

## WHAT IS FAITH (Lindfield 21<sup>st</sup> July 2019)

### HEBREWS 11: 1-6, 32-40

What is faith? The dictionary defines it as *complete trust or confidence in something or someone*. The only specific definition in the Bible is Hebrews 11:1 *Now faith is confidence in what we hope for and assurance about what we do not see. This is what the ancients were commended for*. Both definitions have some similarities: confidence, trust or assurance of something that we do not see but hope for.

Hebrews 11 then goes on and gives many examples of people from the Old Testament (the Hebrew Scriptures) who believed what God had promised them and dedicated their lives in such a way that they lived expecting the promise God made them would come to fruition. As Hebrews says, many of them died without realising the promise or seeing the promise fulfilled in their life-time.

Many of the example of faith were from people who were not the ones one might expect. Many people commended for their faith were not Israelites by birth or religion. They were regarded as “outcasts”, not worthy of God’s kindness, grace or blessing. I think this is the first important point to note: **faith is not dependent on culture, gender, social status or religious background.**

Abraham come from Ur in the Chaldees, which is part of modern day Iraq. This is a journey of about 1200 kms almost entirely through desert. He would have worshiped many gods. Yet our God spoke to him and he obeyed. He uprooted all of his family and took all he possessed and embarked on a journey to an unknown land believing God’s promises would be fulfilled. Abraham is commended as being a man of faith because as the definition in Hebrews says he had the assurance of what he did not see.

In the Gospels there is the story of the Canaanite woman who wanted Jesus to heal her daughter possessed by a demon. Jesus

made the comment that his mission was “to the lost sheep of Israel” but when she replied that even the dogs ate the crumbs that fall under the table Jesus admired her faith and her daughter was healed. The Canaanites were seen as an ritually unclean sect by the Jews and not allowed to worship in synagogue or Temple.

From this we note that **faith does not depend on religious orthodoxy or background but on recognising who can heal and help.**

Finally I want to focus on the Roman Centurion who asked Jesus to heal his servant. If anyone was more hated than the Romans they would be hard to find. An occupying force, cruel and merciless. The beginning of the Emperor Cult where the Emperor was considered a god. Not only does he ask Jesus to heal his servant but he says don’t bother even coming home just say the word and he will be healed. Jesus was astonished at his faith. Jesus replied, *I have not found such great faith, even in Israel* (Luke 7:1-10)

**Faith does not rely on previous religious observance or belief but the acknowledgement or belief that the object of faith (in this case Jesus) can do what is requested.** This is what Hebrews means when it says that faith is *confidence in what we hope for*.

Question to ponder: Was this the same Centurion who was at the foot of the cross when Jesus was crucified and who proclaimed: *truly he was the Son of God?*

What have we discovered in our search for an understanding of faith?

We have seen it is trust and confidence. Being assured of what we do not see. From Abraham we see that is a belief and a confidence to follow a calling or to do something/go somewhere without knowing all the details, without even knowing where the destination is. For

Abraham faith was a journey to the “promised land”. It does not depend of culture, religious background, social status or gender. Faith is being prepared to get up and go.

The Canaanite woman shows us that even though she probably knew something of the Hebrew religion and even the concept of a coming Messiah, she was prepared to not accept the glib response of Jesus but insisting that God even blesses the “dogs” the outcasts and those that might otherwise be rejected. Jesus appears amazed at her forthrightness and he deep understanding of God, even though she was not considered good enough to enter a synagogue or temple.

Here we see that social standing or the need to be accepted by the orthodox is not related to having real faith. Faith is based on an understanding, however rudimentary, that someone can heal (which don’t forget also means saves).

Even someone with no religion or a belief in another religion can show true faith when that faith is directed towards someone who is recognised as the one who can truly save.

We often hear phrases such as, “I wish I had more faith” or “If you had more faith or greater faith or deeper faith than healing would come” etc etc. Such views are based on the petrol tank view of faith. We see faith like the petrol tank in our cars. When it’s getting low we fill it up by coming to church or reading the Bible or praying and so on. But that is a wrong way to look at it.

In the case of Abraham and the Centurion they had no knowledge of God so they could not have faith in that way. The most important thing about faith is not how much he have (who decides that and on what bases?) but what is the OBJECT of our faith. The Centurion and Abraham were prepared to believe God would be true to his word. Abraham just packed up and moved. The Centurion said to Jesus, “Just say the word and my servant will be heal

They were prepared to believe IN someone. It was the object of their trust and hope that lead them to believe, to have faith.

That is the key. It is not an amount. Jesus talked about faith as small as a grain of mustard seed. What do we believe about God? What can God do? We all get discouraged. We all need assurance from time to time. Ask God for a reminder of who He is and that He loves you and knows your plight. My experience is that assurance, that reminder will come. Because I believe that God is with me and wants me to live out of my faith: trusting, believing and with the confidence and assurance the object of my faith is able bring about all good things, even to the end of the age. AMEN.

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