

Faith That God Is Not Ashamed Of

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Date: 24 August 2025

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[0 : 00] I want to ask the question tonight, what does faith in God, faith in Jesus Christ in Jesus Christ! How does faith in God, faith in Jesus Christ in Jesus Christ?

! How does this faith unfold and express itself in the life of a believer? As we live our lives out, as we go about our daily lives, as everything that happens in our life, how does this faith, in fact, express itself? How does it show itself as a mark that is distinctive and different from those who do not have faith? As I mentioned at the beginning, the particular letter, this letter of Hebrews was written because several of those in its Christian community were showing signs of giving up on their faith in Jesus Christ so much that the letter as a whole could be seen as an appeal to those Hebrew Christians to preserve in the faith that they once subscribed to. The opening verse gives a description of faith, while the gallery shows faith in real people's lives. And the summary in verses 13 to 16, which we'll be looking at as the sermon, the summary shows some of the essential characteristics of a real and living Christian faith.

You'll notice that I said the opening statement in Hebrews is a description because I believe it's not a definition of faith. That is to say, it's not an abstract or theological definition of faith. If you think about it, faith is the assurance, one's assurance of things hoped for, and one's conviction, personal conviction, inner conviction or confidence of things not seen. What we have here is psychological language rather than theological language. And therefore, what we have really is a description of the phenomenon of faith. I nearly said the phenomenology because when I did philosophy, it was a word that I utterly loved.

What exactly is faith? And this is what it is in people who have living faith. Forget the abstract, forget the theological, forget the intellectual way that you could perhaps break down faith into three ingredients and all the rest of it. But this is what it is as a psychological reality.

It's something that issues in people's confidence and people's assurance. Jesus once said, if you have faith as a grain of mustard seed. And by that statement, I think, he's letting us see that there's something that is much more important than the actual quantity of faith you have or indeed even its quality. And that's something that's more important as he whom your faith is in.

[4 : 10] It is because we have come to recognize that God can be trusted completely and relied upon because of his character, because of his faithfulness, because of his integrity, because of his righteousness, because of his holiness. That is the secret of our faith.

So, we're not, when we talk about Christians that have faith, some people have said to me throughout my 50 odd years of being a Christian, oh, it's all right for you, you've got faith, I don't. They've made a mistake there. And the reason they've made a mistake is because that faith that I have never issued from me anyway in the first place, faith is a gift of God.

And it's not so much the quality or quantity of my faith, it's who that faith is in. It's when we see the glory of God, when we see his righteousness and his holiness, when we see his absolute reliability and trustworthiness. Colin, I think, recently quoted that great, these great words in John 14, when Jesus said, you believe in God, believe also in me. So, this faith that he's talking about is a description of the mental state, in a way, the state of the heart of those who have this faith. And the point is, what's much more important is the object of the faith, the God in whom that faith is directed towards.

So, I want to look at some of its central characteristics, as I said, in these verses, because this is a summary at verse 13. It's a summary of, so far, what he's been saying.

[6 : 18] These all died in faith, not having received the things promised. Something I did mean to say, and I'll just bring it now, I want you to notice the kind of things that faith trades in. I want you to notice that, and that's back to chapter 11.1.

It trades in things hoped for, and it trades in things not seen. That's what it does. As Paul put it somewhere, you don't hope for something that you already have.

I'm going to suggest to you in this summary, there are four central characteristics of this description and phenomenon of Christian faith in the believer. They are faith unto death, faith into the future, faith and identity, and faith and fulfillment. Firstly then, faith unto death, verse 13a. These all died in faith.

faith. Every single one of them, the writer says, not only began their pilgrimage with faith, but they ended it with faith. As we must live believing, so we must die believing.

Jesus said, he that endures unto the end, the same will be saved. The critical evidence of authentic faith is its perseverance to the end.

[8 : 38] These all died in faith. Now, of course, that doesn't mean that your faith will wobble.

The faith of the people in Hebrews was wobbling. That doesn't mean that you might not go through periods of doubt, as I most certainly have. Indeed, sometimes I can only describe my faith as, I believe, help my unbelief. That doesn't mean that you will be flying in the crest of the top of the mountain all time, all the time. But it means this, that your faith, whether it's as a grain of mustard seed, will be unto death.

There'll be many bumps and potholes on the road. We will go through many of the psalms of questioning and complaint. Why are you so far from hearing me, O God?

Why are you allowing this to happen and continue to happen? Are there not times when you have said, Lord, I believe, help my unbelief?

I was going to say you were in good company, but it's because I said that. I don't mean it that way. But our perseverance is surely matched by God's preserving grace.

[10 : 31] Jesus could say to Peter, I have prayed for you that your faith fail not. I don't know if there's anybody here who's wobbling in their faith. I can't read your mind or your heart and I don't know what's going on in your life. But I know you're a human being like I am. And I know sometimes it can look as as if everything is going pretty rosy and there can be a storm inside.

Take this as an encouragement. Jesus, I believe, has not only said to Peter, that Jesus has said, I have prayed for you that your faith fails not. Because I'll tell you, if my faith is unto the end, it won't be anything to do with my resilience. It will be do with the utter and sheer grace of God. The DNA of faith of Christians is this, that it perseveres to the end.

If it doesn't have that DNA of perseverance to the end, it will not be real faith. Notice they did not receive the things promised. Isn't that amazing? Isn't that utterly amazing?

They were promised land. They were promised a progeny that would be as many as the stars of the sands and the seashore. And they never received any of these promises.

Not one. And you know, let's be honest, Christian brothers and sisters, there's an awful lot that we don't receive either.

[13 : 11] I will make a new heavens and a new earth. Sometimes, Lord, I wish you'd hurry up and make it. I would love the Lord Jesus, our hearts might say, to come. Come, Lord Jesus, come.

Some people in the New Testament were saying, where is the promise of His coming? Now, think of this. The people that said that might have been probably at the most 30 years since Jesus had risen and had been exalted. We are nearly two millenniums and 30 years.

Oh, we know, it's easy to quote, but with the Lord is a thousand years. But that's not the time level that we eke out our lives in.

Christian faith is a faith that perseveres to the end. What about this faith that sees into the future? Christian faith sees into the future of unrealized promises of God, enabling Christians to see and welcome or embrace them from a distance.

[14 : 53] Now, in our Bibles, you'll see the comma, at least there's a comma in this one, after the word promise, not having received the things promised. And then there's the word but. But in the original language, that but, there's a few words that the Greek can use for but. And the particular word that it uses is a word that stands for emphasis and also contrast.

So, what he's saying here is, on the one hand, although they never received anything, but they saw them somehow or other. They've seen them from a distance, from afar.

So, what does this mean? I think it means something like this.

Because they so trusted in God and his reliability and trustworthiness, even although he had made promises to them and to us that will not be fulfilled in our lifetime. For instance, every person that

dies has never got that spiritual body. Even though they will not be fulfilled in our lifetime unless, of course, Christ comes.

They received them through their faith into their hearts and minds. They exercised power in their hearts and minds.

[16 : 53] They inspired them. They affected them in their day-to-day experience. This seeing things of the future, this faith that has this ability to see those things in the future, were actually determined, were actually determined, were determined, were determined, were determined, for conduct in the present. Isn't that remarkable?

I was taking the service in Helensboro this morning, and as we were over dinner, somebody told me the story about, this priest was talking to this reformed person, and they said to the, the reformed person said to the priest, what do you think of us guys, reformed guys? And they said, you're okay in relation to the foundation and beginning of salvation, but you're not very good to talk about after that.

And I actually believe there's something in that myself, and I've believed that for quite some time now. And if you think that those early Christians were powerfully affected by something they hadn't seen, the coming of Christ, the belief in that coming, the longing for that coming.

And, you know, I want to say, and actually it's in this book of Hebrews, getting saved in repentance and faith and your sins forgiven, that's only the first rung in the ladder of a brilliant and stupendous salvation.

We were on the transfiguration this morning, and we got to the bit about Elijah and Moses.

[19 : 03] But I think it's in Luke's gospel, it's in either Matthew, Mark or Luke, but I was flitting between the three gospels because there's different things in these gospels that are of great interest.

E.g., Luke says, as he prayed, he was transfigured. But I'm not going to minister on that. I ministered on it this morning. But, yeah, so, where was I now?

Yeah. Anyway, things in the future become determinative, and that's where I was. Elijah and Moses, I think it's Luke that tells us, were seen in glory, in their glorious, final, redemptive, if you like, state, as people that had already been to heaven.

And that's what that, in that transfiguration story, it tells us. Not only was Jesus seen, at least, in his partial, essential glory, but Elijah and Moses were seen in that glory.

The eye has not seen, nor the ear heard, but the Lord has prepared for us in heaven. I wonder, are we missing out on something that we could be fixing our eyes on the wonder of what's ahead of us as well as what we have just now?

[20 : 43] And could that make, because you see the language that he uses here. He says, but having seen them and greeted them, another translation says, embrace them.

Totally embrace them. Or are we so earthbound and so stressed with being earthbound and everything that that implies that we never think of the glory that's ahead of us?

You know, Abraham is amazing, isn't he? Paul tells us in Romans about Abraham.

And this is the phrase that I absolutely love. Against all hope, Abraham in hope, guess what?

Believed God. In other words, Abraham looked round at his world and he looked at the potentialities and possibilities with his human eyes, so to speak, that were possibilities from that world.

[22 : 00] And guess what? It was zilch. And yet, in the midst of that total hopelessness, he still had hope in God.

Why did he have hope in God? because he could see further than normal human sight sees. What about you and me?

how's our eyesight? How's our eyesight? I was thinking recently, I have always had barifocals and there's a, you know, you can be short-sighted or long-sighted, but when I was reading this, boy, at least this is long-sighted, seeing afar.

But that's what faith and a grasp, that's why theology is important, that's why learning about God is important, that's why taking in the revelation about him in the Bible is so important.

It's that that will anchor our faith and make it stronger and stronger. Okay. So, we've looked, we've looked at what, faith unto death and we've also looked at faith seeing into the future.

[23 : 32] Thirdly, I want to look at faith and confession or identity. Well, it says, doesn't it, in this, and having acknowledged that they were strangers and exiles, on the earth.

Now, I was checking that word acknowledged and it's a word that tends to point to publicly acknowledging.

And it's not just talking about, now we've recited a few words here, it's talking about my lifestyle, my trajectory of living, my values, my priorities, that, that, that walk, as somebody used to say when I worked in the NHS and I went to these conferences, everybody seemed to be saying, walk, get you up out of bed in the morning.

Listen, when I was converted, I had been the lead vocalist of a heavy rock band and I had pretty long hair. I mean, even my granny used to say, I love these waves in your hair, David, they're gone now.

and the pastor had some funny ideas in the shops that I was in and he, in fact, the story is that I was walking home with one of the elders one night and I was a young Christian, just a baby Christian and I never came from a Christian home.

[25 : 23] We had never read the Bible, looked at a Bible, had a Bible, been to Sunday school, anything like that. I came from absolutely nowhere and he said to me, now after I became a Christian, just elders walking me home, he says, do you know that the Bible says you shouldn't have long hair?

I says, no. I says, you're kidding. I says, go home and read it, it's in Corinthians. They're David and that was the Bible that I first learned.

It's a great Bible in many ways, it's majestic in its language and poetic ability. Anyway, so I thought, hopefully this guy's wrong, so I went home, looked at, doth not even nature itself teach you that if a man has long hair, it is a shame unto him.

So, I wrestled for months after that as a young Christian wanting to do the right thing and please God and all this sort of stuff and eventually up in Wick, we had friends up in Wick, I went into this barber and he says, what can I do for you?

I says, take the lot off and he said, why? What's going on? And I looked up at him and I says, God told me. So, yeah, confession and identity.

[27 : 10] This means two things, does it not? When we read here that strangers and exiles, it means that this world is our temporary place.

It's not our place by any stretch of the imagination of ultimate belonging. It's our temporary accommodation, and that this world is not our home.

You know that lovely Negro spiritual I think it is, this world is not my home, I'm just a passing through. My treasures are laid up somewhere beyond the blue. Way beyond the blue in heaven's glory land, oh, I can't feel at home in this world anymore.

Our true home and belonging is with our risen and exalted Savior. Did he not pray Father, I pray that they shall be with me. This, of course, does not mean that we despise and don't care about the earth, the planet.

Paul tells us that even the creation itself is looking forward to being included in the renewal along with the people of God in the new heavens and the new earth wherein dwells righteousness.

[28 : 33] I mean, there's two things right away. This maybe sounds a wee bit contradictory. This universe is going to be history as we know it right now because he's going to make a new heavens and a new earth wherein dwells righteousness.

righteousness. Look, I did history at university for a couple of years. It wasn't my main subject, but historians will tell you of the ugliness of our history as human beings.

The greatest predators ever on the planet. Pretty good at slaughter and killing. I know that's not all we're good at.

There is great things being done. But the shifts in history, the power shifts, mostly are the result of wars and rumors of wars.

the earth is the Lord's and the fullness thereof. If anyone should care about neglecting or harming the environment, it ought to be Christians.

[29 : 50] Having said that, we look for a new heavens and a new earth. Is this our confession?

Would people know by our lifestyle that we're putting our roots down somewhere other than this earth? Are we building spiritual or secular roots for ourselves?

What fires us? What gets us out of bed in the morning? What's important to us? We know what's important to us, don't we, depending on how much we focus on something and how much time we give it.

And strangers and exiles is not thinking of anonymity or hiddenness, but as I said a moment ago, it points to a public lifestyle.

what is it that that being a stranger and exile shows?

[31 : 15] What can people notice that we are indeed people who know that we're strangers and exiles?

Well, he tells us, he says, for people who speak thus, that we're strangers and exiles, make it clear, make it clear, that they're seeking a homeland.

That particular word, by the way, homeland in Greek, means fatherland, homeland, from the German. They make it clear, they're seeking a homeland.

If they had been thinking of that land from which they had gone out, they would have had opportunity to return. Their ultimate longing is for a heavenly final destination.

salvation. And isn't that remarkable that in this summary, that the writer suggests that these people that he's writing about, in verse 16, desire a better country that is a heavenly one.

[32 : 36] In other words, they were looking even beyond the temporal blessings, the land, and everything that that suggests. they somehow or other had this insight that the thing that they were really pilgrimage, pilgriming towards, was a heavenly thing.

God. We finish with this last point.

Therefore, says the writer in this summary, God is not ashamed to be called their God, for he has prepared for them a city.

Well, we've been talking tonight about the need for perseverance unto death. God's love. But like most Christian truths, there's a human side which we call perseverance and the divine side which we call preservation.

And it's God's preservation of faith that enables us to have faith unto death. Both, of course, are required. How he does it is by us being persevering.

[34 : 02] It's our longing, our confession, our desire, but God's grace is in the preservation of our faith as it is in every aspect of our salvation.

Did not Jesus say in John 10, I give unto them eternal life and they shall never perish? Does not Paul say in Philippians he that has begun a good work and you will perfect it?

Perhaps we don't think enough, as I've said, about how thrilled God is as our Redeemer regarding our faith.

About how he is pleased with the faith of all his people and how he has prepared something mind-bogglingly called here a city.

As our eternal inheritance, I go to prepare a place for you, said Jesus, and if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again to take you to be with me forever and ever in exquisite eternal pleasure and delight.

[35 : 18] far from being ashamed to be called our God, maybe sometimes we feel maybe God's almost ashamed that I'm such a poor Christian and I keep having to ask for forgiveness, I keep doing the same things all the time, I make pledges and so on and they never work out.

Well, one of the things that encourages me, remember, was it Peter, he said, how often should I forgive my brother? Seven times maybe?

Or sister? And what was the answer? Something like seventy signs, seven, in other words, it's a euphemism for always, always, always. now, if that is what we're meant to do, God never runs out of the will to forgive us and he is never and will never be ashamed of all those who will persevere to the end.

How is your faith tonight then? How is my faith hopefully not drifting away even in a small measure as our faith oriented to the heavenly fatherland and stretching forward with a faith not only to live for but to die with.

May it be so for every one of us tonight. Amen. Amen. Thank you.