

“Saving Faith”

Hebrews 11:7-19

The kind of faith that saves us is a faith that changes us and keeps on changing us as long as we live. It goes much deeper than merely saying a prayer or mentally agreeing with a particular truth about God. It's deep; it's transformational and it's costly. That's what the author of Hebrews is trying to show us today. He's saying, "Look at the kind of people God declared to be righteous. Look at the ones who were well-pleasing to Him." In each case their faith was a lifelong commitment and a life-changing force. Its reality was proved by the actions they took and the choices they made. The reason he felt he needed to say this was because some of his readers had grown tired of waiting for Jesus to come back and of suffering for Him. So he paraded all these faith-filled men and women in front of them to say, "If you want to be saved, you'll need faith like theirs."

A. What does it say?

- (v 7) Noah had saving faith. He diligently took hold of God's warning and spent 100 years building an enormous boat. His faith: 1) rescued him and his family from drowning; 2) caused him to preach to unbelievers; 3) was counted by God as righteousness; and 4) caused God to adopt him as an "heir."
- (v 8) Abraham also had saving faith. His faith caused him to leave the security of his old life for an uncertain future.
- (vs 9, 10) He lived in this world as a temporary visitor, knowing that someday God would give him an eternal home in heaven.
- (v 11) When the fulfillment of the promise of a child did not come quickly, he and Sarah waited patiently for God's proper timing. Sarah especially showed faith by allowing God to work inside her, healing her and making her younger, until, at 90 years of age, she could give birth to a healthy baby and feed her baby (Ge 21:7, 8).
- (vs 12, 13) Abraham died without receiving all that was promised. But he never stopped believing that God would fulfill the promises in the future. And now as we look back we can see God did everything He said He would do.
- (v 13) Because people with saving faith have eyes to see eternity they are willing to live on this earth like temporary visitors.
- (vs 14-16) They want heavenly treasure more than earthly treasure.
- (vs 17, 18) Abraham withheld nothing that God asked for, even his beloved son Isaac.
- (v 19) Because he was willing to sacrifice the son in whom God's promise resided, Abraham proved he believed God would raise the dead.

B. What kind of faith saves us?

The key element God looks for in a person's heart is genuine faith, and when He finds it He forgives their sins and grants them eternal life. To be genuine such faith must be life-changing. It must hear God's promise and act on it until death.

C. Were Old Testament saints also saved by faith?

Some people have been taught so rigidly that the only way to be saved is to repeat the "sinner's prayer" they question whether or not it was possible for God to save people who lived before the time of Jesus. And to that mindset this chapter is shocking because it presents Old Testament saints as models of saving faith. But what we learn here in Hebrews is confirmed by:

- Jesus: 1) "righteous Abel" (Mt 23:35); 2) Abraham (Lk 16:22-31); 3) Moses and Elijah (Mt 17:1-4)
- Paul: Paul repeatedly stresses that "Abraham believed God and it was credited to him as righteousness" (Ro 4:3, 9, 22; Ga 3:6). In fact he calls him "the father of all who believe..." (Ro 4:11; Ga 3:7). There is no question he is saying Abraham models the kind of faith that saves us.

D. Does this mean Old Testament saints were saved without Christ?

Of course these Old Testament saints were totally dependent on the work of Christ for their salvation, just as we are, but this chapter makes it plain that the cross of Christ extended backward in time to rescue those with faith, just as it extends forward in time to us. We who live today have much more information than they concerning Christ, but it's to faith, not knowledge, God gives righteousness.



LIFE LESSONS

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Teaching the Bible
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the truth of the Gospel

E. How does saving faith change us?

- It changes what I do in life: God replaces my plans with His
- It changes what I want in life: My love for things declines and love for heaven increases.
- It changes what is possible in life: Miracles make the impossible possible.
- It changes the boundaries of my life: Life no longer ends at death. There is an entirely new level of existence beyond that.
- It changes what I own in life: Everything I have belongs to Him and He can take it back if He wants to. I hold His blessings with an open hand.

F. Application

Today God's promise to us is centered in the gospel. By repenting and believing in Jesus Christ, we too are given "the righteousness which comes from God on the basis of faith" (Php 3:9). But what we learn from Hebrews chapter 11 is that our faith in Christ needs to be deep, transformational, costly faith. We may have prayed a prayer or hold some mental commitment to the concept of the cross and resurrection, but that's not enough. To save us, faith has to be so real it changes us. No, we don't have to be sinless and we don't earn our salvation, but if the kind of faith that saves us is in us, that faith will keep changing us for the rest of our lives.

G. Questions

- Identify one of the changes listed above in category "E" and tell us where you see that change in your life.
- Without necessarily using that person's name, tell us about someone you know who changed profoundly after receiving Christ.