

The Nature Of Faith

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Preacher: Harry Robinson

[0 : 00] On page 209 in the New Testament section of the Blue Bible, and goodness knows where in the red. But we have these things that we had printed last week to sort of tell people where they're at, and they have Sunday morning sermons and learners exchange, but on the back they have Wednesday noon Bible studies.

And the Wednesday noon Bible studies say that today, January the 14th, is today January the 14th? Well, that's lucky, isn't it?

That we're talking about the nature of faith, and then it gives the subject for the next series down to February the 25th, which are just different aspects of the same chapter, Hebrews chapter 11.

And so we'll be dealing with that till then. Then you may notice at the bottom of the same page, even song and exposition, which I'm going to use the same material at the evening service at 7.15 tonight as I use here today.

So whether this is the trial run or whether this is the real stuff and they just get the leftovers is something that we'll work out over the weeks.

[1 : 34] But that'll give you a little guide to where we are and what we're doing. And Hebrews is a kind of classical passage in the whole of the New Testament because it, in its scope, covers most of the Bible.

Because it's like a great spiritual portrait gallery, a long, long hall, on which there are the portraits of great men of faith and great scenes from their lives all the way down.

And Hebrews 11, which is a fairly long chapter, being 40 verses, takes you down that gallery and pauses to look at Cain and Abel and Noah and Abraham and Moses and Jephthah and all of them. And it looks at the portraits all the way down. And the purpose of it is to describe what faith is and how it works. So as we turn to the scriptures, let's pray.

Our God, we so much need to know and understand the scriptures. And when we speak words to one another, sometimes we don't fully understand what we're saying.

[2 : 58] And sometimes the person we're speaking to doesn't fully understand what we've said. But we want our relationship to be one in which, through the word which you have spoken to us in Hebrews chapter 11, what you have said may by your Holy Spirit be made alive in our hearts and our hearing so that we may respond to it and that we may be, by your word, shaped into the kind of people that you want us to be in our relationship to you.

So give us that grace as we apply our minds and hearts and wills to your word in this hour. We ask in Jesus' name.

Amen. Okay, now it begins. Now faith is, and so you could start, if you want to look at the chapter, by what is faith?

It starts out to explain what faith is. And the word faith occurs over and over and over again.

It may help you to know, again, what I've told you before, but that noun is the same as this verb.

[4 : 35] If you kick a football, that's the verb to kick, and the noun is the kick, so that it's the same word.

But these two words might appear to you to be different, but this is the verb of which this is the noun. So when you say, what is faith?

You are also saying, what is it to believe? Now the first thing you've got to understand is that faith, this is a representation of faith, like that.

It doesn't stand by itself. It falls down. There is no use having faith in faith. You know, people tell you sometimes they have a lot of faith, to which you should reply, a lot of good that'll do you.

Because faith in faith is often faith in ignorance. Because faith doesn't stand by itself. Faith is only as good as what it is put in, or who it is placed on.

[5 : 55] Faith requires an object to define the value of it. Without a proper object, faith is foolishness.

A friend of mine described pre-war Germany. Money was valueless, jobs were impossible, poverty was widespread, economy was in chaos, morale was hopelessly low, and along came a man named Adolf Hitler, and the nation, in their desperate need, put their whole faith in him, with the result of a world tragedy.

Because faith was placed in the wrong thing, in the wrong person. So, just, it's very important to remember that faith is not one of the Christian virtues by itself.

It's what your faith is in. So that faith always necessitates, I think this is, this will work, like that, if you want.

Faith always necessitates two things, man, in a generic sense, and God, and faith is the thing that is between them.

[7 : 20] It's the thing that binds them together in a relationship, so that man is in relationship to God through faith. And, that's, that's not a bad thing.

You may, you may think it's a bad thing, but it's not a bad thing, and if you look carefully through this, you'll see why I contend, on the basis of Hebrews chapter 11, that faith is, is not a bad thing. This is, this is what you get. If you go carefully through the, the verse that we're reading, faith is, assurance. Okay, so we'll put down, assurance here, eh?

I'm, I just sort of got, that I like writing today, for some reason, so I'll, I hope you, it won't drive you insane, if I do it. That's fine.

Well then, we're all happy. Faith is assurance, then, faith is, conviction. Do you see that? You see how that derives from the passage?

[8 : 32] Faith is the assurance of things hoped for, faith is the conviction of things, not seen. Faith is approval from God.

That's another thing that is, is very important, you know, because men are desperate for approval from somebody, and, they will do almost anything to get it.

But, this is approval from God, so this is assurance, conviction, approval, and then the, the, and then, man lives in a world, which is understood by faith, these are all, man's side of it, and then, the, the final thing that it says about faith, is, that it's, it's what is, seen.

Now, these are all, in a sense, human experiences. We see, we have assurance, we have conviction, we need approval, we live in a world. So, those are all, real experiences to us, on a day-to-day basis, aren't they?

Things that we all need. We all need to be assured. We all, we all live in a very, visible world. We don't live in an invisible world. We live in a, in a world where we can see things.

[9 : 58] We all need convictions of some kind. We all need approval. And we have this world. Now, what, what this passage then goes on to say is, that opposite the seen is the unseen.

And opposite, opposite assurance is hope, hope, that is, our assurance is based on hope for the future.

Opposite conviction, again, is the unseen. Our convictions are not placed on material things.

They're placed on something that is unseen.

Opposite approval is, is God, because it's God who gives the approval. And opposite the world is the word. Do you see?

Now, what happens is, because of faith, you discover that the reality, which is over here, this is God's reality, and this is man's reality.

[11 : 06] God's reality becomes man's reality through faith. So that the unseen is what lies behind what is seen. The validity of the hope is what gives us assurance.

The basis of God, God's control, is what gives us conviction. It's God himself who gives us approval.

And it's the word, which is the origin of the world. It's not the world that produces a word. It's the word which produces a world.

So that it, all these things move in, in this direction. The unseen, the hoped for, God, and the word. These are the, the reality which relate to God.

And these are the reality of those things experienced by man. And the way you experience them is through faith in God. Now, what I, the reason I tell you that is, is because, I think that's what, what Hebrews chapter 11, verses 1 to 3 is, is saying.

[12:22] But, it raises, a, a number of questions. And this is, this is the question that I want to put to you, so that you, you see it.

If, and this is an illustration that I heard, which I found helpful.

If, we were to take, this whole sort of community, and, make it into a kind of spaceship, and let it travel through space at the speed of light, and, and that we would journey on, and on, and on, and people would begin to occupy themselves with, with business, and with the stock market, and with industry, and with art, and with music, and with gardening, and with landscaping, and with skiing, and sailing, and swimming, and learning, and education, and so on.

All these things are happening, in this little thing that's whirling through space. And you go around to the people who are on this great spaceship, and you say to them, where did we come from?

No answer. What are we doing here? No answer. Where are we going?

[13:47] No answer. And I think it's, it's that, that has, I mean, that's, that's what our society has learned to do. It's learned to, cultivate ignorance, about ultimate questions.

Those questions, are just not allowed, in our society. We're not allowed to ask, where are we going? Because we have no way of answering that question, in our society.

We're not allowed to ask, where do we come from? Because that forces you, into areas, where we have no competence. You know, there's nothing we can do, to answer that question.

What are we here for? No answer. You know, I may be busy, with my, with my gardening, or busy with my music, or busy with my studies, or busy making money, or busy doing this, or busy doing that.

We can be busy, with all those things, and avoid all those questions. So that, most people, in our society, won't ask the question. It's not very, it's not very popular, to ask.

[14:55] I mean, you can't, you can't talk about, the creation of the world, because you get into, that scientific, versus religious argument, and nobody knows, which the answer is. And so what do we do?

We avoid the question, altogether. Very important question, but, we have agreed, we have a kind of, covenant in our society, not to ask that question. Because we don't know, what the answer is, and so all we do, by asking it, is to show off our ignorance, so we've decided, not to ask it.

It's like, and if you may excuse, the illustration, it's sort of like, meeting your old friends, from school, you know, and, and being afraid, to ask them, about their wife, because you don't know, if they still have her, you know, or whether they're divorced, or separated.

So you avoid the question. It's the polite thing to do, you know, because you don't want to embarrass somebody, by asking a question like that, and finding that, they don't want to answer it.

So we avoid, we avoid the questions, you know, and when, when you know, that somebody's husband, is in jail, or somebody's, you know, when they're, you, you, we just carefully avoid, asking the question.

[16:07] And so we tend to live, in a world, where we avoid, asking, you know, what is the basis, of your assurance? Well, I'm not sure, that I have any, really, I'm rather busy, right now.

And, what are your convictions, based on? Well, they're just convictions, that's all, I don't know, what they're based on. And, how do you, win approval?

You know, how do you know, your life has meaning? Well, I, don't ask the question, you know, where did the world, come from, and what is the purpose?

Don't ask the question. Now, the reason, of course, that you don't ask the question, is, is because, is because nobody knows, how to answer it.

The only way, you can answer it, is, by faith, in a God, who has spoken to us, and given us the answer. And, if you don't have that faith, then you live in a world, where there are no answers.

[17:12] And, you conduct your life, in such a way, that, that, you're not responsible.

You know, it's, you just, you conduct your life, as though there is no, ultimate meaning. I was inspired, to write a poem, while I was working on this, which, it was, just, do you want me to, do you want me to read you my poem?

It's, it's, probably will not go down, as one of the great classics, in the English language, but it's brand new. Ah, my grandfather said, I believe in God.

Sorry, my great grandfather said, I believe in God. My grandfather said, I believe in good. My father said, I am good.

I said, I am. My son says, who am I? My grandson, takes drugs. Ah, that, that was just a little poem, to illustrate, what happens, when faith disappears, as an element, in our society, and how it disappears, slowly, by a process of attrition.

[18 : 30] You know, it's gone. And some poor kid, two or three generations, down the road, is, is off, in a drug hazed world, because he hasn't got, any answers.

And he's not allowed, to ask any questions. And, that's what I think, is, has happened, to our world, because, you know, you know, people, people with great pride, say, well I'm, I'm not one of those people, that, can live by faith, I gotta have reasons.

Living by faith, is not an option. You can't live without it. You can't live, without relationship. I have, a brilliant, a brilliant quote here, from, from a man, who says, G.K. Chesterton, nobody can get behind, the fundamental, difference, about, the reason of things.

He says, it's, it's as rational, for a theist, that is, somebody who believes in, that there is a God, to believe in miracles, that's entirely rational, for him to believe in miracles, as for an atheist, to disbelieve in them.

In other words, you're a reasonable person, and I'm a reasonable person, you're a theist, I'm an atheist, both of us, can use reason, to come to the conclusion, that miracles exist, if you're a theist, they don't exist, if you're not a theist, if you're an atheist.

[20 : 10] But, Chesterton goes on to say, in other words, there is only one, intelligent reason, why a man, does not believe, in miracles, and that is, he does believe, in materialism.

You know, his view of life, is a totally material view. His view of life, is, is completely on that side. There is no relationship, between that and that.

This is, a materialist world, where, it is a world of the scene, it's a world of self-assurance, it's a world of, personal conviction, it's a world of self-approval.

It's a world of material reality, the basis of which is, taste and touch and handle, it's material reality. And so, for him, just on that side, miracles are totally irrational. But, if, the scene is based on the unseen, and assurance is based on a hope, that we've been given, conviction is based on something, that God has made known, approval is based on, God's relationship to you personally, and the world is made, from the word of God, then, miracles fit.

[21 : 36] They are, a reality. And you have, hope, and you have a reality, which is beyond, the present reality, which is greater than, the present reality, in which you exist, in which we live our lives.

And that's, that's the point, that, that, he's making, in writing this, this story. If you look, just at the verses again, this is what happens.

Faith is the assurance, of things hoped for. In other words, and this is, this is terribly important, because, somebody, came to see me, the other day, and told me, that they had, lost, their faith. But you can't, lose your faith. What they, what they had really, in fact, lost, was, the thing they had, their faith in, had not proved, to be reliable.

And therefore, they, they had discovered, they'd put their faith, in the wrong thing. And, that wasn't a loss of faith.

[22 : 56] It was a, it was a wrong choice, of what to put your faith in. And so, what, what, what, what, what, what, what, what, happens to us, in this sense, is that, that God makes, the reality of who he is, and what his purpose is.

He says, you have come, from me, you will return, to me, and you will, in the meantime, get to know me. I mean, that's, roughly what, why God reveals himself, to us.

And if you go on, in chapter 11, and look at it, you find that there is, a wonderful catalog, which you should just, look at for one moment, because it'll help you, I think, to understand this.

It's, down in verse 36, or that's verse 34, or even verse 33.

Faith, conquered kingdoms, and forced justice. Have you got it there? Received promises, stopped the mouths of lions, quenched raging fires, escaped the edge of the sword, won strength out of weakness, became mighty in war, put foreign armies to flight.

[24 : 16] Women received their dead, by resurrection. Some were tortured, refusing to accept release, that they might rise again, to a better life. Others suffered mocking, scourging, even chains, imprisonment.

They were stoned, they were sawn in two, they were killed, with a sword, they went about in skins of sheep, and goats, destitute, afflicted, ill-treated, of whom the world was not worthy, wandering

over deserts, and mountains, in dens, and caves, and all these, though well attested by their faith, did not receive what was promised.

They had faith. They had faith in a promise, a hoped-for promise, that God had made them. Now we talk a lot about faith healing, for instance.

Now faith healing is an entirely worthy objective for faith, I'm sure. But faith is a lot bigger than that process. There's also faith being tortured, faith dying of starvation, faith dying of thirst, faith in prison.

There's faith in every circumstance of human life. There is a proper dimension of faith, no matter what's happening to you. Faith healing often becomes a trap, because people say, well, I haven't been healed, therefore God can't exist.

[25 : 49] But that's wrong. What it's saying is that no matter what happens, I have the assurance that my hope will ultimately be fulfilled, and it's my faith that gives me that assurance.

Faith is the assurance of things hoped for, no matter what happens. And this is a happy little catalog of what has happened in the past, even of what could happen to you or to me.

But it doesn't say that faith is good until this happens. It says faith allows this to happen, even, and the promises of God don't change.

The hope that God has given us, we are still assured of, no matter what happens. Sort of Job's, though he slay me, yet will I trust him.

That's the kind of faith we are called to. You know, people who put their faith in Hitler, you know, were, I mean, they were absolutely devastated by the consequences of having done that.

[27 : 00] We are invited in the epistle to the Hebrews to put our faith in God, so that no matter what devastation may visit us, our faith still gives us the assurance of things hoped for.

Our hopes are not taken away. Our convictions are not undermined. The reality of this world, we recognize that this world is not all there is.

This world is only a product of the Word of God. And after this world fades completely, there is still the reality of the Word of God from which this world is derived.

Do you see me? What, what in effect this is doing? And I, and I, I don't think you can fit this kind of faith easily into our lives, you know, because as I've illustrated, I mean, I've referred to in a number of different ways, the way faith is used in our language, the way faith is understood by our culture, is, is a far cry from what it says here.

It's just an entirely different thing. You know, it's, it says, to put it in terms that I think are significant, maybe you think they're significant, it's though you have lived all your life thinking two plus two makes three.

[28 : 44] And suddenly you discovered, you know, two plus two makes four. And then millions of things begin to make sense that didn't make sense when two plus two made three.

Everything, all your arithmetic broke down because you had that concept. And what, what, what, what's happening in the epistle to the Hebrews, as we'll see as we go along, is that we are being called to a faith in, in God, which is, which is the basis of, of the whole of our life, our approval, our assurance, our conviction, our world itself.

We can only understand in terms of the God who has given us this hope, who has created this world, who relates to us in approving of us and helping us know that our, our life is in his hands. All those things are dependent upon him. No matter what happens. That's what our faith is. It's way bigger than, than, than I am.

You know, it's, it's, it's like, I, I, I, I can't remember just exactly how he put it, but it's sort of coming hazily into my mind, you know, that, uh, it's like saying, I don't, that I, I don't believe in prayer.

[30 : 31] I believe in a God who answers prayer. You see the difference? You know, uh, and, uh, and that's a very important perspective to keep.

And that's the perspective that Hebrews 11 starts with. It's not that I have, I have great faith, but I have faith in a great God.

And that's why Jesus said to people, you know, I haven't got the faith for that. He said, even a very little bit of faith can be enormously powerful depending on who it is put in.

You know, who that faith is in. So it's not our great faith that saves us. It's our faith in a great God that is the basis of our life, the new arithmetic of our life.

You know, it's, it's, it's like that remark that, you know, when somebody is in, in deep trouble and you can say, well, all you can do is pray. Well, it's such, to my mind, a kind of hopeless remark.

[31 : 53] The very first and most important thing on which everything else depends is God, to whom you pray, you know.

The, when you say all you can do is pray, you said, all the things that you can depend on are gone. And all we got is a kind of last hope. He's not our last hope. He is the very basis of our whole life. Of every breath we breathe, every step we take, every day we live. Faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen.

By faith we understand what we have never understood before, that the worlds were framed by the word of God.

The great reality in our life is not me, my prayers, and my faith, and my diligence, and my conviction, but the God in whom we believe.

[32 : 56] And, and, uh, so that's what these three verses try and do, is to deliberately turn your world upside down.

So, let's just pray. Let's pray. Our Father, give us grace to know how much our world needs to be turned.

upside down. How much it needs to, uh, how much we need to get our minds off ourselves, and our strengths, or our weaknesses, our abilities, or our inabilities, our fears, and anxieties, which become so large in our lives, and so dominate our thinking, and, and, uh, we are, we are, we are a kind of fragile people, but we are called to be, to believe in, a great and loving God, whose eternal purposes will not fail.

and we have been given a hope, which gives us deep assurance of your loving purpose towards us, assurance which we never need to lose.

grant that we may not only experience this in our own lives, but that we might share that faith with so many people around us who have, who are living disappointed and angry lives because they've put their faith in the wrong thing.

[34 : 53] help us to understand and to work this out in our lives, we ask in Christ's name. Amen. Well, thank you very much, and...

for you to be, and... to speak to our Bi■gom ■■■■laws of Whaties A ■■ Araeli A A W D E A A B A A B A B A A B A B