

ST. BARTHOLOMEW'S ANGLICAN PRO-CATHEDRAL IN THE TOWN OF TONAWANDA

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Scripture: Hebrews 12:1-3;

"Faith in Action" part 2 - Hebrews 13:1-25 (part 13 in series)

TRUE FAITH IN ACTION

We now have come to the end of our series on the letter to the Hebrews. This letter is such an important revelation of Who Christ is and Why He came to earth. We have seen how Jesus as the Son of God and the perfect Son of Man is the perfect sacrifice for the sins of mankind. How He is not only a perfect sacrifice but a perfect High Priest, who stands between God and man, representing God to us and representing man before God. Jesus is the perfect go-between. He is why we can be reconciled with God. And therefore, He is superior to the angels, to Moses, to Joshua (as Jesus leads us into a better rest) and presides in a superior tabernacle, a tabernacle not made with hands but one eternal in the heavens! And all of this reflects the New Covenant God has made with mankind – the promise that God's grace and mercy is fully manifested in the Person and Ministry of Jesus Christ and that all can be forgiven and restored into a right relationship with their Father and Creator through Jesus Christ, the Son of God! All of this is set forth in the first ten chapters of Hebrews!

And then we looked at the human response. It will either be one of unbelief or belief. But not just belief in the intellectual sense. No, what we are talking about is faith; an abiding trust in God. And so we heard in **Hebrews 11:1, "Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen."** Moreover, we saw how by faith we understand, please, and are rewarded by God. And if we have true faith, it will be demonstrated in action, in what we do, in how we live our lives. And so the writer of Hebrews, ultimately the Holy Spirit, tells us how we are to put our faith in action.

And last time we looked at Hebrews 12 and we see where we must always start and end whenever we do anything by faith. Let's look there again,

Hebrews 12:1-3: "Therefore, since we have so great a cloud of witnesses surrounding us, 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, fixing our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of faith, who for the joy set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. For consider Him who has endured such hostility by sinners against Himself, so that you will not grow weary and lose heart."

If we are going to put our faith in action, what is the starting and finishing point? Keeping our eyes fixed on Jesus. He is not only our Lord, He is our example. And as we continued reading later in Hebrews 12, we saw some examples of faith in action; and it focused on two things – our relationships with other people and our attitude toward the creation and toward God. Look again at

verses 12-14

Heb. 12:12-17: ***"Therefore, strengthen the hands that are weak and the knees that are feeble, and make straight paths for your feet, so that the limb which is lame may not be put out of joint, but rather be healed.***

14 Pursue peace with all men, and the sanctification without which no one will see the Lord. 15 See to it that no one comes short of the grace of God; that no root of bitterness springing up causes trouble, and by it many be defiled;

So we are to bring good and healing to people, and that means in our relationships with others. We are to pursue peace and reconciliation, and this means being ready to forgive others as well as recognizing that we are all sinners in need of spiritual healing by a Holy God.

Heb. 12:16***that there be no immoral or godless person like Esau, who sold his own birthright for a single meal.***

We are not to be ruled by our senses or our flesh. And finally toward God we are not only to fear the Lord in holy awe and reverence but we are to show gratitude. **28*****Therefore, since we receive a kingdom which cannot be shaken, let us show gratitude, by which we may offer to God an acceptable service with reverence and awe; 29 for our God is a consuming fire."***

An attitude of faith is an attitude of gratitude. And we show this attitude in giving of ourselves, don't we? And the giving of ourselves is really the key way we show love, right? God's love is agape-love and it is unconditional; and the truth about unconditional love is that it simply gives of itself. That is the nature of true love. It is the nature of the One True God. It is what Jesus demonstrated time and time again. **John 3:16, For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten son for us...** the Father gave. The Son gave. Jesus said in **John 15:13 greater love has no one than this, that one lay down His life for his friends. You are my friends if you do what I command you. Romans 5:8 But God demonstrates His won love toward us in that while we were still sinners Christ died for us."**

TRUE LOVE AT WORK

So true faith in action will be loving others as God loves us! And that is exactly what the first verse of **Hebrews 13:1** says: ***"Let love of the brethren continue."*** You see, faith in action is love at work. Jesus said they will know we are His disciples if we have love for one another, but not just those inside the church. Those outside as well! ***"Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers, for by this some have entertained angels without knowing it."***

You know everyone we come in contact with presents us an opportunity to share the love of Christ. And sometimes the strangers we run into may not even be human! In the secular world, it is popular to talk about aliens living among us. No, there are not aliens among us, but there are angels!

Do we look at every time we meet someone whom we don't know as a divine appointment, or do we just look at it as a chance encounter?. There are no chance encounters from God's perspective!

And now we go from the love of a stranger to the love of the prisoner: **3Remember the prisoners, as though in prison with them, and those who are ill-treated, since you yourselves also are in the body.**

Here is a call to remember those in prison. Human nature would say, lock them up and throw away the key; not the Lord. We are not to forget those who are incarcerated. Chuck Colson, one of President Nixon's aides and found guilty in the Watergate scandal, became a believer shortly before being convicted of obstruction of justice. After serving seven months in prison, he started the now international ministry called *Prison Fellowship*, a ministry that has helped literally tens of thousands of men and women turn to Christ, and is the nation's largest outreach to prisoners, ex-prisoners, and their families. Or who can forget Pastor Terry King of *Saving Grace Ministries* here in Buffalo? Pastor King killed a young man while driving drunk and served four years in prison where he came to Christ. As a result of his conversion, when he was released from prison, God gave him the vision to reach out to those coming out of prison. Subsequently, thousands of lives have been touched by God's grace so much so that the NY State Division of Parole supports the work of *Saving Grace* as they have seen the recidivism rates reversed! And the ill-treated? That was common during the Apostles' day, and today it is common among nations in which Christians are being persecuted. That is why we have the ministry called *Prayer for the Persecuted Church*. We need to remember those who are being ill-treated throughout the world and who are in prison simply because they love Jesus.

What is the greatest and most important institution in society outside of the Church? Holy Marriage! **4"Marriage is to be held in honor among all, and the marriage bed is to be undefiled; for fornicators and adulterers God will judge."**

We all know that when it comes to human sexuality the culture and our society has its own truths. The sexual revolution brought forth the idea that people needed to be free sexually to be truly free. We were told that people should be able to do and experience whatever they want sexually. It was to be for the good of not just the individual but for the society as a whole. And do you know what resulted? A skyrocket increase in divorce rates, children born out of wedlock, STD's and AIDS, millions of legalized abortions, increased sexual perversion, an explosion in pornography, and a decrease in the number of couples getting married.

In essence the sanctity of marriage was kicked to the curb and the culture said that we know better than God. In the universities and schools – we know better than God. In the courts and legislatures - we know better than God, and even in the Church – we know better than God. And so, not only is marriage considered one among many equal options; it has been redefined by our nation's courts and lawmakers.

Well, let me just say man might seek to redefine marriage and make it in his image. But God

does not change, nor does His word change. Marriage is to be between a man and a woman for life; and unless you are under the blood of Christ, fornicators and adulterers God will judge!

And now we come to money. We all know that the Bible says that money is not evil, but it is the love of money that is the root of all sorts of evil. Filthy lucre, selfish greed, and living to simply make a buck and to get more and more. Not so for the believer. We are told, **5***Make sure that your character is free from the love of money, being content with what you have; for He Himself has said, "I WILL NEVER DESERT YOU, NOR WILL I EVER FORSAKE YOU,"*

Jesus said, **"Where your treasure is, there will your heart be, also."** Our treasure is to be found in the One who loves us and made it all. Our treasure is knowing the One True God and His Son, Jesus Christ. **6***So that we confidently say, "THE LORD IS MY HELPER, I WILL NOT BE AFRAID. WHAT WILL MAN DO TO ME?"*

"Remember those who led you, who spoke the word of God to you; and considering the result of their conduct, imitate their faith. 8*Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever."*

Now we get to the essence of our faith. Again the focus is on Jesus Christ. Look again at what is said about Him – *He is the same yesterday and today and forever!* God does not change. Jesus does not change. He is the same God of the Old Testament. And why is this so important? It reflects that Jesus is the embodiment of ultimate reality, absolute truth. Truth just is, isn't it?

We live lives based on truth. Every discipline and subject known to man is based on common truths. So why would spirituality be any different? If there is one truth, we know that there can be thousands if not millions of counterfeits. Think of the US Treasury – there is only one genuine dollar bill. The Secret Service is responsible for dealing with counterfeit bills. How do they know if something is a counterfeit? It is different from the original. How can they tell the fakes? By knowing the real one inside and out. How do we know if something is counterfeit spiritually? We must know the genuine inside and out. And once we do, we will see that the counterfeit teachings go against the spiritual truth revealed by God. How do we know if the truth revealed by God is genuine in the first place? It will be consistent, it will stand the test of time, it will make sense, it will work in real life when put into action, and it will be markedly different than all the false forms of spirituality. That is why we read, **9***Do not be carried away by varied and strange teachings; for it is good for the heart to be strengthened by grace, not by foods, through which those who were so occupied were not benefited.*

Through Him then, let us continually offer up a sacrifice of praise to God, that is, the fruit of lips that give thanks to His name. 16*And do not neglect doing good and sharing, for with such sacrifices God is pleased.*

We are to praise and give thanks to the Lord with our lips, and we can do that in song and prayer and acknowledging God before others. And we are always to be givers. Our first thought should be, "What can I give to someone, rather than what can I get from someone?"

And now here is one that is not too popular in this day and age. Listen to those in authority over us in the church. God's Word says, ***17Obey your leaders and submit to them, for they keep watch over your souls as those who will give an account. Let them do this with joy and not with grief, for this would be unprofitable for you.***

Finally, we read, ***18Pray for us,*** Pray, pray, pray and pray some more! Prayer is not simply talking to God, but it is communicating with Him by speaking to Him in thought and out loud with words and listening to Him in our hearts and through His Word. A person of true faith is a person who prays.

These, my friends, are ways to put our faith into action. Such things reflect a true disciple of Christ. Such things must be part of our lives if we are to truly reflect the love of Jesus in our lives. Such things are not just faith in action, but love at work! In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, AMEN!