

Stepping up to Faith

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Editor's Note: This is actually the fourth in a series of messages on Faith. It will build on what has already been laid for a foundation, but it also can stand alone with full understanding. The earlier messages may be consulted on this website: "An Introduction to Faith," "Foundations of Faith," "Growing in Faith."

We have been looking at FAITH, attempting to see it in its *simplicity*, because I think we in the church have made this topic so complex that many people just throw their hands up in despair. They feel it has become far too overwhelming of a concept and the conclusion is: "I don't have faith. I haven't enough faith to accomplish a thing!" And many walk away discouraged.

1st, we **redefined** faith arriving at the understanding that it is as simple as "believing or trusting the word of another," or "relying on" someone else. The noun faith is the absolute certainty that God is – you just know that you know He actually exists (Heb.11:6). The verb is the action of believing – that you simply believe. When James said, "Faith without works is dead," (Jas.2:17), many people picked up on that and endeavored to teach us we should *make something happen* and then call it "faith." But what really are the "works" of faith to which James refers? We discussed earlier that **obedience is the operation of faith**. Walking in obedience to God's Word, will, and ways, is the "work of faith." We cannot separate faith from obedience just as we cannot separate love from obedience.

2nd, we saw how many times **faith is refused**. We selected only a few cases in scripture and saw ourselves in those same spots. How often the Lord speaks a word to us, couples it with *His* faith, and still we totally **resist** it and Him. We ultimately refuse what He has told us to do. Obedience escapes us and in effect we deny Him.

3rd, was the **reduction** of faith. That's when we only partially move into the things that God would have for us, not trusting Him completely for the details. We can accept part of what He says, selecting what is easier for us to follow, but settle for less than His whole plan.

4th, we saw **faith reaching**, or perhaps it would be clearer to say, *planting the seed of faith for a future harvest*. We saw this not as exercising ourselves in things too great for us to handle. It is also not starting at the top of the ladder, but beginning at the level at which we live. It's believing God step by step by step as we go along, reaching out for what He has yet in store for us.

One of the things in *faith-reaching* has to do with how we relate to another person. The following quote tells about a man, Irving, so filled with faith for others that he treated them *as though they already possessed* some quality, whether they actually did or not. "He addressed ordinary individuals as if they were heroes and princes... He made poor astonished women of tiny London apartments feel themselves ladies, in the light of his courtesy, and unconsciously elevated every man he talked with into the ideal man he ought to have been." Wouldn't it be wonderful if each of us would treat people that way, instead of looking up to some and down on others. How wonderful it would be if we could *exercise faith on behalf of another* by expecting from them more than they expect from themselves.

Here's the 5th point. We have seen faith redefined, refused, reduced, and reaching. Now we want to see it **realized**, faith that has come to fruition, to fulfillment. In Hebrews 11, we are going to see some *faith that was realized*. This chapter opens with, "Now faith is," (that's the noun) "the substance of things hoped for, it is the evidence of things not seen." The writer continues in verse 2, "by it, the elders obtained a good report." Verse 3 - It's "through faith that we understand that the worlds were framed by the word of God, so that the things which are seen were not made of things which do appear." Then, it talks about Abel, Cain, Enoch... "But" – and this is what we want to emphasize here – verse 6 – "*without faith it is impossible to please Him; for he that cometh to God must believe that He is, and that He is a rewarder of them that diligently seek Him.*"

Some Christians have a problem with this point because they've asked God for something specific and have yet to *realize* (receive) an answer. A spiritual blessing, healing, guidance, direction, the salvation of unsaved loved ones, or something else important to them and now they are on the verge of completely laying down their faith. They have waited a period of time and feel, right at this moment, almost in desperate straits. Are you one of them? These particular people have come to the point that if God doesn't do it now, they are through; they will simply give up.

Please look at this scripture once again. God says here that we must believe that not only is He God, but that He is "*a rewarder of them that diligently seek Him.*" "Well, then, why isn't it happening in my life?" I don't know. I can't answer that for you. I'm not God. But I do know He promises to reward you as *you purposefully and diligently seek Him.* I could add: "in spite of what your circumstances look like."

Hebrews 11 goes on to talk about Noah and Abraham and others. Verse 32 continues by listing these great people of faith in the Bible. "And what shall I more say? For the time would fail me to tell of Gideon, Barak, Samson, and of Jephthah; of David also, and Samuel, and of the prophets." The next several verses summarize what the biblical personalities **did** – through faith. Of all these, it says, "who, through faith..." did these many different things, "works of faith," or the **realization of faith**. They "*subdued kingdoms, wrought righteousness, obtained promises, stopped the mouths of lions, quenched the violence of fire, escaped the edge of the sword, out of weakness were made strong, waxed valiant in fight, turned to flight the armies of the aliens. Women received their dead raised to life again, and others were tortured, not accepting deliverance, that they might obtain a better resurrection: And others had trial of cruel mockings and scourgings, yea, moreover of bonds and imprisonment; they were stoned, they were sawn asunder, were tempted, were slain with the sword; they wandered about in sheepskins and goatskins; being destitute, afflicted, tormented*" (vs.33-37).

The author of this letter we call the Book of Hebrews, wanted to encourage the contemporary believers of the first century. It basically says, "Then, look at Jesus (Heb.12:3) so you do not become weary in this walk of faith – for **we** have not yet striven unto the death!" (vs.4).

We think we have it so tough. From our personal vantage points, this has been the most difficult season of our whole Christian walk. There are thousands of Christians who would raise their hands in agreement to that assessment. Yes, these have been shaking years. Truly, these are difficult days, but they really don't compare to what we just read, do they? We have not yet "striven unto death." We still live in, basically, a Christian nation with constitutional liberties and freedoms to express ourselves in every way. We have opportunity for service unto the Lord wherever we are, and yet we sit around and feel terrible about our little problems.

How does heaven view these people in Hebrews 11? How does heaven look at *you* as you walk in faith? You who have felt you've been hanging on by a mere thread of faith? You who "brethren" have pointed their fingers at you and concluded, "There must be something wrong in your life or you wouldn't be going through what you're going through. Things wouldn't be so tough for you if there wasn't sin in your life." Or maybe their rationale has been, "You're probably out of order with God. You must need to get your vertical alignment straightened out. If you were rightly-related to God, everything would be going along smoothly." All of these things that you are going through – the verbal persecution, the not being understood, the feelings of rejection – how does heaven view an individual today who rides through the storm with this positive attitude: "I don't understand everything; I don't have to understand everything. 'My hope is built on nothing less than Jesus' blood and righteousness.'"

What **is** the view from heaven? Look at verse 38 – "*Of whom the world was not worthy.*" Heaven looks down and says, "The world doesn't deserve them. They are saints. They're lights. They're beautiful!" Then, why are we still here in the middle of this muddle if we're so wonderful? Jesus said, "Ye are the salt of the earth" (Mt.5:13). We are here to influence, to flavor, to preserve our world until He comes. Don't you know that the whole world is saying, "Pass the salt, please?"

The “greats” of Hebrews 11 wandered in deserts, on mountains, in dens and caves of the earth. “*And these all, having obtained a good report through faith, received not the promise, God having provided some better thing for us, that they without us should not be made perfect*” (vvs.39,40). Does this verse strike a question in your mind about your own doctrine? The only reason that would be possible is if your doctrine is really more “tradition” than Bible. They “received not the promise...” Their prayers were not necessarily answered as they wanted them to be, or when they wanted the answers to come, and yet they are held here before us as examples of faithful living – in spite of their outward circumstances.

And at the risk of causing another question, I wonder if, in the heavens, there is actually a specific date written down for the Second Coming of Christ. I wonder if God wears a hidden tattoo with the date Jesus is to return and Jesus keeps looking to God wondering and saying, “Now?” And the Father says, “Not now. Not yet.” I grew up having been taught that God had a set moment in time for Jesus’ return.

Then, there is another extreme teaching today. It teaches there is no “*rapture of the church*” – that things just sort of evolve into the Kingdom of Heaven on the earth. In 1 Corinthians 15, Paul writes about the reality of Christ’s resurrection (vv.12-19). He questions how some can say there is no resurrection in the face of God’s truth. His argument posits that if there was no resurrection, then biblical preaching has no foundation – nor does faith (v.14). Verse 17 goes on to say, without Christ’s resurrection faith is worthless. Paul concludes, “If we have placed our hope in Christ *for this life only*, we should be pitied more than anyone” (HCSB). The King James says, “we are of all men most miserable.” So, don’t take away my rapture. I’m going up. I don’t care what you do. ☺ The question remains, *when?*

Now, what about that *fixed date*? Is it possible that, in the immutable plan of Almighty God, He looks for the generation of believers who so “walk by faith and not by sight” (2Cor.5:7) – who appropriate revelation as it is revealed to them “line upon line and precept upon precept” (Isa.28:10,13), who the minute they hear it walk in it (Rom.8:1; Eph.5:16) – and when that generation comes into fullness – completeness – maturity – and *becomes the Bride* – He will get the job done. It is THEN that He’s coming. Hallelujah! Is that a reasonable possibility? Just a question.

We have one more complexity to think about. What does the scripture mean when it says, “*By faith they subdued kingdoms?*” (Heb.11:33a). Are *we* going to subdue kingdoms? I think **this is the greatest position of prayer that we have in the Bible**. Paul said, “We wrestle not against flesh and blood” (Eph.6:12). (Sometimes I add “but *we* do”). Too often we seem to be confused about just who is our enemy! We mistakenly believe some human is the enemy, but this scripture is clear: we don’t wrestle against flesh and blood, against people, but (the indication of the verse is straight forward) we do wrestle against principalities and powers of darkness and rulers in high places. These are *spiritual rulers*. I don’t believe Americans ever have fully understood that like we presently understand it today. Never did we dream that the powers of darkness would be so engaged, so operative, amidst the rulers in high places of our beloved country! Undiscerning individuals are easily duped and controlled by the enemy of our souls.

When I hear leaders say, “If you think this is a Godless nation, you haven’t traveled in third world cultures,” I would have to say “Amen” that. Thank God, this is the most Godly of all nations, but I’m not satisfied with where we stand, as a nation, or even as the Church in this nation. I still hold to God’s promise, “If My people who are called by My Name,” – *My people*. Listen Church, **God has always dealt with a nation according to His own people**. “If My people... will humble themselves and pray and seek My face and turn from their wicked ways... I will heal their land” (2Chron.7:14).

Here is a shocking thought: *God is not one bit surprised today at the treatment He is receiving from unbelievers. He is a bit amazed, however, at what He is getting from His own*. Church, I could weep with that statement. When I can see my Jesus – and I’m not endeavoring to be dramatic, I feel this clear down to my toes – when I see my Jesus looking over the city of Jerusalem and saying, “Oh, Jerusalem, Jerusalem. How I would have gathered you unto Myself. I came like a mother hen to lift My wing and bring you under the protection and warmth and care and prosperity of it. I came for you and you

wouldn't have anything to do with Me" (see Mt.23:37; Lk.13:34). And then the Bible says He wept. That hurts me – deeply.

Do you know how it devastates His heart to weep over *this* country – that was born for the divine purpose of being the Light of the world? The birth of the United States of America, the very purpose of its existence, was that we would be the missionary country to the world. Do you know that? That's why we are so prosperous. That's why we've been first in so many things. But when success and prosperity happened, we became very proud of ourselves as a nation. In so doing we have allowed the influence of other nations to come into us until we aren't much different from Israel of the Old Testament. We have embraced too many of the attitudes, and behaviors, of the Godless philosophies of the world. We, even in the church, worship their idols (humanism, materialism, wealth, power, control) and we have taken credit for what was actually the blessing of God!

What's going to break that pride? Will our talking about it with one another, saying, "Oh, woe! Oh, what a terrible world! Isn't it awful?" You can always engage someone in conversation if you start off with a negative position. That's the truth! If you begin speaking with someone you don't know, in a non-church setting, and begin by saying something positive, watch what happens. You walk up to an unbeliever and say, "Isn't this a wonderful day? Isn't the sky lovely? Don't you just love it?" They'll try to escape thinking, "What kind of a creep are you?" But if you walk up to that same individual and say, "Isn't this muggy weather? It's almost unbearable." They'll say, "I know. I get so I just dread being here this time of year!" We can find instant agreement over the negatives. Our mission is cut out for us, Church, isn't it? *We* are to influence our world. We are to make a difference as light and salt (Mt.5:13-16) and that begins in **the power of prayer**.

Faith in God is the foundation upon which we dare to pray and prayer is almost an inexhaustible subject! We could spend a great deal of time talking about the powerful effects of prayer. But *corporate prayer* is almost a thing of the past in many circles. Churches are being built today, beautiful church edifices, with no facilities for regular prayer meetings.

Recently, I was shown the new blueprints for a gorgeous building plan and I looked all through the details as they explained everything to me. I had to inquire, "Where's the Prayer Room?" Their response was, "Well, this little area, right here where the walkway comes through the gardens, that's where we're going to have a special place – where four or five people can come at any time of the day or night to pray." I repeated my inquiry, "Where's the Prayer Room? Where's the *Room* where a hundred and twenty people could get on their knees before God and say, 'Oh, God, we the people of the Lord hereby declare peace to this nation. We break the power of the strongman over our city (Mt.12:29; Mk.3:27). We command, in Jesus' Name, release to the hold the devil has over our leaders.' Where's that Room?" It was absent from the plans for their new *church* building!

The people named in Hebrews 11 "subdued kingdoms" (vs.33a). We can see it fulfilled literally and historically, but we need to see it spiritually. The word in the original Greek is /katagonizomai/. It means, "to struggle against something." The /agon/ speaks of a contest – "to war against something" and what it really came to signify was "to conquer." The Bible says, "We are more than conquerors through Him that loved us" (Rom.8:37).

How is it that we are more than conquerors? Not by sitting back in the winepress – or your pew – waiting to be discovered. That should remind you of Gideon (Jud.6)? The enemy had come and besieged Israel (vv.1-6). As a result, whenever God's people wanted to get a drink they had to go through the enemy. Think about that. Water in the Bible speaks of the Word and the Spirit. All of the wells were taken over by the enemy in Gideon's day. Gideon is threshing a little wheat in the winepress – hiding from the enemy. He feels like a nothing. He has convinced himself of what many people today have convinced themselves: "You can't fight City Hall. I'm the only one here. I'm just little ole me, what difference could I make? Just one lonely voice." The enemy loves that voice – loves that you hear it – loves you to *eat it* – loves that you take it in and believe it.

Gideon is just trying to survive – like a lot of Christians today. “I’ll make it. I’m going through. I’m just going to concentrate on ‘staying saved.’” Suddenly, an angel speaks to him. Angels in the Old Testament speak of the Presence of the Lord. So, this passage is saying God came on his scene. “Hello, mighty man of valor!” (Jud.6:12) I can just imagine Gideon looking around to see to whom the angel could possibly be talking. That is exactly how many Christians are today! The Lord breathes in you, constantly present on your scene by the Presence of His Holy Spirit **resident within you**, and says, “Pray. Take authority over this spiritual ruler as you read the newspaper story.” As you watch various contemporary things on the television, He’s saying, “Take authority over the power that is in control. I’ve given you the power, privilege and authority” (Lk.10:19; Ps.149:7-9). And we’re saying, “Who, me?” He declares, “Yes, *you!* Potentially, you’re going to be a mighty man of valor if I ever get you out of this cave” (see Jud.6:2b).

What happened when Gideon came out of hiding and believed God? He blew a trumpet (vs.34), called all the people of God together (vs.35), and announced hope to them, “I’ve seen the Lord! I have a new commission from God.” Oh, Church, those who sit around saying, “I have no ministry. I have no *place* to minister. I’ve gone to my pastor and let him know my talents and abilities, but he just won’t open any doors for me.” *First of all*, we are ministers unto the Lord. *Secondly*, we become the representation of God’s power on this earth, and through prayer we can release all that is necessary in heaven (see Mt.18:18,19). That is a ministry in itself!

“But why pray? The Bible says, ‘He knows what you have need of before you ask Him’ (Mt.6:8; Lk.12:30). Is that a true statement?” Of course it’s true. “Then, why pray if He already knows what is needful?” **We pray because prayer gives God the moral right to act.** Think about it. God does not impose His will on anyone. He waits for us to invite Him to intervene in our affairs. He wants to hear us voice our agreement with His will. God is totally fair. In that position, He has allowed the enemy some freedom at this time because man, through our own sin as well as Adam’s, yielded his right of dominion on the earth. There will come a time when the enemy will be bound (Rev.20:1,2), but at this present time, the only power the enemy has had snatched away from him by the Resurrection of Christ is the power over Christians – Jesus took that back. He said, “No more. You leave My people alone. You may have nothing to do with anyone under the covering of My blood.” Hallelujah! Don’t ever believe the enemy is stripped of *all* power, that he’s completely powerless. He has some power, but the *only power* he has with Christians is the **power of suggestion, the subtlety of deception**. If we are foolish enough to listen to him, to believe and act on what he suggests, we *will* have trouble.

Jesus declared mighty powerful things to us and for us. “I told My people – I told My Bride – when she became Mine she bore My Name, and anything she asks the Father in My Name, it’s as though I’ve asked the Father Myself – and He will do it (Jn.14:13,14; 15:16; 16:23,24). *That’s* the **power of prayer**. We may not always know exactly how to pray but the Holy Spirit does, and He will reveal it to us when we ask (Rom.8:26). He’s just waiting for us to inquire: “Lord, how do You want me to pray about this situation?” When we pray for or about what God inspires through His Spirit, His divine power and authority are applied until that thing is accomplished.

“Well, I used to believe in prayer. I mean, way back when... I used to pray, and oh listen, God did some *wonderful* things – back then. But you see, for the last four years (pick a number!), it seems like no matter what I pray for, it *never* happens.” Too many of us identify with that scenario! I must question the all-inclusive word, “never!” But the end result is we have lost our fervency in prayer (Jas.5:16b). We don’t want to wait for God’s timing. Jesus is Lord, isn’t He?

Our *responsibility* is to say, “Father, I come in the Name of Your Son, Jesus Christ, and I receive the authority You have given to me because I am His. I pray under Your divine inspiration: ‘Set this nation free from the influence from Godless nations! Once again, let God Almighty be the ruler of America.’” And then, when we become the showcase of God’s glory, we can go to other nations as missionaries and say, “This is the way, walk ye in it” (Isa.30:21; Ex.18:20; Jud.2:22; Ps.143:8). Is that too ideal for you?

Is it too high a goal to reach? Can your faith reach that far? I'm committed to it. I believe it can happen! I really do. But, *if we do not move into God's provision*, He will pour out His Spirit elsewhere and they will have to send missionaries to us! Actually, it's already happening.

Thankfully, I'm watching God stir up His children. The Body of Christ is becoming a threat to the enemy's realm and I love that! I love it when God's people threaten the devil. The devil rises up and says, "Oh no, I've got to put this movement down. Let's see, what's the safest way to do it? I know. I'll get Christians to fight against Christians. That has always worked before!" Jesus said, "If they are not against us, they are for us" (Lk.9:50). We must not forget that. We need to begin blessing anyone – everyone – that lifts up and exalts the Name of Jesus Christ! They may drink wine and you take only grape juice, but my Friend, that does not change the fact that we're all from the same vat!

By faith, they "*wrought righteousness*" (Heb.11:33b) They administered justice. For a lot of years, our attitude about administering justice was, "some day we're all going to sit on a throne and we're going to rule" (Rev.5:10). We have tended to superimpose our human understanding on God's intent concerning our return as "rulers." **We** have had a form of vengeance in mind – and imagined some sort of superior position. But the administration of God's justice is not complicated. It is simply the active display of righteousness which is the behavior of holiness – *it's the way we are to live*.

That's worth repeating! ***Righteousness is the behavior of holiness***. When we live righteously, day in and day out, we are literally administering justice. We're giving good for evil (1Pet.3:9). And we become a living conviction to anyone who loves less or lives less than God's standards.

"Well, what's the difference between that and some of the other things – super-spiritual, superior attitudes, or the high-minded and haughty person who lives so precisely perfect no one can bear to live around them much less with them?" ***The difference is life versus law***. Those who have Christ in them, the hope of glory (Col.1:27), who are **filled** with His divine life and want to please God in everything they do, live righteously. We choose to live that way out of an attitude of love for God and His ways – "that I might please Him" (Jn.8:29). Those who have read The Book and want to be holy – as God commands (Lev.11:44; Mt.5:48; 1Thes.4:7; 1Pet.1:15,16) – will walk daily in accordance with His expectations. **Holiness will be manifested by righteous behavior**, which emanates from what (or Who) is in the heart (Mt.6:21; 17:34,35; Lk.6:45).

"How do you do that?" Not by keeping the Law. We know that legalism is a turn-off for everyone, including Christians. With a legalistic approach to everything – "We don't believe in that." "We don't do that." "That's not the right way to do it," we can "kill" some very good things in the people around us (2Cor.3:6). Some people are so trapped in legalism that it's hard for faith not to become "religion." When someone issues an invitation, "Would you like to go here with me?" the rigid, legalistic reply always sounds so arrogant – "I don't do those things." I want to say, "Well, bully for you." ☺

That is no great witness to the liberty we have in Christ! But oh, when righteousness says, when the Spirit of God prompts the response, "That isn't something I choose to partake of, but listen, blessings to you. Enjoy your day!" there is no condemnation, it's love. When the love of Christ rules in our lives, it is an administration of justice on the earth.

Righteousness. Christians today don't know the difference between filth and filth because we no longer compare today's filth with God's definition of purity. We compare the filth of today with the filth of five years ago. Five years ago, what came on the scene totally shocked us, but today what was filth (or sin) then is considered okay or acceptable because things are so much worse. Hello? God warned us of the downward spiral that occurs in an individual or society when sin remains unchecked or uncorrected (Rom.1).

But God says, "I *will* have a holy people (1Pet.2:9). I'm going to have a holy nation. I'm looking for those who will be worshippers (Jn.4:23), and I'm going to change them and make them more like Me

(Rom.8:29). They are not going to need a list from their pastors of the dos and don'ts of the Church. They are going to have, resident within them (Jer.31:33; Heb.8:10), the divine holy nature of God, the indwelling Holy Spirit that simply says, "That isn't for you."

I'll tell you what's really tough. What's tough is when some other Christian can do your don'ts! Now that is tough to accept especially if they experience and demonstrate the power of God more than you think you do. Our human nature, the old man, the flesh, wants to demand that everyone live by the same application of admonitions we have from the Lord. God deals with individuals and it is for His divine purposes that He requires various behaviors from each of us differently.

"How do we live according to our level of revelation?" *By faith.* It is by faith we pray and believe we can change the world. It's by faith we pray daily – daily – "If any man will come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow Me" (Lk.9:23; Mt.16:24; Mk.8:34). By the way, what is that cross? Is it possible that the cross we're to take up daily is this: First, our daily relationship and fellowship with God – God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit – *beginning every day ministering unto Him?* "Lord, not my will but Thine be done, that the fullness of your Son may dwell within my life that I have offered unto Thee, so that everything I do becomes the thing that pleases You." It's surrendering our self-interests unto Him – an offering, a sacrifice (Rom.12:1); it's not allowing our world to mold us into its kind, but choosing to yield to the transforming power of God (Rom.12:2) and becoming more and more like Jesus (Rom.8:29). That is ministering unto Him. That is worship.

Then when I emerge from that holiest place, my morning prayer closet where I have fellowshiped with Jesus, I'm ready to face the world. *My horizontal relationships come into right order* because I first have this daily time together with the Lord. I pick up my cross daily, knowing there will be sacrifices to make as I follow Jesus throughout my day. Those sacrifices reveal my honor for the Lord and reverence for Who He is. And in the whole scheme of things, I still have not striven unto death!

By faith, they "obtained blessings" (Heb.11:33c). This is where we're taught to *reach* into the unseen and make a thing be. That is **not** pretense; it isn't saying, "I'm well" when I'm sick. I'll tell you why I'm so against that. The whole world looks at the church and laughs at us because we go around saying, "I'm well – I'm healed – I'm whole – from the top of my head to the tips of my toes! I feel great! I feel..." And the world says, "Will you look at them? They're all so superstitious that once they ask their God for something, they *pretend* they have it even though He hasn't given it to them." We are not fooling anyone but ourselves when we act like the negatives of life do not exist.

So, what does this mean: "*Counting as seen the things that are not seen*" (Heb.11:1)? It means I wait. Look at this word "wait" – /kaw-vaw/ -- "to bind together." It means "to entwine myself around something until I am inseparable with it." As I wait for the fulfillment of the answer to come, I know that I know that I know it **is** going to happen. I count it as done, but I don't lie about it.

We are looking at Hebrews 11 – the great chapter in the Bible that could be likened to a Hall of Fame – or better, the Great Hall of Faith. We're also looking at how faith can *reach* out and take hold of the promises of God even though the actual fulfillment is yet to come. Faith believes without evidence (vs.1). And, we've been seeing faith *realized* in the lives of faithful men and women in the Bible (from vs.4 to the end).

By faith, they "stopped the mouths of lions" (Heb.11:33d). David literally stopped the mouths of lions (1Sam.17:34,35). What does it mean when we say, "stop the mouths of lions?" In the Bible lions speak of leaping and strength and valiance of heart, and fierceness, etc. but in general, there is only one lion that's described positively in scripture. That is the Lion of the Tribe of Judah, the King of all, Jesus Christ! The way you deal with that "lion" in faith, is by submitting to Him.

Have ever tried to run away from the Lord? How many of you understand the Psalmist when he said, "If I made my bed in hell You'd show up!" (Ps.139:8)? Have you ever tried to dismiss the Lord from certain

things in your life? I have. We can try to get away from God, we can try to hide when we understand we are not measuring up to what we know is His way (Gen.3:8), we can try to dismiss Him, but He will not leave us! He will be right there with us according to His promises (Mt.28:20b; Heb.13:5). And thank God for that! But we need to remember He's with us, in us, when we're being tempted to go to some hellish places in our leisure times!

The lions referred to in this scripture (Heb.11:33) however, speak of those who come to destroy. For instance, there are "lions" of innuendo. They are the ones who don't actually say anything, they just infer, or imply. Let me illustrate it this way: if someone picks up my itinerary and comments with a questioning inflection in their voice, "I see you're going to..." and names a certain place where I am scheduled to minister, I am left to wonder why they have said such a thing in such a manner. Now all they have to say further is this, "So, do you know anything about those people?" Now I am curious. "Like what?" "Oh, nothing." "What's there to know?" And I am left to wonder if there really is something I need to know. This is a very dangerous situation when the Bible says in the Old Testament, "Thou shalt not kill." Even the words we omit from an innuendo can "kill."

Much, has come to the Body of Christ through words – careless words or purposeful words. How do we "stop the mouths of those lions?" Just as David did, or Daniel: **by faith in God**. We trust Him, in His wisdom, for every situation. Sometimes God will deliver you out of the lions' den. Paul testified to this. Everyone was having a problem with his preaching, but "the Lord delivered me out of the mouth of the lions" (2Tim.4:17; 2Tim.3:11). Or, sometimes, like David, the Lord will have you directly take that devouring negative and rip it end to end (1Sam.17:34,35). And at other times, the Lord will set you down in a den of lions – among people who would love to destroy you for whatever reasons – and glue their mouths shut.

Can you imagine the stench of that place, a den of lions (Dan.6:16ff)? Think of the old lion houses at the zoo. They were putrid smelling! I really do love lions, but they stink! ☺ And here in the den, they're pacing round and round, just looking at Daniel. They're communicating with him too, you can believe that! ☺ He can read the hunger in their eyes. "If we just could get our mouths open, we would take turns ripping you to shreds!" Have you ever had the Lord put you in a den of hungry lions, where looks could kill? You can smell that thing. They want to kill you and you're saying, "Get me out of this, Lord! My God, get me out of this!" ☺ And He says, "A little later. *Wait*. (Remember our word /kaw-vaw/). You'll hear from Me. In the mean time, just keep walking the walk." "Oh, my God! What if one of them breaks loose?" It takes faith – reaching.

"How do we know how to stop the mouths of lions. You say it's by faith and I can believe that, but how do we know whether to destroy them, or defend against them, or that deliverance is going to come?" The same way they knew – the ones in Hebrews 11. The Lord decides. That's where faith is activated. By faith – not reduced or resisted but reaching – we can experience (realize) His perfect love that casts out fear! (1Jn.4:18).

We need to focus daily on being rightly-related to the Lord and stop digging up old things that are already covered under the blood of Jesus Christ. In that way, we can come out of our closets of fear. "What if – what if – what if they found out this about me? What if they found out that?" So what if they did? What's the worst thing that could happen? I allow my sinful past to be known publicly, then the enemy cannot blindside me by accusations from my "secret" past. Everyone that knows my ministry knows I was divorced decades ago. It's under the blood. – I repented and am forgiven and restored.

One time, years after the Lord began using me in a traveling ministry, which was His call, as I departed from the sidedoor after preaching, there was a couple standing right there. They had obviously been talking and when I opened the door, there was a sudden silence. You know my over-developed sense of humor – so I said, "Alright, what were you saying?" ☺ The lady's face turned as red as could be. She almost stammered, "Well, okay. You caught me. I was saying to my husband, 'I just don't understand how a divorcee has a right to handle the Word of God.'"

Now, what was I to do, or say? “Lord, how shall I respond to this?” I turned to them and it just flowed out of my mouth following that prayer. I said, “Isn’t it amazing what God can do?” It was *faith* that laid hold of that word to be “fitly spoken” (Pr.25:11). It broke the awkwardness of the moment and we all laughed. They laughed and I laughed and we all went off thinking, “Amazing grace – how sweet the sound that saved a wretch like me!” That’s what God wants to do through each of us, but it takes an operation of our faith and trust in Him.

Let’s pursue our study further. Hebrews says, through faith, “*they quenched the violence through the fire*” (Heb.11:34a). Oh, how I love this story! Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, along with Daniel are all taken captive into Babylonia. These four are there together with the masses of exiled Israelites. They all must serve the Godless king, and they do it. I want you to hear this exactly as I say it. They serve a Godless king and these four serve him well. They serve him so well they have an extremely positive rapport with him. They are treated differently in their captivity, in a positive way, because they have proven themselves to be exemplary. They have earned a good reputation (Dan.1).

One day, the king decides to have made a great golden image that is to be set up in a public place and worshipped by all in the land. It is decreed that *everyone* must bow to the king’s image. At that time, an enemy of the Jews in this foreign land was stirred up by envy and resentment over the superior positions granted to Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego. These evil men watched for them to walk past the idol. And indeed they did just that, they walked right on by without bowing. Immediately, the report was sent to the king: “Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego did not bow and remember, King, the decree was stamped with your seal and ring, and it stated that anyone who did not bow to your image was to be put to death in the fire of the furnace (Dan.3:8-12).

The three men are called in and interrogated by the king. “Now, look boys. We are trying to keep peace here. Is this report at all true?” (3:13-15). Peace at any price has never been the position of God. Never. It’s the talk of humanism. It’s the talk of the world. It’s the talk of what’s called “preaching” in some circles, but all that does not change the truth. Jesus said, “I didn’t come to bring that kind of peace. I came with a sword, and if something violates the Word of God, then it’s not worth anything” (Mt.10:34).

Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego responded in full sincerity. “King, we cannot bow to the image” (3:16-18). “Now, wait a minute, Iverna. First, you tell us that they come into the Godless country, serve the Babylonian king, and serve him well. And now you say they refused to bow and worship his idol. How is that ‘serving him well?’ What’s the difference?” Oh, I’m so glad you caught that little detail! ☺ Here’s the Truth – ***service may compromise without problems – worship may not be compromised at all***. You can work for an unsaved, ungodly person, and you had better be the best employee they ever had, but you may not worship any god but the true and living God, Jehovah!

The time came for them to be punished. The king feels badly about it because they are his favorite Hebrew boys. He is grief-stricken but cannot express that emotion, so he allows it to be transferred to another emotion that he can handle – anger. It says he was “full of fury” (vs.19). He commands, “Make the furnace seven times hotter than it ever has been before.” So hot were those flames that the men who built the fire and dropped the three into it were themselves killed by the heat (vs.22). In went Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, fully dressed and all tied up in bonds – tossed into the furnace where the people stand to watch them burn (vs.23). They watched and finally, the king asks incredulously, “How many were there?” (vs.24). “Well, King, there were three.” “I see four” (vs.25). What a God we serve!

If Jesus goes with me, I’ll go anywhere! The song writer said, “It’s heaven to me wherever I be if He is there. I count it a privilege here His cross to bear, and if Jesus goes with me I don’t care if it’s to the fire, the flood, I don’t care. I’ll go anywhere as long as Jesus is there.” Can you say “Amen” to that?

What did burn in the fire? Their bonds burned in the fire – only that which was holding them captive. Not their clothing, nor their hair – nothing even smelled of smoke! (vs.27). “Some through the water,

some through the flood, some through the fire..." – Church, *the only purpose for all the "fires" you have gone through is to burn up your bondage*. Some Christians remain so bound. They are bound in preconceived ideas about certain things – "traditions" – that they call doctrine.

Do you want to know what "doctrine" is? *Doctrine is scripture that is supported by scripture*. It is **not** plucking out one verse from its context and building a case, or belief system, on it. It's not necessarily what you were taught by your church. It may be – I hope it is! But biblical doctrine is *scripture* – line upon line upon line that is *supported by many other scriptures*.

Some Christians are so steeped in *prejudice*, perhaps without realizing it, but it keeps them from moving forward. They're prejudiced against color, race, gender, education (or lack of it), or some other discriminating trait. There's rarely a place I travel to minister that someone doesn't say to me, "I don't like *women preachers*." My typical response to that is, "I don't either. As a matter of fact, I also don't like men preachers." ☺ *If it isn't the Holy Spirit speaking up*, I don't have time to hear it!

Gender prejudice continues to raise its ugly head in the church because of the misinterpretation of two verses in scripture. In the first passage, Paul is correcting women who sat on one side of the hall and asked questions of their husbands who sat on the other side. Women had never been allowed in church circles until Jesus came on the scene. They were not familiar with the customs or rituals. Moreover, the Law forbade them to speak to any man except their husbands. So here's Mary over here, yelling to John over there – "Hey, John. What did he mean by that?" John, trying to handle the disruption, replies, "I'll tell you later, Honey." ☺ Someone then wrote a letter complaining to Paul saying, "Boy, do we have a noisy church!" Paul wrote back and said, "*Tell all the women to keep silent in the church, and if they would learn anything, let them ask the husband when they get home*" (1Cor.14:34). "How do you know that's what that verse means?" Read the context. Everything in that chapter is correcting some problem that had been brought to Paul's attention.

The second verse for consideration here is in Paul's letter of instruction to Timothy (1Tim.2:11, 12). Paul sent Timothy out to establish churches. At the time of his writing, Paul is imprisoned. He affirms that he is the "prisoner of the Lord Jesus Christ," and instructs Timothy by this letter: "Timothy, use the men. Get the men started." And here's the sentence we need to look at: "*I suffer not a woman to teach nor usurp authority over the men.*"

There are so many different ways to approach this passage. I prefer to take it quite literally to gain an accurate understanding. I believe what Paul was saying is this, "*I do not allow women to usurp authority over men, nor teach others to usurp authority over men.*" Women, God has made a place for you, but if you get out of that proper place you are in violation to the Word of God. There is no excuse if you step outside of God's guidelines for you.

Whenever I am invited to preach, I submit myself to the authority of the leadership, usually male pastors. I closely follow whatever instructions are given to me by them, and completely function under their authority. There is such security in that submission, for me and for them, when we do all we can to walk in obedience to God's Word. I do not go off on my own agenda and later claim I was being led by the Holy Spirit. Who can argue against, or even complain about, what God is supposed to be directing? But the scripture is clear: "And the spirits of the prophets are subject to the prophets. For God is not the author of confusion but of peace" (1Cor.14:32, 33).

We cannot compromise and be pleasing unto God. It's by *faith in Him* that I obey. It's by faith that the "violence of the things we go through is quenched." "Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death" – that's a threat – "I fear no evil" (Ps.23:4). The evil of that threat in your life cannot touch you, if you allow faith to come forth.

Lastly, by faith, our Hebrews 11 examples were "*made strong out of weakness*" (Heb.11:34c), and that's where we are today. Psalm 27 speaks to this: "The Lord is my light and my salvation, of whom shall I

fear?” When we begin to move out of weakness into strength, when we appropriate the truth of the Word of God in our lives (2Cor.12:9), we are reaching forward with our faith for things yet to come, yet to be realized. Paul said: “I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me(Phil.4:13).