

“Faith Takes Action”

Last week Pastor Chris preached a fantastic sermon, pointing out some important distinctions about faith. He identified that faith goes wrong when we start comparing. Of course, if I compare my faith to the faith of Jesus, I’m going to look like a spiritual weakling, but then I compare my strength of faith to how I perceive other people’s strength of faith to be, and I find myself lacking there too. The problem with all that is the focus is off. “My faith” should not be the focus of my faith. Jesus should be the focus of my faith. That’s why we sometimes say that Jesus is the object of faith. In other words, Jesus is what faith is looking at, focusing on, depending on, so that a person coming to Jesus and saying, “I just have this little faith, and I get a lot wrong, but I know I need you,” that person gets all of Jesus; all his love and forgiveness; all his redemption and new life. Last week we heard a call to repent and reject a self-centeredness that puts ‘my faith’ in the middle, and to let God grow faith in Jesus in my heart by the Spirit’s power. This is a message you’re only going to hear from the pages of Holy Scripture. It drives home the point I recently heard in another sermon: “There’s nothing more practically important than to know the God of the Bible in detail.” (Timothy Keller, “The God Who Is”)

So this week, I’m going to push things a step farther. Continuing in the same section of Hebrews, chapter 11, I’d like to show you, in very simple terms, something God-given faith does. It’s a straightforward “if/then” and I offer it to you to encourage you, and you can take it from there. So let’s dive into this passage which picks up right where last week’s epistle reading left off. Here again, is the passage.

17 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, 18 of whom it was said, “Through Isaac shall your offspring be named.” 19 He considered that God was able even to raise him from the dead, from which, figuratively speaking, he did receive him back. 20 By faith Isaac invoked future blessings on Jacob and Esau. 21 By faith Jacob, when dying, blessed each of the sons of Joseph, bowing in worship over the head of his staff. 22 By faith Joseph, at the end of his life, made mention of the exodus of the Israelites and gave directions concerning his bones.

23 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. 24 By faith Moses, when he was grown up, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter, 25 choosing rather to be mistreated with the people of God than to enjoy the fleeting pleasures of sin. 26 He considered the reproach of Christ greater wealth than the treasures of Egypt, for he was looking to the reward. 27 By faith he left Egypt, not being afraid of the anger of the king, for he endured as seeing him who is invisible. 28 By faith he kept the Passover and sprinkled the blood, so that the Destroyer of the firstborn might not touch them.

29 By faith the people crossed the Red Sea as on dry land, but the Egyptians, when they attempted to do the same, were drowned. 30 By faith the walls of Jericho fell down after they had been encircled for seven days. 31 By faith Rahab the prostitute did not perish with those who were disobedient, because she had given a friendly welcome to the spies. I wanted you to hear

the whole passage again so that you could hear the common thread running through the lives of those who are named in it. From Abraham all the way to Rahab, faith in God moved each of these people to action. Abraham would have sacrificed his son Isaac. Isaac blessed his sons, Esau and Jacob. Jacob blessed his sons. Joseph preached a message about the coming exodus. Moses led the exodus. Rahab hid Israelite spies. In every case, faith inspired action. Faith caused these people to do things; things they wouldn't have dreamed of doing, had faith not compelled them to get up and get going.

And this passage from Hebrews 11 is not just a history lesson. It is a description of what happens in a person who has the gift of faith. When you believe that God the Father did not withhold his only Son, but did sacrifice him in order that our sin would be justly punished, that creates a response, doesn't it? When you're convinced that God's will is always best, you're going to act accordingly. When you're captivated by the vision of His Kingdom coming into the world, you won't be able to just sit there. You will need to be a part of it, blessing others like Isaac and Jacob did.

Today marks the beginning of our congregation's third year of engaging in the mission of Operation Christmas Child, through which we sincerely hope to bless the children of the world. Together we gather items, raise money for postage, and work to prepare for shipping and distribution, because we believe that the kingdom of God breaks into the world wherever these boxes are opened. I had the amazing opportunity to talk to someone who received a box as a child in war-torn Africa, and it was his introduction to life with Jesus. As a young man, his faith would move him to locate some of the men who had murdered members of his own family, so that he could forgive them. That is the Spirit which is unleashed with these boxes. You can be a part of this movement. Your faith can take action this way.

Of course, it's not the only way—it's one of an almost countless number of ways that you can bless others and join in the activity of God's Kingdom. You are absolutely free to decide where your interests align with the Kingdom goal of making disciples. Just ask yourself: what do you love to do—and how can you do whatever you just thought of to make Jesus known? Only you can answer that question, and I'm just going to let it simmer with you, and at the same time remind you just once more: You are saved by faith in Jesus alone. Period. And, freed from the trap of thinking my actions save myself, I can take action to serve others with confidence. What is faith in Jesus leading you to do?