

Sermon Series on Hebrews

1.

By John Atkinson (May 2000)

Sermon Seven

Hebrews 11

Faith

Outline

In the first address I dealt with the key theme of the sermon recorded in the book of Hebrews - Jesus is incomparably better than all that went before Him. In the second address in this series we looked at the issue of rest in God as a fundamental aspect of true spirituality

We saw how the preacher to the Hebrews stressed that two things keep us from this Sabbath-rest

A Unbelief – the refusal to believe and

A A Hardened Heart – a heart used to refusing God.

In the third address the preacher to the Hebrews looked at Jesus our High Priest in terms of Jesus' submission to His Father, even to death. He called us to enter into God's presence with confidence, because of Jesus our High Priest.

In the fourth section the preacher paused to deal with the problems of stagnation and apostasy.

In the fifth address we looked at Jesus our high Priest in the priestly order of Melchizedek. Last week we asked the question "*Has the New Testament replaced the Old?*" and "*To what extent do we take the instructions in the Old Testament as personal obligations?*" Today I want to deal with the introduction to the great Faith chapter of the sermon to the Hebrews - Hebrews 11

Sermon Series on Hebrews

2.

By John Atkinson (May 2000)

Sermon Seven

Hebrews 11

Faith

Sermon Seven

Faith (**Hebrews 11:1- 40**)

- A. The Meaning of Faith (**11:1-3**)
- B. The Faith of the Men Before the Flood (**11:4-7**)
- C. The Faith of Abraham and Sarah (**11:8-19**)
- D. The Faith of the Patriarchs (**11:20-22**)
- E. The Faith of Moses (**11:23-28**)
- F. The Faith of the Exodus Generation (**11:29-31**)
- G. The Faith of Other Servants of God (**11:32-38**)
- H. The Promise (**11:39-40**)

INTRODUCTION

Why does the preacher address the issue of faith at this point in his address? What brought him to this point? To answer these questions we need to return to the previous section. There are three reminders and four challenges that form the backdrop to the faith discourse of Hebrews 11.

The three reminders are a summary of what has gone before:

1. *We have confidence*
2. *We have a new and living way*
3. *We have a great priest*

The four challenges

1. *Enter the Most Holy Place & draw near to God* **(10:19-22)**
2. *Hold fast to the hope* **(10:23-25)**
3. *Remember the earlier days* **(10:26-35)**
4. *Persevere* **(10:36-39)**

1. Enter and draw near to God (10:19-22)

We have heard how Jesus is our Great High Priest who is superior to the old Levitical priesthood with its rituals and sacrifices. Apply this to your life – enter the Holy of Holies and draw near to God

2. Hold fast to the hope (10:23-25)

Hope is not “chance” but a future certainty. This holding fast is a community effort devoid of the selfish individuality that characterises so much modern society. “Let us

Sermon Series on Hebrews

3.

By John Atkinson (May 2000)

Sermon Seven

Hebrews 11

Faith

consider” is the same verb which is found in Hebrews 3:1 where it is translated “*fix your thoughts on...*” This is a strong statement directed at us to help and encourage one another to love and serve the Lord. What have you done in this regard? Does my life make it easier for others to love and serve God? A major aspect of mutual encouragement is meeting together for worship (God-ward) and fellowship (human relationship)

This link is fundamental to the Hebrew Scriptures and the New Testament. Observe how Jesus uses Rabbi Hillel’s statement to link these two directions of love and service together.

Luke 10:27 And he answered, "YOU SHALL LOVE THE LORD YOUR GOD WITH ALL YOUR HEART, AND WITH ALL YOUR SOUL, AND WITH ALL YOUR STRENGTH, AND WITH ALL YOUR MIND; AND YOUR NEIGHBOR AS YOURSELF."

By the way, the statement this portion of the passage echoes Rabbi Hillel’s teachings, Rabbi Hillel lived just before Jesus and his teachings often feature in Jesus’ statements. He was one of Judaism’s most respected leaders. Many scholars have pointed out, the similarity of between the words in this portion of the sermon to the Hebrews, and the words of Rabbi Hillel recorded in the Talmud. “Let us not give up meeting together” In a tractate of the Talmud devoted to ethical insights and principles, known as “The Chapters of the Fathers” one of Hillel’s teachings is given: Hillel said, “Do not set yourself apart from the community.” So the Jewish believers who were avoiding the meetings were going against the Jewish grain as well as Christian teaching.

It is interesting that Hillel word’s about not separating oneself from the community are immediately followed by, “Do not be sure of yourself until the day of your death.” The preacher to the Hebrews also reflects this as he encourages the believers to help one another “... and all the more as you see the Day approaching...(10:25)

3. Remember the earlier days (10:26-35)

This section has a serious warning. There are consequences to letting go of the lifeline. “Do not throw away your confidence which has great reward” (10:35)

They had lived by faith previously, trusting God while being persecuted. This faith response was not new to them.

4. Persevere (10:36-39)

Sermon Series on Hebrews

4.

By John Atkinson (May 2000)

Sermon Seven

Hebrews 11

Faith

The Christian life is about endurance. This means staying focused even when the pressures of life and the competing calls for our allegiance grow ever stronger we exercise endurance by staying focused.

We do not shrink back as though ashamed of Christ. Jesus sentiments are reflected here;

Mark 8:38 If anyone is ashamed of me and my words in this adulterous and sinful generation, the Son of Man will be ashamed of him when he comes in his Father's glory with the holy angels."

This then, is the back drop to Chapter 11. The preacher could have moved from chapter 10:39

Heb 10:39 But we are not of those who shrink back and are destroyed, but of those who believe and are saved.

directly to 12:1

Heb 12:1..., let us also lay aside every encumbrance and the sin which so easily entangles us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us,

but by way of encouragement he gives faith's curriculum vitae.

Sermon Series on Hebrews

5.

By John Atkinson (May 2000)

Sermon Seven

Hebrews 11

Faith

The chapter is divided up in this way:

Faith (Hebrews 11:1- 40)

- A. The Meaning of Faith (11:1-3)
- B. The Faith of the people before the Flood (11:4-7)
- C. The Faith of Abraham and Sarah (11:8-19)
- D. The Faith of the Patriarchs (11:20-22)
- E. The Faith of Moses (11:23-28)
- F. The Faith of the Exodus Generation (11:29-31)
- G. The Faith of Other Servants of God (11:32-38)
- H. The Promise (11:39-40)

A. The Meaning of Faith (11:1-3)

*Heb 11:1 Now faith is being **sure of** what we hope for **and certain** of what we do not see.*

The preacher gives a descriptive definition of faith as an introduction to the accounts of faith in this chapter. We are told two things in particular about faith. The particular use of words in this verse is significant to our understanding of faith.

The first point is that “*Sure of*” is translated from a word in Greek (*hupostasis*) that has to do with the fundamental nature or structure of something, making something what it is (like a genetic chain). The chain dictates what the living being will look like. In one of its derived meanings is came to mean a “title deed”. Faith is the title deed to property and rights as yet unseen.

Second, the words “Certain of or conviction of” are translated from the Greek (*elegchos*) which is used to refer to the certainty or conviction in the mind of the Judge about a brief or case before him. In the same way faith is like the confidence which comes from acting on a brief which cannot fail in court, but which has still to be actually worked out in the court.

As a practical example he points out that there were many men and women in Old Testament times who had nothing but the promises of God to rest upon without any

Sermon Series on Hebrews

6.

By John Atkinson (May 2000)

Sermon Seven

Hebrews 11

Faith

visible evidence that those promises would be fulfilled. So important were these promises to them that they dictated the course of their lives. They took God at His word and directed their lives accordingly.

What about you?

H. The Promise ([11:39-40](#))

The litany of faith ends with a promise which can only be appropriated by faith. He is a good preacher he leaves his hearers to apply the lesson for themselves to see that what is said is true for their lives as well.

The description of faith has included triumph and prosperity, they conquered kingdoms, administered justice, shut the mouths of lions, quenched the fury of the flames and escaped the edge of the sword, became strong, sent foreign armies packing.

The description also includes being tortured, facing jeers and whipping, chains and imprisonment, stoned and executed by the sword, homeless (wandering in deserts, poor and alienated (goat and sheepskin clothes).

They all – the successful and the suffering gained approval through faith.

Should we be taking more careful notice of this passage in a society which worships success and achievement to the extent that ours does. So many preach a triumphalistic message in which they ignore or sublimate the hard realities of a faithful life for many believers.

Faith is no guarantee of an easy ride. But how could we shrink from being part of this great heritage of faith when we have so much more in Christ than the heroes of the Faith listed in this chapter?