

The burgers are better at Hungry Jacks...

By the looks of the grimaces on faces, I'm not seeing that everyone is a true believer...

They've gotta be better. The TV tells me they're better. And the Hungry Jacks website explains why they're better:
Apparently it's because they're flame-grilled...

Are you not convinced???

I reckon the burgers at Hungry Jacks are better than what you'll find at McDonalds, but that's setting a pretty low bar. A burger from just about any Mum & Dad local café will win hands-down, every time.

To say that Hungry Jacks is better than McDonalds is a bit like saying "feeding round bales of Buffel grass to my stock is better than pulling scrub",,, but what if there's another option of putting them in a paddock of oats...

"This",,, is better than "that". Sometimes it's a matter of belief/opinion/fact... But who is the one who judges between opinion and fact?

The Book of Hebrews, could be called "The Book of Better Things". It's a letter outlining how much better it is, to be a Disciple of Jesus.

We are **sure** of better things.

Up to this point in Hebrews, we've already learned that :

- Jesus is better than the Angels

We have:

- a better salvation;
- a better hope;
- a better covenant;
- a better high Priest;
- better promises;

We:

- are **saved** by a better sacrifice...

And today, we've just read some of the best-known verses on faith. In faith, we look forward to a **better** destination/home/land/country.

Is this world, really the best we have to look forward to? Some might sum it up “We live; we suffer; we die...”... Is that it???

What's your plan for life?

Think of The Great Australian dream (for a start) – what is that?

Well according to the Australian Migrant English Programⁱ, *“The Great Australian Dream, is the desire for every Australian family to own their own home. Owning your own home on your own block of land, was a symbol of success.” (BTW only the case from 1950's on).*

I reckon “the Great Australian Dream” has changed somewhat. It's now a dream of “staged upgrades”. We're

looking for a better place to live. The simple homes our great grandparents were content to buy and occupy for the rest of their lives, no longer seem to be “good enough”. And as I think of the people I’ve worked with over the years, their dream usually comes to its pinnacle at retirement.

There are those who wished they could have their own farm. But they could never afford it, and so they would save their super and make their investments, so that when they reached retirement age, they could hopefully afford to buy their own tiny farm. And it might not be much bigger than a hobby farm, but at least it was theirs. And it didn’t matter if their house was not much more than a shack – they’d finally achieved their dream.

Then, there were others, who wanted to retire to the coast, or somewhere like Toowoomba... And for them, they’d use some savings to buy themselves a comfortable home, in a better place.

Perhaps:

- *a more friendly climate;*
- *closer to shops;*
- *medical services;*
- *family; and whatnot...*

And then, depending on one’s health, they could ‘live the dream’. They’ve gotten to the better place (on their own little farm / in their comfortable home). They could enjoy the pinnacle for what they’ve striven to achieve, for as long as their health would hold out, or for as long as their superannuation and other investments held out...

And then, maybe (if all goes well) in their late 70's/80's/90's their dream is no longer a dream – it's now a memory.

And what they had **once** dreamed of, is now a burden.

- They now need someone to help them
 - mow the lawn
 - clean their home
 - mend the fences
 - work the cattle...
- Their husband or their wife may have died;
- The kids now have children and **grand**children of their own; and
- so their beautiful home has 3 spare bedrooms, waiting for visitors that never arrive; and
- it's become a place of loneliness...

At some point, many will move to aged care, where a few will find contentment, but many will count it as “loss”...

Their dream “better place” came, they enjoyed it for a bit, and then it was gone... Was it ever as good as they'd dreamed? For some, the dream may never arrive...

Is that the best life has to offer???

For some it is, but in Christ, we have something better in store.

By faith, we know that the whole of this life, is a journey to our final destination. V13 talks about how we are strangers/exiles on this earth – we don't really belong here.

As Disciples of Jesus, we know this, and we acknowledge this. And some may put us down for that (“Oh, that’s just pie in the sky when you die”)... But for us, this is **not** some kind of wishful thinking. We genuinely believe this/look forward to what we **know**, is our true homeland.

And true to the form of Hebrews (the Book of Better Things), we:

- have a better:
 - country
 - homeland
 - destination
 - city

And we:

- rise to a better life

Now, how much that means to us, usually depends on two things.

It depends on:

1. how good things are going for me in **this** life; and
2. what I believe, about what is to come...

You see, if everything’s going good – if:

- my health is good;
- I’m loving my job;
- my family situation is sweet;
- I’m well-off financially:
 - got a nice place to live;
 - nice car;
 - good retirement planned out...

If things are going pretty good, for many, it will take a time of crisis, to make them seriously consider the life that is to come.

But the second factor, is “what do I really believe?”

You see, there are those who suffer. And when we suffer, it is natural to look for something better. And I praise God that He uses that – He uses one’s circumstances for their good. I thank God, that many have been saved through their suffering – In their time of need, they have searched for strength; and hope; and meaning in life, and they’ve found it, and at the same time, they’ve discovered, a God Who truly loves them...

But here in Hebrews, we’re learning that “faith” is so much greater than this. “Faith” isn’t merely an escape-hatch from suffering. For many, “faith” is the **cause** of their earthly suffering...

For many, to remain faithful to Jesus, means that they cop it...

And we see examples of this in Hebrews. We’re given examples of the faithful, and **sometimes** their faith saved their lives:

There’s those:

³³ who through faith conquered kingdoms, enforced justice, obtained promises, stopped the mouths of lions, ³⁴ quenched the power of fire, escaped the edge of the sword, were made strong out of weakness,

became mighty in war, put foreign armies to flight.

³⁵ Women received back their dead by resurrection....

Wow... God did all that, because they had the faith:

- to go where He led;
- to do what He commanded;
- to proclaim what He said...

And some people will claim, “If you have faith like that today, it’ll all be good for you too. Nothing bad will ever happen to you...” ... Seriously...

Have they not read the 2nd half of this???

Because it goes on:

Some were tortured, refusing to accept release, so that they might rise again to a better life. ³⁶ Others suffered mocking and flogging, and even chains and imprisonment. ³⁷ They were stoned, they were sawn in two, they were killed with the sword. They went about in skins of sheep and goats, destitute, afflicted, mistreated— ³⁸ of whom the world was not worthy—wandering about in deserts and mountains, and in dens and caves of the earth.

Why would they do that???

“Faith” isn’t merely an **escape**-hatch from suffering. To choose faith – to live by faith, will sometimes mean, suffering and death, rather than denying their faith....

Why? Because we look forward to something better.

There is a cost to being a Disciple of Jesus. Just over a year ago, we were in Luke 14, where Jesus revealed, the very confronting cost of being His Disciple. The cost, is to put Him first (above all others {even above those you love the most}), and to be prepared to die for Him.

And at the time, Jesus was speaking to people who, if they saw a bloke (under the guard of soldiers), carrying a cross-piece of timber on his shoulder, they knew that he would very soon be nailed **to** that cross. And on that cross, he would die a very drawn-out and excruciating death...

And Jesus said, **Luke 14:(ESV)27 Whoever does not bear his own cross and come after me cannot be my disciple.** They knew exactly what it meant... “If you want to be my disciple, be prepared for a most cruel execution...”

By faith, we crave the better life to come, even if it means we suffer in **this** life... And if you choose to be a Christian (I want to be very clear on this) – being a Christian, is not an easy path... To be a Disciple of Jesus, is to make a commitment to our Lord, “I will take up my cross to follow You. I will never deny You, Jesus. I am even prepared to die, before I do.”

That’s a pretty big commitment, but it all boils down to what we really believe?

This life is short. Are my eyes fixed on this life, along with its pleasures?

Or am I living this earthly life for Jesus, and my eyes are fixed on Him and on the blessing that is to come?

So, let's get to the crux of the matter.... **Faith...**

When it comes to being a Christian, it cannot be a matter of hedging our bets; Nor can it be done out of fear. It has to be about "faith".

Some of you might be old enough to remember the Blood Sweat & Tears song (And when I Die)... It's about wanting to live his life his own way (all freedom. No chains)... And he's quietly confident that when he dies, it's just going to be peaceful. But until he dies, he's not going to know for sure...

"I say there is no heaven, but I pray there is no hell".

So, some hedge their bets... (Out of fear, they hedge their bets). And they show a little bit of interest in religion, just in case...

Now the thing is, if a person doesn't really believe, that's not faith. And so as soon as they come under pressure, will they stand firm with Jesus? No, because they never really wanted Him in the first place....

They're sitting on the fence (just in case), but they're not eagerly waiting for Jesus to come... They certainly don't love Him...

That's not being a Christian. Being a Christian, is a commitment of faith.

In our reading this morning, the word "faith" appeared 29 times.

The end of Chapter 10 introduces the theme of faith:

V³⁸ but my righteous one shall live by faith,
and if he shrinks back,
my soul has no pleasure in him."

V³⁹ But we are not of those who shrink back and are destroyed, but of those who have faith and preserve their souls.

In Chapter 11

V⁶ 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.

So, what is faith?

11 Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen.

Ultimately, it is faith, in who God is...

He is the one true God. There is no other god.
And He is almighty/all-powerful – He is the creator God...

V³ By faith we understand that the universe was created by the word of God, so that what is seen was not made out of things that are visible.

Now, let's focus on this verse for a bit, and the reason we're going to focus on it, is because of an "untruth". It is an "untruth", that is widely circulated, and widely believed today (even by some who claim to be Christians)...

It's the statement that goes something like this:

That creation and the concept of God itself, is something that the ancients had to believe, because they didn't know any better. They didn't have any other explanation of how the world came to be...

But we are not ignorant like they were. With scientific advances, we now know about the Big Bang and Geology and the evolution of the species...

And so now, it's only the ignorant, or an idiot who would ignore all the evidence, to believe in a God and His creation of the universe...

What it's telling us, is it didn't used to take faith. That's simply not true.

The author of this letter to the Hebrews is telling his readers:

³ By faith we understand that the universe was

created by the word of God, so that what is seen was not made out of things that are visible.

The origins of the universe, have **always** been a matter of faith. And they **continue** to be a matter of faith. Even for an **atheist**, it is a matter of faith...

When an atheist wants to put forward their views on the formation of the universe, and how that led to human life, I sometimes say to them, "I admire your faith". I don't have a faith big enough to believe what you believe...

To believe that there was once a piece of super-dense matter, that just happened to exist, and then just happened to explode, and that from this random explosion, I now experience the love of my wife and children and laugh and joke and feel joy/sadness....

I admire your faith, that a massive explosion caused all this,,,, because I've seen explosions... And they tend to cause chaos and confusion, rather than the clockwork of the universe...

And I admire their faith at the concept of life, randomly generated in a swamp...

Even using today's most complex laboratories, it is not yet possible to take a substance that has never lived, and from that substance, form the simplest form of life... And you believe it just happened... I admire your faith.

The fact of the matter, is there are theories/beliefs, but it remains a matter of faith...

I don't generally try to prove to a person that God created the world, because I can't (there is evidence, but I can't prove it)... And that's not a modern thing. It's always been the way. Even for the ancients, it was an article of faith, and it remains for us, "an article of faith"...

And the issue of creation is important, because it drills down to what **kind** of God I believe in...

Do I believe in a God who's some kind of airy-fairy existence, whose relevance is restrained to feelings and philosophical discussions?

Or

do I believe in a God:

- who is active in this world;
- who has power – Who is big enough and powerful enough to create:
 - The universe;
 - This Solar System;
 - The Earth;
 - this life...
- who created man and woman in His own image

And because we are His creation:

- We are precious to Him;
- He loves us;
- He cares for us;

○ His Son died for us..

- Who has the power to raise the dead back to life;
- Who has the authority for justice and mercy;
- Who, because He created this world, He can renew all things

And do we believe, that our God is so powerful, He does all this, at the very mention of His Word. He says it, and it is done.

If we believe this, we believe in the God Who, has the ability and the will:

- to **re**-create;
 - to speak the Word and the dead are raised; and
 - for all things to be made new,
- just as He has promised.

we believe we:

- have a better:
 - country
 - homeland
 - destination
 - city

And we:

- rise to a better life

faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen.

Where are you at?

For you, is “faith” a hedging of the bets (just in case)? Well that ain’t faith.

Or is it a **conviction**? – something we truly believe, yet, not seen...

Maybe, you are just beginning, to draw near to God... and you’re moving toward faith, but you’re not there yet... My word to you, is “Seek Him with all of your heart”...

whoever would draw near to God must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who seek him.

When we genuinely seek God, He will reward us with genuine faith.

We’re going to leave it at that, and we’re going to continue next week.

Let’s pray.

Heavenly Father,

We thank You,

for those who have shown us what faith is like.

And like the words a man once spoke to Jesus,
I believe... Help my unbelief.

Lord, increase our faith, we pray.

Your word says:

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.

Lord, we are seeking You.
Give us faith to believe.

in Jesus' Name,
Amen.

ⁱ <https://immi.homeaffairs.gov.au/amep-subsite/Files/intermediate-housing-housing-worksheet-1-the-great-australian-dream.pdf>