

**Thought for Sunday 11<sup>th</sup> July 2021**  
**Pastor Gordon Hamilton**

**Hebrews 11:1-40**

By Faith that is how this passage is headed up in my translation, that, of course, is what being a Christian is all about. Some years ago we had a poster in our kitchen of a teddy bear clinging on to a piece of string with a balloon tied to the other end, and the bear was floating in the air. The words on the poster said it all: *'Faith isn't faith until it is all you're hanging on to!'* And there are times when it feels like that. I may have shared this before, but I make no apology for saying it again. We did a sketch at Copthorne Chapel over 20 years ago. One person was a mother bird and one was a baby bird. They are standing on the edge of the nest and the mother is trying to encourage the baby to jump off of the nest. The baby bird says *'you must be joking, have you seen how far it is down there to the ground.'* After a bit the mother hops off and glides around saying, there it is easy if you trust me. Finally the baby bird copies it's mother, and nothing disastrous happens. There are people who are wary of taking the first step of faith to being a Christian, our job is to encourage them and allow them to see the greater life we can have in Jesus Christ our Lord. Chapter 11 begins; *'Now faith is...'* the problem we human beings have is that we want to prove everything. For over a century we have had, Einstein's theory of relativity, something that some scientists have hung their hats on, but I now hear that 'maybe' it isn't all it is cracked up to be. Some years ago people believed that the world was flat and scoffed at people who said differently. People expect Christians to prove God. That is something we cannot do, and so the writer to the Hebrews sums it up, spot on, in verse 1; *'Now faith is being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see.'* I am absolutely convinced of my belief in Jesus. A lovely hymn by D.W. Whittle sums up my personal feeling and I pray you can also have the same belief; *'I know not why God's wondrous grace to me hath been made known; nor why, unworthy as I am, He claimed me for His own. But I know whom I have believèd; and am persuaded that He is able to keep that which I've committed unto Him against that day.'* As a Christian I can hold on to Jesus, believing the biblical account of his life and death, but here in Hebrews 11 we read of people who lived by faith, right at the beginning of human creation. Verse 4 talks of Abel, who is recorded in Genesis 4, one of Adam and Eve's sons. Who has he learned his faith from? The majority of this chapter talks of other Old Testament characters, who trusted in a God who they talked to, and who talked to them. You may remember a couple of months ago we looked at Abram, whom is listed here. God still does talk to his people today. A lot of the time we just don't listen, or we can doubt what he is saying. A lot of those mentioned were people who were 'his' people, but by the time we get to verse 31 we find a prostitute in Jericho who was happy to put her life on the line for two of Joshua's spies, and so we see Rahab commended for her faith but no mention of Joshua's name, here in Hebrews. Yet it was Joshua who, by faith, marched, with his men, around the walls of Jericho and; Joshua 6:20; *'When the trumpets sounded, the people shouted, and the wall collapsed.'* This was after Joshua had taken all the Israelites across the River Jordan, on dry ground, when according to Joshua 3:15; *'the Jordan is in flood.'* Of course Rahab, a Gentile prostitute, is also listed in Matthew 1:5, in the genealogy of Jesus. Hebrews 11:32 says; *'I do not have time to tell about Gideon, Barak, Samson, Jephthah, David, Samuel and the prophets, who through faith administered justice and gained what was promised.'* Verses 35 to 38 don't mention names, just the exploits of others who are commended for their faith. Some of whom were in Old Testament times but some were since Jesus had died, the early Christians. I am sure we have all heard of the events that happened to some of the early Christians, like being thrown to the lions. Even today there are Christians who are being persecuted for their faith. At the time of this letter to the

Hebrews, the persecution would have been coming from Jews. Throughout the world, nowadays, persecution of Christians comes from many different religions, Muslims and Hindus being the vast majority. Even in the UK Christians can find themselves being persecuted by the secular society, because people ‘want proof’ of what you are doing, but as Christians we live by faith. The final two verses of our reading sum it all up; *‘These were all commended for their faith, yet none of them received what had been promised. God had planned something better for us so that only together with us would they be made perfect.’* Godfrey Birtill wrote a hymn in 2005 which said; *‘God so loved this whole world that He gave His only Son, and if we will cleave to Him we will not perish; but we’ll have eternal life and we’ll never be condemned, for God’s promises are Yes and Amen!’* The truth is, yes and amen. But the warning, here in Hebrews 11:33-38, is that it isn’t all going to be a bed of roses. I pray that not many of us will have to go through the sort of persecution that is talked of in these verses, but if we are tested in this way, I pray we can come through like purified gold or silver, as John Bunyan wrote in Pilgrim’s Progress. Amen.

He who would valiant be  
’Gainst all disaster,  
Let him in constancy  
Follow the Master.  
There’s no discouragement  
Shall make him once relent  
His first avowed intent  
To be a pilgrim.

Who so beset him round  
With dismal stories,  
Do but themselves confound—  
His strength the more is.  
No foes shall stay his might,  
Though he with giants fight;  
He will make good his right  
To be a pilgrim.

Since, Lord, Thou dost defend  
Us with Thy Spirit,  
We know we at the end  
Shall life inherit.  
Then fancies flee away!  
I’ll fear not what men say,  
I’ll labour night and day  
To be a pilgrim.