

"Why we keep believing"

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 01 February 2026

Preacher: Jim McAlpine

[0:00] Lord, we pray we may hear you speaking to us through your word. Quiet in our hearts, calm our minds, that we may listen to your still small voice.

! In Jesus' name, amen. There are lots of things that Christians do that can only be explained because we believe in heaven.

And therein lies the problem. We believe in a place that we can't see, can't feel, touch, or otherwise apprehend using our five senses.

Heaven, by definition, lies beyond the veil of the visible, the seen, the untouchable, the tangible, the extremely real-to-us world.

And since this world is the only world we're sure of, then how can we say or believe or imagine that there's another world out there somewhere, somewhere beyond the horizon or beyond the sunset?

[1:13] How do we know there is a heaven? If we look at verses 13 to 16 of our reading from Hebrews, we quickly see that it appears in this chapter as if the writer in the previous verses, 4 to 12, has been extolling the faith virtues of Abel, Enoch, Noah, who we mentioned earlier, Abraham and Sarah.

And then suddenly thinks to himself, people will never believe this, so I better explain it. The writer wants us to consider why certain people do what they do.

That is why they decide to live in a way that seems radically different from the rest of the world. We go back to Hebrews 10, 32, we find a description of the early days of the church when new believers encountered enormous hardships because of their faith.

They remained faithful in spite of terrible suffering. They were exposed to public ridicule. They were persecuted. They helped others who suffered the same way.

They showed sympathy to those thrown in jail. They lost all they had. But then what? Chapter 10, verse 34, tells us they accepted it with joy.

[2:44] That's the hard part. The accepting all of this with joy. Imagine going through some of those things.

And enduring it all joyfully. Sometimes life comes down to the tough-minded, not going to turn back, now decision to keep on following Jesus.

Even when the world collapses around us. Sometimes that's the best we can do. We always admire people who can say, I'm not giving up when quitting would be easier.

But that's not exactly what the writer's talking about. He's somewhere beyond that. When he says that they, that's the first readers, accepted it all with joy.

Now that's hard to do. And I think the writer knew that. So that's why he added this word of explanation in Hebrews 10, 34.

[3:48] He's really saying here. For you knew you had a much more solid and lasting treasure in heaven. Other translations use phrases like a better and enduring possession.

Or another way to put it, you endured this because you knew you had something better. Something that would last forever. That's a good description of heaven.

It's better than anything. Better than anything we have on earth. It's unlike the things of earth. Heaven lasts forever.

So we can give up what we have here because we can't keep it anyway. And we know we've got something better coming that will never be taken away from us.

The missionary Jim Elliott said, and I quote, He is no fool who gives up what he cannot keep to gain what he cannot lose.

[4:56] It is precisely that spirit that has inspired the spread of the gospel for over 2,000 years. And it explains as well as anything why Christians live the way they do.

It's all about heaven. So if a person does not believe in heaven, they won't live like a Christian. And it won't make much sense to them at all.

So how do we explain ourselves? The answer is, it's all about heaven. And if heaven isn't real, well, we've wasted our lives chasing after a dream.

A dream that turns out to be nothing at all. To say it another way, why do we as Christians keep believing?

Why do missionaries and mission organizations keep reaching out to every tribe and every nation? What keeps their faith in action?

[6:03] Well, our reading Hebrews 11, 13 to 16, the first three verses offers three answers to that question. Firstly, Christians live by a different standard.

Verse 13, all these people were still living by faith when they died. They did not receive the things promised. They only saw them and welcomed them from a distance.

What he means here is, all the heroes of faith lived and died without ever fully entering into what God had promised them.

They were like sailors who saw the shoreline a great distance away and stood at the rail, waving and shouting and saying, See, there it is.

What a beautiful land. And look at all those people. They are waving back at us. The sailors see the land, but their ship never reaches the shore.

[7:16] So they sail on, left with their memories of a harbor they never seem to reach. Christians are aliens and strangers on earth in a shrinking and increasingly crowded world.

Christians are truly not from around here. That's the whole point of verse 13. We are from somewhere else.

A realm not visible. A realm not touchable. Because we are a citizen of heaven. Secondly, Christians die with a different hope.

Verses 14 to 16. People who say such things show that they are looking for a country of their own.

If they had been thinking of the country they had left, they would have had opportunity to return.

Instead, they were longing for a better country. A heavenly one. As I already mentioned, in the earlier generations, people believed in two worlds.

[8:34] And they knew that the next world was the real world. The one that would last forever. And so they lived in this world with one eye looking forward to the next one.

They understood that this world could not, cannot, and does not bring someone ultimate happiness. And so we believe there's another world.

Hebrews 11 calls it a country of their own. A better country. A heavenly one. Friends, we're destined to live and die feeling slightly, maybe more than slightly, out of place.

A famous southern gospel song called This World is Not My Home says it this way. This world is not my home.

I'm just a passing through. My treasures are laid up somewhere beyond the blue. The angels beckon me from heaven's open door.

[9:39] And I can't feel at home in this world anymore. Friends, heaven doesn't make this life less important.

No, it makes it more important. The Bible says as long as we're here on earth, we're strangers in a foreign land.

There are enemies to be conquered before we return home. This world is not our home. Our citizenship is in heaven. And Jesus himself confirmed that.

He confirmed our future is secure when he made that wonderful promise in John 14. My father's house.

There are many rooms. I go to prepare a place for you. Friends, these are not poetic words.

[10:58] Meant to give us temporary comfort. No. They're eternal guarantees. What difference does it make?

This vision of a world beyond this world. There are many, many answers, I suppose. But the one in verse 15 here is extremely encouraging.

That vision of heaven keeps us moving forward when it would be so much easier to give up and go back. Charles Spurgeon had a marvelous sermon on this text and he called it simply, Go Back Never.

And he points out that if we want a way out, we'll always find one. Quitters always have an excuse. So do backsliders and complainers and compromisers.

When we get entangled with the world, as we all do from time to time, we find it does not satisfy the way we thought it would.

[12:08] And Spurgeon gives us his whole message in just one sentence here. He says, And those six words, in a way, sum up the whole Christian life and why we keep believing.

We have expectations. Expectations of something much better. So much better than this world has to offer. And he closes his sermon with these words.

Don't expect to find comforts in this world that your flesh would long for. This is our in, not our home.

We tarry here a night. We're away in the morning. That's why we keep believing. That's why we don't turn back.

That's why we don't turn around. That's why we keep our eyes always on heaven. We live by a different standard. And we die with a different hope.

[13:17] Death for a believer is not what it is for the unbeliever. For those who know Jesus, death is going home.

Going home to a real home. Our eternal home. To the place when we get there, we'll say, This is where I belong.

And thirdly, we look for a different reward. Our text ends with a word about our hope for the future. Verse 16.

Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God. For he has prepared a city for them. Hebrews 11 twice mentions this idea of a city.

Verse 10 says that Abraham was looking for a city with eternal foundations, designed and built by God. And now in verse 16, we're told that God has prepared that city already.

[14:29] The concept of the heavenly city means we won't be alone any longer. We'll be with the Lord and his people forever.

And all that we need will be right at our fingertips. Revelation 22 says that in the New Jerusalem, there's a great river flowing from the throne of God down the middle of the main street.

On each side of the river stood the tree of life, bearing 12 crops of fruit, yielding its fruit every month. Just think of it.

As God's provision for all his people, always and forever. As mentioned earlier, our reading ends with this wonderful thought.

Verse 16. God is not ashamed to called their God. Sometimes we are ashamed of each other. More often we're ashamed of ourselves.

[15:34] There are moments, plenty of them, when we look in the mirror and say, you ought to be a better person by now. Probably most of us have felt that way this week.

Perhaps we need, we ask forgiveness for something and then we did it again. Perhaps we lost our temper. We said something unkind about a friend. We broke a promise and then covered it up.

Perhaps we couldn't stop complaining or we neglected to pray or we sinned in secret. Maybe we broke our vows to God. Friends, we look in the mirror long enough.

We're bound to feel bad about ourselves. But Romans 3, 23 reminds us, for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.

And this verse applies to Christians too. So how is it that God's not ashamed of us when we're so ashamed of ourselves?

[16:36] It has to do entirely with His grace. God demonstrates His love for us in this while we were still sinners. Christ died for us.

Christ died for us. Still sinners. The word still comes from a tiny Greek word. Itai. Christ died for us before we were still sinners.

But that little word, itai, applies to us too. We were and are still sinners. That's the true gospel. That's what being saved really means. That's our entire hope of heaven. All of us who believe, even the best among us, have so far to go that we'll never live long enough to get there on our own. Someone else has to do the work for us. Believing in Jesus means trusting Him so much that if He can't take us to heaven, we're not going to go there.

[17:45] Believing in Jesus means risking it all on Him. We don't have a plan B. Jesus is our only hope of heaven. We have a hope and a future.

Romans 10, 12 says, those who trust in Jesus will never be put to shame. Hebrews 11, 16 tells us something even more.

Something even more wonderful. God's not ashamed to be the God of very imperfect people who put their faith and trust in Him.

He never looks down from heaven and says, you're such a loser. I'm through with you. He's not ashamed to be the God of those who trust in Him.

Those words give us so much hope. A hope that's available to each one of us.

[18:48] So why do we keep believing? Because there's no God like our God. No Savior like Jesus. He does not judge us by what we are, but by what we will someday be.

He's destined us for heaven. No matter how many mistakes we may make along the way, His grace is more sufficient to cover them all.

He intends to take all His redeemed children to heaven. And not one of them will fail to make it.

Some of us will run triumphantly.

Others will stumble across the finish line. But by grace we will prevail because God's not ashamed to be our God today, tomorrow, and forever.

What a hope. What a future we have if we put our faith into action by trusting the Lord, the one in whom alone our hope, our future depend.

[19:59] That's why we keep believing. Let's pray. Heavenly Father, we thank you that this world is not our final home.

when we're overwhelmed by the burdens of life. Help us to fix our eyes on the promise of heaven.

Guide our steps on earth to reflect your love, your light, that we may live in a way that honors you.

Give us the assurance that the faith, our eternal destination, is secure in your hands. And help us to keep believing and live with a hopeful, heavenly perspective every day, every day, until you return or call us home.

In Jesus' name. Amen.