

"By faith . . ."

1. The elders (Heb. 11:2)

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FAITH IS fundamental to God's scheme for the redemption of mankind. In place of something we cannot attain, moral perfection, God is prepared to accept something we can demonstrate, faith, so that we might be "accounted worthy to obtain that world" to come (Lk. 20:35).

Faith is a critical component of the disciple's spiritual life: "without faith it is impossible to please [God]" (Heb. 11:6). It is faith that "makes possible . . . all that His goodness desires to do" in us (2 Thess. 1:11, JBP). It is "by faith" that "the just shall live" (Heb. 10:38). It is "through faith" that the named and unnamed elders listed in Hebrews 11 "were all commended", "won a glowing testimony", "obtained a good report" (v. 39, NIV, JBP, AV).

As a result they awaited the certain bestowal of that which had been promised. That promise was centred in the one spoken of at the *beginning*, the one whose heel would be bruised (Gen. 3:15); the one who, seeking his Father's blessings as the climax of his labours drew near, said: "I have *finished* the work which Thou gavest me to do" (Jno. 17:4); and on the cross declared: "It is *finished*" (19:30). In this, Jesus was "the author [mg. *beginner*] and *finisher* of . . . faith" (Heb. 12:2).

Faith is said to be "the substance of things hoped for" (11:1). There may be things we would love to have, things we might hope one day would be ours but which, if we are honest with ourselves, we know are to all intents and purposes beyond the bounds of possibility. There is, therefore, no substance to those hopes.

There are other things which we hope for that we know are within our grasp because we can draw on evidence to support that view. This evidence gives substance to our hopes. There were those who lived before Jesus was born who hoped for the blessings detailed in the promises to Abraham. They believed their hopes were not without substance because they could find in the history of their people incidents which spoke

to them of God's intervention, influence, power and support. That faith gave a substantial foundation to their hope.

Faith is also said to be "the evidence of things not seen" (11:1). There are those who have lived after the death, resurrection and ascension of the Lord Jesus Christ who have had no personal visual evidence of him. These long for his return and pray that they may be accounted worthy to be his saints in the Kingdom to come. It is a reasoned consideration of all the evidence available to them that leads to faith. That well-grounded faith makes them certain of those things they have not been privileged to be eyewitnesses to and of those things yet to be.

Such faith is what motivated "the elders" and for which they were commended. The same should be the basis of our lives. Such faith should be evident in the choices we make and the decisions we take every day of our lives. Faith is not reserved solely for the times when lions have to be faced, the heat of the furnace has to be endured or the fall of the executioner's sword is awaited. Faith is for the everyday situation; for example, as with "the elders", for directing the offering of sacrifices which God desires, in helping to model our life's plan on Divine principles, in resisting the temptation to wander, even briefly or slightly, into the things of the world.

John wrote in his first epistle: "For whatsoever is born of God overcometh the world" (5:4). Jesus, the only begotten and well-beloved Son of God, was truly "born of God", not only in the sense of conception leading to physical life, but also because he derived all the necessities that make for a pure spiritual life from his Father. The aim of his disciples is, similarly, to overcome the world, and fundamental to that conquest is faith, because "this is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith" (v. 4).

May the activities of our every moment be guided "by faith", so that, like "the elders" of Hebrews 11, we ourselves may obtain "a good report".