

# HEROES OF THE FAITH, THEN AND NOW

## What Is Faith?

TEXT: Heb. 11:1-6

INTRODUCTION: Today we come to my favorite part of the Book of Hebrews, and I hope it will become one of your favorite Scripture portions as well. Hebrews 11 has long been called “The Hall of Faith” and in it we can walk down the corridors of time and see the lives of men and women who had a real day to day relationship with God. And if we will take the time to see what their lives were like and why the Lord holds them up before us as examples of lives well lived, lives that counted for eternity, we can learn a lot that will help us here and now. There is of course one common thread that is woven through the entire tapestry that depicts the lives of these people. That thread is faith. Hence the title “Hall of Faith.” So the chapter begins with a simple but very profound lesson on faith. <sup>1</sup> Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen. <sup>2</sup> For by it the elders obtained a good testimony. <sup>3</sup> By faith we understand that the worlds were framed by the word of God, so that the things which are seen were not made of things which are visible.

I am tempted to camp out at this point, but I will not. I will however point out that in the pinnacle chapter of the Bible about faith, it tells us that faith begins in knowing that the universe was created at the command of God, the things we see made from things that cannot be seen. A faith that does not believe the biblical testimony of creation is a faith that is injured at its inception and will never run with the champions of faith but will at best limp through life struggling for the finish line.

But that is another series of sermons, one which I have already done, and will do again, Lord willing, but until then, if you missed it, you would do well to get the CD's and the notes and study for yourself.

But now we will move on to the primary point of this chapter about faith.

**Biblical Faith means believing God.** Not just believing, but believing God. Everybody believes someone or something. Some believe the devil. Some believe their friends. For some there's not much difference! Some believe the world. Some believe themselves. Some believe whoever says what they want to hear. Everybody believes. But Biblical faith happens when you believe God. Let us read some general instruction on Biblical faith and look at some early examples of heroes of faith. **Hebrews 11:1-6** <sup>1</sup> Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen. <sup>2</sup> For by it the elders obtained a good testimony. <sup>3</sup> By faith we understand that the worlds were framed by the word of God, so that the things which are seen were not made of things which are visible. <sup>4</sup> By faith Abel offered to God a more excellent sacrifice than Cain,

through which he obtained witness that he was righteous, God testifying of his gifts; and through it he being dead still speaks. <sup>5</sup> By faith Enoch was taken away so that he did not see death, *"and was not found, because God had taken him"*; for before he was taken he had this testimony, that he pleased God. <sup>6</sup> But without faith *it is impossible to please Him*, for he who comes to God must believe that He is, and *that He is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him*.

When I was a kid, we had heroes. My earliest was Davey Crocket, King of the Wild Frontier. When I was all of four years old I had myself a long rifle named Ole Betsy, a powder horn, an official Davey Crocket side pouch, and a real coonskin hat.

By second grade I had greatly matured. Davey Crocket was abandoned to be idolized by the little ones. My new hero was a man's man, or a man's bear, Smoky the Bear to be exact. And I was an official, card carrying Jr. Forest Ranger. Don't laugh. I took my job very seriously. My family camped a lot on weekends in those days. I lined every fire with rocks. I would have walked a mile to stomp out a smoldering cigarette. And be warned, I would have poured out your last ounce of drinking water if your campfire was still smoking in the least!

Throughout grade school, my heroes changed, but I always had them. But my years in junior and senior high were strange and difficult years for our nation. It was a time in which we turned against our heroes and role models. It began by realizing that no human hero was perfect, but it moved to the point where people looked for ways to trash them. We became a society without heroes, and those were sad days.

We have come through that for the most part, and heroes are back in vogue. That is good; we need examples. But we do need to beware the kind of heroes we have.

**We need our heroes, but we need to be careful who they are and for what they stand.** That is why this part of the Bible is so fascinating. Here are men and women who are genuine heroes. They are not perfect people, not a single one of them. But each of them is a person with a heroic faith worth noticing and worth modeling. This morning we look at the first two. I call them Early Examples.

**To each one let us ask a question:**

**What did you do that caused God to list you in this Hall of Faith?**

## I. ABEL

Heb. 11:4 By faith Abel offered to God a more excellent sacrifice than Cain, through which he obtained witness that he was righteous, God testifying of his gifts; and through it he being dead still speaks.

- **Question: Abel, what did you do?**
  - **Answer: I obeyed. I obeyed God.**

**A. Abel's story is told in Gen. 4:1-7** <sup>1</sup> Now Adam knew Eve his wife, and she conceived and bore Cain, and said, "I have acquired a man from the LORD." <sup>2</sup> Then she bore again, this time his brother Abel. Now Abel was a keeper of sheep, but Cain was a tiller of the ground. <sup>3</sup> And in the process of time it came to pass that Cain brought an offering of the fruit of the ground to the LORD. <sup>4</sup> Abel also brought of the firstborn of his flock and of their fat. And the LORD respected Abel and his offering, <sup>5</sup> but He did not respect Cain and his offering. And Cain was very angry, and his countenance fell. <sup>6</sup> So the LORD said to Cain, "Why are you angry? And why has your countenance fallen? <sup>7</sup> If you do well, will you not be accepted? And if you do not do well, sin lies at the door. And its desire *is* for you, but you should rule over it."

**B. Often people will jump to Cain's defense, saying, "Well maybe Cain did not know or just made a mistake."**

1. God had set the example when he sacrificed an animal to provide clothing of skins for Adam and Eve after they sinned.
2. This was not the first offering Cain (or Abel either) ever gave to God.

**Genesis 4:3** And in the process of time it came to pass that Cain brought an offering of the fruit of the ground to the LORD.

"In the process of time, it came to pass" means that similar events had been going on before, but this time something would be different.

3. Prior to this occasion, Cain had probably traded food he had grown to Abel for a lamb for sacrifice and offered it to God.
4. What we observe here is a heart problem. In pride Cain thought, "The crops I produce with my labor are as good as the sheep Abel produces. Why should I have to buy from him? I will just offer some of the fruit of the ground!" He ignored the fact that God had specified the offering to be an animal sacrifice. What God said was not the important factor to Cain.
5. This observation about Cain's heart problem is confirmed by two things:
  - a. Notice God's words of correction to Cain. **Genesis 4:6-7** So the LORD said to Cain, "Why are you angry? And why has your countenance fallen? If you do well, will you not be accepted? And if you do not do well, sin lies at the door. And its desire *is* for you, but you should rule over it."
  - b. God told him it was not too late for him to be accepted by the Lord. All Cain had to do was do what was right. God warned him that sin was trying to get hold of him to rule his life. Cain ignored the warning and, sure enough, retreated further into sin.
  - c. See Cain's reaction to God's displeasure. **If this had been an innocent mistake in a first time offering, Cain would have been eager to make correction and please the Lord.** Instead he was angry and depressed.

- d. Cain refused to repent, refused to enter a relationship with God the way God prescribed, got furiously angry with his brother Abel and killed him. Cain eventually willfully left the presence of the Lord.

### C. What did Abel do? Abel obeyed God!

1. Therefore what he did was right!
2. Therefore, Abel pleased God.
3. Maybe Cain did not understand why God specified a blood offering, but he clearly knew that God specified a blood offering. And still ...
4. Cain disobeyed, was wrong, and displeased God.

### D. God often tells us to do things we do not understand or cannot be explained by human reasoning. *Isa. 55:9 For as the heavens are higher than the earth, So are My ways higher than your ways, And My thoughts than your thoughts.*

1. We may not understand why the Lord makes us His witnesses when it seems that angels could do so much better.
2. We may not understand why the Lord who owns heaven and earth commands us to give the tithe to Him.
3. We may not comprehend why the Lord says that He hates divorce even when two people cannot ever seem to get along.
4. We may not understand why the Lord requires honesty when a little bit of dishonesty would be so profitable.
5. But God's ways are higher than our ways, and God is always watching for our obedience to His Word, even when we do not understand.

And here is the main point being made about Abel for our benefit:

People of faith obey God.

People who walk in faith do what God says in His Word whether they can explain it or not.

It shocks me often to discover that when I ask someone if they are obeying a particular command of the Lord from Scripture, they say, no I just live day to day by faith. What they mean by that is that they determine right from wrong, determine what they will do and won't do by their feelings inside them at any particular time. And I just want to say, don't you understand that feelings come and go. A bad pepper in your taco can change your feelings in a heartbeat. That's not how to decide how to live. That is not faith. **Faith is not following your feelings or following your impressions.**

**Faith is obeying God.**

And **God tells us His will in His Word.**

## II. ENOCH

Heb. 11:5 By faith Enoch was taken away so that he did not see death, *"and was not found, because God had taken him"*; for before he was taken he had this testimony, that he pleased God.

- **Question: Enoch, what did you do?**

Why did God take you without the death dew upon your brow? Only one other was like that, the mighty Elijah! He was an awesome prophet, a miracle worker, God's bold servant who stood for God against the king and hundreds of false priests and prophets. Were you like that Enoch?

No.

Then why are you included?

- **Answer: I walked. I walked with God.**

One might ask, "So what?" Didn't everybody back then. It was only about 600 years since creation. No...

### A. Enoch walked with God, even when he had to walk alone.

#### 1. Enoch's son was Methuselah - oldest man who ever lived - 969 years

A church member emailed me an app the other day that computed how old you are. I entered my birth date and found out I was 21,779 days old.

But Methuselah was 353,927 days old when he died!

#### 2. Methuselah lived during Gen. 6:5 Then the LORD saw that the wickedness of man *was great in the earth, and that every intent of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually.*

#### 3. Do you know how he died? He died the day the Great Flood began.

#### 4. Enoch lived in vivid contrast to his day, different from his son and grandson and the society in which he lived.

#### 5. Listen to Enoch describe the many people whose hearts were hard against the Lord of his own day. Jude 14,15 <sup>14</sup> Now Enoch, the seventh from Adam, prophesied about these men also, saying, "Behold, the Lord comes with ten thousands of His saints, <sup>15</sup> to execute judgment on all, to convict all who are ungodly among them of all their ungodly deeds which they have committed in an ungodly way, and of all the harsh things which ungodly sinners have spoken against Him."

**B. God invites us to be men and women of faith who will live godly lives in the midst of an ungodly world.**

1. God wants men today who will walk with Him when their buds revile and curse the name of the Savior. Men who will be faithful to their wives, keep their minds and lips pure, and give the Lord some priority time rather than consuming all of their leisure time upon themselves.
2. God wants women today who will put aside the vile standards of the world and demonstrate a heart that loves the Master. Women who dress modestly because they seek the pleasure of their Heavenly Father more than the lustful glances of men. Women who value the inward adornment of the heart more than the outward adornment of fine jewels and precious gems. Women who love God enough to love their husbands and submit to him out of honor to their Lord, even when they know they are smarter and better.
3. God wants young people today who will walk with Him...at school, at play, at work, in their entertainment, in their dating, in their life choices of schools and vocations and mates.
4. **God is looking for men and women like Enoch - who will walk with God!**

CONCLUSION: Do you want to make a start toward becoming that kind of man and woman. Come to Christ. It is impossible apart from Him and His saving grace. Do you want to grow in your faith to be a man, a woman, a young person who obeys God and walks with God.