

*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.*

*4 By faith Abel offered to God a better sacrifice than Cain, through which he obtained the testimony that he was righteous, God testifying about his gifts, and through faith, though he is dead, he still speaks. 5 By faith Enoch was taken up so that he would not see death; AND HE WAS NOT FOUND BECAUSE GOD TOOK HIM UP; for he obtained the witness that before his being taken up he was pleasing to God. 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.*

*Romans 4:21 and being fully assured that what God had promised, He was able also to perform.*

In our Board of directors meetings the past couple of quarters the idea has been floated that from time to time, it might be good to do a topical series.

I'm not crazy about that, and I think the modern mega church business model abuses that idea. Coming up with topic after topic that appeals to the fleshy shallow christianity that is currently the hot seller to our culture, and people who have no intention of leaving their worldly culture behind.

But here I am, in the summer season when attendance is spotty, people get busy, including Pam and me, and beginning a big commitment type project seems better suited to fall perhaps, around the time school begins.

Nothing cast in stone, but I believe perhaps the Spirit is leading me to work our way through the writings of Luke.

You say, that doesn't seem like such a big deal. It is a big deal. Luke wrote the gospel of Luke and the book of Acts.

If you crunch numbers, the writings of Luke consist of 27% of all the words in the new testament. 27%. For comparison, all of Paul's epistles together are 23% of the new testament, and John's writings comprise 20 %

So biting off all of Luke's writings, the gospel of Luke and the book of Acts is a big project. Probably 5 to 7 years of exposition at the same general rate of speed that we looked at the gospel of Matthew.

But hesitating a little bit, we looked at Philemon for two Sundays and I think it might be beneficial to spend some weeks before we begin the gospel of Luke, studying topically, the idea of faith.

What is this nebulous something the Bible simply calls faith. Is it important? Is it quantifiable? Can we define what the Bible is talking about when the author's use the word faith?

I'd like to work through several passages that are what I consider the mainstays of defining the idea of faith.

First, let's answer the question of whether faith, whatever it is, is important.

Hebrews 11:6 *But without faith it is impossible to please Him. For he that cometh to God must believe that He is, and that He is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him.*

Without faith, it is impossible to please God. So whatever faith is, if we do not have it, only judgement and perdition is possible, because without it, it is impossible to please God.

So understanding what faith is, is of paramount importance. Salvation teeters on the axle of faith. Without faith, there is no salvation possible.

The reformers beginning with Martin Luther and Calvin came up with

the mantra of Sola Fide. That is latin for Faith Alone. The Bible teaches that salvation is by faith alone, apart from works.

Nothing we can bring in our fallen flesh is of any value to God. Believing in the finished work of Christ on the cross and His resurrection from the dead is what our salvation is based on.

So I think the place to begin to define what faith is, is in the "faith" chapter. Hebrews 11

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

In our current secular age, our modern world complete with science and mathematics and all of our knowledge, we are taught to believe that everything that is must be able to be defined and proven by our 5 senses.

Five senses refers to the five traditionally recognized methods of perception, or sense: taste, sight, touch, smell, and sound.

In other words, the proof that something is, is in one or more of the 5 senses being able to perceive it. If I can't see it, touch it, taste it, smell it, or hear it; . . . it isn't. Secularism is based in the science of the physical world. Physical things are. And non physical things are not.

Now in view of that, the Bible asks us to believe in things that we cannot see. Or taste. Or hear. Or smell. Or touch.

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

It gets right to the point. Faith is being assured of and holding convictions about things we cannot see.

And we have to get right to the point in a secular society and ask, why would we do that. Believing something is, that has no physical properties that I can sense, is in the modern secular age, irrational. That's what crazy people do. Believe in things they can't see.

And whoever wrote those words in Hebrews 11:1 says we hope for things, and we believe in things, nobody can see. And we have a word for that phenomenon. We call that faith. And the secular world calls that crazyness. Irrationality.

We all watched the political commercial the other night, and we get depressed thinking we'll have to watch thousands more, some politician crying and moaning about school shootings and he flashes up on the screen what other ineffectual politicians are doing about the problem, praying and thoughts. Our thoughts and our prayers are with the victims. And thoughts and prayers both have a bold red line through them.

This politician is saying, quit praying to your sky god. Praying to sky gods and the slightly more politically correct in a secular age, thoughts as opposed to prayers, my thoughts, my sympathies are directed at the victims, that's no good either. Thoughts and prayers do nothing.

Because obviously to secular people, there is no sky god, that's just a phony baloney do nothing show of worthless actions. Prayers don't work. Feelings of sympathy and "thoughts" because of course there's no one to pray to, those are worthless too.

What we need to do is have a riot. We're going to riot and really prove that we mean business against these people with guns who are . . . having a riot. And so goes the logic of the world.

The same people who are slaughtering babies wholesale are going to have a riot about the slaughter of the slightly older children in the schools. Quit praying to your stupid sky god. Have a riot.

That's all they've got.

Welcome to the book that defines not only THE sky God, but also tells us that the reason humans have a dignity above the animals and the reason killing humans is forbidden, is because humans were created in the image of that God.

That is so much weightier than "the solution to the problem of humans slaughtering humans is to have a riot. Let everyone know we're really really mad about this. Meanwhile 3 or 4 thousand babies a week will continue to be slaughtered.

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

We believe and are assured in our belief and have conviction in our belief that there are things not seen. We call that faith. And immediately we find out why that is important. Vs. 2 *For by it the men of old gained approval.*

Faith is necessary for approval with the Creator. Over and over again we will see "*Abraham believed God, and it was counted unto him as righteousness.*" Abrahams faith in promises and facts that God revealed to him was the basis for God declaring him righteous.

So faith is key to a right standing with God. Salvation, a right standing with God is based in our faith. Eternity hangs in the balance over the question of faith.

And immediately the author of Hebrews is going to start building our foundation for this *OH* so necessary faith.

*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.*

This argument is ground zero for believing in God. Pinch yourself. Here we are. Standing upon terra firma. That was the main argument for God for 1900 years. No one had an explanation for the worlds other than what the Bible said in Genesis 1:1. They still don't. Evolution doesn't answer that question

*In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth.* That is the baseline argument for a God who owns everything and makes moral demands on His creation. The heavens and the earth have no other

explanation.

So a belief in God is the beginning point for faith and the proof for all time is the creation. That's what is so insidious and pernicious about the so called theory of evolution.

Even though the theory can't stand up to the science of DNA, science has disproven the theory, people continue to choose the folly of believing in a fool's errand so that they don't have to acknowledge God. Evolution is a deliberate choice against God, the creator.

That's why when the Bible says "*The fool has said in his heart, there is no God*", if you do a word study the word for fool denotes wickedness.

This isn't a fool who can't help being a fool because he's just dumb. This fool has made a conscious moral choice to not believe in God, in spite of the evidence of all the universes and worlds God has created, he will not believe in God because his sin trumps any God.

For 1900 years people just simply acknowledged the Creator, even if they hated Him. There was no other choice. I wonder what hell is like for the man that invented evolution, the no God choice. That's frightening to consider.

*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.*

Such a simple statement. God spoke the worlds into existence out of nothing. (ex nihilo) Vs. 1 asks us to believe in things we cannot see but the basis is something we can see. The worlds. Somebody with infinite intelligence had to make them. They didn't come from nothing by themselves.

And the more science discovers and teaches us about God's massive creation, the more depth our faith should have in one so powerful and wise to prepare all of these wonders by speaking them into being.

Our faith in the intangible is based in the tangible. The awesome

expanses of the heavens we can see, and the earth beneath us that we can see and touch and taste and smell and hear, are the creation of the God we cannot see.

Psalm 19:1 states the obvious. *The heavens declare the glory of God, and the sky above proclaims his handiwork.*

Psalm 8:1 *O Lord, our Lord, How majestic is Thy name in all the earth, Who hast displayed Thy splendor above the heavens!*

Romans 1:19

*For what may be known about God is plain to them, because God has made it plain to them. 20 For since the creation of the world God's invisible qualities, His eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly seen, being understood from His workmanship, so that men are without excuse.*

The creation is the beginning of faith, but not the end. Paul says no one has an excuse to not believe that God is. But believing He is does not save sinners. It only puts them on notice that there is a God, and what He makes is perfect, and we are not.

James says; *You believe God is one. You do well. (good for you) The demons also believe . . and tremble.*

Believing that God is, is only the base line. We look at Him, and we look at us, and we tremble. His creation is perfect and beautiful and wise and good. And it's patently obvious that something happened to us. Because you don't have to look past your nose to find out that we are not. We're broken. What is the cure for our disease?

The author of this book is going to spend the rest of this chapter looking at case studies of people who God restored to righteousness and approval by faith, beginning with earth's 4rth citizen. The 2nd person born to the 2 people God created.

This is post fall. Sin has entered the world by the disobedience of Eve, and Adam. The earth is under a curse. Paradise is lost. But not

permanently.

Faith is hard to define, but easy to see. That's why the author of this faith chapter is going to define faith by looking at case studies whose lives define what faith is.

But before we begin with Abel, let's consider a verse in Romans 4 that I think is arguably the best definition of faith in the Bible.

Over 47 years ago when I had been a christian about 3 months I was reading through the book of Romans for the first time and when I got to this verse, I said to myself, that's a perfect definition of faith.

It's talking about Abraham, and in chapter 4:21 you read; *and being fully assured that what God had promised, He was able also to perform.*

That's our working definition. . . *and being fully assured that what God had promised, He was able also to perform.*

We can't see God. But we know He is. We see His creation. We imagine His perfection and power and awesomeness through what we see that He has made. Is it really that much of a leap to get to *and being fully assured that what God had promised, He was able also to perform.*

Of course He's able. He's even able to restore a broken sinner like me to glory.

Vs. 4 *By faith Abel offered to God a better sacrifice than Cain, through which he obtained the testimony that he was righteous, God testifying about his gifts, and through faith, though he is dead, he still speaks.*

The third human being was not declared righteous, but the 4rth human was. Maybe there's something there?

What was it about Abel's sacrificial offering that pleased God, and Cain's that didn't? This is base line ground zero for humans that are broken and acceptance by a perfectly Holy and Righteous God.



There's lots of conjecture about this. We lack concrete information. But the author of Hebrews says it was because of faith that Abel's sacrifice was better than Cain's.

Therefore we are forced to surmise by working backwards that there must have been some revelation, some instruction on which Abel responded with belief.

Following that logic we can say that an animal sacrifice was faithful, and a self styled religious offering, different from revealed truth by Cain, was not.

Hebrews 9:24 tells us that without the shedding of blood, there can be no remission of sin. If Cain and Abel did not know that by some revelation from God himself, there's no faith involved.

So we have to take what is revealed, that Abel's sacrifice was of faith, and Cains sacrifice dis-regarded faith.

Animal sacrifice with the resulting shedding of blood looks forward to the cross, and the blood of Jesus that removes sin. Abel was faithful. Cain was not. Abel was declared righteous because of his faith. He believed God and worshipped acceptably.

Cain offered self styled worship. Not according to faith.

*5 By faith Enoch was taken up so that he would not see death; AND HE WAS NOT FOUND BECAUSE GOD TOOK HIM UP; for he obtained the witness that before his being taken up he was pleasing to God.*

Enoch lived in the seventh generation from Adam. The Genesis account says that he walked with God. For 300 years after the birth of Methuselah, Enoch walked with God, and then he wasn't because God took him.

Something about Enoch was pleasing to God. So pleasing that Enoch didn't die, God just took him up to heaven. Why? What was it about

him that was so pleasant for God.

Enoch is a son of Adam, just like us all. He was born of sinful seed. But he walked with God. How? What was his secret? We wouldn't know except the Holy Spirit reveals what it was about Enoch that made him pleasing to God. See it there in vs. 5? *By faith Enoch was taken up*

Enoch believed God. He walked with God. And God took him. All because of faith.

*6 And without faith it is impossible to please Him,*

I think that within those words lies the entire key to this whole matter.

We don't realize how abhorrent we are to God in our sinful state that we were born into. Natural man doesn't think he's that bad and natural man doesn't think God is that good.

God gives us a picture in Zechariah 3. Joshua the high priest of Israel is standing before God, and his clothes are filthy. And the Bible doesn't mince words when it says filthy. It's embarrassing to try to get this idea across. Zechariah has been for a swim in the sewer. OK. Beginning to get the picture.

We get another glimpse of our natural condition in Isaiah 64:6 where God tells us, all of our righteous acts are like a filthy rag to him.

Without faith, everything that I can churn up, all my goodness, is like wearing clothes with sewage on them.

That's the idea when the author of Hebrews says; *6 And without faith it is impossible to please Him,*

Without faith we're sewage. We can't please God. Filthy sewage doesn't please anybody. You just want that filth out of your presence.

Faith is what gives us the clean garments. Faith in the finished work of the Son of God who took all of the filth to the cross and paid the

necessary penalty for our sin, and who clothes us with His righteousness. Clean garments, white and spotless.

Before the cross, faith looked forward to God's provision. After the cross, faith looks backwards to that same provision.

*for he who comes to God must believe that He is and that He is a rewarder of those who seek Him.*

I hope you'll join me in this biblical investigation of many of the facets of this diamond we call faith.

Broken sinners begin a relationship with a Holy God we cannot see by faith. Believing that the perfect sinless life of Jesus and His death on a cross and resurrection from the dead can by imputation give us His righteousness and place our sin in Christ at calvary on the cross.

By faith we can stand before God positionally holy with a righteousness not our own, but imputed to us by Christ.

But that is just a beginning of faith that takes us out of this perishing world and places us safely IN Christ. That initial faith we will see in future studies is a gift from God to quicken us from death to life and call us out of this dead and perishing place into a body of believers that belong to Christ.

But once that is true of us, we spend the rest of our earthly days growing in faith, increasing in faith, because faith is what God uses through Christ to accomplish His will in this broken world.

This chapter 11 of the book of Hebrews is just a partial list of people who God called out of this world and then who by faith accomplished things in this world that can only be attributed to the power and majesty of God.

We begin by faith, and then we walk by ever increasing faith, day by day, until the day that our faith becomes sight.

*for he who comes to God must believe that He is and that He is a rewarder of those who seek Him.*

By faith we believe in a God we cannot see. Jesus explained it to Nicodemus as being like the wind.

*Jn. 3:5 Jesus answered, "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit he cannot enter into the kingdom of God. 6 "That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit. 7 "Do not be amazed that I said to you, 'You must be born again.' 8 "The wind blows where it wishes and you hear the sound of it, but do not know where it comes from and where it is going; so is everyone who is born of the Spirit."*

We can't see the wind. But we feel it's touch and we see the trees leaning, and the leaves rustling.

As believers we do not see God, yet, but we see things happening in people's lives that only the Spirit of God can accomplish.

In the world we witness people who are adrenaline junkies. The jump off bridges and off cliffs and do other bizarre things normal folk don't do because they thrive on adrenaline rushes.

I'm praying that we will become faith junkies. That we'll begin to see miracles in lives around us caused by God because of our faith, and that having seen God's miracles in the lives of those around us we'll become faith junkies.

The pitter patter of occasional showers of blessing won't be enough, we'll cry out for a deluge. And mixed up in that hunger to see more of God at work is this requisite faith. And realizing *that* we'll become junkies for faith.

Must have faith. Must increase in faith. No matter what the cost, we'll do anything to increase in faith so that we can see more of God at work among us. That's my prayer.

Faith is the driver. A belief that a God that we cannot yet see with our eyes, can do mighty things among us. Miracles that only He can do in peoples lives, but with our faith combined in the equation, working together with God.