

By Faith: we are motivated in the present to be lead forward into the future Hebrews 11:1-16

In the Voice of the Martyrs NZ February Publication I read of Abu Ali and his family of eight who piled into their car and drove away at speed from their home in June 2014. The Islamic state had over run Mosul a week earlier but Abu Ali had felt in no hurry to leave the city until the moment he sensed God saying, "Go!"

The family left immediately. As Abu looked in his rear vision mirror his heart sank as ISIS fighters carrying swords and knives arrived, kicked in the front door of his house and streamed in.

He suspected his neighbour had told ISIS fighters about them, possibly the same neighbour who had burnt down their house two years earlier after learning that the family had converted to Christianity from Islam. While Abu had escaped he did not know what to do next. They had little money, few belongings and no place to live. However with this uncertainty Abu trusted God, the same God who urged him to leave Mosul just in time. "If we had been delayed 15 minutes we would have been killed", he said.

After a brief time in Turkey, Abu and his family returned to Iraqi Kurdistan and because his ID card identified him as a Sunni Muslim, he and his family were sent to a camp of 6000 Muslims. They were the only Christians and faced immediate persecution, just like in Mosul. The camp shop refused to sell them food, guards harassed them and took their Bibles, their children were bullied if they went out. So... what do you think they did? Cowered away in their tent maybe? No! By faith they were not afraid to exercise their Christianity. Abu and his wife openly shared the gospel with those living in their camp. They even set up a tent full of crosses for prayer and worship next to their own tent to which they gladly invite their neighbours. While they know it is dangerous to talk about Jesus in the camp, they are certain God has a purpose for them, and they know it certainly doesn't include remaining quiet or fearful about their faith. In just over two years Abu has led four people to Christ including Faris and his brother Samir. Faris was immediately beaten on conversion. Samir was spurned and put off by his Muslim religious leaders. Persuaded of the truth Samir put his faith in Christ. So along with his brother they're persecuted. Samir commented that, "Whenever we sleep, we would not be surprised if someone would set the tent on fire," but this threat of persecution from within the camp is not enough to keep them from following the LORD. Faris said "We sleep by faith." By Faith...

The writer to the Hebrews was addressing Jews who had received Jesus as their Messiah and were paying the price for their faith. Have a look at the previous verses in Chapter 10:32-38 revealing that following their conversion and enthusiastic response to the gospel, they had experienced great conflict and suffering. In public they were insulted and persecuted, they had their property confiscated, including houses, furniture and belongings. They were imprisoned. Despite all this, they were told by the writer to, “not throw away your confidence”, but to persevere until they had done the will of God. As the righteous they were not to shrink back but instead to, ‘live by faith’. Even Sleep by faith!

The definition and examples of faith and living by faith follow on in chapter 11:1 [*Faith is confidence in what we hope for and assurance about what we do not see. This is what the ancients were commended for.*]

In the life of a believer, Faith has an important future aspect to it, because it is that trust in God that enables believers to press on regardless of what the future holds. They know that they can rely on God. So this is why the writer’s method is to use some of the great people in the history of the Bible to show briefly how faith motivated all of them in the present, in order to lead them forward into the future, no matter how difficult the circumstances. The result is this great passage that not only encouraged the original readers but has encouraged each and every generation of Christians since it was written until present day... and will continue to do so, until the LORD returns.

From the definition of faith in verse 1 we learn that faith is a present and continuing reality not just some virtue that was practiced long ago by a few ancients. Faith is a living thing, a way of life that the writer strongly desires to see continued in practice by his audience. For he tells us all, Faith is a “being confident or sure” of the things hoped for.

If you think about it, there are certain realities for which we have no actual material evidence, though they become no less real for that. For it is ‘faith’ that enables us to know they exist and, while we have no certainty apart from faith, faith does give us genuine certainty. Because faith is the basis, the underlying substructure, concrete in essence, of all that the Christian life means, and all that the Christian life hopes for.

The substance and essence of Faith extends beyond what we learn from our senses. Its tests are not those of the human senses, which only serve to generate and produce uncertainty in us. Instead, Faith means that as Christians- we are not helpless! We have 'faith' when it comes to assessing the significance and truth of the immaterial realm. For it is by faith that we test all things and can confidently believe and prove the immaterial to ourselves- the things we cannot see. And this is what the ancients were commended for. The ancients being the forefathers, religious leaders of past days, and elders, it is where we get the word for elders in the PCANZ today, although we are not all that ancient on Session being under 65 years. Each one of the ancients listed by the writer in Hebrews 11 are there because of their witness and testimony attached to them on account of their faith. As you read through the chapter you can see that the writer brings out that testimony specifically linking the hero's of old with 'Faith'. Nowhere else in Hebrews do we have such a chapter that distinguishes itself by its single-minded emphasis on faith typified by 2 words...

"By faith" which run through the whole chapter and makes for compelling reading because of what it is emphasizing. For the most part, it is attached to the deeds of these great ones from past generations. However, beginning in verse 3, the writer on purpose involves his readers. Listen to this, "By faith **we** understand that the universe was formed at God's command". So Faith for us is a present reality, it is not the sole property of past hero's. It is 'faith' that gives us our convictions about creation itself. Get this: Belief in the existence of the world is not faith. Neither is it faith when people hold that the world was made out of some pre-existing 'stuff'. But when we come to understand that it is the Word of God, his spoken command that created and produced all things- now that is faith! As the scripture says "...so that what is seen was not made out of what was visible."

This verse reminds us of the first words of **Genesis [1:1]** *In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.* There 'We' have the foundation of our faith in the first words of the bible. God's own Word agrees with the sentiment of Hebrews 11 as you continue through Genesis 1 with its repeated, "And God said" a statement which plainly tells us that the visible did not originate from the visible, instead it is faith, not something material, that assures the writer to the Hebrews that it all originated with God. The world is God's world & faith assures him that God created it.

Faith demonstrated and witnessed in the outstanding lives of those men and women whom God approved and appear in chapter 11. By faith... Abel, Enoch, Noah, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Joseph, Moses, Joshua, Rahab, Gideon, Barak, Samson, Jephthah, David, Samuel and the prophets.... [Hebrews 11] **39** These were all commended for their faith, yet none of them received what had been promised, **40** since God had planned something better for **us** so that only together **with us** would they be made perfect.

The Holy Spirit has commended these ancients and God had planned something better, the fulfillment for them in Christ who is “the resurrection and the life”. All persons of faith who had gone before focused their faith on God and God’s promises. The fulfillment to them has come in Jesus Christ, and their redemption, is now complete in him, as is ours too, and what a great privilege Christians have then. The giants of faith have done great things for God in their times and there is no question regarding God’s approval of them. Nevertheless, they would not be “made perfect” apart from the humble followers of Christ. Consider this:

By faith... the Jewish Christians written to in the book of Hebrews, we believe, did not shrink back from following Christ, but persevered in the face of persecution.

By faith... Martin Luther 500 years ago began the rallying cry of the Reformation in the face of persecution from the church and through the pits of his own emotional darkness and depression, he said “the just or the righteous shall live by faith.”

Closer to home and our time.. By faith... Barbara and Rex Stone with their \$1 began the Mercy Missions in 1991 to minister to the most needy in loving Word and practical deed in South Auckland. Barbara noted in the booklet ‘Years of Caring’ of how she and Rex “Followed the LORD and obeyed His Word. *They believed that we should all live **by Faith*** – Faith to believe that your needs will be met each week.

By faith... Faris, his brother Samir, Abu Ali and his family live with great purpose for Christ in a Muslim camp, not shrinking back from obediently following Jesus in deprived and dangerous conditions.

By faith... Motivated in the present, Werner and Susan have responded to the Word of God to pack up their lives, leaving their

beloved Church, family and friends in South Africa and come to NZ being lead forward in the future to serve God's purpose here.

Challenge and Application:

Now ask yourself this: What is God calling you to do today?

Let's make it more personal. Turn to your neighbour and ask them, What is God calling you to do today?

Do you know God's purpose for your life at this time?

Have you been purposely avoiding it in any way for any reason?

Are you presently convicted by the Holy Spirit as you have listened and heard God's word speaking into your life today?

I encourage you. I implore you. By faith, believe in God and believe in yourself as God's child to be a loving bold witness, and step out to follow in the footsteps of Christ himself and the many who have gone before you. Remember, we do this... By Faith!

Conclusion:

As God's people we must place our full trust and confidence in our Sovereign God. So that By Faith...

we are motivated in the present to be lead forth into the future...

a future where we will live **by faith** as individuals and a church while we wait patiently for the return of Christ, who will come with his reward of eternal salvation. Amen!