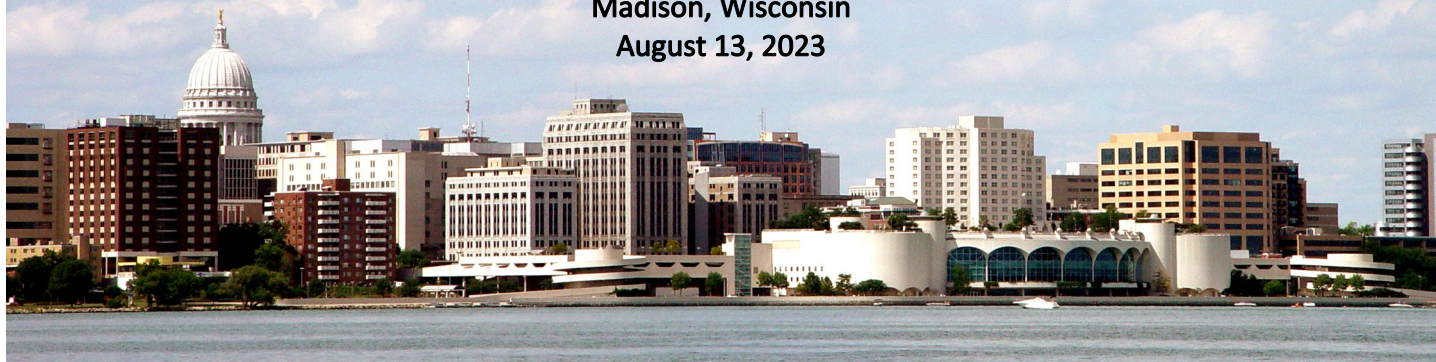


Faith Described

Hebrews 11:1-3

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It's good to be together this morning, and if you are visiting with us today, we are glad you're here. We'd like to ask that you fill out a visitor card online if you can, or use one of the cards from the pew in front of you. We would love to hear from you, and you can also pass along any questions or prayer concerns in that way.

We are here this morning to worship God and to share the good news that God loves us. He sent his only Son to die in our place, but he was raised up on the third day. We respond to that good news in faith – believing the message, turning away from sin, publicly confessing our faith in Jesus as the Son of God, and by allowing ourselves to be buried with him in baptism for the forgiveness of sins. And we do have several examples to share this morning, starting with an update from Edward Brand, somewhere in southeast Ghana. He says, “Two souls washed clean today in Ghana. Not sure what lay beneath the surface of this filthy water, but cleansing the soul does not depend upon the purity of the water.” Amen to that, and so good to see it! We need to thank God for clean water when we have it!

And then some of you might have noticed an update from Faulkner University down in Montgomery, Alabama. Earlier this week, their athletic department posted online and they say, “God is good! 37 young men from the football team put on Jesus in baptism tonight! Praise God for the decisions made tonight that impact eternity!” Apparently they had some kind of devotional together that night, and this is what came of it. According to an article in the Christian Chronicle, the athletic director called the minister for the University Church of Christ next to the campus, and he says, “I jumped in my truck, and on the way to campus, I called every church minister I could think of to help us.” According to the article, ministers from the nearby Dalriada, Vaughn Park, Southside, Eastern Meadows, Landmark and Hunter Hills Churches of Christ, along with Faulkner coaches and other faculty and staff members spoke privately to each of the players and prayed with them before they were baptized by Johnson and Pope. So good to see it. And we share this by way of encouragement. What these young men have done this week, you can do this morning. Let me know if we can help in any way.

This morning, we return to our study of Hebrews! Two weeks ago, the author wrapped up Chapter 10 by saying that his first readers or listeners had need of “*endurance*,” and he just barely started explaining that endurance comes through living by faith. And as with the rest of this book, he is aiming for Jesus, and that's where he's heading. He will get there in the opening verses of Chapter 12. So, we have this encouragement to

live by faith (at the end of Chapter 10), and then we have Jesus as the perfect example of living by faith in Chapter 12. He could have gone straight from one to the other (you need to live by faith, motivated by Jesus), and that certainly would have been a powerful connection, but thankfully, the author steps in and gives us some very practical examples of living by faith in Hebrews 11. In Hebrews 11, then, we have a description of what faith is and then we have a series of illustrations, some personal examples, illustrating (or showing) what faith actually looks like in the lives of people just like us.

This morning, then, we move into Hebrews 11, and I've divided our study of Hebrews 11 into a series of five lessons. Today, we'll start by looking at the definition of faith, a description of what faith is. And then, over the next several weeks, we'll plan on taking a look at the examples. This morning, though, we come to a description of faith. And we need the description, we need the definition, because faith is often misunderstood. If we were to ask the average person to define "*faith*" for us, they may describe faith as being some kind of blind leap into the dark, hoping for the best; they may describe faith as a cosmic "Plan B" – I'll get as far as I can with reason, I'll get as far as I can on my own, and faith will somehow magically fill that gap between where I am and where I need to be; faith is nothing more than wishful thinking; faith is simply a positive attitude; and yet, that is not really what faith is. Remember: From where we left off at the end of Hebrews 10, faith is something we live by. Faith is what gets us through from beginning to end. Faith is how we "*endure*." So, let's jump into Hebrews 11 with the definition or the description of faith in the first three verses – this is Hebrews 11:1-3. The author says,

¹ Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen. ² For by it the men of old gained approval. ³ By faith we understand that the worlds were prepared by the word of God, so that what is seen was not made out of things which are visible.

As we learn from this passage, I'd like to divide these verses in a way that I have not seen them divided. And I think it'll make sense as we move through it, but as I have tried to chew on this passage over the past week or so, it seems pretty obvious to me that we basically have a two-part definition of faith in verse 1, "*Now faith,*" first of all, "*is the assurance of things hoped for.*" And then, secondly, faith is "*the conviction of things not seen.*" Now, as I see it, the author goes on to give two more statements that help to clarify each part of the two-part definition in verse 1. With faith being "*the assurance of things hoped for,*" for example, he explains that by faith "*the men of old gained approval.*" What do we hope for? We hope for heaven! We hope for God's approval! How do we get that approval? By faith. And then secondly, faith is "*the conviction of things not seen.*" The explanation of this one comes in verse 3 with an example of something that we know, that we understand, even though we didn't see it happen (the creation). So, let's go back and learn from this two-part definition...

I. **...starting with that first statement (in verse 1) where faith is defined as being "THE ASSURANCE OF THINGS HOPED FOR." ****PPT******

Other translations may refer to faith as being the "*confidence,*" or "*substance,*" or "*reality,*" or "*certainty,*" of things hoped for. As God's people, by faith, we can rest assured that what we hope for is a firm reality. By faith, we have confidence that God will deliver on his promises. We know this, not just as a desperate leap into the dark, crossing our fingers and desperately hoping against hope that some cosmic being may perhaps reach out to catch us as we fall, but we know what we believe and we are firmly convinced that what we have hoped for is waiting for us at the end. And this isn't foolishness, because we believe in what is real. Living by faith means living on the rock-solid reality that what God has promised will come to pass.

You may remember back in John 16 when Jesus told the apostles that he would be leaving, they got upset, “Oh no, where’s he going?” [paraphrased], and all that. And Jesus responds with an illustration. He describes a woman about to give birth, and as she’s going through the pain of labor, she endures, because she knows what’s coming. She has the assurance of what is hoped for. Once labor starts, she knows that the child is coming. That’s faith, and that kind of faith certainly has a way of shaping the way we are living right now. Just as everything changes for a young couple once they find out a child is on the way, so also our faith in what’s coming also changes everything for us. But this is faith, the assurance of things hoped for.

And this is why I think we can safely recognize that the author has paired this with that statement in verse 2, for by faith ***“the men of old gained approval.”*** I’m not a huge fan of how the NASB translates this as ***“men of old,”*** because the word sometimes refers to women. Sometimes the Bible differentiates between men and women (men do this and women do this), but this is not one of those times. Other translations have him referring to ***“elders,”*** or ***“ancestors,”*** the ***“ancients,”*** or the ***“people of old.”*** He’s saying that when God’s people in times past lived by faith, when they lived with this ***“assurance of things hoped for,”*** they ***“gained approval”*** – God’s approval, of course. The world often gives us their disapproval, but who cares! We are hoping for God’s approval. And when we are approved by God, that’s when hope is realized. What do we hope for? We hope for the resurrection of the dead. We hope for the end of sin and death. We hope for a life after this one. And when we live a life of faith, hope is realized.

Of course, the author is heading for a list of names, and we will get to those in the coming weeks, but for now, we have this connection. Faith is the assurance of things hoped for, and when those from the past lived by that kind of faith, they gained God’s approval. And we will see this throughout Hebrews 11. Those people like Noah, and Moses, and Rahab, and David were approved by God for their FAITH – not their talent, not their beauty, not their strength (all of those qualities the world looks at as they decide who to approve), but those of old gained God’s approval as a result of living by faith. Faith, then, is the ***“assurance of things hoped for, ...for by it those of old gained approval.”***

II. As we move into the second definition of faith, we find in the rest of verse 1 that faith is described as “THE CONVICTION OF THINGS NOT SEEN.”

And we have the reminder here that just because we can’t see something doesn’t mean that it isn’t real. Spiritually speaking, one author explains that “There are realities for which we have no material evidence, though they are not the less real for that. Faith enables us to know that they exist.” In the example he gives in verse 3, he explains that we know about these invisible realities only because of the word of God. We will get back to that in just a moment. But here in the first part of this, we are convicted, we are confident, in what we have not seen, because God has revealed certain things to us in his word. Some have made the comparison that just as physical eyesight produces conviction of things that can be seen, faith is the mechanism by which we can see what is not visible.

And I think we understand this concept in other areas of life. I’ve said many times that there’s no such thing as a perfect illustration (every illustration falls apart if we press it too far), but think about the last time you filled up your car (if you still use gas). When I filled up my car at Kwik Trip on Milwaukee Street this morning (standing there in a cloud of second-hand marijuana smoke), when I filled up my car, I didn’t actually “see” any gas. I didn’t see a single drop of gas this morning! But based on previous experience, based on my trust of Kwik Trip, based on my assumption that those pumps are inspected every once in a while, I swiped my rewards card, tapped to accept the 5-cent per gallon discount, tapped my debit card, lifted the handle, put the pump in the car and pumped. I never saw a drop of gas, but I have every reason to believe that my tank, once

empty, is now full of gas – not full of water, or orange juice, or root beer, but gas. And the fact that I am now here would seem to support that.

Or to illustrate it another way: Years ago, I spoke at a church in northern Illinois on a Sunday evening, and when I left that service, I stopped by a McDonald's on the way out of town (this was back in the days when I would take in 1,400 calories for no reason right before going to bed each night). As I was driving and eating that sandwich in the dark, I suddenly realized, that I have put quite a bit of faith in McDonald's! It takes faith to eat something without looking at it. Normally, I look at my food before stuffing it in my face – don't stare at it, but usually I at least glance at each bite. But here I am, eating what I think is a Big Mac, even though I can't see it. It feels like a Big Mac, it tastes like a Big Mac, it smells like a Big Mac, I can hear and feel the crunch of the lettuce on what I assume is a Big Mac, but I'm not actually looking at it. In a sense, that's faith. There is some trust involved based on previous experience, or the reputation, or the word of the person we are trusting. So also with God and his word.

So, with this being said, let's notice the example we've been given in verse 3, ***"By faith we understand that the worlds were prepared by the word of God, so that what is seen was not made out of things which are visible."*** And what I love about this particular example is that we are included here! We're moving into this chapter where we'll be looking at the faith of Abel, and Abraham, and Moses, and the others, these great heroes of faith. But here, the author pulls us into the example that's given, ***"By faith WE understand that the worlds were prepared by the word of God."*** That's us! We understand this. We look at the world around us, we see design, and we see the Designer, ***"By faith we understand that the worlds were prepared by the word of God."*** As Paul explains in Romans 1:20, ***"For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes, His eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly seen, being understood through what has been made..."*** The word ***"understood"*** in Romans 1:20 (by looking at the world around us, God can be "understood") that word is the same word used here in Hebrews 11:3, ***"By faith we UNDERSTAND that the worlds were prepared by the word of God."*** We didn't see God create everything we now see around us, but we know (by faith) that he did. It's how the Bible starts, ***"In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth."*** God spoke the Universe into existence, and then he told us about it. He told us about it in his written word, in scripture. And now, we see God's fingerprints in the creation, so to speak – the irreducible complexity of the world around us, the design in the world around us. The creation points us to God. We think of those opening lines from King David in Psalm 19, where he says that, ***"The heavens are telling of the glory of God; and their expanse is declaring the work of His hands. Day to day pours forth speech, and night to night reveals knowledge."*** The creation itself points us to God, and his written word fills us in on the details. We believe, even though we were not there to see it.

So, in terms of a practical application here, we come back to the importance of God's word, the importance of spending time in the word, the importance of believing and trusting the word. Sometimes, we look at a verse like Genesis 1:1, and we sense a conflict, don't we? On one hand, we have this statement that God created the heavens and the earth, but then we have this pressure to believe something else. It's important, then, to pay even more careful attention to the word, to study and to learn, and when we have doubts, to share those with our Christian family. And this is another reason why it's so important to get together. When we come together to worship, we're reminding each other of what's true, even though we cannot see it. Every Lord's Day morning, we come together and we step into an invisible world, so to speak. We are reminding each other of some invisible realities.

Conclusion:

So we start Hebrews 11 with these two descriptions of faith (the two-fold definition). On one hand, faith is the assurance of things hoped for, for by faith, those of old gained the Lord's approval. But also, faith is the conviction of things not seen, just as we know for certain that God made the universe just because he told us so, so also his word assures us of many other unseen realities, including the fact that Jesus is really is the Son of God and that he came to this earth to save us. As Elijah read for us earlier, from 1 Peter 1, ***"...though you have not seen Him, you love Him, and though you do not see Him now, but believe in Him, you greatly rejoice with joy inexpressible and full of glory, obtaining as the outcome of your faith the salvation of your souls."***

And this gets us ready for the rest of Hebrews 11, a series of lessons based on real people who lived by faith. They had the assurance of what they hoped for; they lived by faith, completely convinced of spiritual realities shown to us in the word of God, believing even in things that cannot be seen. Don't turn back. Jesus is better! Before we get ready to partake of the Lord's Supper, let's go to God in prayer:

Our Father in Heaven,

You are the great and awesome God, creator of heaven and earth. We look around us, and we see what you've done for us, that you have given us an amazing place to live. You made the sun, the moon, and the stars. You spoke this world into existence. You made everything in six days and rested on the seventh. We weren't there, we didn't see it, but we know it. Thank you, Father, for giving us the word. We pray, this morning, for greater faith.

We've come together this morning to thank you for saving us. You are the everlasting God, but you came to this earth in human form, becoming like us, sympathizing with our weakness. Thank you, Father, for Jesus. We come to you in his name. AMEN.

To comment on this lesson: fourlakeschurch@gmail.com