

Faith In Transition

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[0 : 00] Where's Alex and Elisa? Alex and Elisa, would you guys just stand up real quick? So, those applause are not because they're a particularly attractive couple or anything, although they are, it's because they just got engaged. Isn't that wonderful, eh?

Great, thanks. Well, it is so nice to see so many people at church this evening. It's lovely preaching to a full church.

I'd like to thank you all here because of my preaching, and I will continue to think that. Okay. So, about 10 years ago, I spent a few months studying at a place called Labrie in Switzerland.

And I think probably people who are, the younger folks might not have heard of Labrie before.

Some of the older guys may have heard of Labrie. It is like a Christian retreat center. There's a few of them all over the world.

The original one is in the Swiss Alps, started by a guy called Francis Schaeffer. And I went there to study for a couple of months, and it was wonderful. On my first day there, I met a guy called Rick.

Rick Berman.

[1 : 24] And Rick was living the all-American dream. Just, he was mid-20s. He was a seated doubles tennis player. He was very good-looking. He was very, very smart. Very funny.

He'd just finished up at Notre Dame on a full ride, you know, like an A student, 4.0. He'd done crazy stuff, like he'd been in Miami Vice when he was a kid, acting.

You know, just the all-American dream. Had this fabulous job, enormously well-paid. He was at Labrie for a while, and then he was going on to do his MBA at Harvard. So, he was doing pretty good.

We hit it off. On the first day, we became really good friends, and sort of like best mates at Labrie, and we traveled afterwards, actually, around Italy for a while. He wasn't a Christian when he arrived.

And I remember when I first, in the first couple of days, we were chatting about why he was there. And he said to me, My life has always gone really well.

[2 : 37] Everything has always panned out really well for me. And the only reason I have to think that my life will continue to go okay is that it always has.

And he said, I've begun to realize that is not a good enough reason to think that my life will continue to be okay. He was basically, he recognized that he was just, like, extrapolating out data.

Like on a graph. The trajectory of my life is going to be good, because it always has been. And he saw the frailty of that. He recognized his own vulnerability.

And he recognized he needed something more. He needed a greater hope than just, it's always been pretty good. And of course, what he's describing is faith.

Faith is what he wanted. Faith is what this guy needed. I think faith is probably one of the most misunderstood concepts amongst Christians.

[3 : 44] And it's obviously the main concern of this passage here. I'm predominantly going to look at the first 16 verses of 11. This continuous theme of, By faith, Abel. By faith, Enoch.

By faith, Noah. By faith, Abraham. By faith, Sarah. So I want to spend some time clearing up what faith is. Because when we misunderstand it, it's horrendous.

But when you get it right, it's incredibly freeing and liberating. So in order to define faith, I want to begin by defining it negatively. In other words, I want to look at faith, what faith is not.

Because I think there are a number of things out there that people think faith is, but it's actually not. First, misconception about faith. Faith is a leap in the dark.

In other words, it's this irrational jump into nothingness. Very common, very common

misconception. If you read the Bible, you would see that faith and reason are never actually set

against each other.

[4 : 57] Faith and sight are, and we'll talk about that later, but faith and reason are not. And that's because faith is actually very reasonable. It's not an irrational leap in the dark.

And I say this for a number of reasons. Faith is, is one of the things faith is about, is trusting and believing in a person. Okay? So it's reasonableness, depends on the reliability of the person being trusted, and it's always reasonable to trust the trustworthy.

I have a little girl, I throw her up in the air sometimes, and I always catch her. When I throw her up in the air, she is not going, what are you doing? This is like, this is really dangerous, daddy.

You know? I'm calling social services. No, I throw up in the air, and she's laughing, because I always catch her. She trusts me. It's very reasonable for her to trust me.

It's very reasonable for her to have faith in me. Faith is reasonable. It's not anti-intellectual. Faith is, and faith can be, faith is a monster.

[6 : 04] I'm just going to define it from this passage here, okay? In this passage here, it talks about it in the context of an activity of our mind. Verse 3, it says, by faith we understand.

Understand. Noah was warned. Abraham was called out. They heard from God. The rational response to this word from God was, yes, okay, God says something, there's going to be flood, or I promise you, your descendants are going to be like the stars in the sky.

They believe it. God says something to them, they believe it. That's faith. Hebrews 11 is full of examples. It's not, God, I don't know what's going on here, but I'm going to have faith. No, it's, I've heard you, Father.

I trust that. So in many ways, faith is about, this is going to sound weird, but it's faith is all, it's like faith is about information. It's about mental assent, you know?

Sarah, it says in verse 11, considered God faithful. Faith is not a leap in the dark. The second misunderstanding is that faith is like, like a skill, like cooking, or a characteristic, like having a sense of humor.

[7 : 22] If you've ever said this, if you've ever said, oh, I wish I had that person's faith, you misunderstand faith. Faith is not something you're born with. It's not something you drum up.

You can't get faith by concentrating really hard. Faith, biblically, is something we receive. We get faith.

Faith is given to us. Romans 10, we talked about this a few months ago. Faith comes from hearing, hearing the word of God. Faith doesn't come up from, in here. It doesn't, it's not something we kind of like, oh, I'm going to try and be faithful.

No, we get it from God. These guys in a passage, faith came to them as they heard God's promises, didn't they?

Third misunderstanding about faith. If you believe enough, anything can happen. AKA, the person with the most faith is the person who can believe for the most unlikely thing to happen.

[8 : 28] That is not faith. faith. That is faith in faith. That is not faith in God. Maybe I've told you this story before, but I had a youth leader when I was a teenager who was very lovely guy, but kind of super positive guy, and really believed this.

You know, faith was like, if I just believe something enough, I can, I can make it happen. And, he'd been reading about, you know, people praying for people and they being raised from the dead in Africa. You know, so he goes to this park one day and he, he's telling us this story this night at youth group and he goes, I saw this duck and it was dead.

It was a dead duck. And he's like, friends, I laid my hands on that duck and I tell you, I really believed that duck would come alive. the duck moved.

And he was so, he was so into this. This is like his big, like, this is the big line at the end of his kind of sermon. The duck moved. And like, I'm 18 years old, I've been a Christian a couple of weeks, man, and I knew, I knew at that point, you know, a twitching duck is not, is not what we're about here.

You know, like, it's not, I don't, I don't think this is the, I don't think this is what faith is really about. See, I think for him, faith, and he has a really common misconception, faith is like magic.

[10 : 03] It's like, it's like an incantation, you know, this is what people think. And the verse probably doesn't help us, in the sense that it's got this constant by faith thing, I think that can throw us off a little bit, the translation, because it doesn't mean by means of faith, it doesn't mean like, by some kind of special technique of faith, auto-suggestion, you know, it means acting on the basis of

faith, acting on the basis of God's word, you know, faith is not magic, we can't sprinkle a little fairy dust faith on something and it's, it's going to make it happen, you know, it's not, faith is not the master key that unlocks any door, get any promise, anything you want on the world, that's presumptuous.

You know, Sarah did not get pregnant because she believed hard enough. She, she got pregnant well past childbearing years because God said, you were going to have descendants. She believes in a promise and that's what faith does. We can only have faith in the things God has promised. We didn't lose our building because we didn't have enough faith. Now God, God never promised that we'd get to keep this building forever.

So, I mean, it's a really common misconception about faith, you know, we can sort of make stuff happen if we just believe enough. we bombard the gates of heaven with, faith is humble, it doesn't dictate to God.

Faith is trusting in God's promises. That's why it's important to know what God has promised us. God, let me give you a couple, God has promised to save us from judgment and hell.

[11:54] God has promised that we be with him forever, enjoy him forever in heaven. If we trust him, God's promised that.

Christ will save you from judgment and hell, but Christ is not going to save you from sickness and death necessarily. Somebody's not going to get healed if we just believe enough.

Because God hasn't promised that everyone's going to get healed this side of heaven. If he did, we've got 2,000 years of dead Christians to explain. Know the promises of God, you know.

Know the promises of God. I'm going to keep going. Faith isn't magic. Last misconception. Faith is not training our minds to be positive, pretending everything's okay. Romans 4 talks about Abraham and Sarah.

They fill out the picture. We get a bit of a hint of it here in Hebrews 11. We go back to Romans 4. It talks about even more about what their faith looked like. Let me read from verse 19. He did not weaken in faith when he considered his body, which was as good as dead, since he was about 100 years old, or when he considered the barrenness of Sarah.

[13:12] See, faith doesn't mean pretending everything's okay. You know, faith, I mean, Abraham doesn't walk up to Sarah and say, you know, he's like a million years old.

He doesn't walk up to Sarah and say, hey, Sarah, I'm a vigorous 25-year-old man. You are the octomom woman in the tabloids. You know, you're going to have 3,000 children in that womb tonight because I'm just going to believe.

You know. No. They heard from God. God. It wasn't self-hypnosis. The passage says they considered these things.

He considered his own body. He considered the barrenness of Sarah's womb. Faith does not ignore the realities of life, but it does look at the realities of life in the light of the promises.

That's what Abraham did, didn't he? Okay. Hey, team. That's enough of the negative stuff. What does the passage say positively in terms of a definition here?

[14:20] Well, firstly, I think one of the striking things about Romans 11 here is this idea that faith is something that is hoped for. A future and an unseen present.

This is verse 1 here, isn't it? And it's a great challenge to us that faith is something in the future. A hopeful thing that we can reach out, you know, that's an unseen reality.

That's hard for us. It's difficult for us because, you know, we tend to put our hopes in the present. We tend to put our hopes in the scene. You know, I have a good job.

I make good decisions. I have some money. I have support structures. I have my health or whatever it is, all good things, but that's the stuff we tend to put our faith in. That's the things that my mate Rick put his faith in, right?

That's not what we should put our faith in. Our faith is in a hoped-in future that God has promised, an unseen reality. But these fears of future and unseen are uncomfortable ones for us.

[15:30] Which means that faith is also patient. You know, God's promises will be fulfilled. Everything that God has promised in Hebrews 11 here will come about.

We just don't know when. We will see glimpses of it. We will see I don't know what to call them. We will see these kind of like these wonderful gospel moments. These wonderful future realities present. Every now and then we'll see wonderful healings. We'll see cool stuff like that.

Like Sarah did actually conceive in her life. But Abraham, you know, he never saw the promised land. He never got there.

It was promised to him but he never got there. It's in verse 9, right? He was a nomad his whole life. He was a sojourner his whole life. A pilgrim his whole life.

[16:30] Like we are. The only bit he got was a small cave which he could bury Sarah in. Verse 13 it says all these men and women of faith died in faith not having received the promise at that point.

But they will ultimately. It's a wonderfully surprising passage I think. They had faith. They weren't failures. Like us. They had to leave the time and manner of fulfilment of those promises up to God. We live in the now but the not yet of those promises. And so faith demands something of us. It demands us to be patient. It demands us to trust.

Faith also is about our whole journey. We learn this from Abel, Enoch and Noah who are some fairly random characters that come up at the beginning of Hebrews 11 I think.

They're not guys you expect to read about in the New Testament. Abel is there because he illustrates the commencement of faith. You guys know the story.

[17:45] You know Cain and Abel they both brought sacrifices to God but Abel's sacrifice was accepted and Cain's was not. You know this points to the story this points to the sacrifice of Christ.

Faith begins by being accepted by God. Being accepted by God through the sacrifice of Jesus. That's the beginning of faith. And Enoch was there because he talks about the continuing character of faith which is an ongoing life of fellowship with God.

In verse 5 we read that Enoch had such a great relationship with God he didn't die he just walked up into heaven. I don't know what that looks like but that's what it says. It's a staggering idea.

The basic thing they're trying to get across here is that faith requires an ongoing relationship with God and from Noah we learn about the climax of faith that we are saved from God's wrath and into God's wonderful promise of a future forever with him.

Because the flood story is about judgment and inheriting a new world isn't it? So the end point of faith is that we're saved from God's judgment so that we might walk with God forever.

[18:57] Okay I'm going to finish up here. First my apologies I've said a million things but there was a million things to say in these passages here. But let me synthesize out some key points.

First these guys Abel Enoch and Noah we learn that faith impacts the whole Christian experience. The entry points the ongoing and the end.

We also learned that faith is reasonable it's cognitive it's not a leap in the dark. Faith is something we receive we don't drum it up. It's not about being positive we receive faith as we apprehend the promises of God and faith makes demands of us.

God asks us to be patient to be obedient like Noah in the face of a whole lot of ridicule probably. There's no let go and let God sort of faith in Hebrews here.

Faith is a call to action. Faith is a hope for future. A belief in things unseen. And what is this hope for future?

[20:03] What is this unseen reality? Well remarkably it's a city. Isn't that remarkable? It's a city.

The Bible begins in a garden and ends in a city. That's our great hope for future. Let me read from Revelation 21. First couple of verses.

Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth. For the first heaven and the first earth had passed away and the sea was no more and I saw the holy city new Jerusalem coming down out of heaven from God prepared as a bride adorned for a husband.

And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying behold the dwelling of God is with men. He will dwell with them and they shall be his people and God himself will be with them.

He will wipe away every tear from their eyes and death shall be no more. Neither shall there be mourning nor crying nor pain anymore for the former things have passed away.

[21:06] So that's what that city is going to be like. Folks we are pilgrims in this world. We are sojourners. And when that pilgrimage and that sojourn is difficult like it is now we must remember that we are people of faith.

Which means that whilst we are in this world our hearts are tied to the next world. We are God. And when we live like that this passage here says an amazing thing.

It says it pleases God. Isn't that awesome? It pleases God when we put our hope in that future. And lastly verse 16 here.

Not only does it please God it says that God is not ashamed to be called our God. I hope that is a comfort to you.

And if you are finding this whole thing really difficult I hope that takes the edge off it. Would you put our present difficulties into the context of the great hope that God has promised for us?

[22 : 34] Amen. Folks we have a special litany now. will we thank God for all the wonderful things that have happened in this building and the other ones.

Your part of it your refrain is quite simple. Laura Wersack has put this together with the help of a few people and she is going to lead us prayer.

Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you.