

SERMON – PASTOR GREG

14/08/2022

FAITH IN JESUS CHRIST. Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Hebrews 11: *Faith is being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see....*

*Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, 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.* Let us pray. The Commonwealth Games have once again come and gone. I watched some of it and one memory of them was the final of the women's javelin. Both the Australian girls encouraged the crowd to encourage them by clapping and yelling out the competitors' names. And I also recall the decider at Suncorp stadium between NSW and QLD. Again and again I heard how the Suncorp QLD supporters made all the difference. We all need encouragement in all the various aspects of our lives- especially in our Christian journey. Hebrews was written to new Christians who were in danger of losing their salvation which they had received by faith in Jesus Christ. And to encourage them the writer proclaimed the witness of the ancient people of God but he began with the witness that those first Christians themselves were giving- simply by being Christian and worshipping together.

Hebrews 11 begins with: *Faith is being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see.* The WE here are the early Christians. The mere fact that they were people who had come from Jewish and pagan backgrounds but now were confessing Jesus as Lord is a witness to God and the whole story recorded in the Bible. And the same truth is evident here- we are here because we believe in God and His Son- we too are witnesses to the truth of the Christmas and Easter story.

The writer goes to say: *By faith we perceive that the universe was formed at God's command, so that what was seen was not made out of what was visible.* These words are reflected in our Creeds: I believe in God the Father Almighty who made heaven and earth. We have heard how God created all things- by His word- and we believe it. Again another witness to God and our faith in Him.

Now the writer turns to the ancient people of God and their witness to God. These stories were obviously well known to the early Christians- I fear that that they are not so well known now. I have said previously that when you read the OT, do so in three ways: firstly- read it as the story simply is. Then read it with you in it- which character do you identify with. And finally, read it looking for Christ.

The second witness that Hebrews attests to is Abel. He is called a 'righteous man' because of his faith. His sacrifice foreshadows the ultimate sacrifice of Jesus Christ. And his death foreshadows the death of Jesus Christ. Out of jealousy and anger and unrighteousness his own brother- Cain- killed him. Out of jealousy and anger and unrighteous Jesus was killed by his own people.

The third witness is Enoch: *By faith Enoch was taken from this life, so that he did not experience death...because God had taken him away...for he was commended as one who please God...because he had faith in God.* In Genesis 5 we are told that Enoch walked with God for 300 years. For thirty or so years Jesus 'walked with God' he died but then he was raised from death and ascended into heaven. Enoch's assumption into heaven foreshadowed Christ's ascension.

The fourth witness is Noah. His witness is twofold. His story foreshadows the end of this world- when all those who have rejected God will be destroyed. But Noah's story of salvation through/over the water foreshadows the salvation that Jesus gives through the waters of holy baptism. The main part of a church building is called the NAVE- which means 'ship'. As Noah and his family were saved by water and the boat- we too are saved through water and the boat which is also called the Church.

The fifth witness is Abraham and it is a manifold witness:

He heard God's word, he trusted God's word and he obeyed God's word. To go on a journey to a land he had never seen but believed it would be given to him. To live by faith is to live by God's word. As for Abraham and Sarah- so also for us.

But the land in which Abraham and Sarah lived was only a temporary residence- they lived in tents and never really settled there. They were looking forward to a permanent- eternal- residence. I love living here in Bundaberg and Alicia and I are planning to retire here. But we both know that this is only our temporary home. We have a far greater home waiting for us- prepared by Jesus himself (John 14 and Psalm 23).

The story of Abraham, Sarah and Isaac foreshadows the resurrection of Jesus from the dead. Firstly, both Abraham and Sarah were old- as good as dead in regard to having children were given Isaac. Again and again in Holy Scripture we hear this story of God bringing life from barren wombs (Gen 30:22 Rachel; 1 Sam 1 Hannah; Luke 1 Elizabeth). From death comes life- from the death of Jesus Christ comes life- his resurrection and the offer of eternal life to all who would believe in him. And the second foreshadowing of his resurrection is the near sacrifice of Isaac by his father Abraham: Gen 22: *Abraham reasoned that God could raise the dead, and figuratively speaking, he did receive Isaac back from the dead.* Abraham was prepared to sacrifice his son- his one and only son with Sarah- pointing of course to John 3:16.

Then there is Moses. The prophet, the judge and the deliverer which of course foreshadows Jesus Christ who is the ultimate Prophet, Judge and Deliverer. But there is another aspect of Moses' life which I had not considered previously. He left his position of power, privilege and glory which came from being Pharaoh's adopted son to become one with his people and in doing so- endured much suffering: *By faith, Moses, when he had grown up, refused to be known as the son of Pharaoh's daughter. He chose to be mistreated along with the people of God rather than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a short time.* The Eternal Son of God, of course, never lived a life of sin, but he did give up his position of power, privilege and glory to become one of us and to be mistreated- all the way to the cross- for our sake.

And one of the last witnesses that Hebrews points to is a very unusual one. A woman. A pagan woman. A foreign woman. And a woman who was a prostitute! Rahab: In Joshua 2 we are told that she had heard how the LORD God was giving the Hebrew people the land of Canaan and how He had saved them through the Red Sea and how God had already defeated various Canaanite kings and now who put her own life at risk to save her family. So in one sense, it could be said that she had heard the word of the Lord, trusted in the word of the Lord and obeyed the word of the Lord and so salvation was given to her. And not only that- she became an ancestor of Jesus Christ himself. And her salvation points to the salvation to every Gentile, every sinner- to everyone who calls on the name of the Lord Jesus Christ (Romans 10).

All these witnesses are brought forward to encourage Christians of every place and of all time to *keep their eyes on Jesus Christ- the author and perfecter of our faith.*

And we need every encouragement that we can receive. A quote from Pastor John Kleinig: Lulled as it is by false hopes of social acceptance, economic prosperity, and outward growth in membership, the church in the West has become diffident and demoralised, soft and fearful, because it bypasses Christ's suffering for the redemption of the world. Whether we are persecuted or not, we are all engaged in a contest, the battle against the devil and the powers of darkness. This is part of our vocation as Christians.

So what do we do? Eph 4:15: *(Let us) speak the truth in love. Eph 5:19: Speak to one another with psalms, hymns and spiritual songs. Sing and make music in your heart to the Lord, always giving thanks to God the Father for everything in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ. Hebrews 10:25: Let us not give up on worshipping together.*

And remember always that we are saved by grace through faith in Jesus Christ. Amen.