

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

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Scripture: Hebrews 11:1-6; 12:1-2

***"It's a Matter of Faith!" part 3 - Hebrews 11:1-6; (part 11 in series)***

**BIBLICAL FAITH**

Over the last two weeks, we are on the topic of what is the most important response one can have towards God – Faith! Recall that everyone has faith; the question really is, in whom are you placing your faith? In whom do you trust? And we saw that faith has three components: the mind, the heart, and the body. We believe in our heads – that is agreement; we trust in our hearts – that is attitude; and we act it out in our bodies – action. In other words, we live what we believe. Jesus put it this way, where your treasure is, there will your heart be; and I might add, where your heart is, there your life will be also..

Now Biblical faith, by nature, is different than worldly faith. Its description is found in **Hebrews 11:1: "Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen."** Biblical faith, Christ-centered faith, is knowing with certainty what God has promised to His people will come to pass. Even though it is in the future, it will come to pass because God said it; and God who cannot lie will do it! Second, Biblical faith recognizes and understands that even though we cannot see God with the naked eye or the supernatural realm it is real nonetheless. In fact, it is more solid than what we can see. God's Word says that the temporal or seen world is passing away, but the unseen world is eternal.

Then we looked at the nature of faith. **Hebrews 11:3 "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."** In other words, we can't understand God without faith. We can't let our doubt and the things we don't understand to keep us from not only believing in God but trusting in Him. Unless we come to God with faith like a child, we will not only never understand the things of God, but we won't grow in our understanding.

And then we looked at how we can't please God without faith, ***"For without faith it is impossible to please Him, for he that comes to God must believe that he is,"*** How does faith please God? It gives God the glory, and it teaches us to trust in Him; and that, in turn, transforms our hearts and builds our character. The way Jesus came shows us. He didn't come in great power and glory, and fanfare; but He came as a humble servant, like an ordinary man who through the power of the Spirit said and did extraordinary things. He did miracles not to gain a following or wow the crowds; instead, He did miracles to meet genuine needs and to point people to Who He was. You see, Jesus was looking for those who would turn to Him for first Who He was, not simply for what He could do! And herein lies the key to life and why we don't simply look to the visible world for our guide and all that we need. What God is most concerned about is our hearts! What's inside us. He is concerned about the real person on the inside, not on outward appearances. He is concerned about

purity of heart, and that can only come from a right relationship with God through Christ. In God's Kingdom, character is king, not money, not wisdom, not strength! And so we ended last week with the powerful passage from **Jeremiah 9:23-24**: ***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.***" In other words, don't trust in your wisdom, strength or wealth, but trust in the Lord; that you know and understand the Lord. That is what pleases God, and that will only come through a life of faith!

### **THE NECESSITY OF FAITH cont.**

Now what is the third reason why faith is necessary? Look again at **v. 6**, ***"for he that comes to God must believe that He is, and that He is a rewarder of those who seek Him."*** Not only is faith necessary to understand God and to please God, but it is also necessary to be rewarded by God. In other words, you won't receive anything from God without faith. You say, wait a minute – the Bible says in **James 1:17** that all good things come from God including physical blessings in the natural world; but the writer of Hebrews is talking first and foremost about spiritual things. Remember, we don't first look to the natural world we look to the invisible spiritual world.

And so what is the greatest reward, the greatest gift that we receive from God by faith? **Salvation, eternal life!** And what in essence is eternal life? – a living eternal relationship with God. And who paves the way and shows us how this can be a reality? – Jesus Christ. That's ultimately why He came. In the most basic sense He came to do the will of His Father? But what is the will of His Father – to bring about reconciliation between God and man and between man and man. Jesus did that.

Is heaven a place? Yes, but it is more than a place.. Do you remember what Jesus said on the night before He died? ***"I go to prepare a place for you that where I am, there you will also be."*** (Jn. 14:2)

And how do we enter into a relationship with God? By faith. We have all heard of John 3:16, I want everyone to now turn to **Ephesians 2:8-10**:. ***"For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; 9not as a result of works, so that no one may boast. 10For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand so that we would walk in them."***

So you see, salvation is a gift and you can't earn a gift. It is something you receive; and when it comes to receiving it from the Lord, you receive it by faith and then the good works will follow. Unfortunately, man likes to put the caboose in front and the locomotive at the rear. We like to look at the works and point to what is seen rather than to the faith behind the works – what is unseen. And if good works are the basis for our salvation, then we can boast in them; but do you remember what we

heard from Jeremiah just a few moments ago? We don't boast in what we have or what we can do; we boast in the Lord and specifically that we know Him, that we have a personal and abiding relationship with Him.

And when people fall into the trap of trusting in their good works, it is the same as saying our good works are the basis for our relationship with God. Can you imagine if the amount of good our kids did was the basis for how much we love them? We should be proud of the good they do, but that is not why we should love our kids more. We love them first for who they are, not what they have done. And if that's the case, that love should come out of us and be the result of the change in our hearts rather than the result of what they do. And this is no different with our relationship with our Heavenly Father. We trust in Him first for Who He is – a loving Father who is perfectly righteous and forever faithful. So good works have nothing to do with our relationship with God, except that they will flow from that relationship and can testify to the reality of that relationship but are not the basis for it. The basis is that God's grace is received by man's faith.

**And what is the second reward of knowing God?** We receive the Holy Spirit. How do we receive the Holy Spirit? By faith. When we put our faith in Jesus Christ, it is His Spirit, the Spirit of Christ, the Holy Spirit, the Third Person of the Trinity who comes into us. Listen for a moment to **Gal. 3:14**: ***"in order that in Christ Jesus the blessing of Abraham might come to the Gentiles, so that we would receive the promise of the Spirit through faith."***

In fact, the Holy Spirit is God's guarantee that He lives in us and that we have eternal life. **Eph. 1:13-14**: ***"In Him you also, when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation, and believed in Him, were sealed with the promised Holy Spirit, who is the guarantee of our inheritance until we acquire possession of it, to the praise of his glory."***

The Holy Spirit is literally God's presence in us, but not just His presence, His very person! Think about that for a moment. That is why the Psalmist declares ***from where can I go from Your Spirit***. And now with the work of Christ, the Spirit of God takes residence in every person who puts their faith, their trust, in Christ as Lord and Savior.

So if you ever feel that God is not with you, don't believe it. He is always with us and even more so now that the Holy Spirit lives in our hearts. And if you have the Holy Spirit living in your heart, what more do you need? That is why these preachers who are preaching health, wealth and prosperity and get people focused on the here and now and all the creature comforts of modern life miss the boat! Will God bless us in the temporal world with temporal things – often times He will. But such things are secondary. What God desires is relationship – a living abiding relationship where we are growing in His wisdom, His love, His ways.

We will gain much in this life, but the greatest gain is an eternal relationship with the Lord and the presence of His Spirit in our souls and bodies. Even the earlier saints mentioned throughout **Hebrews 11** did not receive all that God has for them yet. Look now at **Hebrews 11:39-40**: ***"And all***

***these, having gained approval through their faith, did not receive what was promised, because God had provided something better for us, so that apart from us they would not be made perfect.*** They could not be made perfect unless Christ came and unless we followed. See *what love the Father has for those who love them?*

## **THE NURTURE OF FAITH**

So we have looked at the nature and necessity of faith. Now I want you to see the nurture of faith. How do we nurture the faith within us so that it grows stronger? Do you remember what Jesus said to his the disciples when they asked Him to increase their faith? The apostles said to the Lord, in **Lk. 17:5-6**, ***"Increase our faith!"*** And the Lord said, ***"If you had faith like a mustard seed, you would say to this mulberry tree, 'Be uprooted and be planted in the sea'; and it would obey you."***

Clearly, Jesus was using hyperbole here as there is no rhyme or reason to be rearranging the vegetation of our world. What Jesus was talking about is that through faith we can overcome the obstacles in life, whether from our own sin, other people's sin, doubt, setbacks, or anything that is the result of the curse. Such things can be overcome by our faith in God. And I believe Jesus used the imagery of the mustard seed to show us that it is not the faith itself that is most important, for as we saw earlier, everyone has faith; but it is in whom are we putting that faith so I believe that our faith grows in proportion to our understanding of Who God is and What His will is for our lives and our world. Did you catch that? *The more I understand Who God is, how awesome and powerful and loving, the greater my faith will become, because I will be trusting in Him more than anything else.*

If someone doesn't have a lot of faith in the Lord, it is because they don't have the right understanding of Who God actually is! Again do you remember what we are to boast about – God told us in **Jeremiah 9:23-24** - that we know and understand Him! If I really understand God, then my faith will get stronger and stronger.

**1) Spend time in God's Word.** **Romans 10:17** says, ***"Faith comes by hearing and hearing by the Word of God."***

**2) Keep your eyes fixed on Christ** – Look now at **Hebrews 12:1-2**: ***"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."***

It means in our prayer life, that we reflect on Who Jesus is, What He is has promised, and what He has done. This goes hand in hand with spending time in God's Word, but it also means to always be thinking of Christ. Those wristbands that came out about 20 years ago – WWJD (What

Would Jesus Do) speak to this. It is why Jesus said in **John 15:7**, "***If you abide in Me, and My words abide in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you.***"

**3) Be filled with the Holy Spirit** – how are you filled with the Holy Spirit? By faith! But not just faith, repentance. How are you saved? – repentance and faith. How do you walk or live by the Spirit? Repentance and faith! That means learning to confess our sins, not keeping grudges, and asking God to fill us with His Spirit as we do those things that keep the Spirit first in our hearts. The contrast is made clear in **Eph. 5:18**, "***do not be drunk with wine....but be filled with the Spirit!***"

**4) Go out and do what God has said in His Word** and see what happens. God has created us to walk in the good works He has already set up for us. We now just have to go and walk into them. Nothing happens by an accident. Everything happens for a reason. Every person you see and come in contact with is God-ordained. How will you respond?

**5) Finally, share your walk with the Lord with other believers.** Be not only a part but involved in the Body of Christ. We will grow in faith as we work together and learn from each other and share with each other. Why do you think spiritual retreats, Christian conferences, and mission trips are so powerful in our lives? We have the opportunity to take time out to get focused on God's Word, fix our eyes on Jesus, be filled with the Spirit, be obedient to God and share with other believers. One's faith is strengthened and inspired during such experiences. The challenge for each of us is to make sure that we are living by faith every day! The Lord declares, ***My righteous one shall live by faith***; and we do that through not just what is up here and in here but by action, what we do. So get into the Word, focus on Christ, be filled with the Spirit, get out and do what God has called you to do, and be involved in and with your fellow brothers and sisters in the Body of Christ; and then my friends, your faith will grow! In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, AMEN!