

What Does Faith Offer?
Hebrews 11:17-12:3
August 14, 2016

By faith Abraham, when he was tested, offered up Isaac, and he who had received the promises was in the act of offering up his only son, of whom it was said, "Through Isaac shall your offspring be named." He considered that God was able even to raise him from the dead, from which, figuratively speaking, he did receive him back. By faith Isaac invoked future blessings on Jacob and Esau. By faith Jacob, when dying, blessed each of the sons of Joseph, bowing in worship over the head of his staff. By faith Joseph, at the end of his life, made mention of the exodus of the Israelites and gave directions concerning his bones. By faith Moses, when he was born, was hidden for three months by his parents, because they saw that the child was beautiful, and they were not afraid of the king's edict. By faith Moses, when he was grown up, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter, choosing rather to be mistreated with the people of God than to enjoy the fleeting pleasures of sin. He considered the reproach of Christ greater wealth than the treasures of Egypt, for he was looking to the reward. By faith he left Egypt, not being afraid of the anger of the king, for he endured as seeing him who is invisible. By faith he kept the Passover and sprinkled the blood, so that the Destroyer of the firstborn might not touch them. By faith the people crossed the Red Sea as on dry land, but the Egyptians, when they attempted to do the same, were drowned. By faith the walls of Jericho fell down after they had been encircled for seven days. By faith Rahab the prostitute did not perish with those who were disobedient, because she had given a friendly welcome to the spies. And what more shall I say? For time would fail me to tell of Gideon, Barak, Samson, Jephthah, of David and Samuel and the prophets— who through faith conquered kingdoms, enforced justice, obtained promises, stopped the mouths of lions, quenched the power of fire, escaped the edge of the sword, were made strong out of weakness, became mighty in war, put foreign armies to flight. Women received back their dead by resurrection. Some were tortured, refusing to accept release, so that they might rise again to a better life. Others suffered mocking and flogging, and even chains and imprisonment. They were stoned, they were sawn in two, they were killed with the sword. They went about in skins of sheep and goats, destitute, afflicted, mistreated— of whom the world was not worthy— wandering about in deserts and mountains, and in dens and caves of the earth. And all these, though commended through their faith, did not receive what was promised, since God had provided something better for us, that apart from us they should not be made perfect. Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight, and sin which clings so closely, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, looking to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God. Consider him who endured from sinners such hostility against himself, so that you may not grow weary or fainthearted.

Do you have faith? I'm not asking about a faith that's big on talk and short on walk. I'm asking about real faith.

Just for a moment, put yourself in the position of some Christians around the world. You've been arrested. You've been separated from your family. You've been separated from your friends and your church. You've been thrown into jail with people who hate

you. You've faced hostile judges. You're alone with nowhere to run. This could be your last day on earth.

However, you have a choice. Just say you don't believe in Jesus. Just say it and it's over. Just say it and get out of jail. Just say it and go back home. Just say it and hug your family again. Just say it and live. You have a choice. Do you have faith?

Let's talk about faith. The world has its own definition of faith. You can hear Hollywood people and athletes speak of faith quite often. How did you get to this position? I had faith. How did you win the game? We just had faith.

For many people faith is just some emotional, spiritual force. If you ask "faith in what" they might talk about the faith of their family, their friends, their team, or faith in themselves. Faith is reduced to some type of emotion or wishful thinking. Faith for those folks is just vivid imagination.

But what is true, biblical faith? I came across a good definition of faith, it went like this. *Faith is confidence that God is who he says he is and that he will do what he has promised to do. Faith is not a power or a force, it is not a vehicle by which we can coerce God into something against his will. It is simply an expression of confidence in the person and character of God. It is the proper response to the promise or revelation of God.*

Faith is a total abandonment to God. It's a willingness to risk anything and everything for him and his mission. Faith is a constant openness to the possibilities of God.

True faith should grow. Paul told the Corinthians: *Our hope is that as your faith increases* (2 Co 10:15 ESV). As we experience the Lord, our faith should increase. As we see answered prayers, our confidence in him should increase. As we see him work in our lives and in the lives of others, our trust in him should increase.

The more we walk with him, the more we should be willing to abandon for him. The more we see him work, the more we should begin to see the unlimited possibilities he places in our path. Our confidence in the Lord should be steadily increasing as we learn that he is who he says he is and he will do what he has promised to do.

So, do you have faith? Do you have complete and total confidence in God? Do you trust him to be who he says he is and do what he has promised to do? Are you more confident in God today than you were yesterday? Is your faith growing?

Thus far, faith looks like a big-ticket item. Faith can be very costly. It would be fair to ask, "What does total and complete confidence in God have to offer? Where does a growing faith lead us? What can we expect from a growing, solid faith in God?"

To begin with, we can expect our growing faith to be empowering. Listen, once again, to part of our text: *And what more shall I say? For time would fail me to tell of Gideon, Barak, Samson, Jephthah, of David and Samuel and the prophets— who through faith conquered kingdoms, enforced justice, obtained promises, stopped the mouths of lions, quenched the power*

of fire, escaped the edge of the sword, were made strong out of weakness, became mighty in war, put foreign armies to flight. Women received back their dead by resurrection. Some were tortured, refusing to accept release, so that they might rise again to a better life. Others suffered mocking and flogging, and even chains and imprisonment. They were stoned, they were sawn in two, they were killed with the sword. They went about in skins of sheep and goats, destitute, afflicted, mistreated— of whom the world was not worthy—wandering about in deserts and mountains, and in dens and caves of the earth. And all these, though commended through their faith, did not receive what was promised, since God had provided something better for us, that apart from us they should not be made perfect.

This is a faith Hall of Fame. We hear that folks like David, Samson, Gideon, and others did some very remarkable things. They conquered kingdoms, faced lions, quenched flames, their weakness was turned into strength, they routed armies, and raised the dead.

A remarkable thing about these people is that they all started out just like us. They were all imperfect people who simply responded to the call of God. Little by little they saw God working in them and around them. Their confidence in God grew. Their faith in God grew.

God called on them to trust him. He called on them to do what seemed impossible. But with faith, they saw the impossible as possible. They saw God work. They felt God's power and they abandoned all to answer God's call.

God wants your growing faith to empower you. Are you paying attention to what is going on around you? Are you fully aware of what God had done in your life – what he is doing in your life? You should take some “alone time” and meditate what God has done in and around you. Let that increase your confidence in him. Let that open you to the possibilities he is placing in your everyday life. Let that empower you.

God wants this world to turn to Jesus, and he's looking to do that through you and me. It's our job to tell people that God is who he says he is and he does what he promises to do. To do that, we must believe in him. We must trust him. We must have faith in him. Do you have faith?

Our growing faith will also sustain us. Our text doesn't just list the “big names” in Scripture, it also speaks about some unknowns, the “others.” Their lives took a much different path from the lives of David, Gideon, and the like.

We are told the “others” were tortured, mocked, flogged, chained, put in prison, stoned, sawed in two, killed. They were destitute, persecuted, and mistreated. Did these things happen because they didn't have faith? No. They faced these things because they did have faith, and they faced these things with faith.

They were confident in God even when they were tortured, mocked, flogged, chained, put in prison, stoned, sawed in two, destitute, persecuted, and mistreated. They lived

and died in total abandonment to God. They were sustained by their faith. And now, we are encouraged by their faith.

Even as Christians, things don't always go our way. Scripture doesn't promise us a rose garden. We are going to face hard times, bad times, terrible times, and hopeless times. But our faith in God will carry us through, if we don't give up. We can rely on God's perfect track record of being who he says he is and doing what he promises to do. Do you have faith?

We can also expect our growing faith to be rewarding. Verse 40 of our text says that God has something better for us. That "better" is a rock solid promise from God. No matter where you're at, God has something better for you.

If you're considering taking a leap of faith and serve God fully, go ahead, because God has something better for you. If you're in the middle of a bad situation, hold on to your faith because God has something better for you. If your life is almost over, its okay, because God has something better for you.

Your faith and trust in God is never in vain, because God is who he says he is and he always does what he promises to do.