TITLE: FAITH

 Scriptures: Ephe. 2:8-9; Heb. 11:12, 17-18; Josh. 3:8-17; 2 Co. 5:7; Phil. 4:13; Job 2:10, 42:1-5, 10, 12-17: Ephe. 6:10-17

 INTRODUCTION: This morning I want to talk about faith.

 Faith is the most important aspect of our salvation in that no one can be saved without it.

**Ephesians 2:8 - 9 (NIV) For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God— not by works, so that no one can boast.**

What we find is that both the grace of Salvation and the faith to embrace it are both gifts of God…

**For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this not from yourselves,** (the grace of salvation and the faith to embrace it) (but) **it is the gift of God!**

 And once we are saved, our faith continues to be the most important element in our relationship with God and our walk with Christ.

 So, it should not seem strange or foreign to us that Satan will continually strive to weaken or even rob us of our faith.

 We often will find our faith being tried and tested in our walk with the Lord..

Hebrews chapter 11 has been called the faith chapter.

 In it we find record of many of the true heroes of the faith down through the church age. Abel, Enoch, Abraham, Noah, Joseph, Moses, Joshua, Gideon, Sampson, King David and many others are listed in this chapter….All commended for one thing and one thing alone and that was their faith.

The first verse of Hebrews 11 defines what true faith is:

**Hebrews 11:1 - 2 (NIV) Now faith is being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see. This is what the ancients were commended for.**

What is it that the ancients, those who walked with God in previous generations were commended for?

Having a faith that was defined by being sure of what they hoped for and certain of that which they could not see.

 **Hebrews 11:17 - 18 (NIV) By faith Abraham, when God tested him, offered Isaac as a sacrifice. He who had received the promises was about to sacrifice his one and only son, even though God had said to him, “It is through Isaac that your offspring will be reckoned.”**

God had previously promised a childless Abraham that he would become a father of many nations and that his descendants would become as numerous as the stars in the sky and these descendants would come through a child that he and his wife Sarah would have together.

 Isaac was that child, the only son born to Abraham and Sarah and born in their old age.

 Now, God was asking Abraham to literally sacrifice his one and only son!

 How could the promise of God ever be fulfilled to Abraham if Abraham killed Isaac?

 Abraham believed God. Abraham exercised biblical faith. He was sure of what he hoped for and certain of what he couldn’t see.

 And he offered up his son Isaac. You may be thinking, Yes, but God stopped him…

 It doesn’t make any difference.. Abraham had already made the sacrifice in his heart, and had God not stopped his hand as the knife was raised above Isaac the sacrifice would have been made!

 Abraham was already fully committed to obeying the Lord, because even though he couldn’t have understood how God would fulfill His promise of descendants with Isaac dead, he knew that God had to be true to His Word.

 So he acted in a faith that was sure of what he hoped for and certain in what he could not see.

 The Greek word for faith is: **pis'-tis**

**From G3982; persuasion, that is, credence; moral conviction (of religious truth, or the truthfulness of God), especially reliance upon Christ for salvation; assurance, belief, faith, fidelity.**

**Root- pi'-tho**

**A primary verb; to convince; to pacify or conciliate; to rely (by inward certainty):— assure, believe, have confidence, obey, persuade, trust, yield.**

 In essence, Biblical faith is being convinced without reliance upon the senses…

Even though I can’t see, taste, touch, smell, hear or even reason it, I believe it simply because God has said it.

We have another example of this kind of faith revealed by Gods people in the time of Joshua….

 What kept Moses and this generation of Gods people from entering the Promised Land was a lack of faith on their part..

 When Joshua, Caleb and the other 10 men sent to spy out the land of Canaan returned to give their report to Moses and the people they all said that it was indeed a land flowing with milk and honey, a great and bountiful land.

 But all of the spy’s, other than Joshua and Caleb, said that they couldn’t go in and take possession of it because the giants currently living in the land would devour them.

 It was 10 against 2 and the ten prevailed in convincing the people that it couldn’t be done, even though God had previously promised that he would deliver the land into their hands.

    This generation of adults didn’t enter the land because of their lack of faith in Gods promise.

They were not sure of what they hoped for and certain of what they could not see when it came to the promise of God.

 So God didn’t allow Moses or that unbelieving generation to receive the promise. They all would wonder and die in the wilderness.

 Their children would be allowed to enter the Promised Land but even then it would require an act of faith on their part….

**Joshua 3:8 - 17 (NIV) Tell the priests who carry the ark of the covenant: ‘When you reach the edge of the Jordan’s waters, go and stand in the river.’ ”Joshua said to the Israelites, “Come here and listen to the words of the LORD your God. This is how you will know that the living God is among you and that he will certainly drive out before you the Canaanites, Hittites, Hivites, Perizzites, Girgashites, Amorites and Jebusites. See, the ark of the covenant of the Lord of all the earth will go into the Jordan ahead of you. Now then, choose twelve men from the tribes of Israel, one from each tribe.**

 **And as soon as the priests who carry the ark of the LORD—the Lord of all the earth—set foot in the Jordan, its waters flowing downstream will be cut off and stand up in a heap.”**

**So when the people broke camp to cross the Jordan, the priests carrying the ark of the covenant went ahead of them. Now the Jordan is at flood stage all during harvest. Yet as soon as the priests who carried the ark reached the Jordan and their feet touched the water’s edge, the water from upstream stopped flowing.**

**…….The priests who carried the ark of the covenant of the LORD stood firm on dry ground in the middle of the Jordan, while all Israel passed by until the whole nation had completed the crossing on dry ground.**

 The Israelites were not to wait in the camp until the flood waters of the Jordan had receded and were dried up but they were commanded to walk by faith.

 They were to break camp, pack up their belongings, form a marching line, and actually step into the river that was at full flood stage before it would be opened before them.

 If they would have gathered on the river bank and stopped to wait for the waters to divide before stepping in they would still be waiting there to cross today.

 They were told to “set their foot” in the Jordan “before” its waters would be cut off.

 Why? They would need to exercise the faith that their fathers lacked. They would need to show that they were sure of what they hoped for and certain of what they could not see.

 Example: Say you and your family are on this side of the Middle River while it is out of its banks at flood stage and on the other side of the river is a truck full of money that God has promised to give you if you cross over the river to get it.

 All the bridges have been washed out so God says just step out into the water and after you do I will divide the water so that you can cross over on dry ground…

 Now picture yourself on the river’s edge watching the racing current passing by, realizing that if God doesn’t do what he has said that you and your family may very well perish in the racing waters.

 Hey, God! How about parting the water first! How about a little sign here!

 No! You got to step into the water before this will work. The miraculous can only happen in the environment of faith.  You need to be sure of what you hope for and certain of that which you cannot see! You need to have A Hebrews 11:1 faith.

 Actually this is how we are each called to live our life as a Christian.

**2 Corinthians 5:7 (NIV) We live by faith, not by sight.**

We are to live by faith and not by sight….

 One of the things that make living by faith and not by sight possible for the Christian are all the promises of God that are revealed to us in His word.

 Promises such as Paul reveals to us in:

**Philippians 4:13 (NIV) I can do everything through him who gives me strength.**

 No one has had greater reason to falter in their faith then the man Job. No one, other than Jesus Himself, has suffered so much undeserved suffering as Job did.

 In fact, it was because of his great faith in God that made him such a target of Satan’s wrath..

 And for purposes that only God knows, God allowed this great man of faith to suffer so terribly..

I think that Jobs faith is revealed the best, when after his loving wife sees her husband sitting in a heap of ashes scrapping painful boils that have covered his entire body, looks down at her husband and the misery that he is in and says: Honey, why don’t you just curse God and die.

 Listen to Jobs response to his wife’s suggestion:

**Job 2:10 (NIV)He replied, “You are talking like a foolish woman. Shall we accept good from God, and not trouble? ”In all this, Job did not sin in what he said.**

Towards the end of Jobs ordeal, after He has poured out his heart to God and God has finally spoken to his servant, Job’s first words are words that express a Hebrews 11 faith.. A faith that is sure of what he hoped for and certain of what he cannot see from his bed of thorns…

**Job 42:1 -5 (NIV) Then Job replied to the LORD:    “I know that you can do all things; no plan of yours can be thwarted. You asked, ‘Who is this that obscures my counsel without knowledge?’ Surely I spoke of things I did not understand, things too wonderful for me to know.**

**“You said, ‘Listen now, and I will speak; I will question you, and you shall answer me.’ My ears had heard of you but now my eyes have seen you.**

 Lord, even from this ash heap “I know that you can do all things!

 Up until now my ears had heard of you but now my eyes have seen you.

 Abraham believed God and Scripture says that his belief in God, expressed through his act of faith in God, was credited to him as righteousness.

 Joshua and the Israelites believed God and expressed that belief through their faith by stepping into a raging river before it was opened for them.

 Job expressed that same faith in God, being sure of what he hoped for and certain of what he could not see, before he found deliverance from his bed of thorns….

   It was while still on the ash heap that Job declared:

**“I know that you can do all things!**

  Job’s faith is what parted the waters of deliverance for him and allowed him entrance into the promise of God.

**Job 42:10 -12- 17 (NIV) After Job had prayed for his friends, the LORD made him prosperous again and gave him twice as much as he had before.**

**The LORD blessed the latter part of Job’s life more than the first. He had fourteen thousand sheep, six thousand camels, a thousand yoke of oxen and a thousand donkeys. And he also had seven sons and three daughters…….**

**After this, Job lived a hundred and forty years; he saw his children and their children to the fourth generation. And so he died, old and full of years.**

 Our faith is the most powerful weapon that we have at our disposal as a Christian.

 Do you realize that our faith is a weapon? A weapon God has provided for us to use in fighting spiritual battles and spiritual warfare?

**Ephesians 6:10 - 17 (NIV) Finally, be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power. Put on the full armor of God so that you can take your stand against the devil’s schemes. For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms.**

**Therefore put on the full armor of God, so that when the day of evil comes, you may be able to stand your ground, and after you have done everything, to stand.**

 **Stand firm then, with the belt of truth buckled around your waist, with the breastplate of righteousness in place, and with your feet fitted with the readiness that comes from the gospel of peace. In addition to all this, take up the shield of faith, with which you can extinguish all the flaming arrows of the evil one.**

  It is the shield of faith that will enable us to extinguish all the flaming arrows of the evil one.

 And Satan has a lot of flaming arrows to fling around doesn’t he?

 EXAMPLE: In ancient warfare archers would often tie rags soaked in flammable liquid to their arrows. They would ignite them and then fling them into an approaching army or into a city that they were trying to take.. There was usually more damage from the flame then there was from the arrow itself! Sometimes just the added visual effect of hundreds of flaming arrows falling from the sky would invoke great fear among the enemy.

 Walled cities could be burned from the inside out... Shields of wood could be set ablaze by the incoming flaming arrows so that the men behind them would lose their protection..

 The shield of faith will actually extinguish the flaming arrows of our enemy.

 And not just some of them but Scripture says that it will extinguish all of them!

**Take up the shield of faith, with which you can extinguish all the flaming arrows of the evil one.**

Not some or even most --but all!

  If we have been given a weapon this powerful it just seems reasonable that we take it up and carry it with us at all times.

It is a weapon that the enemy cannot prevail against!

Now this isn’t saying that our faith will keep us from getting pricked by the enemy’s arrow, but that our faith will extinguish the arrows flames…

Even though we may get occasionally pricked we will never get burned when we bare the shield of faith..

Job got pricked pretty hard by the enemy’s arrow but the arrows flames didn’t destroy him. His faith extinguished them and he went on to victory..

The apostle Paul got pricked by the enemy’s arrows a lot but his faith extinguished the flames and Paul went on to win the victory..

 Even Jesus was pricked by the enemy’s arrow but His faith extinguished the flames…

 So, we too may occasionally get pricked by the enemy’s arrow, but as we bare the shield of faith it will extinguish the arrows flames and we too will go on to victory.

Someone once said;

*Feed your faith and your doubts will starve to death.*

 A Hebrews Chapter 11 faith is a faith that needs to be fed…

 It is God’s word and prayer and communion with Christ that feeds our faith. So we need to continually be feasting upon these things..

  In May 1995, Randy Reid, a 34-year-old construction worker, was welding on top of a nearly completed water tower outside Chicago. According to reports, Reid unhooked his safety gear to reach for some pipes when a metal cage slipped and bumped the scaffolding he stood on. The scaffolding tipped, and Reid lost his balance. He fell 110 feet, landing face down on a pile of dirt, just missing rocks and construction debris.  A fellow worker called 911.

   When paramedics arrived, they found Reid conscious, moving, and complaining of a sore back.  Apparently the fall didn't cost Reid his sense of humor. As paramedics carried him on a backboard to the ambulance, Reid had one request: "Don't drop me." (Doctors later said Reid came away from the accident with just a bruised lung.)

   Sometimes we resemble that construction worker. God protects us from harm in a 110-foot fall, but we're still nervous about three-foot heights. The God who saved us from hell and death can certainly protect us from the smaller dangers that we face in life as well.

We serve a God who has promised to never leave us or forsake us!

 Jesus has said that He is a friend that is closer to us than any brother!

 God has promised that we can do all things through Christ who gives us His strength!

  These verses and many, many others are faith builders that we need to be feeding upon..

  We need to take up faith as a shield and use it daily, use it moment by moment, and the promise of God’s Word is that it will extinguish all the flaming arrows that Satan has in his arsenal..

Daily, are you arming yourself with faith’s shield?

Are you allowing it, along with all of Gods armor, to lead you to victory?

As we do we may still get pricked by an occasional arrow but the shield of faith will extinguish the arrows flames and we will go on to victory!