

Hebrews 11:1-7: There's Power Waiting for You....If You Believe

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I. Introduction

Many think that faith means believing in something you know ain't true. But faith simply means putting your trust in someone or something based on evidence (however weak or strong). God doesn't expect you to check your brain at the door and hope for the best. Faith involves thinking through things and arriving at certainty based on the evidence. And if you place your faith in God, there's power waiting for you...if you believe.

II. Hebrews 11:1-7: Trusting What God Says Pays

The author knows that his audience is facing persecution and thus the temptation to stop trusting God, to stop having faith in Him, that He will get them through the persecution. What has God asked them (and us) to believe about Jesus so far in the book of Hebrews?

His Son made and sustains this entire universe, thus, He's greater than all the angels. In fact, this universe will one day perish but He will remain forever, Ch. 1. His Son came to restore our life and destiny and to personally help us do this, all of which God verified with miracles, Ch. 2. His Son is greater than Moses and the consequence for rejecting this prophet is greater, Ch. 3. Those who have faith in His Son, get rest now (access to God 24/7) and in the future; those who don't get disciplined, Ch. 4. His Son is the author of eternal salvation to all who obey Him, Ch. 5. His Son is our access to God and proof that we can trust what God says; those who refuse to trust Him are severely disciplined, Ch. 6. The only way we can stand perfect before God is faith in His Son, but Jesus didn't just save us from imperfection, He saves us from everything, as He prays for us, Ch. 7. The new position we have as God's heavenly priests, is thanks to His Son, who made God our Father, enables us to know and obey God, and completely cleansed us of our sins, Ch. 8. His Son bled and died to redeem and cleanse us forever, even our guilty conscience, Ch. 9. Because of His Son's death we stand before God purified and perfected once for all, thus, He's purchased our right and responsibility to enter God's heavenly throne room; to refuse this privilege will merit God's severe discipline, Ch. 10.

The challenge before this audience is to trust God to deliver them no matter what. That's what the author has been urging his audience to do all along (Hebrews 3:13-14; 4:2-3; 6:11-12; 10:23, 35-38). He's confident that they will have faith in the Lord (6:9-10; 10:39), so he encourages them by reminding them of what faith is, what it does, and has done in the heroes and heroines of the faith:

11:1-3, many people think that faith is belief that is not based on proof. Some go farther and say that faith is believing what you know is not true. But everyone (whether atheist or not) has faith and uses it every day. We take things on faith all the time, like trusting that the guy behind you will stop at the red light and not plow into you. He might plow into you, but your experience (evidence) tells you that he won't, thus, you're 100% certain (or 99% certain) that he will stop. In Hebrews 11:1, God says that faith is something more concrete than an idea in your head, "faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen." Faith will give you such assurance and certainty that it will drive you to do something concrete. Faith is not believing what you know ain't true, it's believing what ain't so yet; it's believing what God said and then acting on it. This is how the Old Testament saints were rewarded; they believed what God said and then acted on it.

It is by faith that we “understand” (reason through the evidence) that God spoke this entire universe into existence out of nothing. The Bible says, “In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth....then God said, ‘Let there be light,’ and there was light.” Christians believe that God created this entire universe out of nothing. Do they believe something they know ain’t so? Secular scientists and astrophysicists have concluded that the universe is expanding, which indicates that at one point the entire universe was smaller than a dime and infinitely dense. A massive explosion (the Big Bang) then kicked off the expansion; it was the origin of all space, matter, energy, and time. But how can a massive universe that contains billions of supergiant stars appear out of nothing? You can’t get something out of nothing...unless something or someone put it there.

11:4-7, starting with Abel, the author begins to show his audience what happens when men and women believe what God says and act on it. First is Abel. At some point Cain and Abel were commanded to bring God a sacrifice. Cain was a farmer, so he brought produce. Abel was a shepherd, so he brought the firstborn of his flock. God respected Abel and his offering, but not Cain or his offering. Cain got very angry and felt disheartened. In His response God said, “If you do well, will you not be accepted? And if you do not do well, sin lies at the door. And its desire is for you, but you should rule over it.” There was something sinful in how Cain approached God. Sin overpowered him and it shouldn’t have. What was the sin? Some believe that he failed to bring a blood sacrifice because that’s how cleansing and redemption takes place, through death, through blood (cf. Genesis 3:15, 21). Whether he brought the right sacrifice or not, Cain’s reaction reveals that he believed that God should have accepted him and his sacrifice just as they were. In other words, Cain went to God on his own terms not God’s, which is pride. Abel had faith and thus obeyed God, Cain didn’t. If you’re familiar with the story, Cain then murdered his brother. But God says that even though Abel’s been dead for thousands of years, he still speaks. God rewarded Abel with a lasting testimony to his faith which still teaches us to this day about walking in faith.

Next is Enoch. It says that God took him to heaven while he was still alive; he never tasted death. Why did God reward him this way? Because Enoch “pleased God.” What did he do? There are only four verses in the Old Testament Scriptures that speak of Enoch’s life. Two of them say that Enoch *walked* with God. This is what pleased God; Enoch believed what God said and walked in it. Then God adds a comment: it’s impossible to please God without faith. Those who come to God must believe that He exists and that He rewards those who diligently seek Him. There are many who say that praying to God doesn’t work, that claiming His promises does nothing. The problem is not that God can’t fix our problems; the problem is that we don’t believe He can. When you don’t believe He can, you won’t truly rest in what He said. It’s like a billionaire handing you a \$1,000,000 check but never cashing it because you don’t really believe that they gave you a million dollars.

Finally, we have Noah (who also walked with God, Genesis 6:9). God told Noah that He was going to make it rain 40 days and 40 nights; a terrible flood was going to destroy all life on earth. Prior to this, it had never rained on the earth but Noah believed in “things not yet seen.” Noah believed God and acted on his faith by building an ark that saved his household. He was certain of God’s words and took concrete steps.

Will you believe what God says and act on it or not? James tells us that faith without works is useless. It’s not enough to believe what God says, you have to act on it. The Lord promised to help us the moment we need it (Hebrews 4:16). For example, He promises to get rid of our anxiety if we ask Him knowing full well that He’s going to hear and answer us (Philippians 4:6-7).

III. Conclusion

But 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 diligently seek Him.