

Title: The Nature and Power of Faith

Scripture Reading: Hebrew 11:1-6

Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen. For by it the elders obtained a good report. Through faith we understand that the worlds were framed by the word of God, so that things which are seen were not made of things which do appear. By faith Abel offered unto God a more excellent sacrifice than Cain, by which he obtained witness that he was righteous, God testifying of his gifts: and by it he being dead yet speaketh. By faith Enoch was translated that he should not see death; and was not found, because God had translated him: for before his translation he had this testimony, that he pleased God. But without faith it is impossible to please

him: for he that cometh to God must believe that he is, and that he is a rewarded of them that diligently seek him.

Hebrew 11 is a series of Old Testament examples of those who are faithful in difficult situations. They are meant to encourage the original readers (the Christians in the first century) and believers of every age to remain faithful no matter what physical circumstances may confront them. For the pastor two years we have lived in very difficult condition. So we can learn from all these Old Testament examples to remain faithful in whatever state we are in. Believers start in faith, continue in faith, and die in faith. It is not how well you begin but how well you end. I thank God that all of us begin in faith; if not, we will not be here today. But what matters most is how we end. A faithful end is the evidence of a true beginning, a true

faith. The author of Hebrews evaluates the believer's life from its faithful conclusion as well as its faith beginning. They are not only the initial professor of faith but live lives of faith in the Old Testament. Paul the writer of Hebrews exhorts us to be likewise. This morning I want to encourage you to be faithful in the midst of the difficult COVID-19 situation. I want to encourage you not just to begin in faith but let's end our lives in faith too which is the more important part. I want to encourage you to not just start in faith, but continue in faith and one day die in faith. What can we learn from this portion of Scripture?

1. The Nature of Faith

"Faith, therefore, is the substance of things waited for, the evidence of things not seen. For by it the elders obtained a good report."

Hebrews 11:1-2 JUB

Hebrew 11:1 is not a theological definition of faith, but a picture of the practical outworking of faith. It is a picture of the lives of these names mentioned in Hebrew 11 and the outworking of their faith. The idea here is things not yet experienced, but only hoped for, become real to us by faith. When my Daughter Joy gives us the good news that she is pregnant I sent her a congratulatory message of Celebration. She then starts to make negative comments that maybe it is a false alarm or the baby will not be whole or they may be some defects. I declare in faith that the baby will be fine. Faith is believing that joy's baby will be whole in the womb without defects. I don't see the evidence yet. It will take 8 months for me to see the result. But I have faith. Well, in her first visitation to the gynecologist recently, the baby is confirmed and doing fine in the womb. Actually as of today Joy is already manifesting morning

sickness. Jan has just changed her career from working in the Ministry of Education to Enterprise Singapore, both, government agencies. This February, Jan supposedly is to receive her long service bonus of \$10,000 if she stayed with MOE. But Enterprise Singapore is also a government agency. So Jan asked Pastor Lily to pray for her that MOE will accept that she is moving from one government agency to another and thus still maintain her long-term service record. MOE was unwilling to do so because they wanted her to stay with MOE. Anyway she is prepared to lose her long-term service record as well as her \$10,000 bonus. In faith she asked Pastor Lily to pray. Then Pastor Lily said, she will pray but she must honor God with her substance. Jan agreed. Talking about quick answer to prayer, Pastor Lily just prayed in faith and immediately the following day, we received this message from her: 'Thanks for praying guys! My offer went through and I can be

placed on the movement scheme (MOE to Enterprise Singapore). I won't be losing my bonus. They will transfer her 5 years' experience in MOE into her present company. Her long-term service record remains intact. Because of Jan's preserving in faith, God topped the icing in her cake. She will receive extra 3 days annual leave plus another \$500 dollars. That is God. Always love to give you some extra when you exercise your faith. Of course she will honor God with her substance because she is scared to break promises with God. Both these examples of my two children are not about the definition of Faith but the practical outworking of faith. So faith is the substance, the ground, the confidence. From the OT the primary idea of their faith is "faithfulness" or "trustworthy." There is faithfulness and trustworthy on the part of the person exercising faith. This is the opposite of apostasy. I will come to this point later in the sermon. There is also the

elements is faithfulness and trustworthy on the part of God. Faith is a human response to God's faithfulness and His promise. We trust His trustworthiness, not our own. His character is the key. The Greek term for "faith" (*pistis*) is translated by three English terms: "faith," "belief," and "trust."

Faith denotes "an attitude of patient and confident waiting for something, a state of confident expectation" (i.e., hope). For instance I believe there is a heaven. I have an attitude of patient and confident waiting for heaven. I am in a state of confident expectation. 72% of American believe in Heaven. So already one third of the population of the world doesn't believe there is a heaven. Worse still only 58% of American believe there is a hell. It is scary that almost 50% of the people don't believe in hell because they don't want to be there. By not believing in hell doesn't mean there is no hell. All the more by not believing, it

puts you in dangerous ground. It takes faith to believe there is a heaven. Have you seen heaven? No. Do you believe there is a heaven? Yes. That is faith. Faith is the substance of things hoped for. Do you know that we have a happy future? The Christian faith has a bright outlook towards the future. We have a optimistic future that is not dependent on luck, favorable circumstances or even our natural endowment. But we have a bright future because of Christ's humanity (he came down from heaven), God's character (the implicit goodness of God) and the element in bringing about this wonderful future is because of His choice (dying at the Cross). In the early days of persecution they brought a humble Christian before the judges. He told them that nothing they could do could shake him because he believed that, if he was true to God, God would be true to him. "Do you really think," asked the judge, "that the like of you will go

to God and his glory?" "I do not think," said the man, "I know." At one time John Bunyan (the writer of Pilgrim Progress) was tortured by uncertainty. "Everyone doth think his own Religion rightest," he said, "both Jews and Moors and Pagans; and how if all our Faith and Christ and Scriptures should be but a 'Think so' too?" But when the light broke, he ran out crying, "Now I know! I know!" The Christian faith is a hope that has turned to certainty. Theophilus illustrates thus: the resurrection has not yet taken place, but faith substantiates it in our souls.

Heaven is one of those "things not seen".

Therefore I live in:

- a. hope in the present and future acts of God and
- b. confidence in the spiritual promises of God **(cf. Heb. 10:23)**

c. My worldview is guided by faith. I know that this world is not my home. I am just a passing by. I have a mansion laid up somewhere beyond the blue sky. This worldview guides my daily decisions, not circumstances, materialism or self-centeredness.

Physical reality is subservient (subordinates, excessively submissive) to the unseen spiritual reality. **Hebrew 11:3 says,** 'Through faith we understand that the worlds were framed by the word of God, so that things which are seen were not made of things which do appear.'. Physical reality is known by the five senses, and is not eternal, but fleeting. True eternal reality is unseen and; therefore, must be held by faith, not sight. However, it is so real and true to believers that it controls and demands their priorities. Heaven is so real that it controls and demands my priorities.

This is how all the Old Testament heroes lived.

Hebrews 11:2 says, 'For by it the elders obtain a good report'. The elders here are the people of old, our ancestors. They were the great people who lived in the past. Hebrew 11 lists down some of these great people. Many translations put it as these people, by faith, obtained a good testimony, received approval, won God's approval, are acknowledged and became a testimony.

Going back to heaven and faith. **Hebrew 11:3 says,** 'Through faith we understand that the worlds were framed by the word of God, so that things which are seen were not made of things who do appear. Wow. This world was framed by the 'word of God'. The phrase the 'word of God' is not the Greek term logos but rhema, which is the spoken word. This then refers to the creation by 'fiat', the spoken word. **Psalms 33:6, 9**

says, 'By the word of the LORD were the heavens made; And all the host of them by the breath of his mouth. For he spake, and it was done. He commanded and it stood fast.' From **Hebrew 12:2** we know that the logos of God was the Father's agent of creation. So Jesus was God's agent of creation. In the beginning was the Word and the Word was with God and the Word was God. The Word brings the heavens into existence. So it means that the world was spoken into existence. This does not reject scientific research, but puts it within a faith perspective. My son-in-law is quite a brilliant guy. He studied in the top 5 University in the World and he was valedictorian of the cohort he was enrolled in. But he had a hard time accepting the creation story of Genesis 1. But we as believers allow science to discover the mechanisms of the creator order but affirm ultimacy to God alone. Two of the greatest minds that ever lived is Isaac Newton and

Albert Einstein. Isaac Newton theory of Gravity and Albert Einstein theory of relativity were the foundation upon which astronomers are still discovering the Cosmic World. Yet both believe in God. To them their scientific discovery only affirm the ultimacy to God alone.

2. The Apostasy of Faith

In the second point, I want to go back to a previous statement. From the OT the primary idea of their faith is "faithfulness" or "trustworthy." This is the opposite of apostasy. The Greek term for "faith" (*pistis*) is translated by three English terms: "faith," "belief," and "trust." The antonym for faith is unbelief. The bible says whatsoever that is not of faith is sin. The children of Israel entered not the Promised Land but died in the 40 years of wandering because of unbelief. Again faith is the opposite of apostasy. Unbelief, sin, apostasy

are synonymous. A bible commentator gives the opposite of faith which is apostasy found in 2 Peter 2 and Jude. 2 Peter 2 and Jude are the last books of the bible pointing to the end times period. There is so much unbelief, sin and apostasy in the last days.

The opposite of faith in Hebrew 11 is apostasy. What is Apostasy? It is a total desertion of or departure from one's religion, principles, party, cause, etc. Hebrew 11 was written to warn us against apostasy. If you are not living in faith you are living in apostasy. How are apostasy manifested and who manifest apostasy? There are three groups of people mentioned in **2 Peter 3 and Jude**.

First these are leaders of the church
There are false prophet - a very good example is Quiboloy. He claims to be the Son of God. Recently he has been placed under FBI watchlist for sex trafficking,

money laundering and others. It is said that he sex trafficked underage girls. It is also said that every night girls are sent to his room and they are told it is an honor to serve the Son of God. There is the possibility of him being extradited to America. The sentence is lifetime imprisonment. You have to be very bad to be under FBI watchlist. Yet when questioned he replied being persecuted is part and parcel of being a Son of God. Quiboloy had been a shooting star for the past 20 years and his followers are in the millions. I believe he started in faith but he is not ending in faith. These are number one on God's list of apostates because they lead millions astray. One of their characteristics is that they lived among the people of faith.

Then there are the false teachers - they teach wrong doctrine. Their captions are deceiving. They claimed to be the way as Jesus is the Way the Truth the Life. They

claimed their ways are the ways of holiness. Their emphasis is Jesus but left out God the Father, God the Holy Spirit. So you are Baptized in Jesus' name only. This is totally unbiblical because Jesus himself tells us to baptize people in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Ghost. Their doctrine are half truth. Heresy are mostly half-truth. Again these teachers are leaders of the church. Their characteristics is they are not only living among the people but they bring in damnable heresies, they deny that Jesus had paid for their sins and purchased them with His blood. They ever do these secretly and deceived even the elect. How do you identify these false teachers that brings in heresies? Very simple. By their fruit you shall know them. You look at their fruits and you can immediately know what they are made of. They are so full of themselves. They will tell you, you can do anything in the church because we are in the age of Grace.

And many follow their harmful evil way. I mean how many followers has Quiboloy. They are usually the biggest church in their cities.

Other characteristics are they are covetous and with fictitious and deceptive words they swindled from the people. The fruits of their works are covetous for money, engage in fleshing pleasure and having the pride of life (they are so full of themselves).

The third group of people are called the world of the ungodly. The majority of us fall into this category. They lived in the cities and their cities are called the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah. What is their characteristics? They lived ungodly lives. Their conversations are filthy. Their works are ungodly deeds. They walk in the flesh and lusted after uncleanness. They despised government control. A group of teenagers

beat up a bus driver because they were told by the driver to put on their masks. They want freedom and nobody should tell them how to live and what to do. This is the very characteristics of the last days children. The bible is very clear that we have to submit to government as much as possible unless they ask you to deny Christ. Even Jesus paid taxes (obeyed the government) when he was asked to. He took it from the mouth of a fish. The only time he called a ruler a fox was because Herod hindered the work of God. Herod beheaded John the Baptist and put his head on a platter. He claimed to be the leader of the Jewish people by building the Jerusalem temple but actually was responsible for constantly plotting against God's people. He even killed James, the brother of John when the church was undergoing a great revival in the book of Acts. The point is you don't see the main content of Jesus' message is against the government, but the Gospel message.

There was one time I was really critical of my government because I felt that they have abused their power by giving problem to the opposition party and implement policies without seeking our approval. It became so bad that I was constantly speaking against the government until Pastor Lily rebuked me and told me we are called to submit to the authority above us.

What are the characteristics of the third group of people?

2 Peter 2:14 says, 'They are presumptuous, self-willed. They have eyes full of adultery, and that cannot cease from sin; beguiling unstable souls: an heart they have exercised with covetous practices; cursed children:"

Their eyes are always on the lookout for women whom they commit adultery with. They are always on the lookout for the

opportunities to sin. Pastor Lily and I once stayed in a friend's house when we were abroad on a holiday. We were invited to stay with her. But her husband wasn't happy at all. So he got into a big fight with our friend. I had to pacify him by bringing him out for shopping. He wanted me to buy cigarettes for him in the shopping mall. But I noticed something about him. His eyes was roving, moving around. Then his eyes caught a young lady and started to look at her lustfully and was moving towards her. He was literally following her in the supermarket. He is described 2 Peters 2:14, 'they have eyes full of adultery and cannot cease from sin.',

But I believe you are not anyone of the 3 groups I have just described. I choose to believe you are people of faith. The common characteristics of these three groups of people is they are not people of

faith. They are filled with unbelief, self-centeredness.

3. The Power of Faith that form Characters

Faith controls the life of a believer. Faith engages his attention. Faith calls for his energies. Faith molds his habits. Faith directs his affections. This Christian hope is such that it dictates a man's conduct. He lives in it and he dies in it; and it is the possession of it which makes him act as he does. The conviction and the confidence which make his character is grounded by faith. This truth receives splendid illustrations in the lives of saints who lived in the Old Testament. They trusted in a Savior who was yet only hoped for and in a sacrifice for sin 'not seen'. Although they lived so very long ago, and although the truth which they rested on was still but imperfectly developed, yet theirs was saving

faith and it was vigorous, valiant and victorious.

Paul now turns his attention to find the first historical illustrations of faith.

Firstly it was the faith that formed the character of Abel

Hebrew 11:4, 'By faith Abel offered unto God a more excellent sacrifice than Cain, by which he obtained witness that he was righteous, God testifying of his gifts: and by it he being dead yet speaketh.'

Some says Abel was accepted because his materials were more valuable and were carefully selected. Cain on the other hand presented an offering of vegetables, taking the first that came to his hand; while Abel offered an animal sacrifice, and the choicest which his flock could supply. Others judge that Abel's sacrifice was 'more excellent'

because of the living faith in which it was expressed. He worshipped in spirit and in truth, whereas Cain's offering was that of a formalist and a hypocrite. But the true view must go deeper than either of these two answers. Abel's sacrifice was better, not merely because he brought it in faith, but because his faith led him to select an offering which was in itself more appropriate than that of Cain. He was told the way of the offering and he in faith he followed the instruction. So 'The LORD had respect unto Abel'. His offering, we may presume was an act of faith resting upon the Divine Testimony regarding 'the seed of the woman' and the necessity of atonement by blood. But Cain, in presenting only fruit, declared thereby his disbelief in the Gospel promise and his repudiation of the appointed way of salvation. So, God bore visible witness to Abel (maybe fire came down and consume the sacrifice) and declared 'that he was righteous'. Indeed

Abel still speaks to the whole church by his faith. He teaches us that we can only approach God through the propitiation of Christ, and that in [leading the one propitiation we must bring also the sacrifice of a broken spirit. The Power of faith formed the character of Abel: he was obedient, he followed instruction. He worshipped God in Spirit and in truth and he accepted the way of salvation through Christ.

Secondly, it was faith that formed the character of Enoch

Hebrew 11:5-6 'By faith Enoch was translated that he should not see death; and was not found, because God had translated him: for before his translation he had this testimony, that he pleased God.'

There was a total contrast between the end of Abel's earthly life and that of Enoch. For Abel it was a melancholy monotone, which

declares 'And he died'. On the other hand sweet words was used regarding Enoch's removal: 'He was not, for God took him.' Here we have a statement regarding Enoch's translation: his faith was the reason he was transported to heaven without tasting death. His wonderful removal was the reward of his singularly holy life, and that, in turn, was the fruit of his faith. The fruit of Enoch's faith was his holy life. The power of faith from Enoch's holy character. Enoch's translation is said to have taken place in consequence of the peculiar favor of God. Scripture bears witness to him 'that he had been well-pleasing unto God.' Before it informs us of his glorification. It is evident that none but a believer can obtain the Divine favor. The spring of holiness is always faith. Enoch, like Abel, had met the unseen Jehovah over a bleeding sacrifice. He had lived under a sense of the Divine presence. He had confided in God, and cultivated congeniality (likeability, niceness,

relationship) with him. He had been a witness to a sensuous and ungodly world. But he overcome the ungodly world by Faith. His faith is similar to that of Moses: choosing rather to suffer with the people of God than to enjoy the pleasure of sin for a season.

4. No Faith, no Divine pleasure.

But without faith it is impossible to please him: for he that cometh to God must believe that he is, and that he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him.'

I asked Pastor Lily recently. I said, 'Dear, is it true that I only need faith to go to heaven? She replied, 'Yes, not works.' This is a powerful statement to ponder. How does one go to heaven? By faith or by works? It is by Faith.

Here the Apostle Paul mentioned two indispensable articles of faith regarding God. Firstly, his being. To believe in God is to be convinced of a truth 'not seen' and made evident only by revelation. Secondly, his benevolence. To believe in God as 'a Rewarder' is to cherish 'the confidence of things hoped for.

The writer to the Hebrews didn't say that it is *difficult* to please God without faith. He said that it is **impossible**. Thomas Watson comments that: Unbelief is the root of apostasy. 'an evil heart of unbelief in departing from the living God'. What is the reason those who seemed once zealous—now despise God, and leave God? I think of two persons: Joshua Harris and John Piper's son, Abraham Piper. Abraham Piper said, 'Nobody believes in a literal hell. He also said it is weird to make kids read the bible. Joshua Harris on the other hand declared that he has divorced his wife and is leaving

Christianity. Why? Is it not their unbelief? They believed not that God is, and that He is a rewarder of those who diligently seek him. Infidelity is the cause of apostasy. In the Greek, 'apistia' (unbelief) leads to 'apostasia' (apostasy). And if unbelief is the breeder and fomentor of so much sin, then the unbelieving heart must needs be an impure heart.

And to whom did He swear that they would not enter His rest, but to those who were disobedient - refuse to be persuaded and deliberately disobey. So we see that they were not able to enter because of unbelief - literally not believing.

Israel's **unbelief** was reflected in her **disobedience**, and so one can see that faith is clearly related to obedience.

The **psalms** repeatedly address Israel's disobedient, unbelieving heart writing that

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Because (see [Ps 78:21](#) for what he is explaining) they (Israel) **did not believe** in God and **did not trust** in His salvation. ([Ps 78:22](#))

