

"HOW CLEAR IS YOUR VISION?"

Hebrews 10:32-12:3

May 26, 1996

A few years ago a friend of mine who had for many years professed to know and love the Lord Jesus walked away from his family, his friends, and his God.

For years he had said he believed certain things about the future but then he said he no longer believed them.

Circumstances confronted him and he decided that what he all along said he believed couldn't accommodate those new circumstances - so he changed what he believed.

Last week I mentioned a man who went to church all his life until his two year old child died.

He has not darkened the door of a church since.

Like my friend, this man's picture of the future changed.

What before he thought would happen in the future he no longer believed would happen.

What you truly believe determines what you do.

I made that statement last week as well but today I want to address it in a slightly different context.

How many people get a dose of Christianity, saying they believe it and then somewhere along the way they drop out?

When they accept Christianity they get a certain picture in their heads of what the future will be like and then when it doesn't quite turn out that way, or they stop believing it will, they quit the whole thing.

I think there is tremendous temptation to bail out of Christianity.

How many times have you prayed, even pleaded with God for something that was truly important and felt like you got no answer?

In spite of your best efforts at doing things right, you lost your job and couldn't find another one, or your spouse walked out on you, or your business collapsed, or something happened to your kids, and you

looked around and saw many outrageous pagans getting along just fine.

The godless and ungodly seem to prosper and frankly have a lot more fun in life than those who obey the God of the Bible.

Christians are expected to forgive and turn the other cheek when offended and abused.

Christians are expected to pursue life not for their own advantage but for the advantage of others.

Christians are expected to think of all their money as belonging to God to be spent, saved, invested and given away as God determines.

Christians are expected to invest a significant part of their time in helping others not just recreating and vacating.

Christians are expected to be together with other Christians in church weekly and at other times for the purpose of encouraging those other Christians and worshipping God.

Do you have any idea how all that interferes with life?
Why not just forget it?

Please look in your Bible at Hebrews 10:32.

This letter that we call "Hebrews" was written to a church somewhere in the Roman empire - probably a church in a city near Rome or in Rome itself.

Rome, you must recall, was not sympathetic to Christianity. To the contrary, Christianity was considered a threat to the Roman Empire - and threats in those days were not handled in courts that respected civil rights and freedom of religion.

In A.D. 49 Emperor Claudius expelled the Christians and Jews from Rome.

Seen as enemies of the people, these new Christians were subjected to insult, persecution and the confiscation of their property - they got out of the area only with what they could carry on their backs.

Now at the time of the writing of this letter, It was about 15 years later.
And under a new emperor a new threat had broken out against Christians.

A fire broke out in Rome.

It spread quickly through the city.

Once nearly contained, it broke out again and when finally snuffed out it had raged through 10 of the 14 districts of the city totally destroying three of them.

The unpopular Emperor Nero had been away when the fire broke out and he returned to the city when his own palace was threatened.

He provided emergency assistance, sacrifices were offered to the gods, and he embarked on an elaborate program of urban renewal.

The problem was that many thought the Emperor's efforts were an attempt to cover the fact that he had deliberately started the fire.

To silence such rumors, Nero commanded the imperial police to move against the Christians.

A contemporary Roman historian wrote that Nero did this to suppress the rumor about him. And that he fabricated scapegoats and punished with every refinement the depraved Christians as they were known.

They were paraded before the magistrates and condemned to death for arson.

And on the basis of their testimonies many other Christians were discovered and likewise tortured and put to death.

What would it have been like to have been, at that time, part of a church in Rome or in a town not far from Rome?

The stories were too awful, the threat too close.

What price were they willing to pay to be disciples, followers of Jesus?

They had reason for quitting Christianity?

Listen to the author's words to them in that dark time: READ 10:32-36

But how do you do that?!? How do you persevere?

What keeps Christians from "bailing out"?

What keeps you from quitting when things get rough?

There is a one-word answer: FAITH.

Now wait a minute don't jump to conclusions about what I mean by that word "faith".

I always fear when I use a well known word that everything just "fuzzes" up - definitions get real cloudy.

"Faith" is one of those words we hear so often we no longer put any definition to it - we just say "Oh yes - faith".

Listen to the Bible beginning at V37.

The author quoting from the O.T., tells his readers how they can "hang in there", how they can remain faithful to God even in the midst of great persecution. - READ 37-38a ending with "My righteous one will live by faith".

There's that word "faith" - but what does he mean?

We've already seen the word "faith" used one way in this letter.

Faith means believing that God will forgive us and bring us into his family when we trust only in Jesus Christ and his death and resurrection for us.

We speak of this faith as "We are saved by grace through faith." - trusting in Christ and what he has done.

But the faith spoken of here, in Hebrews 10, is not the faith that looks back - the faith that sees in Christ the basis of our forgiveness and new relationship to God.

The faith spoken of here is a faith that looks forward.

In fact the author gives his own definition of the word right here in the context: Look at Hebrews 11:1 READ

Now most of you know that chapter 11 is called the great "faith chapter" in the Bible.

And when you look at the verses you see verse after verse that begin with "by faith" some person or another did such and such.

Obviously the author is illustrating the point he wishes to

make.

What's the point? How do you remain faithful to God even when everything appears to go wrong? The answer: Faith.

Before we look at his illustrations however I want us again to look at his definition of faith:

From verse 1 we learn that the faith he is describing here has two components.

The two lines of V1 say the same thing two ways:

What are the two things you see in both lines - what are the two components of the faith he is describing:

What words do you find in line one that have a synonym in line two?

Line one - "being sure" compared to line two -

"certain" = What's the component? Certainty.

Line one - "what we hope for" compared to line two -

"what we do not see" = What's the component?

Vision - seeing with the mind into the future.

The two components of faith: Certainty and Vision.

Please look with me to V6 where the author gives us even more help in understanding what he means by faith: READ

What is another synonym for "certainty" that you find here?

"Believe".

What is another word or phrase for "vision" that you find here?

This may not be quite as obvious until you study it for a while but look at the words "God rewards those who earnestly seek him".

When are those rewards given? IN the past or the future? The future of course - the issue is that faith looks forward to the rewards that will come - we have a synonym here for "vision" - a looking forward.

I'm ready to give a definition now:

"Faith is the act of believing God and mentally seeing his vision of the future even when we can't see it with our physical eyes."

Or again as the Bible says it, "Faith is being sure of what we hope for and being certain of what we do not see." AND

"He who comes to God must believe that He exists and that He rewards those who earnestly seek Him."

Because of God we are certain of Him and His vision of the future.

I want you to look at chapter 11 with me now and see the illustrations the author uses to drive home his point.

Again, what is the point?

By faith we are able to remain true to God even when circumstances would tempt us to give up and quit.

When we look at the 11th chapter we see that the author gives us illustrations from one end of the O.T. to the other.

Look at V3 he starts with a reference to creation.

V4 he goes next to Abel the son of the first man and woman.

V 5 he refers to Enoch a descendant of Adam's and Eve's

V 7 we hear about Noah and the flood

V 8-19 we read about Abraham (obviously a descendant of Noah)

V 20 we see Isaac, the son of Abraham.

V 21 we see Jacob, the son of Isaac.

V 22 we see Joseph, the son of Jacob.

V 23-29 we come to Moses who led the descendants of Jacob out of Egypt.

V 30-31 he mentions the time of Joshua, the leader after Moses.

Then at V32 he realizes it would take too long to mention the many others in the detail he has already mentioned some.

And so he summarizes by mentioning the time of the Judges, the Kings and the prophets telling how some were victorious in this life and others were thoroughly defeated but all (V39) were men and women of faith.

What do we learn from all these illustrations that help us remain faithful when the temptation is to give up - to quit - to pack it in?

1.

The first thing I want you to see about the faith of these people that instructs our faith is that "FAITH SEES THE INVISIBLE."

Look at V7 "By faith, Noah, when warned about things not yet seen, in holy fear built an ark to save his family."

Most of you are sufficiently familiar with the incident to remember that God told Noah what was going to happen - a flood was coming.

Noah had a choice - to believe God's picture, God's vision of the future or not believe it.

"When warned about things not yet seen" - Noah got the vision, the picture, in his own head and he acted on the basis of that picture.

That picture of what would be, was more real to him than any thing he could see with his physical eyes.

In spite of the fact that he lived in a land-locked country and there had likely never even been rain, much less a flood - Noah built the Ark.

By faith he saw the invisible.

Look at the last part of V8.

God told Abraham to leave his home city of Ur and Abraham obeyed God "even though he did not know where he was going."

God had told Abraham that God was going to make of Abraham a great nation and give him an inheritance of a great land.

Stuart Babbage, an Australian pastor has four pictures hanging in his office.

Each of the pictures looks nearly identical and equally barren desert.

When he was asked why he had those pictures he said that

he took them while standing among the ruins of ancient Ur, where Abraham had lived.

No matter which way you look from Ur you see much the same thing - sand!

Why would Abraham leave that cultured, comfortable, and secure city not even knowing where he was going.

Because he had a picture from God in his mind of what God was going to do - and he believed God.

Faith sees the invisible.

Look please at V22. Speaking of Joseph who lived in Egypt and died 300 years before his descendants left Egypt, the text says correctly that Joseph "spoke about the exodus of the Israelites from Egypt and gave instructions about his bones" - that is that his descendants were to take Joseph's bones with them when they left Egypt and went to the Promised Land.

What picture did Joseph have in his mind? He saw the land God was going to give them and he believed God.

Faith sees the invisible.

There are at least 5 more examples among these illustrations of this same idea.

What kept these people going?

Their God-given picture of the future was more real to them, they believed it more than any thing they could see in the present.

What picture of the future do you have and what impact does that picture have on the way you live?

2.

The second thing I want you to see about the faith of these people that instructs our faith is that "Faith overcomes fear".

Look at V23 "By faith, Moses parents hid him for three months after he was born, because they saw he was no ordinary child,

and they were not afraid of the king's edict."

Most of you remember that the Egyptian leader, fearful of the population growth of the Israelite slaves in his country ordered that all male children be killed.

Moses parents' didn't comply. WHY?

Look at the middle of the verse - they saw something.

Obviously it doesn't mean the baby looked unusual to the physical eyes but that with eyes of faith, these parents saw into the future and they obeyed God.

Look at V27 "By faith, Moses left Egypt not fearing the King's anger"

When the Israelites finally left Egypt after the night when all the first-born Egyptian children were slain - the King, the Pharaoh, changed his mind once again and sent his army to stop the people.

Imagine men, women, children, carts, and all being attacked by the mightiest army in the world.

But Moses left anyway. WHY?

Look at the rest of the verse: "He persevered because he saw him who is invisible."

Moses saw something. He saw into the future and he believed that picture more than he naturally feared the Pharaoh.

When Martin Luther was fighting for his life during the Reformation in Germany over 400 years ago, he writes that at night he would go to his window, look out, and ask God, "Whose world is this anyway? Yours or mine. I know it is yours, God, and so I'm going to bed, I'll see you in the morning."

His confidence in God and God's picture of the future overcame his fear.

3.

The third thing I want you to see about the faith of these people that

instructs our faith is that "faith overcomes temptation".

Look at Vv 25-26 "Moses chose to be mistreated along with the people of God rather than to enjoy the pleasures or sin for a short time. He regarded disgrace for the sake of Christ as of greater value than the treasures of Egypt."

Again, I suspect that most of you remember that Moses, though a Jew, was raised in the palace of the Pharaoh's daughter.

But when it came time to choose between living as the grandson of the Pharaoh or living with God's people - he chose God. WHY?

Oh, it's that vision thing again.

Moses had a picture of the future that had been given to him by God and he believed it.

And the text says that he regarded that future as having greater value than all the treasures of Egypt.

Everything in this culture vies for our attention and our investment. The temptations to invest in the here and now, the temptations to succumb to the pleasures of the moment are intense.

But Moses vision of the future was absolutely clear - and it was in that future that he was going to invest - what about you.

What God-given picture do you have of the future and are you investing in it. Or is your investment greater elsewhere?

Faith overcomes temptation!

4.

The fourth thing I want you to learn about faith, from the faith of these people, is that "faith overcomes delay and opposition."

Look at V21. Jacob was the grandson of Abraham.

To Abraham had been given the promise of becoming a nation of many people who had a land of their own.

That promise had been reiterated to Isaac, Abraham's son, who in turn repeated it to Jacob.

Think about it, how long do you go on believing something is going to happen when it hasn't yet?

By the time referred to in V21 Jacob is an old man, he is not even in the land that God had promised to Abraham and his descendants - he is in a foreign country, Egypt.

Surely the vision has faded away!

After that much time - they must have misunderstood God.

But what does the verse say: Jacob blessed Joseph's sons and he worshipped God.

From the Genesis account we learn that Jacob spoke to Joseph and his sons about the part of the land that would be theirs when they left Egypt and went to Caanan.

All these years later and Jacob didn't miss a beat - he believed that God-given picture in his head as much as if it had already happened.

Faith overcomes delay and opposition.

Look at verses 36-37.

The author recalls that down through the years many had met such opposition to their faith that they died.

But they died with their vision undimmed.

Even death couldn't conquer the vision.

Richard Wurmbrand is a man who has for many years worked to get the Scriptures and the Gospel to people behind what was once the "iron curtain" - into once communist controlled countries.

Before he began that ministry Wurmbrand was imprisoned in his country because of his Christianity.

For 14 years he lived in a soundless cell 30 feet below the ground. He saw no trees, no sky, no children.

He was hungry all the time - fed potato peel soup and sometimes only a slice of bread a week.

For those 14 years they tried every inhumane form of torture they could think of to get him to renounce his faith.

Why did he not renounce it?

Because his God-given picture of the future that he carried in his head was clearer and more real than even the circumstances under which he lived.

Faith overcomes delay and opposition.

5.

There is so much more in this chapter but the last thing I want you to learn about faith from the faith of these people is that "Faith has an object."

Many today define faith as that silly belief that something will happen that can't possibly happen.

Or faith is defined as what you fall back on when you have no reason to believe.

Or faith is defined as a kind of irrational optimism.

NO. Faith has an object.

For faith to be biblical, Faith must believe in something and someone.

I have already described faith as having two components: certainty and vision.

Vision is about pictures of the future.

What God-given picture did Noah have in his head?

He saw a flood covering the earth and he saw a boat floating on those flood waters safely carrying him and his family.

And why was he so certain the picture reflected future reality?

Because he believed God.

Noah's faith had an object - the object was the picture God gave him

of the future and the object of his faith was the God who promised it.

What was Abraham's picture of the future?

He saw a land where thousands or even millions would live - his descendants. And he believed the God who promised it.

Faith has an object - a God-given vision/picture of the future and of the God who promises it.

If you don't have a God-given picture of the future I can't imagine that you will be able to withstand the pressures of life.

Without a vision, a God-given vision of the future, life will throw you.

God says, I don't want you to "shrink back", fall away, "throw away your confidence", bail out.

What God-given picture of the future do you have?

And do you live your life by it?

Do you believe God?

Let me tell you what I see in that picture of the future given by God in his word:

1. I see a people of God grown to maturity in Christ.

I see a congregation of men and women who love the Lord Jesus, love his people, and love to do His will.

You see I believe the picture the Apostle Paul paints in Philippians 1:6 and corroborated in many other places:

"I am confident of this, that he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus."

If I cooperate with God in the coming to pass of that picture, that

vision, I can't fail - God has guaranteed it will happen.

I'm willing to invest my life to see that happen - how about you?

2, Secondly I see a thriving, reproducing church established in every people group of the world.

The picture is one of congregations of believers worshipping God in every country, every region, every language, every tribe.

Jesus said in Matthew 28 "Go and make disciples of all peoples"

If I cooperate with God in the coming to pass of that picture, that vision, I can't fail - God has guaranteed it will happen.

I'm willing to invest my life to see that happen - how about you?

3. Thirdly, I see Jesus coming again.

The picture is Him coming with all the accoutrements of power, I see him breaking through the clouds and coming to this earth just as he said he would.

I see him reigning as King of kings and Lord of lords not just potentially but actually, visibly, and eternally.

And I see those true believers who died before then being raised from their graves and I see them and those of us who did not die coming together at the throne of Jesus to worship him and thank him that every thing he said would happen has indeed happened.

Following Jesus was worth it! It was worth it all!

Those pictures of the future are what drive the present.

That vision and a certainty that God exists and that he rewards those who earnestly seek him make it possible to overcome fear, temptation, delay, and outright opposition.

Prayer

Benediction - READ 12:1-3