

Abraham and Sarah

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[0 : 00] All right, on with the sermon, Hebrews 11. The passage is about faith. It's about faith. In this chapter, it repeatedly says things like, by faith, Abraham did this, or by faith, Sarah did that.

By faith, Noah did this. By faith, Enoch did that. So what does that mean, though? Like, what does that even mean, by faith? Does that mean that they were just particularly positive people? Were they natural risk-takers? Were they just innately braver than everybody else? Is that what faith is?

What is faith? I think it's probably one of the most misunderstood concepts amongst non-Christians and Christians today. So let's spend 10 minutes just talking about what faith is.

And I want to do that by defining it negatively first. And what I mean is this. Let's look at what faith is not as well as what it is.

[1 : 05] Because I think there's some things we think faith is, but it's actually not. And our passage is really helpful on this. The first wrong-headed idea about faith is that faith is a leap in the dark.

Faith is a leap in the dark. This is how atheists understand faith. You know, famous atheist Richard Dawkins says, faith is blind. He said in a debate a while ago, we only need to use the word faith when there isn't any evidence.

But this is not the biblical definition of faith. The faith in the Bible is not irrational. It's presented as reasonable. It's presented as a reasoned belief.

And where do we get this in the text? Verse 11, By faith Sarah herself received power to conceive even when she was past the age of Jesus. She considered him faithful.

Who had promised? She was very, very old, but she got pregnant. God said it would happen. She believed God. Why did she do that? Why did she have faith?

[2 : 12] Because she considered God to be faithful. Who had made the promise. She used her brain. And she realized, this is a God I can trust. So this was not blind faith.

This was not a leap in the dark. Faith is a carefully considered posture of trusting the promises of the promiser. Faith says we know God.

And we know he delivers on promises. So faith is not, you know, like these mental gymnastics you do to make yourself believe unlikely things.

Faith doesn't turn off your brain. Faith doesn't ignore logic. Faith is trusting in a person. It's trusting in God. And it's always reasonable and rational to trust the trustworthy.

When I was younger, and my kids were younger, and when my kids were lighter, I could throw them in the air and catch them again. And whilst in the air, my kids were never freaking out.

[3 : 14] They weren't going, oh my goodness, what are you doing? Are you crazy? This is so dangerous. I'm calling social services. This is appalling parenting. No, they were laughing. They're having a great time.

They had faith that everything would be okay. They trusted that I would catch them. And it was reasonable for them to trust me. So when I reached down to pick them up, to throw them in the air, they'd reach out with their little arms to be picked up in faith.

So my point again, faith is reasonable. It is not, as some people would tell you, anti-intellectual. The Bible connects faith to our minds.

In verse three, by faith we understand that the universe was created by the word of God. Faith and activity of the mind. Now it's more than that, but we just have Hebrews 11 to deal with here.

And that focuses on this particular aspect of it. Now look at verse eight. Abraham was called out by God to go somewhere, some foreign land. It says Abraham didn't know where he was going to go, but he packed up his bags and he went.

[4 : 23] He said yes to God, not an irrational act. It was a rational response to a God that he trusted. God had made a promise to him and Sarah and he trusted that promise.

So I hope you're getting, I know I'm laboring this, but faith is not something that some people naturally have and others don't. Faith is not a thing that a few of you are born with and others are not.

Faith is a human response to the word of God. God says something and we say, I can trust that. That's faith.

It's something we can all have. So in this sense, faith is only as good as its object, isn't it? Faith is only as good as its object. So if I went ice skating on a lake and the ice was very thin, but I had lots of faith in that ice, what's going to happen?

I'm going to die. Like I'm going to die, right? But if I go ice skating on a lake with very thick ice and I have just a small amount of faith in that ice, I'm actually going to be okay.

[5 : 36] So it's not so much even about how big your faith is. It's about who your faith is in. Faith is only as good as the object of your faith.

So our faith, big or small, is in an invisible God who created the universe and loved us so much that he would rather die on a cross than be without us.

This is a God we can trust. We can trust what this God says. It's a faith. It's rational. It's rational because it's rational to trust in a trustworthy God who made certain incredible promises, which brings us to another misunderstanding about faith.

The misbelief is this. If you just believe enough, anything can happen. If you just believe enough, anything can happen. No, no, no, no, no. That's not faith.

That's not biblical faith. That's faith in faith, not faith in God. If I just believe enough, anything can happen. No, that is not biblical faith. Faith is not magic. You can't wave it around or sprinkle it on some problem you have in your life just to get what you want.

[6 : 50] Faith is humble. It doesn't dictate to God. Faith is not some master key you can use to unlock any door. God doesn't promise us health and children and marriage and a great career.

You can't expect to get these things simply by having enough faith, by just believing enough, which is why it's important to know what God actually has promised and what He hasn't.

You know, one of the great promises of the Bible that's brought into focus in this chapter is the land of promise that God promised to Abraham and his descendants. And that land for us is this picture of a heavenly home that we will inherit where we can have faith in that promise that God will bring it about because God does what He says.

We can have faith in that promise that because of Christ, we will be with God for eternity in a remade world where there will be no more tears, no more death, no more abuse.

So faith is our response to what God has promised. We can't just write our own ticket. We can't use faith to get whatever we want. You know, lots of people over the centuries have had, you know, brilliant faith.

[8 : 10] Some of those folks live these amazingly blessed and well-funded, creative lives and others were sworn in half. Okay, folks.

Bit of a summary before I close up here. Faith is not a rationale. It's not a spiritual tool you use to get what you want in life. It's a reasonable response to a trustworthy God who makes promises that we can actually read about and hang on to and build our life on.

Now, to wrap up this definition, let's look at verse 1. Now, faith is the assurance of things hoped for.

What does that mean? So the word assurance, assurance there, has a wide range of meaning.

Faith is the assurance of things hoped for. In part, it means just confidence. You could probably work that out. Faith is confidence in the promises that God has made about the future. But there's another aspect to its meaning that I read about this week.

The Greek word has this idea of expression. Assurance means expression. So faith is an expression of our confidence, a tangible expression.

[9 : 20] Faith is a lived out expression, meaning faith isn't just mental ascent. It's not just believing in what God has said.

It actually changes how we live. It affects our lives. I'll give you an example. Let's say you have a good friend from out of town and they text you and they say, we're coming to town to visit.

We'll be there on Thursday at 8 p.m. Let's say this friend is Swiss. So you know they'll be there.

Right? They're on time people. They're trustworthy.

You trust what they say. What they say. So you do anticipate that they will indeed be at your house on Thursday at 8 o'clock. But not only do you believe they're coming to your place, you know, you have faith in what they said about the future, but that belief produces tangible acts in your life now. So you go to the bathroom and you scrub out the grout in your shower that you've been ignoring for months and you pull out that dodgy old curry that's been sitting in your fridge for a few weeks and you actually pull the couch out from the wall and sweep it out, not just sort of do a cursory little sweep underneath.

[10 : 43] What you believe about the future produces real substantive acts now. That's what faith does. That's what real faith should look like. It doesn't just stay in our praying. It's a call to action.

It's lived out. In chapter 11, once you have the definition, it's a series of examples of examples of examples of faith lived out. Let's wind this up.

Verse 1. Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen. Faith is about apprehending this future, this unseen reality and seeing it work out in your life today, now. But these spheres of future and unseen, they're not, they're uncomfortable for us, aren't they? You know, because we like, we like present, not future. We like seen, not unseen.

I can, you know, I can see my bank account. I can see my career. These are all, there's nothing wrong with those things, but if you ground your life on just the seen and the now, that's all you'll get.

[11 : 46] That's all you'll have and you'll just keep investing in that and it'll be what shapes and animates you and your life will just be a shadow of what the world has to offer.

But if you take the word of God seriously and you let it change the way you live, well, some people in the world will think you're crazy, crazy for choosing a profession that, you know, might make you earn less money, crazy for choosing not to follow the sexual ethics of the world, crazy for, you know, spending your life giving it out in service to God's people, if you take the word of God seriously, you trust in it and let it change and shape your life now, I promise you will never look back and say, I wish I hadn't done that because trusting in God's word is the most rational thing you can do in the world.

Now, if you are the kind of person that likes to go away and think about something quite particular about the sermon, let me give you a little summary question to do that. I think one of the questions the passage asks us is this, is my life being shaped by the promises of God?

Is my life being shaped by the promises of God? You know, my worst case scenario for you as a congregation listening to this sermon is you go away and think to yourself, oh yeah man, I just need more faith.

I just need to get more faith. And I hope you don't hear me just saying, have more faith. Because that, you know, when preachers do that, that's cruel.

[13 : 30] That's a cruel thing to do because me standing up here saying to you, have more faith does not create, generate faith in your life. Faith is something we receive as we submit ourselves to God's words.

So go away, consider the promises of God. You might have very particular ones for particular things in your life.

Go away, consider those promises and ask yourself, am I living a life submitted to these promises, to this unseen future promise.

Do that and faith will come. Amen.