

Hebrews 11:1-7

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[0 : 00] God, we need you to speak to us this morning by your word. We need your spirit, Lord, to open our eyes and to soften our hearts so that we might hear from you today your word to us this morning.

God, I pray that you might use my words, Lord, to speak for you. And that you would point us together towards you this morning.

God, we pray we would be strengthened and encouraged. We pray these things in Jesus' name. Amen. Amen. So I'm wondering if you've ever woken up in the morning for those of you who are here and have professed faith in Christ, maybe you've grown up in the church, if you've woken up in the morning and just thought, is any of this really real?

You know, your kids wake you up out of a deep sleep. You stumble out of bed, drag a comb across my head, get dressed, eat a bowl of Cheerios, manage a few fights, get off to work.

And you just think, is the Christian faith real? Does it make a difference? Maybe you're here this morning and you're exploring that question.

[1 : 51] And you're looking around and you're thinking, all of these people believe something and I don't understand why. And I don't get it.

We live in a world that doesn't tell us that God exists.

Most of your neighbors won't say, hey, isn't it great that there's a spiritual world where God lives? And is it work among us today?

In fact, we may even live in a world, depending on your particular circumstances, where faith is opposed.

Faith is seen as a crutch for the weak. For people who can't make it on their own, they need something else. Maybe faith is seen as an escape into unreality.

[2 : 56] So when you say things like, I believe in the Bible and I want to follow it, you're looked at like you have two heads without a single brain between the two of them.

Not always, but often. I think we live in a world like that. Or we live in a world where you'll be encouraged to have faith and believe. But not to believe in something in particular.

Faith is the power of positive thinking. Just believe and the world will become a better place. Just believe and you can achieve all of your dreams. Just believe.

Be optimistic because it's better somehow. In the midst of all of this, the Christian faith presents its...

The Christian world, the Christian belief system holds, I can't even say it without saying, it is a system of faith. It is about believing something.

[4 : 18] And it is hard for us to keep going when both the mundane realities of our lives and the world that we live in every day seem to tell us that it's not very real or it's not very important.

And we grow weary of believing. We grow weary of feeling like the odd man out. We grow weary of feeling like we're committed to something that other people think is foolish.

We wonder if it's worth it. We wonder how we can keep going. Well, friends, our passage this morning is about that.

Hebrews chapter 11. It's listed in your bulletin. I think it's page 1009 or something like that. Somewhere around that area.

I forgot to get the number. Hebrews chapter 11, verse 1. And as you turn there, I just want to remind you about the context of what we heard. Last week, we looked at the end of chapter 10.

[5 : 28] And after 10 chapters of this glorious exposition about how Jesus is greater than anything else in the whole world, Jesus has done everything we could ever want, then there is in the section right before this, if you remember, Pastor Nick preached on this, a solemn warning and a great

encouragement.

And in the midst of it, what we saw was that the stakes are really high. To keep going in faith for Christians makes all the difference in the world.

And to keep going means that there's a great reward. And there are promises that will be kept. And there is a better and an abiding possession that we have with God and in God himself that is greater than anything else.

Oh, but if we lose that, but if we let go of that, if we turn away from that, what a grievous thing it is. And the writer is writing these letters to encourage us to keep going, to persevere, to press on in faith. And if you remember, that's how he ends it.

[6 : 39] We are not of those who shrink back and are destroyed, but we are those who have faith and, therefore, preserve our souls.

And that leads us to our section this morning. Please pray, or please read with me Hebrews chapter 11, verse 1 through 7.

Now, faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen. For by it, the people of old receive their commendation.

By faith, we understand that the universe was created by the word of God, so that what is seen was not made out of things that are visible. By faith, Abel offered to God a more acceptable sacrifice than Cain, through which he was commended as righteous, God commending him by accepting his gifts.

And through his faith, though he died, he still speaks. By faith, Enoch was taken up so that he should not see death and he was not found because God had taken him.

[7 : 49] Now, before he was taken, he was commended as having pleased God. And without faith, it is impossible to please him. For whoever would draw near to God must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who seek him.

By faith, Noah, being warned by God concerning events as yet unseen, in reverent fear, constructed an ark for the saving of his household.

By this, he condemned the world and became an heir of the righteousness that comes by faith. How do we keep going?

The writer of the Hebrews wants us to see that the answer is by faith. It is by faith that we keep going in this Christian life.

But what does that mean? That's what our passage is going to help us see this morning. And what we're going to see is that faith is the organ, it is the instrument, it is the lens that God has given us to see the world and the reality of the world as he sees it, as he defines it, as he says that it truly is.

[9 : 16] Faith is the gift of God by which our eyes are opened to see the world as it really is. And as we do that, we are strengthened to persevere.

This is what I hope you will get from this message this morning. is that persevering is dependent on faith.

And faith is God's gift so that we can see what is really real. And when we see what is really real, it makes it worth continuing on.

The passage breakdown very simply. Verses 1-3 tell us about the essence of faith. Verses 4-7 give us a picture of the exercise of faith.

So let's look at it together. First, the essence of faith. Faith has been described as, well, it's been described in the world by many things.

[10 : 25] I talked about some of them earlier. Faith is described as believing in something you know that can't possibly be true. Or faith is hoping that something you wish might be true would be true, but you don't really know.

But biblical faith is different than that. If you look at me with me in verse 1, you will see, it says, now faith is the assurance of things hoped for and the conviction of things not seen.

When we talk about faith in our modern culture, we often talk about it as subjective experience. I have faith. faith. And, unfortunately, the language of this translation seems to reinforce that.

Faith is assurance or conviction. So, so my faith is about how strongly I hold to the things that I think. But, you know, a hundred years ago, if someone read this passage in the authorized version or the King James version, it would read, faith is the substance of things hoped for and the evidence of things unseen.

We could get into a whole discussion about why the translation has shifted. But what I want you to see is that behind this verse, the definition of faith is not a subjective experience of believing something.

[11 : 48] But faith is the ability to see an objective reality. And particularly, do you see what he says? It is the objective reality of things hoped for.

And the evidence, the signs that something is true even though it cannot be seen. It is an incredible thing that God has given us faith so that we can look at the world and know what is true about it by faith.

The promises of God are one of the things that the writer of the Hebrews wants us to remember that we can see. He's talked for ten chapters and if you've been here, we've talked for six or seven months now about the promises of God, about what God has accomplished in Christ for us.

And that when we are in Christ, we are sheltered from the storm of God's righteous wrath against sin. We are given a future promise of life eternal with God that can never be taken away from us.

We are promised a cleansed heart that will one day be made new so that the stain of sin will be completely removed from it and we will no longer know the evil, selfish desires that spring up in our heart.

[13 : 41] Friends, these aren't things you can see. they aren't things that you can pull out a Geiger counter or a microphone or a camera and record.

They're not something that our five senses can ascertain. But they are real. They are as real, in fact, I might argue they are more real than the material world that we live in.

This is why the writer of Hebrews in verse 3 goes right to creation to lay a foundation stone for us.

Friends, there's a lot of discussion today about where the world came from and how it came into being.

But to believe in the God of the Bible is to believe what verse 3 says. That matter is not eternal.

That the physical world is not all that there is.

And there's great value in science and exploring it and understanding it. But we must not confuse that with knowledge of all things.

[15 : 01] For it says that we know that the world came from God because He spoke and in the power of His Word, the physical world that we live in, the universe that we live in, came into existence.

It did not create itself. It does not sustain itself. But an unseen God is the source of it all. And the writer of Hebrews goes there to say, look, the very fabric of the world we live in shows us that there is more than what we can see with our physical eyes and measure and test with a scientific hypothesis.

There has always been more than that in this world that we live in. And so faith is the eyes to see that the world is more.

That there is a reality that God exists and that God shapes the world that we live in. There are future things that are certain.

There are unseen things that are real right now. Do you remember the story we just read? If you followed Elizabeth as she read that story in great vigor.

[16 : 28] Elisha prayed that God would open the eyes of his servant to see the reality of his situation. And as his eyes were opened by God with faith, he suddenly saw a reality that he couldn't see otherwise.

He saw God's power. He saw God's forces at work in the situation. But friends, it's not simply enough to know something by faith.

That's only the very beginning. In fact, classically, faith has been defined as knowledge, knowing something, assent, agreeing that it's true, and then finally trust.

Trust to live in light of it. For God, as he calls in us into faith, calls us into a relationship with him.

So verse 6 says, whoever must draw near to God, that is, come to God in relationship and find him to be the great treasure and reward of life, those who draw near to God must believe that he exists.

[17 : 33] Now that sounds sort of silly. Of course you'd have to believe he exists to draw near. But you must also believe that he is the rewarder of those who seek him.

Not just that he is there, but that he's trustworthy, that he's worth pursuing, that he's faithful, that the things he says are true about you and about himself and about the world.

Trusting means living in this relationship in a way that changes how we act.

You probably have heard the great, the story, this is a classic illustration of what faith is. The great blondin walked in the 1940s across Niagara Falls on a rope. In researching I realized he didn't just do it once, he did it like for weeks. And he did different things. He cooked an omelet. Over Niagara Falls on a rope. There's a story, I think it's true, I don't know if it's true.

[18 : 41] There's a story about one time he took a wheelbarrow and he walked the wheelbarrow on the rope, across the rope, and then he turned around and he came back and some wag from the audience made a comment and blondin looked at him and said, do you think I can do this again?

He said, yes. He said, do you think I can carry you in this wheelbarrow? Yes. We'll get in. Friends, that's a picture of what biblical faith is.

It's not just knowing, it's not just a sensing, yeah, I think you can do it. It's taking your whole life and putting it into the hands of the thing that you are saying is true.

And here is putting our hands, our lives, in the hands of the living God life. You might be thinking, isn't this just wishful thinking?

Have we escaped from just like Matt and a bunch of people thinking, oh, this is a great idea?

Maybe, maybe, if only this were true, then I would believe it, but I don't know how to believe it.

[19 : 55] On what basis do we know that this is true? On what basis do we understand God? Well, friends, that's another sermon, but briefly.

It's because God has made himself known. He's made himself known through this book, the Bible, which tells us who he is and what he's done in the world.

But even more importantly than that, he's made himself known by sending his son into the world. I remember when I was 16, exploring Christianity for the first time.

I didn't come to faith because I was convinced that God had created the world. I didn't come to faith because I knew that the Bible was absolutely true. I came to faith because I became convinced that Jesus was real, that he really came and he really lived and he really died and he really rose again from the dead.

faith. And if God entered the world like that and did what he did for us, well, that made me go back and suddenly this book made more sense and suddenly believing that God created the world fit a lot better.

[21 : 31] It's not all the answer to that question. There's a lot of good reasons to believe, but if you're here looking for proof, I don't know if you're going to find it because God has designed us to persevere by faith, by believing in him, by putting on these lenses so that we see reality as he defines it, as he tells us that it is.

One of the fun things is that we're going to spend the next five weeks, four weeks, exploring what this looks like because the rest of the book, the rest of the chapter, Hebrews chapter 11, is all of these pictures of what does it actually look like to believe.

What particularly did people believe about God? How did it change their lives? How did they exhibit both knowledge and trust in God as they lived by faith?

And it is this catalog of people to give us examples so that we would be encouraged to not lose heart but to persevere in faith by putting on that lens and seeing the world as God defines it and living according to it.

So what does it look like? What does the exercise of faith look like? Let's look at verses four through seven with me. You'll see that each of these stories there are three main characters here Abel and then Enoch and then Noah in verses four, five, and seven and there's this pattern by faith Enoch Abel by faith Enoch by faith Noah and this goes on for the rest of the chapter it happens in verse four, five, seven, eight, nine, eleven, seventeen, twenty-one, twenty-two, twenty-three, twenty-four, et cetera, et cetera.

[23 : 29] He does it over and over and over and over and over again to say this is what it looks like to live by faith. And we get these three examples and the first two are very quick.

Abel, his story is recorded in Genesis four. He offered up a sacrifice that was more pleasing to God than the one that his brother offered.

friends, this is not because Abel's sacrifice was categorically, quantitatively better than Cain's.

It seems very clear both in the Genesis four passage and here that the thing that was the difference between Abel and Cain's sacrifice was the state of their heart and their faith.

Abel came and he offered this sacrifice to God believing that he existed seeking to please him and to honor him looking to him to be a rewarder for his faithful offering giving the first fruits from the work that he had.

[24 : 50] Whatever Cain did it was not that for when God did not accept Cain's sacrifice there was no repentance there was no broken heartedness there was no grief there was anger there was resentment and ultimately there was a rejection of God and a denial and so Abel is held up as this brief example of a man who wanted to please God with his offering and was declared righteous that is he did the right thing before God by exercising his faith and then Enoch is mentioned in the middle of a genealogy in Genesis 5 22 through 24 and it says that he walked with God and that he was taken up he was rewarded by being spared the judgment of death by being taken up into heaven because he had walked because he had lived a life seeking to please

God what I want you to see is the writer of Hebrews throws out these two examples really quickly not because we're supposed to dig into the details of it but simply to say look these are two men they sought to please God because by faith they believed that God was there and that he was a rewarder of those who diligently seek him and that that is what Abel did and that is what Enoch did and that's why verse six is in the middle of this section and not in the definition in verses one through three because he's just saying do you see what's going on here these guys believed that God was there and they sought him diligently they sought his reward his commendation his witness of their faith that they believed in him and lived for him in the world and then we come to the last example in verse seven the story of Noah Genesis six through nine he was described in Genesis six as having someone who had found favor with God who walked with God who was righteous in all his ways and he stood out like a sore thumb in fact it says that the world had gotten so bad that God had repented of making it that God saw that men did all evil everywhere all the time you couldn't get more superlatives to say how bad the world was how dark it had become I haven't seen the movie Noah but I hear that one of its strengths is that it depicts the darkness of the world not even recommending it I'm just saying if you've seen it and in the middle of that darkness God repented of making the world God wished that he could destroy the evil because it was so terrible and yet this one man

Noah stood out and God came to him and God told him of an unseen future thing that was going to happen he said Noah the day is coming where there will be deliverance and there will be judgment and I want you to build an ark so that this deliverance will happen I want you to obey and says that Noah did all that God told him to he built a four story boat in the middle of the arid high plains of upper Mesopotamia there is probably no boat that size ever built anywhere in that millennia it was so large and it was not built near any body of water large enough to hold it I don't know if you're Keith Green fans do you guys know Keith Green you just think about Noah toting his umbrella when there wasn't a cloud in the sky all his neighbors would laugh when he would pass by and they snickered when he passed by and God said don't worry Noah you know just keep building that boat just a matter of time till we see who's going to float so anyway but when you think about it Noah stood out completely from the world around him he must have looked like an absolute fool he must have looked like an idiot he must have looked like he was crazy and yet the writer of Hebrews tells us that by faith he did this he put on the lens of faith and he saw that what God had said about the world was true and he changed his life in accordance to it he believed he believed that God would deliver his family by this boat and by his faithfulness he condemned the world around him as it says in verse seven

[30 : 33] Charles Spurgeon says the way you know a crooked stick is by placing a straight one next to it you can tell how crooked it is doesn't mean Noah preached condemnation to his neighbors it simply meant that by his righteous faithful obedience to God he demonstrated the unrighteousness and the evil of all around him the writer of the Hebrews brings up Noah to say this is a man who lived by faith because he saw the world the way God defined it not the way his neighbors would have seen it and so he was declared righteous righteous not because he was morally perfect but as it says in verse seven in fact he became an heir of the righteousness that comes by faith friends we have to get this right faith isn't another work that we have to do so that

God will be pleased with us because we do it so well or because we do it so rightly faith is a gift that God gives us so that we can see him and see his faithfulness and see his power and see his reality and see his salvation and see his deliverance more clearly because when that is true then we will be saved not because we believed but because of what God has done and the thing that we have

put our faith in this is why at the end of chapter 10 the writer of Hebrews quotes Habakkuk 2 form the righteous shall live by faith this is why the context of the whole book is so important because we could read this chapter and just think you should believe harder or believe more but he's given you 10 chapters of what you are to believe in so that you may be saved that

Jesus offered the sacrifice necessary that Jesus died on the cross for the salvation of wicked selfish self important people like you and me and that when we put our faith in what he has done when we trust in that when we acknowledge it's true when we assent that we agree with it and then when we trust in it when we forsake all of our other self salvation projects to put all of our eggs in one basket and to say this is my only hope of drawing near to God this is how we are saved and this is meant to be an encouragement to the Hebrews who are facing persecution who are losing their possessions and possibly even their lives the writer of

Hebrews saying hang in there hold on to faith because faith will hold on to God and his reality and as you hold on God will preserve you and the promises will come true though they take your life they cannot take you out of the hands of God though they take your career they cannot take your identity in Christ though they take your children they cannot take you out of the family of God whatever it might be you have by faith all that you need and it's meant to mean encouragement to us too meant to be an encouragement to us when we keep a Sabbath and draw a line and say I won't work on Sundays it helps us when we draw a line to say I won't stay over with you tonight to your girlfriend or boyfriend because I'm committed to purity it helps make sense when you say I'm going to give away 80% of what I earn because I can live on 20% of it it makes sense when you say this is the book by which I live this is the book that defines reality and when I don't understand how this relates to something else I'm going to keep seeking understanding but I'm going to start here and let this be my guide when like

[36 : 00] Noah you may be viewed as crazy by your neighbors or when like me when I wake up in the morning I wonder is it real I go back I go back to the very beginning the most important reality is that Christ is real that he lived that he died that he rose again that now he is ever interceding for me that he has saved me that he has made me his that he will one day bring all the promises home that I will be his he will be my treasure friends this is a life of faith this is what it can look like for us to believe let's pray

Lord we think of the man who said Lord I believe help my unbelief God with him we cry out this morning Lord will you help us Lord in our unbelief Lord we need you to remind us we need you to strengthen us we need you Lord to again help us see clearly the world as you have defined it and to see you most importantly in the world and over the world Lord that you are the most important reality of all and Lord in seeing that Lord you will help us to make sense of our everyday lives both the hard things and the mundane things

God we pray you would help us in Jesus name Amen