

PROVIDENCE CHURCH

Glorifying God by knowing, living and proclaiming His truth in the world

Be a Hero of the Faith Pastor Ted Guthrie Hebrews 10:19-39 March 8, 2015

A number of years ago I heard a story about a music minister who worked for a very famous, and articulate, and powerful preacher/evangelist. It was when I was in college, so I don't know if my parents, or Todd remembers this same story. I don't remember which music ministry it was, but there came a time in the music minister's life when it turns out the pastor wasn't going to be present for the service that coming week. So the pastor asked the music minister if he would be willing to preach, and so the music minister, knowing the grace and eloquence with which the pastor normally delivered the word of God, he nonetheless told the entire congregation and the townsfolk, "If you come next week you are going to hear the greatest sermon ever preached." Well, this no doubt piqued the curiosity of many of the townsfolk in the congregation, so they showed up to church the following week, eager to see what the music minister was going to say. So after the songs were done, the music minister stands, straightens himself, takes his Bible, walks to the pulpit, and asks the congregation to please turn to Matthew 5. He then proceeds to read all three chapters of the *Sermon on the Mount*. He then closes his Bible, and walks back to his chair and sits down. No one disputed that it was the greatest sermon ever preached, and while I would very much like you to turn to Matthew 5, especially with Ty here, and you know that his ministry to us in the word of God, and the blessings that God has given him, especially after just coming from the Shepherd's Conference, by the grace of God, I'm going to preach on faith out of Hebrews 11. You know some people have said that Hebrews is one of the most difficult books in the New Testament. I know that is true because the person that I read it from was Donald Guthrie, and anybody who has the last name of Guthrie, has to be true.

But the reason that Hebrews is such a difficult book is because the audience, the author, the time that it is written, all are much more difficult to determine than we have in other books of the New Testament. But as with any passage of Scripture, it is still helpful for us to take a look back at the background of the book so that we can get a context for the message that the writer of Hebrews is going to deliver. The book of Hebrews is called 'To the Hebrews', this is the name that was given to it back in A.D. 100, when the canon of the New Testament was combined and pulled together, and that name has stayed with the book ever since. Although in the book itself, it never said who it is written to, but we can take from the name of the

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book being 'To the Hebrews', which is the names of the books are not inspired by God, they are just the title that is given, but we can still assume that it was written to a group of Christians. We don't know if it is either in Israel, or perhaps other places around Asia. A group of Christians who had put their faith in Jesus Christ, some of whom may have been tempted, or have been enticed by the grace that they found in the message of the Gospel, but they had not fully put their faith in Christ, and to these are to whom this book was written.

We know that it was written around the time of the sacrificial system because over, and over, and over again in the book 'To the Hebrews' you find references to the Old Testament sacrificial system. And then you also find references to one of the wonderful truths of the book of Hebrews is that Christ is superior to the Old Testament sacrificial system. So to these Christians, many of whom had been saved out of Judaism, who had the Old Testament sacrificial system in their memory banks, that was the operational approach that they were responding to, they would look at the newfound Christianity with a little bit of skepticism. And if you look at the sacrificial system that they were operating under, you have altars, you have sacrifices, you have priests, you have a temple that you go to to offer your sacrifice, you have all of the trappings of religiosity that these people would have been used to expecting to make themselves pure and right with God. But yet then you come, and you put your faith in Jesus Christ, and you meet in a home. So a lot of these Christians that this book was written to had one foot still in Judaism, in Old Testament Judaism, and they had one foot in Christianity, as they tried to straddle the line.

When it comes to the authorship, the authorship of Hebrews has been debated for a long time. Many people have ascribed Paul as the author, most notably a very early historian named Pantanus, who around the turn of the 2nd century ascribed Paul as the author, and many people followed his lead. Some people think that even though the doctrine is some that Paul would espouse, a lot of the terminology and wording is not of Paul. Especially Paul normally ascribes himself as the author in most of the other New Testament books. Nobody ascribes themselves to the author in Hebrews. Even Martin Luther, about 1,500 years later, after the book was written, he thought Apollos was the more logical author, maybe from the eloquence of its arguments, and he espoused that view to which the Catholic Church, in the Council of Trent, right? That famous council where they made a number of other unfavorable declarations. They said definitively that Paul was the author of Hebrews, and I guess that was supposed to settle it, but of course we know that it didn't. So we don't still know who the author of Hebrews was, but we do know

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that the author is truly the Holy Spirit, who authors all books in the word of God for our benefit.

As we look at some of the major themes in the book of Hebrews, we already talked about the superiority of Jesus Christ. You know, there was a sect of that day called the *Qumran Sect*, and they had separated themselves, and they had gone off for a while, maybe you've seen some stuff on the History Channel or something, about Qumran, but one of the things they were is they were very good historians, and they kept track, and they knew their Old Testament, and they kept a lot of the documents that we have today. Some of them were uncovered archaeologically from the sect.

But in this *Qumran Sect*, they tended to take the Old Testament, covenantal, or Old Testament system that they were under in that day, and they applied it to the New Testament, they applied it to their own lives, but they never really took into account what the Old Testament context was, and we have people who do this today. We have people who go and take a verse out of the Bible, never looking at what the context of that verse is, and they just say, "This is what it means to me." And so that is one of the heresies, or one of the things that this original church had to deal with as well.

One of the other main themes of the book of Hebrews is to encourage the people of Hebrews, the Jews that they were writing to, encourage them to endure, to stand steadfast, to be strong in the Lord. So I want you to put in place, I'm going to read actually the passage of Scripture right before Hebrews 11 as our beginning passage here. I want you to put yourself in the place of the church that this book was written to. You are Hebrews who have already been persecuted to some degree, very likely additional persecution is coming. The temple was destroyed in A.D. 70, which is why we believe this was written sometime before A.D. 65 and A.D. 70, because the sacrificial system was still very much a part of this book. After the temple was destroyed, you didn't have the sacrificial system as much after that obviously. So you are a called out people, or somebody who is investigating Christianity, but you are not sure if what you are seeing and reading, and you're still pulled back to the old Judaistic practices, but yet you are facing persecution for what you are now coming to believe. So let's read the word of God together with that context in mind. Hebrews 10, let's begin reading in Verse 19.

Hebrews 10:19-39 ~ Therefore, brothers, since we have confidence to enter the holy places by the blood of Jesus, 20 by the new and living way

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that he opened for us through the curtain, that is, through his flesh, 21 and since we have a great priest over the house of God, 22 let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, with our hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water. 23 Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for he who promised is faithful. 24 And let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works, 25 not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day drawing near.

26 But if we go on sinning deliberately after receiving the knowledge of the truth, there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins, 27 but a fearful expectation of judgment, and a fury of fire that will consume the adversaries. 28 Anyone who has set aside the law of Moses dies without mercy on the evidence of two or three witnesses. 29 How much worse punishment, do you think, will be deserved by the one who has trampled underfoot the Son of God, and has profaned the blood of the covenant by which he was sanctified, and has outraged the Spirit of grace? 30 For we know him who said, "Vengeance is mine; I will repay." And again, "The Lord will judge his people." 31 It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God.

32 But recall the former days when, after you were enlightened, you endured a hard struggle with sufferings, 33 sometimes being publicly exposed to reproach and affliction, and sometimes being partners with those so treated. 34 For you had compassion on those in prison, and you joyfully accepted the plundering of your property, since you knew that you yourselves had a better possession and an abiding one. 35 Therefore do not throw away your confidence, which has a great reward. 36 For you have need of endurance, so that when you have done the will of God you may receive what is promised. 37 For,

*"Yet a little while,
and the coming one will come and will not delay;
38 but my righteous one shall live by faith,
and if he shrinks back,
my soul has no pleasure in him."*

39 But we are not of those who shrink back and are destroyed, but of those who have faith and preserve their souls.

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Let's begin with prayer this morning.

Father, what a privilege it is to come before the word of God, knowing that it is sufficient. We ask that Your grace, and strength, and truth would be evident this morning, that Your Holy Spirit would be the one that teaches us, and that we would go away saying, "It has been good to be in the house of the Lord." We pray these things in the wonderful name of Jesus Christ, Amen.

My sermon today is very simple, and it is 'Be a Hero of the Faith'. I hope you put yourself in the context of that Christian church to whom this was written. Either you are newly a believer in Jesus Christ, or you are one who is investigating the claims of Christ. Here you have the writer of Hebrews who is telling you, as he is about to introduce this great pantheon of heroes of the faith, and he is coming to you, and right before he goes into that chapter that Ty read, that long 40-verse chapter, he's telling you, he goes, "You have already suffered, and you have already been tempted, and you have already struggled, and you have already been tempted to shrink back, and you are going to face more persecution, and you will be tempted more to shrink back." But then he quotes here out of Haggai, and he says, "But my righteous ones shall live by faith. Therefore, do not throw away your confidence which has a great reward." Then in Verse 39 he introduces Hebrews 11 by saying, "We are not of those who shrink back and are destroyed, but of those who have faith, and preserve their souls."

So here he is telling this kind of newfound church in Asia, Israel, we don't know exactly where it is. He is telling them, "Let me show you. We are not the ones who are going to shrink back, and who are going to turn back on our faith. We are the ones who are going to persevere, and be strong." And he then walks them through this pantheon of faith, and I don't know, when I grew up, whenever you hear a message on Hebrews 11, obviously a very famous message, a very famous chapter in the word of God, I'm like, "Well, those are the Old Testament, almost like gods that you see." These are the people who talked with God directly. These are the people who had a mighty power of God on their lives. But the author of Hebrews is telling the church in Hebrews, as he is starting this chapter, he is saying, "I want you to be like them." That is what he is saying. "I don't want you to shrink back. We're the ones who have faith. Let me give you a number of examples of the people who had faith because I want you to be like them." You say, "I know Ty read through, obviously, Hebrews 11, and you can hear the words 'by faith' and 'through faith' over, and over, and over again. Over 25 times it appears. Hebrews 11:6 makes it clear the just shall live by faith. Without faith it is impossible to please God.

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You say, “What is faith? You want me to be a hero of faith, what do you want me to be?” Both the Old Testament and the New Testament word have the same meaning although they are obviously different. One is in Hebrew in the Old Testament and one is in Greek in the New Testament, but the New Testament word is the *‘pistis’*, and the word *‘pistis’* means *‘to be fully persuaded, to believe’*. It is from a root word meaning *‘to be convinced’*. If I give you a couple of examples, in the Old Testament, by the way, there is only two places that the word *‘faith’* actually shows up. One is in Deuteronomy 32:20, where God is saying that there are children in whom is no faith, and He goes on to say, “That displeases Me,” He is angry with those who have no faith. The other one is the quote that we have out of this passage we just read, out of Habakkuk 2:4, right? “The just shall live by faith.”

But in the Old Testament, the word is translated *‘believe’* over and over again, and in the New Testament we have different words that are used for the same Greek word *‘pistis’*. If you look at a couple of examples really quickly. First of all, if you look at Hebrews 11:1, what I learned of the King James Version, I grew up with the King James Version. It is a wonderful version. It is a very poetic, glorious translation of the Scriptures, but the word that was translated as now *‘faith’* is *‘the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen’*, and that was difficult for me to grasp. What really does that mean? And, by the way, what you should really call, when you say the King James Version, you should really say the William Tyndale version, because 85-90 percent of the King James Version came from the William Tyndale version.

William Tyndale, I’d like to get into it more, a wonderful martyr for the faith who translated the New Testament, and some of the Old Testament, into English. Then he used the newfound printing press in the 1500’s. By the way, Tyndale was a contemporary of Martin Luther. Some believe they even collaborated together. He was exiled from England, although he was a very learned man. He knew eight different languages including Greek, Latin, Hebrew. He used his skills to the word of God and ended up being martyred for his faith when he was betrayed by another Englishman, somebody from his own country. But if you look at the William Tyndale version of Hebrews 11:1, it says:

Hebrews 11:1 ~ Faith is the sure confidence of things that are hoped for, and is the certainty of things not seen.

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Isn't that much more clear? Then at least the King James Version that I grew up learning. It ... *is the sure confidence of things that are hoped for, and is the certainty of things not seen.* If you look in Romans 8:38, you don't have to turn there, I'll just quote several of these. *For I am persuaded...* The word 'persuaded' is 'faith'.

Romans 8:38-39 ~ For I am persuaded, that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, 39 Nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Does that sound like Paul was just kind of hoping? He is absolutely persuaded, he is convinced that God is able.

2 Timothy 1:12 ~ ...But I am not ashamed, for I know whom I have believed, and (What?) I am persuaded (I have faith.) that he is able to keep that which I've committed unto him against that day.

Luke 16:28-31 is the account of the story of the rich man and Lazarus. Some people think it is a parable. I personally think it is an actual story for a couple of different reasons. Number one, it never says it is a parable. The second reason is if it is a parable, it is the only one where Jesus gives the characters names. So here you have a New Testament story, some say parable, the rich man and Lazarus, right? The rich man fares sumptuously. He lives gloriously. Lazarus is the beggar at the gate. He has sores. The rich man dies and goes to hell. Lazarus dies and goes to Abraham's bosom. If you look at that passage of Scripture, there is a very interesting section at the very end in Luke 16. First of all he asks for water on his fingers to cool his tongue, and to come and quench it, and Abraham says, "There is a great gulf fix. We can't pass to you. You can't pass to us." Then he says, the rich man says:

Luke 16:27-28 ~ ...'I beg you therefore, father, (Father Abraham) that you would send him to my father's house— 28 for I have five brothers—so that he may testify them, lest they also come into this place of torment.'

So he is asking Abraham to allow Lazarus to rise from the dead, and then to be sent to his five brothers and they will believe. And Abraham said to them, ... ***'They have Moses and the Prophets; let them hear them.'*** And the rich man says,

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Luke 16:30-31 ~ ...‘No, father Abraham, but if anyone goes to them from the dead, they will repent.’ 31 He said to him, ‘If they do not hear Moses and the Prophets, neither will they be persuaded (Faith, same word.) though one rise from the dead.

We know this is true because a little while later, Lazarus, not the same Lazarus, Lazarus, the brother of Mary and Martha, he rises from the dead. Christ calls him out of the grave. What are the Pharisees’ and the Jewish response? Is it, “Wow, if this man can raise people from the dead, then I’m going to put my faith in Him.” That is not their response. Their response is, “We’re going to look to kill Jesus.” That is their reply to somebody who can raise people from the dead. Later on, of course, Christ Jesus Himself rises from the dead, proving that He has the power over death in His own being. Is their answer then to put their faith in Jesus Christ? No. They pay the soldiers to lie and say that somebody took Him out of the grave.

I want to tell you, if you are expecting there to be enough intellectual evidence to overcome your doubt, and to overcome your insecurity about whether Christianity really makes sense, and really is a religion that you can put your faith in, not a religion, but a person of Jesus Christ you can put your faith in, you will be sorely disappointed. Not because the word of God doesn’t stand up on its own two feet scientifically, we’ve been going through months now of scientific evidence in our Sunday morning Bible study of when I consider—geological, right? Astronomical, biological, chemical. We go through all of them, paleontological. We go through all the disciplines of science showing that what is in the word of God is accurate, it’s fully accurate, and it makes sense. You don’t come to the word of God and you say, “Well, I’m going to throw out everything else I’ve ever seen in the world around me, but I’m going to put my faith in this.” What you see in the world around you absolutely supports the word of God because God’s works support His words because it is the same author. But if you’re going to come expecting there to be enough intellectual argument to commit you, to allow you to put faith in something, you’re going to be disappointed. I love the way MacArthur, I’m going to read his notes here. He’s got a great note on this verse. In 1631, some of you have the MacArthur Study Bible, you can read it with me.

This speaks powerfully of a singular sufficiency of Scripture to overcome belief. The Gospel itself is the power of God unto salvation, since unbelief is at heart a moral, not an intellectual problem. If you are not going to believe in the claims of Scripture, that Jesus Christ is sufficient, that the Gospel and the word of God is true, and complete and accurate, it is a moral issue, it is not an intellectual problem.

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These people weren't convinced even though one rose from the dead. Let me show you an Old Testament example. Turn over with me to Psalm 78. Psalm 78 is a wonderful recounting of God's providence to the children of Israel, and we have to go through it quickly. Let's look at Verse 12, I'm just going to skip quickly, but you can follow along if you like. Marvelous things He did in the sight of the Father, right? He's talking about the children of Israel, and the land of Egypt. He divided the Red Sea, He caused them to pass through on dry land, He made the waters stand up like a heap. In the daytime He led them with a cloud, in the nighttime He led them with the fire. He split the rocks in the wilderness, and He gave them to drink in abundance like the depths. They were thirsty, He gave them abundant water. He also brought streams out of the rock, He caused waters to run down like rivers. You want to know how much water? Did you ever think about what it was like when you are children of Israel? You have no water, you go to the rock, or you go to Moses, you were thirsty, and he goes, "Well, let me hit this rock over here." He speaks to the rock. In one case, he hits the rock. Do you think it is like a little trickle? "Well it's going to take us a long time to fill up our..." It runs out like rivers, the Bible says. That is how much water God caused to flow out of the barren land.

Verse 17, but they sinned against Him even more. They rebelled against the Most High in the wilderness. They tested God in their heart. They asked for food. So this is what they are asking for. So He's gone through a litany of the miracles that God has performed, starting actually, by the way, leading them out of Egypt, and the wonderful example of His power and sufficiency in causing Pharaoh to let them go. They asked for food of their fancy, they spoke against God, and what did they say? "Well, can God prepare a table in the wilderness?" Well, behold, He struck the rock and the waters gushed out. "Okay, well that was one thing, but can He give us food as well?" The amazing unbelief. "Can He provide meat for His people?" Therefore when the Lord heard this, not surprisingly in Verse 21, He was furious. So a fire was kindled against Jacob, and anger also came up against Israel because why? They did not believe in God. You know what that word is? Faith. They had example of miracle, after miracle, after miracle, after miracle, and then they grumbled against God and said, "Well, I don't think He can do this." It goes on to say they did not trust in His salvation.

So do you want to know what God did after they grumbled, and complained, and questioned whether He was able? He sent manna down like rain. The angel's food, the word of God says in Verse 25. He sent them food to the full. It goes on to say that later on they were completely well-filled, Verse 29, so they ate and were well-

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filled for He gave them their own desire. So here God, in His gracious mercy, even though He's angry with them, He still gives them food miraculously. Do you want to know what their response is? Look down in Verse 32. In spite of this, they still sinned and did not believe in His wondrous works. Want to know what the word 'believe' is? Faith. Same word. So if you think that when you talk to somebody about the Gospel of Jesus Christ, if you think that just by arguing enough intellectually you are going to cause them to be a believer, or if your own heart, if you are here this morning and you believe, "Well, I just have a few more arguments, a few more scientific debates and examples, some more corroboration," whenever He's given you the entire world which speaks of His creative ability, I'm afraid you will never arrive because faith is a moral problem. It is not an intellectual problem. I encourage you to bow the knee to Jesus Christ, and put your faith in Him because it is a willingness to submit to the Lordship of Jesus Christ.

That is the meaning of faith, is to be fully convinced, to be fully persuaded. It doesn't come about because of scientific arguments, even though a quote my dad quotes me often, since he knows I've been teaching Sunday morning Bible study on creation, right?

Language is the mathematics with which God has written the universe.

– Galileo

You can see in creation, the fingerprint all over of God. So you say, "Faith in what?" Well, many people have faith. I have faith that when I get in my car after church, and I drive home, it is going to get me there safely, and you know what? That faith is probably well-placed. It has demonstrated it over and over again. But people can have faith in a lot of things. So the writer of Hebrews says exactly what you are supposed to have your faith in. It is not just an open-ended faith. In fact, a lot of people you talk to in society today say, "Yeah, I have faith." "What is your faith in?" Nobody even ever asks that question. But it is important that we say as Christians, "What is my faith? What am I fully convinced of? What am I fully persuaded of?" Right? Hebrews 11:6, without faith it is impossible to please God for whoever draws near to God must believe. You want to know what the word 'believe' is? Faith. Must believe that He is, and that He is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him. Right?

Ty has mentioned quite often Exodus 3, when Moses is getting ready to lead the children out of Israel. He goes to God and says, "Who shall I say sent me? They are not going to believe me. Who do I tell them is telling me to go and rescue them

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from the Pharaoh?” and He says, “You tell them that I am that I am.” God is the self-existent one. He is the first cause. He is the great and only one who can call things out of nothing. So if you are going to come to God, you must believe that He is, that He exists. You say, “Well, that is pretty obvious,” but then you have the word ‘*and*’. No word in the word of God is superfluous. It is not written there just for embellishment. Then you have the word ‘*and*’, so you have to start with the fact that God exists, *and* that He rewards those who diligently seek Him, because you have people who take one without the other.

In James 2, when it says, “There are those who seek God,” in fact, it is a wonderful argument, it says, “Well, you show me your faith without your works, I’ll show you my faith by my works.” Same argument in James the writer of Hebrews is making here. Then he goes, “Well, hey, do you believe? Do you have faith?” You can see the people who are in the audience, right? “Yeah, I have faith.” You do well, probably patting themselves on the back at this point. Then of course He follows up with, “Well, the devil also believed,” and He kind of almost twists the knife and says, “And they tremble,” almost saying, “Do you tremble? You believe, but do you tremble at the word of God? The devils even tremble at the word of God because they know that He is, but they are completely unwilling to be those who follow Him. They already made that decision long ago.”

You know it is also possible to do the converse. There are people who are seekers. In fact, they’ll tell you. You know what? You talk to them about Christ. You talk to them about the wonderful Gospel, and they say, “You know what? I’m searching. I’m seeking. I’m trying.” Well, you know, in some sense, that’s good. I’d rather have somebody do that than not question where they are from an eternity standpoint at all, or why they’re here, or where did they come from. At least if you’re seeking, at least hopefully you’ll find the word of God. But it’s insufficient.

In fact, you know, in preparing for this message, I went to the internet and I typed in *seekers* into Google. One of the first things that comes up is this one website called www.seekershut.org. Doesn’t that sound good? “If you’re a seeker, I’m going to help you out.” It’s the Seeker’s Hub. “We’re the hub for those who are seeking.” You quickly get to where you can go to the *About* and it tells of what this website is all about. Of course it said, “Allah’s religion is vast.” This is the quote. “Allah’s religion is vast. It is for all people, in every time and in every place.” The quote is written by somebody called Shaykh Yahya Rhodus, You go on and you find out very quickly it says, “We’re for the people who are seeking to understand and learn and pattern their life after the Qur’an.

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You can seek. We've all talked to people who seek. The New Age movement is big. Eastern Mysticism, you can even seek for truth, and light, and understanding in your own heart, but it doesn't stop, and says that, "He rewards those who diligently seek." It doesn't stop there. It says, "Those who diligently seek *Him*."

"Faith is one who comes to God and believes He exists," and then it says, "Those who diligently seek God with their whole heart, soul, mind, and spirit." You need to encourage those that you talk to, if you're going to be a true follower of Jesus Christ, you will believe that He is, and you will believe that He rewards those who diligently seek Him, and you can tell that by their actions.

You have though this little parenthetical verse. After you kind of get through these great, wonderful texts of Scripture on what faith is, what faith requires, you have a little parenthetical verse if you look again.

Hebrews 11:1 ~ Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen. 2 For by it the people of old (the elders) received their commendation.

By the way, I'm reading the ESV. It says: ...the people of old... It's not the old people. There are a number of examples here. They were probably people who were young who exhibited faith, but by it they received commendation. So the author of Hebrews is introducing his audience to walk through the hall of these great heroes of the faith with him, and you would think that he would go, "The people of old, by it they received commendation. Let me explain to you these people of faith." You would think Verse 4 would come right next, where he'd go into, "By faith Abel... By faith Enoch..." right? "Noah, Abraham, Sarah, Jacob, Isaac, all of them." You would think it would follow right after, but there's a little parenthetical verse that almost seems to not even belong, and that's Verse 3, where he says:

Hebrews 11:3 ~ By faith we understand that the universe was created by the word of God, so that what is seen was not made out of things that are visible.

He almost puts a parenthetical and says, "If you're going to have faith in God, you need to understand that God was the great Creator. He starts with creation, and this theme happens over, and over, and over again in the word of God, because there are some people who say, "You know what? We're in the New Testament now. We're in the New Covenant. Jesus Christ has been more gloriously exhibited on

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the pages of the Gospels. We have these doctrinal books written by Paul and others to the churches. That is sufficient for me. I don't really need to go back to the Old Testament," besides the fact that the writer of Hebrews is going to go and give many examples. I think it's like 18 examples of people from the Old Testament who had strong faith. But they still say, "No, no. I don't need to go all the way back. It doesn't really matter what I believe about creation. It doesn't matter what I believe about the book of Genesis." But you have a problem, and the problem is that the book of Genesis is quoted more times than any other book of the Old Testament, in the New Testament. So in the New Testament, they quote 200 times from the book of Genesis, and 100 of those times are from the first eleven chapters of Genesis. That's the one where we talk about, "In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth." You have the fall. You have the creation of man. You have the curse. You have the Tower of Babel. You have the flood. You have all these things that intellectuals from today will say, "Those didn't happen. They didn't happen. Science disproves that. Those did not occur." But the New Testament affirms that they did occur.

In fact, Christ Himself refers to Adam and Eve. Christ Himself refers to Abel being the righteous prophet. Christ refers to Noah, and Abraham, and Jacob, and Lot, and Lot's wife. In fact, in Mark 10:6, whenever Christ is answering a question on divorce, and they say basically, they ask Christ, "Is divorce okay or not?" and the first thing Christ says is, "Haven't you read your Bibles?" We looked at this in Bible study a couple of weeks ago. That's really what He's saying. "Have you not read? Haven't you studied your Bibles? In the beginning..." So Christ there is affirming in the beginning of what? In the beginning of time, because God creates time, He creates space, and He creates matter. He creates everything that we can see, and the experience through which we experience it. He creates all of it. "In the beginning, God created them male and female, Adam and Eve," right? Christ Himself said that. "In the beginning, God created them male and female." And then He goes on to say, "For this reason..." For what reason? The reason that in the beginning God created them male and female, "...shall a man leave his father and leave his mother, and cleave to his wife, and they too shall be one flesh." Do you want to know what the basis for marriage is? It's in the beginning God created them male and female. If you're going to take away the beginning, you have no basis for marriage. Not really, just do whatever you want.

In Luke 24, Jesus joins His disciples on the road to Emmaus, and beginning with Moses and all the prophets, He expounds to them the things concerning Himself.

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Who does He begin with? Moses. He goes back to the beginning. Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy.

John 5:46 ~ For if you believed Moses, you would believe me; for he wrote of me.

This is a very interesting passage where Jesus Himself is comparing believing in His words with believing in the writings of Moses. That's in John 5. The writer says in Verse 45:

John 5:45 ~ Do not think that I will accuse you to the Father. There is one who accuses you: Moses, on whom you have set your hope. 46 For if you believed Moses, you would believe me; for he wrote of me. 47 But if you do not believe his writings, how will you believe my words?"

I want to make sure it's clear. I think that someone can be a Christian, can hear the Gospel of Jesus Christ, realize that they are a sinner, put their faith and trust in the finished work of Christ, repent of their sin, and be gloriously saved, without ever knowing how the world began. That's possible, but the whole basis for salvation is in Genesis with creation. I do think it is difficult—you can maybe have no concept—I think it is difficult to argue that Genesis has no relevance, and then argue that Jesus Christ is the one who is the Savior of the world, because Jesus Christ is the second Adam, and if you have no first Adam, through whom the curse came through sin, then the second Adam, through whom he is related by blood, which allows Him to be our Kinsman Redeemer, then His sacrifice doesn't make much sense. It's hard to argue that it's efficacious. The writer of Hebrews starts with creation. "The word of God framed the worlds." I looked up the word *worlds*. That's the King James way they say it. Here they say *universe* in the ESV. Do you know what the word *worlds* means? It means worlds. It means the universe, everything we see, "So that the things which are seen are not made by the things which do appear." Right? So the things that we see in the world around us, we take by faith. Ex nihilo creation—God created out of nothing.

In fact, if you look in the book of Genesis, there are three places that the word *creation* appears. I'm just going to go through them quickly.

Genesis 1:1 ~ In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.

Do you know what the word *creation* is there? It's בָּרָא (bara). It means *God created*. The second time it's used is in Genesis 1:21.

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Genesis 1:21 ~ God created the great sea creatures...

By the way, do you know what sea creatures are, translated elsewhere in the Bible, almost everywhere else? They're dragons. I personally believed this is where God creates dinosaurs. You go, "Oh no, dinosaurs lived billions and billions of years ago, and they never overlapped with humans." Yes, they did. God created great sea creatures. In fact, the actual word is תַּנִּינִי (tanniyn), which means either a land or a sea monster. The third place that God uses the word *bara* is Genesis 1:27, when God created man:

Genesis 1:27 ~ So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them.

In fact, there are other words that are used for God's creative process. There's the word *asa* which means *to make*, where God makes things out of other things, or the word *yatsar* which means *to form*. He forms things. He transfers things. But anytime you see the word *bara* used in all of the word of God, you can be assured that God Himself is the subject, because only God creates. Everybody else changes. You say, "Well, we procreate." Well, that's not really creating, because the seed is in itself, just like God told us in Genesis 1. Only God creates, and if you're going to come to God and you're going to believe that He is, and that He's the rewarder of those who diligently seek Him, the writer of Hebrews starts, you need to first of all understand that God is the one who creates, and no one else, and it's verified over and over in the word of God. A lot of these wonderful thoughts come from Henry Morris, the original Founder of The Institute for Creation Research. We could go on. Even when Paul talks at the Areopagus, right? When he starts with creation, "And God made the world and everything in it," when he's preaching to the Greeks, "being Lord of Heaven and earth, He does not need anything as though He is served by human hands, because He made the world and everything in it, and He sustains the world and everything in it." And then it goes on later and goes, "And that is why He is able to make Jesus be the Savior, why He was able to raise Jesus from the dead." He starts with creation and gets to salvation. That's Paul's argument. That's the basis for which we believe in the rest of the belief about God and His creation.

So you say, "Okay, I understand faith as being fully persuaded. It's being fully convinced. I'm convinced that God is. I'm convinced that He rewards those who diligently seek Him. I'm convinced that He's the Creator of all things and the sustainer of all things." So as we walk through this hall, which we'll do fairly quickly, if we walk through the hall, let's look at what the character of their faith

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is. Look at the common thread. It's like looking at beautiful tapestries in an art gallery. You go, "You know what? There's the same color thread. There are different paintings. There is the same hue, the same approach to the painting," and that's because it's the same author. The Bible says, "For by grace are you saved, through faith, and that not of yourselves." What's not of yourselves? The faith is not of yourself. "It is the gift of God." Even faith is a gift from God through grace.

So first of all I want you to look again, picture the great hall with me. We're walking through the hall of faith. We're going to go through it quickly, but I want you to view the common threads. First of all is this, is that grace is what defines them. Grace defines them. If you look at the examples, by the way, you know it's what defines them, because of what they did. These are people who thousands of years later whenever the writer of Hebrews wants to call this group out, he keep saying what? "By faith they did this. By faith they did that. By faith they did this other thing." Faith is what defines their lives thousands of years after the fact. Abel offered a more excellent sacrifice than Cain. Enoch was taken, so he did not see death. The Bible records in Genesis 5 that he walked with God.

By the way, a quick aside, over in Jude we find out more about Enoch. Enoch preached against unrighteousness and warned of the wrath to come. We don't find that out in Genesis. You don't find that out until Jude. Noah prepared an ark for the saving of his household. He was warned of God of things yet to come. Can you imagine Noah's everyday life? He wakes up in the morning and his friends go, "Hey Noah, what are you going to do today?" "I'm going to work on the ark again today." Whatever it was, 70, 80, 100 years, but it was a long time. The Bible says he was 400 years old right before he had Shem, Ham, and Japheth. He was 500 years old whenever the flood came. So sometime in the period he builds the ark. You think your job is boring. Every day he gets up and he's got to build the ark. But it says what it that passage, in Genesis 5 to 9 where we record the story of the ark? It says Noah was righteous in his generation and he found grace in the eyes of the Lord. That's the first time the word grace appears. It's called The Law of First Mention. It's important whenever the Bible first mentions a concept. Pay attention to it because it tells you something about what the Bible wants to say about the rest of that idea throughout the Scriptures. You find already, "Noah found grace." You can't earn grace. It's unmerited favor. We just quoted, "For by grace are you saved, through faith." It's God's unmerited favor to Noah.

By the way, the first time grace appears in the New Testament is in Luke. The angel appears to Mary, right? Mary is of course afraid. "Fear not, Mary, for you have found favor." It's the same word *χάρις* (charis). "You've found favor in the

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sight of God.” So we find that even for these heroes of the faith, it is by the grace of God.

It tells us later in that passage that Noah obeyed all that God asked him to do. You get to Abraham. By faith, Abraham left. He was unwilling to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season, so he went out and sought for a country that was not his own. He lived in tents in the land and in a strange country. You have that wonderful passage, “By faith he offered Isaac.” Isaac, the seed of promise, the one he had waited for for decades after it had been promised. It finally came true, and he was asked to offer Isaac.

Again, a quick aside—the first time love is mentioned in the word of God is with Abraham, when God tells Abraham, “Take your son, your only son, Isaac, whom you love, and go and offer him on a mount that I will show you of.” The first time that we have love mentioned in the word of God, love is actually defined for us. What is the basis for love? All the love that you experience with your family, or with husbands and wives, or with children, the basis for it is the love that God has for His Son. Some of you fathers understand a little bit about this. Your love for your son, your love for your children, your daughters, but we have no real concept. It’s the love that God has for His Son that defines how we should love other people. In the New Testament, the first time love appears is Matthew 3. A dove descends on Jesus Christ, and God speaks out of Heaven, “This is My beloved Son whom I love. Hear Him.” Basically He’s saying, “Hear Him.”

Go to the same place in Mark 1, and there’s the same thing. “This is My beloved Son in whom I am well pleased.” In Luke 3, “This is My beloved Son in whom I am well pleased.” Then you go to John, the book that speaks more about love, more about the Father, and more about the Son than any other book in all of the Bible. The first time love is mentioned in John. Of course it has to be. “For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever should believe on Him should not perish, but have everlasting life.” It’s like the Bible is telling us in the Old Testament by first mention that the basis for love is God’s love for His Son, and He’s telling us in the New Testament that the basis for love is God’s love for His Son. There are wonderful, wonderful truths even kind of buried here in this Heroes of the Faith.

So Abraham offered Isaac because he believed that God would raise him from the dead if he died. I don’t know of any example. Maybe Ty can tell me after. I don’t know of any example where somebody had been risen from the dead prior to this. We’re fairly early in Genesis. We have people who died, but you have no

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examples, so Abraham is believing that God is able to raise him from the dead, on the absence of no evidence, in the face of no evidence, but he counts God faithful. By faith Isaac blessed Jacob. By faith Jacob looked forward and told him to, concerning his bones, take them out of the land of Egypt. By faith Jacob blessed his sons Ephraim and Manasseh, looking forward. Joseph asked that his bones be returned to Canaan for burial. Moses the great lawgiver, his parents exercised faith, because they hid him in the bulrushes. They didn't kill him, and what does it say? "The parents were not afraid of the king's command," another great proof of faith. And then Moses refused to be called the Pharaoh's grandson, and he chose to experience the affliction with the people of God. Moses left Egypt. Again, like son and like parents, in this case. Moses did not fear the wrath of the king. He kept the Passover and he passed through the Red Sea.

We could go on. Joshua made the walls fall down. Rahab hid the spies. That's evidence of faith in God, that He was the one true God. Then you have this kind of small cameo appearance. You have Gideon who destroyed the altars of Baal. He defeated the Midianites. Remember he culled his army down to 300? They had to blow the trumpets. They broke the pitchers, and God had a marvelous victory.

Barak? There are a few people in here that I had to go look up. I don't know about you, but I'm thinking, "Hey, these are the great heroes of the faith. I've been a Christian for some time. I should know who they are." Okay, once you read about it, you remember them. But Barak was an unusual one. Barak is the one who defeated the armies of Sisera back when Deborah was the prophetess. Samson, we know about Samson. He defeated a thousand men at one time. He was a great judge for twenty years. He killed the Philistines. Jephthah defeated the Ammonites. That's another one I had to go look up. Twenty cities he defeated of the Ammonites. He judged Israel for six years. David was a giant-slayer, a poet of Israel, the most celebrated king. Samuel was a child of promise an answer to Hannah and her prayers.

So I want to ask you a quick question as we close. Here are these great portraits of these heroes of the faith. They are known by their faith. What is it that defines you? If we were to go to your place of work, if we were to go to your neighborhood and ask what is it that defines you, would they say, "Well, that's the person who's a great Alabama fan. He's fanatical." Would we say, "That's the person that loves to watch soccer on TV," or, "They're really into their kids. That's what defines them." I would ask that you consider that your faith should be what defines you, that if they were to write a history of Providence Church thousands of years later, that they would say, "By faith, so-and-so did this. By faith, so-and-so

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did that. By faith, so-and-so was unwilling to let the world around them pull them in and pull them back to what they used to be and what they used to feel, but they pressed on for Jesus Christ.”

You say, “Listen Ted, I’m not a hero of the faith. I’m not like these guys.” But if you look at even as Ty prayed, if you look at what these men and women were really like, Noah, after he got out of the ark and decided to become a farmer, got drunk in his tent, was disrespected by one of his sons. Abraham—adultery, ran ahead of God with Hagar through which we have Ishmael. Isaac was a trickster. Jacob was a supplanter. He was also immoral. Moses had an anger problem and never entered the Promised Land. Rahab was a prostitute. You talk about a scarlet letter. How would you like it thousands of years later when you are called out in the halls of faith, and she’s called out again in James, the answer is, “This is Rahab, but she’s the prostitute,” but yet, what? She’s in the heroes of the faith.

Gideon is really an unbeliever, in a sense. I’m not saying he didn’t have faith in God. He believed in God, but I’m saying he had to be convinced. Remember he put out the fleece? Not once, but twice. First of all he said, “Hey, if all the dew is on the fleece, but it’s dry around everywhere else, then I’m going forward,” and so God made it happen. So He comes that day and he goes, “God, don’t be mad with me, but I’m going to try again. This time if the fleece is dry and all the ground is wet, okay, then I’ll be convinced.” That’s Gideon, a hero of the faith, also immoral and had many, many wives, and through one of them was born this awful king Abimelech.

Barak, right? Barak was the one who I told you with Deborah, and he had to go defeat the armies of Sisera. So Barak wouldn’t go to war unless Deborah went with him. This is not your Marine. This is not the guy that you want going, “Well, I’ll go to war, but I need this lady to come with me or I’m not going.” That’s him. He’s a coward, and consequently he didn’t get any of the glory, because Jael, remember her? She drove the stake through Sisera’s head, and it wasn’t just a little tap. The Bible says it drove all the way into the ground. She got the glory. That’s also a woman you probably don’t want to mess with. But Barak was a coward.

Samson had a weakness for women—Delilah. Jephthah, he’s the one who made the rash promise, that the first thing that came out of the door, if God had given him the victory, he would offer. So it was. He ended up killing his daughter. He should never have honored that promise, because it violated a higher command.

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David, we know about Bathsheba. But he should have been out to war, he was not, he committed adultery with Bathsheba, and then he killed Uriah the Hittite to try to cover it up. Samuel's sons did not walk in his way. They perverted justice. They took bribes. Over, and over, and over, and over again as you're walking through the hall, you recall, because the word of God tells it to you. You recall that these were men and women like us, who failed like us, but who still had their faith as the defining nature of who they were. They continually looked forward to a new city, a better city, a better country whose architect and builder was God. As Ty read, some were tortured, refusing to accept release. Why? Because they were looking forward. They were looking to the wonderful promise, the promise of salvation. It tells us back in Hebrews 9 that's what the promise is. They were looking forward. This is what defines people of faith. They persevered. They looked forward, not to the here and now, because they know that He who has promised is faithful.

Faith perseveres. It's interesting that several times these all died in faith, not having received the promise. They were great men and women of the faith. We look at them now and they never received the promise, and they still believed. They still had faith that God is, and that He's a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him. In closing I just want to read two verses in Hebrews 12. It's nice when the writer of the Scripture, as is sometimes the case, draws the application for us.

Hebrews 12:1 ~ Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses,...

What witnesses? The heroes of the faith that have gone before us, that we are to be like.

Hebrews 12:1 ~ Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight, and sin which clings so closely,...

Especially the sin of disbelief.

...and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, 2 looking to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God.

Jesus alone is the founder and perfecter of our faith. I encourage you as you go throughout even this week, be one who is known by his faith. Be one who is

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defined by her faith. Let that be what people know the most about you, that you truly believe that God exists, and that He rewards those who diligently seek Him, and they know it because they can tell it by what you do.

Let's close in prayer this morning...

Father, we're thankful that You don't leave us to have faith by ourselves. Lord, indeed it is the grace of God that gives us that faith, Lord, and a very appropriate prayer is, "Lord, increase our faith," because faith is a gift from God. Father, we want to be those who are filled with faith. We want to be those who are fully convinced that You are who You say You are, and that You will do what You say You will do. Father, we thank You for the word of God which continually speaks of the faithfulness of God. Lord, You who are faithful to Yourself, because there is no higher calling, Lord, we are faithful to each other sometimes and sometimes not, but You never fail us. Lord, we're thankful that the grace of God is shown abroad in our hearts. We pray that we would be the ones, Lord, when you command all men everywhere to repent and to believe the Gospel, that we would be those who urge others to believe the Gospel, to put their faith in the word of God, and therefore obtain the great and precious promise of eternal salvation. We're thankful for the love and mercy that You have for us this morning. We pray this in Jesus' Name, Amen.

"Be a Hero of the Faith"

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