

FAITH – CONVICTION IN ACTION

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Scripture: Hebrews 11:1-6

Let's set sail on a ship named Endurance. Endurance was the first ship with the task of circumventing the Antarctic Circle. Way back in December 5, 1914, Endurance under the command of Captain Shackleton and its 28 members decided to undertake this journey, and set sail from South Georgia to go across Antarctica.

You need to pay attention to the dates to understand the gravity of the story. The ship had left South Georgia on December 5th, 1914, and December 7th of the same year she entered the Antarctic ice pack. December 30th, she enters the Antarctic Circle and crosses over. January 18th 1915, the Endurance got stuck in the ice, what we in nautical terms call 'beset in ice'. Today, we can probably deal with a situation of that sort, but back then it was something which was considered very difficult to come out of. The only choice would be to wait for the ice floes to move apart or melt or allow the ship to have some kind of movement.

February 24th of 1915, Captain Shackleton ordered all operations on the ship to stop because he was concerned with the way things were. And on May 1st, 1915, there was utter darkness because the sun set, not to be seen for the next 4 months.

On 2nd September, almost 9 months into the situation, the ice pressure that was around the ship caused the ship to literally lift up out of the sea and get thrown onto its side. She was now lying flat, a beam on the icepack. On October 27th, Captain Shackleton ordered abandonment of ship. 21st November, Captain Shackleton suddenly shouted "There she goes" and they saw Endurance slip under the ice and sink, never to be seen again.

From 23rd December, these people begin their grueling walk across the ice pack to as far as they could. 29th December, they came to a place and they set up camp there, and called it Patience Camp. Year 1916, January 21st, a strong blizzard destroyed their camp and they were forced to move out from there. March 30th, the crew shot the last of their 69 dogs and ate the meat to survive. 31st March, the ice pack that they were camped on broke into two, and one part took three lifeboats away from them. Somehow, they managed to get hold of those 3 lifeboats and they remained on those lifeboats till April 7th when they saw Elephant Island on the horizon. On April 18th, they managed to reach the island and they set up camp there.

Now, Shackleton had an idea that he would take a lifeboat along with a few members and try to cross 800 miles back to South Georgia to get some help. They left Elephant Island on April 24th and headed back to find South Georgia. May 10th, Captain Shackleton and the few members found themselves on the west coast of South Georgia and now had to trek over ice-packed land to find a whaling station from where they could call for help. Finally, on May 20th, they arrived at the whaling station and Captain Shackleton asked for some kind of help. Remember, April 23rd he left the people back on the island, and now it's May 20th.

23rd of May, one of the ships from an English company set sail to go in search of these people who were stranded. It came up to about 100 miles from Elephant and could not go any further, and turned back. June 10th, the Uruguayan government sent out another ship; that too got to about 100 miles close to Elephant Island and turned back. July 12th, the British Association sent out a chartered ship; that too turned back about 100 miles out. Finally, on August 25th, the Chilean government sent

out a ship which into close proximity of the horizon of Elephant Island on August 30th. There is one of the most renowned photographs of one of the persons who had a camera. He took a photograph of all the crew looking at a small boat appearing on the horizon. Now this is nearly 497 days past the day that they left South Georgia on their mission. It's well past almost seven months since they lost their ship. And they banked only on their faith and loyalty and trust on their captain in command, Captain Shackleton.

This story is all about Shackleton and how his crew had faith in him. This is a story that I thought would set the ground for how faith needs to come into action. So let us see what the Bible says about faith when it comes to us putting it on the Lord Jesus Christ.

Hebrews 11:1-6

11 Now faith is confidence in what we hope for and assurance about what we do not see. ² This is what the ancients were commended for.

³ By faith we understand that the universe was formed at God's command, so that what is seen was not made out of what was visible.

⁴ By faith Abel brought God a better offering than Cain did. By faith he was commended as righteous, when God spoke well of his offerings. And by faith Abel still speaks, even though he is dead.

⁵ By faith Enoch was taken from this life, so that he did not experience death: "He could not be found, because God had taken him away. "For before he was taken, he was commended as one who pleased God. ⁶ And without faith it is impossible to please God, because anyone who comes to him must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who earnestly seek him."

Vs.1-2

"Now faith is confidence in what we hope for and assurance about what we do not see. This is what the ancients were commended for."

The story I narrated was kind of banking on this line that we are hoping for something we do not see and time can kind of play with that. but in this case, when we look at that verse we just read – Faith is the assurance of things hoped for and convictions of things not seen. It kind of means almost the same thing. But there's a vast difference in the implication on that. The words 'conviction' and 'assurance' involve a slightly more emphatic meaning rather than just hoping. It is not trying to think that it's going to happen. It's an assurance. It's as assured as the next step that you take on this ground that is going to hold you up. It's as assured as the fact that when you breathe next, you're going to breathe in oxygen and not carbon dioxide. It's that kind of assurance that it's trying to bank on. It's a confident assurance that the unseen things will come to pass.

When we look at something of that sort, we should actually look at it being demonstrated. Let's look at Thomas. What was Thomas' history? He was with Jesus, he walked along with Jesus wherever He went, he saw Jesus perform so many miracles. But yet, when it came to the fact about Jesus having been risen, what was Thomas' response to that? He said, "Unless I see in His hands the imprints of the nails, and put my finger into the place of the nails and put my hand into His side, I will not believe."

Here is a man who saw Jesus in real life. but when it came to His resurrection, he not only wanted to see the imprints, he actually wanted to put his hands into the wounds to verify that it was really the Jesus who had risen. Would that mean that Thomas did not have faith in Jesus? Would that mean

that he did not believe in Jesus? No, it does not. It does not make any sort of inference of that sort. It basically says that it took his faith to one more level. It took it a notch higher. It was suddenly seeing that this was the same Jesus that he saw die and is risen. There was a conviction in him which led his faith to have a confident assurance, and he suddenly started believing in so many things that he himself had not seen. He had no feeling of grasping the reality of it, but yet he believed that his sins were forgiven, yet he believed that he would see Jesus again, and he believed that he's going to live in eternity with Christ. That was the level of the faith that he had, and that faith went to the point that his conviction was bringing the word of God all across the south of India. And to that end, he gave up his life as well. He was martyred here.

So, just by seeing Jesus Christ in reality, by touching the wounds on His hands and the piercing on His side, Thomas' faith went from just normal faith to faith with conviction, faith with action. If you try to sum it up, even the fact that his faith was suddenly filled with intangible, unseen and non-existent things, but he moved ahead believing that it is going to happen. It's talking about believing while not fully seeing.

So we see an aspect of faith being enacted in Thomas' life. For us, we need to understand that believing is not just believing in the dictionary sense of the word. It is believing knowing that it is firm and secure. It is believing that our life banks on the unseen as though it was seen. That's the difference. You do not see it now, but you know that it's going to happen.

v. 3

“By faith we understand that the universe was formed at God’s command, so that what is seen was not made out of what was visible.”

For us, it's inherent with the belief that we have in God that He is the creator of all things.

Let's look at another Thomas – Thomas Nagel. He is an ex-professor with the New York University, retired in 2016. A very famous professor, but all of his life, he professed atheism, probably in his own intellectual way. But he made this statement: “I want atheism to be true. It isn't just that I don't believe in God, and naturally hope that I am right in my belief. It's that I hope that there is no God. I don't want there to be a God. I don't want the universe to be like that. I am curious whether there is anyone who is genuinely indifferent as to whether there is a God.” He basically just wants to prove that whatever he believed in, that there was no God, was true. And there was no root or analysis to his point. It was just that he had a contradictory faith that there should be no God. And so, to prove that aspect of there being no God, he would go to any extent to say that.

Now, as I have, I'm sure each one of you have also had instances of getting into debates and arguments with people who professed that there is no God. And I'm sure, just as I have, you too would have come to a point where suddenly you're at a loss for words as to how do you prove that there is a God, because they have equally solid scientific evidence to say that there isn't. But here's the thing: the Bible calls them fools, not because you are any smarter but because they are spiritually blinded. They are not open to the spiritual realities of this world. What makes it any better for us? It is just that by God's grace that blindness was removed from our eyes and that we are able to see beyond the visible. We are able to see the unseen and we are able to believe in it

And when it comes to understand the creation, it's all about faith. If we don't have faith, then the crux or the foundation of our entire belief system fails. And oddly, for the atheist, it's also by faith he believes that there is no God. It's because this premise is so vague that there is no way that either side can actually beyond a shadow of doubt say that there is or there is no God. You have to have faith. And such is the place of faith because you cannot disprove him, you cannot prove yourself. But

for us as God's children, we are grateful that we are no longer behind the wall of being blinded, and therefore we are able to see what God has intended. At the same time, God has given the concept of science to keep us properly occupied while we are on earth, so continue with the studying.

Vs. 4, 5

⁴By faith Abel brought God a better offering than Cain did. By faith he was commended as righteous, when God spoke well of his offerings. And by faith Abel still speaks, even though he is dead.

⁵By faith Enoch was taken from this life, so that he did not experience death: "He could not be found, because God had taken him away." For before he was taken, he was commended as one who pleased God.

Both these people are individuals at different times over the span of years. Abel was there when creation had just begun, and he probably knew every relative he had, everybody – there were not many people around him. And then there was Enoch who was there when there was quite a number of people on earth. But both of them, though different times, the Bible connects them through one cord which is that they both lived a life of faith.

"By faith Abel brought God a better offering than Cain." When the word 'better' is used, it can be misconstrued that it had reference to the kind or the quality of offering. But presenting offerings to the Lord was not just physically bringing something, it was also your heart, your attitude. And it was coming before the Lord in worship that was also engulfed in this sacrifice that was brought. But it says that Abel's sacrifice was found to be better than Cain's. It was not that God had a preference of veg. or non-veg. the Bible tells us that Abel brought firstlings of his flock and there were fat portions. It's not that, because in Leviticus 2, God made provisions for grain offerings also to be included. So it was not about the type of sacrifice; it was more the heart of sacrifice, the attitude behind the presenting of that offering.

Genesis 4:3 onwards recounts what Cain was doing. ³ So in the course of time, it came to pass that Cain brought an offering of the fruit of the ground to the Lord. ⁴ Abel, on his part, also brought an offering, from the firstborn of his flock and from their fat portions. And the LORD had regard for Abel and his offering; ⁵ but for Cain and his offering He had no regard." Now, if you read this passage alongside Hebrews 11:4 where it says by faith Abel offered God a better sacrifice than Cain, we can infer that Cain had no faith. Cain had no intent in his heart to bring before God as Abel brought it. And therefore, Abel's sacrifice was acceptable to God. Abel's worship was acceptable to God, and Cain's wasn't.

Then v.5 tells us that the Lord had regard for Abel and his offering, but for Cain and his offering, God had no regard. So Cain became very angry and his countenance fell. Why did Cain become angry, and whom did he become angry with? Obviously with God because God did not accept it. But it was not that he was unaware that God did not accept it. He knew that God was not going to accept it because he knew his heart. But at the same time Cain was angry with his brother. He was probably jealous that God accepted Abel's offering. It seems foolish that he would do something wrong and then would be upset with his brother.

But Genesis 4:6-7 onwards, Lord says to Cain, ⁶ "Why are you angry? And why has your countenance fallen?" ⁷ If you do well, will not your countenance be lifted up? And if you do not do well, sin is crouching at the door, and its desire is for you. But you must master it."

God knew very well what was happening in Cain's heart, just as he knows what's happening in each of our hearts. And we get that correction from God ever so often. Likewise, God gave that same correction to Cain. He says, "Why are you being like this? Why are you being angry? Why has your

countenance fallen? If you were going to do the right thing, would it not be right? Would it not be easy for you to come through this? But you are waiting for that sin to capture you. You've got to master it." A clear-cut warning from God to Cain. If such a message was ever heard by me, I'm sure I would turn 180 degrees from whatever I was doing, and I would want to retrace my steps. I don't want to be walking down the path where God's going to speak so clearly.

But hear what happened in Genesis 4:8 "And it came about when they were in the field, that Cain rose up against Abel his brother and killed him."

Cain refused to correct his ways. Even when God reprimanded him and asked him to change it, Cain went about to do what he was originally intending to do. His heart was not in the right place. Not only did he present a sacrifice with an ill heart, he went on to do the actions that he intended to do.

But Cain is not the focus; it's Abel. Because the Bible says, "By faith, Abel offered to God a better sacrifice." And it goes on to say in Hebrews 11:4 about God testifying about his gifts and through faith, though he is dead he still speaks. If you look at it, technically, Abel happens to be the first martyr. He died for the cause that he believed in, the word of God. He believed in what he was doing, and as a result of that, he was killed. And because he was killed, and because he was righteous, the Bible itself speaks about him.

In Matthew 23:35, Jesus refers to the blood of righteous Abel. ³⁵ "And so upon you will come all the righteous blood that has been shed on earth, from the blood of righteous Abel to the blood of Zechariah, son of Berechiah,...and so on." Jesus Himself speaks about the righteous blood of Abel, we are speaking about it, and generations on will speak of it. a righteous life in God's eyes, which is pleasing to God, which is walked in faith, will have similar effect because generations after generations will talk about that faith being exemplified.

In the second half of that verse we read about Enoch. "By faith, Enoch was taken up so that he would not see death, and he was not found because God took him up. For he obtained the witness that before his being taken up, he was pleasing to God."

Now, Enoch's name occurs in very few passages, I think three of them in the Old Testament. The genealogy in Genesis 5 gives a little brief into who he was and about his life. it says from v.21 onwards: ²¹ "Enoch lived sixty-five years, and became the father of Methuselah ... and Enoch walked with God three hundred years, and had sons and daughters. ²³ So all the days of Enoch were three hundred and sixty-five years. ²⁴ And Enoch walked with God; and he was not, for God took him."

Enoch walking with God – that's describing one who lives his life in close communion with God and draws pleasure from God. We all believe we are there, that we are all walking a walk close with God, and we are drawing pleasure. Only we ourselves can assess how close and how much pleasure are we drawing from God. But here's the thing. We need to look at Enoch's life and see that God was so pleased with him that God suddenly decided: Hey Enoch, you're not going to die a death which is going to be painful and it's not going to be an ailing death as happens on earth. You're going to come right up with me just the way you are. And that's why it says Enoch walked for 365 years and then he was not. If you look at all the genealogies, especially in ch.5 starting from Adam and Seth and Enosh, Kenan, Jared, Methuselah, Lamech – everything ends saying, "and he died." But in the case of Enoch it says, "and he was not." The verse itself says that he went directly into the presence of the Lord without dying first. He did not experience death. By faith, Enoch was taken from this life so that he does not experience death. That was God's desire. He did not want Enoch to experience death.

When we look at a parallel of that kind, when we ourselves believe that we are living a life of faith and living a life which is walking close with God and we are drawing pleasure from God. Then it comes to an understanding as to where are we when we compare that faith of Enoch that God was

so pleased that God decided to take him up. But yet, when we live our life, the 70, 80 years or whatever we live up to, we still end up not achieving what Enoch did, or rather what Enoch enjoyed. Hebrews says it was by faith that Enoch was taken up. What does that mean? it does not specify that this was so many sacrifices that Enoch did or that he attended so many worship meetings or that he sang so many songs. It was not by his works; it was not by the prayers that he offered. It was just that he lived a life that pleased God and God decided he was coming up. And this was only demonstrated by his walk with God.

v. 6

And without faith it is impossible to please God, because anyone who comes to him must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who earnestly seek Him.

Pleasing the Lord is at the heart of every Christian. I believe that each one of us here wants to please God in everything that we do. If I were to put the family as an example. The child wants to please the father and mother. They want to do everything that stands right in front of their parents. Likewise, between spouses, they want to please each other because they love each other. They want to be right. They want to be found worthy of that love and affection that they do. But at the same time, for us who are God's children, we also have the same desire that we want to do what is right for God. We want to please Him in everything that we do.

2 Corinthians 5:9 "Therefore we also have as our ambition, whether at home or absent, to be pleasing to Him, whether living or dead, to be pleasing to Him. Now, what does Hebrews 11:6 say – If you want to please God, you must believe. Without faith, it is impossible to please Him. Alternatively, faith is necessary to please God, if I may use that word.

If you look at the Bible, there are such heroes of faith all through:

- Abel – by faith offered God a better sacrifice,
- Enoch – by faith, he was taken up,
- Noah – by faith, in reference he built an ark,
- Abraham – by faith, he went out not knowing where he was going,
- Sarah – by faith she received the ability to conceive a child,
- Abraham – by faith he offered up Isaac,
- Isaac, Jacob, Joseph – by faith, they blessed their sons.
- Moses – by faith, he was hidden,
- Moses – by faith, he refused to be called the son of the Pharaoh's daughter.
- Rahab – by faith she was saved from destruction.

All these people exemplified faith at a much higher level than what we would probably do.

It's not just by reading the Bible, it's not just by coming to church on a Sunday or even Christmas or Good Friday or Easter or Palm Sunday, and then saying that I have faith. No, that doesn't work. These have no account. These are being done because there's a change of attitude, there's a change of our heart. It's in response to our calling that we want to do that. We would rather be in church than be anywhere else. We would rather have pleasure fellowshiping with God's children than to be out with our friends doing something else. But it does not mean that these are what is essential. It's not been spoken about in the Bible. It talks about faith; it talks about a walk with God. To please God you must have faith.

Romans 14:23 says, "Whatever is not from faith is sin." And that's where we probably need to introspect. And I think each one of us has something that kind of fits into that bracket. So many aspects of our life get shifted away from walking in faith.

1 Corinthians 13:1-3 says: ¹ If I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, but do not have love, I have become a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal. ² If I have the gift of prophecy, and know all mysteries and all knowledge; and if I have all faith so as to remove mountains, but do not have love, I am nothing. ³ And if I give all my possessions to feed the poor, and if I surrender my body to be burned but do not have love, it profits me nothing.”

So, if I have to worship the Lord and there is no faith, it’s pointless. It’s futile. God is not pleased. If I obey the Lord but do not have faith, God is not pleased. If I shut the mouths of the lion and put foreign armies to fight, but I do not have faith, God is not pleased. God is pleased only when we manifest faith, faith which puts into action, faith which is with a conviction and assured confidence. But the problem with us is we look at relationship with God as a check list. Go to church – tick. Study the Bible – tick. Attend a prayer meeting – tick. Cell groups – tick. But that’s not what it is. We are doing all this to find a way to get God’s approval.

But here’s the thing. Romans 8:1, “There is no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.” God stamped His approval on us the day we accepted Him as our Lord and Savior. There is no need for any of us to work towards that approval. It was done and sealed the day we accepted Him as our Lord and Savior, as our heavenly Father. The thing that is required is the walk thereafter has to be with the conviction of faith being exemplified to a higher level.

And how do we do that? v.6 itself gives the answer. Without faith it is impossible to please God because anyone who comes to Him must believe that He exists. The first thing is that we must believe in His existence. We must believe in the reality that God is. And then it says that He rewards those who earnestly seek Him.

When I talked about Thomas Nagel, I was talking about how they give counter-arguments about God not existing. And they look for proofs to prove that God doesn’t exist. But here’s the thing: we can use the same things that one looks at as clues to God’s existence. What do I mean by that?

if you look at simple creation around yourself, the example I use is that of the fish which is found in the Mariana Trench, eleven and a half kilometers down. it’s got a light up in front so that it can see where it is going. Who thought of that. the fish didn’t know there was light because it never came up to see light. Somebody created that fish with light. The bat in the night, which goes by sound, creates echoes to see because it can’t see. It doesn’t have good eyes, but it’s able to see using echolocation. All the navigational aids that we use is what the bat is using.

Then I use the example of mankind. If man’s evolution over a million years brought us to where we are, why have we stopped? Why are we not evolving any further to become much more in what we are capable of as we see in science fiction movies? What we need to look at is how every aspect of nature, every aspect of creation is so beautifully made that it cannot be by chance. Somebody has to have an artistic, beautiful thought to create something like that. So the proof that we look for to say whether God exists or doesn’t exist.

And then it says, believe that He will reward. v.6 – he who comes to God must believe that He is and that He is a rewarder of those who seek Him. The very crux, the fundamental part of our faith is that we have a reward in heaven. We have eternal life. That’s fundamental to our faith. And when we look at Proverbs 16:7 and various other chapter, it talks about this reward. “When a man’s ways are pleasing to God, He makes even his enemies to be at peace with him.”

Matthew 13:44-46 talks about the treasure that the merchant found and he wanted to let go of everything, buy the land or buy the pearl.

Matthew 6:19-21 God says all of these are treasures on earth which you are trying to store up for yourself. ¹⁹ Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth where moth and rust destroy, and where thieves break in and steal. ²⁰ But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys, and where thieves do not break in or steal.

Basically, our treasure or our reward is not here on earth, it is up in heaven. The apostles asked Jesus when the rich man went away saying that he was not happy with Jesus' saying to sell everything and follow Him. They say, "We have given up everything. We gave up all that we had and we followed you. What is our reward?" and Jesus tells them "²⁸ Truly I say to you that you who have followed Me, in the regeneration when the Son of Man will sit on His glorious throne, you also shall sit upon twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel. ²⁹ And everyone who has left houses or brothers or sisters or father or mother or children or farms for My name's sake, will receive many times as much, and will inherit eternal life."

A reward is promised by God. And various other verses are there, but the fact of the matter is that when we live a life which is pleasing to God, we live a life which is based on God's promises. It is based on the reward that we have. and to live a life of that sort, we need to have faith which is committed at proving that there is assurance, there is confidence in who this God is.

Let me give you a short story of George Müller, who is known as a man of faith. He was on a ship going to Quebec, and he had a prayer meeting of sorts to get to. It was almost 24 hours that George Müller was on the bridge with the captain and very desperate about the way things were going. There was a dense fog and the ship was moving slowly because in those days, they could only do navigation with sound and sight. There were no aids that we have today which would help things move faster. And so, George Müller goes up to the captain and says, "Captain, I have come to tell you I must be in Quebec on Saturday afternoon." The captain tells him it is impossible. "Just not possible with the kind of speed that we're doing." And so, George Müller tells him, "Then, very well. if your ship cannot take me, God will find some other way. I have never broken an engagement in 57 years. let us go down into the chat room and pray."

And these are the words that the captain had written in his story. "I looked at that man of God and thought to myself, what lunatic asylum can that man have come from? I have never heard of such a thing as this." Anyway, he looks at George Müller and says, "Mr. Müller, do you know how dense this fog is?" And Mr. Müller says, "I don't, and I don't care to know, because my focus is not on that fog. My focus is on the creator God who has created everything, and it is in Him that I trust that He will make it happen. 57 years, He has never failed me. So I'm going to pray."

So both Captain and George Müller go down and they start praying. And afterwards, Müller prays the simplest of prayers. At the end of that, the captain was about to start praying. Müller stops him and says, "As you do not believe He will answer, and as I believe He has, there is no need whatsoever for you to pray about it." That was a kick below the belt to the captain, because he suddenly realized that there was a vast difference in the approach to the situation. Then Müller told him, "Captain, open the door and look outside." And sure enough, there was no trace of any fog. And Müller made that meeting.

Müller goes on to write this in one of the books written by Basil Miller titled 'George Müller, Man of Faith'. He says, "It is not enough to begin to pray, nor to pray aright; nor is it enough to continue for a time to pray. But we must patiently, believably continue in prayer until we obtain an answer. And further, we have not only to continue in prayer until the end, but we have also to believe that God does hear us and will answer our prayers. Most frequently, we fail in not continuing in prayer until the blessing is obtained, but we fail in expecting the blessing."

That's where our failure falls. It's not that we can pray and we continue for a time. it's just that our pray is not with that expectation of a blessing. It's not looking at God as a prayer-answering God. We are just doing it. We are going through the motions of it. And that's where faith comes in with an action. It comes with a conviction because you're not just doing it as a motion. You're doing it with the resolve that this is going to happen. There is a confident assurance that God is at work. We don't need to come to Him always as a prayer-answering God. Sure He is, but we need to come to Him knowing that He is in control and our faith, our conviction has to be working towards pleasing Him. And whenever we do that, then God finds pleasure in us. God is pleased by us.

Trust you are blessed.
