

“Enoch’s Faith” – Hebrews 11:5-6

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[What follows is the transcript of a sermon. It was originally intended to be heard, not read, so the tone is more conversational than academic. It has only been loosely edited, so forgive any grammatical, syntactical, or spelling errors. If you have questions please contact Southern Oaks Baptist Church through their official website, www.welovethegospel.com]

Take a Bible and meet me in Hebrews 11...

[Prayer tonight...Rwanda Fundraiser...give online]

In our text this morning the author of Hebrews highlights a very obscure figure from the Old Testament that may strike us as a curious addition to the Bible’s “hall of faith” chapter. This is reinforced by the fact that, like Abel before him, “faith” is not even mentioned in the few verses the Old Testament dedicates to the man. But there is something about this mysterious figure that does evidence faith and that’s what the writer of Hebrews aims to highlight. So let’s have a look. I’ll begin reading in verse 5. Follow along as I read. This is God’s Word...

“By faith Enoch was taken up so that he should not see death, and he was not found, because God had taken him. Now before he was taken he was commended as having pleased God. ⁶ And without faith it is impossible to please him, for whoever would draw near to God must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who seek him.” (Hebrews 11:5-6)

Like the other figures mentioned in Hebrews 11, Enoch is introduced with the expression “by faith.” However, typically that expression is joined to an active verb of some sort, a verb that shows what the person *did*—Abel *offered*, Noah *built*, Abraham *obeyed*, and so on. In Enoch’s case the verb is passive, not describing what he did but what was done to him—By faith Enoch *was taken up*...¹

The snatching up of Enoch is recorded in Genesis 5 and the remarks there are as brief as here. Genesis reads,

“When Enoch had lived 65 years, he fathered Methuselah. ²² Enoch walked with God after he fathered Methuselah 300 years and had other sons and daughters. ²³ Thus all the days of Enoch were 365 years. ²⁴ Enoch walked with God, and he was not, for God took him.” (Genesis 5:21-24)

We don’t learn a lot about Enoch here, but what we do learn is remarkable. For starters, he lived a long time by modern standards. “He was one of those long-lived ante-diluvians.”² In other words, he lived before (ante) the Deluge (Noah’s flood). The lifespans seem to have been longer before the Flood. In Enoch’s case, he walked the earth for 365 years.

The most remarkable thing that this text says about Enoch, however, is not his age (which was actually quite modest for the day), but that he “*walked with God*” (5:22, 24). That’s unique language. However, it differs a bit from Hebrews 11. When we compare Genesis 5 and Hebrews 11 we discover that the former speaks of Enoch “walking with God” whereas the latter speaks in terms of him “pleasing” God. Why the difference? Well, it’s not arbitrary. Part of the explanation is translational and part of it is theological.

The writer of Hebrews is drawing on the imagery of the Septuagint (LXX), which is the Greek translation of the Hebrew Scriptures. The Old Testament was originally written, primarily, in Hebrew. But in the first-century, Greco-Roman world many people struggled to read Hebrew, so they read the Scriptures, by and large, through a Greek translation known as the Septuagint. Many of the Old Testament quotations in the New Testament (not

least of which those we find in Hebrews) are drawn from the Septuagint. What Hebrews 11 says about Enoch is an example of that influence.

You see, the translators of the Septuagint really recoiled from anthropomorphic language (i.e., descriptive language of God in human terms) because of the idolatry that was rampant in their day. They didn't want the readers of their day to confuse metaphor for physicality when God is Spirit. The translators were notorious for conveying the idea behind the anthropomorphic language of the Hebrew Bible in a way that avoids that confusion. So you can imagine them reading in Genesis 5 of Enoch "walking" with God and being a little uncomfortable. Are we to conceive of God with human legs and feet? Not exactly. Again, God is Spirit. But this is an example where His "functions and activities are described in human terms for our benefit."³ So they seemed to have reasoned that what is being said is that Enoch pleased God.

And, of course, observing that Enoch "was well-pleasing to God" fits right in with quotation of Habakkuk 2:4 (which he again draws from the Septuagint) in Hebrews 10:38—"*my righteous one shall live by faith, and if he shrinks back, my soul has no pleasure in him.*" The righteous live by faith. God takes no pleasure in those who do not. So, if Enoch was "well-pleasing to God," which the Septuagint says twice (Genesis 5:22, 24), then clearly he was a man of faith. That's the logic derived from these translations. He is reading the story of Enoch through the lens of Habakkuk 2:4 and arriving at that conclusion—Enoch was a man of faith, even though Genesis doesn't say that explicitly.

In the end, the argument is as much theological as it is translational. What does it mean to "walk with God"? The Greek translators had the right instinct—it means to walk in a manner that pleases God. "We may rightly take this idea of pleasing God as a working definition of what it means to walk with him."⁴ That's not a very literal translation, but it does capture the meaning. The life of faith is a life that pleases God, which is to say it is a life of walking with God.

This metaphor of "walking" is significant. It implies something ongoing, doesn't it? You see, it's quite possible that one reading Hebrews 11 might take from the first example of faith, Abel, that faith is expressed merely in religious acts of worship. It was, after all, Abel's offering that is put forth as the example of his faith. Enoch, by contrast, shows us that a believer's faith is expressed through more than just "the regular act of religious worship or the occasional presentation of some sacrificial gift."⁵ It is expressed through every aspect of our life, such that our entire life could be described as "walking" with God.

Please don't miss the significance of this language. First of all, if you are reading Genesis for the first time, you will remember that in Genesis 3 we see that God was "*walking in the garden*" of Eden among the first humans (3:8). Evidently, Adam and Eve once enjoyed walks with God in some sense. That's just an incredible thought. But that access and intimacy was lost because of their sin. They are kicked out of the Garden and such walks with God are a thing of the past. But then, a couple chapters later, we read of Enoch walking with God. Maybe all is *not* lost. Maybe it *is* possible for us to enjoy intimacy with God again. But how? How can one be so reconciled with God that they can walk with Him again? Well, the writer of Hebrews says, "by faith".

But before we get to that, again, just think on how amazing this image of walking with God is. This is God! *The* God! The Creator of all things! All of it! Consider that the distance between your pew and the sun is roughly 93 million miles. If you could take that distance and contract it to the thickness of a single piece of paper, then the diameter of the Milky Way, our galaxy, would involve a stack of paper 310 miles high! And that's just our galaxy! That's just one galaxy that seems to be just a speck of dust in the vast expanse of space.⁶ And Enoch is said have walked with the God who created all of that!

But, as Kent Hughes has pointed out, "It is impossible to walk together unless there are several mutual agreements."⁷ For example, if you and I are going to walk together we have to agree on a destination. Married couples know that the path to Home Depot and DSW is not the same. And for the dudes out there, that's "Designer Shoe Warehouse." You simply cannot walk together to different destinations, so Enoch must have

been “heading in God’s direction.” And, yes, it is possible to be heading to the same destination via a different route (drive Broadway enough and you find the motivation to figure that out). But you can’t walk *together* unless you are going to the same destination along the same path. Furthermore, you have to travel at the same speed in order to walk together. So walking together implies that two people are traveling to the same “place,” on the same “path,” at the same “pace.” This is, in a sense, what Enoch was doing. You might say, “Enoch was in step with God.” And we call that fellowship.⁸ And we must strive for the same. In Paul’s words,

“If we live by the Spirit, let us also keep in step with the Spirit.” (Galatians 5:25)

That’s a call to walk with God.

“It implies personal knowledge, an ever-increasing understanding of the one with whom we walk...It is not a bare knowledge of facts, or a grim recitation of doctrines. To be a Christian is to walk with God, to know him and to live in the light of his presence.”⁹

And that should sound delightful to us. The Westminster Shorter Catechism famous begins with the question, “What is the chief end of man?” The answer it gives is spot on: “The chief end of man is to glorify God and enjoy him forever.” With the exception of Jesus Christ, it’s hard to imagine any person in Scripture who embodied that more fully than Enoch. That’s his legacy. He walked with God. No wonder Warren Wiersbe wrote,

“Enoch had been walking with God for so many years that his transfer to heaven was not even an interruption. Enoch had been practicing Colossians [chapter] three centuries before Paul wrote the words: ‘...keep seeking the things above....Set your mind on the things above, not on the things that are on earth’ (vv. 1, 2).”¹⁰

But did you notice though that Genesis 5 indicates that Enoch did not always walk with God? That intimate fellowship with God had an onset. It began when he was 65 at the birth of his son, “*Methuselah*” (5:21, 22). There’s something about fatherhood that changes a man. Sometimes for the better.

“It may not be too much to assume that the responsibilities of parenthood forced Enoch to recognize his serious moral and spiritual limitations, and in this spiritual inadequacy he may have felt himself cast upon God for help. He came to realize that only if he walked with God could he be a good example to his children.”¹¹

This is not just a matter of being present and invested in the life of our kids. It’s about being present and invested in the right things for the sake of our kids. There’s less than a half a percent chance that a kid playing high school baseball will get drafted by the pros and even then the odds are stacked against them that they will ever see the field. But one out of every one kid entrusted to your care will stand before God one day and give an account. So I agree with Voddie Baucham on this one, “If I teach my son to keep his eye on the ball but fail to teach him to keep his eyes on Christ, I have failed as a father.”¹²

We don’t know the circumstances of Methuselah’s birth and what was going on in Enoch’s heart, but we do know that the two were not unrelated. The birth of his son changed the trajectory of his life. And it changed it for the better because, from that day forward, “*Enoch walked with God...*” What about you?

Of course, if you do walk with God in this life that is no guarantee that you will be “taken up” in the same way that Enoch was. Genesis 5:24 is intriguing, to say the least. What does it mean that “*Enoch walked with God, and he was not, for God took him*”? We don’t really know. The writer of Hebrews recognizes that “*Enoch was taken up so that he should not see death*” (Hebrews 11:5) and that puts him in pretty rarified company. In fact, there is only one other person in the Bible whose story suggests that he did not see death. That person was Elijah, who was carried up from this earth in a whirlwind and chariot of fire (2 Kings 2:1ff). We know even less

about the mysterious conclusion of Enoch time on earth. It's fun to speculate, but we remain agnostic on the manner in which Enoch was carried away.

But while we don't know exactly *how* God took the man, we do know *why*. The author of Hebrews ties it to Enoch's faith. And there are at least three lessons we can learn about faith from this text in Hebrews. First of all...

Faith Has An Object: *God*

If we are to "draw near to God" like Enoch, Hebrews 11:6 tells us that two things must be true of us. The first thing is that we "*believe that he exists*," otherwise we would never draw near. Faith has an object—God. But while that truth is fundamental, it is hardly sufficient. In other words, "Belief in God is necessary but not a sufficient condition."¹³ Lots of people believe in a "god" without a true knowledge of the one God who actually exists. That may even be hinted at here in the Greek wording. As one commentator explains,

"At first glance it may seem that he is asking people to believe only that God exists, to hold at least some abstract assent to the idea of God. On closer study, however, he is being much more specific. A literal translation of the Greek would read this way: 'It is necessary for anyone who comes to God to believe that he is.' This wording points to the confessional or doctrinal aspect of faith in a way the original Hebrew audience surely would have noticed....At a minimum, the original Jewish-Christian audience could not help but see a connection to the great statement God made to Moses at the burning bush in Exodus 3:14. Having just been told to go down to Egypt and confront mighty Pharaoh, Moses asked God, 'What is your name?; God answered him, saying, 'I AM WHO I AM....Say this to the people of Israel, 'I AM has sent me to you.' " Again, in the Greek translation used by the early church, the link is even more explicit. In the Septuagint, Exodus 3:14 says, 'Tell them I am the one who exists.' Pointedly using that very language, our writer says, 'Whoever would draw near to God must believe that he exists.'"¹⁴

It's not just belief in God. It's belief in the God who has revealed Himself to His people as recorded in the Scriptures. The true God. Not just any god of our imagination.

Yet even believing that the biblical God exists is not sufficient to evidence saving faith. Demons believe that God exists (James 2:19) and I wouldn't put much confidence in the faith of demons, would you? Yet that's as far as many people get. They are theists. They have the faith of demons and they fool themselves into thinking that that it will all come out in the wash in the end. But believing in God—in the sense of affirming His existence—is not the sum total of biblical faith. Biblical faith involves trust. Not just believing facts about God. Staking our life on Him. Trusting that He is our only hope in life and death. Trusting that He is Lord and walking accordingly as He leads. That is the character of faith. It's not just believing in God's existence. It's also recognizing that we need to seek His favor in His way. And that leads us to the next point...

Faith Has A Objective: *Pleasing God*

What is the relationship between faith and pleasing God? Well look again at verse 6—"whoever would draw near to God must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who seek him." So in addition to getting the object right, we must also recognize that God is a Rewarder of those who seek Him. You receive a reward from someone when you do something that is pleasing. Those who God rewards are those who please Him. Seeking His reward then is tantamount to seeking to please Him.

This language of “‘Reward’ (10:35; 11:26) is one of several ways that Hebrews describes the object of a believers’ hope—their inheritance (1:14; 6:12, 17; 9:15; 11:8-9) in the heavenly homeland and city of God (11:10, 16; 13:14).”¹⁵ This is what God offers those who seek Him by faith. And what a reward it is! Of course,

“As soon as we speak of God giving out rewards, some people get upset; they perceive a threat to the clear biblical teaching of salvation by grace alone. ‘If salvation is a matter of getting your reward, then we must be talking about works-salvation,’ they reason. However, that is very far from the case. This particular statement simply asserts the reality that God is the One who determines blessing versus condemnation. To have faith, we must realize and accept that we have to deal with this God, that his judgment about us is the vital one, and that we had better seek him; that is, that we had better gain his favor.”¹⁶

Whose favor are you living for? If you want receive God’s favor, then you must approach Him for grace, recognizing that He is generous. “It pleases God when we come to him in a way that affirms this and delights in it—when we come to him as a Rewarder.”¹⁷ As Al Mohler writes,

“Faith honors God and God honors faith. Enoch is the prime example of this reality. His faith was a pleasing aroma before God. . . . God is a ‘rewarder’ because he gives grace and mercy to those who *trust* in his promises. In the gospel, God makes promises of salvation and declarations about the goodness of his character. When we trust those promises and believe those declarations, he fulfills his word and rewards us with his kindness. What a glorious truth! How does one enjoy the blessings of God? By believing that God will make good on his word to shower us with grace if we come to him with the empty hand of faith.”¹⁸

Now put it together. “Those who, like Enoch, wish to *draw near to God*, must encourage their faith to give constant expression to two great facts about God—his existence and his generosity.”¹⁹ Those are two foundational realities of faith: it has as its object the God who exists and it has as its objective pleasing God so as to receive the reward He gives to those who seek Him. In other words, it trusts that He is “real” and He is a “rewarding.”²⁰ And because saving faith involves those two things, it pleases God.

But the writer of Hebrews wants us to understand that such faith alone is what pleases God. This is reminiscent of our sermon last week and leads us to the last point...

Faith Is An Obligation: *Impossible!*

How does verse 6 begin? “*And without faith it is impossible to please [God]*”.

“Notice that he does not say that ‘without faith it is *difficult* to please God,’ or ‘without faith you will have to work *extra-hard* to please God.’ He says categorically that it is *impossible!* This resonates with Paul’s insistence that God cannot and will not be pleased apart from the righteousness that comes from God through faith (cf. Romans 3:21, 22; Philippians 3:9). Indeed, without this faith all are under the wrath of God (cf. Romans 1:17, 18; 2:5–8). Christians understand that ‘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’ (Ephesians 2:8, 9).”²¹

This is so important for you to get! There is nothing more important for you to grasp in fact. One cannot be commended by God apart from faith. This was a lesson we considered in the life of Cain a couple weeks ago. It’s the lesson Paul communicated to the Romans when he states succinctly, “*whatever does not proceed from faith is sin*” (Romans 14:23). And this is a lesson, Al Mohler points out, that people of our day have trouble remembering.

“While works of external righteousness and general morality may commend us before men, these things are not sufficient to commend us before God. Humanitarianism, religiosity, morality, and following the most scrupulous personal ethical codes cannot bring us God’s approval on the day of judgment. Without faith it is impossible to please God. There is no divine commendation for anyone who walks uprightly (by the world’s standards) without placing faith in Jesus Christ.”²²

And because of the sufficiency of Christ’s sacrificial work in our place, there is good news! The converse is also true, namely, that “with faith it is impossible to be condemned” and that, brothers and sisters, “is the glory of the gospel.”²³ But don’t take my word for it, take God’s Word for it (here conveyed through the Apostle Paul):

“There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.... For I am sure that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, ³⁹ nor height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.” (Romans 8:1, 38-39)

What good news! That’s the truth of the Gospel. And we have been reminded of it through both of the characters the writer of Hebrews has introduced us to so far—Abel and Enoch. And while their disposition toward God was the same, the circumstances that marked the end of their time on earth were quite different. One was murdered and one was “taken up” to God. One a picture of martyrdom and the other resurrection, both of which were real possibilities for the original audience.

And both Abel and Enoch ministered in an age where people were marked by hostility toward God and His people. It was likely very bad in Enoch’s day given that God would, in short order, destroy humanity for their wickedness, through the Flood, sparing only the family of Noah, Enoch’s great grandson. So it would appear that “Enoch resisted the sinful gravity of his culture” for centuries by faith.²⁴

But he didn’t just isolate himself from the world around him. He lived his life in service to God. In the NT, Jude tells us that Enoch fulfilled a prophetic role during his three centuries of faithfulness.

“It was also about these that Enoch, the seventh from Adam, prophesied, saying, ‘Behold, the Lord comes with ten thousands of his holy ones, ¹⁵ to execute judgment on all and to convict all the ungodly of all their deeds of ungodliness that they have committed in such an ungodly way, and of all the harsh things that ungodly sinners have spoken against him.’” (Jude 14, 15)

We too should bear witness to our generation and trust God with the results. And we should trust God with the cost for faithful living, which will be somewhere on the spectrum of Abel and Enoch. But in the end we should believe the promises of God that assure us that we will in fact be like Enoch one day. We may not be delivered from this world and death in the same fashion, but we will be delivered from both in just as miraculous a fashion. Since Christ has been raised, we too will be raised. That is the hope of the Gospel. Death has lost its sting and been swallowed up in victory (cf. 1 Corinthians 15). In this way, Enoch foreshadows the Christian’s hope.

Tom Schreiner makes this point in one of his commentary.

“The author concentrates on the fact that Enoch didn’t die, mentioning it five times and in different ways in the verse. The writer did not expect the readers to escape death, and so his point is to see an analogy between the reward given to Enoch and the reward promised to believers. Just as Enoch escaped from death altogether, the readers will finally triumph over death when they are raised from the dead.”²⁵

Indeed, he writes,

“Human beings are summoned to put their faith in God, entrusting the entirety of their lives to his lordship and love. God is pleased with faith because if he is trusted he is also loved, for trust in God cannot flourish without believing that he is good.”²⁶

And why do we love Him? The biblical answer is “*We love because he first loved us*” (1 John 4:19). And this brings us to the Table...

Jesus said, “*Greater love has no one than this, that someone lay down his life for his friends*” (John 15:13). He said that to His followers knowing that He had come to die for them on the cross. This is what we are called to remember when we share the Lord’s Supper together. We are remembering that our faith rests not in our own works, but in the work of another.

And that work involved the sinless life of the Son of God who offered Himself on the cross in the place of sinners and died the death that we deserved. His body was broken for us like bread. His blood spilled like wine. He willingly partook of this suffering so that our sins could be atoned for. We can have peace with God because of His suffering and death. His work alone removes the hostility between a sinner and the holy God. None of us can walk with God unless our sin is dealt with and Jesus alone was able to deal with it. And the benefits of His work are bestowed on us through faith in Jesus alone. As Andrew Murray has said:

“Faith seeks for God; it believes that He is; it keeps the heart open towards Him; it bows in humility and hope for Him to make Himself known. To know God, to see God in everything and everywhere, in our daily life to be conscious of His presence so that we always walk with Him—this is the true nobility of man; this is the life that faith lives; this is the blessedness Jesus has now fully revealed in the rending of the veil. Faith can walk with God.”²⁷

So I plead with you, draw near to God through faith in His Son, the Lamb of God—crucified, buried, and raised. For He lives today, having set the Table before us, that we might enjoy fellowship with God. So by faith, we remember what He has done for us. By faith we draw near. By faith we, like Enoch, please God. By faith we too will be spared the death that we deserve and conquer the grave. By faith we enjoy a fellowship with God that will last forever. And by faith we now partake of the elements as a picture of our union with Him and with one another.

Let’s pray...

¹ Timothy Keller, “Enoch and the Purpose of Faith; Commitment, the Way to Intimacy,” a sermon preached on October 9, 1994, and accessed via Logos Bible Software in *The Timothy Keller Sermon Archive* (New York City: Redeemer Presbyterian Church, 2013).

² R. Kent Hughes, *Hebrews: An Anchor for the Soul* (PW; Wheaton: Crossway, 1993), 72.

³ Richard D. Phillips, *Hebrews* (REC; Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2006), 417.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Raymond Brown, *The Message of Hebrews* (BST; Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1982), 200.

⁶ Keller, “Enoch and the Purpose of Faith.” Hughes (80) gives a similar illustration: “In thinking about our solar system, we can glimpse the scale of things if we think of our sun as the size of an orange, which would make the earth the size of a grain of sand circling around the orange at thirty feet out. But within our galaxy would be one hundred thousand million oranges, each separated from its neighbor by a distance of a thousand miles. And there would be one hundred thousand million more galaxies like our own galaxy, each having one hundred thousand million oranges—and some of the oranges would be more than twenty-seven million times bigger than our orange.”

⁷ Hughes, 77.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Phillips, 416-417. He also states, “When it is God with whom we walk, there is a hierarchy, just as when the disciples walked with our Lord Jesus Christ. One is Lord; the other is disciple. One is teacher; the other is student. One is Father; the other is child. There can hardly be a more beautiful description of the Christian life than the idea of walking with God.... Walking with God is its own destination, yet at the same time we are indeed going somewhere! We are growing in our knowledge of the infinite and divine; we are growing more like him in character as he guides us; we are realizing progress in spiritual things. This is the Christian life!”

¹⁰ Warren W. Wiersbe, *Run with the Winners, A Study of the Champions of Hebrews II* (Wheaton: Tyndale House, 1985), 44.

¹¹ Brown, 200.

¹² I do not recall the source of this statement.

¹³ Thomas R. Schreiner, *Commentary on Hebrews* (BTCP; Nashville: B&H Publishing Group, 2015), 345-346.

¹⁴ Phillips, 418.

¹⁵ Dennis E. Johnson, “Hebrews” in *Hebrews-Revelation* (ESVEC; Wheaton: Crossway, 2018), 164.

¹⁶ Phillips, 419.

¹⁷ John Piper, “Without Faith It Is Impossible to Please God,” a sermon accessed online as of June 29, 2019, at the following website: <https://www.desiringgod.org/messages/without-faith-it-is-impossible-to-please-god>.

¹⁸ R. Albert Mohler Jr., *Exalting Jesus in Hebrews* (CCE; Nashville: B&H Publishing Group, 2017), 173, 175.

¹⁹ Brown, 201.

²⁰ John Piper, “Without Faith It Is Impossible to Please God.”

²¹ Hughes, 78.

²² Mohler, 173-174.

²³ Ibid., 174.

²⁴ Hughes, 82.

²⁵ Schreiner, 345.

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Andrew Murray, *The Holiest of All* (Grand Rapids: Fleming Revell, 1993), 450.