

Hebrews 11:5

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[0 : 00] 506 years ago, or 506 years and two months ago, a young law student in Germany was out in a thunderstorm.

And a thunderbolt, or a strike of lightning, hit just as far away as the corner of that Sehen Moor to me, and knocked him off his feet.

And he cried out, St. Anne, save me, I'll become a monk. Well, he became a monk, true to his word, but within 12 years, not being able to get any satisfactory answers from his abbot, or from his bishop, to the questions that he had, because he was a diligent student, and he gave attention to God's word, he nailed 95 theses up on the castle church in Wittenberg.

And the Protestant Reformation was begun by Martin Luther. And Martin Luther's famous watchword was sola fide, by faith alone.

That was his mantra, justification by faith alone. Also, scriptura, sola scriptura, and sola gratia, by scripture alone, and by grace alone.

[1 : 22] None of those take away from one another. In the text, we have the phrase, pleasing God, pleasing him, it actually says, but it's impossible to please him, to please God.

The first catechism, which many of us have learned as children, and I've got it with me, not for that particular catechism, but for another one.

But, catechism one is, man's chief end is to glorify God and to enjoy him forever. It could just as easily say, to please God.

For pleasing God also benefits ourselves, and God blesses those who please him. Those who particularly loves, that is, those he loves savingly. I'm not talking about earthly blessings, but spiritual blessings.

And if we don't please God, we can only expect to be banished from his presence forever. And this distinction can be seen in the first brothers.

[2 : 31] We read about them today, Cain and Abel. Their sacrifices were equally good of themselves. But Cain's sacrifice was not mixed with faith, and Abel's was.

So any sacrifice since Cain, that's not mixed with faith, is a waste of time and effort. And it's an insult to God. Like the Pharisees, who tithed even their mint and their cumin.

But their hearts were far from him. So to break down the sermon, I'd like to, I'd like to speak about a definition, give you an argument, and an application.

The first section is, what is faith? And I'll speak of that under four headings. And then I'll try to advance an argument that without faith, it's impossible to be saved.

Because that's not what the text says. It says it's impossible to please him. But I'm going to say that it's impossible to be saved. And finally, a question and application to ourselves.

[3 : 37] Have you, or have I, have each of us got that faith which alone pleases God? So what is faith? The necessity of faith and whether we do have faith.

And what if we do? And what if we don't? We're talking about saving faith. We're talking about faith. Not other kinds of faith that are in the scripture.

Like historical faith. Like Agrippa had in Acts. Or in James chapter 2 verse 19. You believe that God is one, you do well.

Even the demons believe and shudder. Or temporal, temporary faith. Like the parable of the sower where those who had no root sprang up quickly and then died away.

And in 1 John 2.19, they went out from us but they were not of us. For if they had been of us, they would have continued with us. So we're talking about saving faith, not other kinds of faith.

[4 : 42] And there's three elements to that I'd suggest. There's knowledge. There's assent or agreement which you could call belief. And I think it's an easier word to use so I'll use that one.

And there's the resting. I was talking a bit earlier to the children. Resting and leaning. Relying and depending. That's trust. So these are the three elements I think that are coming to save. Giving faith.

Knowledge. You can't properly believe what you don't know. If someone asks you what he believes, I believe what the church believes. Oh, well, what does the church believe? Oh, well, the church believes what I believe.

Well, that begs the question. You're not dealing with the question. And there are people that do that because they don't know what they believe. So we must know that God is.

It says that here. We must believe that God exists. And that he is who he says he is. And what he says he is. That he's sovereign. That he's just.

[5 : 41] And all these attributes of him. Of his. And we have to believe that Christ is able and willing and effective as a redeemer. Paul says, how can they believe in him of whom they have not heard?

And how can they hear without a preacher? Now, we've got to know the Bible and we've got to know its doctrines. I'm not saying we're not going to know them like a theology professor, but we have to know the truth.

Because it's not blind faith. Like the man on the rope bridge. It wasn't a blind faith. It was a considered faith. It's not a blind faith as Dawkins would have us believe in his foolishness, in his lack of understanding.

We've got to search the scriptures to acquire that knowledge. It's before us. We have easy access to it. There's no reason why we shouldn't know it. If we pay attention to it.

And that knowledge ought to lead us on to faith. Now, an example of the kind of thing I'm not talking about would be if a preacher just said, believe, believe, believe.

[6 : 51] That might evoke an emotional response from some people without being able to give a reason for why they're believing. That is not of knowledge.

So knowledge, I think, is the first element necessary for faith. But then we must have belief.

Because we can know something but not believe. That wouldn't lead to faith.

To have faith, we must agree the Bible is the truth of the living God. not just know what's written on its pages, but say, whatever's written on this page, I believe it. For each page. I mean, we might know the stories of Rumpelstiltskin or Brer Rabbit.

But we don't believe that they're true. We know them. We don't believe them. They're just stories. We need to believe the Bible is inspired.

That it's all his word. That's not a liberal view. That's a reformed. That's a conservative. It's a Bible-believing view.

[7 : 56] We can't believe these things half-heartedly, but we have to believe them fully. Even when we don't understand them, like things like the Trinity. How can we understand Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, one God?

Who can understand that? But we can accept it and we can believe it. And we must. So what I'm saying here is we have to have a deliberate, voluntary, definite assent or agreement with the Word of God, with the truth of the Gospel.

Or we can't have faith. But that's not enough because we can have knowledge and belief, but

there's a third element. And the third element is the trust element I was talking about earlier.

Knowledge can be head knowledge. Many of us might have it. Many of us might have had it for many years. Some of us might have done well for youth exams and so on.

I'm one of them. I did well in them. No boasting. I just did well because I was expected to know these things. But I knew, and there might be many here who can say the same, knew many things about the Bible, many things in the Bible, but that didn't lead to faith.

[9 : 24] And belief can be general. It doesn't have to be particular. Like, for example, the vows that parents are asked to give at baptism. They're not necessarily asked to say that Christ is their Savior, just that he is the Savior.

That's a general belief. It's not particularizing it. It's not personalizing it. Now, I'd referred to trust as leaning or depending earlier on, didn't I?

Resting, relying, all these words. Another word the old timers used to use, I think it might have been the Puritans, is saying that trust is like a recumbency on the truth.

It comes like lying on a couch or a bed, putting all your weight, all your weight upon it, resting on it completely, fully supportive, fully supported by it, by the truth of the gospel.

So, I'd say it's not enough to know that Christ is the Savior. Not enough to believe that he can save. Each of us needs to know and believe those things.

[10:34] But we also have to trust in him to be our own personal Savior. It's not enough to believe in the atonement that Christ unites people to God, that he makes us as one with God.

We must hold that belief. As a belief in him, as the one who atones for me, for you. I'll give you a practical example.

There's a life belt or a life boy and you're in the sea. It's not enough for you to know what it is, what its function is. It's not enough for you to believe that it's a pretty good invention and it'll work.

You've got to put it around you. It's got to surround you and support you or it's of no use. The vital thing is to put it on. A guide dog for the blind is only as good as the trust that the master has in the dog.

The man or the woman has got to walk when the dog walks, stop when the dog stops, implicitly having faith in that dog. We have to trust.

[11:50] We have to trust in Christ in the same, well, in a greater way. That's a very inadequate illustration. But I'll try to give you a simple picture to illustrate what I've been getting at in this first point.

Imagine a burning building and a child in the first floor window. and there's a man down below really putting his hands out to catch that child.

Will the child leap? Well, the knowledge is seeing the man there. And the belief is believing that he's big and strong enough to catch the child safely.

But the third essential thing is actually letting go, dropping down, dropping from that window into those arms.

That's where the trust comes in. I had another story about Niagara for later in the sermon, but this is one I hadn't really thought of before.

[13:02] The French tightrope walker of the 19th century, Charles Blondin, did many things. He was the best trapeze artist, tightrope walker in the world at the time.

And he crossed the Niagara Falls where to fall would mean certain death, no safety rope or no safety net. He did it with a long balancing pole. He did it walking forwards.

He did it walking backwards. He did it doing a somersault in the middle and landing on the rope. He did it pushing a wheelbarrow. He did all these things in front of people. And he came up to one man and he said, do you believe I can cross that tightrope again?

He said, yes, certainly. Will you come with me on my back? No, of course not. I'm not daft. And he said to the next man who happened to be his manager, do you believe I can do it?

Oh, yes. Yes, I fully believe you can do it. Do you trust me? Really? I believe with all my heart you can do it. Well, come on my back and I'll piggyback you over. And that man went on Blondin's back and Blondin carried him safely over.

[14:09] That was the trust. The first man believed, but he wasn't willing to trust his life. So, from those examples, it's easy to see that we can know Christ died for sin.

We can understand that he's able to do it, but we must also put our trust. I have to do it. You have to do it. Everyone in here has to do it. We can only do it for ourselves.

We can't do it for our families or for anyone we love. Only ourselves. Only ourselves. Only ourselves. Only ourselves. But I said there were four headings in this part and there are.

But the other one isn't an element of what faith is. It's rather the manner in which it has to be exercised. It's humility. God gives grace to the humble. That is, only the humble get grace.

Including the grace of faith. Faith can only properly be exercised with humility. And the old theologians, again, had great phrases and one of them was that faith was a kneeling or stooping grace.

[15:15] If we're humble, we bow down, we stoop, we kneel, we praise God in the attitude and posture of humility. But if we don't have faith, we can't do these things.

Why? Because pride prevents it. We're too proud to believe. We won't become as a little child as Christ demands. We won't accept that God tells us and that he commands us to believe.

We won't accept what he commands us to believe either. And Spurgeon, the great Baptist preacher of the 19th century, said, Christ is a door big enough for the worst sinner to enter, but so low a door that all who enter must bow down or stoop to do so.

So where there's faith, there's humility, and where there's humility, true humility, there is faith. So that's the first heading. What's faith?

I've tried to show it to consist of three elements, and they have to be exercised in true humility. So why is it true that without faith we cannot be saved?

[16:25] Well, first of all, there's no scriptural example of anyone who was saved without faith. The chapter of faith we read, chapter 11 of Hebrews, catalog of 17 people, I think, are named there.

The heroes of the faith. Some of the heroes of the faith. And it's not an exhaustive list because he says, the epistle writer says, time would fail me to tell of all the others.

But there were other Bible characters who didn't have faith. Ahab, for one, who humbled himself, but he didn't have a show true repentance, only remorse.

insincere confessions of sin from Ahab, from Saul, who humbly repented to David time and again and kept on trying to kill him.

For Esau, who showed remorse, tears even, but that wasn't repentance. And for Judas Iscariot, who despaired rather than repented and went and hanged himself.

[17:37] Since there's no examples in the scripture, why should we think, why should we dare to think that any of us could be saved without faith? So we have no scriptural warrant to believe we could be saved without faith.

Now secondly, the Bible tells us works cannot save. We read that together. We read that in Galatians.

Martin Luther recognized it. Paul wrote about it. Good works aren't useless. James tells us that very clearly.

Faith without works is dead. But only as an evidence of faith. That's the only way in which good works are useful. They have no value as far as being qualified for salvation is concerned.

We can't earn salvation. Good works are a real value only after the exercise of faith, not before. But the trouble is, we often want, don't we, to earn things, to earn salvation.

[18:47] all religions do, except the true religion of biblical Christianity. One way or another, they all have some way of earning.

We don't. Because Christ doesn't leave us with that option. It's very clear that works cannot save. And just as well, because that would lead to pride, surely, wouldn't it?

We can see that in ourselves. If we can earn things, we're proud of it. We have no basis for pride if we're relying upon God and upon Christ. Without faith, we have no union with Christ.

Ephesians 3. Verse 17.

So that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith. And short of catechism, and this is why I have the catechism with me, for catechism 30. And the texts before it.

[20:08] How does the spirit apply to us the redemption purchased by Christ? Well, the catechism is only so good as the texts that underlie it, of course. But we will speak with the texts. The spirit applies to us the redemption purchased by Christ by working faith in us and thereby uniting us to Christ in our effectual calling.

And John 15.5 says, I am the vine, you are the branches. He that abides in me and I in him, the same brings forth much fruit. Without me, you can do nothing. So it's important, it's vital, it's essential that we be united with Christ.

Without that, we can't be saved. Remember, our prayers are all for Christ's sake. He's the only one that's earned anything for us. We must be united to him in our prayers as well.

The other story about Niagara. In the Niagara River above the famous falls, two men were being swept away by the river.

Downriver some way, some people managed to float a rope out on or just below the surface and one of the men grabbed onto the rope. The other man grabbed onto a log.

[21:24] who do you think was saved? Obviously, the rope man. You can see Christ as the person on the bank pulling him to safety and the rope as the faith that unites him to Christ, that unites the man to Christ.

The other man had nothing, no union with Christ. He had the log. good works, perhaps, swept him away.

So we can liken that rope to faith. And the fourth heading in this second section is, it's impossible to persevere in the Christian life in holiness without faith.

Easy enough if there's no challenge, but that's not perseverance. It takes a lot to stand against persecution, but it's God's grace that allows us to do so. Only that.

And faith in Christ. It's the object of faith that's important. Not the type of faith or the strength of faith, but the object of faith. But the point I'm trying to stress here is, perseverance to the end is important.

[22 : 40] That's what we need. I'll give you another anecdote about that. In the southern United States before the Civil War, there was a slave who prayed for his unbelieving master.

And that master hated it. He hated being prayed for. And he told that slave, I will beat you if you ever pray for me again. And he fulfilled his threat. But there came a time in God's province that that man felt the need for prayer.

And he didn't know anyone who could pray except that slave. So he swallowed his pride and he went to the slave and said, I need you to pray for me. And the slave said, I've never stopped praying for you secretly ever since you first flogged me.

He had kept on praying. He had persevered despite the beatings and so on. He prayed. And that slave's prayer led to that slave master's salvation and his wife's conversion.

All on account of the perseverance of the slave who was beaten but refused to stop trusting, believing, and praying.

[23 : 57] So to recap the second point, I gave you four reasons why salvation is impossible without faith. No one in the Bible has been saved without faith. Works can't save.

We need faith in order to have union or communion with Christ and perseverance. We need perseverance in faith to be saved. Perseverance in the faith.

faith. And I hope that establishes to your satisfaction that faith is necessary and why it's necessary.

And finally, the all-important question for us all, have we got that faith which alone pleases God?

Do we believe that Christ Jesus is the Savior, is our Savior? Do we accept him as Savior? Do we believe him with all our heart? God, it's not mystical.

It's not airy-fairy. I'm going to suggest three tests we can use to conclude objectively whether we have faith. That faith that pleases God. And we don't get that faith by heredity or by education or by ceremony or anything else.

[25 : 10] It's a free gift of God's grace. But we still need to receive it and we still need to exercise it. So if we have faith, we renounce our own righteousness. We can't have one item of faith in ourselves or we're not trusting in God, in Jesus Christ completely.

We must trust him alone. John the Baptist said, he, Jesus, must increase, I must decrease.

And Augustus' top lady in Rock of Ages, nothing in my hand I bring, simply to thy cross I claim.

Secondly, faith leads inevitably, invariably, to a very high and great esteem for our Lord Jesus Christ, our Savior.

Do we love him? Do we seek to serve him? He says, if you love me, keep my commandments.

Don't despair, friend, if you're not keeping them perfectly.

Nobody is. But that must be our aim, our desire. Do you love his people for his sake? Is his name higher than any other to you?

[26 : 25] As well as, Lord, is he wonderful, counselor, prince of peace, the mighty God? Is he Jehovah's blessed, can you, God our righteousness as he was to Robert Murray McShane?

Can you say, can I say, Jesus, I love thy charming name, tis manna to my ear? If you do and can say that, you'll know how awful, dreadful, hateful it is to hear his name blasphemed.

I mentioned earlier I was in Ireland this year. I've never heard such blasphemy in my life and I hope I never hear it again, using the name of Jesus Christ casually, callously.

It's bad enough using the name God in vain, but using Jesus Christ is so much more calculated and wicked, I would say. And it did and does set an arrow when you hear it.

if you have faith and trust in him, if he's your savior. And if we have true faith, we show true obedience.

[27 : 43] We have to live a trusting, obedient life. We can't trust in good works, but we have to seek to obey, to show our love.

Spurgeons, said, faith is the father of holiness. If you don't love the child, that is holiness. You don't know the parent. That is, you don't have faith.

He had such a great way of putting things, so simply, he could reach people with simple thoughts, profound thoughts and simple words. faith. I'm conscious of the time.

I'm just going to skip to the end to say, lastly, the fourth part. What's the answer to this part of the sermon, to this question? Have we got that faith? What's your answer, friend? What's my answer? if you have faith, God be praised. If you can truthfully, thoughtfully, conscientiously say that these things are true of you, you have good cause for hope, the Christian hope, certainty in the gospel.

[28 : 55] people. But friend, if you don't have faith, and only you know in here if you do or you don't, no one else can tell you whether you do or you don't, not for sure.

The matter's urgent. It couldn't be more urgent. We don't, we're not promised any other day than this day. This is the day of salvation.

this is the only day we're assured of seeing. So may God grant that none of us leave this life without that faith.

May God grant that none of us leave this day without that faith. And even, may we not leave this building without exercising faith. Looking to him, Jesus Christ, the righteous one, and not leaving it a moment longer.

Amen. Let us pray. Amen. Let us pray.