

It goes without saying that faith is important in the Christian life. It is like oxygen. What oxygen is to our physical life, faith is to our spiritual life.

We know that true saving faith is a gift from God (Ephesians 2:8-9). It is a divine gift from God. It is something that God grants by the work of the Holy Spirit. We are saved by faith (Romans 1:16), justified by faith (Romans 5:1), receive the Spirit by faith (Galatians 3:12-14), etc.

And faith is not irrational. It's based on what God has said ('hearing with faith" in Galatians 3). Faith is based on God's sure word from heaven. It's based on the revelation he has given us in his word. So we have faith for the things that God has promised. And we do have an objective standard. We have faith in God because he has spoken. And God's word does not change (Isaiah 40). We have faith in the scriptures because the God who speaks, only speaks truth (Psalm 119:160), cannot lie, and never fails.

As we come to Hebrews 11, we see that this divine gift of faith is powerful and makes a tremendous difference in our lives here and now. Faith does not just hold out, waiting to be taken to heaven. Nor is it a sort of wishful thinking. Nor does it deny reality. Since true faith is a divine gift, it is tough and perseveres. It causes us to run with endurance to the end and preserves the soul. Remember 10:38-39 says,

*My righteous one shall live by faith, and if he shrinks back, my soul has no pleasure in him. We are not of those who shrink back and are destroyed, but of those who have faith and preserve their souls.*

The Christian life is lived "by faith" (Galatians 2:20); a faith that does not shrink back. It perseveres, endures to the preserving of the soul. Scattered throughout the book of Hebrews are some of the most breathtaking views of the beauty and glory of Jesus Christ - the perfection of his saving, atoning sacrifice and high priestly ministry. The new covenant which is infinitely superior to the old covenant. But along with the outstanding, bright glimpses of Jesus Christ, the shadow of severe warnings are cast for those who neglect this great salvation, those who drift away, those who shrink back in their faith.

So as we come to chapter 11, we see the chapter is primarily given to supply example after example of men and women of faith - the kind of faith that doesn't shrink back. The kind of faith that is a divine gift from God. And the point, I think, is to encourage these Christians to remain faithful, not give up, endure in faith the end. And so today, we will look at 11:1-3 which sets the stage for the rest of the chapter. If you want the kind of

faith that is weighty and strong and durable, then listen up. Notice three things. First, The definition of faith. Second, the approval of faith. Third, the effect of faith.

### **The Definition of Faith (verse 1)**

Faith grabs ahold of the future promise of eternal glory and joy now and sees the invisible Christ now. It is not physical possession, nor is it physical seeing. It is faith that possesses and sees. A British preacher from the 19th (Wescott) century said: "The future and the unseen can be made real by faith." So we have the definition of faith in verse 1. This is so important for us. I think there is a lot of muddled thinking about faith. Some think faith is simply mentally assenting to some facts. Others consider faith a force through which they can create reality. Hebrews 11:1 is the clearest definition of faith in the NT. Here's what verse 1 says:

*Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen.*

#### **1) Faith is the assurance of things hoped for (verse 1a)**

Faith is not the innate ability in you to arrange the future you want. It is the God-given ability to trust the future that He has promised. If faith was the ability to arrange our own future, all the saints in Hebrews 11 would have arranged things differently. They lived hard lives. But they had faith. Think of Noah (verse 7). God told him to build an ark basically in a desert when it had never rained before. And it took him 120 years. Now would have never chosen that if he could have created his own future. But he had faith in what God said and lived by faith.

So faith is the God-given ability to trust in the future God has promised. And it's important to add, trusting without receiving it right now. We see this in verses 13 and 39 (READ). So it is faith in God's promised, glorious future. This is the kind of faith it describes Abraham having in verses 9-10 (READ). Moses had this kind of faith as we see in verses 24-26 (READ).

Assurance could be translated (and is in NASB, NKJV) "substance". I like that word. If something has substance, there is something to it. It's weighty. Well, it has substance. And I think the point is that faith has such confidence in what God has said about the future that it possesses it right now. The return of Christ, the resurrection, eternal life, our glorious inheritance, fullness of joy in the presence of God.

Paul speaks with this kind of certainty in Romans 8:18 when he said, "*For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing to the joy that is to be revealed to us.*" The man of faith takes seriously

the promises of God and lives as though he already has them, even though he can't touch them right now. Matthew Henry, commenting on this verse said:

*Saving faith "is a firm persuasion and expectation that God will perform all that He has promised to us in Christ. Faith is the firm assent of the soul to the divine revelation and every part of it, and sets to its seal that God is true."*

How much time do you spend thinking about God's promised future in Christ? You want to be strong in faith? Give yourself to that treasure hunt.

### ***Faith is the conviction of things not seen (verse 1b)***

Faith is not only the God-given ability to trust the future he has promised. Faith is also (there's overlap here, of course) the God-given ability to trust in the invisible realities he's revealed. I love the word conviction. We don't use that word very often. When one has convictions and speaks with conviction, often they are seen as narrow-minded or proud. I was accused of that just last week. And of course I could be proud, that's true. But conviction is a great word. It means to be convinced of something. Even though you cannot see the glorious future God has promised, faith has the conviction of it. Not assumption of it. Conviction of it! So there is the unseen future. But I think there is more to this. Listen to what verse 27 says about Moses: *"By faith he left Egypt, not being afraid of the anger of the king, for he endured as seeing him who is invisible."* Moses saw the invisible God by faith and that is how he endured.

Listen to what Peter says in 1 Peter 1:8-9: *"Though you have not seen him, you love him. Though you do not now see him, you believe in him and rejoice with joy that is inexpressible and filled with glory."* Do you hear the language of "the conviction of things not seen"? Do you know Christ is here now? The most stupendous reality for you and I right now is that the real, risen Christ is with us. He says so: "I am with you always, to the end of the age." Faith has the conviction that Christ is here!

So faith is the God-given ability to trust in the future He's promised and in the invisible realities he's revealed.

### **[Verse 2 tells us of] The Approval of Faith (verse 2)**

I'm not going to spend much time here because we will take this subject up at length next week. Verse 2 says, "For by faith, the people of old received their commendation." NASB says by faith they "gained approval." Have you ever thought about what it means to please God. When Silas and I go out and play catch with the

football, he loves hearing the words my approval - "Great catch bud!". He loves hearing the approval of his dad.

You could read this verse as faith gives us approval or commends us to other people. Like, "yeah, she's the real deal." But I think this is talking about God's approval, which is infinitely more important than man's! Look at verse 5:

*By faith Enoch was taken up so that he should not see death, and he was not found, because God had taken him. Now before he was taken he was commended as having **pleased God**.*

God approves of and is pleased with our faith. He loves when we take him at his word in faith. And every genuine son and daughter of God wants to hear the approving, affirming words of their Father in heaven, "well done."

### **The Effect of Faith**

The kind of faith that has been described is very active. This God-given faith is like jet fuel that launches the one who has it into action. John Piper said,

*Faith lays hold on a future reward of eternal joy with God in such a way that it makes a great difference in life here and now.*

We see a phrase over and over again in Hebrews 11: "By faith." And what follows is what they did "by faith" or through faith or energized by faith. Verse 4: "By faith Abel offered to God a sacrifice." Verse 5: "By faith Enoch." Verse 7: "By faith Noah". Verse 8: "By faith Abraham". Verse 11: "By faith Sarah". Verse 20: "By faith Isaac". Verse 21: "By faith Jacob". Verse 22: "By faith Joseph". Verse 23: "By faith Moses". Verse 30: "By faith the walls of Jericho fell". Verse 31: "By faith Rabab". Faith moved these men and women to act, to obedience, to courageous activity.

Daniel 11:32 says, "Those the people who know their God will stand firm and take action (carry out great exploits - NKJV)". It is interesting that toward the end of Hebrews 11, the great exploits people did by faith are described in ways of obvious victory and apparent defeat. Let me explain. Verses 32-35a say that "by faith" men and women enjoyed obvious triumph:

*And what more shall I say? For time would fail me to tell of Gideon, Barak, Samson, Jephthah, of David and Samuel and the prophets-- who through faith conquered kingdoms, enforced justice, obtained promises, stopped the mouths of lions, quenched the power of fire, escaped the edge of the sword, were made strong out of weakness, became mighty in war, put foreign armies to flight. Women received back their dead by resurrection.*

Wow, by faith they did all these things? Yes. But that's not it. The next three verses show us another group of people who suffered apparent defeat "by faith":

*Some were tortured, refusing to accept release, so that they might rise again to a better life. Others suffered mocking and flogging, and even chains and imprisonment. They were stoned, they were sawn in two, they were killed with the sword. They went about in skins of sheep and goats, destitute, afflicted, mistreated-- of whom the world was not worthy--wandering about in deserts and mountains, and in dens and caves of the earth. (v. 35-38)*

By faith, all these people lived for God's glory, without receiving the fullness of God's promise (verse 39).

Randy Alcorn in *The Treasure Principle* (William Borden): *"Apart from faith in Christ, there is no explanation for such a life."*

All the heroes of the faith that have books written about them, all lived lives that don't make any sense apart from faith in Christ. Whether it be Athanasius, or more modern people like Mary Slessor, Hudson Taylor, CT Stud, Amy Carmichael. They all lived lives that don't make any sense apart from faith in Christ.

Now don't come to the conclusion that to live a life of faith in Christ will lead to notoriety and being well known. Not at all. Not for 99.9% of us. But what it does mean is that the only life that will matter for eternity, and receive the commendation of God (you know what that means don't you – hearing from Christ "well done" at the end), and the rich eternal reward that awaits us is the life that's lived by faith. A life fueled by trust in the future God has promised and trust in the invisible Christ.

You are called to this kind of life - a life of faith right where you are. Husbands and/or Dads, you are to lead your families by faith. Wives and/or mothers, you are to nurture your children and love them and teach them and raise them by faith. Single men and women you are to live God glorifying, pure, radical lives of obedience to Christ by faith. Every one of us, we are called to speak to others of about Christ by faith, stand up for truth

by faith, resist the spirit of the age by faith, to start a business by faith, to and on and on and on. What part are we to do apart from faith? Not one single thing! I said earlier that this faith is a divine gift from God. And it is. But that doesn't mean you can do nothing to strengthen it. God uses means. So how can you strengthen faith?

1. Ask God for strong faith. If it is a God-given faith, ask him. The Father loves to give good things to his children. Ask him. Do it now.
2. Immerse yourself in the word of God. Romans 10:17. Fill your mind with gospel truths of God's promised future and present, invisible realities until they become so real to you that there is substance and conviction of them.
3. Be deeply connected with others.
4. Do whatever is in front of you "by faith" and launch out in courageous obedient faith - trusting in the glorious future God has promised and which cannot be taken away from you and the real, present Christ with you. Take God-glorifying risks by faith.