

The many aspects of faith, continued

(xi) Faith achieves success for God even after we have died

• Some of what we do for God may have its greatest impact after we have gone to heaven!

• The life of faith makes a lasting impact on the kingdom of God

Faith is...

• Seeing first

• Embracing what we see

• Seeing and embracing with such conviction that it bursts out for everyone to see

At this point Hebrews pauses to reflect a little further on the character of faith, before moving on to the next incident in the life of Abraham. There is another aspect of faith that is of interest. Some of our most significant achievements begin in this life and yet have their most far-reaching effects after we have died. The greatest example is Jesus!

(xi) **Faith achieves success for God even after we have died.** We have already had the expression, 'Although he has died he still speaks'¹. Now our writer makes the point that the same is true of others also. He says that ¹³*These all died in faith, not having received the things promised...* They must have received the promise in **some** sense, because Hebrews 6:15 says, 'Abraham...having patiently waited, obtained the promise', and Hebrews 11:33 says these heroes 'obtained promises'. They had received what was promised in the sense that an oath had been given them and the promises given to them were **bound** to be fulfilled. In the case of Abraham from the incident of Genesis 22 onwards it was 100 per cent certain that Jesus would come as the seed of Abraham. Yet in another sense the promise had not been received since it did not happen until long after Abraham had died. This is an important point for us. Some of what we do for God may have its greatest impact upon others after we have gone to heaven! The life of faith makes a **lasting** impact in the kingdom of God. We must be ready to have 'obtained the promise' and yet not to fully see it in our own lifetime. Like Abel we might do most of our work after we have died!

In passing our writer gives us a clear definition of what this kind of faith involves. ¹³*These all died in faith, not having received the things promised, but having seen them from afar off. They embraced them and acknowledged that they were foreigners and exiles on the earth.* **Faith is seeing.** At first it is entirely passive. It is a conviction in the heart by which we 'see' that what God says is true. It is not at first doing anything, but seeing something. Like the people of Israel who looked at the bronze serpent and found life¹, so we 'see' God's word by the Holy Spirit and find life in what we see.

Faith is embracing what we see. Faith is not purely an intellectual matter. It begins by being passive, but what we see so grips the heart that it excites us and rouses us. There is nothing intellectualist about saving faith! 'The word is not received in faith when it merely flutters in the brain, but when it has taken deep root in the heart...' said John Calvin. ^a

Faith is seeing and embracing **with such conviction that it bursts out for everyone to see.** They saw. They embraced. Then they 'acknowledged'. They spoke out and let everyone know that something had happened to them that gave them an entirely new outlook on life. No longer were they passionately interested in this world's good. No longer did they feel at home with everyone around them. They made it quite clear to everyone that their hope was in heaven. ¹⁴*For people who say such things make it clear that they are*

¹ 11:4

¹ Numbers 21:9

seeking a country to which they truly belong. They set their sights on heavenly glory. They regard that as their true homeland in which they have their citizenship – and they let everyone know it.

(xii) Diligent faith continues to grow even in old age

• Abraham did not 'retire' from faith!

• They stayed in Canaan but looked forward to heavenly glory

• Persistent faith will win through until it gains the final stages of heavenly reward

(xii) **Diligent faith continues to grow even in old age.** Hebrews 11:15 says, *If they had been thinking of that land from which they had originally come, they would have had opportunity to return.* Our writer is thinking of Abraham's old age. When Abraham was elderly and his work was more or less finished he did receive news of his wider family back in Ur of the Chaldees, fourteen kilometres west of what is now Nasiriyeh on the river Euphrates in south Iraq¹. It was the place where Abraham had grown up and most people have fond memories of the place where they grew up. Many like to go back to their origins in their old age! Abraham had opportunity to 'retire' from Canaan, go back to his old family and rest until he died in Ur of the Chaldees! But we do not 'retire' from faith! Abraham and his family stayed where God had put them. It was not that they were living for Canaan. But Canaan was where they were placed to serve God. ¹⁶*But actually, they desire a better country, that is a heavenly one.* They stayed in Canaan but looked forward to heavenly glory. Every birthday of Abraham in his old age was one step nearer to the winning post! God himself honours the people of faith. *Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God for he has prepared for them a city.* Persistent faith will win through until it gains the final stages of heavenly reward. God himself will be proud of us. The world we live in is incurably wicked. We disassociate ourselves from it and get ready for the coming of the Lord Jesus in the glory of his Father. We shall be given the greatest conceivable honour – the approval of God and the enjoyment of the new Jerusalem that comes down upon earth and in which righteousness will be found for ever. The city is prepared already, and we are approaching it – by persistent faith.

¹ see Genesis 22:20-24

Note

a.. J. Calvin, *Institutes* 3:2:36 (translation by Henry Beveridge).



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