*Introduction*

As one year ends and another begins, God willing, we come to a point where we can look back on what has been, and look forward to what might be.

The main difference to looking back and forward is that when we look back, we are thinking about things that have happened.

Some of these things are good and some bad. For some we look back to family weddings and good family times, or that holiday, or the arrival of a new member of the family and we give thanks to God for all of these.

But the not so good things we look back on such as family or personal illness, or relationship issues, those things we do not give thanks for, in fact we probably ask why? why did God allow that to happen to me?

On a more global note, we have seen the world get worse and worse. We have seen more disasters, more killings, more controversy than ever before.

Despite man making breakthroughs in medicine and technology that make life better, we are also seeing man becoming more barbaric to their fellow man.

And I have to say that we can look forward in 2015 to an even worsening situation.

Don't worry, this is not a doom or gloom message, but a message about living by faith.

I believe that 2015 is a year that needs us to be ready for some rough times. Times that will push us to the very limits.

So we need to make sure our faith is not in 'things' or 'money' but in God through the Lord Jesus Christ and by the power of His Holy Spirit.

As Christians, we are people of faith, or we should be.

But do we really know what faith is?

Let us go to our reading for this morning - HEBREWS 11: 1-10

READ.

We are going to look at two things:

1. What is faith?

2. What is your faith in?

**What is faith?**

Hebrews 11:1 tells us that:

***Now faith is confidence in what we hope for and assurance about what we do not see (NIV)***

***Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen. (KJV)***

This verse tells us two things:

Firstly, faith is something so real that we can have confidence in it, or it has substance. These two words mean the same thing. If we go back to the original Greek we find that this word for confidence or substance is the Greek word *hupostasis,* which literally means *"that which stands under" something else, or "provides the basis for"* something else

This same word - hupostasis is used in Hebrews 1:3

***The Son is the radiance of God’s glory and the exact representation of his being, sustaining all things by his powerful word***

The meaning is that God the Father is the eternal, invisible, underlying reality of which Jesus Christ is the visible expression.

When we apply this meaning to Hebrews 11:1 we may say that Faith is the underlying reality of things hoped for.

Faith is real; faith is substance and we can have confidence.

Secondly this verse tells us that faith is ***assurance about what we do not see (NIV)***

or ***the evidence of things not seen. (KJV)***.

Whatever version of the Bible you want to use, the vital point is that Faith deals with things we cannot see, it relates to the invisible.

Time and time again in Hebrews 11 we see this, Abraham leaving his home to go to another place, Noah building an Ark and so on.

In verse 3 we even get a physics lesson, because the writer believed that the world that he could see was made out of things that he could NOT see (atoms etc).

Our senses want to make us believe in the things we can see, we believe in bricks and mortar, we believe in the heating system being on when it is cold because we see the red light on, the electric or gas meter going round and feel the warmth.

The natural way of thinking is 'Seeing is believing' but that is in opposition to faith.

Paul says:

***2 Cor 5:7 For we live by faith, not by sight.***

Let me give you two examples of believing before seeing, so that you can see that faith is not about what you see but what you believe:

***Psalm 27:13I remain confident of this: I will see the goodness of the Lord in the land of the living.***

***John 11:39-40‘Take away the stone,’ he said. ‘But, Lord,’ said Martha, the sister of the dead man, ‘by this time there is a bad odour, for he has been there four days.’ Then Jesus said, ‘Did I not tell you that if you believe, you will see the glory of God?’***

So faith is about believing and not seeing. So where does that belief come from?

It certainly does not come from the things we go through, and the things we go through - what would they give us faith in?

***Rom 10:17 Consequently, faith comes from hearing the message, and the message is heard through the word about Christ.***

What was the message about Jesus Christ?

Well, simply this,

Jesus is the Son of God, He is God in human form, fully human yet fully God and that he came into this world to save sinners - we are ALL sinners!

That Jesus said:

***John 14:6 Jesus answered, ‘I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.***

The other part of the message from Christ was this:

***John 14:2-3 My Father’s house has many rooms; if that were not so, would I have told you that I am going there to prepare a place for you?***

***And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with me that you also may be where I am.***

Do we believe that?

Paul goes on to say:

***2 Cor 4:17-18For our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all. So we fix our eyes not on what is seen, but on what is unseen, since what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal***

Do we believe this?

***Rom 8:28And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose.***

Do we believe this too?

So to sum up this first point, faith is about believing wholeheartedly in the things you cannot see, the things that God has in store for you, eternal things that can only come through the message of Christ Jesus.

**What is your faith in?**

Many people, you may be one of them, put their faith in what they have. They believe that if they have enough money, everything will be alright, if they have the right qualifications, I'll make it. We are religious, we'll make it!

For some Christians, their faith is in what is to come, their hope is heaven.

But there is more to faith than waiting for heaven and making sure you are going their! One thing is for sure, only a true faith in Christ as Saviour will get you in to heaven.

Faith is also about the present reality.

Paul again says:

***ROM 1:17For in the gospel the righteousness of God is revealed – a righteousness that is by faith from first to last, just as it is written: ‘The righteous will live by faith.***

The word live is an all-inclusive word which includes eating, drinking, sleeping, working and every other activity of life.

Faith should be lived out in every function of our lives.

Faith is not just a future hope but an everyday working out of that hope.

Jesus himself laid down this principle:

***LUKE 16:10-11‘Whoever can be trusted with very little can also be trusted with much, and whoever is dishonest with very little will also be dishonest with much. So if you have not been trustworthy in handling worldly wealth, who will trust you with true riches?***

God is concerned with the way we show faith in the little things.

*Conclusion*

So as we approach a new year, its not a weight-loss programme that you need or a fitness regime, as good and appropriate as they may be, its faith.

It is a faith, not in the things we see around us, not in the changes that will be made, but in God and His word, through Jesus Christ.

Faith is a small word with a big potential.

Let me close by bringing two scripture verses:

***MATT 19:26Jesus looked at them and said, ‘With man this is impossible, but with God all things are possible.’***

We trust or should be trusting in God who can do the impossible. He showed through Jesus that he could feed 5000+ people with only a tiny amount of food, he could walk through walls, he could turn water into wine, and raise the dead.

This is our God - is your faith in Him?

The second verse is this:

***Mark 9:23‘“If you can”?’ said Jesus. ‘Everything is possible for one who believes.’***

Faith is the channel that makes God's possibilities available to us. Through faith, all that is possible to God becomes equally possible to us.

As 2015 approaches, let us go forward in faith. It is faith in Christ Jesus that saves us, and makes us righteous, and the righteous are to 'LIVE' by faith.

Amen