

Sunday 11th August 2019
Genesis 15:1-6 Hebrews 11:1-3, 8-16 Luke 12:32-40

Intro

Last week we were thinking about our reading from Ecclesiastes, the famous words that the writer, probably King Solomon, opened his writings with

Vanity! Vanity! Everything is Vanity!

Meaningless! Meaningless! Everything is Meaningless!

Hevel! Hevel! Everything is Hevel! (Eccl 1:2)

You'll remember, HOPEFULLY those of you who were here!, that the Hebrew word Hevel, sometimes translated as vanity or meaningless, is actually better translated as vapour, something without substance. The whole point of Solomons writings in Ecclesiastes is to teach us that things and people will one day disappear. No matter how good they are, not matter how worthwhile, they have no lasting, eternal value. And therefore we should focus our energy, our investment, in things eternal, in the on true God who will never leave us nor forsake us.

Our Gospel reading from Luke this week picks up on this idea. Jesus reminds his disciples, his close followers, 'to make a purse that will not run out or wear out but will hold treasures in heaven, that no one can steal or destroy'. (Luke 12:33) Jesus actually tells them to sell their possessions and give the money away to those in need because what is most important is what money cannot buy. Investing in such treasure is the complete opposite of Hevel.

And faith in God is exactly this kind of treasure. As is righteousness that was reckoned / credited to Abraham because of his faith in God

Both are everlasting, through, on in to eternity.

Because God is love and because He is trustworthy and honest and merciful and gracious, because of all these attributes and many, many more, we can have total faith in Him.

He is not like the thick white clouds seen from the plane that look solid and reliable and yet, were we to step out on to them, they would just let us fall, and fall, and fall straight through.

In the words of the Psalmist, God is our help and shield, the one in whom we CAN rejoice and put our trust (Ps. 33:20+21)

But, as I have said before, faith is like a muscle. The more you exercise it, the stronger it becomes.

If you read the whole of chapter 11 of Hebrews it reads as almost a catalogue of people of faith. It lists many people whose stories we find in the Old Testament who experienced God's great power because of their faith.

By faith Abel...

By faith Noah...

By faith Jacob... Moses... Rahab... Samson, David, Samuel...

There are more in the list - have a read when you get home.

We are going to focus on Abraham, referred to as Abram in our Genesis reading, but who is the same person - Abraham - that we heard about in Hebrews. Part of his story is that God significantly gave him a new name.

Abraham

We don't have time today to go in to the whole story of Abraham but our readings pick out a couple of the main events of his life.

When I was in Bath a man in our church would borrow the local community mini-bus and take a group out for the day. Once a year he would take them on a 'mystery tour'. The group would set out for places unknown, the itinerary for the day only known to Tim and even then, I am reliably informed, could easily change as the day panned out!!

Abraham was asked to set out for an unknown place, not for a day trip but for life.

'Abraham obeyed, when he was called, to set out for a place that he was to receive as an inheritance; he set out not knowing where he was going!' (Heb 11:8)

Abraham had lived in a city called Ur of the Chaldees (Near the modern day border between Kuwait and Iraq) This was a city that people moved TO rather than FROM. The luxury items found there by archaeologists would suggest that it was one of, if not the, richest and most civilised cities of the world at that time. Its citizens were the envy of the world. And God told Abraham to leave, not knowing where he was heading to! (Genesis 12:1)

God asked Abraham to leave his country, his people and his fathers household and go... to the land that God would show him... To head for an unknown destination

On route he would live like foreigner in tents, rather than in the house that he probably had in Ur
A HUGE ask and a FAITH driven response

The Lord did not tell him the whereabouts of this mysterious Promised Land. He simply asked him to trust that becoming a tent-dwelling nomad and a stranger in an undisclosed foreign land was better than continuing to be a homeowner in Ur (P Moore Straight to the Heart of Hebrews P.222)

Abraham had FAITH and trusted in God's character and promises when the destination was far from clear!

The writer of Hebrews tells us of another HUGE example of Abraham's faith in God

Our reading from Genesis sets the scene clearly for us

The Lord had spoken much about the heirs, the children, that Abraham would have and what would happen in and through them.

'I will make you into a great nation and I will bless you: I will make your name great and you will be a blessing' (Gen 12:2)

But Abraham and his wife Sarah grew old, way past child bearing age. And without having children of their own. So, humanly speaking, how could these promises of God be true?

But Abraham and Sarah had faith in God, believed in His word, and miraculously conceived and had a son called Isaac.

Yes - they tried to bring about an answer to God's promises in their own way when they became impatient but ultimately they hung on and let God bring about His answer and His solution to their situation so that God's words to Abraham in Genesis 15:4 would be fulfilled. It would not be a slave - Eliezer of Damascus - that would become heir to Abraham but a son of his and Sarah's.

Abraham had Faith and trusted in God's character and promises when the time scale dragged on and on!

How does our FAITH compare to that of Abraham?

Maybe that is an unfair question. How can we compare ourselves to this huge man of faith, a forefather of the Jewish religion?

But he had to start somewhere. His faith started small as a mustard seed that grew and grew.

How often might we say to God I'll trust you, I'll follow you, I'll obey you, I'll put my faith in you if...
you guide me a bit more clearly - Neon sign in the sky please!
you just give me a little more money in the bank as back up before I...
but please do it quickly - it seems a long time since you spoke! Did I get it wrong!

But FAITH means remembering the one who has spoken, called, made the promise
-believing that God's invisible character will trump our visible circumstances
-believing that however impossible our situation, God IS the God of the impossible and will never let us down.

Faith in God means trusting Him with our everyday things as well as the big things... trusting Him with our families, our jobs, our home, our today as well as our tomorrow
Trusting our God who is love and who is strong and reliable and the God of the impossible.

And FAITH means trusting in this Almighty and loving God, EVEN IF we do not see our hopes realised in our earthly life time.

Abraham and Sarah never got to live and settle in the Promised Land

Why? Because it was not God's perfect time

But they remained faithful.

Their reward was to see God's provision in the day to day, His blessing of a precious son, His faithfulness in their day to day living and leadership

But ultimately their reward would be in heaven.

Faith leads to action

Abraham's faith in God led him to up sticks and leave the comfortable life in Ur for a life on the move, living in tents as a foreigner

His faith meant that he took his precious son up on to the mountain and was about to sacrifice him before God provided the lamb

His faith meant that he wandered in the desert and did not see the Promised Land

But his faith also meant that he was credited with righteousness and a heavenly reward from a God who was not ashamed to be called his God.

What do we need to have faith in God for today?

What has God asked you to do or where has he asked you to go...

What are you facing today that seems impossible?

Maybe you feel, or have even said 'maybe my faith is not big enough for...'

God is good. God is faithful. God is trustworthy. God has more resources at his disposal than we begin to ask or imagine. God is love. God is God of the impossible.

Dare to place your faith in Him today. Start off small if you are not sure.

He will not let you down. He does listen. And he will see you through

Faith in God is not HEVEL It is the absolute opposite. And it will bring everlasting treasure, treasure reckoned to us as righteousness, treasure in our heavenly home for all eternity.