

Daily Bread with Brother Hwa-Chi (Not reviewed by the speaker, for personal use only)

Hebrews 11: 4-7

Brothers and sisters, peace be with you, this is Hwa-Chi. Thank the Lord, it's time to read the bible again. Today, we will continue reading Hebrews chapter 11, verses 4 to 7.

Hebrews chapter 11 is a great chapter discussing faith. The author first uses three verses to provide a precise definition of faith. "Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen." I hope that all the saints can memorize this, and perhaps you don't understand it now, but that's okay; in the journey of every saint following the Lord throughout their lifetime, it is an exercise of faith. I believe that under God's sovereign authority, this precise definition will become our experience.

After giving the definition, the author presents internal and external evidence. The internal evidence is in verse 3, which is that the source of our faith comes from God's word; because of faith, we can know the power of God's word, which includes the creation of the visible world, the universe, and all things. The external evidence is in verse 2, which is that many great people of faith in ancient times bore a beautiful testimony to faith.

From verse 4 to verse 40, the author lists the testimonies of some great people of faith. Of course, there are many figures of faith in the Old Testament, and the author, after careful selection, records those who exemplify certain qualities of faith and their testimonies regarding these qualities. Since the author lists quite a few figures, it's impossible for us to review every detail recorded about these individuals in the Bible. Therefore, we will follow the author's train of thought and discuss the perspectives he presents. If the saints wish to pursue this further, I encourage the saints to review the daily readings of Genesis and Exodus about these great people of faith, which will serve as examples and encouragement for us in following God.

Verse 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.”

Abel and Cain were the sons of Adam, the second generation of humanity, and their deeds are recorded in Genesis 4:1-16. Abel, by faith, offered a sacrifice to God that was more excellent than Cain's. In the account in Genesis, faith is not emphasized. Since the author of Hebrews brings up faith, faith becomes the key to interpreting this passage in Genesis. Please, saints, do not forget that the Old Testament is a shadow, and the New Testament is the reality; we must use the truth of the New Testament to understand the pictures of the Old Testament—this is a fundamental principle of biblical interpretation.

So why does the author say that Abel offered a more excellent sacrifice by faith? What exactly did Abel believe? Let's review the scene at that time. After Adam and Eve ate the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, they realized they were naked, so they hid from God's presence and made aprons for themselves out of fig leaves to cover their shame. As a result, God found them and came to execute judgment. In the judgment, there was both grace and a curse. The grace was that the seed of the woman would bruise the serpent's head; since there would be offspring, it meant the woman would not die. God also killed a lamb and made garments of its skin to clothe them—this was on the side of God's grace. The curse was that the ground would bring forth thorns and thistles, and man would toil all his life, sweating profusely, to get food from the ground.

Cain and Abel must have heard their parents repeatedly recount that past event. The two brothers heard the same story but responded differently. Cain heard the principle of the curse and became a farmer, toiling daily to eke out a living. Abel, however, heard the principle of grace: man sinned and deserved death, but God killed a lamb in their place and covered them with the lamb's skin. Abel became a shepherd. At that time, people did not yet eat meat, so he had to trade sheepskins for his daily food. Clothes made of sheepskin could last a long time, but food was needed every day. We can imagine that Abel's life was not easy.

It was likely under their parents' instruction that they knew they should offer sacrifices to God. Although humanity had been driven out of the Garden of Eden, people could still come before God through sacrifices and speak with Him. Cain, being a farmer, offered the produce of the ground, while Abel, a shepherd, offered the firstborn of his flock. As a result, God respected Abel and his offering, but He did not respect Cain and his offering. Some commentators say that Cain did not offer the best of his produce, which is why God did not respect it, but the Bible does not say this. The real reason God did not regard it is that without the shedding of blood, there is no remission of sins. Abel, in revelation, saw the principle of grace, and thus he was willing to pay the price to become a shepherd, living a difficult life, so that he could slaughter a lamb to offer to God. Therefore, God first delighted in Abel, and then in his offering.

Dear brothers and sisters, perhaps you might feel sorry for Cain—he listened to God's word and toiled with sweat to get food from the ground. But you must understand that this was not God's perfect will but His permissive will, a way of survival God left for man after the fall. Abel, however, saw God's perfect will: a lamb would take man's place, bearing the punishment for sin, and its skin would cover man. In the meaning of the New Testament, this is Christ becoming our righteousness.

Thus, the author of Hebrews says that Abel obtained witness that he was righteous, which is the testimony God gave concerning his gifts. Because God delighted in Abel and his offering, He also warned Cain, for Cain became exceedingly angry over this matter. God warned Cain that sin was crouching at the door, telling him not to be ruled by sin but to rule over it. Cain did not heed God's warning and killed his brother Abel. This was the first murder in human history, and the reason, ironically, stemmed from an offering not being accepted by God.

Offering sacrifices to God and worshipping Him were originally good things, yet they led to a murderous outcome. Though this happened in the second generation of humanity, it later became a recurring event in human history. Religion leads to killing. What is religion? The most standard definition of religion is worshipping God

without God—having the rituals and methods of worshiping God but lacking God’s actual presence.

We must realize that worshiping God must be done in God’s way to be acceptable to Him, whereas religious people worship God in their own way. They lack revelation and do not understand God’s heart; when God does not delight in their worship, they try harder, but their efforts are the works of human hands, which of course cannot please God. When people try hard and still fail to please God, the result is jealousy and resentment, ultimately leading to the outcome of Cain killing Abel.

Though Abel died, it was a physical death; his soul did not die, nor did his acts of faith die—they still speak and continue to speak to the saints of later generations. Even today, Abel’s faith continues to speak to us. As Revelation 14:13 says, “Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord from now on. ‘Yes,’ says the Spirit, ‘that they may rest from their labors, and their works follow them.’” Though Abel’s body died, the effects of his faith followed him.

Verse 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.”

Enoch, by faith, was taken by God so that he did not see death. Enoch was the seventh generation of humanity and the first person to be taken by God without experiencing death. The Bible records very little about his life, only four verses in Genesis 5:21-24. The author of Hebrews says that Enoch was taken by faith. So what did Enoch believe? We must grasp the key word “faith” and look back at the biblical record. Genesis 5:21-24 says, “Enoch lived sixty-five years, and begot Methuselah. After he begot Methuselah, Enoch walked with God three hundred years.” Methuselah is a very special name, meaning “when he dies, something great will happen.”

Why did Enoch give his son such a strange name? Because in faith he sought God, and in faith he learned that the year Methuselah died, God would judge the world with a flood. The generation at that time had already begun to grow corrupt, and Enoch, in faith, saw God's plan and named his son Methuselah as a reminder to himself. Methuselah lived 969 years, the longest lifespan in human history. This shows that before God executed judgment, He extended grace, giving people the longest possible time to repent. Enoch was the first to repent; he not only saw in faith that God would judge the world in the future, but he also lived by faith, walking with God for 300 years—an extremely difficult feat. Our tendency is to fail to keep up with God and instead force God to walk with us. Enoch completely set himself aside and walked with God. During this time, he also bore children and lived a normal human life, yet he was able to walk with God in everything.

Thus, after 300 years, God took him away, and he was not found. He became the first person in human history to be taken up. Before he was taken, he had already received the testimony that he pleased God, and he became an example for all who hope to be taken up in later generations.

Dear brothers and sisters, according to the truth, 1 Thessalonians 4:17 says, "Then we who are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And thus we shall always be with the Lord." This tells us that when Christ returns, the saints who are still alive will be taken up. This indicates that those living saints, like Enoch, must live a God-centered life in their daily routines and completely set themselves aside to walk with God. Only then can they receive the testimony of pleasing God and be taken up. Therefore, we must frequently examine ourselves in our daily lives today, asking whether we put God first in all things and consistently place Him at the forefront of our lives.

Verse 6: "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."

This is the conclusion of the two previous examples. The author is very familiar with the Old Testament. The accounts from Genesis chapters 1 to 5 are very concise, and within these five chapters, the record spans from the first generation, Adam, to the tenth generation, Noah. Starting from chapter 6 with Noah, the Bible becomes very detailed, recording specifics of Noah's life. Thus, in the first thousand years of human history, the author selects only two representative figures: Abel and Enoch. One died yet speaks through faith, while the other was taken alive; before being taken, his life of faith had already pleased God.

This is precisely the condition victorious Christians should exhibit before Christ's return in the last days. If they die before Christ returns, their faith continues to testify for them, or they are taken alive. The author draws a conclusion for these two: without faith, it is impossible to please God—whether through offering sacrifices that are accepted by God, like Abel, or walking with God and living a beautiful spiritual life, like Enoch. The fundamental key is faith.

Don't forget the definition of faith: in revelation, one sees God's promises, and these promises become a person's hope. With hope, every action and decision in life is directed toward that hope. Faith is the mechanism that realizes this hope; with faith, one can please God.

How does this mechanism of faith work? It has two aspects. First, those who come to God must believe that He is. If we follow the KJV translation, it is to believe that God is the "I AM"—God's name is "I AM." God is the self-existent, eternal One who reigns forever; even in our circumstances, God is in control. God allowed Abel to be killed, but God is still the "I AM"; He willed Abel's faith to speak even after his death. This is the first aspect of faith's operation. Regardless of your situation, in season or out of season, God remains, God reigns, and God is still the "I AM."

The second aspect of faith's operation is that to those who seek Him, God is a rewarder. God is full of mercy and grace and will surely reward those who diligently seek Him. Enoch saw that God would judge the corrupt generation, sought God, and walked with Him; God rewarded him by taking him up without death.

We must know God through faith, recognizing Him as the God who gives grace and rewards, and live a life actively pursuing Him to the point of walking with Him. The lessons of faith from the first ten generations of humanity bring out these two aspects of faith: believing God is the “I AM” and believing He is a rewarder.

Verse 7: “By faith Noah, being divinely warned of things not yet seen, moved with godly fear, prepared an ark for the saving of his household, by which he condemned the world and became heir of the righteousness which is according to faith.”

Noah was the tenth generation of humanity. In the year Noah turned 600, which was also the year Methuselah died, God judged that generation with a flood. Genesis chapters 6 to 9 record Noah’s deeds. These four chapters detail many aspects of Noah’s life. Let’s follow the author of Hebrews’ train of thought to examine Noah’s lesson in faith.

Noah, by faith, was divinely warned of things not yet seen. This likely refers to Genesis 6:3, “And the Lord said, ‘My Spirit shall not strive with man forever, for he is indeed flesh; yet his days shall be one hundred and twenty years.’” He recognized God’s righteousness, which would not tolerate the corrupt generation to continue. Yet before God executed judgment, He was full of grace, giving a 120-year buffer period. Noah, in faith, saw things not yet seen and was moved with godly fear. He not only saw in faith but also followed in faith; he mobilized his entire family—eight people—to build the ark, constructing it on a mountain as a contrary testimony to that generation.

While everyone else was eagerly pursuing pleasure in sin, Noah’s family of eight followed God’s command, building a massive ark on dry land. 2 Peter 2:5 specifically mentions that Noah and his family of eight preached righteousness. While building the ark, Noah and his family preached for 120 years. After preaching for 120 years, not a single person believed; his family became a laughingstock to that generation, yet Noah persisted in faith. When the time came, the fountains of the great deep burst open, the windows of heaven were opened, the flood came,

and Noah's entire family entered the ark, saved from the judgment of the flood. At that time, the whole earth was corrupt and judged; the only way to live was to enter the ark.

Noah preached for 120 years, and the door of the ark remained open for 120 years, yet not one person was willing to enter. This ark is a foreshadowing of Christ's redemption. In a fallen, corrupt generation, the only escape from destruction is Christ's redemption. Noah's act of faith condemned the sin of that generation, while his family of eight was saved from judgment. Noah and his family were in the Old Testament, looking forward; when Christ offered Himself once and accomplished eternal redemption, the effect of this redemption reached Noah's family, and they too received the righteousness that comes by faith.

Today, we have reached the end of the age; Christ's return is near. Christ also said that when He returns, He will judge the world. Today, we are building the church, this ark, and preaching the gospel to those around it. Our situation is very similar to Noah's, so we must rescue as many as we can until Christ returns, when the door of grace will close. At that time, all who have not accepted Christ's redeeming grace will face judgment. But we who have received salvation and been justified by God, like Noah, will condemn the sin of this generation. Faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen. What Jesus Christ has promised us is our hope, and today we use faith to realize this hope.

Let us pray together: Lord, thank You for placing these great people of faith before us. Abel, though he lost his life, testifies through his faith. Enoch, by faith, walked with God, received a beautiful reward, and was taken up without seeing death. Noah, by faith, built the ark, not only saving his family but also condemning that generation. Faith worked in these people, and it works in us today. Help us to follow in faith, so that our faith may also become our testimony. Bless my daily life. I pray in the holy name of the Lord Jesus Christ.