

# Faith Brings You into Reality

Hebrews 11:1-4

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## Introduction:

Today in our sermon series in Hebrews, we have come to chapter 11.

- Here we have set out to us examples from the Old Testament of persons who had faith.
- Having learned in Hebrews about Jesus Christ as the beautiful and excellent object of our faith, these examples will help you to understand how to live out your faith.

In the passage we are looking at today, we have an introduction to the whole subject.

- The emphasis here is not so much to define faith, but to speak of how it transforms the way we live. It makes us thrive and flourish in our walk with God!
- Listen as I read it to you. I will read from Hebrews 11:1 to 11:4.
  - This is the word of God. May He bless us as we hear.

**Hebrews 11:1-4: Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen. <sup>2</sup> For by it the elders obtained a good testimony. <sup>3</sup> By faith we understand that the worlds were framed by the word of God, so that the things which are seen were not made of things which are visible. <sup>4</sup> By faith Abel offered to God a more excellent sacrifice than Cain, through which he obtained witness that he was righteous, God testifying of his gifts; and through it he being dead still speaks.**

Thanks be to God for His holy and infallible Word.

I am going to take each of these verses this morning and show you what faith does when you have it.

- It changes everything.
- Let's begin.

## I. Hebrews 11:1 shows you that faith brings God into your life.

- It says, **Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen.**

A. You see how it speaks about *things hoped for*.

1. This speaks of purpose—direction—of a desired future outcome.
  - We will look at the meaning of the whole verse in a few minutes, but I want to start with this phrase, “things hoped for.”
- What is it that we hope for?
2. It is communion with God. That is our ultimate purpose. That is your purpose.
  - a. You are meant to know Him as He truly is. To worship Him and adore Him. To consciously receive all your blessings from His hand, to find out what is pleasing to Him and to serve Him, to obey Him, to enjoy Him, to trust Him.
  - b. You are meant to grow into a greater and greater fullness in this communion.
    - This growing and learning of Him and serving Him is to keep growing for all eternity, for He is God.

- You are to be forever finding out His greatness, discovering the depths and fullness of His glory.
- c. This growing is made possible by depending on Him.
- looking to Him to make Himself known to you.
  - looking to Him to transform you and to conform you to Him and His ways.
3. Hebrews has called this
- Making us perfect (Heb 2:10)
  - Our eternal rest (Heb 4).
  - Being saved to the uttermost (Heb 7:25)
  - Having His law written on your heart so that you obey it (Heb 8:10)
  - All knowing Him from the least of us to greatest of us (Heb 8:11)
  - The promise of an eternal inheritance (9:15).
  - A better and an enduring possession (10:34).
  - A great reward (10:35).
- B. From this great purpose of communion with God, the human race fell.
1. We continued in this purpose for but a very short time, then we foolishly turned.
- When our first parents ate the forbidden fruit, they turned from finding their purpose in God to trying to find their purpose and fulfilment in themselves.
    - Such a futile endeavour! We are mere creatures.
    - It is a dead end—a path to utter misery.
    - Not only is it stupid, it incurs eternal judgement because it is wicked and unjust.
2. Our hope of communion with God perished.
- We could no longer see Him as He is or learn of Him rightly.
  - Now our knowledge of Him was all twisted and distorted by our twisted fallen minds.
  - Instead of seeing Him as He is, we began to embrace idols—false distorted versions of Him that are like us—and that end up as nothing more than us.
3. We became as one living apart from reality.
- We could still see the visible world around us, but the true God was no longer in our purview.
    - Our perception of reality became devoid of the most important part of reality, our Creator for whose glory we were meant to live, our Creator in whom alone true happiness could be found.
  - We were left with no real or satisfying purpose, no destiny, nothing substantial to live for.
    - Without the true God in our view, we were completely out of touch with reality—living in a lie.
- C. But our verse teaches that when faith comes, we are restored to God!
1. First it says that **“Faith is the substance of things hoped for.”**

- The idea is that faith brings you back into connection with your real purpose!
  - The word *substance* is often translated *assurance*, or *confidence*.
    - It was sometimes used of title to property or of a guarantee.
    - It has the idea of standing under—it brings you into man’s original hope of eternal blessed communion with God.
    - You now, by faith, have assurance of eternal life in fellowship with the eternal God.
    - Though we are still in a fallen world, you have confidence in the promised mercy of God in Christ—you have this assurance of hope.
      - By His promise and covenant you have a title to your eternal inheritance.
2. The second part of the verse is a parallel statement, essentially repeating the same thing... is says that **faith is the evidence of things not seen**.
- *Things not seen because* either because we do not yet have them yet (things hoped for) or things not seen because they are things that are not visible to the human eye.
    - They are things that are known by faith—by believing what God has said.
      - What He has promised, what He has said about Himself, about salvation, about our sin, about the way Christ atoned for it, about His acceptance of Christ’s offering for sin, about His eternal reign, about salvation for all who trust in Him, about the destruction of Satan and all those who remain in rebellion with him.
    - Now we can see God whom we could not see before, and it clarifies lots of other things.
      - The word translated *evidence* comes from the verbal root that means *to convince*—or to *convict*. It is used, for example, of the Holy Spirit *convincing* the world of sin, righteousness, and judgment.
      - Faith convinces you of things that are not seen because it believes what God says—it makes what is invisible but real yours!
3. Faith (if you have it) has given you a complete paradigm shift.
- You were going along without God and without hope, but now you have both.
  - You were going away from God, avoiding Him, until faith came.
  - Now you are going to God, seeking Him, full of the hope of eternal life.
    - Your life is completely transformed.
    - Now you live for what those who do not have faith cannot perceive.

TRANS> There is, then, this radical paradigm shift.

- Your whole purpose is altered—actually, it is found.
- The true God is now in your purview. You are in touch with reality.

## II. Hebrews 11:2 shows you that this faith transforms your whole life.

- Verse 2 says, “By it [faith] the elders obtained a good testimony.”

- A. That is what this whole chapter is about.
1. It tells you the effect that faith had on the ancients—how faith that brought them into reality transformed them.
    - We will look at people like Enoch and Noah, Abraham and Sarah, Jacob and Joseph... Moses...
  2. It will tell us of their exploits—of the great things they did when their lives were restored to God by faith.
    - They did some very remarkable things—and things that made no sense to the world—because the world is not connected to God by faith.
    - For example, it will tell how Moses forsook Egypt where he might have reigned in the palace—and chose to suffer affliction in the wilderness with the people of God.
      - All because he had faith that he would have communion with God at last, which was far better than a lifetime here in a palace.
    - It is not that the lives of these men of faith were always consistent.
      - It was that God was at work in them and they kept returning to their hope and they lived in light of it, yearning for it, and seeing it ahead of them.
        - They looked to God for their happiness and ultimate blessing even though they were still in a world of much sorrow and trouble.
        - In fact, most of them had, we could say, more than their share of trouble in this world, but they looked for the city whose Builder and Maker is God—that city of which it was said that God is there.
          - They had it by faith and that faith transformed them.
- B. Think of how faith has transformed you!
1. You are going to God and you know this.
    - To you, this world takes a secondary place—
    - The world cannot understand you.
      - Why do you live as you do?
      - Why are you not getting drunk and getting high?
      - Why do you give a tithe to the church?
      - Why do you stand up for what is true when it is unpopular and there is no advantage for you in this world?
  2. How different your life is!
    - You put off the old man and put on the new man.
    - You who used to be angry and bitter are learning to be kind and patient with others—and to truly care about them—to take an interest in them and their hurts and not just your own.
    - You who used to cheat people now go out of your way to do right by them.
    - You who used to give up are learning to press on for the Lord even when you are tired or disheartened.

- You used to gossip, but now your desire is to help the one you used to gossip about.
  - Now you go to church every Lord's Day—even when there is something else to do that to the world seems way more exciting.
  - Now you pray, now you read the word of God with desire to know Him, now you obey His commandments, now you are thankful to Him.
3. Like the ancients in this chapter, as you go on like this, you get a good testimony.
- Your testimony is your reputation—even what God testifies about you—that you know Him now—that He delights in your progress and growth, in the fruit that He is bringing forth in you!
  - You get a good testimony because by faith you have His help, and you have hope of communion with God, and because by faith, you can see Him who is invisible and because by faith, you believe His promises.
    - Thanks be to God.

TRANS> What else does faith do?

### III. Hebrews 11:3 explains that by faith you know God as Creator.

- It says: **By faith we understand that the worlds were framed by the word of God, so that the things which are seen were not made of things which are visible.**
- A. God spoke the whole world into being.
1. By faith we understand that.
    - Not because we are smarter than other people, but because God has testified that this is how He did it and we believe Him.
  2. The worlds (the ages) were framed (put together in an orderly way) by the word of God—not here *logos* of Christ the word—but *ray-ma*, the spoken word.
    - We know that He did not make the world out of preexisting materials—He spoke it into being out of nothing.
      - As Psalm 33 says: **6 By the word of the LORD the heavens were made, And all the host of them by the breath of His mouth. 7 He gathers the waters of the sea together as a heap; He lays up the deep in storehouses. 8 Let all the earth fear the LORD; Let all the inhabitants of the world stand in awe of Him. 9 For He spoke, and it was done; He commanded, and it stood fast.**
    - We know that because we believe what God has said.
- B. Believing this brings us before God in awe!
1. Think of the power and wonder—He spoke and it was done! Let there be light and there was light!
    - Who can resist Him? To Him, nothing is impossible. He is invincible.
  2. We see such wisdom—to order it all so beautifully, to design it so wonderfully.
    - Who can dispute with Him or be His counsellor? We must bow humbly and sit at His feet to learn.
  3. We see such kindness—in the beauty He created along with giving us the ability to see it.

- Why should we have babies the way we do? Why should it be so pleasant to receive nourishment—so many excellent things to eat.
- Why should there be wine to cheer our heart?
- 4. Truly, it calls for praise and trust to see Him as the one who creates by a mere word of power!
  - It calls for boldness—if God is for us, who can be against us?
  - What can man do to us?

TRANS> Worship and praise is due to Him.

C. Knowing Him as Creator like this also causes us to see that everything is for Him.

1. If He created it, it is all His and it is for His glory.
  - That means that everything you have and everything you enjoy (from a beautiful sunset to a new set of clothes) ought to bring forth thanksgiving.
  - It means that you ought to use what you have for His purposes...
    - That includes enjoying it... be it music, sex with your spouse, or steak.
    - It includes giving things away to those in need...
    - It includes using the creation to be a blessing to your neighbour.
2. Since He created you, it also means that *you* are here for Him.
  - If He has appointed a trial for you, you bear it for Him.
  - If He has appointed many trials for you—and persecutions—it is all for Him.
3. Seeing God as the one who created all by the word of His power cures Chicken Little Syndrome.
  - You know what that is, don't you?
    - Chicken Little is the one who thought the sky was falling and ran around telling everyone to take cover.
      - So Chicken Little Syndrome is when you are worried about all the looming disasters—viruses, climate change, devastating war, economic meltdown—or more personal matters.
      - Some of these things happen, but when you know that God is in full control, you trust Him, even if you must suffer and die.
    - When you believe that God created everything, you know that He is not going to lose control of it.
      - You know that whatever calamities come, even when it was a world wide flood, they are all appointed by Him.
      - You trust Him, again, remembering that you are here for Him.
        - He created the world and He created you.
        - By faith, you know that because He has told us that in His word.

TRANS> So you see that by faith, we know God as Creator.

- Now we will turn to verse 4 and see what else we know by faith...

**IV. Hebrews 11:4 shows you that by faith, you know God as Redeemer.**

- In verse 4, we get into the first example of an elder who had a good testimony by faith—Abel, one of the sons of Adam and Eve and the brother of Cain.
  - It says (v. 4): **“By faith Abel offered to God a more excellent sacrifice than Cain, through which he obtained witness that he was righteous, God testifying of his gifts; and through it he being dead still speaks.”**

A. Abel shows faith in God as Redeemer.

1. We are told that by faith Abel offered a more excellent sacrifice.
  - The thing that made it stand out as an excellent sacrifice was that it was offered in faith.
    - Hebrews has taught us that priests offer sacrifices for sin—to atone for sin.
    - This is taught all through the Bible.
      - Hebrews even says that without the shedding of blood, there is no remission of sin.
  - We have every reason to believe that God had instructed Adam and his family about sacrifices and their purpose as a testimony of atonement for sin.
    - It would have been highly inappropriate for Abel or Adam or anyone else to just decide that they could atone for sin by the death of another in their place—or that this would be a suitable symbol of the redemption that God had promised.
    - We can be sure that since they did sacrifices, God would have instructed them that they were to make these offerings, trusting in Him for the forgiveness of sin. God would not have approved of this otherwise.
2. When we look back at Genesis 4, this is what we find.
  - Gen 4:3-7: **And in the process of time it came to pass that Cain brought an offering of the fruit of the ground to the LORD. <sup>4</sup> Abel also brought of the firstborn of his flock and of their fat. And the LORD respected Abel and his offering, <sup>5</sup> but He did not respect Cain and his offering.**
    - Notice that God respected not just the offering, but Abel and his offering—it was offered as sacrifices were meant to be offered, trusting God for the forgiveness of sin.
    - Cain did not offer his in an acceptable manner and become angry because God rejected him—
  - Continuing from the middle of verse 5...
    - **And Cain was very angry, and his countenance fell. <sup>6</sup> So the LORD said to Cain, “Why are you angry? And why has your countenance fallen? <sup>7</sup> If you do well, will you not be accepted? And if you do not do well, sin lies at the door. And its desire is for you, but you should rule over it.”**
    - God tells him that he must do well.
      - What would that entail when offering a sacrifice?
      - What we have seen with Abel—offering with faith in God for forgiveness.
        - God Himself, by accepting Abel and his offering, provided (as Heb 11:4 says) **witness that he [Abel] was righteous.**
        - God testified that Abel was righteous by faith in sacrifice.

- Cain was willing to acknowledge God as the One who gave him his crops—as creator—but he was not willing to acknowledge Him as Redeemer.
- He wanted to be accepted without trusting in a sacrifice for sin.
- There are lots of religious people like that—some of them are very devout—but they are angry when they are told that they are sinners and need a redeemer—
- They want to be accepted because they are good people who have done so much for God.
- God does not have respect for them or for their offerings.

B. What about you?

1. We have seen in Hebrews that God's accepted sacrifice for our sins is His only begotten Son—crucified for the sins of His people.
  - Will you believe? Will you trust in Him? Do you trust in Him?
  - What a difference it will make if you do!
    - You will know God's forgiveness by faith.
    - You will know it even better than Abel did because, now that Christ has come, you see what God did to take away our sins.
    - You will receive the hope of eternal communion with God.
2. That testimony that God gave of Abel's righteousness by faith in sacrifice lives on even though Abel has been dead for 6000 years.
  - As it says, even though he is dead, the testimony still speaks.
    - It has stood through every age for these 6000 years.
  - In fact, now that Jesus has come, it speaks louder than ever—we see clearly how it is that God accepts the death of a substitute for our sins—
    - because the substitute He had provided is His righteous Son.
      - This is what makes you righteous if you will believe.
      - This is what makes our hope certain.
3. If you refuse to believe, like Cain did, you are unacceptable to God.
  - We all are until we trust in Christ crucified to take away our sins.
  - Without faith, you will die in your sin. There is no remission of sin without the shedding of blood.

**Conclusion:** What a difference faith makes!

- It brings you into a new reality that includes the true God as Creator and Redeemer.
  - Your whole life is now about Him—albeit not always so consistently!
  - By faith you have hope of eternal communion with God.
  - By faith you have a transformed life for God.
  - By faith, you know Him as Creator who calls into being what is not by His word.
  - By faith, you know Him as Redeemer who gave His Son to take away your sins.