



PREPARING TO STAND

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“In this age, just prior to the second coming of Christ in the clouds of heaven, God calls for men who will prepare a people to stand in the great day of the Lord.” SW 3-21-1905

THE FAITH OF HEBREWS 11

by Jim Buller

When thinking about a definition for Faith, many of us immediately go to Hebrews 11:1 which says, “Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen.” This is a valid scriptural definition. However, knowing the importance of faith, Satan has had a lot of time to work, and even with this scripture he has laid his traps.

For instance, what is the “*substance* of things hoped for?” If we are content to simply answer, “faith,” as some have, we may set ourselves up for some shallow circular thinking that doesn’t really leave us with an adequate working definition for faith. If “faith” is simply the “substance of things hoped for,” and if “the substance of things hoped for” is just “faith,” where does that leave us?

This type of circular thinking reminds me of a talk about creation versus evolution I once heard. The speaker told of a visit he had made to a geological site. While taking the tour, the guide informed the group that a particular strata of rock was “fifty million years old.” (I may not have my numbers exactly right here, but you’ll get the point.) The guide was asked how they knew the rock was “fifty million years old.” He replied that they were able to determine this because the rock contained fossils of fifty million year old organisms. Then the guide was asked how they knew the fossils were fifty million years old. He replied, “because these fossils are in fifty million year old rock.” Let’s be careful we are not content with this type of shallow thinking in regards to our faith.

Another trap Satan has laid is the popular message that, “if you just believe hard enough it will happen.” Whereas this is *not* correct theology, we have to admit that this idea *does* fit within a definition of faith that is simply “the substance of things hoped for.” This message states, if I hope for something “hard enough,” there *will be* a real “substance” to my hopes —this is called “faith” in the popular media.

Please don’t misunderstand me here. I’m not saying that there is anything wrong with Hebrews 11:1. We just need to be careful that we are not content with these types of shallow “understandings” of what faith is all about. We need to dig deeper. And as in many cases in Scripture, this is easily done by reading the context for the verse.

The verses following Hebrews 11 talk about different men and women in the Bible who lived “by faith.” Much can be learned about faith from their stories. But for the sake of time, we will skip through them and go directly to verses 13 through 16, where the author of Hebrews summarizes what is to be learned from their experiences. He says,

“These all died in faith, not having received the promises, but having seen them afar off were assured of them, embraced them, and confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth. For those who say such things declare plainly that they seek a homeland. And truly if they had called to mind that country from which they had come out, they would have had opportunity to return. But now they desire a better, that is, a heavenly country. Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God, for He has prepared a city for them.”

“These all died in faith, not having received the promises.” What promises? From the context here, it is obviously referring to God’s promises of a better life in a better world. Notice that it says these great men and women of faith “were assured” of these promises, and “embraced them.” They literally grabbed hold of God’s promises, and held them tight.

Notice also that they, “confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth.” This world was not their home. They were seeking a heavenly homeland. Which reminds us of Matthew 6:33, “Seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you.” The chief pursuit in the lives of these great men and women of faith was “the kingdom of God and His righteousness,” not the things of this world.

The next sentence states, “And truly if they had called to mind that country from which they had come out, they would have had opportunity to return.” This statement reminds us of the experience of Abraham, who left his home and connections in the East, obeying the call to go to a place he was unfamiliar with, (his story was listed along with the Bible stories referenced earlier in the chapter). This sentence also reminds us of a dream Ellen White had of a group of people heading up a path that continued to get narrower and steeper as they went along. (See *Testimonies for the Church Volume Two* page 594-597.) They started out with heavily loaded wagons, but as the path grew narrower they had to leave the wagons behind, and journeyed on, on horseback. As the path grew narrower still, they had to let go of the luggage they had brought with them on the horses, and then further on, even leave the horses behind. Eventually they end up traveling barefoot, having taken even their shoes and socks off. The fifth paragraph of this story is highly significant. It says:

“We then thought of those who had not accustomed themselves to privations and hardships. Where were such now? They were not in the company. At every change some were left behind, and those only remained who had accustomed themselves to endure hardships. The privations of the way only made these more eager to press on to the end.” *Testimonies for the Church Vol. 2*, page 595

“At every change some were left behind.” Every time it was necessary to leave something behind in order to keep going up the path, there were those who took their “opportunity to return.” The sacrifice was too great. They chose to hang on to the “luggage” rather than “embrace” the promises.

This brings us to the subject of worship and values, and the phrase in Hebrews 11:16 that says, “now they desire a *better*.” The root idea of “worship” is the concept of something being “worth it”. The whole issue revolves around what we believe is of value. What is worth it? What is better? Which raises a very important question. Is it *worth it* to let go of the “luggage” in order to stay on the path toward what God has promised? At *each* stage of our journey we are faced with this question. Will we “embrace” God’s promises, or hang onto the “luggage?”

Isaiah 55:8-9 tells us, “For My thoughts are not your thoughts, nor are your ways My ways,” says the LORD. ‘For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are My ways higher than your ways, and My thoughts than your thoughts.’” And Galatians 5:17 says, “For the flesh lusts against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh; and these are contrary to one another, so that you do not do the things that you wish.” Are we willing to give up our own way of thinking and doing, and even the things we *want* for ourselves to be able to follow the path God has laid out for us? Are we willing to let go of the things that take up our time and resources and which keep us from serving those whom God has called us to serve? — things that might even be good in themselves yet get in the way of our ministry? Is it *worth it* to hang on to these things? Or is it better to let go of them in order to keep traveling up the narrow path? Depending on what is most important to us, we *will* let go of either one, or the other. Those who “embrace” the promises and keep going up the path do so because they believe that what God has to offer is “better” than any and everything else. Those who never start up the path, or “return” after traveling a certain distance, think something else is of more value.

John 6 is a most interesting chapter. At its beginning, Jesus feeds the five thousand. The people recognize that He must be the Messiah and are ready to take Him by force to make Him king. In order to de-fuse the situation Jesus sends the disciples in the boat across the lake while He dismisses the people. Then He goes up on the mountain to pray. (See *The Desire of Ages* chapters forty and forty-one.) Later, a storm comes up, and Jesus walks out to the boat on the water. Once He gets into the boat, they are immediately at their destination on the far shore.

The next day, when the people find Jesus again, and hear about the events of that night, they become even more excited. Jesus knows they are going to try to make Him king again, so He tells them what His kingdom is all about—that it is first of all a *spiritual* kingdom, and that it will involve sacrificing worldly values. (See verses 26-65.) As a result, the people realize Jesus is not going to be the type of king they want, and “From that time many of His disciples went back and walked with Him no more.” (Verse 66.) They took their “opportunity to return.” Things were so bad that, “Jesus said to the twelve, ‘Do you also want to go away?’” (Verse 67.)

“Then Simon Peter answered Him, ‘Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life.’” (Verse 68.) In spite of all that was going on, much of which didn’t

even make sense to him, Peter believed that if he were to let go of Jesus what else would there be? To him, Jesus was everything, and His gift of eternal life was “better” than anything the world had to offer. Therefore, he was willing to give up his personal desires, and humbly surrender to God’s way. He chose to trust God, not lean on his own understanding, (Proverbs 3:5), and stay with Jesus on the narrow upward path.

Peter’s comment, “You have the *words* of eternal life,” also bring us to another important understanding about faith. Romans 10:17 tells us, “Faith comes by hearing ... the word of God.” Thus, it is *the promises contained in God’s Word* that are “the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen.” Faith “embraces” these promises and, when necessary, lets go of any “luggage.” This kind of faith will dramatically affect our values, the choices we make, and the way we live.

Do you believe that what God has for you is “better?” Is it *worth it* to let go of the comforts, conveniences, and approval of this world? Is it even *worth it* to let go of our own opinions, ideas, and desires? Is a life of self denial and service *worth* God’s promise of eternal life in the earth made new? These are all questions we will each have to answer for ourselves. May we, along with the other faithful witnesses of Hebrews chapter 11, answer, “Yes.”

It may seem simple enough to state *in principle*, that we believe that what God has for us is better than whatever this world has to offer. But notice the following line of thinking:

1. Where did the Creator put Adam & Eve? —In the garden. And what was outside of the garden? —More nature. So, they were essentially placed in the wilderness!
2. What did Adam & Eve *do* in the garden? Did they just wander around all day looking at the beauty? [Ultimately, how boring!] —No. They daily *interacted* with nature to get the things they needed, similar to the way many native peoples, for thousands of years, have lived their lives closely interacting with nature.
3. And after the “restoration of all things,” (Acts 3:21), where will we be? —back in the garden again. So it only makes sense that as a part of our “final training” for heaven we will be spending some serious time in the wilderness!

From all this we understand that the Creator *intended* for the human race to live in close connection with nature —to be a part *of* the ecosystem, rather than *apart from* it. Is it any wonder then, that Satan has so arranged things in modern society that nature isn’t even a part of most peoples reality anymore!

To put it another way, how can we truly appreciate Jesus’ dying so that we can live, if we don’t appreciate the life He intended for us *to* live? —a life of close interaction with the rest of His creation. He didn’t die so we could keep living the same disconnected way we always have —that’s why He had to die in the first place!

If we have listened to the messages of modern culture so much that we don’t appreciate nature, possibly even being *afraid* of being out in nature, will we be willing to keep going up a path that ends up *in* nature? Will it be *worth it* for us to let go of things we *do* value in order to keep struggling on up the path to something we *don’t* value?

SECRETS TO KEEPING WARM

Generally, your body produces enough heat to keep you warm. So, it is not as necessary to *add* heat, as it is to keep the heat you have from escaping. Think of your body-heat as a container full of water. “Leaks” will cause you to lose heat and make you cold. If you are able to “plug” these leaks, you can keep warm. So, if you feel cold, mentally check each part of your body to figure out *where* the “heat leaks” are, and *why* they are there. Then do what you can to “plug” them. Below are several helpful ideas.

- **Insulation** —Insulation is the “plug” that stops the “heat leaks,” and is therefore the key to staying warm. When sleeping, you *can* lose more heat to the ground than to the cold air, so be sure to put adequate insulation between you and the ground. In most survival situations, insulation amounts to extra clothing, or “debris” —leaves, dried grass, pine needles, dead ferns, moss, etc.
- **Adequate Clothing** —Choose your clothing carefully. If possible, wear wool, or some of the modern synthetics designed to provide warmth even when wet. Wet cotton in cold weather has led to the saying, “Cotton Kills.”
- **Stay Dry** —The cooling effect of evaporation can rapidly drain away a lot of body heat. In wet weather, or when crossing streams, take extra precautions to keep your clothing dry.
- **Cover Your Head** —A large percentage of body heat is lost from the neck, ears, and head. A simple “sock cap” can go a long way toward keeping you warm.
- **Dress in Layers** —Several thin layers may be warmer than one thick layer. Each layer acts as a barrier which heat must get through in order to leave your body.
- **Allow for Good Circulation** —An adequate blood supply is needed for all body functions. These functions produce body heat. Loosen any tight clothing particularly footwear. Usually, you will be warmer by taking your shoes off when you sleep.
- **Cover Your Body Equally** —Cold causes the blood vessels to constrict, which slows circulation. Insure equal circulation of warm blood to all body parts.
- **“Pumping”** —As you move, warm air is pushed out through openings in your clothing and then cooler air is sucked back in. As much as possible, close off the openings around your neck, waist, wrists, and ankles.
- **“Scarecrow”** —Stuff leaves or other debris inside your clothing for more insulation.
- **Wash Up** —You will be warmer if your skin is clean. My personal theory is that the salts excreted in sweat are somewhat hygroscopic —that is, they absorb a certain amount of moisture from the atmosphere, which makes you slightly “wet.” Your body heat evaporates this moisture, but the salts keep re-absorbing it, resulting in a continual extra loss of body heat. If it is too cold to take a “dip in the creek,” wash and dry one part of your body at a time.
- **Minimize Drafts** —Flowing air will carry away much more of your body heat than still air. As much as possible, get out of the wind and plug off any holes in your shelter with debris.