

June 11, 2017

Faith: The Choice to Believe

"Now faith is being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see. This is what the ancients were commended for...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 fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and protector of our faith..."

Hebrews 11:1-12:2

For the purpose of our present study we have defined faith as 'the choice to believe that changes everything.' In the letter to the Hebrews the author shares several examples from Scripture detailing the models set by believers from long ago. Today we want to consider three of these examples: Abel, Enoch, and Noah.

Abel was the second son born to Adam and Eve after their sin forced them out of the Garden of Eden. Abel, Scripture tells us, kept flocks and his older brother Cain worked the soil to produce crops. Genesis 4:2-5 tells us their story. ***"Now Abel kept flocks, and Cain worked the soil. In the course of time Cain brought some of the fruits of the soil as an offering to the Lord. But Abel brought fat portions from some of the firstborn of the flock. The Lord looked with favor on Abel and his offering, but on Cain and his offering he did not look with favor."***

Men have argued for centuries about the difference in these two men and in their sacrifices and how that difference affected God's attitude toward them. The Hebrew author tells us, ***"By faith Abel offered God a better sacrifice than Cain did."*** How was Abel's sacrifice better? In the Genesis account we are, I believe, told the difference. Cain offered ***"some"***, but Abel offered the best parts from the ***"firstborn of the flock"***.

God always wants us to give him our very best. It is a measure of our faith when we give him our very best, and entrust everything else to him. He makes this abundantly clear throughout Scripture. Abel gave of the best of the flock, but Cain gave only some. The difference in their attitudes made all of the difference in their relationship with God.

Enoch's story in Genesis is barely three verses long and yet he is listed in the Hebrew author's roll call of the faithful. The author says, ***"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. For 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."*** (Hebrews 11:5-6) Enoch was one of only two men in Scripture who did not die. His story, short as it is, is summarized in this one statement: ***"Enoch walked with God."*** (Genesis 5:24)



The final of our three heroes of faith for this week is Noah. Of course, we all know the story of Noah and his ark from Sunday school or from the movie. Noah stands out for a number of reasons, not the least of which is that he was nearly unique in his day as a man of obedient faith. The Hebrew author summarizes Noah's story this way, **"By faith Noah, when warned about things not yet seen, in holy fear built an ark to save his family."** (Hebrews 11:7) Noah lived

in a time when mankind had become so evil that, **"...every inclination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil all the time."** (Genesis 6:5) It is really amazing that Noah, unlike everyone else living in his time, **"...was a righteous man."**

So, when God determined to wipe away his creation, Noah's righteousness caused the Lord to spare him. His story is even more amazing when we consider what we are told in the Hebrew letter about **"...things not yet seen..."** It may well be that in Noah's day there was no rain, no floods, and certainly no seaworthy barges of the size of the ark.

The key in each of these three stories is that each man chose to believe God and to put their faith in him. Their faith choice changed their lives in amazing ways. Abel's faith led to his murder, but also to his God. Enoch was taken directly to heaven by God because of the way he lived. Noah obediently spent 100 years building the ark, survived a year in that barge, and began repopulating the earth. Whatever their situation each of these three men chose to put their faith in God and it changed everything.