

# Christ's Surpassing Supremacy

*"Faith Is..."*

Hebrews 11:1

FCC | 11:1

## **Introduction:**

If you have a copy of God's Word with you this morning, please make your way to Hebrews 11. It really shouldn't be overlooked that in God's providence we are dealing with Hebrews 11:1 on November first. I was looking ahead a few weeks ago when I was studying for this sermon and I got tickled at this. Being out of the pulpit for a month and here we get back on track today of all days. I don't know, maybe I'm thinking too much not it, but, it's really fun to think about God ordering all the previous events and then sort of saying, oh yeah and when you come back... Anyways. I hope that you've made your way to Hebrews chapter 11.

This morning we're going to look into verse 1 alone. So let's go ahead and read that together. "Now, faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen." (Hebrews 11:1 ESV) This morning we're going to define this faith that the author of Hebrews speaks of in five steps or five points. We're going to see that Faith is; a noun, it's the subject, faith is standing firm, it is a hopeful trusting, and finally Faith is sightless confidence.

## **Faith is a Noun:**

Well with five points to my sermon, we should just get right at it. First we see that faith is a noun. Nouns are persons, places, or things. Verbs are action words. Typically speaking, when people speak of faith their mind drifts to the act of trusting or believing in or on something. The Scriptures definitely have a word and use the faith in the verb form, but here—in probably the quintessential verse on faith, its a noun. This faith is understood as a thing not an action to be done.

Look with me again at the text. "Now Faith is the assurance of things hoped for..." Before we move on to my next point I just wanted to bring up the fact that faith, as a noun, is pitted against something previous. This is the meaning of the use of the word "Now". Now causes the reader to understand that before there was some thing previous that was deficient but now, there is something better. What we've been discussing in Hebrews 10 was a thorough examination of the Old Covenant's types and shadows that have now been replaced by the real things. The Old Covenant saint, and the New covenant saint both had this "faith" that Hebrews 11:1 speaks of. I know that, I'm positive of that, because the rest of Chapter 11 deals primarily with those Old

Testament saints who by this faith, pleased God. So the point of saying “now” is not to signify—in the past no one had real faith and, now we who trust in Jesus do. No. On the contrary. Though the saints of old didn’t know that His name would be Jesus, they still trusted that He was coming and that He would atone for their sins. No the “Now” highlights, what 10:39 said. You see the verse and chapter divisions weren’t there when the author wrote the letter. Read that with me. *“But we are not of those who shrink back and are destroyed, but of those who have faith and preserve their souls”*

So we see that this Faith, this thing that we have, and not some action we perform, is in contrast not to the Old Covenant, but is in contrast with those who “shrink back”. Why do I bring this up and why did the author of Hebrews write it this way? I believe at least one reason for this has to do with the fact that Hebrews—to this point, has been really critical of the Old Testament and the Old Covenant. Hebrews 11 is known as the “Hall of Faith Chapter” in the Bible. Story after story is mentioned and each historical account recited highlights the “Faith” that these men and women had. I believe this is in service of showing us that although the Old Covenant is “obsolete”, that doesn’t mean that it’s worth nothing. On the contrary, Hebrews is saying that the Faith that we have today was first exhibited by those hundreds, those thousands of believers that preceded us. Therefore this also serves the purpose of highlighting the fact that the faith we have in Christ is the same faith that David had in his Messiah; that Abraham had of the land whose founder and builder was God; even Able who offered a pleasing sacrifice in faith.

If faith is a thing that we have and not an action that we perform; if this faith is something that is good and pleasing to God, and if this faith that we experience today is the same faith of those who lived thousands of years ago; then it must be understood that this faith is not from us, but from God, the one whom all blessings flow.

### **Faith is the Subject:**

The noun, “Faith”, is in what’s known as the “nominative case”. The nominative case designates that this noun is of the greatest importance within the verse. Because Faith is not necessarily an action, or at least in this verse it’s not an action, we need to understand that we see Faith is also the subject of this verse—and I would argue it’s the subject of this whole chapter. It is what this sentence is all about. And because, as we already said, faith is not some action performed by man that God finds pleasure in, we see also that the subject, is ultimately God—and His gracious gift of faith to us.

The subject of our verse, and the subject of the chapter; the subject of the book and really the subject of the entire Bible is God and God alone. He or she who is always seeking themselves in the pages of the Scriptures, what the Scriptures have to say about them, will undoubtedly fashion for themselves a god after their own image. Because the point of the Bible is not to tell us more and more about us, but to teach us about God. That's not to say we don't learn things about us. That's not to say that the Bible doesn't expressly teach us things about ourselves. My point is, that the point of the Bible is God so when we confuse our use of the Bible, we will undoubtedly confuse it's point as well.

The subject of the Scriptures is God, not us. We are the indirect object. We are the recipients of Grace, not the great Giver. We are not the protagonist, you and I aren't even the antagonist, sin is. We are the vessels on the shelf filled with either sweet wine or bitter poison. And the Scripture's message is about God's love for the one and purposed destruction of the other.

When we come to the discussion of faith, we come not understanding that Grace is a gift of God and faith is a work of man. NO. Faith is the loving leash which He uses to tug us gently in the direction of trusting and following Him. We have it. We exhibit it. We please God by it's expression in our lives. But saving faith, is not something that is inherent in man. Faith is an unnatural human expression toward God. He is the one who gets all the praise and glory for our salvation. He doesn't share that with any man or any woman. If it were that God shows grace to the sinner and then they placed "their faith" in Jesus, God would be nothing more than a derelict salesman. Look around you, the majority of people around us are not buying what Jesus quote-unquote, would be selling. No. Jesus is not the Chevy dealer's salesman of the month. No there is not one person who should trust that doesn't trust in Christ. Because Faith is not about you it's not about me, it's about God. Faith is the magnanimous gift of a loving Father to His beloved children.

### **Faith is Standing Firm:**

This faith has a look and it has a feel to it though, that we most definitely experience. Our text highlights some these in the remaining phrases. Let's quickly take a look at these statements. Read our verse with me again. "Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen." First we see that this gift of faith is the assurance of things hoped for. That is, it stands firm upon a hope. The hope we'll look at in a moment but the first thing to take note of, is this "assurance". The term

“assurance in the Greek is the word Hypostasis. This word is used today in medical terminology to refer to the settling of blood or fluid in the lower extremities. The word’s English use traces back to the 1600’s where it was used of sediments. Those things that have settled down into what’s known as bedrock. This is the essential meaning. It’s found a meaning in theology, it’s been used in philosophy and by medical professionals but it’s basic, fundamental meaning is that of something that has settled down and is now a natural foundation for other things. Faith is just that, it is a foundation. It is a basis for which everything else is built upon. Without faith there is no Christianity. Without faith, as verse 6 says, it’s impossible to please God. It is the bedrock of Christianity.

### **Faith is a Hopeful Trusting:**

This assurance, this foundation—faith is built with hope. Read the verse with me again. “Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for...” Faith is not merely trust, but a hopeful trust. C.S. Lewis once said something that just hits the nail on the head when it comes to what we often believe is faith. He said, “We’re not necessarily doubting that God will do the best for us; we’re wondering how painful the best will turn out to be.” That’s not a picture of hopeful trusting. That’s fatalistic acceptance. Job speaks faith when he says in chapter 13 verse 15; “Though he slay me, I will hope in him...” Do you hear the extreme nature of that statement. “Though He slay me...” not my circumstances, not my family members, not husband or wife, not my boss or employees, though God slay me, yet still I will hope in Him. Let me share with you the Greek definition of this word hope: “to wait for salvation with joy and full confidence”.

Faith is what produces joy in the midst of the storm. Faith is what causes the Christian to stand firm when the world around them is crumbling. And this is another reason why we can be absolutely sure that this faith is not natural within mankind, but is a gracious gift of God. Naturally men lose hope. Naturally, mankind defaults to depression. Christ, however, grants His children, through regeneration, the supernatural joy and confidence in God’s perfect plan no matter what that looks like. Psalm 31:24 “Be strong, and let your heart take courage...”, Romans 12:12 “Rejoice in Hope, be patient in tribulation, be constant in prayer...” Joshua 1:9 “...Be strong and courageous...”, James 1:12 “Blessed is the man who remains steadfast under trial...”, 2 Corinthians 4:13-17 says, “Since we have the same spirit of faith according to what has been written, “I believed, and so I spoke,” we also believe, and so we also speak, knowing that He who raised the Lord Jesus will raise us also with Jesus and bring us with you into His presence. For it is all for your sake, so that as grace extends to more

and more people it may increase thanksgiving, to the glory of God. So we do not lose heart. Though our outer self is wasting away, our inner self is being renewed day by day. For this light momentary affliction is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison,”. Faith is not fatalistic acceptance of our circumstances, but is rather a joyful reliance, it’s a hopeful trusting, that He who began this good work, will bring it to a joyful and happy completion.

### **Faith is Sightless Confidence:**

Well faith is also expressed in Hebrews 11:1 as sightless confidence. Read it with me again. “Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen.” Some translations use the word “proof” and others use the word “evidence”. All those are excellent translations. I will say that I prefer “conviction” because it implies not merely that faith is abstract proof or empirical evidence, but that this proof and evidence has an effect on those who have it. Faith is that which causes us to say with absolute certainty, God is real. Christ is God. Christ’s sacrifice is sufficient for the rescue of sinners. Conviction is a confidence that is steadfast and immovable. Martin Luther said this of Faith; “Faith is a living, bold trust in God’s grace, so certain of God’s favor that it would risk death a thousand times...” He would continue to say in his introduction to the Book of Romans, “Such confidence and knowledge of God’s grace makes you happy, joyful and bold in your relationship to God and all creatures.” close quote.

Faith is not merely evidence that effects how we live, it’s sightless, it’s evidence that has never been seen. If you think that this seems—contradictory, Paul explains it in 2 Corinthians 4:17-18; “For this light momentary affliction is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison, as we look not to the things that are seen but to the things that are unseen. For the things that are seen are transient, but the things that are unseen are eternal.” The tension is there on purpose. The idea that we have proof, but you just can’t see it is sort of the point. I’ve share this quote before but it is so appropriate that I must remind us of it. Blaise Pascal made the observation that “In faith there is enough light for those who want to believe and enough shadows to blind those who don’t.”

When I say that I have faith in a chair and then sit down, I’m resting in that trust because I have a history with chairs. I’ve sat in a chair before. I base that faith or trust in the chair because it looks and seems logically sturdy enough to hold me. If some rickety chair made out of twigs is set before me, I won’t trust that. I have a history with twigs; I’ve snapped them with my thumb before. This is not the kind of faith that saves.

The saving kind of faith is trusting in something we've never experienced. Biblical faith is a supernatural confidence in that which we've never seen, nor will see—until faith has brought us safely to what it's promised. This isn't natural. If I came to you after the service and said, write me a check for all the money you possess and I'll give you a case of cash next week filled with 10 billion dollars, would I have any takers? Of course not. Why because although you may trust me with some things that you have a history with me concerning, I haven't even done that for myself. You have nothing to view, nothing to cause you to say, I trust this guy to do that.

Human faith, can save no one. Biblical faith is a daring confidence in something you've never seen, never had any history with, and for all intents and purposes makes no logical sense to believe. Through this kind of faith—salvation is granted. Through this faith the Christian life is lived. Through this faith, the faith that is granted to us, this is how we please God.

**Conclusion:**

If you've never experienced this sort of trust, this kind of confidence, then you've never been given this faith from God. If you don't have this kind of faith, then let me encourage you to turn from your lack of trust and ask God to grant this faith so that you may not die and fall under the wrath of God, but rather be granted eternal life and find forever favor with Christ. Jesus suffered and died to pay for the sins of those who would have this faith in His person and his work. If you're a Christian this morning, but struggle to joyfully trust and seem to fall into that fatalistic acceptance, then let me echo what I learned from an old cartoon, GI Joe. Knowing is half the battle. If you know that this acceptance you experience is not actual faith, then you can pray more purposeful for that trust that begins and is granted only by God in heaven.

Let's take the next few moments now in silent prayer together to seek Christ. Either for the faith to believe in Christ's sacrifice that we haven't seen before. Or to pray for Christ to renew our faith and trust in Him and to reject that sentiment of fatalism.

**Benediction:**

*May grace and peace be multiplied to you in the knowledge of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ.*