

Introduction

- I got the title wrong for tonight!
 - "Jesus has proved reliable"
 - that has overtones of looking backwards, of what has happened in the past
 - which is of course true to the material in the passage - a whole list of people in the past commended for their faith
- **BUT**
 - this is more a passage that looks forward!
- We're going to look at some of the key characters or incidents, and then move on to summarise the notion of hope that the author of the book of Hebrews saw in the lives of all these characters.

The Characters

- All had faith
 - all had faith that has a future dimension
 - however, that isn't the only thing the passage is about, and that future dimension is less clear in some, such as Abel, so pay less attention to those characters!
- For instance, with Abel:
 - the details of the sacrifice Cain offered do not on the surface appear to be blameworthy
 - *Genesis 4:3-7*
 - but God sees blame in Cain's offering
 - can only presume that there was a problem of the heart that God saw, and allowed the writer of Genesis and Hebrews to have insight into
 - but because it isn't explicit, won't lean on it too much!

Enoch (v.5)

- *Genesis 5:21-24*
- Death comes to us all...
- **But**, the Christian hope includes a certainty of freedom from death
 - if you work out the timing of when people lived, how old they were when they had kids, etc, it turns out that Enoch goes to be with God shortly after Adam dies
 - which underlines that there **is** the possibility of going & being with God, even though Adam's sin has blown it!
- **There is hope**

Noah (v.7)

- *Genesis 6:1-9:17*
- Hope in the face of God's judgement!
 - the Noah narrative is of a sinful world to which comes God's judgement
- The **hope** is not just that he believed the "silly" word from God to build a big boat:
 - it is also that God loved the world enough to save some
 - and indeed that God was gracious enough to save Noah and his family!
- Noah displays that hope in the face of a world filled up with sinfulness, with needless killing:
 - a hope that sees that God has made plans, and that they are good plans
 - plans that include both justice and mercy
- **There is hope**

Abraham's journey to Canaan (v.8)

- *Genesis 12:1-9*
- Doesn't know where he's going; knows little of the God who has called him!
 - becomes an itinerant, ultimately without a permanent earthly home, based on the God given **hope/certainty of a true home** - a city with foundations
 - what God has promised Abraham is more true, more real, more dependable than his actual experience

- and so he enters a pilgrim life
- as did the hymn-writer: "we have a hope that is steadfast and certain" - the hope of a heavenly home
- It is not true that it is "Better to journey than to arrive!"
 - it is indeed important to journey well through life; to live well, to attend to the needs to others, to contend for just, and so on
 - but we have a hope that means it'll be fantastic to arrive too!
- **There is hope**

Abraham hopes for a son (v.11)

- *Genesis 15:1-18:15; 21:1-7*
- Part of God's promise to Abraham was descendants:
 - and God was faithful, despite the unpromising earthly material available!
 - this was part of Abraham's hope for a permanent home in the land
 - the blessing of descendants who would carry on his name...
 - this was permanence in the culture in which he lived
- **There is hope**

Abraham offers up Isaac (v.17)

- *Genesis 22:1-19*
- Offer Isaac - despite, explicitly, him being the one through whom the promise would be fulfilled! (*Genesis 21:12*)
 - but Abraham remembered that Isaac was impossible anyway!
 - ...so why not have him coming back from the dead to father his descendants!
 - God can do anything!
- Abraham's confidence, his hope, was in **GOD**:
 - not in what God had already done
- **There is hope**

Joseph giving instructions about his bones being buried in Canaan (v.22)

- *Exodus 13:19; Joshua 24:32*
- His hope was tied up with God's promises for the future of Israel.
- His future was in God's hands - he wanted to be where God's will was, and symbolically that meant that's where his bones should go too!
- **There is hope**

Moses' parents hiding him (v.23)

- *Exodus 2:1-10*
- God has a plan for his people in the midst of their slavery.
- That hope takes away **fear**
 - for there is a greater confidence, and a willingness to trust self into God's hands knowing that he will save, even if through death
- **There is hope**

Moses' refusal to be known as Pharaoh's son (v.24)

- *Exodus 2:11-24 and/or Exodus 12:31-42*
- Explain apparent contradiction of v.27 with Exodus 2:14.
 - "By faith he left Egypt, not fearing the king's anger; he persevered because he saw him who is invisible. (Hebrews 11:27)
 - The man said, "Who made you ruler and judge over us? Are you thinking of killing me as you killed the Egyptian?" Then Moses was afraid and thought, "What I did must have become known." (Exodus 2:14)
 - explanation - is there a distinction here between personal fear and a fear that God's purposes could be thwarted?
 - or perhaps there is a benefit of hindsight thing going on! - "not just fearing the king's anger..."
- But, whether then or later, Moses came to understand that his future was not, ultimately, tied up with the riches and security of the Egyptian court:
 - his hope for security was tied up with God and with His dealings with His people
 - so he looked to the future, in the certainty that God's way was best, despite

appearances

- There is hope

Walls of Jericho (v.30)

- *Joshua 5:13-6:27*
- Walking round those walls was an unlikely thing to do!
 - still wasn't working as day followed day
 - even as circuit followed circuit on the seventh day!
- Yet God had promised - and they looked to him for fulfilment - a homeland
 - this is part, also, of the wider hope for a home in Israel for God's people
 - fulfilled to a limited extent in Joshua's invasion
 - perhaps more fully by the time of David & Solomon
 - or again to limited degree at the return from the Exile (Ezra...).
- But they all shared in that ultimate hope of an eternal homeland:
 - where the king is among them
 - where the state of the whole world is changed - e.g. Isaiah 11, shoot out of Jesse, lion with lamb...
- There is hope

Hope in the Old Testament

We are unlike them (v.39-40)

- We have seen Christ.
 - cf. *Simeon in Luke 2* - now I can rest in peace, for I have seen...
- We have seen the earthly fulfilment of that hope:
 - the inauguration of the kingdom
 - the one who has "gone through the curtain, touching the throne"
 - we know the reality of the resurrection - the biggest vindication of God's ways and plan
- We have a hope that has deeper and firmer grounds than they had open to them

We are like them

- But we are also like those OT believers:
- For the final fulfilment, the true "city with foundations", the new Jerusalem, is still ahead of us:
 - we have the same need to live in faith and hope, looking ahead for what we cannot yet see and touch and feel for ourselves.
- We too need to live pilgrim lives, as vs.13-16 describe.
 - aliens and strangers on earth - on a journey
 - travelling light?
 - longing for a better, true home?
- *"Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God, for he has prepared a city for them" (v.16)*