

Faith with Feet on It (Hebrews 10.39-11.3) ZCC 11.3.13

39 But we are not of those who shrink back to destruction, but of those who have faith to the saving of the soul. 1 Now faith is assurance of things hoped for, proof of things not seen. 2 For by this, the elders obtained testimony. 3 By faith, we understand that the universe has been framed by the word of God, so that what is seen has not been made out of things which are visible. (World English Bible)

Right at the end of an important baseball game, a pitcher may be saying to himself, “I gotta have faith, I gotta have faith, I gotta have faith...” His wife may be sitting in the stands closing her eyes and crossing her fingers before what MIGHT be the final pitch of the game, saying the same thing to herself, “I gotta have faith, I gotta have faith, I gotta have faith...”

In a real sense, faith is a belief in something that has not yet proven to be a fact. Those two would be expressing faith in the pitcher's ability to get that last strike and that last out in the last half of the last inning. Unfortunately, it may not work out because the batter and his wife and his team may have the same faith in HIS ability to knock in the winning run. In this case, someone's faith will be proven to be wrong.

When we are in church, we speak of faith in terms of religion, but we have faith in lots of things. Sometimes our faith can be misplaced. We may have faith in our stock-broker and yet lose all our money. Sometimes we put faith in our doctors only to have things turn out wrong. We may put out vote and our faith into action for a political candidate, only to have him or her become involved in a scandal.

Even religious faith may let us down. We may have faith in a minister only to have them turn out unworthy. It is possible for some part of our faith to be based on misinformation or misunderstanding.

I can promise you that if we have faith that God will protect us from everything bad and hurtful, that faith will let us down—because God never promised that.

We can be disappointed when we place our faith in religious THINGS: churches, teachers, denominations, scripture translations, missions groups, ministers, religious books—even our own carefully-crafted theology can disappoint us.

Faith may sometimes disappoint, but faith in God will not disappoint us. At least it won't as long as we don't try to keep God in a box or limit him. Not as long as we understand that God has a will of his own and that he is not a divine Santa Claus. Not as long as our faith is in God and not just religion or religious things.

The verses I read constitute one of the best definitions of Faith ever.

***“The assurance of things hoped for...”* The word that is translated as “assurance” or “substance” is also the word for nature. Faith is the very NATURE of the things hoped for, the certainty of things we cannot see. It is a contractual word. We could reasonably translate it this way: “Faith is the title-deed of things hoped for...” The Greeks used this word to talk about legally binding contracts.**

Every part of Christianity requires faith. We cannot see God—to even believe in him requires faith. To believe that the creator of everything loves us requires faith. I have a close friend in Canada who believes in God as creator, but cannot fathom that same God having a personal love for individuals—for you and for me and for him. I have FAITH that he is wrong about that. Believing that Jesus, the Christ, came to earth and took on our guilt requires faith.

In the tenth chapter, the author of Hebrews encouraged his readers to endure—to remain confident in God and confident in the reward God had for them. After that beautiful definition of faith in chapter 11, he then begins to refer to the lives and stories of the patriarchs as examples of faith in action—faith with feet.

Their faith was in God—in his love and his nature and in his promises. Many of the heroes of the Hebrew faith had, as far as we know, no knowledge of a Messiah to come—but they had faith that they could trust God with their lives and their futures. In the first and second verses, we see that it was by their assurance and their belief and their acceptance that they gained a testimony—that they had a Bible-story-worthy experience with God. By faith.

So the men (and the women) of old gained witness or testimony or were both testified to and testified about because of their faith. It is pretty clear that they received their eternal reward because of their faith and God's approval of their faith. They were made just or justified by faith in God. According to the writer of Hebrews, they gained many more things also. Several people are mentioned in this chapter. Each one is given a quick literary sketch, including the benefit they received from being faithful. The original audience of this book would have been very familiar with each player. So are we, but I still want to hit a few high points.

As we glance through this list of some of the faithful of old—both men and women are mentioned and non-Hebrews are included. I think it is important to note that this exclusive-club is not as exclusive as we might expect.

Abel put feet on his faith by offering a proper sacrifice—the sacrifice required by God—and he was declared righteous by God.

Enoch had great faith in God. He was a friend to God. He was exceptional—if you look at the 5th chapter of Genesis, you will see an accounting of many men. Who was born, who their children were and how long they lived. Over and over again we read, “...and he died.” “...and he died.” “...and he died.” but not Enoch. Seems that he was translated directly from this place to the presence of God without dying. He put feet on his faith literally—by walking with God.

God recognized Noah as a righteous man in a wicked world. Noah put feet on his faith by building a boat that was too big to move where there was no water.

Abram was also a man of faith. Men—can you imagine going home and telling your wife that God told you to pick up stakes and move and that you've sold the house and that your family is leaving first thing in the morning—destination unknown? Patriarchal society or not, I'll bet he heard a word or two when he made that announcement. Abraham literally put feet on his faith as they journeyed forth and he received the promise of fathering God's chosen nation.

Sarah is also listed among the faithful. Sarah, by faith, accepted God's promise of a child after her child-bearing years were over.

Abraham's reward was being the father of God's nation—hers was being the mother of God's chosen people.

In the 13th verse there is a bit of commentary on the lives of the elders, the people of God. Both before and after the flood, they lived in faith and they died in faith. They didn't see the end-result of their faith--had not yet received the things promised. They were not yet a nation as “numerous as the stars in the sky.” Yet, by faith they believed in saw the end-result.

They were living for that which could not be seen and they were confessing with their mouths that which had not yet happened. They were putting feet on their faith as they walked in trust and knowledge that they were God's people. They were not living in the promised land—yet they looked forward to that place by faith.

In the 20th verse the roll-call continues. Isaac blessed Jacob and Esau with respect to the future—not just their future but the futures of their children and grandchildren. Issac had faith that God would honor his promises.

Jacob faithfully blessed Joseph's sons instead of those of his older sons—establishing the line of the chosen people and the line of the Savior to come. Again—looking to the physical and spiritual future.

Even as he died in Egypt, Joseph was certain that there was a promised land and certain that his people would inherit it. He gave strict orders that they take his bones when they went. By faith he saw the exodus to come.

The parents of Moses showed their faith when they hid him from Pharoah and ultimately placed him in a reed basket—setting him upon the waters. Not only were they rewarded because he lived—they were rewarded by the continued life of their people and their exodus to the promised land.

Only by faith and belief in his people could Moses have refused all that he had been given as a son of Pharoah. He gave that up to be counted with his people. His faith was ultimately rewarded and his people were delivered from slavery. He was also rewarded with a similar status as Enoch—he was God's friend.

The author mentions one after the other, but let me point out one more. Rahab.

Rahab was not a Hebrew and she was a woman—not a very righteous woman at that. She is often described as a madam or a harlot—though the Hebrew word can also just mean an innkeeper. Out of desperation and with a very immature faith in God's ability to deliver her—she aided the spies who were seeking to destroy Jericho under Joshua. What was her reward? She was accepted by the Israelites and taken in by them. Many scholars believe that the Rahab listed in the genealogy of Jesus is this same woman. Saved from destruction, accepted by the people of God, and a part of the Christian tradition—by faith.

The author points out others who were faithful and yet did not yet receive that which was promised. He argues that faith is still a worthy exercise—even more so because that **ULTIMATE promise has been given. Israel has become the way of salvation through her son—Jesus of Nazareth—the ultimate object of their faith.**

Faith in God is still a worthy exercise. Through Jesus the Christ, all the benefits of old are still granted by God to those who have faith.

Like Abel, we can be declared righteous by God. Like Enoch, we can be God's friend and find life that never ends. Like Noah, we can see our families delivered from death. Like Abraham, God will guide us to a promised land far greater than any in Palestine. Like Joseph, we can be certain of our future in the land promised to us. Like Moses, we can be delivered by the hand of God

These things and more are available to us through faith. Verses 39 and 40: *These all, having had testimony given to them through their faith, didn't receive the promise, God having provided some better thing concerning us, so that apart from us they should not be made perfect.*

Through faith in Christ—we are included in this glorious list of the faithful. They were ultimately perfected by their faith in God—their promises and rewards came to them at the end of their lives. Through Christ, we are already made perfect in the eyes of God—our promise (and their promise) has been received.