

# ***“Faith”***

Hebrews 11:6

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## Introduction:

This morning I would like for us to go back and study one of the basics of our Christian faith by taking just a few minutes to reconsider the concept of faith. Certainly the Bible says quite a bit about faith. In fact, if we wanted to, we could probably spend several weeks just by starting in **Genesis** and looking at each reference to faith in the entire Bible. And yet this morning (instead of looking here and there and not really taking the time to consider each verse responsibly) I would like for us to look at a single verse, and the verse is found in the great chapter of faith—in **Hebrews 11**. In our pew Bibles, **Hebrews 11** starts on page 1882.

»PPT»

The book of **Hebrews** was written to a group of Christians who had come out of the Jewish religion. They were what we might describe as “**second generation**” Christians; that is, they had not actually seen the Lord, but they had been taught the gospel by those who had (we learn this from the opening verses of **Hebrews 2**). But as we also discover in the book of **Hebrews**, these Christians were undergoing a time of intense persecution, it was about to get a lot worse, and so they were apparently tempted to turn back to the safety of the Jewish faith (which, at that time, unlike Christianity, was still legal in the eyes of the Roman government). And so these people were facing a challenge. They were facing a decision: Do we press forward with Christianity, or do we turn back? Do we press forward to perhaps a dangerous and uncertain future, or do we turn back to the safety of Judaism?

With that challenge in mind, the author of the book of **Hebrews** often reaches back into the Old Testament and he makes the argument that Jesus is better—Jesus is better than the Law of Moses, Jesus is better than the Levitical priesthood, Jesus is better than the sacrifices of bulls and goats, Jesus is better in every possible way. And when we get to the end of **Hebrews 10** (in the very last verse), the writer says, ***“But we are not of those who shrink back to destruction, but of those who have faith to the preserving of the soul.”*** And so he introduces the subject of **FAITH**. And then, in the very next verse (in **Hebrews 11:1**), the author says, ***“Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen.”*** After giving that as the definition of faith, the author then goes into a long series of heroes—men and women from the past who acted on their faith—men and women who made dangerous and life-changing decisions based on their faith in God. **Verse 1** is a powerful verse, but this morning I would like for us to skip ahead just a little bit and look together at **Hebrews 11:6**, because in the middle of this long

section of heroes, as he gets started, the author seems to back up a little bit to reinforce the importance of faith. It is almost as if he is preaching a sermon, and he gets started, but then he pauses—he wants to make sure that his audience gets it. And so he refers to God in verse 5, and then he says in verse 6, ***“And without faith it is impossible to please Him, for he who comes to God must believe that He is and that He is a rewarder of those who seek Him.”***

This morning I would like for us to look very carefully at this statement, and as we look at each part of it, I would like for us to apply it to our lives today. We are living in a different culture, we are living in a different time altogether, but I would suggest that this verse is more up-to-date and more relevant than this morning's newspaper.

**I. One of the first things we notice here in verse 6 (a very encouraging lesson) is that IT IS POSSIBLE TO PLEASE GOD. »PPT»**

At first, the statement seems rather ominous as the author says that, ***“...without faith it is impossible to please Him.”*** By definition, the word ***“impossible”*** refers to something that cannot be done. The author is not talking about something that is difficult, or something that is hard, but it is ***“impossible.”*** And so when the author says that it is ***“impossible”*** to please God without faith, we take notice—we get concerned. Let us not, therefore, attempt the impossible! Someone has said, ***“To attempt a difficulty may be laudable, but to rush upon an impossibility is madness!”*** Very true! But the positive side of this is that with faith it is possible to please God.

As imperfect human beings, we have the ability to make God happy. We have the ability to give God pleasure. God is pleased when we look into His word. God is pleased when we discover what kind of worship He likes and when we do it. God is pleased when we pray and ask according to His will. Our kindness toward other people puts a smile on His face. We think about our own children. Do you know the most valuable pieces of artwork in our home? The pig made out of clay in 3<sup>rd</sup> grade, the tracing of a hand made in Kindergarten, the picture of me standing in this pulpit drawn by a 4-year old. As parents, we are pleased when our children treat us with respect and do the things they know we will appreciate. And perhaps in a similar way, it is possible for us to please God, but it can only be done ***“with faith.”***

As we know from the Scriptures, faith is a lot more than simply knowing something, but faith involves doing something about what we know. Faith is not just a concept to be debated, it is not just an idea to be discussed for an hour every Sunday morning, but faith is something we do. Faith is something we live. Faith is something that pleases God.

We think about the examples right here in Hebrews 11, and we understand that faith is a whole lot more than a feeling or a blind leap into the dark, but when people in this chapter had faith, they did stuff! By faith, Abel offered a sacrifice that was pleasing to God—he went out in the field, picked out an animal, slit its throat, and burned it on an altar. By faith, Enoch walked with God—he lived his life in a way that

was pleasing to God. By faith, Noah built an ark—he went out, looked for trees, cut them down, dragged them back to the jobsite, and built. By faith, Abraham left his home and lived the rest of his life in tents, looking for a land that God would show him only when he got there. By faith, Moses gave up the passing pleasures of sin and instead decided to endure being mistreated along with the children of God. Faith, then, is not some kind of magic pill that takes away all of our pain and makes life easy, but faith can be dangerous. I mean, think about the very first example in this chapter. Abel offered a better sacrifice than his brother, and what did that get him? It got him murdered by his brother! Now, please correct me if I'm wrong, but that is not generally considered a good outcome!

Please look with me at what faith did for some of the others in this chapter, starting about halfway through **verse 35**, *"...others were tortured, not accepting their release, so that they might obtain a better resurrection; and others experienced mockings and scourgings, yes, also chains and imprisonment. They were stoned, they were sawn in two, they were tempted, they were put to death with the sword; they went about in sheepskins, in goatskins, being destitute, afflicted, ill-treated (men of whom the world was not worthy), wandering in deserts and mountains and caves and holes in the ground."*

And so as the writer of **Hebrews** is trying to convince these early Christians to hold on, he reminds them that faith has always been dangerous, and yet without faith it is impossible to please God. Or, in more positive terms, we have the great privilege of pleasing God, but we can only do it through faith. And so the writer of **Hebrews** is reminding us that the price is worth it. When we enter the Christian life, we enter into one of the most exciting lifestyles known to man—yes, it is dangerous, but we also have the privilege of pleasing God.

**II. There is a second basic idea in this passage—an idea we definitely still need right here in Madison—and that is, THOSE WHO COME TO GOD MUST BELIEVE THAT HE IS. »PPT»**

And like the previous little phrase in **verse 6**, we come to another statement that seems rather firm—a statement that can almost come across as being dogmatic—as we find that the author of **Hebrews** uses the word *"must."* Again, the word *"must"* (like the word *"impossible"*) is not very flexible—it refers to an absolute. If we are to come to God, then we *"must"* believe that He is. And so even when it sometimes appears that God isn't, we as Christians (if we are to come to God), we must believe that He is.

Well, it sounds pretty silly to have to point this out, doesn't it (that in order to come to God we need to believe that He is)? And maybe we can think about it this way: I do not go out looking for Unicorns, because I do not believe that they exist. In the same way, I do not go out looking for a pot of gold at the end of every rainbow—I do not believe that the gold is there. We think about Ponce De Leon who went out searching for the fountain of youth. He believed it was out there somewhere, and so

he spent his life looking for it. He searched diligently for it, because he believed it was there.

Perhaps in a similar way, if we believe that God is, then we will spend our entire lives on a persistent search to go out and find Him. Those who come to God must believe that He is. And here is a key question: What kind of god are we looking for? I would strongly suggest that we go looking for the God of the Bible. It is so frustrating, sometimes, to hear people talking about their God, **“My god does this, or my god does that,”** and so on. Several years ago, a preacher here in Wisconsin wrote me and said, **“My god is not concerned with rule-keeping.”** And yet when people start talking like that, they miss the fact that the existence and nature of God do not depend on our opinions of what God should really be like. In other words, we are not to go out and make a god in our own image, but we are to go to the Scriptures, and we are to read and learn what God is really like. We believe that message, and only then can we **“come to God.”** Those who come to God must believe that He is.

Sometimes our wrong impression of God can keep us from coming to God as we should. I recently read an article where a man was trying to convert an atheist, and the man started the conversation by saying to the atheist, **“Why don’t you tell me about the God you don’t believe in, because it may be that I do not believe in that God either.”** In other words, if someone looks at God as being only angry and vengeful, then I would need to say that I do not believe in that God either, because that is not an accurate image of God as painted for us in the Bible. If someone looks at God as being weak or distant, there again, that is not an accurate image of God. Sometimes, though, people are like that—they paint an inaccurate picture of God in their own minds, and then they refuse to believe in that god—not fair to God at all!

I recently read about a man who fell off a cliff but managed to grab hold of a tree limb on his way down, and so he cried out, **“Is anyone up there?”** And the Lord said, **“Yes, I am the Lord. Do you believe in me?”** And the man said, **“Yes, I believe, but I can’t hold on much longer.”** And the Lord said, **“Then I need you to let go.”** The man then paused for a moment and said, **“Is there anyone else up there?”** You see, the man did not like God’s answer, and so he started looking for another god. That, of course, is a fictional story, but it represents what many people do to the one true God of heaven.

Sometimes (especially in our society) we want to see some concrete evidence that God is who He says He is. And sometimes we think, **“If I could only see the evidence for myself, then I would believe.”** And yet for just a moment consider what happened after one of the greatest miracles in the New Testament. A man by the name of Lazarus had been dead for four days when the Lord called his name and the man came back from the dead. The people were dealing with evidence—eye witness testimony, a story they could research, a story that would hold up in court—and yet people dealt with that evidence in different ways. Some people believed, but others got mad and tried to figure out a way to kill the Lord. All of this just goes to show that when we go into a situation with our minds already made up about something, we can easily find all kinds of ways to avoid the truth of the situation.

Most of us are familiar with the old fairy tale: Frog + Princess=Handsome Prince. Well these days there is another fairy tale going around: Frog + Billions of Years=Handsome Prince. You see, for those who refuse to believe, the evidence is not convincing. The Bible refers to this as having a heart that is hard—a heart that refuses to accept the evidence. To me, it is interesting that we do not have the hard physical evidence concerning the life of Christ. We don't have the actual cross, or the cup that was used at the Last Supper, or the actual robe that Jesus wore. But we do have the words. We do have the manuscript evidence. We have thousands of copies of the various accounts of the life of Christ, and so it is the word of God that really matters. When it comes to science, we may not have the actual hand of God, but we have the fingerprints, we have the evidence we need to have faith. As the writer of **Hebrews** says, ***“Those who come to God must believe that He is.”***

**III. There is a third basic concept that still applies to our situation here in the Madison area, and that is: THOSE WHO COME TO GOD MUST BELIEVE THAT HE WILL REWARD ALL OF THOSE WHO DILIGENTLY SEEK HIM. »PPT»**

Over and over again in the Bible, we find that God has made many promises to reward people, and He has never been guilty of breaking a single one of those promises. We think about the promise made to Noah, that God would flood the earth and save a few. God has been faithful to that promise. We think about the promise made to Abraham, that God would make his descendants as numerous as the sand on the seashore and that the whole earth would be blessed through the seed of Abraham. God has been faithful to that promise. We think about the land promise made to Israel. By the time of Joshua, the land promise had been completely fulfilled. As Joshua said on his deathbed in **Joshua 23:14**, ***“Now behold, today I am going the way of all the earth, and you know in all your hearts and in all your souls that not one word of all the good words which the LORD your God spoke concerning you has failed; all have been fulfilled for you, not one of them has failed.”*** And so we learn from the Scriptures that God keeps his promises, that God is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him.

We think about the examples of faith given here in **Hebrews 11**. What were these people doing? They were diligently seeking after God. They were looking to please God. They offered sacrifices, built arks, traveled great distances, stood up to kings and world leaders—they stepped out in faith doing whatever it took to please God. They were seeking God. ***“By faith Moses, when he had grown up, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter, choosing rather to endure ill-treatment with the people of God than to enjoy the passing pleasures of sin, considering the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures of Egypt; for he was looking to the reward”*** (**Hebrews 11:24-26**). With all of his heart, Moses believed that God was a rewarder of those who would seek diligently after Him.

In **Hebrews 11:6**, the word translated here as “*seek*” refers to those who will exhaust themselves in the process, to those who will seek out, demand, or inquire—to those who will do whatever is necessary to find what they are looking for.

We think about the attitude of the Psalmist in **Psalm 42:1-2**, “*As the deer pants for the water brooks, so my soul pants for You, O God. My soul thirsts for God, for the living God; when shall I come and appear before God?*” The author of that Psalm was seeking for God just as a deer looks for water, just as we would go looking for the necessities of life.

How much more fervently, then, should we go looking for God! During an average week, how much time do we devote to pursuing God? To reading about God? To worshiping God with our Christian family? To telling others about God? The author of **Hebrews** wants us to know that those who come to God must believe that He is a rewarder of those who seek Him.

As guys, we know there is a huge difference between admiring a girl from across the room and actually getting up the courage to go over and start a relationship. In perhaps a similar way, there is also a huge difference between admiring God from a distance and actually pursuing God and getting involved in a relationship with God. And so perhaps the question for us this morning is: Are we craving God?

### **Conclusion:**

This morning we have taken just a brief look at FAITH as presented in **Hebrews 11:6**. Certainly there are many things we may believe that have no real impact on the way we live. We believe, for example, that Mercury is the closest planet to the sun, but that belief does not really do anything for us—it does not change the way we live. We believe that it is cold at the North Pole, but again, who really cares? Our belief in that fact does not really matter to us—it does not make us go out and purchase a warm coat.

However, we also believe in God, and our belief in God does impact the way we live. Our faith in God requires a response, and the response is very practical, because the Lord is looking for a relationship with us. And in the words of **Hebrews 11:6**, we believe that, “*...without faith it is impossible to please Him, for he who comes to God must believe that He is and that He is a rewarder of those who seek Him.*”

The Bible teaches that sin breaks our relationship with God, and in response to our sin, the Lord sent His only Son as a perfect sacrifice. We respond to that sacrifice in faith; that is, we believe in God, and like the great heroes in **Hebrews 11**, we then do something about it. We put our faith in action. We seek the Lord, we turn away from in, and we obey the Lord’s command to be immersed in water for the forgiveness of our sins. That does not mean that we earn our salvation or that we deserve it in any way—we cannot show up on the Judgment Day demanding entrance to heaven, but it means that we have responded to the Lord in the way that He has

told us to respond. Like Namaan in the Old Testament who was told to dip seven times in the Jordan River to be healed of his leprosy—he was not cured by the river, but he was cured because he obeyed the Lord's command. If you have any questions about God's plan of salvation, we would love to look at it together with you sometime soon—let us know about that. But if you are ready to obey the good news right now, you can let us know as we sing this next song. Let's stand and sing...

To comment on this lesson: [church@fourlakescoc.org](mailto:church@fourlakescoc.org)