH IS...

Hebrews 11:1-3 Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen. 2 For by it the elders obtained a good testimony. 3 By faith we understand that the worlds were framed by the word of God, so that the things which are seen were not made of things which are visible.

We need to dissect these three verses to understand what they are speaking to us:

1) Faith involves confidence and conviction. – v1

Without this inner confidence in God and conviction of His faithfulness to keep His own promises, our faith is nothing.

2) Faith always relates to the future. – v1

By its own definition and word behavior, faith cannot associate with what happened in the past. For Christians, we can see how God previously worked with other people that we can expect what God would do for us in the future.

3) Faith has as its object “things not seen”. – v1

When we focus on the unseen, we develop an incredible ability to envision what God will do.

4) Faith is a must in pleasing God. – v2

By faith we gain the approval of God. There is no substitute for faith when it comes to pleasing God. No amount of good merits or sacrifice, or even sincere religious activity can make up for what is lacking in our faith.

5) Faith in God means believing what He said in the Bible FULLY. – v3

We cannot fully comprehend what God does. If we could, He is not God. We are finite, He is infinite; we are limited, He is limitless; we are bound by time, He created time.

Listen, true faith in God is confident obedience to His Word in spite of circumstances and consequences.

Genesis 1:1 In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.

The vast majority of the world population doesn't accept this, so they consequently don't accept the rest of the Bible. They claim that they are intelligent, scientific, and logical people. Yet they embrace the evolution theory with more faith than they realize.

They also argue that Christians put their faith in what the old manuscripts say. But in reality, those who believe in the evolution theory rely on hearsay of other scientists, comments, and writings from the previous generations.

In their book “The Grand Design,” co-authored with U.S. physicist Leonard Mlodinow, the eminent British theoretical physicist Stephen Hawking says, “Because there is a law such as gravity, the universe can and will create itself from nothing. Spontaneous creation is the reason there is something rather than nothing, why the universe exists, why we exist.”

Though the statement by Hawking sounds logical and deep, it is not. Professor John Lennox, an Irish mathematician, philosopher of Science Dept. of Oxford University summed it up very simply, “Unfortunately, while Hawking’s argument is being hailed as controversial and ground-breaking, it is hardly new. Besides, he was using a circular reasoning to argue his point. It means that he hasn’t proven anything.”

Since Hawking accepted the fact of the law of gravity, he also must accept the fact of the Second Law of Thermodynamics which says, in plain English, “A cold body can’t heat up a warm body. Heat naturally wants to flow from warmer to cooler areas. Heat wants to flow and spread out to areas with less heat.” According to the evolution theory, there was nothing before the universe was existed. By following the Second Law of Thermodynamics, nothing cannot create any big bang that brings forth heat. Thus, their idea of the Big Bang couldn’t happen from nothing as the evolutionists’ origin.

You may have heard that there are two types of evolution concepts – ‘micro evolution’ and ‘macro evolution’. Micro evolution happens WITHIN the species as the surrounding circumstances and environments get changed. Christians can accept this. But macro evolution jumps above the specie levels. Now this is totally wrong.

But the evolutionists love this idea. They say, “Throughout billions and billions of years, one cell entity evolves to multiple cell being. Then, it became a fish like a creature. As evolution continues, it becomes an ape, finally a human.” Then, I have this mind-boggling question: “Why are those monkeys in the zoo still monkeys? If the macro evolution is true, all the apes shouldn’t be existing, because they should have evolved to humans.”

But their basic idea was shaken at the foundation by the founder himself, Charles Darwin. He denied his own evolution theory at the end of his life by saying, “Nature does not jump.” He was denying the idea of the macro evolution.

B. ABEL IN WORSHIP OF GOD

Hebrews 11:4 By faith Abel offered to God a more excellent sacrifice than Cain, through which he obtained witness that he was righteous, God testifying of his gifts; and through it he being dead still speaks.

The second son of Adam and Eve was Abel. He was a shepherd.

Genesis 4:2-5 Then she bore again, this time his brother Abel. Now Abel was a keeper of sheep, but Cain was a tiller of the ground. 3 And in the process of time it came to pass that Cain brought an offering of the fruit of the ground to the Lord. 4 Abel also brought of the firstborn of his flock and of their fat. And the Lord respected Abel and his offering, 5 but He did not respect Cain and his offering. And Cain was very angry, and his countenance fell.

Why did the Lord reject Cain’s offering to Him? Because God was not a vegetarian and He loved lamb chops. I am sure that the Lord taught them about a blood sacrifice through their father Adam. These two brothers knew what to bring and Abel obeyed while Cain did what he wanted against God’s commandment. Abel’s faith was evident in his obedience and Cain showed his defiance and lack of faith. Cain might have been sincere in his sacrifice, but sincerity is no substitute for obedience.

Though Abel was killed by his own brother, his faith still speaks to us that his faith in the Lord was not based on the ritual of religion, rather the relationship with God.

It’s human nature to want to come to God. We are made that way. However, we want it in our own way, on our own terms, with the offering of our own good works. But God’s way says, not our way, but His way ONLY – the shed blood of His only Son Jesus Christ.

C. ENOCH IN WALKING WITH GOD

Hebrews 11:5-6 By faith Enoch was taken away so that he did not see death, “and was not found, because God had taken him”; for before he was taken he had this testimony, that he pleased God. 6 But without faith it is impossible to please Him, for he who comes to God must believe that He is, and that He is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him.

We have very little of the Scriptures that mention Enoch.

Genesis 5:21-24 Enoch lived sixty-five years, and begot Methuselah. 22 After he begot Methuselah, Enoch walked with God three hundred years, and had sons and daughters. 23 So all the days of Enoch were three hundred and sixty-five years. 24 And Enoch walked with God; and he was not, for God took him.

Jude: 14-15 Now Enoch, the seventh from Adam, prophesied about these men also, saying, "Behold, the Lord comes with ten thousands of His saints, 15 to execute judgment on all, to convict all who are ungodly among them of all their ungodly deeds which they have committed in an ungodly way, and of all the harsh things which ungodly sinners have spoken against Him."

"Walking with God" is a common Christian phrase for having fellowship with the Lord. But for Enoch, it was a literal walk with the Lord. I wonder what it was like; what kind of conversations they had; how God spoke to him? In spite of the wicked world Enoch was living in before God's judgment against the world – the Flood that engulfed the whole earth, his faith in God was not wavered.

Many Bible students, including myself see Enoch's departure from this earth without experiencing death as a typology of the rapture of the church that will happen before the Great Tribulation.

The author of the Book of Hebrews doesn't say that it is difficult to please God without faith. He says that it is impossible. Unbelief in God cancels our prayer. To not believe what the Lord says in the Bible is true means calling God a liar. Thus we must pray in faith in God that He will do what is right in His sight, not ours.

D. NOAH IN WORKING FOR GOD

Hebrews 11:7 By faith Noah, being divinely warned of things not yet seen, moved with godly fear, prepared an ark for the saving of his household, by which he condemned the world and became heir of the righteousness which is according to faith.

I am, by any means, not a handy man. I am so bad at building things, but good at blowing things up or destroying things that our church building team told me to stay out of getting involved with the church building. So my job for the church building is limited to putting my signatures on the documents.

During the time of Noah, according to Genesis 6, the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every intent of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually. It sounds very much like now, don't you think?

Genesis 6:8-9 But Noah found grace in the eyes of the Lord. 9 This is the genealogy of Noah. Noah was a just man, perfect in his generations. Noah walked with God.

Without a fuss and an objection, Noah started to build an ark. The size of this ark was two football fields in length and one football field wide and four stories high according to Genesis 6. They didn't have power tools back then. They'd never had rain falling, they were far from any large size of lake to put this box in. It took 120 years to build it. I am sure that he was a laughingstock and a blunt end of the jokes all the time. Noah acted in faith, believing God's Word over the public opinions.

E. APPLICATIONS

By faith, Abel worshiped the Lord in God's way, not his own way like Cain.

By faith, Enoch walked with the Lord, not following the world.

By faith, Noah worked for God, not for the world.

Abel, Enoch, and Noah all were common men with an uncommon faith in God. By faith, we, too, need to seek the arms of God rather than the embrace of the world.