

## The Reality of Faith

How real would you judge your profession of faith to be? What amount of stress and trial would it stand? How far are you prepared to have your characters prepared for you "by the chastening hand of an all-wise Father? It is comparatively easy for those who are enjoying a time of good health and comparative prosperity to return a confident answer, but what of those who are undergoing a period of strain and trial? Is our anticipation of the promises of God sufficiently real for us to know that nothing can shake our confidence and trust in God, absolutely nothing? From God's point of view - and He has given it to us - there is nothing hesitant or doubtful about the rewards He has promised to those who show unswerving faith in Him, and equally positive is the condemnation upon those who lack this essential quality.

This faith is far more than a conviction of the coming Kingdom, This faith includes a complete trust in the over-riding wisdom and love of an omnipotent and all-wise Father who we know cannot make any errors of judgment in His calling or in the preparation of His family. These men and women whose names are listed here in this chapter we have read together are living examples of men and women who have pleased God by their faith and who will be eternally rewarded as a consequence. God has selected their names as examples to us. Because of their faith and trust in Him they were able sincerely and genuinely to rejoice in all their tribulations. Their faith did not lead them to hope that their trials would be removed, their pains lessened, their problems solved, their wishes granted. It did enable them each one to trust completely in the judgment of God.

This chapter 11 of the epistle to the Hebrews has its basis in the last few verses of chapter 10. If you will go back to verse 34 you will see the words which led the apostle, under the Spirit guidance, to list these names to illustrate his meaning. "For ye had compassion of me in my bonds, and took joyfully the spoiling of your goods, knowing in yourselves that ye have in heaven a better and an enduring substance," That is the basis of the chapter - to take joyfully present trials, understanding the reality of the coming reward. "Cast not away therefore your confidence, which hath great recompense of reward. For 'ye have-need of patience, that, after ye have done the will of God, ye might receive the promise. For yet a little while, and he that shall come will come, and will not tarry- Now the just shall live by faith; but if any man draw back, my soul shall have no pleasure in him. But we are not of them who draw back unto perdition: but of them that believe - that have faith - to the saving of the soul."

Then follow those practical examples of what Paul is talking about. They are taken from the earliest days of Gods purpose, as Abel, down to the generation of the apostle himself, and Paul could well have added his own name to the list. The works of faith shown by these men and women do not follow any pattern or sameness but are, we believe deliberately, widely diverse. Of one, the building of a boat on dry land requiring meeting mockery and scorn with perseverance and faith; another, the rejection of a position of luxury and security and riches, showing a real appreciation of the riches of the reward promised. Marching round the walls of an armed city and merely blowing a trumpet to defeat it; and so on. Different examples of what is meant by stamina of faith. The acts differed, but the motive behind them was the same - complete and unqualified belief of and trust in God, without any reservations.

Have we got this faith? If we have, the Kingdom and its glory will be ours. If we have not, then God has no pleasure in our walk before Him.

Let us go further. When there was nothing apparently to justify their confidence,

when all the facts and appearances of the circumstances were against it, they still trusted. It seems as if God deliberately arranged the circumstances surrounding the act of faith, requiring it to be of additional positiveness. And this is the faith that pleases Him. In the majority of cases listed these acts of faith were performed at the cost of much suffering and often loss of life - faithful unto death, Abel was murdered. We have only "to mention the name of Abraham to call to mind the quality of his faith. When there were no apparent grounds in continue in hope, nothing to justify his confidence, he still held it. A miracle was required; he believed God would perform the miracle. Is not that just our position? Ordinary men and women who have become associated with the gospel of salvation, and God has promised a share with Christ in His kingdom. It seems incredible that we .could ever attain- the kingdom and glory, and yet this is the promise and God insists on seeing within our hearts a genuine belief and conviction that with His help we shall be there to share the kingdom with all our brethren and sisters and the worthies of all ages.

God did not take the strain from Noah for very many years. Year after year he preached and worked, and he did not make a convert outside of his own sons and their wives. The scorn and ridicule is, passed over in just a few verses as the fact of his faith is set out. The generation of Noah is held to be similar to that of our own, and so we preach, so we teach as we work, with seemingly such a very little effect. Halls are hired; brethren and sisters travel long distances, and then wait hopefully; bills are distributed, sandwich-boards carried, much, work is done, seemingly to" no effect. If only we could see the judgment "that is being passed upon our efforts by God, judgment upon these acts of faith as we carry out the will of the gospel. Truly the day did come when Noah was vindicated but it was not for very many years; and the day will come when our faith will be likewise justified.

The name of Sarah is added to this list of heroes and heroines. Her intense longing for a son and heir through whom the promises were to come had be tin encouraged by the words of the angel, yet G9d delayed their fulfilment. A miracle was needed, Isaac truly had to be a gift from God, and this faithful couple lived, waited, worked and trusted.

Could Moses have illustrated his conviction of the future in any better way than by so totalling, rejecting the present? All the wealth of Egypt was offered him but he deliberately chose the association of the slaves of Israel. Read again verse 24: "By faith Moses, when he was come to years, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter." Is there an analogy there which we can particularly address to our younger brethren and sisters? "When he was come to years". Until such time he had been trained by his mother, living with Pharaoh's daughter. The test came when he was required to exercise his own judgment, when none could say: "Do this" or "Do that". Is it not so with our young ones? We train them at home; the Sunday School adds its weight upon their learning, and then the day comes when the strains and temptations of the position are placed in front of them. What will they choose?

- The world with its allurements? The attainment of ambitions, of aims?
- The attractiveness of the tinsel and glitter or the association and the discipline of the meetings?
- The association of daily separation?

What an example Moses is here. "When he was come to years, he refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter; choosing rather to suffer affliction with the people of God than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season; esteeming the reproach of Christ greater riches than 'the treasures in Egypt, for he had respect unto the recompense of the reward. "

"By faith he forsook Egypt, not fearing the wrath of the king: for he endured, as seeing him who is invisible." And that is required of us. We must see the future which is invisible, if we would have the endurance to stand the trials and temptations of the present. Moses could have compromised. No doubt he could have kept one foot in his "foster mother's" house, who brought him up, and one with the Israel of God, but that would have been totally unacceptable to God. No, he had faith in the recompense of the reward, and this faith did not allow for weakness or compromise.

God's estimate of these men and women, of all those others showing similar faith, is that the world is not worthy of their presence. But the day will come when it will be cleansed and purged and made worthy for them to inherit and enjoy for the endless ages of eternity. Then Paul adds a general reference to those saints who are martyred for their faith, from Daniel, through to the Christian era. Unknown to us by name but each one individually known to

God, loved and remembered by Him with a memory that cannot fail, that will ensure for each one that better resurrection. They will inherit and inhabit the coming Kingdom. Nothing seemed more unlikely to their generation than that these men and women were the future rulers of the earth. It seemed ridiculous to the ears and eyes of those who knew them as seemingly ordinary people, for those who had no faith and who rejected God. And so it is with all generations among whom the sons and daughters of God have lived out their probations, even as it is today; yet the Word of God to us is emphatically reassuring. Verse 39; "And these all, having obtained a good report through faith, received not the promise-. God having provided some better thing for us, that they without us should not be made perfect." There is this picture of the gathering together of the completed family; God as the Father, Jesus the elder brother, and this mass of faithful worthies who inherit His kingdom.

So we come to our own generation, to ourselves in particular, we today are the sons and daughters of God in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation, one like that of Noah's time, a generation that is utterly without faith. Not satisfied with disbelieving the promises of God, they now even deny His existence. "He that cometh to God must believe that he is." But our lectures appealing: "Can we believe that God exists?" fall today on deaf ears. The urgent command to those called to be His children is to place this complete and implicit confidence and trust in God. We are without excuse, we have the benefit of the completed revelation of His purpose. It is simple and direct in its facts and in its promises. It is the future that matters, not the present. These days are opportunities for demonstrating our conviction and faith in God. We are being daily prepared by God to that end. He places upon each one of us circumstances seemingly natural that will test and strain the quality of this faith. It comes in so different ways as it did to these men; some in prolonged illness that is demanded by God they should rise above, seeing the time which is coming when they shall "run and not be weary," shall "walk and not faint," shall "mount up with wings as eagles." God has promised us that. Shall we now complain that our limbs are restricted of movement? God demands to see in our hearts an understanding faith in His promises.

This is so in every respect in regard to the strain and trials that are placed upon us. The past should give us grounds for this confidence. Just as chapter 10 is the basis for this list of examples so we think the opening verses of chapter 12 provide the exhortation; "Wherefore seeing we also are compassed about with so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which doth so easily beset us, and let us run with patience the race that is set before us

In verse 16 we have an example of a man who refused to put his faith in the future. He wanted present satisfaction: "Lest there be any fornicator, or profane person, as Esau, who for one morsel of meat sold his birthright." And then comes the exhortation, verse 28, 'therefore we receiving a kingdom which cannot be moved, let us have grace whereby we may serve God acceptably with reverence and godly fear.'

And that is what God, looking down from the height of heaven, desires to see in the daily walk of each one of us: a clear understanding and appreciation of the liberality of our calling. Today our lives seem ordinary and uneventful yet they are truly working out for each one of us that "far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory."

A trial comes; and it can come in so many ways. Our pride is hurt; what we thought we were, others do not see and we hear sharp words that cut us in pride. Then God watches our heart. Are we going to resent the criticism? Are we going to go down under it, or, worse still try to hit back? God watches the strain. Is there genuine humility in us, for the coming kings must be humble. It is up to us. If we resent it in any shape or form God cannot take us into His Kingdom. Pain comes to our limbs; our movements are restricted. God watches and waits and waits and sees. Does He see a heart lifted up to praise and thank Him as faith shows the way to endure?

Or does He hear within the heart: "It is all right for him (the speaker) he does not know the pain or the patience that is needed." Then so often, and more often, we are denied our wishes. The things we think we would like to have, our ambitions, remain unsatisfied. Does God really care? A broken heart searches for the love of God in breaking it. Then comes the promise: "set not your affection on things on the earth. Seek ye first (in faith) the kingdom of God and all these things shall be added unto you." And this will fulfil every possible dream and longing.

To some truly come those heavier blows that test the faith of the son or daughter seemingly to its limit, as they came to Job or at times they, must have come to Paul. Faith is not faith until it has been tested and strained, strained to such limits that God alone knows His son or daughter can take. To where shall we turn? "Whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom he receiveth." So today, by way of exhortation, having read the chapter and thought upon it, are we able to add our names to this list of worthies? By refusing all the temptations offered us by the world we can each one demonstrate the faith of Moses. By refusing to be impatient under trial we can

Share the faith of Abraham. Each one of these worthies is a working example to each of us. Although there is nothing dramatic or apparently noteworthy in our daily lives, yet they do exhibit to God the quality of our individual faith. Tears and a heavy heart must not be characteristic of our way of life. Grief and pain must be overcome by faith that enables confidence in God to rise as praise from the heart.

We must never question or doubt the method God employs to prepare us for faith in His Kingdom, for God alone knows our future.

So we look now from Eden to Patmos, from Abel to John in tribulation, and we ask ourselves, Have I this same quality of complete trust? And if we want further encouragement, in a moment we shall take the cloth away, leaving the bread and the wine before us. Was there a greater quality of faith shown than that exhibited by Jesus? God required in him the greatest measure of suffering it was possible for the human frame to endure, we look on Jesus, and are comparatively, to the limit of our

abilities, prepared to share his sufferings, merely because we see the future in the coming Kingdom stretching before us with all its promised blessings and rewards. Please God we shall be able to share it with Abraham, with Moses, with those faithful" worthies, with Christ; with bodies energised by Spirit power, to go forth into the future with them, because we, like them, had faith in God and in His purpose.  
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