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8By faith Abraham, when he was called, obeyed by going out to a place which he was to receive for an inheritance; and he went out, not knowing where he was going. 9By faith he lived as an alien in the land of promise, as in a foreign land, dwelling in tents with Isaac and Jacob, fellow heirs of the same promise; 10for he was looking for the city which has foundations, whose architect and builder is God. 11By faith even Sarah herself received ability to conceive, even beyond the proper time of life, since she considered Him faithful who had promised. 12Therefore there was born even of one man, and him as good as dead at that, as many descendants AS THE STARS OF HEAVEN IN NUMBER, AND INNUMERABLE AS THE SAND WHICH IS BY THE SEASHORE.

13All these died in faith, without receiving the promises, but having seen them and having welcomed them from a distance, and having confessed that they were strangers and exiles on the earth. 14For those who say such things make it clear that they are seeking a country of their own. 15And indeed if they had been thinking of that country from which they went out, they would have had opportunity to return. 16But as it is, they desire a better country, that is, a heavenly one. Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God; for He has prepared a city for them.

This is now our second morning together talking about an idea that is somehow vague and indistinct. How do we define faith? What is faith?

It's important to talk about and have a grip on whatever faith is, because eternity with, or without God hangs in the balance based on this word, faith. Nothing is more important.

That last sentence just lost most people around us in 2018. What is God, and what is eternity? 2 more concepts that are not based in physical reality.

We live in a secular culture that is based in physical science. Whatever science cannot discover . . . does not exist. Does not matter.

Our culture tells us we are here because of chance. This planet that sustains life is an accident. A chance happening. All of the order of complex atomic molecular structures and the impossibly complex order of cells that reproduce themselves in like kind by a complex DNA structure, is an accident.

We are encouraged to believe that the cosmos, the unmeasurable vastness of the universes, the uncountable suns and planets of space are just there. No explanation offered. They just are.

And we are just accidental beings that are floating in that vast space on a tiny rock of no particular consequence.

Science can't determine God and cannot think logically beyond this space, time continuum. All it can offer is; you're here by cosmic accident, and once this short life is over, you're gone.

Then, according to a world that only acknowledges scientific facts as truths, knowing God and dwelling as a conscious being beyond this life becomes as equally undefinable as faith.

If there is no God who will judge between good and evil, and we are chance accidents floating on a tiny rock of no importance, why wouldn't we exterminate babies that are inconvenient to our self centered existence?

Why do we question someone who walks into a school room and ends that meaningless existence for several other pointless lives? *Why not?* is the more logical question.

Science can offer explanations about physical things that can be discovered, but it has no answers for the bigger questions. And yet this book that science has jettisoned to the trash heap, does answer those questions.

There is a God who spoke all things into existence. He lives beyond our time / space model in eternity. He ever was, is now, and ever will be. He is a moral God, and He is a person with personhood similar to ours, since He created us in His likeness with intelligence of personhood.

God is holy. Perfect in all of His ways. And those who will join Him in eternity, beyond the limits of this time and place, must also be holy. He will not allow rebellion and evil in His presence.

Eternity away from God's presence and His holiness is hell. And the author of this book tells us that faith is the fork in the road. Because of faith we ultimately will either be with God in paradise, forever, or be in a conscious place of torment and darkness and terror, forever.

Therefore we need to think and understand clearly about this nonphysical concept that this book has defined and called faith. And the author of Hebrews begins with that concept immediately in vs. one of chapter 11.

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.

Faith is being convinced that things we cannot see, are never-the-less very real. God. Eternity. Conscious existence beyond this time - space continuum we know now.

He tells us that in some way, this non-physical concept we call faith, is the basis for God's approval, or conversely, His dis-approval.

Then by way of further review, he tells us in vs. 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.*

Faith is the conviction that God is, and that He rewards those who seek Him. And I want to pause for a moment in our review, just here at this idea of seeking God.

This is the letter to the Hebrew Christians. In that context, what does it mean to be a seeker of God? How would they have understood that?

Well, first of all, they're seeking the right God. The Hebrew God is the God of creation who determined by His own sovereign pleasure to reveal Himself to a distinct family of peoples. So, immediately they have that advantage above all others who poke blindly about in the darkness trying to find a meaningful god.

When David was commissioning his son Solomon to build the temple, the dwelling place of the Lord, David says; 1 Chron. 28:8,9 *So now in the sight of all Israel, the assembly of the LORD, and in the hearing of our God, observe and seek out all the commandments of the LORD your God, so that you may possess this good land and leave it as an inheritance to your descendants forever. 9 As for you, Solomon my son, **know** the God of your father and serve Him wholeheartedly and with a willing mind, for the LORD searches every heart and understands the intention of every thought. If you seek Him, He will be found by you; but if you forsake Him, He will reject you forever.*

David acknowledges that seeking God is inextricably connected to revelation. We're seeking a God that science cannot find or know or describe, and thus we are seeking someone who can only be known by what He has chosen to reveal to us.

For the Hebrews, that is the God of this book. And again, that God is revealed in the commandments. David's command is twofold. In vs. 8 he tells Israel to seek God by observing and seeking out all of the commandments given by God.

The second thing David says explicitly to Solomon is to seek God with your whole heart. God looks at the heart. David tells his son to know the Lord. Not know about Him, know Him intimately and personally by obeying His revealed commands and seeking Him with all of his heart.

To seek God with all your heart is not to just mechanically and legalistically keep commandments, it is to involve the affections. We seek to know God with our feelings, personally and affectionately.

That's what it means to love God with your whole heart.

The purpose of the commandments is to define what God is like and what we are not like. We look at those commandments and then we look inside our hearts, honestly, and we say, no wonder God has to remove me from His presence.

I look at His holy nature described in the commandments and I realize, my heart is evil. I'm broken. Something deep seated in my heart wants to do just the opposite of every one of His commandments.

Exodus 20. The commandments of God.

1 And God spoke all these words:

2 "I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery.

3 You shall have no other gods before Me.

Nothing. No thing is allowed to be pre-eminent in your life and your thoughts above God. You were made by Him, to be subject to Him first above all things.

He is Master, we are owned by Him. Everything else is second, third, fourth. He is to be to you, the preeminent point of everything.

Whatever has become more important to work for and to satisfy you, than God who created you for Him, is sin. We are created for worship, and God who created us is the object of our worship.

How are you doing so far.

Vs. 4 You shall not make for yourself an idol of any kind, or an image of anything in the heavens above, the earth below, or the waters under the earth. 5 You shall not bow down to them or worship them; for I, the LORD your God, am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on their children to the third and fourth generations of those who hate

Me, 6 but showing loving devotion to a thousand generations of those who love Me and keep My commandments.

To choose not to worship God is to choose to hate Him. And He requires us to worship Him with our minds and our hearts. Physical objects that can be seen and touched are not God.

He doesn't allow His creation to worship things seen. We are to worship God by loving Him who we cannot see, with our hearts, and keeping His commandments.

7You shall not take the name of the LORD your God in vain, for the LORD will not leave anyone unpunished who takes His name in vain.

This is the person who speaks of God but in their heart they do not really believe that He is, or that He acts. Phony people with empty words. Words words words about God, but they are empty. That God is false. A vain God is an empty airy non God.

These are people who speak of God all day long, but without substance. Their empty God, is not the God who has revealed Himself. They say they are Israelites, but the God in their head is false, empty, nothing. People who create God in their own image.

We'll see them again in James chapter 2 where he indicts people who claim to have faith, but their airy faith is nothing but empty words. Vain faith. False faith. Phony faith. Words with no substance faith.

Vanity means emptiness. Wind. All is vanity and striving after wind says Solomon. The bible pictures vanity in Jeremiah 4:30 like a woman who paints herself beautiful, but just beyond the painted beauty, emptiness. Vanity.

The third commandment isn't talking just about someone who curses with God's name, it's far more devastating than that. This is the person who claims God, but there is no substance beyond the empty words. God lite.

8 Remember the Sabbath day by keeping it holy. 9 Six days you shall labor and do all your work, 10 but the seventh day is a Sabbath to the LORD your God, on which you must not do any work—neither you, nor your son or daughter, nor your manservant or maidservant or livestock, nor the foreigner within your gates. 11 For in six days the LORD made the heavens and the earth and the sea and all that is in them, but on the seventh day He rested. Therefore the LORD blessed the Sabbath day and set it apart as holy.

Stop work for one day a week and rest, so that you can concentrate on worship.

Is it too much to focus your mind, soul, heart, and strength on God, 24-7. Then set one day aside to rest from labor, and keep one holy day.

12 Honor your father and mother, so that your days may be long in the land the LORD your God is giving you.

The first four commandments are about our relationship with our Creator.

1. He is pre-eminent above all things.
2. We don't worship physical things, idols, we worship a God we cannot see, but our minds and our hearts can engage Him by what He has revealed to us in His word.
3. Don't worship Him falsely with empty words and empty thoughts. A false worship of words with no substance. Vanity. Wind. Empty. False. Phony.
4. Stop your necessary labors for one day each week which is a holy day unto the Lord. Stop and worship.

The fifth command for human thriving, once the relationship with God is defined, is about our relationships with each other, and the commandment before all others is family.

Honor family. Fathers. Mothers. Children who honor and obey parents who themselves were children who honored their fathers and mothers.

The family unit is the baseline for civilization. Men. Women. Boys. Girls. Parents who teach their children God's laws and who require their children to obey.

Children who learn to honor the complimentary roles of God's binary creation. Men and women, boys and girls, dwelling together with honor and submission to the order that God ordained in the first pages of the Bible.

12 Honor your father and mother, so that your days may be long in the land the LORD your God is giving you. Civilized society is based here. Do you want to dwell in the land for long. This is the baseline command for human flourishing, human with human.

Family is where we learn about authority and submission. Honoring parents with obedient submission. We carry those lessons of authority and submission beyond the family nucleus and build societies, cultures, civilization. We respect all persons.

When the family unit dissolves, culture and civilization dissolves with it.

13 You shall not murder. 14 You shall not commit adultery. 15 You shall not steal. 16 You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor.

Each of those is a sub-set learned in the family unit growing up. That's why family comes before these. The family unit is where all of these things is learned and obeyed.

Of course we don't murder. Or commit adultery, Or steal, or lie. No family can tolerate any of those things.

Neither can our neighbors outside the family unit.

17 You shall not covet your neighbor's house. You shall not covet your neighbor's wife, or his manservant or maidservant, or his ox or donkey, or anything that belongs to your neighbor.

Is this the hardest one of all? To be satisfied with the hand God in His

sovereign love dealt you? What God has given you is yours. You're not allowed to want what other people have. You are to be thankful for what God has given you.

This is the one command that's invisible. Coveting can go on in our hearts, undetected on the surface. That's why Paul uses the 10th commandment to illustrate the impossibility to totally keeping God's law.

We're broken. Born in sin. The law says do not covet, and yet, if I'm honest, I have to admit every sort of evil coveting going on in my evil heart, beyond my control.

The whole purpose of the commands is to show us what God IS like and what we are impossibly NOT like. The law was given to cause us to cry out to God for mercy because of all the evil that dwells in us.

A right standing with God can never come from within me. I'm broken. Sold under sin. Helpless. A right standing with God can only come from Him, not me.

That's why faith is the pivotal point for heaven or hell. We are helpless to help ourselves. We need a saviour who can make atonement for all of our evil and give us His righteousness instead so that we can approach God with a righteousness not our own. The perfect righteousness of Jesus.

Faith is the belief that God has accomplished all of what is necessary for salvation from our lost sinful condition, in His perfect Son. We trust in the finished work of Jesus, on the cross, once for all.

We believe that He rose again up from the dead after He took our punishment of death. We believe that He ascended into heaven and dwells at the right hand of God.

But here's the thing. A mere mental ascent that all we have stated is true is not the faith that pleases God. The faith that pleases God is a faith that does things that may seem irrational to the onlooking world.

The author of this book teaches us about invisible faith by recounting what people did . . . because of their faith. Story after story after story. People believed in God and were obedient to the level of revelation made available to them and moved out, by faith in an invisible God to do what everyone else was not doing.

And just here I want to look at one of the most controversial texts in the whole Bible. James 2:17, 18 says;

17Even so faith, if it has no works, is dead, being by itself.

18But someone may well say, "You have faith and I have works; show me your faith without the works, and I will show you my faith by my works."

James says that not everyone who claims to be saved is in fact saved. He argues against someone who claims to have this faith that saves. And his argument is; you claim you have faith, and maybe you do, but where are the accompanying works.

Noah built an ark. Abraham left his old life behind and went to a new country.

Just saying you believe something doesn't cut it. The demons believe and they aren't going to heaven. The faith that saves is a faith that follows an unseen God in obedience away from this world's follies.

And the author of Hebrews is going to show us what faith looks like. Faith that is unseen is defined by acts. Real faith brings about real action.

7By faith Noah, being warned by God about things not yet seen, in reverence prepared an ark for the salvation of his household, by which he condemned the world, and became an heir of the righteousness which is according to faith.

God told Noah He was going to judge the entire world by water and the way through that judgement would be an enormous wooden boat that

would float on top of the water.

Noah worked on the ark for 120 years. The anti-deluvian world was a misty place. It hadn't rained. Thus the onlooking world must have thought old Noah was quite mad.

The world will perish. What foolish talk. Yesterday was like today and tomorrow will follow just like yesterday. Therefore, by all the empirical data we have collected over these many years we have decided to believe the world will NOT perish. You, sir, are a fool.

Noah kept right on building his enormous wooden box. Why? He believed God, and the fact that he took action based on the belief in what God had told him, something never before seen and completely unknown, is a picture of faith.

Notice that Noah's actions also had an effect on the rest of the world. God used Noah and his giant wood box to warn the rest of the world what was about to take place.

The action of Noah's faith was a rebuke and condemnation on the onlooking world. God will destroy this world and those who ignore God will perish. Like preaching to the dead for 120 years.

Then on God's appointed day the tidal wave came out of heaven and Noah's wood box was lifted up and floated on the waters while the rest of the world perished.

I dare say if Noah had affirmed his belief in what God told him and continued to live like everyone else, he would have perished with them.

We are the most dangerous sort of radical people. We believe God and it causes us to affirm things and do things that the rest of the world thinks is insane. And tolerance for that is waning. The secular world's tolerance to a faith in God that causes actions that condemns them . . is getting very thin.

Before we're gone, we may be called on to act and do things that this

world will find untenable. It may become costly to affirm God's Holy inspired authoritative word. It certainly would not be the first time.

8 By faith Abraham, when he was called, obeyed by going out to a place which he was to receive for an inheritance; and he went out, not knowing where he was going.

Abraham is mentioned as the model of what faith looks like more often than any other example in all the Bible.

The reference here is to Genesis 12.

*1 Now the LORD said to Abram,
“Go forth from your country,
And from your relatives
And from your father’s house,
To the land which I will show you;*

*2 And I will make you a great nation,
And I will bless you,
And make your name great;
And so you shall be a blessing;*

*3 And I will bless those who bless you,
And the one who curses you I will curse.
And in you all the families of the earth will be blessed.”*

We don't know how God relayed that information to Abram. Did Christ in a preincarnate theophany visit Abram as a man?

That isn't necessary for us to know. What we have is the exact text of the word of God to Abram.

Leave your country. Leave your relatives. Leave your father. Go to a place I will show you.

The promise is a propositional one. It requires faith in the one making the promises, and that faith demands actions.

Take your wife and your near relatives and your belongings and go out into the unknown. No road map, no direction, no compass. Just move out. God will provide the details later.

God's conditional promises to Abram were vast. A great nation. Blessing somehow through him to all nations. All peoples.

In some fashion, in some way Abram couldn't completely comprehend, God promises that the curse on all nations because of sin and rebellion, that curse will be somehow reversed. God will bless the nations.

Pinch yourselves. Here we are. Descendants of Abraham, by adoption. Abram wrought David, and David wrought Jesus, and Jesus died so that people near and people far could be reconciled to God in Christ.

We are peoples of the very nations God promised blessings to because of Abram's obedience.

Abram believed God, and that faith *caused* the obedience to what God had revealed. He left his home and his father and went on a journey looking for the land of blessing.

And yet, the full completion of the promises to Abram cannot take place until Jesus Christ returns and deposes Satan and eliminates all of the rebellion against God, and sets up His holy reign on this earth.

9By faith he lived as an alien in the land of promise, as in a foreign land, dwelling in tents with Isaac and Jacob, fellow heirs of the same promise; 10for he was looking for the city which has foundations, whose architect and builder is God.

This final statement we will consider this morning gets us right down to the nitty gritty of reality.

By faith we are believing a promise that will not become a reality in this lifetime on this earth. The promise is for the future. The city promised and the blessing promised is for a future time.

Abraham and Isaac and Jacob were heirs together of a blessing in the future. Thus, they dwelt in this world as aliens in a foreign place.

Think about that. We are to be ambassadors for God, telling people that there is a future blessing and begging them to be reconciled to God and then to dwell in this world as aliens and strangers, separated from the lusts and desires of this place.

That's a hard sell. Our culture has become mesmerized with this world. We stare into little 3X5 windows of the promise of this world. 24-7 Vanity Faire.

Our culture, like every previous culture is dead and blind to God and they've got comfort and promises of this place and 24-7 entertainment in their little black 3X5 windows, and we are ordered by our Master / Owner to go tell them they are vile to God in their sinful condition and that He is coming soon to judge this world and that in their current state there is nothing but separation from God forever, but there is a glorious city promised for a future time and by faith in the finished work of Jesus on the cross, they can be reconciled to God, and become strangers and aliens to this world, but heirs to Glory.

That isn't even a tough sell. It's an impossible one. Luke 18:

18 A ruler questioned Him, saying, "Good Teacher, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?" 19 And Jesus said to him, "Why do you call Me good? No one is good except God alone. 20 "You know the commandments, 'DO NOT COMMIT ADULTERY, DO NOT MURDER, DO NOT STEAL, DO NOT BEAR FALSE WITNESS, HONOR YOUR FATHER AND MOTHER.'" 21 And he said, "All these things I have kept from my youth." 22 When Jesus heard this, He said to him, "One thing you still lack; sell all that you possess and distribute it to the poor, and you shall have treasure in heaven; and come, follow Me." 23 But when he had heard these things, he became very sad, for he was extremely rich. 24 And Jesus looked at him and said, "How hard it is for those who are wealthy to enter the kingdom of God! 25 "For it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God." 26 They who heard it said, "Then who can

be saved?” 27 But He said, “The things that are impossible with people are possible with God.”

Nobody's going to believe in your airy fairy God, your pie in the sky at some future date God who demands that you leave this current world behind and follow Him.

It's an irrational, impossible demand given to people who are deaf and blind and dead.

With men this is impossible, but with God, all things are possible.