

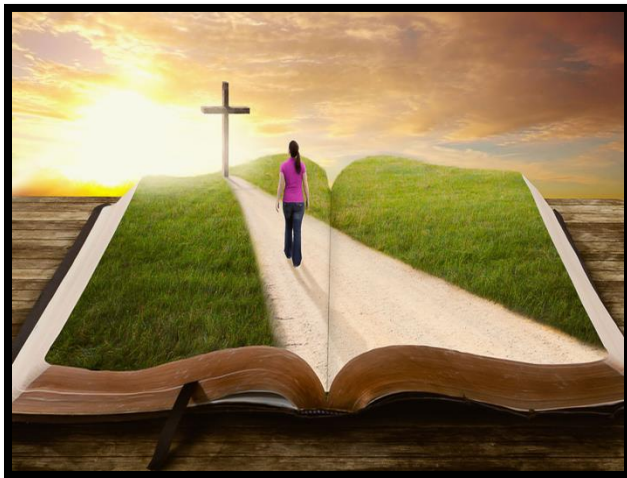
A LIVING FAITH

Hebrews 11:1-12

Online Sermon: http://www.mckeesfamily.com/?page_id=3567

“Now faith is confidence in what we hope for and assurance about what we do not see. ²This is what the ancients were commended for. By faith we understand that the universe was formed at God’s command, so that what is seen was not made out of what was visible” (11:1-3).

All human beings put their faith in something or someone.¹ For some it is finances, others friendship, others family, others good looks and yet for others it is popularity. Faith in a biblical sense is not trust in what one can touch or feel to guarantee a glorious present and future



but is “being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see” (11:1).² Genuine faith changes our whole perspective on life for the reality of the spiritual and eternal world makes “molehills out of our current mountains” (2 Corinthians 4:17-18)!³ “Faith is the foundation of the positive attitude towards the future, which cannot yet be experienced but has to remain a matter of hope.”⁴ Faith is not belief that something is going to happen based on one’s abilities or the probability of its occurrence. Faith is living as if one has already been granted a blessing despite knowing it is “humanly” or

“by chance” impossible to obtain but guaranteed the moment God speaks it into existence! Faith is not passively asking a holy God to fulfill our every wish and desire but is actively living as if one has already received those blessings that are a present but yet a future reality such as “the world to come (2:5), an eternal inheritance (1:4; 6:12), the heavenly Jerusalem (12:22-24) and

¹ Philip H Hacking, [*Opening up Hebrews*](#), Opening Up Commentary (Leominster: Day One Publications, 2006), 70.

² Philip H Hacking, [*Opening up Hebrews*](#), Opening Up Commentary (Leominster: Day One Publications, 2006), 70.

³ Philip H Hacking, [*Opening up Hebrews*](#), Opening Up Commentary (Leominster: Day One Publications, 2006), 71.

⁴ Peter T. O’Brien, [*The Letter to the Hebrews*](#), The Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI; Nottingham, England: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2010), 398.

the unshakeable kingdom (12:28).”⁵ Faith never stops being a living sacrifice by meditating and obeying God’s commands and even if the reward be but a lifetime away one never stops rejoicing because God truly is one’s portion! “Faith is the organ which enables people to see the invisible order”⁶ of God’s kingdom and to boldly claim that despite not having seen the creation of this world it was by “His word as an invisible power”⁷ that the universe was created out of nothing (2 Corinthians 4:6)!⁸ The following sermon is going to review some of the ancients of the Bible⁹ to help define what faith truly is: faith is living, action, enduring and an unwavering devotion to Jesus as our Lord, Savior and King!

A “Living” Faith

“By faith Abel brought God a better offering than Cain did. By faith he was commended as righteous, when God spoke well of his offerings. And by faith Abel still speaks, even though he is dead. ⁵ By faith Enoch was taken from this life, so that he did not experience death: “He could not be found, because God had taken him away.” For before he was taken, he was commended as one who pleased God. ⁶ And without faith it is impossible to please God, because anyone who comes to him must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who earnestly seek him (11:4-6).

If faith is to be genuinely and firmly grounded in God’s word and love then it must be above all, lived! In Genesis chapter four we are told that in the course of time both Cain and Abel brought offerings to God appropriate to their vocation.¹⁰ While Cain, the farmer, brought “some of the fruits of the soil,” Abel, the Shepherd, brought “fat portions from some of the firstborn of the stock” (2-4). While God looked upon Abel’s sacrifice with favor He did not do so with Cain’s. Since both brothers offered their sacrifices in season and according to their vocations, there has been much debate over why God did not accept them both! Some of the reasons scholars give for the “apparent” superiority of Abel’s sacrifice is “it was living, whereas Cain’s was lifeless; it was stronger, Cain’s weaker, and it grew spontaneously, Cain’s by human

⁵ Peter T. O’Brien, [*The Letter to the Hebrews*](#), The Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI; Nottingham, England: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2010), 399.

⁶ F. F. Bruce, [*The Epistle to the Hebrews*](#), Rev. ed., The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1990), 277.

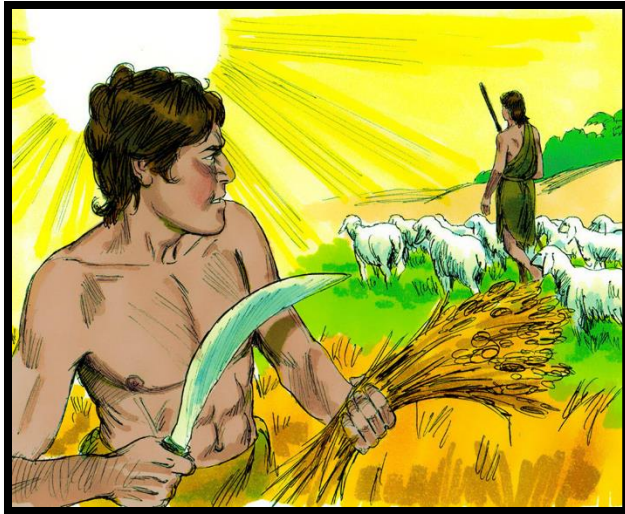
⁷ Peter T. O’Brien, [*The Letter to the Hebrews*](#), The Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI; Nottingham, England: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2010), 402.

⁸ Peter T. O’Brien, [*The Letter to the Hebrews*](#), The Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI; Nottingham, England: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2010), 401.

⁹ F. F. Bruce, [*The Epistle to the Hebrews*](#), Rev. ed., The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1990), 276.

¹⁰ F. F. Bruce, [*The Epistle to the Hebrews*](#), Rev. ed., The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1990), 281.

ingenuity;”¹¹ and it involved the shedding of blood necessary for forgiveness (Hebrews 9:22)¹² whereas Cain’s did not. While all these reasons are possible, they are unlikely because they assume both sacrifices were offered for sin which is not indicated, and they ignore the stated



reason for God rejecting Cain’s sacrifice as given in verse seven. Cain’s offering was rejected because “sin crouched at his door” and his deeds were evil (1 John 3:12).¹³

Abel’s offering was accepted not because it “was animal instead of vegetables,”¹⁴ but since he had a “living faith.”¹⁵ Abel’s sacrifice was acceptable because it was “an outward expression of a devoted and obedient heart!”¹⁶ Without faith it is impossible to please God (11:6)¹⁷ for until one truly trusts one’s unknown future to the known God of Israel¹⁸ one has not truly surrendered that of which one cannot keep to obtain that which one cannot lose.¹⁹ Faith is to be a “living voice”²⁰ that out of

the springs of living water (John 4:10) and the eternity God has placed in one’s heart (Ecclesiastes 3:11), one clings so tightly to the Pearl (Matthew 13:45) one has found in the field. A living faith also is one that willingly and continually invites Christ to take every thought captive and obedient (2 Corinthians 10:5) to He who, by His word, either in this lifetime or the next, will fulfill every promise and give beyond measure unspeakable, unmerited blessings to those who are sinners (1 John 1:10) yet masterpieces of His grace (Ephesians 2:8-9)!

¹¹ Leon Morris, [“Hebrews,”](#) in *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary: Hebrews through Revelation*, ed. Frank E. Gaebelin, vol. 12 (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1981), 115.

¹² F. F. Bruce, [The Epistle to the Hebrews](#), Rev. ed., The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1990), 282.

¹³ F. F. Bruce, [The Epistle to the Hebrews](#), Rev. ed., The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1990), 283.

¹⁴ Philip H Hacking, [Opening up Hebrews](#), Opening Up Commentary (Leominster: Day One Publications, 2006), 71.

¹⁵ Leon Morris, [“Hebrews,”](#) in *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary: Hebrews through Revelation*, ed. Frank E. Gaebelin, vol. 12 (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1981), 115.

¹⁶ F. F. Bruce, [The Epistle to the Hebrews](#), Rev. ed., The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1990), 281.

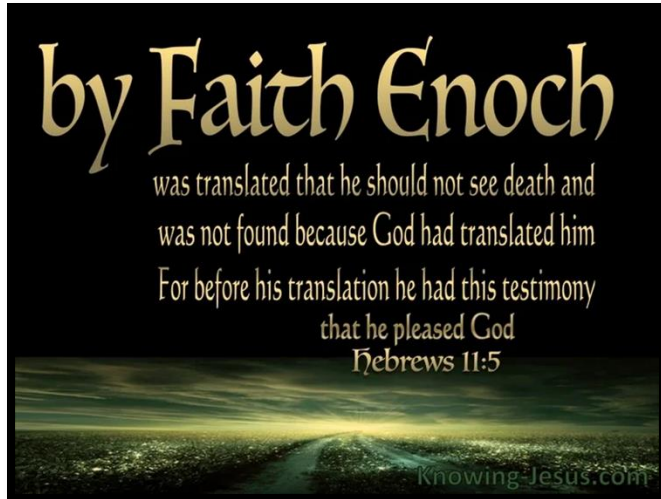
¹⁷ Peter T. O’Brien, [The Letter to the Hebrews](#), The Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI; Nottingham, England: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2010), 403.

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²⁰ Leon Morris, [“Hebrews,”](#) in *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary: Hebrews through Revelation*, ed. Frank E. Gaebelin, vol. 12 (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1981), 115.

From the next example of faith, Enoch, we learn that without a “living” faith it is impossible to please God (11:6)! In the genealogies from Adam to Noah no matter how long a person lived it always ended with the “chilling words, and he died” except for one person!²¹ After Enoch became the father of Methuselah at age 65 we are told that he had other sons and



daughters over the next 300 years²² but what truly defined his legacy was the statement that he “walked faithfully with God, then he was no more because God took him away” (Genesis 5:21-24). Enoch was “transferred” directly into God’s presence²³ without having experienced death (Hebrews 11:5)! What made Enoch truly remarkable was not just that he believed in God’s existence, for even the demons believe God exists (James 2:19),²⁴ but that he voluntarily and with unspeakable joy (Psalms 43:4)²⁵ allowed his life to be “controlled by the unseen reality of God.”²⁶ The decisions

by which defines whom one truly has allegiance too, for Enoch, was not made based on probabilities of receiving temporal pleasure, as if gratifying self was the ultimate purpose of living, but an unwavering belief that those who seek God will be rewarded with continual “access and fellowship with one’s Creator”²⁷ plus a legacy of being assured the gift of life was spent living by faith to please the Father in heaven! From both Abel and Enoch, we learn that without living by faith it is not just difficult to please God, it is impossible!²⁸ It is through placing our complete trust in God that we are able to embrace whatever will He has for our lives

²¹ Philip H Hacking, *Opening up Hebrews*, Opening Up Commentary (Leominster: Day One Publications, 2006), 71–72.

²² F. F. Bruce, *The Epistle to the Hebrews*, Rev. ed., The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1990), 284.

²³ Leon Morris, “[Hebrews](#),” in *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary: Hebrews through Revelation*, ed. Frank E. Gaebelin, vol. 12 (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1981), 115.

²⁴ Leon Morris, “[Hebrews](#),” in *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary: Hebrews through Revelation*, ed. Frank E. Gaebelin, vol. 12 (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1981), 115.

²⁵ F. F. Bruce, *The Epistle to the Hebrews*, Rev. ed., The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1990), 287.

²⁶ Donald A. Hagner, *Hebrews*, Understanding the Bible Commentary Series (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2011), 185.

²⁷ Peter T. O’Brien, *The Letter to the Hebrews*, The Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI; Nottingham, England: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2010), 406–407.

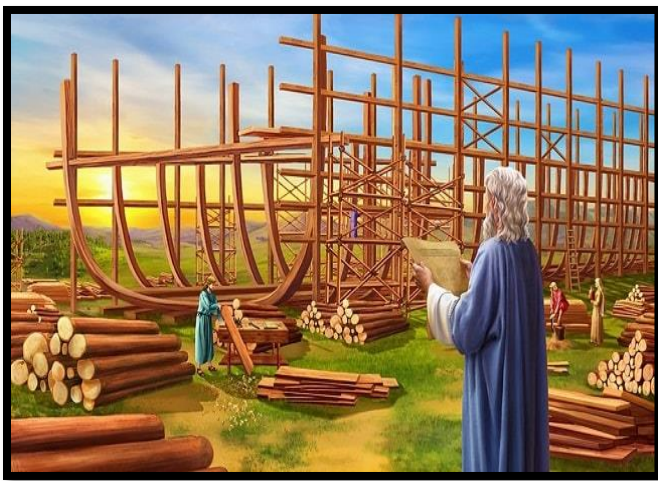
²⁸ Leon Morris, “[Hebrews](#),” in *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary: Hebrews through Revelation*, ed. Frank E. Gaebelin, vol. 12 (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1981), 115.

because He alone is the only reward²⁹ which deeply and completely satisfies the longings of our hearts!

Faith of Action

“By faith Noah, when warned about things not yet seen, in holy fear built an ark to save his family. By his faith he condemned the world and became heir of the righteousness that is in keeping with faith” (11:7).

For faith to be a “living” faith that pleases God then it must be one of action not just reflection! It is one thing to boldly state I believe in the Father, Son and Holy Ghost but quite



another to obey when without divine aid one is doomed to fail! While Noah was a righteous man like Abel and Enoch, what he is known for is doing something unprecedented³⁰ ... making practical preparations of building an ark³¹ not based on a hunch or human advice³² but based on the word of God³³ that in his heart he knew would come to pass. While it must have seemed utterly absurd to his neighbors to “build an ark far inland,”³⁴ an act that undoubtedly invited much criticism and possibly even persecution, Noah put his complete trust in God that his

faithful obedience would lead to God’s gracious provision of saving himself and his household.³⁵ Noah obeyed God not because he was timid or fearful of God’s wrath but due to his reverence and awe of the very God whom he “righteously” served.³⁶ Noah’s actions more than his words

²⁹ Peter T. O’Brien, *The Letter to the Hebrews*, The Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI; Nottingham, England: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2010), 407.

³⁰ F. F. Bruce, *The Epistle to the Hebrews*, Rev. ed., The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1990), 287.

³¹ Peter T. O’Brien, *The Letter to the Hebrews*, The Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI; Nottingham, England: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2010), 407.

³² Leon Morris, “[Hebrews](#),” in *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary: Hebrews through Revelation*, ed. Frank E. Gaebelin, vol. 12 (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1981), 116.

³³ Peter T. O’Brien, *The Letter to the Hebrews*, The Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI; Nottingham, England: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2010), 409.

³⁴ F. F. Bruce, *The Epistle to the Hebrews*, Rev. ed., The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1990), 287–288.

³⁵ Peter T. O’Brien, *The Letter to the Hebrews*, The Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI; Nottingham, England: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2010), 407.

³⁶ Leon Morris, “[Hebrews](#),” in *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary: Hebrews through Revelation*, ed. Frank E. Gaebelin, vol. 12 (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1981), 116.

were not only condemnation to a sinful, disobedient generation³⁷ but were also a glorious example of letting one's light shine joyfully in both the good and bad times! From Noah we learn what James would later reinforce, faith without deeds is dead and useless (James 2:14-26). Genuine faith that pleases God is not merely believing that He will do great things in and through our lives (Romans 8:28) but is also accompanied by a wholeheartedly devotion to obey and serve Him despite the personal costs that are truly minor compared to Christ who gave His very life for us (John 3:16)!

An “Enduring Faith”

“By faith Abraham, when called to go to a place he would later receive as his inheritance, obeyed and went, even though he did not know where he was going.⁹ By faith he made his home in the promised land like a stranger in a foreign country; he lived in tents, as did Isaac and Jacob, who were heirs with him of the same promise.¹⁰ For he was looking forward to the city with foundations, whose architect and builder is God.¹¹ And by faith even Sarah, who was past childbearing age, was enabled to bear children because she considered him faithful who had made the promise.¹² And so from this one man, and he as good as dead, came descendants as numerous as the stars in the sky and as countless as the sand on the seashore (11:8-12).

For faith to be a “living” faith it not only has to be filled with obedience to God's word but also must not waver even if one must wait a lifetime to receive crowns of righteousness! Abraham is both a historical example of faith in action and endurance³⁸ for it was by faith in God alone that he was able to “overcome obstacles that from a human perspective were insurmountable.”³⁹ First, without knowing where he was going,⁴⁰ just a vague promise of God making him into a great nation (Genesis 12:1-3), Abraham obeyed God's call “while it was still sounding in his ears”⁴¹ and went to a foreign country only to live in tents all his life⁴² without any rights to ownership to the land he walked upon!⁴³ Year after year he pitched his tent amongst the Palestinians and “commanded their respect as a prince of God” and yet the only land

³⁷ Philip H Hacking, [Opening up Hebrews](#), Opening Up Commentary (Leominster: Day One Publications, 2006), 72.

³⁸ Philip H Hacking, [Opening up Hebrews](#), Opening Up Commentary (Leominster: Day One Publications, 2006), 72.

³⁹ Donald A. Hagner, [Hebrews](#), Understanding the Bible Commentary Series (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2011), 189.

⁴⁰ Donald A. Hagner, [Hebrews](#), Understanding the Bible Commentary Series (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2011), 189.

⁴¹ Leon Morris, [“Hebrews,”](#) in *The Expositor's Bible Commentary: Hebrews through Revelation*, ed. Frank E. Gaebelin, vol. 12 (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1981), 118.

⁴² Peter T. O'Brien, [The Letter to the Hebrews](#), The Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI; Nottingham, England: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2010), 413.

⁴³ Leon Morris, [“Hebrews,”](#) in *The Expositor's Bible Commentary: Hebrews through Revelation*, ed. Frank E. Gaebelin, vol. 12 (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1981), 118.



he ever owned in Canaan was a burial plot in the field of Machpelah near Hebron.⁴⁴ Though God never gave him inheritance in the land, not even a foot of Canaan to either himself (Acts 7:5), Isaac or Jacob except one burial plot; Abraham never stopped believing that a “time of fulfillment”⁴⁵ would one day occur when God would give him a home in a glorious city whose architect and builder was not other than God Himself!⁴⁶ A “living” faith does not question when the rewards of service might come, as if one is owed anything by one’s Creator, but instead rejoices that God is enough portion of

reward until the glorious day one goes home to see Jesus and receive the unspeakable blessings awaiting for all of God’s children!

The second obstacle Abraham persevered in faith was that despite being “worn out,”



“impotent”⁴⁷ and long passed the normal age of childbearing (Gen. 15:1–6; 17:15–22; 18:9–15),⁴⁸ Abraham believed the very God who created the universe out of nothing would create life where life no longer existed! At the tender age of 99 Abraham was told that the fulfillment of the divine promise to make his offspring as numerous as the stars in the sky (Genesis 15:5) and the sand which is one the seashore (Genesis 22:17) would begin in one year’s time with the birth of Isaac!⁴⁹ Even though

⁴⁴ F. F. Bruce, *The Epistle to the Hebrews*, Rev. ed., The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1990), 292.

⁴⁵ Peter T. O’Brien, *The Letter to the Hebrews*, The Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI; Nottingham, England: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2010), 414.

⁴⁶ Leon Morris, “Hebrews,” in *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary: Hebrews through Revelation*, ed. Frank E. Gaebelain, vol. 12 (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1981), 118.

⁴⁷ Donald A. Hagner, *Hebrews*, Understanding the Bible Commentary Series (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2011), 190.

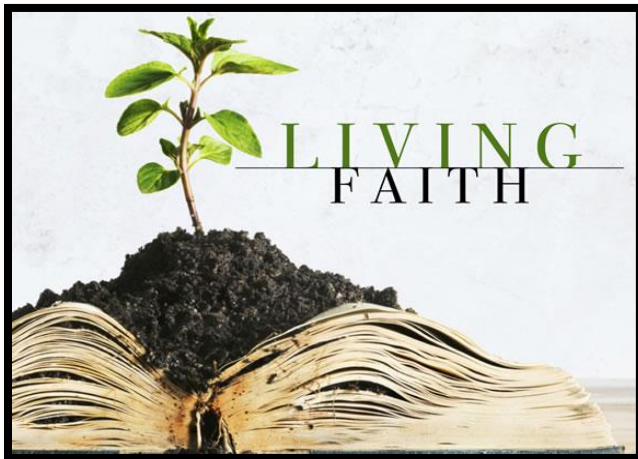
⁴⁸ Peter T. O’Brien, *The Letter to the Hebrews*, The Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI; Nottingham, England: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2010), 416.

⁴⁹ F. F. Bruce, *The Epistle to the Hebrews*, Rev. ed., The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1990), 296–297.

Abraham laughed and said, “will a son be born to a man a hundred years old” (Genesis 17:17) he believed God and continued to walk faithfully and blamelessly before Him as if this promise had already come to pass! And the final obstacle Abraham faced and preserved in faith was on a “mountaintop not far from where Calvary stood”!⁵⁰ With his only son on the altar and his knife drawn back in obedience⁵¹ Abraham will forever be known as righteous because he was ready to obey God’s command to kill the heir of God’s promise with the overwhelming assurance that it would still come to pass ... even if God had to raise the dead to life! “The implications to us “listeners” are clear: for faith to be genuine it must be lived through action with the unshakeable assurance that God gives “real and incorruptible” treasures beyond our imaginations to those who trust in Him and patiently endure for His promises to be fulfilled!

What then is Faith?

Faith is confidence in what we hope for and assurance about what we do not see (11:1). The foundation of faith is a positive attitude towards the future, which cannot yet be experienced but must remain a matter of hope. Faith is not belief that something is going to happen based on one’s abilities or the probability of its occurrence. Faith is living as if one has already been



granted a blessing despite knowing it is “humanly” or “by chance” impossible to obtain but guaranteed the moment God speaks it into existence! Faith is to be a “living voice” that out of the springs of living water and the eternity God has placed in one’s heart, one clings so tightly to the Pearl one has found in the field. A living faith is also one that willingly and continually invites Christ to take every thought captive and obedient to He who, by His word, either in this lifetime or the next, will fulfill every promise and give beyond measure unspeakable, unmerited

blessings to those who are sinners yet masterpieces of His grace. Since it is by the decisions of life that one’s allegiance is truly shown, faith is actively serving God with all one’s heart, mind, strength and soul not to build a legacy on this earth, as if that were ever possible, but to make life decisions according to His word so that one might please He who is the very source of one’s existence and the Lord of all things seen and unseen! And above all faith is enduring on the righteous path God sets before one’s life with the assurance that His presence and love is enough reward for now coupled with the wavering belief that the glorious day when one goes home to see Jesus one will receive the unspeakable blessings waiting for all of God’s children!

⁵⁰ Philip H Hacking, [Opening up Hebrews](#), Opening Up Commentary (Leominster: Day One Publications, 2006), 73–74.

⁵¹ Philip H Hacking, [Opening up Hebrews](#), Opening Up Commentary (Leominster: Day One Publications, 2006), 74.