

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. 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.

(Hebrews 11:5-6)

Most of you will know that I am, more-or-less, a lifelong Plymouth Argyle fan – it is a hereditary condition

- I probably first went to a game as a three-year-old and am not sure if I have vague memories of it or not
- I remember a game against Cardiff City in October 1966, not long after my eighth birthday fairly clearly
- And another game against Torquay United on Boxing Day 1969
- Both these games are still fresh in my mind – and I can tell you some significant things about them
- But I had a really good reason to recall them recently when I met the nephew of one of the old players
- When I volunteered that I was an Argyle fan he said, ‘my uncle played for them, have you heard of him?’
- ‘Heard of him? I saw him play! I saw him play against Cardiff City and against Torquay United
- Boxing Day 1969’ – ‘Argyle won 6-0 and he scored four’ (I couldn’t remember the other date)
- It was the same against Cardiff City, Argyle won 7-1 and he scored four
- The nephew was really excited to think that I had seen both of these great games and his uncle score (8)
- Because he had never seen him play – let alone score four goals in a game - but I had ... twice!

Some years ago, on Plymouth Barbican, I met two young girls eating Thai noodles from a box

- First I asked if the noodles were as nice as they looked and when the two girls said they were
- I asked where they came from, only to discover they came from a building I knew as the Bethel Mission
- Inside I realised that it was here, in the theatre upstairs, that I had attended a most memorable service
- I was probably about 12 or 13 years old – the preacher was the fiery Scot, Duncan Campbell

I calculated that over the years, I have been to about 5,200 services

- To be honest, I don't remember very many of them, even in the most general terms
- But I remember a Sunday evening in the Little Theatre at Plymouth with the dodder, Scottish preacher
- Not because he was a great speaker, or because some of the youngsters attending misbehaved
- But because, in some way, the theatre fell silent and I knew we were in the presence of God
- 'The Kingdom of God is not going to be advanced by our churches becoming filled with men
- but by men in our churches becoming filled with God' (Duncan Campbell)
- and here lies the problem – I meet people who tell me that they can be Christians without going to church
- This is an assertion I tend to shy away from these days – because it challenges defective logic, a syllogism
- The syllogism runs like this: A Christian goes to church, I go to church, I am a Christian
- A non-Christian does not go to church, you don't go to church, you are not a Christian
- Someone challenges the syllogism: I can be a Christian without going to church and we cannot defend it

It's the same, of course, when someone says, I don't go to church but I worship God on country walks

- Sometimes I reply – I realise that I could do that but the reality is that, for the most part, I don't
- But a more sophisticated reply is, 'I realise that it is easy to worship God as Creator on a country walk
- But I find it harder to worship God as Saviour on a country walk, what about you?'
- This is not the opportunity for a serious consideration of worship – we easily equate worship with singing
- But I think the Bible teaches that the fundamental thing we should be doing is gathering around the Word
- And that with the purpose of knowing the presence of God – Christian worship formally affirms this
- Anglican worship often includes the bidding, 'the Lord is here' – 'his Spirit is with us'
- The wedding service begins, 'We are gathered in the presence of God', we need what we express formally
- To be the reality of our experience and our Christian worship

I COMING TO GOD

Hebrews 11:2-39 is a section of the great chapter that brackets a prodigious list of great believers

- In this list, we must remember it was not through having great faith that they came to know God
- but through knowing God that they came to have great faith – their God is our God
- Between Abel, Noah and Abraham, of whom we know quite a lot, comes Enoch, of whom we know little
- Jude (14, 15) says Enoch preached about God's coming judgment, information from an Apocryphal book
- Apart from two listings in genealogies (1 Ch. 1:3, Lk. 3:37), the only other mention of Enoch is here
- And his inclusion in a long list of descendants of Adam (Genesis 5) which notes
- After he became the father of Methuselah, Enoch walked faithfully with God 300 years ...
- altogether, Enoch lived a total of 365 years (Gen. 5:22-23), so what happened when he was 65 years old?
- The writer to the Hebrews (11:6) perhaps provides us with a clue:
- 'anyone who comes to him must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who earnestly seek him'

Enoch was the man who walked with God but there was, it seems, a time when the walk began

- Is it too much to think that the responsibilities of parenthood challenged Enoch to come to God for help?
- Did he realise that only by walking with God, relying on him daily, could he set a good example?
- We can only surmise – but one thing is for certain – coming to God in faith is an important event
- And those who would draw near to God must believe two things – his existence and his generosity
- A theoretical belief in an abstract deity is not enough – we must draw near or come to God
- Believing that he exists means a commitment to his presence and involvement in the whole of life
- The verb 'come to him' (proserchomai) can be used for drawing near in worship (10:1)
- Particularly drawing near to God through faith in Jesus Christ, the great High Priest (cf. 7:25)

II SEEKING AFTER GOD

Some years ago, I set myself the task of doing a series of short addresses on Genesis 1-11

- This had seemed like a good idea until I reached Genesis 5, just a long list of how long men lived
- But where the constant refrain is ‘and then he died’ – I likened this to the tolling of a bell (died ... bong!)
- But then comes the startling exception ‘Enoch walked with God; then he was no more,
- because God took him away’ (Gen. 5:24) – Philip Hacking comments, ‘The stranglehold of death
- had been broken in a glorious anticipation of the New Testament resurrection hope.’
- This is one of those occasions where the NT quotes the OT but it does not read the same –
- Hebrews reads, ‘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’ (11:5) this is because Hebrews quotes the LXX
- A Greek translation of the OT that tends to avoid anthropomorphisms – but the impact is still the same
- This is not a “resurrection” but a “translation” – taken to heaven with a physical death
- Only a man of faith, who pleases God, can enjoy close communion with God, from life to life eternal

To seek after God it is necessary to believe in him but also that ‘he rewards those who earnestly seek him’

- The reassurance is given that seeking after God is always successful – but it needs faith to accept this
- ‘You will seek me and find me when you seek me with all your heart’ (Jer. 29:13).
- There are people who seek after God for a specific blessing – but this is seeking after God for himself
- That by faith we may know him and come to trust him just like the men and women of faith here
- That it is not to say that we please God by faith and he rewards us, in fact almost the opposite is true
- It is when we realise that we cannot please God – and as we realise, come to him and seek him
- That this simple trust, this growing faith in the faithfulness of God is rewarded, where hope is rewarded

III WALKING WITH GOD

The simple trust, the growing faith of Enoch in the faithfulness of God is expressed as walking with God

- I am a great dog-lover and like most breeds of dogs, especially collies and rough collies in particular
- Collies are not great retrievers and a walk that includes throwing a ball may include fetching it yourself
- But the one thing they like is to walk with you – so much so that it is pretty common to trip over them
- They really walk with you – walking has to include movement – in a kind of harmony
- When people really walk together, they do so at the same speed, often pretty much in time together
- Enoch is not the only man described as walking with God. Noah walked faithfully with God (Gen. 6:9)
- The prophet Micah gives us an insight into God's desire – 'he has shown you, O mortal, what is good and what does the Lord require of you? To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God.'

The great American pastor and writer of the first half of the last century, A. W. Tozer (1897-1963)

- said that the goal of every Christian should be to 'live in a state of unbroken worship'
- The prophet Amos (3:3) asks, 'Do two walk together unless they have agreed to do so?'
- You do not have to be perfect but you do have to agree on the destination, the pace and so on
- Walking with God means that we choose to glorify him in every way we can, despite the cost
- Like Enoch, who stood out in his generation, a person walking with God stands out in our generation
- A. W. Tozer's more famous writings (*The Pursuit of God* and *The Knowledge of the Holy*)
- Are about the Christian pressing on to a deeper relationship with God – something Tozer himself did
- He lived a simply, gave generously to those in need, he devoted his life to prayer, and Christian service
- When he died his grave was marked with a simple epitaph: 'A. W. Tozer - A Man of God.'
- When Peter and John were arrested – they were recognised as men who had been with Jesus (Acts 4:13)

I think it is fair to say that this kind of teaching, which was ‘Methodism’ in my childhood years

- Is not prevalent in the Methodist Church of today – and has not been for a long time
- We tend to value the people who do the most, who are busiest – and ministers are so grateful for them
- I don’t know if congregations tend to value the ministers who do the most, who are busiest
- I am tempted to think that they do – but God rewards those who walk closely with him, ‘by faith’

Over the years, I have met members (typically men) who say they are not great for prayer but they do things

- The writer to the Hebrews puts it more plainly than we might have confidence to do
- And without faith it is impossible to please God (Heb. 11:6)
- This is the key to the whole chapter that lists great men and women of faith
- There is no substitute for faith – this is not vague ‘credulity’ or even believing lots of things
- It is faith that draws us near to God in worship, that we might walk with him
- It is drawing near to God through faith in Jesus Christ, the great High Priest (cf. 7:25), Jesus
- ‘He is able to save completely those who come to God through him,
- because he always lives to intercede for them’
- ‘He sacrificed for their sins once for all when he offered himself’ (Heb.7:27)
- ‘He did not enter by means of the blood of goats and calves,
- but he entered the Most Holy Place once for all by his own blood (Heb. 9:12) – here is the object of faith
- the writer to the Hebrews does not say that without faith it is difficult to please God
- he says that without faith it is impossible to please him! Faith is the way we believe, receive, accept
- the promises of God. By faith we believe in God’s actions in the past
- by faith we accept his presence now and by faith we have hope in God’s promised actions in the future
- not just believing facts (important though that is) but coming to God, seeking him and walking with him