

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

The Very Rev. Fr. Arthur W. Ward, Jr. + Dean

Scripture: Hebrews 11:1-6

"It's a Matter of Faith!" part 2 - Hebrews 11:1-6 (part 10 in series)

REVIEW OF LAST WEEK

We are on the topic of what is the most important response one can have towards God – Faith! We read in **Hebrews 10:38** ***"My righteous one shall live by faith."*** And then in **Hebrews 11:6**, ***"...without faith it is impossible to please Him, for he who comes to God must believe that He is and that He is a rewarder of those who seek Him."***

Now before we continue in Hebrews, I want us to hear again what Jesus said about faith – Jesus said we can't enter the kingdom of God unless we receive it like a child and that means having faith like a child (**Mk. 10:15**). Recall what Jesus said, before opening the eyes of two blind men who had come to Him, ***"Be it done according to your faith."*** On a number of occasions, Jesus said to those whom He healed, ***"Your faith has made you well."*** And on the flip side, when His disciples wondered where they were to get bread or when they were afraid on the waters of Galilee during a storm and didn't trust the Lord, Jesus said, ***"O ye of little faith."*** The question of whether or not one has faith is so important that Jesus said in **Luke 18:8**, ***"When the Son of Man returns, will He find faith on the earth?"***

So since faith is so vital to following God, we better understand what it is and why it is necessary. And that's what we began to look at last week. What is faith? It includes three things – **agreement, attitude and action**. We believe in our heads; we trust in our hearts, and then we activate the faith in our bodies with action. Thus, the full expression of faith is how we live our lives. It's why **James 2:26** says, ***"Faith without works is dead."*** Actually, James uses the comparison of body and spirit; just as a body is dead without the spirit, so too is faith without works.

And here's the thing – everyone has faith and puts their faith, their trust, in someone or something; and then all that they do is based upon in whom they have put that faith! I mean, think about it for a moment. When you put your money in the bank, you are demonstrating faith in that bank to take care of your wealth. When you get in your car to drive to church, you are exercising your faith that the car will get you to your destination. When you go to class, you put your faith in the lesson your teacher is giving you when you study for a test. I can go on and on. The truth is that all of life is based on faith – whether it be in other people, in ourselves, in material objects, in ideas, and so forth. The question then is simply not whether or not you have faith but in whom are you putting your faith. The atheist has faith. They simply have faith that there is no God. That's what they are trusting to be so. So what is different about the nature of Christian faith?

Let's look again at Hebrews 11:1: *"Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen."* Recall the first part - Biblical faith is the certain and assured

understanding that the promises of God, what God has declared to be true, will come to pass. Why? Because of who He is! Perfect, Holy, True and Faithful! God cannot lie. What He says will come to pass. So it is a rock-solid confidence, not wishful thinking. The things hoped for are the things already promised by God. They will come to pass. And **the second description of faith** – conviction or being convinced of the unseen world. There are two worlds in life – the natural and the supernatural. We can see the natural realm. We cannot see the supernatural with the naked eye. We can in the spirit, but not merely in the body. And we saw how the reality of the unseen world can be understood through the knowledge that we ourselves and everything we can experience via the natural senses are made up of atomic and subatomic particles that are invisible to us and how radio waves and TV waves are invisible; but if you tune them in with a radio or television or computer, that which is invisible can be made visible! We may not understand it, but we know it is true nonetheless.

So again the nature of Biblical faith – it encompasses the total person – mind (agreement), heart (attitude of trust), and body (action). It trusts in the promises of God – knowing that even though they are in the future, they will be kept because of Who God is; and it recognizes that there is an invisible realm that manifests itself in the visible realm and also supersedes it.

THE NECESSITY OF FAITH

But now what about the need for faith? Why is it necessary? Verse 3, ***“By faith we understand that the worlds were prepared by the word of God, so that what is seen was not made out of things which are visible.”*** You will not understand the things of God unless you first come to Him in faith. In fact, the reality and existence of God and how He made everything cannot be understood by our finite minds. Recall the Bible never explains God; He is simply presented. That is why science will fall short. The scientists weren't there at the beginning. And they can't measure or evaluate or test the Almighty in a laboratory! And yet after we come to God by faith, we will gain understanding as we grow in faith.

But what's a second reason for why faith is necessary to know God and grow in our understanding of Him and life itself? Look again at v. 6, ***“For without faith it is impossible to please Him, for he that comes to God must believe that he is,”***

You can't please God without faith. Why is that? God has ordained that this life of ours be lived by faith, and more importantly that our relationship with God be one of faith. Otherwise, we would not hear, ***“My righteous one shall live by faith.”*** Why did God set it up this way?

Well, let's look to see a life without faith. You see, if God wanted to, He could remove our need for faith, He could prove himself to us, He could move into this church right now and perform a miracle, He could just take the roof off of this building and say boo! and everybody would say I believe. He could move in here and show himself with a dazzling display of glory.

Why doesn't He do that? Well, if He did that, He would cheat you of the gift of faith and rob

himself of the glory that He wants to show you, the world, and the hosts of heaven. You see, God wants you to respond to him by faith. God could threaten you, God could bribe you, God could coerce you. He could overwhelm you and take away the need for faith; but if He did, there would be something missing that God wanted you to have; and it's faith because faith pleases God. Why does faith so please God? Because faith gives glory to God, faith honors God.

How does faith honor God? How does it bring glory to God? I want you to think for a moment ABOUT how Christ came the first time. Do you remember what we read a couple weeks ago from **Philippians 2**? When the Lord Jesus Christ came into this world, he laid aside His glory and His majesty and much of His power. He laid it all aside and all of the beauty that was inherently His. He left it all in heaven and came down through that dark Judean night; He was born through the portals of a virgin's womb, and where? In an insignificant little Judean village called Bethlehem, in a barn with cow dung on the floor, laid on straw, wrapped in coarse cloths; and then He grew up in a carpenter's shop, reared in Nazareth, and excuse me? But can any good thing come out of Nazareth? Nazareth, of all places, that's where the hillbillies were, that's where the hicks were. That's where Jesus was reared; and the Bible says in Isaiah that ***He has no stately form or majesty that we should look upon Him, nor appearance (beauty) that we should desire Him.*** In other words, *nothing extra on the outside.* Jesus left it all behind so we read again in Philippians 2, who although ***being in the form of God, did not regard equality with God as something to be held onto for himself, but He emptied Himself, taking the form of a servant and humbled himself ...even to death on a cross.***

And yet He said to people, "Follow me!" and they followed Him.

Now some will say, well, they followed him because of the miracles that he did. And you know what, that was true for many. But it was those people, the miracle mongers, who left Him first! As a matter of fact, do you remember what Jesus would often say after He performed a miracle? He'd say don't tell anybody about this, keep it to yourself. Growing up, I always wondered why Jesus told people not to tell others. Well, one of the reasons was that Jesus was not doing miracles for PR; He didn't do them to get a following. He did them because of His compassion and love, not to make a scene. Certainly the miracles demonstrated who He was and is, but they were not primarily done to gain a following.

Remember the loaves and the fishes, the feeding of the 5000; many who got their bellies filled were the first to leave Jesus when things got tough. But what of the ones that stayed with Jesus? Do you know why they stayed with Him? They followed him for another reason. They saw in Him the character of God. He laid aside the glory and the splendor, but He did not lay aside his nature; He was God and there was that inner beauty, He was full of grace and truth.

And there was something in the hearts of men and women when they saw Him. They responded to him, and that response was not primarily a response to what he could do; it was a response to who he was. Are you seeing the difference? Not to what he had, but to who he was, his

very essence, his very nature, his character, full of grace and truth; and they followed him because there was something about him that caused their hearts to respond and *that response* of their heart to His character and nature, the Bible calls faith. And that kind of faith pleases God. You see true biblical faith is the response of the heart to the nature and character of God. And when you respond to God that way, it pleases Him because you aren't asking Him to prove Himself, you're not demanding that He give you everything you want, and you aren't seeking him to do some celestial trick.

Oh, there were those who did, however. They said, "***Give us a sign from heaven!***" And do you know what Jesus said? "***No sign will be given to this sinful and adulterous generation.***" (Mt. 16:1-4) They said, "***Come down from the cross and we'll believe.***" (Mk. 15:32) And thank God He didn't. And oh how there were those who believed even when Jesus was on that cross! the dying thief turned to him, the one who at that moment had a cross for a throne, spikes for a scepter and thorns for a crown; and he begged for mercy and said to our Lord, "***Remember me when you come into your kingdom.***" And Jesus replied, "***Today you'll be with me in paradise.***" (Lk. 23:42)

You see, faith pleases God; it is necessary for understanding God, and it is necessary for pleasing God. The truth is when we understand what faith is, that it is a response to the character of God, to WHO God is, and not primarily to what God can do but just simply who God is, then you have learned the secret of faith. You see, true biblical faith responds to God's nature, to God's character by trusting Him, not for what He can do but for who He is. That's why God has set up life with the need for faith.

And do you know what that teaches us? It goes back to why the unseen world is more important than the seen world? The seen world is passing away. That means our looks, our money, our accolades, our things, everything is passing away. But do you know what is not passing away? Our souls, our spirits, and our faith. Our relationship with God. Our relationships with one another. Those are the things that are eternal.

But do you know what we fret about? All the stuff in this world that is in fact passing away! Do you know what we worry about? Our bodies, our appearance. Food and fashion. Do you know what we concern ourselves with? Keeping up with the Joneses or making sure we have enough material things. Do you know what clogs the airwaves of things of real substance? The obsession with sports, with Hollywood, with the political smoke and mirrors of Washington, with the changing winds of Wall Street. And do you know what God says? It is not only about not what we eat or wear, but it is not even about what you can simply see, taste, touch, smell or hear. No, it's about developing your character. And this character is about developing purity of heart. And purity of heart can only come from the purity of God, and the purity of God flows from the love and holiness of God. And the love and holiness of God is embodied by Jesus Christ. And the reason why Jesus did not come to us in beauty or splendor or great power was to show us that life is not about what is on the outside, but it is about what is on the inside. And everything God does and everything we experience is a microcosm of this conflict between the flesh and the spirit. God wants to change our hearts into ones that reflect

His love. And that will never happen; the sinful heart will never be changed if it has everything given to it on a silver platter. We don't mature or grow or develop godly character when all is perfect. Character and godliness can only come when we face tests of faith, when we face affliction and hardship, and when we learn to depend on God rather than ourselves.

And we can do so by faith. That's how we can live victoriously in this life, by faith in the invisible God! Look for a moment at the example of Moses in **Hebrews 11:24-27** ***"By faith Moses, when he had grown up, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter, choosing rather to endure ill-treatment with the people of God than to enjoy the passing pleasures of sin."*** So you see, there is pleasure in sin. Otherwise, there would be no such thing as temptation. The devil is too smart to go fishing without any bait on his hook.

Why did Moses choose affliction rather than pleasure? Why did he choose to suffer rather than to be rich? Why did he turn his back on the pleasures and the treasures of Egypt? v. 26. ***Considering the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures in Egypt, for he was looking to the reward*** (he just gave up dirt for diamonds). By faith he left Egypt, not fearing the wrath of the king, (now watch for it,) ***"for he endured as seeing him who is unseen."*** Moses had faith and faith sees the invisible.

And so the life of faith teaches us to be grateful for when all is going well but not to become complacent or take our blessings for granted but to realize from Whom they come; and at the same time, not to be fearful or worried when things are not going well and when things are taken from us because of WHO is with us. It is why the Scriptures say that ***God's power is manifested in weakness***. God wants the world to trust in Him. He wants each of us to learn to trust in Christ for all things. It's why the Apostle Paul wrote, ***"I have learned the secret, with going without or having much, I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me."*** Do we find our self-worth in what we do and how we look and what we have, or do we find our self-worth in WHO we are in Christ? That Christ is the One who not only makes all things new but makes us new creations in His love.

It is why the LORD declared through the prophet Jeremiah declared, ***"Thus says the LORD, "Let not a wise man boast of his wisdom, and let not the mighty man boast of his might, let not a rich man boast of his riches; ²⁴but let him who boasts boast of this, that he understands and knows Me, that I am the LORD who exercises lovingkindness, justice and righteousness on earth; for I delight in these things," declares the LORD.***

And, my brothers and sisters, it is why true faith pleases Him! In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, AMEN!