

Thursday, November 3, 2011 - A Faith that Looks Forward

Hebrews 6:11-12 – And we desire that each one of you show the same diligence to the full assurance of hope until the end, that you do not become sluggish, but imitate those who through faith and patience inherit the promises.

Life is sometimes not what it seems. Things change, people change; that which you thought was solid or sound, true or stable are no more. Change occurs all around us and it can try the soul. We take comfort in Christ's promise that if we are, "**faithful until (unto) death, and I will give you the crown of life.**" Not just faithful until you die, though that is important, but faithful to the point of losing everything, even your life, for the cause of Christ. That, my friend, requires faith. Faith, like other important things, must be maintained — or it will be lost. We are told in **Revelation 3:11**, "**Hold fast what you have, that no one may take your crown.**" Christ will come in a quick manner, no warning. We need to hold fast or cling tenaciously to our relationship with God. At all costs we are to make sure that no man takes our crown and cause us to forfeit the heavenly inheritance of which we, if faithful, will inherit. The life of faith begun is virtually worthless if it is not completed. Paul says in **Colossians 2:5**, "**For though I am absent in the flesh, yet I am with you in spirit, rejoicing to see your good order and the steadfastness of your faith in Christ.**"

What happens to our faith is crucial. In **Hebrews 11** we see multiple examples of those who were faced with critical stages in their lives and how their faith helped them look past themselves to what God wanted them to do. Notice particularly **Hebrews 11:17** when the writer speaks of depth of Abraham's faith: "**By faith Abraham, being tried, offered up Isaac: yea, he that had gladly received the promises was offering up his only begotten [son]; even he to whom it was said, In Isaac shall thy seed be called: accounting that God [is] able to raise up, even from the dead; from whence he did also in a figure receive him back.**" Abraham understood that whatever God asks or requires of us, our faith can see us through.

What, then, is involved in having a lifelong faith?

First, we must have a faith that grows. Even after experiences should have matured our faith considerably, it may in fact still be small. Consider Christ's disciples:

Matt. 8:24-26 – And suddenly a great tempest arose on the sea, so that the boat was covered with the waves. But He was asleep. Then His disciples came to Him and awoke Him, saying, Lord, save us! We are perishing! But He said to them, "Why are you fearful, O you of little faith?"

It is not true that our faith only grows in small amounts. It is possible for faith to grow significantly. Consider Paul's words:

2 Thes. 1:3-5 – We are bound to thank God always for you, brethren, as it is fitting, because your faith grows exceedingly, and the love of every one of you all abounds toward each other, so that we ourselves boast of you among the churches of God for your patience and faith in all your persecutions and tribulations that you endure, which is manifest evidence of the righteous judgment of God, that you may be counted worthy of the kingdom of God, for which you also suffer.

We must have a desire for greater faith and it must characterize us in all that we do and say. Christ's disciples were told of the incredible power the smallest faith provides:

Luke 17:5-6 – And the apostles said to the Lord, "Increase our faith." So the Lord said, "If you have faith as a mustard seed, you can say to this mulberry tree, 'Be pulled up by the roots and be planted in the sea,' and it would obey you.

We need to think about how strong our faith truly is. A weak faith can hinder our prayer life and cause us to miss out on blessings from God. Consider the story of the father who brought his ailing son to Christ's disciples:

Matthew 17:14-20 – And when they were come to the multitude, there came to him a man, kneeling to him, saying, Lord, have mercy on my son: for he is epileptic, and suffereth grievously; for oft-times he falleth into the fire, and oft-times into the water. And I brought him to thy disciples, and they could not cure him. And Jesus answered and said, O faithless and perverse generation, how long shall I be with you? how long shall I bear with you? bring him hither to me. And Jesus rebuked him; and the demon went out of him: and the boy was cured from that hour. Then came the disciples to Jesus apart, and said, Why could not we cast it out? And he saith unto them, Because of your little faith: for verily I say unto you, If ye have faith as a grain of mustard seed, ye shall say unto this mountain, Remove hence to yonder place; and it shall remove; and nothing shall be impossible unto you.

Second, we must understand our faith will be tested. We should not regret circumstances that strengthen our faith.

James 1:2, 3 – My brethren, count it all joy when you fall into various trials, knowing that the testing of your faith produces patience

1 Pet. 1:6, 7 – In this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while, if need be, you have been grieved by various trials, that the genuineness of your faith, being much more precious than gold that perishes, though it is tested by fire, may be found to praise, honor, and glory at the revelation of Jesus Christ

We should not be foolish and overestimate the ability of our faith to win out in certain circumstances but neither should we shrink from any hardship that it is our responsibility to face. It is not easy in sudden crisis to develop a strong faith — we must prepare for the “big” tests by daily triumphing in the “small” tests of our faith.

1 Cor. 12:7-10 – And lest I should be exalted above measure by the abundance of the revelations, a thorn in the flesh was given to me, a messenger of Satan to buffet me, lest I be exalted above measure. Concerning this thing I pleaded with the Lord three times that it might depart from me. And He said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for My strength is made perfect in weakness." Therefore most gladly I will rather boast in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me. Therefore I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in needs, in persecutions, in distresses, for Christ's sake. For when I am weak, then I am strong.

Third, our faith must be active. Our definition of “faith” is sometimes quite limited. James tells us in **James 2:26 – For as the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without works is dead also.** Faith must be also complemented by other qualities in our inner character. Consider what Peter tells us:

2 Peter 1:5-11 – But also for this very reason, giving all diligence, add to your faith virtue, to virtue knowledge, to knowledge self-control, to self-control perseverance, to perseverance godliness, to godliness brotherly kindness, and to brotherly kindness love. For if these things are yours and abound, you will be neither barren nor unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. For he who lacks these things is shortsighted, even to blindness, and has forgotten that he was cleansed from his old sins. Therefore, brethren, be even more diligent to make your call and election sure, for if you do these things you will never stumble; for so an entrance will be supplied to you abundantly into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

Saying I have faith and proving it by the way I live are two completely different things. Remember Christ's words in **Revelation 3:15: "I know thy works, that thou art neither cold nor hot: I would thou wert cold or hot."** Jesus knew the works of the Laodiceans and none of them were commendable. They were neither cold nor hot in their religious attitudes and activities. Just like the lukewarm waters emitted in their geographical vicinity they were lukewarm, listless, unconcerned, indifferent and heartless. This group of people claimed to be Christians, but they were indifferent in their commitment. Jesus knows Christians today in the same way.

Finally, we are exhorted to "stand fast in the faith." We cannot always control circumstances, but one thing we can control: our decision to stand firm. Standing firm in our faith will sometimes put us on the opposite side of our friends, family, co-workers, etc. Christians are to do what is right regardless the cost.

1 Cor. 16:13 – Watch, stand fast in the faith, be brave, be strong

Rev. 2:10 – Do not fear any of those things which you are about to suffer. Indeed, the devil is about to throw some of you into prison, that you may be tested, and you will have tribulation ten days. Be faithful until death, and I will give you the crown of life

Faith itself is essentially forward-looking — it has to do with future realities.

2 Cor. 5:6, 7 - So we are always confident, knowing that while we are at home in the body we are absent from the Lord. For we walk by faith, not by sight

If we concentrate solely on the past and the present, we may lose our salvation

Heb. 3:6 – but Christ as a Son over His own house, whose house we are if we hold fast the confidence and the rejoicing of the hope firm to the end

Heb.3:14 – For we have become partakers of Christ if we hold the beginning of our confidence steadfast to the end

Heb. 10:22, 23, 35 – let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water. Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for He who promised is faithful...Therefore do not cast away your confidence, which has great reward

The "end" of our salvation awaits those who have remained faithful

1 Pet. 1:5, 9 – who are kept by the power of God through faith for salvation ready to be revealed in the last time...receiving the end of your faith--the salvation of your souls

What does your faith say about you?