

Sermon for August 14, 2016
"Faith: Assurance of Things Hoped For"

Hebrews 11:29-12:2

"Faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen. This is what the ancients were commended for."(Hebrews 11:1-2) This month we have been pondering this definition of faith. What is faith? Last week we saw that faith is something that is lived out. The best definition of faith is a life lived in faith. It is not just a state of mind. It is a spiritual gift that impels us to action; to step out in faith.

Today we consider faith as an "assurance of things hoped for." We all have hopes. As parents we have hopes for our children. Perhaps we hope that they will grow up to be successful and prosperous. Maybe that they will grow up fulfilled and at peace. Based on those hopes we encourage their growth and learning.

We hope for health and comfort. We hope for strong relationships and families. We hope for a world free of injustice and violence. We hope for a country where all children are fed and cared for and where people are judged by the content of their character and not by their color or creed. We hope and yearn for truthfulness, and honesty, and integrity.

On a spiritual level we hope too. We hope for new and abundant and eternal life. Perhaps we hope for a mansion in glory on a street of gold by a crystal stream. Maybe we hope for a peace and tranquility and wholeness that passeth understanding. We hope for a love that is patient and kind; not envious, boastful, arrogant, or rude, and that bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.

In chapter 11, Hebrews recalls some people who hoped for something they did not end up seeing; in this life at least. Abraham and Sarah hoped for many descendants that would be a great nation and a land of promise for them to live in. At the time of their death, they had only a few descendants and they still wandered in their promised land as nomads not actually possessing it. Moses hoped for freedom for his people; a freedom that included a land they could call this own. He never entered that Promised Land but only saw it from a distance. The Israelites passed through the sea and journeyed for 40 years to see the Promised Land but that generation died in the desert without entering it.

All of these hoped. They hoped and in faith they believed that these promised hopes would come to pass. They strove forward even though they did not achieve those ends. Many people of great faith faced death and even died for their faith or died in the journey toward their hope, but did not see it in this life.

Then Hebrews says, "³⁹These were all commended for their faith, yet none of them received what had been promised." Their faith was strong as can be seen by their lives. They all received benefits from their faith in their hopes. Some were saved from perils and others grew and prospered. But there was something more; some greater hope that was promised which they did not receive.

Hebrews goes on, “⁴⁰God had planned something better for us so that only together with us would they be made perfect.” All of these Old Testament figures strove toward a day when God would be realized and revealed. Part of that hope was the promised hope of a Messiah that would lead God’s people in righteousness and love. Hebrews is saying that in Christ that hope was realized. He came to be Emanuel, God with us, to bring that hope to fruition. All these people had faith in that hope and it led them forward.

That is the nature of hope. You can’t hope for what you already have. You might hope to keep what you already have, but hope entails the uncertainties of the future. I have a glass of water. I can’t hope for a glass of water. I might hope that next Sunday I would have a glass of water, but I can’t hope for it now.

Hope reaches beyond the present. It is beyond what we can see. Sometimes our hope seem way beyond what we can see. To hope for love and justice in a world torn by hatred and prejudice seems unrealizable. But we hope anyway.

Faith, that spiritual gift of trust in God, gives us an assurance of the promises. Even though some situations and places may seem God forsaken, we are promised that God is everywhere and that God has not forsaken anyone. Faith gives us the assurance that the hoped for promise of God’s presence and love are true. God promises that all creation will be reconciled to God and that Jesus will come and bring justice and peace. World peace and harmony seem like a pipe dream, but we hope for it anyway and in faith we strive for that hope.

Hebrews tells us to look to Jesus to have a faith that helps us hope for what seems beyond our grasp. It says, “²Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy set before him endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.” Jesus spoke of a future when all the nations of the world would gather like people come to a wedding banquet. He lived out God’s love for all by ministering the Samaritans and even Gentiles. He spoke the truth even though it got him killed. And he lived forgiveness and grace for even the people who were killing him.

If we want an assurance of things hoped for, we need to follow his example. If we hope for peace and justice and love and kindness, we need to live it. But we can’t live it if it is not realized in us first. We have to look to Christ, not just as our example, but also as the one who can redeem us. Through Christ and the Holy Spirit, God can put love and righteousness and forgiveness and peace in our hearts.

“Faith is the assurance of things hoped for.” In Jesus Christ we have the hope of salvation brought to fruition. If you hope for a change in your heart and life, and in your world, look to Christ. He has blazed the trail of faith that many others have made their life pilgrimage on. Trust in Christ and you will have an assurance of God’s grace and love for you and through you. Give your life to him so he can give you the faith to hope even when things seem hopeless.