

Record of Sermons delivered during the month of
February 2019

(added progressively after each Sunday)

(see following pages)

What is Faith and How Does Faith Behave? PT 2

per S Olyott

(review so far)

Last week the Apostle defined faith. What is it: Being totally convinced that we live in a created world and are answerable to the Creator. Like Enoch, once a person is convinced of the reality of the unseen world – on the sole ground of God's Word – such a person can only have one ambition in life: to please God!

Now in verse 7 we move on a few more years: we come to Noah. Think about Noah. Every time it rains think about Noah. Did you think about Noah this morning? Perhaps if it had been very wet and windy, you might have thought, "Do I really have to go to church, in this weather?"

Noah lived at a time in the history of the world when it never rained! So how did he know it would rain when it never had rained? He was warned by God of things not seen, as yet! Including rain. Not only did he know it would rain but that there would be a universal flood. How did he know? On no other ground than the bare word of God! And he believed what God said, although there was no evidence in the modern sense of that word. There was the bare word of God. He knew the rain would come. The fountains of the great deep would open. There would be this world wide flood and he was filled with fear. He spent a Century, 100 years, building the ark in which he and his family were ultimately saved. Now that was believing, and keeping on believing, if there ever was an example of it, in the world!

For a hundred years, he got out his hammer and his saw, his nails and his pitch. For 100 years while the world gestured and mocked at him, saying it was all a dream. It would never happen. It was impossible. There was no evidence! On the bare word of God and nothing else, he knew that something was going to come. The invisible God was a reality to him. In the end his faith was vindicated. The world was showed up for what it is! This world is an anti-God establishment. This world is a world of unbelieving men and women. He condemned the world. He showed it up for what it is. He became the heir of righteousness. That is by faith! At the same time he was shown up for what he is, and was. He was one who came into the experience of being accepted by God, through faith.

Well the Apostle moves on now. In verses 8, 9 and 10 he devotes his attention to Abraham. He's writing to Jews remember. They would have been interested in Abel. Been interested in Enoch and Noah, but they would have been particularly interested in Abraham, because they traced back their ancestry very especially to him. To him were given the Covenant promises, which they believed were fulfilled in the Jewish race.

"Well," says the Apostle, in verses 8, 9 and 10, "there's no greater example of faith, in history, that Abraham! Here's a man who left his own country. He went off not knowing where he was going. On no other ground than this: God's word! God told

him to go, and God promised him an inheritance. The invisible God was real to Abraham! He was a living God. The Word of God was sure to Abraham and so he didn't hesitate to obey."

Can you imagine what his neighbours thought: "Look", they said, "you're leaving behind everything that we call a certainty. You're launching out into a life of uncertainty." But Abraham didn't think like that. He couldn't see it that way. To stay where he was, in contradiction to God's word: that was uncertainty. To proceed not knowing where he was going, on the basis of the word of God. That was certainty! The word of God was His certainty. He was more certain of God's word than anything else: that's faith! That's why he put up with living in tents all those years – verse 9.

God had given him a promise and God repeated that promise to Isaac and to Jacob. He knew and they knew, that there was an inheritance into which they would enter. One much better and enduring than Canaan. There was something into which they were certain to enter. All they had to do, to enter, was to obey. They were more certain of God's Word than anything!

Well, in case the women are feeling left out, having mentioned, Abel, Enoch, Noah and Abraham, the Apostle now discreetly and wisely, takes us to Sarah. There are men of faith in history. There are women of faith in history. Many of them. Wonderful women. So in verses 11 and 12 he takes us to Sarah.

Sarah showed faith. Yet somebody says: "I seem to remember, in the Old Testament, that Sarah laughed at what God said!"

"Yes she did." Her faith wasn't without its doubts. But, it was Faith – none the less. 'Doubt' is only the other side of the coin called 'Faith'. It's unbelief you have to watch! But never be troubled with doubt. Unbelief is when a person says, "I can't believe it any longer, and I won't! And walks out. Doubt is when: "I can't believe it any longer -- but I want to!" That's different all together.

Sarah had doubts because she had faith. Look at what it says about her in verses 11 and 12: She was far too old to have a child. She was physically passed it. It was impossible. But she believed she would! But it's impossible! But she still believed. She received strength to conceive a child. But it was Impossible! But she received strength. On no other ground, than the fact that God had said it. It was impossible but – God had said it. So it must come to pass.

That's how in verse 12: it was born to a man who was as good as dead, an innumerable company of descendants. "The very fact that there are Jews in the world." says the Apostle, "is due to the enduring faith of Abraham and Sarah."

That was a very sharp rebuke to those Hebrews! They were saying, "Let's give up the life of faith and go back to Judaism. Back to something a little more Jewish."

And now the Apostle is saying, "The only reason there are any Jews at all, is because, many years ago there, was a couple who lived the life of faith." That must have come as a really sharp cut to the original readers of this letter!

Well the Apostle has surveyed Abel and Enoch, Noah and Abraham and Sarah. He concludes the section with verses 13 to 16: ¹³ *These all died in faith, not having received the things promised, but having seen them and greeted them from afar, and having acknowledged that they were strangers and exiles on the earth.* ¹⁴ *For people who speak thus make it clear that they are seeking a homeland.* ¹⁵ *If they had been thinking of that land from which they had gone out, they would have had opportunity to return.* ¹⁶ *But as it is, they desire a better country, that is, a heavenly one. Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God, for he has prepared for them a city.*

Why did they act as they did? They acted as they did because they saw the invisible God. And recognised the invisible world as real. And because they were convinced of the truth of everything God had said. But in this life had they entered into everything God had promised? He promised to all of them a Messiah. None of them saw him! God had promised all of them a better sacrifice but none of them were there when it took place. God had promised them a city, but none of them entered into it. They never met the earthly Messiah. They never saw Calvary. They never entered the city. But they saw all those things in the distance, and they knew them to be certain. They set their hearts on them and that is the point!

They told everybody that they didn't belong here. There were other things that they lived for. This world wasn't their enduring home or their enduring hope. It was those distant things that we're closest to their hearts. Those were the things they embraced!

If you had asked them at verse 14, "What they hoped for in this life?" They would have said, "We want the Messiah and the better sacrifice and the enduring City. That's where our hope lies, and our affections have been set". This hope loomed so large in their lives, that it never even occurred to them, to turn their back on it and live like everybody else. All their hopes, all their hearts were set, on getting home safely. Into God's dwelling place: Heaven. That's what they lived for; that's what they cared about. It was the most real thing to them!

The greatest reality in their life, was the invisible God and his Word. Which assured them of the coming Christ. The becoming sacrifice and the better hope. They were most sure of it! God's Word is true. The glory awaited them, and they knew it.

"God seeing such quality in their life, is actually proud of them," says the Apostle, in verse 16. Marvellous that: isn't it? Not ashamed to be their God. God was delighted

with them. God took pleasure in them. "He has indeed prepared for them", says the Apostle, "in their seeking they will not be disappointed. Those Old Testament saints will be in heaven. And so will everybody else who lived in faith and died in faith!" Which brings us back to the lesson that he taught last week.

So then we're able to answer the question: Do I have faith? Is the invisible God a reality to me? Is God's Word more certain to me than, anything else? If it is, it will lead me to approach God in the appointed way – like Abel. If it is, it will make me intent on pleasing the invisible God – like Enoch. If it is, it will move me to act on what God has said – like Noah. If it is, it will lead me to obey what God has said – like Abraham. If it is, it will lead me to trust that what God says will happen. Will happen, even though it's clearly impossible – like Sarah.

The man of faith is the man or woman who stakes his life and his death and his eternity on what God has said. The message of the chapter is that all who stake everything on what God has said: they will not be disappointed or let down. He will not be ashamed to be called our God. He's not ashamed to walk with us in this life, that we might walk with him in the next.

But if there is no faith there is no where else for you to go; except to live under His anger; to die in His anger; and to be lost.

[1880]

May it please God that all present, through Jesus Christ, shall have life through His Name.

Delivered Sunday 10th February 2019

Hebrews 11:17-40

Nothing Can Extinguish True Faith

per S Olyott

(review so far)

There is but one lesson in this Passage: That there is nothing at all which can extinguish true faith. Let us briefly review what we have already learnt in the first part of chapter 11.

A true Christian is a man or woman of faith. If you are a true Christian this morning you are a man or woman of faith. However a true Christian is someone who not only has Faith but who lives the life of faith – lives by faith – and dies in faith. Which leads us to ask the question what is faith?

If to be a Christian I have to be a person of faith – to live in faith and to die in faith, where I go at last to heaven because I have lived and died in faith: what is faith? Chapter 11 verse 1 has given the answer: ¹ ... *faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen*. If you believe, that what God says will come true – will come true! Then you are a person of faith – that's *the assurance of things hoped for*. If you believe the invisible world is real: then you are a person of faith -- that's *the conviction (or ,evidence) of things not seen*.

On what ground do I believe, that what God says will come true? On what ground do I believe that the invisible world is real? Simply on the ground that God has said it: in his Word!

So if you want a summary of faith you can put it like this: A man or a woman of faith is someone who has more confidence in God's Word than in anything else. So I asked you again this morning: directly, are you a man of faith are you a woman of faith? Do you have more confidence in what God has said than anything else?

We looked at some examples of faith. In verse four: we looked at Abel. He had faith and that led him to approach God in the way God wanted. Verses 5 and 6 brought us to Enoch: He had faith and that led him to believe that: pleasing God is the most important thing in the world. We looked at Noah, verse 7, he had faith – and that moved him to act, even when everyone else laughed at him. We looked at Abraham verses 8 to 10: he had faith. That's why he obeyed God. Even when it appeared that he was giving everything up, by doing so. We looked at Sarah: verse 11. She had faith and therefore she trusted God that something would happen: even though it was clearly impossible.

So we looked at these people of faith. They lived in faith and they died in faith.

And yet we further learnt, in verses 11 to 16: That God had promised them far more than they ever experienced in this life. They died without actually laying hands on everything that God had promised to them. But they didn't doubt God! They still believed that what God promised would come true. They were men and women of faith and that's why we learnt in verses 14 to 16 that God wasn't ashamed of them. God was proud of them! In fact the Destiny that they were seeking all along, this they will at last enter into.

So we've been talking about faith. Today we come to chapter 11 verse 17 onwards: Keep in mind that the Apostle was writing to people who were thinking of giving up their faith. That's why he's stressing that a true Christian lives in faith and dies in faith. That's why he's told them what faith really is. For the remainder of the chapter starting with today's passage, verse 17 onwards, we're going to learn one lesson only. The passage teaches only one lesson! It teaches there is nothing – nothing -- that can extinguish true faith. Genuine faith! Nothing!

It does this by teaching in two parts:

Verses 17 to 28 to begin with, then verses 29 to the end of the chapter – as the second part of our message.

Verses 17 to 28: In teaching us that nothing can extinguish true faith he teaches us first:

- **Faith looks forward when there is nothing to look forward to.**

Take the case of Abraham: Verses 17, 18 and 19. Abraham had received a promise from God. What was the promise? That he would be the father of a great nation, through his son Isaac. Not through Ishmael, but Isaac! Through Isaac he would be the ancestor of a great nation and of the Messiah. Through Isaac! That's what God said. And Abraham believed it. He took God at his word. He believed that through Isaac God's promise – God's Covenant promise – would come to pass: through Isaac!

Then God told him to sacrifice Isaac. Now Abraham had a real problem. Can you imagine it? He must have paced up and down, under the Syrian sky, asking, "How could this problem be possibly worked out?" "God says that through Isaac I'm going to be the ancestor of Christ. God says that through Isaac I'm going to be the father of a great nation. Now God tells me to sacrifice Isaac! I can't disobey God. So I must carry out the sacrifice and yet -- God's word can't prove false, so the boy really will be the one through whom The Promise comes to pass. How can I both kill the boy and yet God's promise becomes true?"

As he paced up and down and prayed and agonised and thought -- like a flash of light, into his mind, came the solution: "I've got it", he said, "I will kill Isaac -- in

response to God's command -- but then God will raise him from the dead! And Isaac will be the father of a great Nation: just as God has promised. That's the conclusion he came to at a stage in the world's history when not one person had ever been raised from the dead! So he travelled to the mountains of Moriah. Fully expecting to kill the boy. He even got to the point where the knife was in his hand and he was about to plunge it into the boy's chest. Even at that moment, when there was nothing to look forward to, humanly speaking, he nonetheless was still looking forward. Because he sincerely believed even when the boy was dead, that God would raise him from the dead. Because God's promises can't be broken. And so we find Abraham looking forward when there's nothing to look forward to. Because that's how Faith behaves. Not even so great a trial as this can extinguish true faith. He couldn't believe that God's Word will let him down.

And he did receive Isaac back from the dead, in a figure, metaphorically, didn't he? That's how Faith behaves. Nothing can move faith's confidence that God's Word is true.

Tremendous rebuke to these Hebrews, who were thinking of walking out on their faith.

Take the case of Isaac himself, verse 20. The boy grew up. Eventually he became an ancient patriarch. The time came in Isaac's life when the only thing he had to look forward to, humanly speaking, was death. He came to the stage in his life where people spend all their time looking backwards. But was this man of faith, looking backwards? No even as an elderly, ancient, patriarch you still find him looking forwards. When there's nothing to look forward to, he's still looking forwards. To things still to come:

Here's Jacob with all his deceit and trickery -- you know that story don't you? About Esau being a hairy man; Jacob being a smooth man and Jacob making out that he was a hairy man; the blind father blessing the wrong boy. But has it ever occurred to you what a remarkable thing it was for the blind father to be able to bless, either boy. But nursing in his heart was still the confident belief that God's purposes were going to be progressed in the future, when he himself was off the scene. Of course he blessed Jacob because it was the will of God to do so. Although God was not pleased with Jacob's deceit. And he made it clear by the same spirit of prophecy that Esau had no place in the future purposes of God.

But the old man was still nursing the confident belief that God's Covenant promises we're going to come true in the future. Through the line and descendants of, as it happened, Jacob. He was unshakably sure that God's Word about the great nation and the coming Christ must come to pass. That's faith!

Take the case of Jacob, himself: verse 21. Because the deceiver, Jacob, grew up, and lived a life of trickery. (It's worth reading it again in the Book of Genesis) Yet despite all the deceit in his life, and all his clever tactics, there was a real faith

in Jacob's life. He became a prince with God.¹

Jacob now is an old man. He's come to the point of death. And what do you find him doing at the point when he's about to die? You find him blessing his two grandsons. Crossing his hands. (Do you remember that story?) And once more the boy who no one expected to get the first blessing, got the blessing. There was that old man with a heightened awareness of the visible God, crossing his hands and blessing the boys. Predicting their futures, and showing how certainly he believed that God's promises would come to pass, in the process of history. He's an old man but he's still looking forward! The Invisible God is a reality to him. The Word of God is sure to him. There are very few old people, who enjoy that perspective. Like all the 'ages' of man in the typical world scene: the perception of the reality of God and that His Word is sure is sadly lacking in so many instances. So many people with nothing to look forward to. But not so Jacob! When everybody else had nothing to look forward to he still was looking forward. Nothing can extinguish true faith!

Take the case of Joseph verse 22. Had a wonderful life: Joseph! Didn't he? Not all wonderful. But the coat of many colours was very nice. Potiphar's prison wasn't so good. Being grand vizier of Egypt had its advantages. But at the end of this very eventful life, we find him looking forward. He could see the day of the Exodus. Which wasn't to take place for another 400 years. He could see the day that God's people would leave the Egypt that they were now in, because God said it would happen. There was no sign of it happening at the time, but God said it would happen and so it must happen. So in his will, Joseph leaves instructions regarding the resting place of his bones.

Like the others he lived and he died without seeing everything he knew that God had promised. But he never became cynical. Never became a doubter. Never hesitated. God had said certain things and because God had said them they must come to pass. His heart could believe no other possibility.

That's what faith does. All these men enjoyed that perspective. That's the way they lived. That's the way they died. Even when, humanly speaking, there was nothing to look forward to, they were still looking forward! Because that's what faith does.

The Apostle is teaching us that nothing can extinguish true faith. That in the first place: **Faith looks forward when there is nothing to look forward to.**

[1968]

May it please God that all present, through Jesus Christ, shall have life through His Name.

¹ Prince with God is the Hebrew meaning of the new name given to Jacob: Israel.

Hebrews 11:17-40

Nothing Can Extinguish True Faith – Pt 2

per S Olyott

(review so far)

Last week we began to consider verses 17 – 40 of Hebrews Chapter 11. This passage contains one lesson: **That there is nothing at all which can extinguish true faith.** In doing this we began to identify two aspects, the first being: **that Faith looks forwards even when there is nothing to look forward to.** This is found in verses 17 to 28.

So far we have been guided through the Old Testament accounts of the examples set by the patriarchs. Abraham, Isaac, Jacob and Joseph. (up to verse 22)

- Now we take the case of Moses, verses 23 to 28: It's a longer section in comparison with the others.

Firstly consider Moses' Mum and Dad, verse 23. They knew there was no future for Jewish boys. But they looked at this boy and knew, not only that he was a good looking boy, but that God's favour rested upon him. There's no future for Jewish boys! But they knew differently. That's why they committed him to God's care, by putting him in that little ark and putting him in the bulrushes -- committing him to the Providence of God. Everyone said, "It's all up with our boys. Pharaoh's killing them!" But when everyone else had nothing to look forward to, they looked forward. They committed their lad to the all-seeing ever-present God.

Moses himself grew up in faith. Everybody knew that there was no future outside the Egyptian Court. But he knew there was **only** a future **outside** the Egyptian Court. Look what it says about him: ²⁴ *By faith Moses, when he was grown up, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter,* ²⁵ *choosing rather to be mistreated with the people of God than to enjoy the fleeting pleasures of sin.* ²⁶ *He considered the reproach of Christ greater wealth than the treasures of Egypt, for he was looking to the reward.* ²⁷ *By faith he left Egypt, not being afraid of the anger of the king, for he endured as seeing him who is invisible.* ²⁸ *By faith he kept the Passover and sprinkled the blood, so that the Destroyer of the firstborn might not touch them.*

In verse 24, he refused to identify himself any longer with Pharaoh's Court. Instead he identified himself with the people of God, because the future lay with them. It was better to be one of them, than to enjoy all the pleasures of sin: for a season. Because from this great people at last would come the Christ! What was happening to them was in many ways a *type* of Christ. To identify with them was to enjoy and endure the reproach of Christ. He threw in his lot with the people of God because he knew that there were greater riches in going the way

of God than merely enjoying the material benefits which Pharaoh had to offer. Because there was a greater reward to come. He could look beyond his own Century, and beyond the Centuries to come when Christ would come, even to the end of the world and beyond the end of the world.

Moses could look to the judgement seat even when he was in Egypt and he knew that at last there would be rewards given. That's why he identified himself with his Christ, and with Christ's people, because his eye was on the recompense of the reward. He was looking forward. Far further forward than anyone else. That's what faith does.

So at last here are Pharaoh's chariots chasing them to the Red Sea. In verse 28, we find they've already kept the Passover -- that was a feast of 'looking forward' for deliverance from the plague and the setting off on that journey to the safety of The Promised Land.

Look at verse 27: He hadn't feared the wrath of the king because he was in the purposes of God. "How come you endured -- Moses? How come you endured when there were so many great difficulties?" "I can see Him who is invisible!" The invisible God was a reality to him. That's what faith is.

Having got to verse 28 again, our hearts must be struck by the fact that men and women of faith are so, so different from other people. All these verses bear testimony to the fact that men and women of faith are different. Take the ordinary man in the street -- your next door neighbour perhaps, or the person at work or school or at the shops. They think about the future, don't they?. How do they think about the future? Well, they think in terms of what is feasible, possible and what might happen. They plan. They hope! But the believer's view of the future is completely different. The unbeliever's view of the future is regulated by their own hopes, their own plans, governed by their own belief of what is possible. But the believer's view of the future is always regulated by the promises of God. Always! The old saying: a future is as bright as the promises of God (William Carey).²

You can't think, as a believer, like other people. They can only think about Christmas holidays -- next year's holidays -- and their annual increments -- their latest wage negotiation. Their next house or their next possession! And what they are going to do -- with whom -- where -- and why.

Built into a Christian's mind, are also thoughts about the progress of the gospel -- which he knows is sure. He thinks of the Second Coming of Christ. It fills his whole future with light. He thinks of the judgement, bringing solemnity and quietness into his life. He thinks of Heaven which excites him immeasurably. All those things are there in his mind when he thinks of the future. And all of them are unseen. All of them are unproved, by the rules of the world. All are without worldly evidence. All of them are doubted by other people.

² Read more at: https://www.brainyquote.com/quotes/william_carey_191985

But he can't get them out of his mind. He's sure of the progress of the Gospel. He's sure of the Second Advent. Sure of the Judgement and sure of Heaven. He's certain about it all – he's comfortable. Because thinking about it, he's comforted by these truths. He's looking forward to them. And on what basis? On no basis, apart from the fact that the Word of God teaches those things about the future. His whole thinking about the future is governed, by The Promises of God. That's what gives him his perspective. So he never capitulates to pessimism. He might have his moments of discouragement, but this never, never swamps him. He never ends up in total despair! Why not? Because the future, to him, is bright. It's 'as bright as the promises of God'. He has a certainty about the future, which is carried in upon him, by The Promises of the Bible.

Do you live like that? Because that's how men and women of faith, do live. There is great joy in being a Christian Believer. Everybody else's world is collapsing. When everybody else's world is collapsing and tottering and gone, our world is just really beginning. People may have had all sorts of financial hopes and now they're threatened. People have made all sorts of plans for the future, and now they find they can't afford it. Made plans for their children, but things are happening to the children, now that they've grown up, that they'd never thought would be possible. Such people's worlds collapsing all around them!

The Christian has his heartaches and disappointments also, but his real world never collapses. His God is still with him tomorrow. His God will guide him tomorrow. His needs will be supplied tomorrow. All the promises of Scripture will be true tomorrow. The Gospel, which he loves, will grow: even tomorrow. The Lord's people will be holier tomorrow. There is our tomorrow. It's in God's hands! All history is hastening to the unveiling of the Son of God. All the evil around him will at last be judged in the future. All the things that he longs for, will at last be his. In Heaven -- this covers all his thinking, and he's looking forward, looking forward, looking forward. When everyone around him has got nothing to look forward to.

Well we're learning this one lesson: **Nothing can extinguish true faith. It looks forward when there's nothing to look forward to.**

[1411]

May it please God that all present, through Jesus Christ, shall have life through His Name.

Delivered Sunday 24th February 2019

Hebrews 11:17-40

Nothing Can Extinguish True Faith – Pt 3

per S Olyott

(review so far)

Well we're continuing to learn this one lesson: **Nothing can extinguish true faith. It looks forward when there's nothing to look forward to.**

Now let's look from verse 29 to the end of the chapter. Here then is the same lesson put another way: Nothing can extinguish true faith – that's the lesson! he's teaching, so far by telling us that it **looks forward when there is nothing to look forward to.** He now teaches the same lesson to us by showing, that **faith keeps going, when everything else gives up.** Faith keeps going!

Look what happened at the Red Sea: verse 29. They knew God was with them as they hastened towards the Red Sea. God promised them safe conduct to the Promised Land. They seem to have come against an impossible situation. They can't go backwards because Pharaoh is behind them. They can't go North because they'll end up in the Mediterranean. They can't go West because they'll end up in the wilds of Ethiopia. They can't go any way except the way that God has said – yet that seems barred to them because the Red Sea is in the way! It all seems impossible. It all seems against reason. It seems as though they're all going to be facing certain death. But faith doesn't die in that situation. They acted on God's Word! Moses stretches out his rod. And upheld by nothing more than the bare word of God, they go through the Red Sea as though on dry land. Which when the faithless Egyptians attempt to do, are drowned.

Difficulties cannot kill genuine faith. Faith keeps going when nothing else can keep going. That's a rebuke to the Hebrews! Who were thinking of giving up their faith.

Look what happened at Jericho in verses 30 and 31: Six days they'd gone round that city of Jericho. Put yourself in their shoes! You've gone round once – next day you go round again – next day: again. All you can see are these Jericonians, peering over the walls at you. Nothing seems to be happening. So why did they keep at it? Faith! God said it was to be done. God said that was the way the city would be taken. They can't see how. But they believe, and act. Everything else would give up. Faith keeps going. On the 7th Day they walk around 7 times. When the trumpets are blown and the shout is shouted – down comes the walls and in they go! Nothing but faith could have survived in that situation.

Have you ever thought about poor Rahab? She lived on the wall! God had determined that the wall should come down. Yet she lived on that wall! God had determined that all the inhabitants of Jericho would be killed. She was an inhabitant of Jericho! She didn't ring her hands in despair, and say, "I live on the wall. I'm a native of Jericho. It's all up with me". Because in the name of God, the spies, had given her a promise. All she had to go on, when there was slaying going on, all around her, was a Divine promise. She had nothing else to rest on, at all! But she did, so rest. And she was preserved. She had an overwhelming reality of God. A certainty that never left her: that His Word was true. Faith kept going when everything else would have given up. Because true Faith just simply cannot peter out.

"We could look at the whole history of your Nation," says the Apostle, from verse 32 to 38, "yet I just haven't time", he says. (And nor have we.) "I haven't time," he says, "to record for you, each example of faith. Suffice it to say", says the great Apostle, "that all the great heroes of your history, were great heroes, because they were great men and women of faith."

That's how they did what they did. If you look at verses 33 to 38, you'll find that the whole history of Israel, is encompassed in a few sentences. These great men of faith were men of courage, valour, bravery, boldness, endurance. They withstood awful pain, torture. They went through awful sacrifices, privation and suffering. When everything was against them, they remained true, to their God. Because that's how faith behaves.

How did they manage it? The invisible God was real to them. His Word was sure to them. They were certain that whatever happened to themselves, God's Word was true. Whatever happened to themselves, the invisible God, remained God. So they never gave up. They never gave in. They never went back. They never walked out. They were never the same as others. Because they had faith. Because when everything else gives up, faith keeps going. It remains sure that God's Word is true. It remains sure that the invisible God is real, and therefore it has to act, as if these things are true because they are true. Whatever the cost, it has to act in the light of the fact that there is a God. That his Word is true. It has to act in the light of that. It cannot give up. That's faith.

Look now at the last 2 verses of the chapter: ³⁹*And all these, though commended through their faith, did not receive what was promised,* ⁴⁰*since God had provided something better for us, that apart from us they should not be made perfect.* That's how they lived. God's smile rested on them. That's how they died. Yet, despite all the promises they'd receive from God, they never saw the earthly Messiah. God had promised them many things, and they saw many of the things he promised. He promised them all an earthly Messiah, yet not one of them actually saw Him. Not one of them saw the perfect sacrifice for sin. And certainly none of them saw the Glorious City, into which the redeemed at last will enter.

"So those Old Testament Saints had to wait for us." Now, why is the Apostle saying that? Because he wants to make it clear that Old Testament days weren't superior. They were inferior! How silly of the Hebrews to want to go back to the Old Testament religion! "Those Old Testament Saints, believers in Christ though they were. They had to wait for us! God wasn't going to have them entering into everything, and then we come along as some sort of second rate people. Therefore they didn't enter into everything. We've seen the Messiah, we New Testament Christians." (Not us now personally). "We've seen the perfect sacrifice. Seen things that Old Testament Saints never saw! How can you say then that Old Testament religion is superior?" Says the Apostle.

But there is something that neither they nor we saw or have seen. It's the city into which God's people go. When at last Heaven's doors swing open, and we enter into the eternal state, old Testament believers, new Testament believers, will enter into The eternal state together. They won't go one in front of the other. When the doors of Heaven – the eternal state – are opened, it won't be just Old Testament believers that will go in, or just New Testament believers. It is futile then for New Testament believers to say, "What we really ought to be is Old Testament believers." Which is what the Hebrews were saying. Similarly it's futile for Old Testament believers to say, "What we should be is New Testament believers." The only thing that is necessary, it's not whether you're an old testament believer or a new testament believer but that you are a Believer.

What is necessary is not whether you have your faith prospectively – looking forward to Christ – or retrospectively – looking back to Christ – all that counts in the final analysis, at the judgement seat is: do you have faith in Christ?

The sole lesson that we've had this three weeks is that if you do have faith: Nothing can extinguish it, if it is true faith.

We put the question again: Is the invisible world, right at this moment, real to you? So real that it affects your actions! Is the Word of God sure to you? So sure that you rest on what it teaches for Salvation; you rest on what it teaches for your comfort in death; you rest on what it teaches for your comfort and acquittal at the judgement; you rest on what it teaches for your hopes for eternity.

The final proof that your faith is real of course, will be that having lived in the faith you die in the faith, and that your faith is never extinguished. When you die, if you have true faith, you will still be found looking forward. Whatever fears you have. However cold the river may be. You'll still be found looking for the Celestial City. And when everything else has given up -- even your health, your faith will remain. If it is true faith.

Therefore Christian friends, lay aside side everything that is a hindrance to your progress in the Christian life. Lay aside everything that is a hindrance to the strengthening of your faith. Which is exactly the point that the Apostle takes up in the next chapter. Which God willing we look at next week.

[1557]

May it please God that all present, through Jesus Christ, shall have life through His Name.