

Keep Living by Faith

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[0 : 00] We pray that as we have a quick look at it this morning, that you might encourage us to follow in their footsteps. We ask it in Jesus' name. Amen.

Well, there was once a man, as the story goes, who went on a bushwalk during a misty morning. He tripped and fell down the side of a cliff.

But as he fell, he managed to reach out and grab a root of a tree that was sticking out of the cliff. And hanging there for dear life, with only the mist below him, he cried out, help, is anyone up there? And lo and behold, a voice replied, yes, I am here. The man couldn't believe his ears and he cried out, who is that? The voice replied, it is God. The man was really excited at that.

He said, oh God, please help me. God replied, do you trust me? Of course, said the man. Then God said, let go. The man paused, then said, is anyone else up there?

[1 : 04] Now, it's meant to be a mildly amusing joke, but it illustrates, I think, the nature of faith, or in this man's case, the lack of faith. You see, faith is believing or trusting God's word such that you act on it, even if you cannot see the ground below or the future ahead.

Presumably, in the joke, the man is hanging over a river or the ground is not as far below as he thinks. It's just covered by the mist. And so he could let go and fall safely. But either way, faith is trusting God's word confidently such that you act on it, even when you cannot see the ground below or the future ahead.

Chapter 11, verse 1 puts it like this. Now, faith is confidence in what we hope for and the assurance about what we do not see. Faith is confidence in what we hope for.

That is, faith means we consider what we hope for as something certain, real, solid, even though we cannot see it. Now, this verse is not a complete definition of faith, but it's a very good one for our readers, for the Hebrews.

Remember, they had started the Christian race well, even joyfully accepted the confiscation of their property, we heard last week. But now they are thinking about throwing in the towel, giving up.

[2 : 24] Because they cannot see their promised inheritance of heaven. Instead, all they can see is their persecution and hardship. And so last week, the writer encouraged them to persevere in the faith.

If you've got your Bibles there, have a look at the same page, chapter 10, verse 35. So do not throw away your confidence, says the writer. It will be richly rewarded. You need to persevere so that when you have done the will of God, you'll receive what he has promised.

For in just a little while, he who is coming will come and will not delay. And my righteous one will live by faith. And I will take no pleasure in the one who shrinks back. But we do not belong to those who shrink back and are destroyed, but to those who have faith and are saved.

You see, the writer says that they need to persevere in faith, in trust, in belief. And he says the righteous will live by faith. And he says they are those who have faith.

And now in chapter 11, he says this is what faith looks like. It is trusting with confidence, certain of what we hope for, because God has promised it.

[3 : 39] It's not blind faith. I mentioned this morning, in fact, someone from the earlier service said, I bet you wish you no longer supported the blues because they're like coming last or something.

He was a Collingwood supporter. It's always Collingwood supporters. Now, if I had faith that the blues would win the premiership, that's blind faith, right? But the faith of these people is not blind because it is in God.

It is in God who keeps his promises. And this is the type of faith that the Old Testament people were commended for, verse 2. And so the writer then lists a whole stack of people from the Old Testament as examples of those who lived by this sort of faith.

Examples which are meant to encourage the readers to follow in their footsteps. Now, we don't have time to look at this whole chapter.

I was trying a bit off more than I could chew this morning at 9, so I've learnt my lesson. I'm going to just give you a bit of a framework, and then I'm going to focus on just one section. So, from verse 3 to 38, essentially, we've got all these examples.

[4 : 49] And they're in historical order, okay? And they can be grouped by a period of history. So, verse 3 to verse 7, you've got from the beginning, creation, to the new beginning, after the flood with Noah.

So, creation to Noah. And then from verse 8 to 22, you've got Abraham and his immediate family, Isaac, Jacob, Joseph. And then you've got, in verse 23, you've got Moses as they leave Egypt, the next stage of history, as they exit Egypt down to the promised land.

And then from verse 32, even he runs out of time and says, what more should I say? I do not have time to tell all about those people. And you've got other examples later on in history.

So, you've got different groups grouped by their period of history. But they're also grouped by an aspect of faith that they draw out. And so, for example, in verses 3 to 7, we see a couple of aspects, like the fact that we are made right with God by faith.

So, verse 4, by faith, Abel was commended as righteous. Or verse 7, by faith, Noah condemned the world and became an heir of the righteousness that literally is, that comes by faith.

[6 : 10] In other words, we are made right with God by believing in God. That's how it works. But throughout the whole chapter, we also see that faith leads to action.

Faith leads to obedience. And faith means trusting in God's promises, even though we can't see it. And those two things are picked up in group 2, Abraham.

So, let's pick it up at verse 8 with the examples of Abraham and his family. Verse 8. 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.

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 of land.

For he was looking forward to the city with foundations, whose architect and builder is God. Here in verse 9, Abraham left his homeland, which was the land of Ur.

[7 : 18] U-R is how you spell it. Ur. The kids say all the time to me. Land of Ur in Mesopotamia. And he left without even knowing where he was going.

Without even having seen. He simply obeyed God and went. And that's extraordinary. I mean, when I go on holidays, I check out the place before I go on the internet and have a look and see if it's, you know, got all these mod cons.

Has it got a dishwasher? No? Well, I've got my three kids. That'll do. Does it have heating and cooling and those sorts of things? I check it all out before I go on the holidays, let alone go to live. Abraham just goes. He obeys. His faith obeys, even without seeing. And when Abraham got to the land that God promised, he did not become the owner of the land.

He inherited himself straight away. He didn't build a city to settle in it permanently. No, he remained a stranger in the country, a foreigner. And he lived in a tent.

[8 : 16] It's the opposite of permanence. In fact, he never got to own the land apart from a cave to bury his wife Sarah in. That was the only patch of land he got to own in the end.

Yet he and Isaac and Jacob continue to trust that God would deliver on his promise. That God would give many descendants from Abraham, even though he only had one son.

And that God would give the land to those descendants. Have a look at verse 13 in your Bibles. Verse 13. All these people were still living by faith when they died.

They did not receive all these people's Abraham, Isaac, Jacob. They did not receive the things promised. They only saw them and welcomed them from a distance, admitting that they were foreigners and strangers on earth.

You see, even though they did not receive the promised land, even though they did not see thousands of descendants as God promised, they still trusted God so much so that verse 13 says that they actually saw the fulfillment of the promises in their mind's eye.

[9 : 26] They actually welcomed the fulfillment of the promises. That's how much they believed God. They believed God so much so that they thought, well, good is done.

I believe. Sorry, I didn't mean to get you there. But that's the kind of faith they have. Because it was God who promised it. And in the meantime, Abraham and co regarded themselves as strangers in this land.

That is, they didn't regard it as their homeland, even though it was promised to them. Sure, they absolutely believed God would give this land to their descendants. And God did. God kept his promise.

But as for them, they didn't regard it as their homeland. So they called themselves foreigners and lived in tents, like tourists camping through a country they were visiting.

And so in verses 14 to 16, the writer draws a conclusion from their words, from calling themselves strangers. He says, verse 14, for people who say such things show that they are looking for a country of their own.

[10:31] I mean, you don't call yourself a stranger if you're in your own country, do you? Verse 15, if they'd been thinking of the country they had left, the land of Ur, they would have had opportunity to return.

But they didn't. And so instead, they must have been longing for a better country, a heavenly one. Therefore, God is not ashamed to be called their God, for he has prepared a city for them.

Do you see what the writer is saying? They call themselves strangers, which meant they didn't regard the physical promised land as their home. And they didn't return back to the land of Ur, so they didn't regard that physical land as home either.

And so the writer concludes they must have been looking for a spiritual home, a spiritual city built by God, a better country, a heavenly one.

And this is what they would call home. You see, they trusted that God would give the promises to their descendants, and they trusted that God would still give them a home in heaven.

[11:37] Now, the reason that the writer pauses to point all this out for his readers is because it relates directly to them. You see, they were suffering here on earth because they were Christians, which made them stand out as different.

Like a foreigner stands out in a foreign country. Like a stranger stands out in a small town. And so the writer reminds them that they ought to have the same faith as Abraham, who trusted that God would not only deliver on his promises, but also bring them home to heaven.

They were to regard themselves as Abraham regarded themselves as foreigners that not cling to this world, but long for the world to come. They were not meant to try and fit into this world.

They were meant to stand out as different. And sometimes that would mean persecution and suffering now, but it would definitely mean a heavenly city later.

There are a number of corny romantic lines that guys use on girls, like that terrible one. Did it hurt when you fell from heaven? Yeah, yeah, yeah.

[12:51] Don't, oh, that's corny. A nicer one I heard recently, thanks to Facebook, was a guy said to a girl, what's this material?

It's boyfriend material. And it worked, apparently. Another corny one was from a movie. The guy says, why are you trying so hard to fit in when you're born to stand out?

Corny. But remarkably true for Christians. You see, we are born into God's family and we are meant to stand out as different.

This is not meant to be our true home. We're meant to look like foreigners by the way we live, by the way we act, by the way we speak. See, sometimes we can work so hard to fit into this world and cling to the things of this world, can't we?

We can spend all our money on the same way and the same things that the world does. We can do all the same things that the world does, have the same priorities the world does, even speak the same, think the same, have the same values and attitudes when really we are born to stand out as God's children, as strangers, as foreigners, different.

[14:09] Because our home is not this world, but the world to come. Of course, it wasn't just Abraham who did this.

It was Isaac and Jacob as well. They lived by faith, believing God would deliver on his promise to their descendants and believing that God would give them a heavenly home.

And so they lived by faith as strangers and foreigners. And what does God say? End of verse 16. What a compliment.

God is not ashamed. In other words, God saying, I'm proud of them because they trusted in me. What a compliment. I've been proud of my kids from time to time. And it's a good thing. And I tell them because it's it's meant to encourage them. How much more so when God says it, I'm proud of you because you trust in me.

[15:16] He says it every time we trust in his promises. Even though we cannot see them. We are to keep living by faith until we enter our heavenly inheritance.

We are to keep living by faith, trusting in the promises we cannot yet see. And C.T. Stubb was a brilliant cricket, cricketer, British cricketer, one of the greats. He was playing a tight match with Australia. The match that actually sparked the Ashes series, the concept. So tight was the competition. This is back in 1880s. So tight was the competition that it was reported a spectator almost chewed through the handle of their umbrella in nervous tension. Can you imagine that? That's sharp teeth. And Australia won. Great for us. Not so good for England. But Stubb was one of the greats. And for a period, he had few cricketing rivals that could equal him. And at the height of his career, 1884, he said, I know that cricket will not last and honor will not last and nothing in this world will last.

[16:21] But it is worthwhile living for the world to come. So he and seven other Cambridge graduates packed their bags, went off to China to share the gospel because they believed God's promises that through Jesus people can be saved.

Because they believed God's promises that this world is not our home, but the world to come is. In fact, even while in China, Stubbs' father died, leaving him an inheritance of 29,000 pounds, which back in the 1800s, I've worked it out. I tried to get some calculators. About \$2 million. So pretty tidy sum of inheritance. And he gave it all away to Christian work. Why?

Because he trusted in God's promises. And those future promises shaped his present reality. Andrew, I keep going to say your last name and we're not supposed to say your last name. Andrew and Helen from CMS. He was telling us our Bible study group on Thursday night. We were sharing a bit about his life in Egypt. And, you know, they love it there.

[17:36] And good for them. I'd find it really hard. Why on earth would they go? Why? Because they want to see people saved. That's how much they believe God's promise in the gospel.

That whoever believes in Jesus will be saved. Why are they not clinging to this homeland of Melbourne? Not because it's not cold. Although they miss the heat. But because their homeland is heaven, I take it. And we're not CT starved. We're not Andrew and Helen. But we are to follow their examples. We are to follow the example of Abraham. Who trusted God's promises about the future and lived in the present in light of them. Who counted heaven as his homeland and didn't cling to this world. Well, I've gone on too long. Let me finish where the writer finishes. The whole point of this is to encourage his readers to keep living by faith. And so he ends up in chapter 12 verse 1. Have a look at chapter 12 verse 1.

[18:39] He says, Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, all these people like Abraham, let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles.

And let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us, fixing our eyes on Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of faith. For the joy set before him, he endured, persevered the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.

Consider him who endured such opposition from sinners, so that you will not grow weary and lose heart. Here is the greatest example of living by faith.

Jesus. And we are to consider Jesus. Consider Christ and his faith. His trust in the Father. His obedience to the Father, which took him to the cross for us.

At the start of the service when... Sorry, I'm running out of time, but funny story. At the start of the service when Glenn asked us to think about our favorite character of faith person in the Bible, his children were behind me, and so I just turned to them while Glenn was up here.

[19:46] I said, Oh, so, you know, who do you think your favorite people are? And one of the kids, I won't say which one, said, Jesus! I said, Why is that? She said, Because he's my Lord.

How old is she? Four. And she gets it. Consider Christ. Follow in his footsteps. Keep the faith until we reach heaven.

Let's pray. Our gracious Heavenly Father, we do thank you for these great examples of faith. Not only these he recorded for us in the Bible, but those around us here at church.

Father, we thank you also, most of all, for the Lord Jesus, the greatest example of faith. Help us to consider Christ and his faithfulness to the cross, that we might continue to follow in his footsteps and keep living by faith.

We ask you in Jesus name. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.
[20 : 55] Amen. Amen.ame