

EXPOSITION OF HEBREWS

Message #24

Hebrews 11:1-3

I read a story of a man who was about to jump off a bridge to end his life. A policeman pleaded with the man not to jump and made him this offer. He said I want you to take five minutes to tell me your reasons why your life is not worth living, and then I want you to let me take five minutes to tell you why your life is worth living. The officer said if at the end of the ten minutes you still want to jump I'll let you jump. The man stepped down and proceeded to tell him for five minutes how depressing his life had been, and then the policeman took his five minutes to try to convince him life was worth living. At the end of the ten minutes, both men joined hands and both jumped off the bridge.

We live in a world in which people are looking for something worthy to believe. If you cannot believe in something, you have no hope. The most fulfilling object of any faith is the God of the Bible. Life without God and life without faith is meaningless. Take away a person's faith in God and life is a hopeless effort in futility.

Sometimes you will hear someone try to convince someone else that every day is a wonderful day. This is pure nonsense. Not every day is a wonderful day. Some days are miserable days, and what God's people need in those miserable times is the faith to believe and trust God.

We come now to one of the most loved chapters in the entire Bible. Believers of all ages have loved pouring through this chapter, and there is no doubt that it is a chapter that has strengthened the faith of many people.

The book of Hebrews is a book designed not only to exalt Jesus Christ, but to also show that He is the only means by which any sinner may have amazing and direct access to God. We are now in the practical part of the book of Hebrews, which teaches us how to have access to God.

W. H. Griffith Thomas said that in Hebrews 10:22-25 there are three exhortations:

1) Faith (10:22); 2) Hope (10:23); 3) Love (10:24). He said these three virtues are now developed: Hebrews 11 deals with faith; Hebrews 12 deals with hope; and Hebrews 13 deals with love (*Let Us Go On*, p. 140). As we come to Hebrews 11 we come to this point:

THE BELIEVER IN JESUS CHRIST, WHO LIVES LIFE IN CLOSE ACCESS TO GOD, IS ONE WHO WILL LIVE A LIFE OF PATIENT FAITH BASED ON GOD'S WORD REGARDLESS OF CHALLENGES OR CIRCUMSTANCES.

No believer will have any access to God without faith. However, faith is not blind; it is based on the written Word of God. The actual word faith is used 24 times in this chapter (11:1, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 7, 8, 9, 11, 13, 17, 20, 21, 22, 23, 24, 27, 28, 29, 30, 31, 33, 39). The word "faith" (πίστις) refers to what one believes in or trusts in or places his confidence in (G. Abbott Smith, *Greek Lexicon*, p. 362). Dr. C. I. Scofield said "the essence of faith consists in believing and receiving what God has revealed" (*The Scofield Study Bible*, NASV, p. 1685).

H. A. Ironside said that true faith has always believed God's Word, whatever that Word may have been (*Hebrews*, p. 130).

In the immediate context of the book of Hebrews this refers to a faith that holds fast to Jesus Christ for the possibility of drawing near to God and having access to God. It is a faith that exalts Jesus Christ and keeps its focus on the Person and work of Jesus Christ. So this chapter gives us information and illustrations of the kind of faith that lives life in a close access to God way.

Now as we will see, the specific kind of faith that has continual access to God, presented in this chapter, is somewhat of a multi-directional faith. It is a faith that is in God and not the world (11:7, 38); it is a faith that is in the invisible and not the visible (**11:1, 3**); it is a faith that is in the future and not the present (11:13, 20).

We will notice that **Hebrews 11:1** begins with the conjunction "now" (δε), which is a sharp contrasting conjunction that links us back to the preceding context. In sharp contrast to those who turn away from holding fast to Jesus Christ, there are those who stay focused in their faith on Jesus Christ and endure in their faith no matter what happens. As we will see, there are a list of people who kept their faith-focus on God and His revealed future.

Now as we come to this text, there are three main introductory points to this chapter that deals with faith:

INTRODUCTORY FAITH MATTER #1 – The description of what faith is. **11:1**

True faith is not a brainless faith nor is it some sentimental feeling faith. It is a very real faith and a very focused faith.

What is actually given to us in this verse is a description what faith actually is. It is not a specific definition of faith, but it does give us a description of faith: The verb "is" is present tense as are the participles, "hope" and "not seen." **The emphasis of these present tenses is that faith that has access to God and one that draws near to God is a continual faith, not a momentary sporadic faith.**

There are two descriptions given of faith in these verses:

(Description #1) - Faith is the assurance of things hoped for. **11:1a**

The noun "assurance" (υποστασις) is one that refers to a firm confidence or steady assurance in something (G. Abbott-Smith, *Greek Lexicon*, pp. 462-463). Faith is the steady confidence and assurance, the firm conviction of the continual expectation or hope that we have. It isn't specifically stated what the hope is, so we may understand it to refer to everything God has promised us that we have not yet seen or have. Faith continually hopes for and has a firm confidence that God will fulfill all of His promises to those who stay focused on Him. Someone said faith is the ability in the present to believe what God has revealed about the future.

Now of course what we believe is based on the Word of God; so the Word of God becomes a key to our faith, for it is the Word of God that not only develops our faith (faith comes by hearing the Word of God), but it is the Word of God that reveals to us what we should hope for.

The specific context of this is that if we continually keep our faith focused on Jesus Christ and the value of His shed blood, we will not throw away our rewards and we will not shrink back to the place where God finds no pleasure in us at all.

A faith that is near to God is a faith that has a firm confidence in the reality that God will do exactly what He has promised to do. We have been promised an eternal inheritance, and faith is that which keeps focused on that hope.

Faith that lives in close nearness to God is a faith that looks beyond present conditions to future promises.

(Description #2) - Faith is the conviction of things not seen. **11:1b**

The word “conviction” (ελεγχος) is one that refers to something one proves by a test (*Ibid.*, p. 144). It is a conviction that one holds to because it has been tested and proved. The word “things” (πραγματων) refers to various things, matters, actions, deeds (*Ibid.*, p. 375). The kind of faith that is near to God is a tested faith that believes the various things God has revealed in His Word even though one hasn't seen them.

This is somewhat of an odd statement, for typically to actually have a conviction of something and an evidence of something, you must be able to see it. In this case, faith that has access to God is proved by belief in things God has revealed which we have not seen. Faith enables us to have confidence in things we have not or do not see right now. Faith is perpetually operative in believing that which we do not presently see. Faith demonstrates the belief in the existence of a reality one cannot presently see. The closer one is to God, the more one knows the reality of the Word of God just as much as anything he can see, feel, taste, touch, or smell.

For example, in **verse 7**, the specific thing Noah didn't actually see was the wrath of God flooding the world. But his faith was that God would do what he said He would do and he built the boat long before he ever saw the flood. In **verse 11**, Sarah believed God could make her conceive even when there was no other woman she could look to who even came close to having a baby at her age. Faith is the conviction that God will do exactly what He has promised to do.

There are Christians all over this world in Arab countries or China who live and die by their faith and that is all they have to cling to. They certainly do not see God blessing their nations or even them, but they live faithful lives and they believe God's Word and they have a firm conviction about the truth they cannot see. That is the kind of faith that has close access to God.

INTRODUCTORY FAITH MATTER #2 – The testimony of what faith accomplished. 11:2

By means of their faith, “the elders” (οι πρεσβυτεροι) “gained approval” (εμαρτυρηθησαν). The actual word “approval” is one that means that these men of old gained a favorable report or witness. The passive voice of the verb “gain approval” means that these believers were the recipients of the approval. They gained the approval of God.

By actually trusting in God’s Word, even when they did not specifically see what they believed from God’s Word, they gained the approval of God.

As we will see, there were some remarkable demonstrations of this kind of faith, many of which will be mentioned in the subsequent verses. In fact, Hebrews 11 has been called God’s honor roll of faith (H. A. Ironside, p. 130). By a demonstration of this kind of faith, there are a number of believers who gained the approval of God.

Before we move on, let me say that none of those mentioned in this list of Hebrews 11 were perfect people. But all of the people mentioned had a stable faith and they earned the approval of God. Truth is, some that are named here had real lapses in their flesh, but they were certainly those who continued to believe God and His Word.

INTRODUCTORY FAITH MATTER #3 – The beginning of what faith believes. 11:3

Faith begins at the beginning. The starting point in our faith is not something we cannot see, but something we can see, the created world of God. All around us we see the creative genius and power of God in His creation. What we also see is a bunch of “scientific imbeciles” who have speculated on the origin of the universe and have invented their own faith theories. This is not a new debate; this is one that has gone on for thousands of years.

Faith not only continually believes things in the present that God has revealed about the future, but it also continually believes in the present things God has revealed about the past. No one will ever have a faith that pleases God or have access to God until he believes in the fact that God created the heavens and the earth.

Just as His Word said, “In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.” This is a beginning foundational point of theology and it is a beginning foundational point of a faith that has access to God. All of the faith heroes in this chapter started at this point.

The starting point of faith is to believe that all of the things in the universe and all of the ages of time were prepared by the Word of God and God brought them all into existence. He made the world out of nothing. He created it out of nothing. He literally spoke it into existence (Psalm 33:6, 9). In other words, the beginning point of a faith that has access to God is a belief in the God-revealed truth of Genesis 1.

I love what B. F. Westcott said, the world was conceived in the mind of God and then God spoke the world into existence and brought it into His designed limitations of time and space (*The Epistle to the Hebrews*, p. 352).

The word “ages” has more to do than with just the world. What we must believe is that God has everything throughout all of time in His creative genius. He is the One who is in charge of all that exists.

By using the word ages, God is revealing that He controls all of creation and all of the various stages that it goes through in time. It is His universe; it is His creation; it is His time; it is His world and it is His space. He determines what will happen and what He will permit to happen in His universe throughout all of time.

B. F. Westcott said, “By faith we attain to the assurance that the world is not the result of blind fate but answers to an expression of the will of God” (*The Epistle to the Hebrews*, p. 352).

This world did not come into existence by some simple material cause. This universe and all in it did not just occur by some random chance occurrence of tidal disruptions or cataclysmic explosions. Everything has been carefully planned, designed, and made by God and then God spoke it into existence.

Now notice what is stated here - by faith we understand this. By faith we believe this. By faith we know this.

If you are not willing to concede that God is the Creator, you don't even begin to have a faith that will ever have any access to God. If you do not believe that God created the world you can see, how will you believe that Jesus Christ can give you complete access to God when you cannot see it?