

Consider 5/19/19 Steve Harden

Hebrews 11:1-3 “Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen. For by it the people of old received their commendation. 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.”

This is the word of God. We are in week two of our series of Faith that Endures, and I would encourage you as Shelly did earlier to, go to our website, because we'll be reiterating and strengthening what we talk about here on Sundays and we want this emphasis of faith to continue on throughout the week.

So today we return to this subject of faith and we're looking this summer about the role that faith plays in our lives and exploring how we may strengthen and encourage and develop our faith in the faithfulness of our God. And we're looking specifically about how faith helps us to persevere during trials and struggles. It fits right into what the writer of the book of Hebrews is encouraging in his original audience 2,000 years ago. For you see, they were Jewish believers in Rome, and they were facing persecution, they had been for the last fifteen years or so, and they were struggling. They had lost their houses, some of them had been imprisoned, and some of them were saying, “Hey, we didn't have this problem before we came to Christ, when we were just in Judaism. And if it was good enough for our fathers, Abraham, Isaac, Moses, if it was good enough for them, maybe it's good enough for us and we don't have to face this persecution.” Right? There's some rationalization going on, and the preacher says, “You can't do that. Once having seen Christ, you can't go back.”

Faith is what will help you endure the persecution and remain strong. Faith is central, not only in ushering us in to a relationship with Jesus, justification by faith, but it's central in our growth and development as a follower of Christ.

Last week, if you remember, I posed a question for you to consider together, and I'll ask it over and over and over again this summertime. The question is, "What would your life look like if you totally trusted God in every area?" As a congregation, perhaps together, corporately, we can be asking ourselves, what would it look like if we totally trusted God in every area of our lives together? It is not a question that is answered simply and quickly. I think it will take at least the summer to ponder. And I want to explore that with you this summer. I anticipate growing in my faith this summer, and I hope you do as well.

As a reminder, here in chapter 11, the writer will present a series of case studies about what it looks like to have faith, and will show different men and women of the past and what it looked like for them to live out their lives of faith. Now these stories are not simply written to be informative for us, but for us to infer from their story how we are to live. So, let's not just read for historical value, or informative value that says, "Ah well now I know," but these are truths that I can infer in my life of faith from these stories that are given to us. These men and women will act as our guides to teach us.

Now our focus today is verse three that Lauren read, but I want to touch on what we learned last week because it's so foundational in our understanding of faith. Verse one gives us a working definition of what faith looks like and there's two aspects if you remember, faith is the reality of what you hope for in the future, "the assurance of things hoped for." Faith is certain of what is going to happen in the future. The word hope in this context is not simply wishful

thinking. It is not a desire for something in the future that may or may not happen. It is an absolute surety that has been promised will happen.

You see, the Old Testament saints listed here in chapter 11 had nothing but the promises of God to fall back on, nothing but the promises of God to rest on. These promises however, were so real that they based their life on them and made life-altering decisions based simply on the promises of God. If God said it, then they did it. And all these promises dealt with things in the future, mostly things that would happen thousands of years in the future. They saw the promises of God as more reliable than what they saw with their eyes themselves, what they took in with their senses. They trusted more in the promises of God than what they could see before them, with their eyes and their ears. It's very powerful. The unseen reality was more accurate than the seen reality.

For example, God promised Noah that it would rain and flood the earth. So, based on nothing but the word of God, he built a boat for 120 years. With nothing in between, it would seem. But he trusted the word of God. God promised Abram a land and descendants, and he said, "Abram, go!" And Abram said, "Where do I go?" And He said, "I'll get to that later. But you go now." So, he picked up all his family and he left for a place he didn't even know. But see, he trusted the word of God for something in the future, and he said, "This is true."

Secondly, faith is the reality of what you cannot see right now. We see that in "the conviction of things not seen," there in verse 1. Faith acknowledges that there is always going to be things that we don't know. Unseen realities going on right now that we can't see, we can't perceive. We trust in the promises of God even though our emotions are crying out and saying, "No! He can't be trusted. This is what I see. My situation is out of control. There's no hope. I

don't know what to do." But we recognize by faith that God has it in control. Faith calls us to reject our emotions or senses if they negate or are contrary to the promises of God. Paul writes in 2 Corinthians 5:7 "To walk by faith, not by sight." Faith calls us to put all of our eggs in the promises of God basket. Without reservation, without holding anything back, okay? That is the definition of faith. That's what we'll be working with throughout the summer.

So today, we're taking a look at verse three and we'll see in this first case study, introduced by, 'by faith,' the first case study is not a person at all, but rather it's creation. Let me read again verse three: "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." I want to propose one thing for you today. That the key to growing in your faith is to think and consider what you know to be true. One more time, the key to growing in your faith is to think and consider what you know to be true. That's the message, and I'm going to take twenty more minutes to say the very same thing, just so you know.

We're going to look at this case study in two ways. First, the principle set forth, and then how the principle is illustrated. The principle here in regard to creation is that faith is reasonable. Faith is rational. You see, the writer by speaking about creation is encouraging us to think and to reason. He is establishing a pattern that he will use over and over and over again throughout this chapter, he will use it throughout this passage, and we are encouraged not only to hear him speak of the heroes of the faith but to analyze and infer what is true for me in light of what he has written, to apply it to me. To ask in light of what is written, what is rational here? For me? In this case, by faith, what is rational for me when he brings up the subject of the origins of the universe? Of creation? And it's interesting why he does that, because you see, the Jews didn't

have any trouble accepting that God created the world. So in this passage, he's not developing an apologetic for creation versus something else. His audience accepted Genesis 1: "In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth."

By faith, the Jews accepted that this is true based solely upon the word of God. But he is showing them, he is telling them that they've already accepted some things by faith. This is how they operate already, and he is drawing on what they already understand to be true, that past invisible reality of the origins of the universe: creation. In the same way, he says, "You believe that God created the world, believe in other unseen realities, use the same process, use the same implications about faith, as you do about creation." Okay? So that's what we're going to be looking at.

He is encouraging them to think and apply. You see, faith and reason are never opposed. Understand that truth. Faith and reason are never opposed. You are never encouraged to believe and trust and not use your mind and think through what is occurring. Faith is not opposed to thinking. We are called to wrestle with what God has said, and what we know to be true from the word of God, and then act accordingly. Faith is built by thinking, what is true? You see, faith and reason are never antithetical. They're never opposed. Let me ask you, what is the greatest commandment? You shall love the lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind." Mind! We are to engage our minds to believe and to trust, you don't have to check your mind at the door to have faith! And in fact, if you do, you're not growing in Biblical faith.

We believe in objective truth. Something is either true or it is false, but nothing in between. We know that all truth is God's truth, I don't care how you categorize it, whether you

call it science, whether you call it philosophy, whether you call it theology. Truth is truth regardless and it will always be true. So we are encouraged by our God to put every ounce of our intellectual ability into pursuing truth and never be afraid of faith and reason working together. Even in this study of origins!

If you wish to be a person of great faith, and to trust Him in every area of your life, the only way to do that is to think and to ponder, to reason and to trust. That is the only avenue open to you. To look at the world with an eye for truth. And frankly, it's a little counter cultural. Listen to what Norman Cousins says, he says: "Our age is not the age of the meditative man. It's a sprinting, shoving age, daily new antidotes for contemplation spring into being and leap out from our store counters." There is so much in our society that keeps us from just taking the time to meditate and to think. It's easy to scroll, instead of think. I'm guilty. I admit it. I confess. You get a few minutes to think, to consider, to ponder something that's important, and it's a whole lot easier to scroll. Did you know that in this information age, that there is more information in one issue of the Wall Street Journal than Jonathan Edwards had to process in his whole life. Jonathan Edwards was the greatest American theologian that was born here in America, but there is more information in one newspaper, than what he had to process. And so, we have to fight against a lot of things in our culture, just to think and to meditate. You have to be purposeful to ponder and to reason. It's a discipline, and it's so important.

You see, all throughout Scripture we are encouraged to think and to reason, to take what we know to be true and infer it and apply the truth to our lives. I mean, the whole book of Hebrews is talking about why Jesus is better than the old covenant, and the old sacrifices, and the old priests. The writer uses this aspect of think and reason and infer. The Sermon on the Mount,

let me read to you Matthew 6:25: “Therefore I tell you, do not be anxious about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink, nor about your body, what you will put on. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothing? Look at the birds of the air: they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not of more value than they?” Hear the reasoning? “And which of you by being anxious can add a single hour to his span of life? And why are you anxious about clothing? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow: they neither toil nor spin, yet I tell you, even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these. But if God so clothes the grass of the field, which today is alive and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, will he not much more clothe you, O you of little faith?”

Do you hear it? What is he teaching you? You observe the birds, you observe the flowers of the field, you see that. What application, what inference, what implication does that have for you? See He’s teaching us to use our minds! Further, Matthew 7: “Ask, and it will be given to you, seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives, and the one who seeks finds, and the one who knocks it will be opened. Or which one of you, if a son asks him for bread, will he give him a stone? Or if he asks a fish, will he give him a serpent? If you then, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father who is in heaven give good things to those who ask of Him!” Do you hear what he’s saying? He’s saying, this you know to be true, you know you’re not going to give a stone to your boy when he is hungry, you know that. What can you infer about your heavenly Father when you ask Him things? When you ask him to eat? What can you infer about that? See, it’s all throughout Scripture.

Faith is reasonable. Let's look at our case study, creation. Let's take that principle and apply it to creation. There are only two premises about the origin of the universe. The first is that there is no God, so that the universe is a closed system, and has its origin somehow within itself. And the second premise is that there is a God and He created all things. All the theories, all the premises, fit within these two camps. I don't pretend to have studied all the different theories, and my goal is not to go through them and debunk them in some way, that's not what we're here for. I have no interest in spending time with alternate theories. But what I want to do is to show you how faith plays its role here. I think for any premises not including God to be true, there has to be two really high hurdles that they have to cross.

First is the issue of nothing becoming something, and I'm sure many of you are familiar with this principle. But it seems that every naturalist theory simply begins with assuming that something is in existence, and begin their theories from that something becoming something else, right? Something becoming something else. But it makes sense to me that we need to ask where that first something comes from. If there is nothing, and it becomes something, then how does nothing become something?

It's the argument of the first cause. We know that early philosophers all the way back at least to Aristotle and then later Aquinas, spent a lot of time thinking about this first cause. And basically, we're talking about cause and effect, right? One cause making another event happen, which is the effect. Cause and effect, that's the world we live in, right? But every effect has a cause which had another cause, which had another cause, and when you take that all the way back as far as you can go, logically, you'd have to trace it back to something that was the first cause, right? There has to be something that is not an effect of another cause. Something



operating on its own accord that was not ever an effect. You and I would consider that God was that first cause, because without Him, logically, there's nothing that initiates action. How did the universe come into being, from nothing? So, the first hurdle for those who would not accept creation, is the argument from first cause.

The second one that I have to wrap my head around, and that I can't find an answer for apart from God creating the world, is the Second Law of Thermodynamics. Now, I ask you all to be gracious to me, because there's a reason why I'm a pastor and not an engineer, okay? So be gracious to me, I'm going to try. I'm much more comfortable with Murphy's Law, than I am the Second Law of Thermodynamics. You know Murphy's Law, right? If it can go wrong, it will. But the two are kind of related. There's a term called entropy. And it's kind of like Murphy's Law, applied to the entire universe. Entropy means simply that systems tend to move toward disorder, that's the Second Law of Thermodynamics.

Systems tend to move towards disorder and all closed systems tend to gravitate towards entropy. Okay, think about your house. What happens if you don't clean your house for a week? What happens if you don't do your dishes for a week? What happens if you don't do your laundry for a week? Now some of us guys say, "I don't know!" right? "Sounds like a normal week!" But let me ask you, does it tend towards more order or more disorder? What does it take to bring it into order? And I'll ask the women here, because you know, it takes energy, doesn't it? It takes you putting forth energy into this system, to maintain order. The Second Law of Thermodynamics states that overall the entropy of the universe always increases. So if the universe is a closed system, now you understand, a closed system without God inputting into this system, without any external input, you would not expect it to become more orderly, but you

would expect it to become more disorderly. I think you have to deal with that if you're going to try to wrestle with this issue of naturalism and the universe, if God did not create.

But those are just two things that come to mind, I know there are a lot more that you could share with me, and I hope that you will but, what are the implications regarding faith? That's what we're really here for, right? What are the implications regarding our faith? If indeed the world is a closed loop and God did not create it, let me suggest two.

The first is relativism. Everything is relative. If God does not exist and He did not create the universe, then there is no authority that is any more authoritative than anything else. There is no one who can say this is right, and this is wrong. Because if we came into being as a result of just chance, a purely random event, then there is no external standard for morality. If something is right for you, that doesn't make it right for me. If you want to push it farther, where does even the concept of right or wrong come from if there is no God?

Where does happiness come from if we're just chemical reactions occurring? Where does sadness come from? Where does love come from if we're just purely accidents from the universe?

The second implication is just simply despair. If God doesn't exist, and He didn't create the universe, you, my friend, are simply a cosmic accident, congratulations. You're just an accident. There is no purpose or meaning in your life. You were just atoms and molecules that had the good fortune to evolve into a human being and not a monkey, or a snail. There is no purpose or meaning in your life, it really doesn't matter.

You are an accident! You're nothing special. You are utterly insignificant in the role of the world. Your life is not good or bad, it just is. Faith, trust, belief, they're all nonexistent.

There's no purpose or meaning, what will be will be, you might as well do whatever you want. Eat, drink, and be merry because it really doesn't matter. I don't think it's an accident that the death rate of teens has continued to increase, when you tell them that there is no reason for their existence, that they're a random accident, there's no purpose, there's no meaning.

Now understand, these conclusions, or inferences, are not simply mine. This is not a Christian critiquing another person's view. Philosophers and proponents of these closed loop Godless systems say it as well. Thomas Huxley, an early day champion of Darwinism in a lecture entitled "Evolution and Ethics" in 1893, argued that Evolution and ethics are incompatible. He could offer no justification for assuming the validity of morality and ethics on purely naturalistic principles. John Paul Sartre admitted that on the basis of his beliefs, he couldn't say Nazi fascism was wrong. Now, he knew it was wrong, but he admitted that he just had to live in conflict with his beliefs. Which leads me to think if you know your premise is wrong, why not change the premise? But that's another story. They know that in this scenario, there is no meaning or purpose.

So, what is our premise? Our premise is that God exists, and He created the universe. We affirm together Genesis 1:1 "In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth," John 1:1 "In the beginning was the word, and the word was with God and the word was God. He was in the beginning with God and all things were made through Him and without Him was not anything made that was made," and Hebrews 1:1 "Long ago, at many times in many ways, God spoke to our fathers by the prophets, but in these last days he has spoken to us by His Son, whom He appointed the heir of all things, through whom he also created the world. He is the radiance

of the glory of God and the exact imprint of His nature, and He upholds the universe by the word of His power.”

We believe that God created everything, from nothing into something. In our text, what is communicated by the specific words that are used here is not simply that creation exists, that God put creation in order and then sat back and watched it spin. No, rather what he says in this text is that everything is orchestrated perfectly by Him for His pleasure. The universe is beautiful and glorious, it is orderly and perfect. The brushstrokes of the perfect painter are everywhere for everyone to see. “The heavens declare the glory of God, and the sky above proclaims His handiwork, day after day pours out speech and night to night reveals knowledge.” You see, this is our premise.

We believe that God created and now He sustains His universe because His word is true. Every rational thought from a redeemed mind will point us to this truth. The Christian is not afraid to think and to think through the implications of what it means to believe that God created. Let me suggest three, and there are many, but let me suggest three.

If God truly did create the universe, then He is absolute in power. He spoke and nothing became something. That’s powerful. Even the greatest artist has to start with something, they have to start with paint or the canvas, but God didn’t even have that. He spoke it into existence. And now, Jesus upholds the universe by simply the word of His power. No one or nothing can stop God from doing what He wants to do. There is no more powerful being in all of the universe.

Daniel 4:35 “But He does according to His will in the host of heaven, and among the inhabitants of earth and no one can ward off His hand or say to Him, ‘What have you done?’”

There is not one rogue molecule in the whole universe that does not bow its knee to King Jesus and do everything that He commands. So, what is the implication for you? When you are struggling, and you are trying to try to put the pieces together and you have no hope, what do you have to do? When you think that God is absolutely sovereign in His universe, do you see? What are the implications for you? Did this catch Him off guard? Did He see it coming down the path and say, "Oh gee, I wish I could keep that from happening for him!" I hate to be facetious in that but everything, everything comes to us by the power and authority ordained by an absolutely sovereign God.

Secondly, He is infinitely wise. I cannot fathom what it took to create the world in all its detail and its beauty. I cannot fathom the wisdom that it took. It completely boggles my mind that every cause has an effect, and He ordained it to be true from the beginning of time, all the way to right now and through the rest of time. Everything is working together according to His will and His plan; He's got all these things going on, I can't keep my checkbook balanced. And yet, from before time began He had it all worked out in His mind. He is so infinitely wise. Never an error, never anything that had not been planned for or ordained.

And thirdly, He is infinitely good. He is the definition of good. If He created it all, then He gets to choose what's good. And He really didn't have to choose, because goodness is simply a character of His nature. It is His character, it's who He is, and He created the world to reflect who He is, and His character. He is the measure of goodness. He is infinitely good, which means there is no end to His goodness. There is no point beyond Him that is good, that He is not.

Which means, what? That He hates evil with an infinite hatred. If there is a limit to how much He hated evil, that would be the limit of how good He is, do you see? So, in His character He is infinitely good, and He hates evil infinitely, what does that matter for you?

When you are going through trials and struggles, when you are persecuted for righteousness' sake, when somebody who is unfair to you, who does things to you that are not right, and yet, God tells you, "Don't take vengeance," what do you have to fall back on? Do you see? What inferences can you make? Can you not agree that God, the ultimate ruler of the universe, who is all wise and good will see justice done? He will see that justice will reign? That I don't have to get in the middle of it?

You see, if somebody harms me, I'm either going to punish them more than they deserve or less, because I'm just not all that wise. And I'm certainly not that good. What does it mean in the midst of trial and suffering, that you know that He is good and He is wise and He's working everything together, for your good, and His glory? What does that mean to you? Christian, you can fall back on that, you can rest on that. But it takes thinking! It takes rational thought, it takes reasonableness.

What do I know to be true? Do I have a really good Father who would not give me a stone when I ask for bread? Do I not have a really good Father who will not give me a snake when I want a fish? Reason! Think! That's what it means to have faith and trust in Him. If you are to grow in your faith, you simply must think and consider. When I'm tempted to worry, what am I telling myself? What am I listening to? Am I not telling myself that my situation is hopeless? Do I not tell myself, "I just can't handle this, I can't go on." Do I tell myself, "It's never going to be any different"? Do I tell myself that there's not really anyone who understands

or cares, I'm all alone? I think we all can recognize that to some degree. If we are listening to ourselves, that's what we hear.

My friend, don't listen to yourself, preach to yourself. Tell yourself what is true. Fear and anxiety and discouragement all come from not thinking. 2 Corinthians 5:7 says: "Live by faith, not by sight." You see, my sight will bring me fear, because I only see what's visible around me. Sight will kill your faith, because I'm not thinking and seeing everything. Sight is not thinking, it's reactionary. You see, faith is not developed by simply praying for more faith. That's often our approach, right? "God give me more faith! Zap me from heaven with more faith!" It just doesn't work that way.

You know how you grow in your faith? You think! What is true? And when I recognize what is true about my God, then my faith grows. It's only developed by thinking and reasoning and drawing conclusions based on what you know to be true. Now as we work our way through these great verses in this coming chapter, my constant plea to you will be to think, and to ponder, and to consider. If we want to know what our lives could look like if we totally trust Him, we will think. Let's pray.