**Hebrews 11 – No 1 Verses 1 to 7 What we hope for**

This week we start our brief look at one of the great chapters in the Bible. Often referred to as the ‘Hall of Faith’ it sweeps us through a glorious panorama of God’s people of faith in the Old Testament. It challenges us to faithful service to God as we read about the testimonies from the lives of these ancient saints. The writer (still not known) challenges his hearers to live lives of faith according to the pattern seen in those who were faithful to God in their earthly lives.

The phrase ‘by faith’ is used repeatedly throughout the chapter – by using it so often the author is driving home the centrality of a life of faith for the people of God. That’s why it’s so important for us because our lives are lived by faith and not by sight (2 Corinthians 5:7) so this chapter is a blueprint for how we live. His other literary skill is to cite a whole range of people, all of whom had their faults, but who tried to live God’s way. In each case the author gives us

1. The words ‘by faith’
2. The name of the person who by his or her own faith or the faith of another is being used as an example.
3. The action or event by which faith is expressed
4. The positive outcome

*(NIV Application Commentary – Hebrews – George Guthrie)*

1. It’s not surprising the author starts with a definition of faith.

Try reading it through together a couple of times.(Ch 11:1)

Are you completely happy with it? Are there phrases you find difficult

Would you define your faith as ‘sure’ and ‘certain’?

How can be sure about hope when that hope is in the future and yet to be experienced?

How can you be certain about something you cannot see?

Are we influenced by 21st century scientific views about what can be verified?

One translation of this verse is ‘Now faith is the resolute confidence … ‘. That confidence is based on the promises of God even though all the OT characters did not see the greatest fulfilment of God’s promises – the life, death and resurrection of Jesus. Sometimes reality cannot be seen because it is either in the spiritual realm or is yet to happen.

1. Do we base our lives too much on daily or earthly realities (i.e. things we really can see and are certain about) rather than on the promises of God?

The ‘ancients’ had much less to go on than we do but are commended for their faith. (v2)

Would we be commended or are we too self-sufficient?

The example given here is that of creation (v3) – he wants us to grasp the idea of the ‘reality of the invisible’. We weren’t there when it happened but we believe that God created the universe by his word and out of nothing. So, we can look at the created order and marvel at its beauty and complexity. This gives us confidence in God although we didn’t see him do it – we worship the God of creation BY FAITH.

1. The very fact that we can see God’s wonderful creation today in both its beauty and its wonderful order and pattern should convince us that God is the author of creation. This idea is assumed by the writers of the Bible (e.g. Ephesians 3:9).

Does the creation give us faith in the unseen – do we actually believe that God made the heavens and the earth (I would advise against a discussion on your views on the ‘days’ of creation). Do we believe he is still sustaining the world that he made?

The writer then launches into his list of the people of faith. We start with Abel – there’s much more about Cain than Abel in Genesis 4 but we know he was commended for giving a better sacrifice than his brother Cain. Why it was better is that his offering was described as being from ‘the fat portions from some of the firstborn of his flock’ – the best that he could offer (Genesis 4:4). Cain is portrayed as a man who was not right spiritually (Read Genesis 4:6 & 7)

1. Abel was commended by God and it says that he still speaks today even though he is dead.

What do Abel’s actions say to you?

Cain’s subsequent actions (Abel’s murder) came from the state of his heart and mind.

What does Abel teach us about the connection between our hearts and our actions?

It is quite remarkable that Enoch gets a mention in this ‘Hall of Faith’. We are told that Enoch was taken out of this life, ‘so that he did not experience death’ (v5) (read also Genesis 5:21 to 24). He was commended as ‘one who pleased God’ (v5) – sometimes translated as ‘he brought God pleasure’.

1. It also tells us that those who walk by faith and ‘earnestly seek him’ will be rewarded.

Here is another challenge that suggests that if we are to please God we must ‘believe that he exists’ (v6) and ‘earnestly seek him’.

What does that mean to us today? How do we earnestly seek? BE PRACTICAL – NOT THEORETICAL

In verse 7 we come to a much more familiar character – Noah (Genesis 6:1 to 9:17). Too easily we can reduce Noah’s Ark to a quaint animal story. Noah acted on a divine warning from God. His actions show that he believed in an unseen God who would judge the world because of its wickedness and disobedience (Genesis 6:5 to 8) – Noah acted to save his family and the creation that God had made. He is described as ‘a righteous man, blameless among the people of his time‘ (Genesis 6:9).

1. Noah clearly believed God when he spoke to him – by building his refuge he condemned the world to God’s judgement (v7) and built something that would have surprised his neighbours.

He is said to have ‘holy fear’ – what is it and do we have it?

Do we give God enough time to hear his warnings about the future of our world?

Be specific about what you think God is saying to our world today.

**As we go through this ‘Hall of Faith’ in Hebrews 11**

**why not turn back to the Old Testament**

**and read what each of these people did**

**and why they were commended for their faith**