



Holy Trinity Claygate

Following Jesus Together

Living by Faith

A series of Small Group studies
for Summer 2008

based on Hebrews 11

"We live by faith, not by sight" (2 Cor 5:7)

HEBREWS 11 – LIVING BY FAITH: INTRODUCTION

Why this series?

Our motto this year is 'We live by faith, not by sight' (2 Corinthians 5:7). This verse will be especially relevant for us as a church from September as new services start and we live through change and, we pray, growth. But it is a verse that is always relevant for Christians as we focus not on what we can see but on all that God has for us now and in the future.

Our studies in Hebrews 11 give us the chance to think about what that verse looks like in practice. This famous chapter includes many of the heroes of the faith of the Old Testament, men and women who lived by faith in challenging times. It is a wonderful passage through we can be inspired by others' example and encouraged to live lives of faith ourselves. We will also find ourselves being reminded of the story and shape of some of the Old Testament, and see how the promises of the old covenant find their fulfilment in the new.

The letter to the Hebrews

Authorship

Hebrews is unique among New Testament letters because we are not sure who the author was. It is fairly certain that it was not Paul; other suggestions of Barnabas and Apollos are possible but cannot be proved either way. However, this does not hamper our reading unduly for we can be confident who the audience was and the issues they were facing.

Date and Audience

It seems certain that Hebrews was written before the destruction of the Jerusalem temple in AD70 and so a date in the third quarter of the first century seems likely. The audience apparently comprised converts from Judaism, hence the lengthy reflection on the Jewish sacrificial system and how it had been fulfilled in Christ. Yet these converts were being tempted to renege on their Christian faith and revert back to Judaism.

Themes

The main themes of the letter, therefore revolve around two areas: first, the superiority of the Christian faith to the Jewish priestly and sacrificial system, and second, the resultant need to persevere with faith even when the going is tough. It is in the context of this latter charge (see 10:19-39) that the writer embarks on his survey of OT characters (very familiar, of course, to his Jewish audience) who walked and lived by faith. His aim is not to say everything about faith (the focus and work of faith is explored more by Paul in his letters) but instead to give practical examples of people whose faith shaped their lives and decisions.

Studies for today

In the course of studying these passages we will have to recognise that the OT world is very different to our own; however, we will also see how the faith exercised by these OT people is not so dissimilar to that we are called to demonstrate in 21st century Britain. Moreover, the God they worshipped and followed is the same God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. The faithful living he called these people is the same He calls us to today. We hope and pray you find these studies helpful as we all 'live by faith and not by sight'.

Prayer

You may find this prayer useful as you prepare for these studies.

Almighty and ever-living God, we give you thanks for all those who have walked by faith and not by sight. Grant to us the same faith and power, that as we rejoice in their triumphs we may be profit by their example and come to that place where we see you face to face, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen

Philip Plyming, Tom Darwent and Mike Harle

Introductory Study No.1 - Faith and Assurance

Introduction

"Faith is believing what you know ain't so" – quotation attributed to Mark Twain.
What is faith really about? Some write it off as a vague hope that things will go alright without having any evidence that they will. People who live by faith, goes the argument, are well-meaning but deluded. But is there more to faith more than that?

- what are your hopes for the future (for yourself and those close to you)? How confident are you that these things will happen?

Context

So what is our hope and where is our confidence? In introducing his survey of the OT heroes of faith the writer of Hebrews describes what he means by faith and its basis.

Read Hebrews 11:1-3

1. **'Faith is being sure of what we hope for' (v1). What can we hope for as Christians?*
Split the group to read and feedback on the following verses:

Group A: Rom 8:1 – forgiveness and no condemnation
1 John 3:1-3: children of God/see God
1 Thess 4:16-18 – the return of Jesus
Romans 8:20-21 – creation restored
Rev 21:1-4 – new creation with no pain

Rom 8:1

Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus

1 John 3:1-3

1How great is the love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God! And that is what we are! The reason the world does not know us is that it did not know him. 2Dear friends, now we are children of God, and what we will be has not yet been made known. But we know that when he appears, we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is. 3Everyone who has this hope in him purifies himself, just as he is pure.

1 Thess 4:16-18

16For the Lord himself will come down from heaven, with a loud command, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet call of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first. 17After that, we who are still alive and are left will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And so we will be with the Lord forever. 18Therefore encourage each other with these words.

Rom 8:20-21

20For the creation was subjected to frustration, not by its own choice, but by the will of the one who subjected it, in hope 21that^a the creation itself will be liberated from its bondage to decay and brought into the glorious freedom of the children of God.

Rev 21:1-4

1Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and there was no longer any sea. 2I saw the Holy City, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband. 3And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, "Now the dwelling of God is with men, and he will live with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God. 4He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away."

Group B: 1 Cor 13:12-13 – see God face to face
2 Cor 4:16-18 – eternal glory
1 Cor 15:50-57 – eternal life and victory

1Cor 13:12-13

12Now we see but a poor reflection as in a mirror; then we shall see face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I am fully known. 13And now these three remain: faith, hope and love. But the greatest of these is love.

2 Cor 4:16-18

16Therefore we do not lose heart. Though outwardly we are wasting away, yet inwardly we are being renewed day by day. 17For our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all. 18So we fix our eyes not on what is seen, but on what is unseen. For what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal

1 Cor 15:50-57

50 I declare to you, brothers, that flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God, nor does the perishable inherit the imperishable. 51Listen, I tell you a mystery: We will not all sleep, but we will all be changed— 52in a flash, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, the dead will be raised imperishable, and we will be changed. 53For the perishable must clothe itself with the imperishable, and the mortal with immortality. 54When the perishable has been clothed with the imperishable, and the mortal with immortality, then the saying that is written will come true: "Death has been swallowed up in victory."^[a] 55"Where, O death, is your victory? Where, O death, is your sting?"^[b] 56The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law. 57But thanks be to God! He gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.

Can you think of anything that doesn't appear on that list?

2. *How is that Christian hope different to the main preoccupations of 21st Century society?
3. *If our hope is unseen, what evidence do we have for our faith and where is our faith focussed? You may wish to brainstorm answers, drawing out the different sources of evidence for our faith (see also 1 Cor 15:1-8).
4. *Why do you think faith is something that God commends (v2)? – (see also v6 and John 20:29)
5. How does looking at creation help build faith? (v3)
6. *In what ways is having faith hard? What questions would we like answered during this series?
7. How would we encourage and advise someone who said they were having difficulty being sure or certain about faith?
8. *How can we be encouraged by the idea that God commends those who have faith in Him

Conclusion

Faith is a proper response to a powerful creator God. It is more than a vague optimism; it is based on confidence in what God has done and what He has promised. Doubt is not the opposite of faith, but self-reliance (placing our confidence in ourselves) is.

Prayer

Lift to God those areas in our lives and that of our church where having faith is hard. Pray for a confident faith in what God has done and what He has promised.

Reflection

Write out the promises of God listed in the passages you have read and stick them on post-it notes around the house.

No.2 – Faith and Favour – Abel and Enoch

Introduction

What does it take to earn God's favour? Some people live to please themselves, and react in one of two ways to God: they ask him to bless their plans, or - suspecting that he might have different ideas - avoid him. Others try and please him.

- How many of your friends and family would confidently say that they were trying to please God in their lives?

Much Christian discussion of the 'means of salvation' focuses on what we need to believe to be saved. However, the bible also has a lot to say about the right underlying attitude. Review Jeremiah 29:13; it could serve as a summary of our passages in this study.

Read Hebrews 11:4 and Genesis 4:1-6

1. * Hebrews 11:4 is a direct reference to the favour Abel's sacrifice brought him from God, But the contrast with Cain's sacrifice has nothing to do with the relative merits of an offering of plant life compared with animal life. What then was the crucial difference between their offerings?
2. How much thought do you think they put into their respective sacrifices? What were they hoping to achieve?
3. * The writer to the Hebrews concludes that this was a demonstration of faith (11:4). Why does he say this? What did Abel have faith in? In what ways is this similar or different to our faith?
4. Why was Abel then commended as a righteous man (11:4)? What does 'righteous' mean, and how does this passage imply we become so?

Read Genesis 5:21-24

5. * Hebrews 11:5 tells us Enoch was commended as one who pleased God. What light does the Genesis account shed on how he pleased him? What does this mean? What does Micah 6:8 add to our understanding? What do these things tell us about God?
6. * Hebrews 11:6 gives us two things that someone must believe in order to be saved. Do you know people who believe the first and not the second? What sort of God do they believe in?
7. What proportion of the UK do you think believe these things? What then do some of them fail to do, which stops them pleasing God? (see James 1:22).
8. * What do you think are the rewards are 'for those who earnestly seek him'? How highly do you value those rewards?
9. What stops you being motivated by those rewards enough to seek him as you feel you should? Why does that happen? What can you do to prevent it?

10. Do you know any non-Christians who don't believe because they have a wrong understanding of God or of what he requires of us? How would what we have learnt today challenge them? Do you think with God's help, you could persuade any of them that this is what God is like? How would you do so?

Conclusion

In today's passages we have heard the call to earnestly seek God, so that we might find him and enjoy our reward. This has reminded us of what the purpose of life is, and of what God expects of us if we are to be part of his people. This is a message that our world needs to hear.

Prayer

Pray that you would have courage to talk with non-Christians about what they believe the purpose of life is, and whether we need to live to please God.

Reflection

What are the rewards to those who seek God and would your life be different if you sought him afresh each day?

No. 3 – Faith and Fear - Noah

Introduction

We are all motivated by fear sometimes. It can have a very negative impact on our lives, leading us to find it difficult to commit to anything.

- Is fear always a bad thing? Where can it be useful?

In these passages, Noah is held up as a positive example of someone who feared God, and so was commended as a man of faith.

Read Hebrews 11:7 and Genesis 6:9-7:1

1. What do we learn about Noah from the opening verse of this passage from Genesis? What does it mean?
2. * What was Noah's 'holy fear'? What was its basis? What is the connection between the word of God and faith?
3. * What is the godly 'fear' for us? What connection does this have with the word of God?
4. What warnings have we been given about the future and what is the course of action God has made open to us?
5. What is our 'ark'? How was the inclusion of every type of creature in the ark a foreshadowing of the eternal people of God?
6. How did Noah's faith 'condemn the world'?
7. * What does the Noah story tell us about God and what does it tell us about man? What proportion of British population do you think believe these things? Do you feel with God's help you could persuade an unbeliever that they were true? How would you go about it?
8. * What does the Noah story teach us about dependence on God? What do you think you can learn from it?
9. Is there anything God has warned you about that you have not yet responded to?
10. * Are there things that Christians believe which you think would change the way you acted if you thought about them a bit more often? Why don't you think about them that often? What do you think God would say about that?

Conclusion

This passage reminds that the motivation of fear is a legitimate part of the Christian life. God has given us warnings about the future that have implications for us and our world. The implication is that we will find our spiritual life galvanized if we face up to them and keep them front of mind.

Prayer

Pray for a new sense of urgency in your spiritual life and your evangelism, that reflects the realities of what God has revealed about the future.

Reflection

What have you learnt from these passages about how you could stimulate your spiritual life? What help would you like from God?

No.4 Faith and Obedience – Abraham's Covenant with God

Introduction

Reality TV often features the stories of families or couples who are moving home to start a new life in a different place sometimes far away. However, the families involved usually have a clear idea of where they will live, what job they are going to do and what life will be like when they get there. Abraham, Sarah and Lot had none of this certainty. The only thing they knew for sure was that this was what God wanted them to do. And that was enough for them.

- think of a time when you have taken a risk because you felt God was calling you to do that? How did it feel? What sustained you?

Context

Abraham's father Teram had moved the family to Haran from Ur, a prosperous city. There is no particular evidence that Abraham knew God prior to his call in Haran. This study draws us into how God can call us to fulfill his purposes and the inspiring example of how one man responded in faith and obedience.

Read Together 11:8-10 and Genesis 12:1-9

1. How did God break into Abraham's life?
2. *Genesis 9:1-3 covers God's call to Abraham. Put yourself in Abraham's shoes, what questions would you have? To what extent do God's promises answer these questions?
3. In the 21st Century we can contemplate moving home, sometimes even moving base country or continent. What would have been the complications for Abraham and his family in their time (vv 4-5)?
4. Haran to Canaan is a journey in excess of 300 miles. Their "caravan" must have looked odd to passers-by. When asked "where are you going and why?", how do you imagine Abraham might have responded?
5. How did God seek to sustain Abraham during his journey?
6. What was Abraham's response?
7. *Canaan was a place of worshippers in Baal. A foreign destination. In what ways does the world sometimes seem like a foreign land to you? How does God sustain you?
8. How does God call to you? How can you be assured of its authenticity?
9. *Think of a time when obedience to God has found you grappling with other priorities. How have you set about resolving the dilemmas? How have you been conscious of God at work in you and through others? What did you learn?
10. If a stranger were to ask you "where are you heading and why?", how would you respond?

11. The famous Christian martyr in Nazi Germany, Dietrich Bonhoeffer once said "one act of obedience is better than one hundred sermons". What did he mean and why might he have said this?

Conclusion

Abraham's exemplary response to God's call is one of obedience, action, overcoming obstacles and faithful living. The purity and simplicity of the Genesis text and its reflection in Hebrews clearly tells a story which is inspiring to many. God's promises to Abraham were big, numerous and fulfilled. His promises to us are just as exciting.

Pray Together

Thank God for the way he has faithfully led you and that you will be obedient to his call on your life right now.

Reflection

What is your equivalent of the caravan from Haran to Canaan? Map your own spiritual journey. Think about where you are now and where you are heading, by God's grace.

No. 5 - Faith and Hope – Abraham and Sarah

Introduction

Hope is a powerful idea. The idea that the future could be better than the present is one that drives politicians, residents, entrepreneurs and parents. But what if we never get to see the future come about? Does hope then disappoint us?

- *if you could change 3 things about Claygate that would improve it, what would they be?*

So far we have looked at how Abraham responded to God's call and moved to a new land. He has also received a promise that his descendants would be as numerous as the stars (Gen 15:5 and 17:3-8). In this study we find out how he kept his faith in tough circumstances, and also learn about how we should view the land we are in

Read 11:11-12 and Genesis 17:15-19 and 21:1-7

1. ** How did Abraham respond to God's promise that his wife would bear him a son? How might Sarah have reacted? (see also Gen 18:10-12) What can we learn from this?*
2. *How did Abraham and Sarah react when Isaac was born?*
3. ** Given that we have not received Abraham's specific promise about children, what can we learn from his example of faith?*

Read 11:13-16

These verses are a bit of a summary of the examples thus far.

4. ** How would you describe the character of the people studied so far (v13)? how must it have felt to die without receiving the things that had been promised?*
5. *What perspective does this give us as we near the end of our lives? Use personal examples as appropriate.*
6. ** To what extent should we describe ourselves as 'aliens and strangers on earth' (v13)? (cf 1 Peter 2:11) what might be the practical implications of this approach to life?*
7. ** What 'better country' are we looking for (v16)? what are its characteristics? Perhaps take notes from Rev 21 and 22. What is our response?*

Conclusion

We need to remember that this world is not our ultimate destination, and even an improved Claygate has nothing on the country that awaits us. We need to trust God's promises as Abraham did (with a good degree of honesty!) and live lives consistent with that belief.

Prayer

Pray for a clear vision of heaven and the joy that awaits us, and ask God for guidance about how to live your life as strangers and aliens in the world.

Reflection

Read John Bunyan's Pilgrim's Progress, a classic Christian text that explores the theme of vv13-16.

No. 6 – Faith and Sacrifice – Abraham and Isaac

Introduction

“The devil tempts us to bring out the worst in us, but the Father tests us to bring out the best in us” (Warren Wiersbe). “....Trials, difficulties and sometimes defeat, are the very food of faith....” (George Muller).

Has this been true in your experience?

One of the hardest forms of trial or testing can be when we called to give up something we love. But though Satan tempts us (1 Cor 7:5) in order to make us fail; God tests us in order to confirm our faith or to prove our commitment. This story provides an example of God’s gracious activity in a believer’s life in just such a way.

Read Hebrews 11:17-19 and Genesis 22:1-14

1. * Though many bible verses condemn the practice of child sacrifice (e.g. 2 Kings 17:17 and Isaiah 57:5), they were all written after the time of Abraham. So the challenge he was wrestling with was not a question of morality, but rather the seeming contradiction between the promises and command of God (Hebrews 11:17-18). What were these promises that God’s command in the story appeared to challenge?
2. * Indeed Hebrews 11:17 describes the event as a ‘test’: what was the test for Abraham? How are tests that we experience similar? Indeed, to what extent is the whole of the Christian life a test?
3. * What happens to our faith when we go through tests? What does this story suggest is the best way for us to respond to them? And how important does this suggest it is for us to know the word of God? Do Christians ever find themselves anxious or unhappy because they do not know his promises well enough?
4. * On another level, the Genesis 22 story raises the question of our own willingness to make sacrifices for God. To what extent is it true that it is only the things we really love and value that make a worthy sacrifice? Why is that? (see Gen 4:3-4). How does that help you understand what your own love for God should naturally involve?
5. What then do you think you can learn from the example of Abraham in this story?
6. * And how – in the light of all this – do you feel your response to trials and the costs of following Christ should change? How should we pray when we face them? And how should we pray in times of confusion about what God is doing?

Conclusion

We see from this passage that trusting in God’s promises is the key to faith, even when we do not understand how they can be fulfilled. It rests on the belief that God does not promise what he can’t deliver. We take confidence from God’s promises that he has already fulfilled when we think about the uncertainties of the future.

There is also a challenge to us be prepared to sacrifice, and an encouragement that this will bring significant spiritual benefits.

Prayer

Pray that God would show you which promises you need to trust him more about, and for a more positive attitude towards times of trial and testing.

Reflection

How much weaker would our faith be if we hadn't ever been tested?

No.7 Faith and Future – Joseph

Introduction

Man's ability to predict the future is notoriously poor. Here are some prime examples from the technology sphere:

Heavier-than-air flying machines are impossible. — Lord Kelvin, British mathematician and physicist, president of the British Royal Society, 1895.

"There is no reason anyone would want a computer in their home." — Ken Olson, president, chairman and founder of Digital Equipment Corp. (DEC), maker of big business mainframe computers, arguing against the PC in 1977.

"The horse is here to stay but the automobile is only a novelty - a fad." — The president of the Michigan Savings Bank advising Henry Ford's lawyer, Horace Rackham, not to invest in the Ford Motor Co., 1903.

Briefly discuss "why do we have such a poor record at imagining the future, when we spend so much of our lives worrying about it?"

Context

The story of Joseph resembles a mini-novel, bridging in time the tribes from Palestine to captivity and Egypt and preparing the ground for the exodus. Yet it makes a single dramatic plot with a captivating story line and many indications as to the true character of God and his people. In this study, we highlight Joseph's faith in God's good purposes for the future of his people.

Read Together Hebrews 11:20-22 and Genesis 50:20-26

1. What is the Hebrews author seeking to emphasise in vv20-22?
2. * Genesis 50:20 Joseph highlights how God's intentions were good, resulting in the "saving of many lives". To what forthcoming event was Joseph referring?
3. Joseph demonstrates a capacity to forgive his brothers in vv20-21. Why was this important to the achievement of God's purposes for his people?
4. * A hundred and ten years of life was regarded as the "ideal" life span (see v22). Why does the writer indicate this and what else does he seek to achieve in v23?
5. *As Joseph tells his brothers that he is "about to die" in v24, what range of emotions might they have experienced about the present and the future? How does Joseph seek to reassure them in v24?
6. *"God will surely come to your aid" is repeated in v25 as Joseph's parting words. Why does he commit his brothers to swear to this and to "carry his bones" from this place? (See also Exodus for the fulfillment 13:19, as well as Joshua 24:32).
7. One of the themes of the Genesis passage is God's blessing on his people. How are past blessings relevant to a view of the future?

8. *In John 14:18-19, Jesus reassures the disciples of his continued love through the coming of the Holy Spirit. In what ways can you see similarities to Joseph's reassurances in Genesis 50:24?
9. In what ways have you already experienced God coming "to your aid"?
10. *How does faith help us face the future? Share some examples and perspectives on our hopes and concerns and how we meet Jesus in them.

Conclusion

Joseph's exciting and insightful story is a fine illustration of faith in action. After Joseph, Moses led the charge by God's strength. The Old Testament promises of God's faithfulness are fulfilled in Jesus' coming, death, resurrection and the Revelation image of his second coming. So we too can have faith in the future (see John 3:16).

Pray Together

That our fears about the future can be replaced by confidence in God's love for us, and that through his Cross we can have his peace.

Reflection

Read Revelation 22:20. Jesus will come. How can we be ready?

No. 8 Faith and Choice - Moses

Introduction

We all face difficult choices in our lives, especially when what we believe to be the right thing to do involves keeping up things we have enjoyed, or brings us opposition or ridicule.

- What was the last tough choice you made that involved 'going against the flow'?

Today's passages drive home the fact that it often in these difficult decisions that true faith is demonstrated. We have to keep choosing to follow Christ, not just at the beginning of our Christian journey, but throughout. And Moses faced similar difficult choices as he chose to be part of God's purposes for his people.

Read Hebrews 11:23 and Exodus 2:1-10

1. Our study begins with the faith of his parents. What was the faith that they showed? How was it vindicated?

Read Hebrews 11:24-26 and Exodus 2:11-15

2. * Acts 7:21-22 gives us background on the privileges of Moses' childhood in Pharaoh's palace. What does Hebrews 11:25-26 tell us he gave up? What were the things then that motivated him to make this choice? What does Exodus 2:13 reveal about his hope for God's people?
3. Moses wouldn't have any detailed understanding of the messianic hope, but the story does reveal that he saw God's purposes being fulfilled through the Jewish people. So it was with them that he chose to be identified, with all the costs that involved. What then was the reward he looked forward to?
4. * The original readers of Hebrews faced a similar choice in whether to associate with the people through whom God's purposes were being fulfilled, or remain in the comfortable, convenient and secure community of the synagogue. What reward were they to look to? How then was Moses' choice a foreshadowing of their call to suffer 'disgrace for the sake of Christ'?
5. * To what extent are we called to endure similar hardship? How closely can you identify with the call to live distinctly from the world around them, that both Moses and the Hebrews faced? From whom do we face opposition and what is our reward? What must we be prepared to give up?
6. * Do we want to be part of what God is doing among his people, as much as Moses did? What difference would it make to our lives if we did?

Read Hebrews 11:27-28 and Exodus 12:21-27 and 50-51.

7. Hebrews 11:27-28 reveal a little bit more about what motivated Moses in his choice: he feared God more than man (v27), and he believed that only by following God's instructions could he (and his people) experience salvation from slavery. To what extent do these foreshadow our motivations as Christians?
8. What stops us seeing our choices as clearly as Moses saw his? What can we learn from his priorities and from his actions?

9. * How does Mark 8:34-38 build on all that we have thought about in this study? How could we pray in response?

Conclusion

These passages remind us that faith is often manifested in difficult choices, that involve giving up comfort or wealth and bringing hostility or ridicule. However, in the end our motivation can be found in our fear of God, and our desire to be part of what he is doing among his people, and our concern that we and as many others as possible would know his salvation. Seen in such a context, these difficult choices become easier.

Prayer

Pray that we would see clearly the choices need to face up to and how God would have us respond,

Reflection

Have we fully aligned ourselves with what God is doing among his people in Claygate?

No. 9 – Faith and Action – Rahab et al

Introduction

Does living by faith mean we all have to be the same? Is being a Christian about conforming to a particular social norm?

- *do you know or have you heard of someone you would describe as an unlikely Christian?*

In this study we come to the end of the list of the heroes of faith, but not before we look at one of the most striking examples of faith in the Old Testament.

Read 11:30-31 and Joshua 2:1-16

What makes Rahab an unlikely hero of faith? List the things that would exclude her: her gender, her nationality, her job. Charles Spurgeon wrote "If we could have taken a bird's eye view of the city of Jericho, and had been informed that there was one believer there, I warrant you we should not have looked to Rahab's house. She would have been about the last person we should have supposed had been a possessor of faith in the true God."

1. ** What is the nature of her faith (vv10-11)? How does this help us recall our faith?*
2. ** Rahab asks to be saved from the attack to come, and the spies agree. What is her response to their promise (vv15-16)? What faith does this demonstrate? What was the result (see Josh 6:22-25)?*
3. ** What hope and encouragement can we take from the Rahab story?*

Read 11:32-40 and 2 Cor 4:7-18

The writer of Hebrews goes on to list a number of different examples of faith (some of them quite exotic!)

4. *What kept these people going and not losing heart*
5. **What might cause us to lose heart as we live by faith (ether as individuals, a group or as a church)? why, according to Paul, do we not need to (2 Cor 4:16)? in what ways can we remind ourselves and others of this?*
6. **As we finish this list of heroes, in what ways can vv39-40 be true of us?*

Conclusion

R.T.Kendall writes on Rahab: "Whatever else could be said about Israel's first battle in the land of Canaan, none could ever escape the knowledge that, in Israel's pivotal and crucial moment of history in her land, God used an unpatriotic prostitute to ensure Israel's safety and security." We can be people of faith too and be used by God.

Prayer

Pray that whatever happens in the future we will walk by faith and trust in God and his promises

Reflection

Read 2 Cor 1:18-20 and reflect on how God's promises are fulfilled in Christ and available for all who believe?

No.10 Faith and Focus – Jesus

Introduction

There is a well-known scene in the film “Chariots of Fire” when the sprinter Harold Abrahams loses a race because he keeps looking sideways. Why? Because he is watching for his rival Eric Liddell. He later berates himself for such amateur behaviour and breaking a classic rule of top-class runners – never look for the other runners.

- When have you failed at a task through becoming distracted?

This combination of passages illustrates Jesus’ ministry and his focus in seeing through his earthly mission, whatever the cost and the obstacles in his way.

Read Together Hebrews 12:1-3 and Matthew 16:21-28

1. Who are the “great cloud of witnesses” mentioned in v1? Why might they be called this?
2. What is the “race marked out for us” (v1)? What do verses 2 and 3 tell us about what would help us run with perseverance?
3. What attitude does the author urge us to take regarding sin in vv1-3?
4. Peter’s confession of Christ precedes the passage from Matthew (see Matt 16:15-16). Why does Jesus choose that time to explain what lies ahead for him?
5. There is a strong sense in 16:22-23 of spiritual struggle. God’s purposes against Man’s captured in Peter’s words. In what way does this reflect some of our own dilemmas?
6. Throughout verses 16:24-28 the cost of true discipleship is highlighted. What are the main illustrations of this?
7. How does 16:27 help us to keep our focus?
8. Jesus mission involved both great Godly purpose and much human cost. What qualities did Jesus possess that ensured he completed God’s task?
9. What do you find most personally challenging about these passages and why?
10. What strengthens you from Jesus’ example? How can you use it to keep focused running your own race?

Conclusion

Following Jesus' example is a road of cost, sacrifice, but receiving the ultimate prize. Jesus had a full sense of the race he must run. We can use his inspiring example to help us persevere through our own struggles and dilemmas, and keep him in our sights at all times.

Pray Together

Pray that, through God's grace, your Small Group will become a full source of support and perseverance in our own journeys of faith. Give thanks for the blessings you have been to each other thus far.

Reflection

How does sin distract us from Jesus in our daily lives? What steps might we take to cast off the "sin that easily entangles"?

A Time for Reflection.....**either personally or in groups**

As we reach the end of the Hebrews 11 studies, you may wish to consider some of the following questions, or add some of your own...

1. What is faith? Has your understanding of faith changed during this series; if so how?
2. What have you found inspiring from the examples of "living by faith" in Hebrews 11?
3. What are the characteristics of your personal faith in the Lord Jesus Christ?
4. How has your journey of faith in him developed?
5. What encourages you when that faith seems weaker than at other times?
6. What further steps do you need to take in your own life, so that you truly "live by faith"?
7. What support can you gather or seek?

Thank God for new insights into faith. Thank him also for remaining faithful to us even when our faith falters. Offer praise that Jesus sets the example for us to seek to follow. That in him our faith brings assurance and perfect hope.