

Perfect Faith Hebrews 11:29 – 12:2

Stop for a moment and consider just how important faith is in your life. Do you realize how different things would be without it? Without faith, you and I would not be here this morning. We had faith that the church doors would be open when we arrived, the lights would be on, the bulletin would be printed, and a spirit-filled worship service and sermon would be planned and competently delivered. If you rode with someone, you had faith that the person behind the wheel was a responsible and safe driver who would bring you here in one piece. If you drove here, you had faith that the brakes, steering system and other vital parts of the vehicle would work as they should. We had faith that the bridges and freeway overpasses we travelled would carry the weight of our car and passengers safely. Even if you walked to church, your faith in the sidewalk or ground beneath your feet kept you from believing a sinkhole might open and swallow you up.

Everyone has faith in something, and our actions reveal much about our faith. We freely put our faith in those and other temporal things even though they have no real certainty. The electric might have been out of service this morning, the copier that we use to make the bulletins might have quit working, and your pastor could have been run over by a truck on the way here. Yet none of those possibilities kept us at home. Our faith brought us here, despite the frail nature of life and physical things that have no certainty of always being there for us.

The good news is that there is something we can truly have faith and trust in without fear of failure or compromise. Isaiah 40:8 gives us a clue as to what it is. Earthly things do not last. Due to the effects of sin they break, they wear out, they let us down. God's word is different. It is eternal, which means we can believe with absolute certainty that it was true yesterday, that it is true today and that it will be true tomorrow and every day after that. There is no good reason to doubt John 8:31 that says if we abide in God's word, we will know the truth and the truth will set us free from sin. There is no good reason to doubt John 3:15 that says whoever believes in Jesus will have eternal life. There is no reason to doubt John 15:9 that says Jesus loves us like God loves Jesus.

We can have absolute faith that those promises and every other promise of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ found in this sacred book is forever true, and that each one is made to you and I and everyone else who has faith that Jesus is God. God is the creator of all things seen and unseen, including the gift of our faith in Him. We heard in our scripture text this morning that Jesus is the “author and perfecter of our faith”. He specifically designed it for us, He specifically gave it to us, and by grace He is now helping us to perfect it. What exactly is this thing we call faith?

The most perfect definition of faith is found in the first verse of Hebrews chapter 11. **Now faith is being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see.**

Notice that there are 2 parts to it. As we learned last week the kingdom of God is not just there and later but here and now. Being sure of what we hope for refers to the future. Faith is the assurance that God’s plan for Jesus to deal with our sins means our future place with Him in the heavenly kingdom is secure. It is often said that seeing and hearing is believing, and there are numerous passages that may be seen or heard in in our Bible that relate faith with our future place in the kingdom. The words of Jesus in John 6:47 are a perfect example- Most assuredly I say to you- he who believes in me has everlasting life. ***Heaven is not a place for the dead but a place for the living.***

The second part of that verse refers to the here and now-being certain of what we do not see. We can have confidence in the promises of Scripture here and now even though we will not physically see or hear Jesus until there and later. Despite much heartache and pain that we may suffer while living here in the earthly kingdom, it is our faith in Jesus that will sustain us and enable us to believe that something better is to come in the heavenly kingdom. Once again, the words of Jesus are so very true: John 20:29- blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed.

Heaven is not a place for the dead but a place for the living. That was true even for those who lived before Jesus first set foot on this earth. Even before Jesus came to earth in bodily form, His influence was there. Our faith causes us to look back to the promises of Jesus in the Scriptures, while the faith of OT believers looked forward to the promised Messiah.

Faith is a powerful gift. Our faith is perfected through our belief in Jesus Christ and perfect faith leads us to obedience, obedience leads us to action and action leads to rewards. As James the half brother of Jesus famously said “faith without works is a dead faith”. (James 2:17).

In our text this morning, the writer of Hebrews gives us several prime examples of faith in action that led to rewards. Moses was obedient to the Lord when he was told to lead God’s people out of Egypt. Even when faced with Pharaoh’s army and 600 Egyptian chariots, he had faith that God would provide for their safe passage. His obedience resulted in action- he led the people out of Egypt and in faith lifted his staff, stretched out his hand and divided the Red Sea.

Part of the reward came as they were released from centuries of bondage. They were finally a free people again! The rest of their reward is still yet to come, as we will see in a few moments.

Skip ahead a few hundred years to the battle of Jericho. Joshua was obedient to God’s command to march around the city; for 6 days straight; while blowing their trumpets. Can you imagine what the people of Jericho thought? People who are not believers do not understand such faith. Verse 38 puts it bluntly-“the world was not worthy of them”. You know the rest of the story. On the seventh day, they blew their trumpets in unison and the walls came tumbling down. Faith and obedience to God led to action, which resulted in reward.

Similar patterns are found throughout the Old and New Testaments alike. Faith is a powerful gift. But what of the others listed in verses 36 and 37? They were obedient, they were called to action, where were their rewards? As a result of their faith they were imprisoned, beaten, tortured, stoned to death, sawn in two and killed by the sword. Did their faith fail them? Perhaps some of us may relate to them better than those like Moses and Rahab and Joshua. My guess is that we all have known faithful and obedient Christians that have suffered through illness, tragedy and death. Where was their reward?

The answer to that question is found in verse 39 and 40. Like the OT believers these verses originally referred to, they too were all commended for their faith, yet did not receive their reward on earth. Like the rest of us, they had to wait. God has promised and provided something better than earthly comfort, health and happiness. What is it? A place in the heavenly kingdom. Or, as the Scripture writer and many of us Methodists might say – made perfect in faith.

Our faith in Jesus, our obedience to His word and our actions that come as a result will bring us the greatest reward of all- spending eternity with our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ along with the rest of those ones called the saints. Until that time comes, I pray that we will continue to be faithful, obedient and active workers in His kingdom.
Amen