Without faith it is impossible to please God

Hebrews 11:1-7

Key 11:6

“**And without faith it is impossible to please God, because anyone who comes to him must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who earnestly seek him.**

Through our Summer Bible Conference, God taught us the importance of faith in him. When Abraham failed to believe God is God almighty he ended up living a compromised life. But when he fully believed God almighty and trusted him he could offer his son Isaac as a burnt offering. So the secret of our spiritual revival is to have faith in God almighty. Through our conference God restored our campus mission. Now the question is how we can keep our faith in God almighty and serve our mission faithfully. So we prepared four special Sunday messages to boost our faith in God almighty from Hebrews chapter 11.

The book of Hebrews was written to Jewish people who believed in Jesus. They were Jewish converts to Christianity. They had challenges, and one of their main challenges was to seek God by faith rather than pleasure and easy going life. The author encouraged his people to seek faith in Jesus despite persecutions and trials in life. In order to boost up their faith in Jesus, the author revealed that Jesus is superior to angels, any prophets including Moses, and any priest like Melchizedek, and Jesus is sufficient for our salvation from chapters 1 through 10.

Now today we will learn the first lesson. Among all the blessings faith can bring, arguably there is the greatest blessing. That is to be commended by God. In today’s passage, Abel, Enoch, and Noah were commended by God. Interestingly, all three of them, did not bear visible fruit. So they were commended by God not because of their fruit but because of their faith. No visible fruit only strengthen their faith and they were commended by God for their faith. So let us how it happened. My message is divided into two parts.

Part I. Now faith is confidence and assurance (v.1-3)

Part II. He rewards those who earnestly seek him (v.4-7)

**Part I. Now faith is confidence and assurance (v.1-3)**

Now look at verse 1. “**Now faith is confidence in what we hope for and assurance about what we do not see.”** I believe this is the only definition of faith in the whole bible. According to this verse, faith is related to hope and invisible things.

First, faith is confidence in what we hope for. Where does our confidence in our hope come from? It comes from God’s faithfulness.

**Psalm 18:25** reads, **"To the faithful you show yourself faithful, to the blameless you show yourself blameless".** God "shows" or "proves" Himself faithful to the faithful. But even when we are not faithful, God remains faithful. **2 Timothy 2:13** reads, **"If we are faithless, he remains faithful, for he cannot disown himself."** In other words, God Himself because of His absolute faithfulness, gives us confidence in what we hope for!

When we try to put our faith in God and His Word, we find out He is faithful to His promise.  And even if we then become faithless God still remains faithful, proving His Word is True.  And as we grow in our lives of faith, God gives us confidence in the hope He gives us.

When Jesus met a man who had been invalid for 38 years Jesus asked him, “Do you want to get well?” The man already gave up his hope to be healed a long time ago because it never worked for him despite his repeated trials. The man who had been sick for 38 years was just there not because of his hope but because of his despair. But Jesus came and planted hope in him by asking him, “Do you want to get well?” Jesus planted faith in him when he asked, “Do you want to get well?” because faith is confidence in what we hope for.

Our confidence comes from God’s faithfulness. Indeed Jesus healed the man even though the man could not say “Yes. I want to get well” but only complained saying that others did not help him. Truly our confidence comes from God’s faithfulness.

Now faith is also assurance about what we do not see. We know what we can see is not everything. There are so many things that we cannot see with our physical eyes but they exist. The main one is of course God himself. How can we know God exists? It is through faith. Someone told me, “I cannot believe God because I don’t know whether he exits or not.” My answer would be ‘why don’t you first believe and you will see his existence. Through your faith God can show himself to you.” Truly when we have faith we can see what is invisible. That is why we call ‘faith’ as our ‘spiritual eyesight’ or ‘eyeglasses’. God is certainly invisible and we cannot see him. But he surely exists. Atheist may say many things but all their saying still cannot remove God who exists although he is invisible. Indeed faith is assurance about what we cannot see.

Now look at verse 2. **“This is what the ancients were commended for.”** Here the word ‘ancients’ refers people of old days. People who lived before the recipient of the letter. The ancients, the people who lived before them, were commended by God because of their faith. The word ‘commend’ means ‘to praise someone or something in a serious and often public way.” They gained God’s praise through faith. How can a mere mortal man, a sinner, be praised by the eternal God? Is there such a way? Yes, there is such a way, and it is through ‘faith’. God will commend us when we have faith.

Now look at verse 3.

**“By faith we understand that the universe was formed at God’s command, so that what is seen was not made out of what was visible.”**

Verse 2 says that the ancients were commended for their faith. But in verse 3 suddenly the author talks about ‘we’ which means not the ancients. Why did he suddenly talk about ‘we’ rather than the faith of the ancients? It is because the creation faith is the common faith of all believers. Whether they are ancients or present contemporaries all believers have the same faith in God’s creation. Creation faith is the foundation for all other faith.

Genesis chapter 1 shows how God created the heavens and the earth in the beginning through his command. When he spoke, everything came into being including human beings. Certainly, what is seen, was not made out of what was visible but from what was invisible, the word of God’s command.

No one was there when the universe was formed. But when we have faith we can understand. People may want to understand how the universe was formed or came into being. So several thousands years have passed since scientists have searched the origin of the universe, and they are still searching. Still they do not understand. They still do not know. “Big bang theory’ is one theory and it is not complete answer. But when we have faith in God we can understand how the universe was formed at God’s command.

Surely the word of God is real reality of everything that we see. Every visible things came from the word of God.

Real faith is faith in God's Word.  The Word that has power!  The power to create!  The power to give life!  The power to make something imperishable.  1 Peter 1:23-25.

That is the Word God used to bring about creation.  To bring something out of nothing.  Men are like the grass, going to wither and fall, but by His Word we are made imperishable, this was the same WORD that was preached to each of us!

When we have joint prayer meeting in the morning at 5:30 am I was moved by msn Mari Lopez’s prayer. Her prayer is that she does not want to compromise bible study preparations even though she is very busy. Since what is seen was not made out of what was visible but what was invisible, the word of God, we should pay attention to the power of the word of God all the more.

Jesus taught the word of God in order to save men. We also rely on the word of God in order to lead people to God. If Jesus replies on the power of the word of God how much more should we depend on the power of God’s word in order to lead people to Christ.

Now the creation faith is the foundation of all other faith because it teaches that God is the Almighty Creator God, and everything belongs to him. Since God is Almighty Creator nothing is impossible with him. What is impossible with men is possible with God.

There is huge gap between verse 3 and the rest of the verses. After God created the universe and men at his command, man disobeyed God, and they lost the paradise and their relationship with God was broken. Sin and death came into man’s life and they lost God. When man lost God he also lost mission from God.

So the verses 4 through 7 can describe how God opened the way for men to repent and turn to him by faith. The way was opened only by the grace of God. These verses show how man can approach God, experience his forgiveness, overcome power of death and be delivered from God’s judgment through faith.

**Part II. He rewards those who earnestly seek him (v.4-7)**

The first way for man to restore his broken relationship with God was coming to God through offerings. Look at verse 4.

**“By faith Abel brought God a better offering than Cain did. By faith he was commended as righteous, when God spoke well of his offerings. And by faith Abel still speaks, even though he is dead.”** Abel and Cain were sons of Adam and Eve. But sin has already entered into men, and both of them were born as sinners. The bible did not tell us how Abel and Cain could learn the way to approach God, which is by bringing their offerings. But somehow both of them knew it. God opened a door for man to approach him by bringing offerings.

One old man told a pastor that he became sleepy whenever he heard about Jesus’ death for his sins. Then the pastor told him that he could understand Jesus better if he thinks about Jesus as a gift to God. The old man could understand the meaning of Jesus better when he thought Jesus as a gift to God. He could understand better when he thought about the reason why he brought some gifts to someone from whom he wanted to find favor. For example, he really wanted to have favor from his grandchildren. So he always tried to bring some gifts for them. When he understood Jesus was the best gift that he could bring to God to earn God’s favor he was not sleepy anymore whenever he heard about Jesus’ death for his sins.

Even though Adam and Eve sinned, God opened the door for man to come to him but it was through the way of offering. Therefore ultimately the offering refers to Jesus Christ who became our eternal offering to God.

Both Abel and Cain brought their offerings to God but God only favored Abel and his offerings. Why? Was it because Abel’s offering was more expensive? No, it was because Abel brought his offering by faith. But Cain did not bring his offering by faith. In our church we also make financial offerings. When we offer our gifts to God we need to offer it by faith, and God knows the difference between when we offer it by faith or when we offer it without faith.

Abel was commended as righteous when God spoke well of his offerings. Based on his faith God forgave Abel’s sins and the relationship between God and Abel was restored. But the relationship between God and Cain was not restored because he did not bring his offerings by faith although he brought offerings to God.

“And by faith Abel still speaks even though he is dead.” What is it that Abel speaks to us today?  He says when I gave my very best to God, He is pleased with me and I do not die.  This is my faith in God!  I believed that God is worthy of my best!  And it's true!

God speaks well of my offering.  He is pleased with my offering, because I give it out of my faith in Him!

Now the restoration of the broken relationship through forgiveness of sin is one thing. There was still another that man needs to overcome. It is the matter of death.

Look at verse 5. “**By faith Enoch was taken from this life, so that he did not experience death: “He could not be found, because God had taken him away.” For before he was taken, he was commended as one who pleased God.”**

Because of Adam’s sin all men were born under sin and therefore they all died because wages of sin is death. But Enoch made an exception. He did not experience death. “By faith Enoch was taken from this life, so that he did not experience death. He could not be found because God had taken him away.” Although he was under the curse of sin and death by faith he was delivered from the power of death. He did not need to experience the pain of death. Why did God take him away exempting him from the sting of death? It is because he pleased God, and God rewarded him with the exemption of death.

“Before he was taken he was commanded as one who pleased God.” **Genesis 5:22-24 “After he became the father of Melthuselah Enoch walked faithfully with God 300 years and had other sons and daughters. Altogether, Enoch lived a total of 365 years. Enoch walked faithfully with God; then he was no more, because God took him away.”**

What did Enoch do for 300 years?  He was a prophet.  And the message he gave is in Jude 14-15. **14Enoch, the seventh from Adam, prophesied about them: “See, the Lord is coming with thousands upon thousands of his holy ones 15to judge everyone, and to convict all of them of all the ungodly acts they have committed in their ungodliness, and of all the defiant words ungodly sinners have spoken against him.”**

For 300 solid years Enoch preached repentance, but ABSOLUTELY NO ONE, NOT ONE PERSON, listened to him. We know this because no one, but Noah and his family were saved in the flood (God's judgment). Can you imagine having Bible study for 300 long years and not even having 1 Bible student repent and turn to God!?

And yet, Enoch did not stop serving God's mission for his life despite setting absolutely no fruit or response in his mission field.  Enoch walked with God faithfully, which means, he worked faithfully in his mission field and he did not taste death even though God told Adam, "You will surely die!"  Because Enoch pleased God by his faithfulness (which means, faith), God decided to make his life, that looked like such a human failure, not to taste any death at all.  Meaning, his life was not a failure AT ALL!

A life that looks like a human failure, but that walked faithfully with God is not a failure AT ALL, it is a life that will never taste death!

Now look at verse 6. “**And without faith it is impossible to please God, because anyone who comes to him must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who earnestly seek him.”**

The author emphasizes the importance of faith as the essential way to please God by using ‘double’ negatives – ‘without’ and ‘impossible’. Instead of saying, “If we have faith we can please God”, he said, “Without faith it is impossible to please God.” “Without faith it is impossible to please God” means ‘faith’ must be present in order to please God. Even if everything is there except faith, we cannot please God. Surely without faith it is impossible to please God. Enoch pleased God by believing God’s existence and his reward although his life of mission for 300 years was tough. It was far more challenging than for us to go to campuses and invite students to bible study and help them to grow as disciples of Jesus despite repeated failure. But Enoch endured hardships by faith. He believed God would surely reward him if he earnestly sought him. For 300 years of preaching did not bear any fruit. Not even one person was changed. Many of us even did not preach for 30 years. Enoch preached 300 with no visible fruit at all. But God rewarded him. He did not taste death. Although his life of mission was hard, no power of death could influence him. Surely God rewarded him as he earnestly sought God in his mission field.

What about us? Do we seek God earnestly? We may seek God in a lukewarm way or in our deep heart we may seek pleasure. We may deceive ourselves thinking that we may seek God but in reality we may seek pleasure. How can we know if we seek God or not? We can know it when temptation comes. When we are tempted to take life easy and seek pleasure we will know whether we seek God or our pleasure. When we are tempted it will reveal how much we seek God.

But there is God’s reward for those who earnestly seek him. For example, I remember one shepherdess committed to go to international summer bible conference when she was very poor. Then miraculously she got a raise in her two jobs and she was able to pay airfare, the conference fee, and her common life expense. We may not know what is going on in our hearts. But God who is living knows what we are seeking in our deep heart and he surely rewards those who earnestly seek him.

I know another man. Whenever he was short of money he increased the amount of his financial offerings to God against common sense. God knew how earnestly he was seeking God and eventually God made it very clear that his family was blessed by God financially because he provides their financial needs whenever they need. They did not have savings but God became their savings. Surely God rewards those who earnestly seek him.

I have been sick since last Friday. I did not have any reason to be sick. I slept enough. I took even nap. But my sickness did not go away. I could not come to Friday’s discipleship group bible study and 8 pm prayer meeting. I took Tylenol and took rest on Friday night. But when I came to Saturday prayer meeting among overseers I found that I was still sick. So I took another nap in my house yesterday after breakfast. But mysteriously my sickness did not go away. I didn’t have any reason to be sick and I had a lot of work for my message which I am delivering now.

Finally it dawned on me that my sickness could be Satan’s deception. It is the first week after the conference, and its attack can come to me in disguise. I could see the devil wanted to deceive me that I was sick and therefore I could not prepare my Sunday message properly.

When this realization came to my mind I decided to work on my message ignoring my sickness. It is my way of seeking God, believing that God would heal me and help my message preparation.

Surely without faith it is impossible to please God because anyone who comes to him must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who earnestly seek him.

Now what happened when people kept on sinning persistently despite Enoch’s preaching? There was God’s judgment. But at the time of God’s judgment there was one man of faith through whom God saved human race.

Look at verse 7. “**By faith Noah, when warned about things not yet seen, in holy fear built an ark to save his family. By his faith he condemned the world and became heir of the righteousness that is in keeping with faith.”**

It was hard for Noah to build the ark because it was a huge project and took lots of time and energy. When everyone else was enjoying their lives and their free time, building up their careers and investing in this life and world, Noah on the other hand still had to feed and provide for his family, but in his "free" time he used it to build the ark.

It was hard for Noah to build the ark because he had to build it out in the open.  It must have been able to be seen for miles around.  Everyone, and I mean everyone must have laughed at him.  He was not ashamed of God or His judgment to come or to pronounce it on his generation, even though it didn't happen immediately. It didn't happen until his act of faith was completed.  God was not ashamed of him.  And God saved not only him, but his family.  This is a shadow of the everlasting covenant.  God did not just save Noah. But He became the God of his descendants after him!

By faith Noah condemned his generation, the world, and became heir of righteousness that is in keeping with faith!  He lived a life that pleased God.

 When Noah was warned about things not yet seen in holy fear he built an ark to save his family. People may not take God’s warning seriously. Jesus warned people that he will come again when people expect him the least. So when we become most complacent and when we take our life easy Jesus will come. It is his warning. It is warning against our complacent life style.

Look at **Luke 17:26-35**

**26“Just as it was in the days of Noah, so also will it be in the days of the Son of Man.27People were eating, drinking, marrying and being given in marriage up to the day Noah entered the ark. Then the flood came and destroyed them all.**

**28“It was the same in the days of Lot. People were eating and drinking, buying and selling, planting and building. 29But the day Lot left Sodom, fire and sulfur rained down from heaven and destroyed them all.**

**30“It will be just like this on the day the Son of Man is revealed. 31On that day no one who is on the housetop, with possessions inside, should go down to get them. Likewise, no one in the field should go back for anything. 32Remember Lot’s wife! 33Whoever tries to keep their life will lose it, and whoever loses their life will preserve it. 34I tell you, on that night two people will be in one bed; one will be taken and the other left. 35Two women will be grinding grain together; one will be taken and the other left.”**

We have to be serious when we are warned by God. We need to examine our hearts, whether our hearts are in eating and drinking, marrying and being given in marriage, buying and selling, planting and building. Of course, we need to eat and drink, buy and sell, marry and being given in marriage, plant and build. But the question is “where is our hearts?” Where is our commitment? For what purpose are we doing all these things? What are we seeking in our deep hearts?

Are we seeking God or are we seeking our pleasure and comfortable life through financial security? Do we seek God earnestly? What is our treasure and where is our treasure? Eating and drinking? Marrying and being given in marriage? Buying and selling? Planting and building?

Do we seek God by engaging in spiritual battles to preach Christ’s second coming through the word of God like Enoch? What do we seek? And how much earnestly do we seek? That is the question we need to answer each day. But remember! God will surely reward those who earnestly seek him like Enoch who preached the word of God denying his sinful desires by faith, and he did not taste death in his life!

The righteousness Noah earned is given to us when we believe in Jesus’ death and resurrection for us. And we will be delivered from God’s judgment through faith.

Now we live in the fallen world where sin and death entered into our lives. We live in the world where men lost mission from God and live for themselves. How can we restore our relationship with God and restore our mission from God? It is through faith.

By faith we can understand that the universe including ourselves were formed at God’s command. By faith we can bring our offerings and can be commended as righteous. By faith we can walk with God for 70 or 80 years and can be taken away from this life without experiencing death. By faith we can believe God’s existence and his reward for those who earnestly seek him. Surely by faith we can become heir of the righteousness together with Noah and be exempted in God’s future judgment. Surely by faith we can preach the second coming of Jesus denying our sinful desires. Most of all by faith we can be commended by God.

Today we learned that Abel, Enoch, and Noah were commended by God. But there is interesting common factor for three of them. It is they did not have visible fruit. They were commended not because of their visible fruit but because of their faith. No fruit only strengthen their faith. Their faith was their fruit, and they were commended by God through their faith.

One word: By faith we can be commended by God.