

MINISTRY BY MAIL
Lutheran Conference of Confessional Fellowship
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Twenty-Second Sunday after Trinity, October 27, 2013

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(Hymns found in The Lutheran Hymnal, CPH, 1941)

Hymns: 29, 16:4, 428, 396, 468.

Lessons: Psalm 33, 1 Corinthians 1:4-9, Matthew 22:34-46.

Sermon Text: Hebrews 11:1-10.

Sermon by Pastor M. H. Eibs

Dear friends in Christ:

The Bible passages that speak about faith in the Lord, being faithful, and trusting in the Lord, are several hundred in number. When our text, then, speaks about faith, it is teaching us something that is very important, something that should command our diligent attention.

To have faith in God means to trust in him, to take him at his Word. It means to believe whatever God says in the Bible. Such faith is a precious gift of God. It is a gift that really stands out in this sinful world where so many question almost anything and everything in the Bible and say they don't know what to believe.

Without faith in God, there is doubt and uncertainty. Without faith in God, people don't know where they're at and are afraid of the future. Without faith in Jesus as the Savior, there is no hope of salvation, for the Bible says: *"Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life, but whoever rejects the Son will not see life, for God's wrath remains on him."* (John 3:36)

With faith in God the Father and Jesus our Savior, we have the confidence of a little child trusting its father implicitly, no questions asked. With such faith we also have the sure hope of everlasting life in heaven.

We, then, have great reason to seriously study our text and

LEARN FROM THE SCRIPTURES ABOUT SAVING FAITH.

- 1. A scriptural definition of saving faith; and**
- 2. Examples of faith from the Old Testament.**

Our text says: *"Now faith is being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see."* The Holy Spirit caused this definition of faith to be very carefully worded, and so we ought to pay close attention to it. Faith, according to this Bible definition, is *"being sure of what we hope for."* It's an assurance we have in our hearts. It's a conviction of mind. It's something that makes us sure because it says so in God's Word. As Christians, then, we accept whatever the Bible says as being right, reliable, and true.

What is it that we hope for? Briefly stated, we hope for everything that has to do with our eternal salvation. Paul says: *"The gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord."* (Romans 6:23b) We don't know when Jesus is coming, but we know he will come back to take us to heaven. Our faith is based on this promise: *"This same Jesus, who has been taken from you into heaven, will come back in the same way you have seen him go into heaven."* (Acts 1:11) We know we have to suffer here because of our faith, but we look forward to the glory of heaven which will be so outstanding that our sufferings ought not even to be mentioned in comparison. Our faith is based on this Word of God: *"Now if we are children, then we are heirs - heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ, if indeed we share in his sufferings in order that we may also share in his glory. I consider that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us."* (Romans 8:17-18) Since we have been declared righteous for Jesus' sake in the Gospel, and by the grace of our God believe in Jesus, we are sure of eternal glory. Our faith is based on many passages such as this Word of

God: ***"Those he predestined, he also called; those he called, he also justified; those he justified, he also glorified."*** (Romans 8:30) Faith in the Word of God means that we are sure of all that we hope for.

Faith, our text says, is also to be ***"certain of what we do not see."*** Faith is the divine assurance in the heart of a believer of future and invisible blessings. We have not seen God the Father. Jesus said: ***"No one has seen the Father except the one who is from God; only he has seen the Father. I tell you the truth, he who believes has everlasting life."*** (John 6:46-47) We have not seen Jesus either who was sent by the Father. But by faith we say with Job: ***"I know that my Redeemer lives, and that in the end he will stand upon the earth. And after my skin has been destroyed, yet in my flesh I will see God; I myself will see him with my own eyes - I, and not another."*** (Job 19:25-27) We have not seen the eternal glory in heaven, but faith in God's Word makes us certain of what the Bible says: ***"He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away."*** (Revelation 21:4)

Being sure of what they hoped for and certain of that which they had never seen, this, our text says, ***"is what the ancients were commended for."*** This is why the believers of long ago stand out as examples of great faith. This is why we look to them as examples and for encouragement to cling to the Word of God in all difficulties and afflictions.

Let us now consider the examples of faith from the Old Testament.

2.

The first example is taken from the first page of the Old Testament: ***"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."*** The Bible says that God spoke: ***"Let there be..."*** (Genesis 1:3,6, etc.) God created all things in the universe out of nothing by his almighty word. The psalmist writes: ***"By the word of the Lord were the heavens made, their starry host by the breath of his mouth. ... For he spoke, and it came to be; he commanded, and it stood firm."*** (Psalm 33:6,9) The Bible clearly teaches that God created all things in six ordinary, 24-hour days about 6,000 years ago.

Our text clearly rejects any idea of evolution in these words: ***"what is seen was not made out of what was visible."*** By faith we accept the creation of the universe by God in 6 days. The difference between the Christian faith in this matter and the evolutionist's ideas is this: We believe what God says in his Word. The evolutionist chooses to believe theories and guesswork, theories which really strain the imagination. For example, that the planets were formed as a result of a big explosion millions or billions of years ago, the so-called "big bang theory." Or that man with his immortal soul gradually evolved from some single-celled life starting millions of years ago. Faith accepts what the almighty God says, not what foolish men guess happened. The true faith is to accept whatever God says in the Bible, just because God says so.

The next example is of Abel. ***"By faith Abel offered God a better sacrifice than Cain did. By faith he was commended as a righteous man, when God spoke well of his offerings."*** What made Abel's sacrifice acceptable is his faith. God looks at the heart, not at outward things. Genesis says: ***"The Lord looked with favor on Abel and his offering, but on Cain and his offering he did not look with favor."*** (Genesis 4:4-5) Abel's faith is emphasized in our text, and it says: ***"By faith he still speaks, even though he is dead."*** Though Abel has been dead for thousands of years, the record of his faith still speaks to us in the Scriptures. It continues to teach us: ***"The Lord does not look at the things man looks at. Man looks at the outward appearance, but the Lord looks at the heart."*** (1 Samuel 16:7) So in the public judgment on the Last Day, Jesus will speak of the outward works as evidence of what was in the hearts of people.

Next, Enoch is mentioned as an example. ***"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."*** Only two men in history have been taken to heaven without dying - Enoch and Elijah, What our text emphasizes with regard to Enoch is his faith. By faith it was, as Genesis says, that Enoch ***"walked with God."*** (Genesis 5:24) He pleased the Lord because of his faith. Our text adds: ***"And without faith it is impossible to please God, because any one who comes to him must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who earnestly seek him."*** Faith that pleases God believes that God really exists and that he will graciously for Jesus' sake reward these who believe with eternal life.

Noah is an outstanding example of a man who believed. ***"By faith Noah, when warned about things not yet seen, in holy fear built an ark to save his family."*** Think of the faith it took to build the large ark on dry land while the unbelieving people all around him ridiculed him. Noah believed that God would send a flood to cover the highest mountains and that all unbelievers would perish. He had full conviction even though he had not one thing visible to go on. With that faith, our text says, Noah ***"condemned the world and became heir of the righteousness that comes by faith."*** The unbelievers were condemned, but Noah and his family were saved. Noah's faith is an example to us, that we should believe whatever God's Word tells us, no matter how incredible it may sound.

Abraham's faith gives a similar example. ***"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."*** God told Abraham to leave his home, his family and acquaintances, and go to a strange land. He did not know where he was going, but he blindly followed the Word of God, also believing that this new land would be his inheritance. Our text says: ***"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. For he was looking forward to the city with foundations, whose architect and builder is God."*** Abraham's faith was such that he simply obeyed God's command: ***"Leave your country, your people and your father's household and go to the land I will show you."*** (Genesis 12:1) He believed God's promise: ***"To your offspring I will give this land."*** (Genesis 12:7) He never owned even a small part of this land, and even had to pay for a burial plot for his wife. He lived in tents, traveling from place to place, just as did Isaac his son, and Jacob his grandson. But all this made no difference to Abraham. He believed God's promise, even though he did not know how or when God would fulfill it. That's faith! He had something far more important to think about, something to look forward to by faith. That was the eternal home in the heavenly Jerusalem which God has prepared for all who believe in Jesus. Abraham believed the promise of the coming Messiah that would come from his descendants. Believing that Gospel promise he could be sure of a home in heaven, a permanent home in glory everlasting.

When we speak of the Christian faith, the saving faith, let it be clearly understood that it is being sure of what we hope for, that which we are certain of, because God's Word says so. According to the Gospel we are sure of this: ***"God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting men's sins against them."*** (2 Corinthians 5:19) We have this assurance that God counts us righteous in his sight for Jesus' sake. With such faith in our hearts, even though we do not yet see it, we are sure that the eternal glory God has promised will be ours to enjoy forever. Amen.

(Reprinted from the Ministry By Mail for October 2, 1988 by M. H. Eibs. Edited by Robert Mehlretter)