

Hebrews 11:1-16

By Faith

20171126

By faith we please God when we obediently seek him, trusting his provision for this life and the next.

Introduction:

I want to start this morning by considering two objects. These two objects are a great reminder to me of the depth of what we are attempting to study this morning from Hebrews 11. The first object is this plain glass marble. It is a sphere, it has no faces, no edges, it doesn't attract much attention, because it doesn't really appear to have any depth to it, its character is rather ordinary.

The other object is this beautiful cut diamond. This diamond is a stark contrast to the plain marble, the marble had no sides. The diamond seems to have endless sides. You hold it up to the light and it sparkles and refracts light a certain way, it is brilliant. You turn it just ever so slightly and your eye is rewarded with another scene of beauty. It is multifaceted, deep, and seems like a place of unending treasure to the eye.

As we have been working through this book we have seen the tender loving care of the author for the congregation receiving this letter that they would not turn away from their faith in God through Jesus Christ. They were being tempted to do just this as persecution was increasing, as the cost of adhering to Christianity was increasing. We have been reminded that this happens to us as well.

When difficulties arise, we don't see what good can possibly come through persevering. Our tendency is to switch careers, switch meaningful relationships, switch our place of living, switch our places of worship (that is our churches), all in an effort to build faith, not in God, but in ourselves, our own decision making, our own ability to control life. We want to be pleased and fulfilled but we fail because we look in the wrong places, we look to the wrong things, that includes looking to ourselves. The Bible teaches us that the life worth living is characterized by faith. From this first portion of Hebrews 11 we will learn: **By faith we please God when we obediently seek him, trusting his provision for this life and the next.**

Describing Faith vv1-3

1. Review **Hebrews 10:32-39**
2. If shrinking back and being destroyed is a danger and having faith is the requirement to preserve one's soul; then we are helped along by understanding faith just as the recipients of this letter were helped along.
 - a. An explanation of what faith is. **v1** *"Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for,..."*
 - i. The first thing for us to bear in mind is that faith is a noun, it is possessed. God gives us faith and we are entrusted to use it.
 1. **Heb 10:22-23** *"let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith,..."*
 - ii. If faith belongs to believers as a possession how is it to be used? You might be saying tell me exactly what it is and then maybe I'll know how to better use it, that is when I would smile and reference back to my diamond and my marble and say I'm trying.
 - iii. Faith is understood as being a reliance and trust in God; truly it is the central emphasis of Christianity (LBD).
 - b. With our first verse this morning is reflective of this when we consider the words: *"Now faith is the assurance or the substance of things hoped for,..."*

- i. Assurance or substance here is like a legal document that allows for or effects a transfer of property.
 - 1. **Think about a title to a vehicle.**
 - ii. Things hoped for – is that which we would be confidently and reasonably expectant of a future event.
 - c. The first verse continues from there: “...*the conviction of things not seen.*”
 - i. Convicting in the sense of it will be accomplished even though it has never been seen. I could give you an example of something physical, something we could reason together about and understand, but faith in this sense is unique in that it is in something **not seen**.
3. At this point we follow along the author’s argument in vv2-3.
- a. As a way of preview **v2** “*For by it (that is by faith) the people of old received their...*”
 - i. And as we heard in our scripture reading we know that the people of old are definitely mentioned throughout the remaining verses of this chapter.
 - b. **v3** “*By faith we understand that the universe was created by the word of God,....*”
 - i. The world had to be put together from something. But what we see in scripture is that God created all things, those somethings, from nothing ex nihilo. If faith were based off of what we could reason and recreate this is not where the author of Hebrews would have taken us. The root, the very basis of faith, is grounded in what God alone can do.
 - 1. We begin to exercise faith when we understand that the universe was created by the word of God (**Gen 1:1**).
 - 2. This is exactly why the creation account is under constant attack. Satan wants to erode any basis for faith. If we can’t trust what the Bible says about creation, then what else cannot be trusted in the Bible? **Do you hear the whisper of “Did God actually say?”**
 - a. **I know this is a place of attack a place of doubt. If it is a struggle you have, trusting what God’s word says about creation don’t deny your struggle, make it known. You are not the first one who has worked through it, you are likely to find someone here who would love to share how God revealed truth to them on this subject.**

Transition: Here in these first three verses we see that at the very basis of faith, the object, the possession, we are given by God to walk through this life is a grounding in the trustworthiness of God’s Word... Even if we cannot see it we can believe it, hope in it, cling to the promises for he who gives the gift of faith is faithful to keep his promises. **Heb 10:23** “*Let us hold fast the confession of our hope...*” That is how we take the gift and apply it to our lives. The testimonies of those who have gone before us are evidence of this and are what we will look at next.

Attributes of Applying Faith vv4-7

- 1. As we begin to look at the examples of living “By faith” we will note a pattern. The pattern is repeated, the examples given are not random, the point is being clearly made by the author of Hebrews that once

you receive faith, once you have it, you are to use it. Following this pattern is a good start. The pattern, "By faith" the individual exhibited obedience (did something) and was commended by God.

- a. Let's take a look at this pattern first in Abel. **v4** *"By faith Abel offered to God a more..."*
 - i. You see the pattern? By faith, that is that reliance and trust in God, Abel offered to God an acceptable sacrifice, God commended him for the gift.
 - ii. The outcome of Abel's faith was that he was murdered by his brother. This is where we start to see the author's point, and even the truth we are trying to learn from this passage. **By faith we please God when we obediently seek him, trusting his provision for this life and the next.**
 1. "...though he died, he still speaks." Here we are thousands of years later and the faith of Abel still speaks.
2. Likewise, we see the example of Enoch in **v5** *"By faith Enoch was taken up so that he should...."*
 - a. Here the pattern is observed as before "By faith" Enoch did something, less obvious from this text or from the account given in Genesis, but whatever it was pleased God and in an amazing act God spared Enoch the normal experience of death and took him to be with him. His commendation was realized by God taking him.
3. Although the reason for the commendation of Enoch was not specified, we see a further revealing of truth from the next verse that helps our understanding further. **v6** *"And without faith it is impossible.."*
 - a. The pattern we saw in Abel and Enoch is filled out with this verse. They both received commendations from God. The text states that "By faith" they did what they did allowing them to draw near to God. What we now can deduce is that they also believed that God existed and that he would reward them for seeking him.
 - b. Bringing this now to us, as a church, trying to understand our faith our understanding is expanded. The beauty of faith continues to glitter and expand in its depth. Not only is it a gift given by the one who is called Faithful, it is to be used by us to please him as we draw near to him, believing that he exists, believing that he rewards us when we seek him.
 - i. *Do you appreciate having established patterns from scripture to follow? Do you appreciate creeds and statements of faith that can be spoken and held to? I certainly do. So, we grab ahold of this verse and ascend to believe God exists and that he rewards those who seek him.*
 - ii. *If we struggle with our belief, we cry out as the Publican did, Lord help my unbelief. When we struggle with our current condition, we ask God to sustain us until that time he calls us home, knowing he rewards those who seek him.*
 - c. By these two examples, Abel and Enoch, we see two different outcomes in the temporal but the same eternal outcome.
4. The next example given to us in this passage is that of Noah. His account is also in Genesis, but just a few generations into the earth's existence God is dismayed by his creation as evil has become prevalent. He called Noah to construct an ark, a large seagoing vessel, to act as a shelter from the coming destruction of the world by a divine flood.
 - a. **v7** *"By faith Noah, being warned by God concerning events as yet unseen, in reverent fear..."*
 - b. Noah followed the pattern, "By faith" he obeyed God's command to build an ark and was rewarded by God becoming an heir of righteousness.
 - i. Some statements about Noah from Genesis are as follows:
 1. **Gen 6:8** *"But Noah found favor in the eyes of the LORD."*
 2. **Gen 6:9** *"...Noah was a righteous man, blameless in his generation. Noah walked with God."*
 3. **Gen 6:13** *"God said to Noah, "I have determined to make an end of all flesh, for the earth is filled with violence through them..."* and the command continues

from there detailing the destruction by flood and the instructions for building the ark.

4. **Gen 6:22** *“Noah did this; he did all that God commanded him.”*

- ii. Now that you are reminded of some of what God’s word says about Noah, consider this additional aspect of faith through Noah’s account. The facet of reverent fear.
 - 1. v7 says Noah in reverent fear constructed an ark, that is in showing fitting and proper respect to God he did as the Lord commanded. Despite what would have been under constant ridicule during the time of construction, despite never having seen such a flood as described by God, Noah “By faith” obeyed God’s command.
- c. Also recorded in this verse is the sentence *“By this he condemned the world...”* Church this may be an aspect of our faith we don’t understand and probably don’t fully appreciate. When we live for the Lord we will invariably have an impact on those who are not living for him.
 - i. If we listen to their words, they may even be so bold as to say, “stop judging me, or don’t condemn me.” This has happened to me a few times over the years and I have often been taken back by it knowing I haven’t said a word, but as we discussed this idea Wednesday as elders Ben brought up **John 3:16-18**

Transition: We learn from such examples as Abel, Enoch, and Noah how to take the faith entrusted to us and by that same faith live obediently in accordance with God’s word. He is pleased we are provided for, even rewarded, if not in this life in the next. Abraham is who we turn to next, and it is for this very reason the author takes us to the Patriarch Abraham, he understood a future reward and was commended for it.

Realizing the Rewards of Faith vv8-13

1. If v6 reminds us that we are to **believe that God exists** AND the **he rewards those who seek him** we would look at the examples so far and see how that is true, but we still have much to learn about God’s rewards for those who are considered seekers of him. To the original audience of this epistle, a Hebrew congregation, they would be ready to hear about the father of their people, Abraham.
 - a. As we look now to Abraham I want to ask a question to those of us gathered here. **How many were born and raised in the Hood River Valley and have stayed here since the time of your birth? Just really some of the young children in the congregation and that is it!**
2. **v8** *“By faith Abraham obeyed when he was called to go out to a place that he was to receive...”*
 - a. **Do you see why I asked the question? Although we have not all exercised faith like Abraham, we know what it is like to move away from what we have known, from the familiar, even distancing ourselves from loved ones.**
 - b. This was what started Abraham down the path that allowed him to become known as a man of faith. He took a step. He moved when God told him to go to a new land.
 - c. **Now I want to turn my attention to those who are most likely to move again, it really could be any of us, but most likely the children here amongst us. You will likely find a time in the not too distant future when you are feeling the urge to move out of the valley.**
 - i. **This can be done faithfully or it can be done unfaithfully. Why would you move? God may lead you to pursue school, a career, maybe a spouse, a ministry, or a tour of duty in the armed forces.**
 - ii. **All of those things I just listed can be pursued faithfully, trusting God as he prepares you for the future, patiently putting in the time needed to develop skills, or develop the knowledge to be successful.**
 - iii. **Those pursuits could also be done unfaithfully. If you are using those opportunities as a means to an end that God is not directing you in. Or you are going begrudgingly always looking to return here to the valley of your youth, never satisfied elsewhere because you**

are always comparing that place with this or you are missing family too much to engage in the community God has you residing in.

- iv. You would be wise to consider father Abraham and why God saw him as righteous. He went out by faith. He lived by faith. He never personally realized the promise, but that did not cause him to run back to Ur. He trusted God with his life and with those of his descendants, "...having seen them and greeted them from afar."
- 3. **v9** "By faith he went to live in the land of promise, as in a foreign land, living in tents..."
 - a. Abraham did not hold back, he embraced that God had a plan for his life.
 - b. But that doesn't mean he didn't have doubts. When Abraham had doubts do you remember what God did to encourage him? He appealed to his creation, much the same way he appealed to his creation when encouraging Job. Church we have the same window to encouragement if we would only look out it.
 - i. God tells Abraham to count the stars if he is able! Harkening back to the first part of the book **Heb 1:2** speaks of God creating the world and earlier in this chapter **Heb 11:3** "By faith we understand that the universe was created by the word of God,..."
 - c. Are you concerned as I am, about our lack of attention to what God has provided us with so readily to observe his magnificence – that being through his creation? Consider the hilltops, the wind, a rushing river, or as mentioned the stars. Carefully consider them. It is hard for us to do that because we do not control those things the way we do our rectangular devices. What I speak of is often the window we are using to look through, but it is often a deceptive window because we control what we take in through that portal. We exhibit a level of control that is foreign to the way God created us to experience him, his creation, and each other. Let me ask you this, which time were you more amazed by God: the last time you spent an hour gazing into the night sky or the last time you spent an hour on your smart phone?
- 4. As Abraham was living in a foreign land and in tents and after him Isaac and Jacob as heirs of the same promise **v10** says, "For he was looking forward to the city that has foundations, whose designer..."
 - a. He was looking for what only God could provide, that city, although he may not have known where it was, he believed God would take him there some day.
 - b. Already his descendants, Isaac and Jacob, are here mentioned, but they were not possible apart from his wife Sarah. **v11** "By faith Sarah herself received power to conceive, even when..."
 - i. You might be thinking, but didn't she laugh at the idea? Yes, initially she did, but here we have recorded that some power was given to her to conceive because of the faithfulness of the one who made the promise.
- 5. **v12** records, "Therefore from one man, and him as good as dead, were born descendants..."
 - a. Using the language of the promise to describe what God accomplished on the behalf of his servants, those servants who exercised faith.

Transition: Realizing the rewards of faith for Abraham and Sarah would seem like a foolish tale if it was told at the very end of their lives, just think how God called him father of a multitude at the time when he died that seems like a laughable name. But by faith and over time what do we say now? We are blessed to be grafted into that family tree, are we not? The author of Hebrews is driving home a point that the temporal blessings of this life are far outweighed by the eternal reward of heaven. That is where we turn our attention now, living for eternal reward.

Living for Eternal Rewards vv13-16

- 1. **v13** "These all died in faith, not having received the things promised, but having seen them...."
 - a. These all had one thing in common (well except Enoch), they all died. They were all strangers and exiles on the earth. This is something we so easily lose sight of.
 - b. C.S. Lewis in Mere Christianity "If you read history you will find that the Christians who did most for the present world were just those who thought most of the next. The Apostles themselves, who set on foot the conversion of the Roman Empire, the great men who built the Middle Ages,

the English Evangelicals who abolished the Slave Trade, all left their mark on Earth, precisely **because their minds were occupied with Heaven**. It is since Christians have largely ceased to think of the other world that they have become so ineffective in this."

- i. How do we go about getting our focus back on heaven? I think one place we start is with our tongue, and refining the way we speak. I get this idea from the next verse.
- c. **v14** "For people who speak thus make it clear that they are seeking a homeland."
 - i. What was it they spoke? That they were strangers and exiles on the earth, that they were looking forward to receiving the promises of God.
 - ii. A funny thing about the way we speak, when we claim something we begin to abide by it, others come to expect it, we are then further strengthened in our convictions and our beliefs. However, when we are **silent** about what we believe, we find a different path, one where it is easier and easier to stay quiet in the face of persecution. When someone begins to smear the reputation of Christians or use the name of the Lord irreverently. Our resolve is not strengthened in this way. Our focus on heaven is not maintained.
- d. The next verse we cover contains validation for the bold and faithful and a warning for the timid and fainthearted. **v15** "If they had been thinking of that land from which...."
 - i. Brothers and Sisters, we need to be strengthened in our faith, **speaking of our future reward to one another does a faith strengthening work**. We have all been brought out of a life of servitude to the flesh if we have been saved by the blood of Christ, we have a new life, we have a future reward, no matter what the consequences might be here and now our future reward motivates us to continue living for Christ.
 - ii. Hear the warning that is embedded in this verse. **The life of sin we were once enslaved to had fleeting pleasures associated with it. For some of us that was physical pleasure, maybe chemically induced pleasures - such as those that come from the abuse of alcohol and drugs, and the list goes on from there. The point is we are not to entertain thoughts of returning to that previous land. If you find yourself frequently dreaming of the pleasures you had before coming to Christ, or are even experimenting with some of those pleasures now...beware lest you have an opportunity to return.**
- e. No, as believers we have what is better when we live by faith. **v16** "But as it is, they desire..."
 - i. I read earlier of the problem outlined in C.S. Lewis' book about shifting our gaze off of heaven, which is really a problem for mainly Western Christianity. For the persecuted church this sermon would probably seem silly to their ears. But we need to be preparing for such a time. God has us in Hebrews for a reason, it is a good book of preparation as we consider the possibility of increased persecution.
 - ii. Our reward is an eternal reward, our eyes are firmly fixed upon our Lord who has been preparing for us that eternal reward with him.

Conclusion:

I will conclude by saying we still have a great deal to cover in this chapter, and Seth will pick up next week in v17. But this whole chapter is being used by the Lord to teach us about faith, the faith described in the end of chapter 10 that is desperately needed, **v39** "But we are not of those who shrink back and are destroyed, but of those who have faith and preserve their souls." That is why we need this chapter, and all the encouragement that can be gleaned from it, including an understanding of what faith is. The beautiful multifaceted object that is entrusted to us as believers. We need to understand the attributes of how it is applied, even being familiar with the pattern of "By faith" doing something of obedience in order to seek God who in his goodness rewards us. Those rewards are most definitely realized now, but more importantly they are being treasured up as rewards that will be yet future, eternal rewards. This is all in an effort to build up our endurance as believers, just as the believers who received the original epistle needed to be built up in their endurance. Chapter 11, in its entirety, is helping us to lay aside those sins that hinder us from running our race with endurance. By God's

grace we are learning wonderful truths from this book. Such as the truth we learned today. **By faith we please God when we obediently seek him, trusting his provision for this life and the next.**

Family

Table Talk



November 26, 2017

GOD'S TRUTH

By faith we please God when we obediently seek him, trusting his provision for this life and the next.

Family Discussion

1. It is important, that as a people of faith, we are able to describe what faith is. Have you ever tried to understand what it means to have faith? Could you explain it to someone?
2. With the ability to understand faith we quickly realize it is also to be put to use. Read through the accounts of Abel, Enoch, and Noah in Hebrews 11. Did you notice a repeated pattern when reading those accounts? It appears to be a pattern that represents a way of life. Have you exhibited this pattern in your life?
3. One thing you may notice in school, or in life, the more you talk about something the more you learn about it. Talking, in this way, is helpful. When the detail is learned it becomes easier to articulate, if it is important for life it is also easier to resolve to do it. Think about a memory verse, perhaps a multiplication table, maybe spelling words, does thinking of those items compel you to speak about them? This is true of faith as well and the rewards that come by our faith in Jesus Christ. Can you speak about these rewards as a family? As God's people our future looks very bright!



Key Verse

"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."

Hebrews 11:6

TABLE READING

Lead your kids into
God's Word...

1. Hebrews 11:1, Galatians 2:16, Matthew 7:21-27
2. Hebrews 11:4-5,7, Ephesians 2:10
3. 2 Corinthians 4:13-15, Hebrews 11:13-14

Scripture Memory: Hebrews 11:1-2

"AND THESE WORDS THAT I COMMAND YOU TODAY SHALL BE ON YOUR HEART. YOU SHALL TEACH THEM DILIGENTLY TO YOUR CHILDREN, AND SHALL TALK OF THEM WHEN YOU SIT IN YOUR HOUSE, AND WHEN YOU WALK BY THE WAY, AND WHEN YOU LIE DOWN, AND WHEN YOU RISE. YOU SHALL BIND THEM AS A SIGN ON YOUR HAND, AND THEY SHALL BE AS FRONTLETS BETWEEN YOUR EYES. YOU SHALL WRITE THEM ON THE DOORPOSTS OF YOUR HOUSE AND ON YOUR GATES." - DEUTERONOMY 6:6-9 (ESV)