**Session 4**

**March 22, 2020**

**HOLY VOCABULARY: THE WORD *FAITH***

**Hebrews 11:1-6**

If we are *justified by faith* (Rom. 5:1; Gal. 3:24); and believe that *the just shall live by faith* (Hab. 2:4 et al.); and understand that *without faith it is impossible to please God* (Heb. 11:6), then it seems rather important that we understand both what faith *is,* and what faith *does.*

**What faith *is* (vv. 1-3).** While the Bible is filled with descriptions of faith and examples of the faithful, I can think of no other place in the New Testament that attempts to *define* what faith really is. And no writer has ever put it more eloquently: “Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen.” Two words are key; both of which indicate that faith is something real. The word *substance* refers to that which is “set under.” So, faith is a foundation; it’s a solid, consistent confidence. The word *evidence* means “proof,” or “conviction.” So, faith is not simply hoping, or wishing, or wanting. Faith is a deep-seated *trust*. Bible commentator Arno Gaebelein (circa 1900) put it this way: “Faith **makes real** to the soul that which we hope for and is **a demonstration** of that which we do not see.” The next verses give us the motivation for faith. Verse 2 reminds us that godly men of old were recognized as godly *because* of their faith, and verse 3 suggests that if we can believe that God created everything *ex nihilo* (“out of nothing”), then we can be assured there is nothing beyond His ability to perform.

**What faith *does* (vv. 4-6).** In the examples that follow, faith is linked directly to worship. All worship involves expressing honor to a God we know exists but cannot see, so all worship requires faith. In Genesis 4, Cain and Abel both offered sacrifices. Cain was a tiller of the soil and he brought some produce he had grown. Abel, his brother, was a shepherd of flocks and brought “some of the firstborn of his flock and their fat portions” (Gen. 4:4). Genesis 4:4-5 says, “The Lord had regard for Abel and his offering, but He did not have regard for Cain and his offering.” Surprisingly, some commentators suggest that the Lord did not accept Cain’s offering because his attitude wasn’t right. But a careful reading of the story indicates that Cain’s ugly attitude came *after* his sacrifice was rejected, and *because* it was rejected (Gen. 4:5-6). So why was Abel’s sacrifice better that Cain’s? (Heb. 11:4) Because it was a *blood sacrifice* aligning with the forgiveness of sin illustrated by God’s slaying of animals in Genesis 3! Abel’s faith reached beyond thanksgiving to God, or a general reverence for God; it was offered as an admission of sin and a plea for forgiveness because of that sin. The end of verse 4 is a testimony of Abel’s faith. While God made the first animal sacrifice in Scripture, Abel made the second. His example still speaks to us today of the need for a blood sacrifice on our behalf (see Heb. 9:22); a sacrifice paid once and for all by the Lord Jesus, the Lamb of God (John 1:29).

The second illustration of faith in worship is that of Enoch. Whereas Abel’s example was an *act* of worship, Enoch’s example is a *life* of worship. His great story is captured in a few short verses, culminating with “Enoch walked with God; then he was not there because God took him” (Gen. 4:24). The commentary in our focal passage adds some details. To “walk with God” (Gen. 4:24) is described by the writer of Hebrews as being *approved* by God and *pleasing* to Him. Hence, Enoch’s sudden rapture was not a punishment, but a reward! The curse of physical death was voided. Why? Because he lived a life of faith; for “without faith it is impossible to please God” (v. 6). The final part of verse 6 summarizes the section. Faith is the medium that allows us to “draw near” to Him who we know exists, and in whom we are willing to place our trust.