

## Prayer

We honour You and worship You, Jesus Christ our Lord and Saviour. Bless us today in our worship, and by its inspiration, lead us onwards through all that this coming week will bring. May we sing our praises to you not just today, but every day of our week, and enjoy Your presence in the midst of every part of our lives. Thank You Lord Jesus, AMEN

## Other Prayer Suggestions

### Weekly Theme: Friendship

The theme of friendship is one which touches many different feelings for each of us, and it is therefore a fruitful subject for our prayer suggestions. Some of us have many friends, and some have few, but one thing will be true for us all, and this is that friends matter, and we need them. Pray for some of your own friends with whom you are close at the moment.

## Meditation

Help us, Holy Lord, to be true to our calling:

To offer You our truest worship;

An offering of our hearts in spirit and truth,  
The worship of our hearts and minds  
And the giving of our best to You.

To be a living fellowship;

A community of people based in love and service,  
The place where people find faith and peace  
And the gifts of Your Spirit, shared.

To live as a people of service;

A practical and spiritual expression of love,  
The gift of all our time and effort  
And the best that we can be, through You.

## Bible Study - Hebrews 11:1-3

<sup>1</sup> Now faith is being convinced about what we hope for, and certain about things we cannot see; <sup>2</sup> and this is how our forefathers received approval. <sup>3</sup> By faith we know that the present age was set in order by God's Word, meaning that the things we can see have been made out of things we cannot see.

### Review

These wonderful and powerful words have long been valued as one of the most helpful 'definitions' of faith in the New Testament. No one scripture, of course, can totally encompass everything that is meant by the word 'faith' in the Bible, but these three verses are a significant help to all who wish to gain a broad understanding of it. Faith is, of course, the essential human response to the saving work of Christ which makes it possible for us to have 'peace with God' (Romans 5:1f.). The text itself is sandwiched between the writer's forceful presentation of the privileges and duties of faith (ch.10) and a series of examples of faith from the Old Testament (11:3-40).

The letter of Hebrews has just attempted to encourage faithful Christian people who have experienced a hard time as their faith has come under pressure from the society in which they live (see 10:32-39). In ancient times, as in the present, Christian faith has to be sustained when everything in the world seems to contradict the basis of hope in Christ; Christians can often suffer through no fault of their own (10:33), the Lord Jesus sometimes appears to delay when His help is most needed (10:34-36), and injustices within the world can make some doubt that God is benevolent (10:35). It is against this backdrop that Hebrews makes its comments about

the nature of faith. Our text is not supposed to be a definition, even though it uses terms which would have been familiar to anyone who was studying philosophy in the first century. It is supposed to encourage us to hold on to the faith God has given us even though the evidence we see with our eyes may appear to contradict it.

The first verse is highly memorable, and you may know it in the King James version; 'Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen.' However, the old word 'substance' distracts us from what the verse really means, because the Greek word means 'something about which you are certain' (as in my translation). The text tells us that to have faith means to be fully convinced that something will happen before it has taken place or been finished, and as the verse continues; to be 'certain about things we cannot see.' The Christian believes that by trusting in Jesus we will certainly secure our acceptance before Almighty God in the final judgment; and of course, that judgment has not yet happened. We trust this will be true even though we have no personal visible proof of it, because we accept, by faith, the testimony of Jesus, of other people, and of God's Word, that Jesus' death and resurrection has achieved this for others and will achieve this for us. So faith is a confident hope in the future based upon the testimony of what God has already done in the world, which is why the 'forefathers' are mentioned in verse 2. Their testimony of faith helps establish our faith.

Verse 3 evokes the idea of God's creative power to support this understanding of faith, and it does so by using two ideas, firstly the notion of the 'present age' (1:3) of the Kingdom of God which is the age in which we now live, and secondly, the notion of God's creative power which is described by the words 'set in order' (1:3; the Greek word for this always refers to God's creative power). What this verse says is that our faith tells us that God made the world order we experience out of the hopes and aspirations of previous generations of God's people who longed for the Messiah to come; indeed, 'the things we can see (God's Kingdom, and the church) have been made out of things we cannot see (the faith of past generations)'. Our hopes in Christ, therefore, are based on a certainty, for God has already made the hopes of previous generations into something real. What other proof do we need of the power of faith?

This same truth stands for us today, and our faith and hope for the future is based on what we know God has faithfully done in the past. Just as the people in the first century could see that their forefather's faith had been vindicated (and Hebrews goes on to say more about just this is the coming verses of the letter), we can be inspired by what God has created through the faith and hope of both our forefathers in the Bible and also Christians who have gone before us. They all tell us that God is faithful and ultimately brings the hopes of His people to fruition.

## Questions *(for use in groups)*

1. If we are convinced about something, is it right to talk about it as our 'hope'?
2. What do these three verses tell us about faith which is new to us, or not found elsewhere in the New Testament (to the best of your knowledge)?
3. What more is there to the act of 'creation' than making things visible which were not previously visible?

## Discipleship

What is it that you hope for in Christ? Indeed, what do you look forward to as a Christian? You may think that the answer to these questions is straightforward, or has been answered by the text we have studied; but each of us must be honest with ourselves and with God about the inner state of our faith. We often hide from other people the times of trial and distress in which we have difficulty holding on to our faith, but if we will share these things and deal with them openly and honestly, then we will be blessed by the love and understanding of others.

## Final Prayer

Holy Spirit, lead me onwards to share with all I meet the great blessings I have received through Jesus Christ. Holy Spirit, take my life and purify it by Your fire, so that I might be found acceptable before God's throne of grace. Holy Spirit, strengthen my faith and give me hope; in Jesus' name: AMEN