

Hebrews 11:1-7

“Pressing Forward Faithfully”

Ch 11 of the book of Hebrews is what has commonly come to be called, “The Hall of Faith,” and the people mentioned in it are often referred to as, “The Heroes or Heroines of Faith.” and Though that has nice ring to it, (I’ve referred to it often times the same way) I think that it *can* betray the intent of the author in writing it. Because it tends to give us the impression that you’ve really got to be somebody, above and beyond the average believing individual to be inducted and that only a few “super saints” have ever done it. But the intent behind this Ch *is not to discourage* you by comparing you to the few super saints that have been inducted showing you who you’ll never be! The heart behind what’s written is to *encourage* every believer, even (and especially) those who are somehow struggling to realize that all of God’s saints, every believer is capable of leading a life of faith.

We’ve got to keep the context, these Jewish believers were down, they were discouraged and despairing. They were contemplating; they were considering a return to the sacrificial system, the various rituals and rites of the law so that they might simply get out from under the blanket of persecution that seemed to be suffocating them. and You remember the encouragement, the exhortation that came to fruition in our last study and then rounded out again our final few minutes together, it was don’t draw back, draw near and patiently persevere. The days may be difficult, the times are no doubt tough, don’t draw back in fear or frustration, draw near and move forward in faith. The answer isn’t found in pulling away *from* Christ, but in drawing even nearer *to* Christ. Because you can’t come into that mindset of, “Hey, following Christ is tough, so I figure as long as I’m basically a good person, make sure I *do* certain things, that I *don’t do* other things, sacrifice this and that, that’ll be good enough.” That’s to trample the Son of God underfoot and place your works on par with the work of the cross of Christ, that’s to count the blood of the covenant a common thing and to insult the Spirit of grace. and You think that God will react or respond to that favorably? It’s not going to happen, if you look to *anyone* or *anything* other than Christ for your salvation, your sanctification, your right standing in the sight of God you will be in for a rude awakening because there’s no other alternative regarding our entrance to heaven and right relationship with God. Christ is the only sufficient sacrifice.

The just, or those who are justified (meaning just as if I’d never sinned at all) in the sight of God are *not* those who live by rules, regulations, rituals, and rites of religion, but by faith, faith in the atoning work of Jesus Christ on our behalf. One day Jesus was out teaching the people and we read where, “...*they said to Him, ‘What shall we do, that we may work the works of God?’ Jesus answered and said to them, ‘This is the work of God, that you believe in Him whom He sent.’*” John 6:28-29 You see, man’s all about works, rules, what do *I* need to do, it’s just easier that way. But God’s saying, “I’m not going to receive *your* work, you’re going to receive *Mine*. It’s not going to be about what you do, it’s about what I’ve *done*.” “The just shall live by faith.”

It's like the author anticipates the question, "That's great, but it hasn't always been that way has it? I mean is there anyone else who's ever done that?" Yes, anyone who's *ever* been accepted in the sight of God has been received on the basis of grace through faith. He's encouraging them to realize that they weren't alone in this good fight of faith. Those who have loved the Lord and have been well pleasing to the Lord throughout history have had the same testimony; fighting the fight of faith through difficult days and tough times.

They've come from all walks of life and have had varying personalities and all kinds of different circumstances surrounding them. But one thing they all had in common was faith. "Well, if faith is what it takes to please God, to come into a right relationship with God through Christ, then what is it? What is faith?"

Vs1

This is what we might refer to as a basic *explanation* of faith and then what follows are several *illustrations* of how faith played out practically in various people's lives. A lot of times people don't really think of faith as being something practical, in reality it's incredibly practical. (and We'll develop that a little more fully later). But we're talking here about an inward assurance that brings about an outward response regardless of the way things may appear circumstantially. We might say that faith is the realization (reality) of the assured expectation, and the conviction, or the evidence, that is the confidence of things not seen.

Remember when we talk about biblical hope we're not talking about wishful thinking, we're talking about a guaranteed certainty and a concrete reality. and So understand that biblical faith has a foundation, an assured expectation. It's not wishful thinking, it's not blind optimism, it's *certainly not* believing in spite of the evidence (that's called superstition). It's not a leap in the dark, it has a foundation, evidence (or conviction), there's substance to it. and Rather than spending an extended time being all wordy with it, let me just boil it down for you. Faith has as its basis the word of God; and biblical faith is quite simply acting in obedience to the word of God regardless of my situation *circumstantially* or what it might cost me *personally*.

God speaks and I obey, that's faith. Now, God may ask me to do something that seems circumstantially impossible, or the consequences might be frightful, but because I *trust* the Lord, I *obey* the Lord, that's faith.

Now don't let this phrase, "The evidence of things not seen" throw you off as if to lead you to believe that faith goes against reason. There are all kinds of things people believe in that can't be seen yet there's evidence that assures that they're there. We can't see them with our eyes but due to the evidence at hand we know they're there, therefore we believe it. If I were to ask you what's right out here in front of me you might be prone to respond, "nothing."

But the fact is there are all kinds of things there that you can't see, there are molecules, there are radio waves, various television signals, and all I'd have to do to demonstrate that would be to turn on a radio or a T.V. tune it to the proper channel and there they would be, they're right here. The evidence is all around us, you just can't see it. You can't see the wind, but you know it's there, you can feel its effects, see dust or dirt blowing around in it, leaves being carried around by it, so I believe in the wind even though I've never seen it with my eyes, there's evidence for it. Magnetic force, I can't see it, but when I grab a couple of magnets and hold them near to one another it can't be denied, the evidence is there. and There is evidence all around for God, for a Creator, I've experienced His love, have received of His Spirit, I've never seen Him, haven't conversed face to face with Him, but I believe in Him, He's there. If I could see Him with my eyes wouldn't that defeat the need for faith? Faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things *not* seen. So though the evidence is there, I've never seen Him with my physical eyes, I believe in Him by faith.

Turn to 1st Peter (I said I wouldn't get all wordy, I feel like I've already blown that, I think Peter puts it way better than I can) 1Peter 1:3-9 (read) God has promised salvation to all who trust in Jesus Christ and so we trust Him for that no matter what it may cost us personally, or how it may affect us circumstantially. That's faith; it's the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen.

Vs2

What is it about these great examples of godliness that gave them such a good testimony? It was their faith, they had varying personalities, again things varied in their lives circumstantially, but the common thread that wove them all together was faith. Faith in the word of God. Faith have all kinds of impact upon your life, one thing it will do is create a testimony in your life. Or another way to understand that is that it will cause you to be a witness. and I'm not necessarily referencing you giving an audible account of Christ, though you might. I'm saying that because of your faith, you'll lead a life that's notably and recognizably different from the world, people will see something different about you. Your life will bear witness to the reality of God's word and God's work in your life.

Vs3

In our introduction I posed the question, "Has anyone ever lived by faith before?" Speaking of pre-incarnate Christ, was faith active in people's lives prior to the new covenant? and The answer is yes, as a matter of fact we're going to see that faith was active in the lives of people from the beginning of creation forward.

Now, faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen. None of us were around when the world was created, there's not a single human soul that seen that with their eyes. Faith is what brings us understanding as to how that happened based upon the account of the One who was there and who told us how it happened. God's word tells us how the earth came into being; the worlds were framed by the word of God. "God said, let there be light and there was light." God spoke and the universe came into existence, we know that by revelation, God has told us in His word. Now, you have only 1 of 2 choices when it comes to believing how this world came into existence. You have to believe by *speculation* or you can believe by *revelation*. But if you don't believe the revelation of God's word, you're in the realm of speculation, guess work. and The most brilliant of scientists weren't there either, they speculate. They speculate that random chance, natural selection, and billions of years have evolved from the goo, to the zoo, to you.

The revelation of the word of God says, "*By the word of the Lord the heavens were made, And all the host of them by the breath of His mouth.*" Ps 33:6 and Again, "*For He spoke, and it was done; He commanded, and it stood fast.*" Ps 33:9 The worlds were framed by the word of God, so that the things which are seen were not made of things which are visible. That's an interesting phrase isn't it? The things which are seen were not made of things which are visible. Do you understand that everything you see is made up of things you can't see, be it atoms, protons, electrons, you may see the object itself, but those things that comprise the object, the atoms, protons, neutrons, electrons and all of that you can't see. Thousands of yrs ahead of modern science the word of God declared that what you see is made up of things you can't see, so in once sense everything you see is evidence of things you can't see, "Faith is the substance of things hoped for the evidence of things not seen."

But you can either believe God's word through revelation, or man's word of speculation. The world came into fruition through the Word of God, or random chance, natural selection, and billions of years. But I'm going to tell you that foolish is the person who takes the side of chance. Why? Because *chance* is a non-entity, *chance* can't *do* anything. If I took a quarter and flipped it you might tell me that there was a 50/50 chance that it would land heads or tails. But does chance *determine* how it lands? No, chance simply describes statistical probability.

What determines the outcome is velocity, how hard I flipped it, how high I flipped it wind current, are there flaws on the quarter? If I could flip it exactly the same way, in exactly the same conditions every single time it would have the same result every single time. There's no chance in that. Chance merely describes statistical probability. But chance can *do*, nothing, so to speak of something taking place by chance is just foolishness.

Creation speaks to us of the fact that there is an intelligent designer, the most brilliant minds in history all together in a room for 100 yrs couldn't create something as incredible as a single living cell. It can't be done, much less the various complex systems in the full spectrum of the variety of species on our planet, much less the make up of the rest of the universe. So you see, faith never contradicts reason, though it may go beyond what I can see, it doesn't go beyond solid reasoning.

Now I should point out before we pick up the pace here that there's an erroneous teaching that seeks to point out that you can create by your word of faith even as God created by His word of faith. The problem with that exposition of Heb 11:3 is that God didn't create *anything* by faith, God is omnipotent, omniscient, all powerful and all knowing, now if you see everything, know everything and can do everything, you don't need faith. *We* need faith, God doesn't, it doesn't say that by faith God created the worlds; it says that by faith *we understand* that the worlds were framed by the word of God. So don't be deceived, this idea of God having faith is erroneous. Faith is the evidence of things not seen (God sees all) the substance of things *hoped* for, what does God hope for, whatever He desires, whatever He wants He accomplishes. Faith isn't our magic formula for getting our agenda accomplished, it's the means by which we come *to Him*, and rest *in Him*, and walk *with Him*. and From the very beginning man has exercised faith in his relationship with God.

Vs4

So we've have a basic explanation of faith, now we begin to see various *illustrations* of faith. and They're in chronological order except for the mention of David before Samuel (as we'll see next time). But by faith Abel offered to God a more excellent sacrifice than Cain. and As we go through this list the author assumes that you and I are familiar with these people and the circumstances that surrounded their lives. You recall the story of Cain and Abel (Gen 4). After God drove Adam and Eve from the Garden of Eden we read that Adam knew Eve and she bore a son (Cain), she bore again and had another son (Abel). Now Abel grew to be a keeper of the sheep and Cain a tiller of the ground, Abel was a shepherd, Cain was a farmer. and In the process of time it came to pass that Cain brought an offering of fruit to the Lord, Abel brought an offering of the 1st born of his flock. Well, to keep it brief we find that God accepted Abel's sacrifice and He rejected Cain's. and People speculate exactly how they knew one was accepted and the other's was rejected, the bottom line is that's what happened.

There are those who say that the reason Cain's offering was rejected was because God had shown them that a blood sacrifice was necessary when He made the covering for Adam and Eve through the shedding of blood and that since Cain brought a grain offering instead God rejected it. But Abel brought a lamb, pointing ultimately to the Lamb of God who would shed His blood for the sin of the world and so God was pleased. and That may be but I don't see that anywhere, in the law grain offerings were accepted as were offerings of blood. The record that we have in the word of God is simply that Abel's offering was sanctified by faith, Cain's was not. Abel approached God not on the merit of his own works but trusting God by grace through faith to receive him.

Cain came to God by the works of his own hands, sought to impress God with what *he'd* done for God, what *he'd* brought to God. and God rebuked him for not doing well. and How did he respond to that, how did he react to that? Did he humble himself and repents, cry out for forgiveness and restoration? No, he murdered Abel. What was Abel's reward for his faith? He was murdered, and we go, "Wow... was it really worth it then?" Absolutely, he being dead still speaks. The writer reminds us that faith isn't always rewarded on earth, sometimes it gets you into trouble, it may even cost you your life. But there isn't anything you're going to suffer here temporarily but that God isn't going to reward you far more greatly eternally. The light afflictions of this life (the worst that can happen in this life is at best temporary) are working for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory.

Vs5

Enoch is one of the rather mysterious men of the Word of God. He's mentioned briefly in Gen 5 Vs 19,21-24 and all we read of him is that after the birth of his son Methuselah he walked with God for 300 yrs and then he was not for God took him. That is He translated him, He raptured him. and It almost seems as if before he had Methuselah he didn't walk with God, but after he had him it changed him. There's just something powerful about having a child, it has this way of changing you. God just seems to soften people up through their children, but he was 65 yrs old when he had Methuselah and from that point forward he walked with God for 300 more yrs. and Then God took him, he was just gone one day, he was pleasing to God so God just took him.

But before that he walked with God intimately, consistently, persistently for 300 yrs. What's my point? That faith promises the possibility of a daily, consistent and persistent walk with God. Of leading a life pleasing to God day after day after day. Do you ever wonder if your life is really pleasing to God? It can be, you can walk with Him everyday on the basis of faith.

Of course Enoch serves as a type of the church in what's called biblical typology. Some people will say that the church is meant to go through the great tribulation just a Noah went through the flood waters but God spared him through it. But Noah typifies the nation of Israel who will go through it but God will preserve them in it. The church is represented by Enoch who was taken by God, then the floods came and His wrath was poured out. The bible tells us, "*For God did not appoint us to wrath, but to obtain salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ,*" 1 Thess 5:9 Jesus told the faithful remnant (the church of Philadelphia) there in Rev 3:10, "*Because you have kept My command to persevere, I also will keep you from the hour of trial which shall come upon the whole world, to test those who dwell on the earth.*" Enoch walked with God, was pleasing to God, so God took him before the flood of His wrath came upon the earth.

Vs6

Underline it, memorize it, somehow draw attention to it, “with out faith it’s *really really difficult* to please God.” Is that what your bible says? That’s not what my bible says, “with out faith it’s *impossible* to please Him,” It’s not going to happen, you’re not going to get on God’s good side apart from faith. Because it’s by faith that we come to Christ, that we receive Christ, that we walk with and grow in Christ, those things aren’t possible apart from faith. I mean, there are some basic requirement for coming to God, 1st all you have to believe that He is. If you don’t believe that God exists, well you’re in a bit of a dilemma right there. But beyond that if you believed He existed but that in seeking Him, or trying to walk with Him He wasn’t really going to honor that... “Well, I’ll seek Him but I don’t really expect Him to answer me, or reveal Himself *to me...*” How’s that supposed to be pleasing to God, that’s a lack of faith. Do you understand that when you boil it down to the most basic premise for our existence what you wind up with is the fact that we were created to please God?

There you find in Rev Ch 4 where the 24 elders around the throne fall down before the throne and worship the Lord saying, “*Thou art worthy, O Lord, to receive glory and honour and power: for thou hast created all things, and for thy pleasure they are and were created.*” Rev 4:11 Why do we exist, why were we created? To please God; and if we don’t do that...then we’re not even fulfilling the most basic reason for our existence. So many people feel like they have no purpose, nothing fulfills them, everything seems so empty. and It’s because they’re not fulfilling the purpose for which they were created, they’re looking to please themselves, and it just dives the void deeper and deeper. We were created to please and have fellowship with God and you’ll always feel like a fish out of water until you’re where God has designed and desires you to be; in that place of walking with Him, being pleasing to Him by faith.

Vs7

Do you begin to get the picture as we move through these various illustrations (and they’ll continue on next time) that faith does more than simply *rest on* the facts? Faith *responds to* the facts. The word “faith” is a noun, but it settles in our lives in verb form, it results in a reaction, real faith will always *do* something. James pointed it out over and over again. He said, “*But someone will say, ‘You have faith, and I have works.’ Show me your faith without your works, and I will show you my faith by my works. You believe that there is one God. You do well. Even the demons believe — and tremble! But do you want to know, O foolish man, that faith without works is dead?*” James 2:18-20 He went on to say, “*For as the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without works is dead also.*” James 2:26 Faith reaps real time results in our lives.

Noah, being divinely warned of things not yet seen. Now what is faith? “Substance of things hoped for, evidence of things not seen.” God warned Noah, gave His word *to* Noah, it had *never rained* on the earth prior to the flood. The bible says that a mist went up from the ground and watered the whole face of the earth, it was a tropical paradise. But Noah believed God’s word, the result was that he responded *to* God’s Word. He *moved* (that’s an action word) with godly fear, with righteous respect. and He prepared an ark for the saving of his household.

Mom, Dad, the priority of your life (outside of your personal walk and relationship with God) is to be the saving of your household, your kids, God has entrusted them to you. What are you doing to ensure the fact that they know the love of God, the grace of God, the desire of God to forgive them and to save them. Noah's agenda in building that ark went beyond the saving of his own skin, man he was worried for his kids, and their families. and He was going to do whatever it took to ensure that they had the opportunity to be saved.

I don't think he stood there on the ark shouting condemnation to that world of filthy sinners, that's not how he condemned the world. What condemned the world was the very fact that he went against the tide of the world (no pun intended), believed God and responded in faith. Built a boat in a place that wasn't even near the ocean and had never even seen rain, the ridicule didn't matter, what people thought of him didn't matter, he made it his aim to trust *in* the Lord and be pleasing *to* the Lord. It's faith that enables you to cut through the contemporary point of view, to with stand social pressures and respond with reverence to God in obedience to His word.

It's faith that causes us to build our lives on a revelation of the future given to us by the word of God, that other people may count as foolish. I'm not saying it's easy, or something that takes place effortlessly. But we're to press forward faithfully, you're not alone in your days of discouragement. Countless men and women have been there, but they've pressed forward in faith, we're to do the same. The entire spectrum of our relationship with God is predicated on faith. Now it's not faith that saves, Jesus saves, but He does so through the means of faith.

Abel shows us that it's by faith that we're received *by* the Lord, Enoch shows us that it's by faith that we walk intimately *with* the Lord, and Noah shows us that it's by faith that we respond *to* the Lord. and He who promised is faithful to you, so don't let days of discouragement draw you back, continue to press forward faithfully.

Prayer Points:

Father, what incredible examples You've laid before us of those who've been "just" in Your sight, who've lived by faith, who've pressed forward in the face of difficulty and opposition, who were persecuted simply because they trusted in You. Yet they trusted in You; in spite of all they went through, they trusted in You. Lord help us to trust in You, that whatever it is that may enter into the equation of our lives, there's no going back, only forging forward by faith. God we want to lead lives pleasing to You, we want our lives to be testimonies to Your glory, have Your way we pray...

Perhaps you've never made that initial step of simply believing on the Lord, being as it were received *by* the Lord by faith. It won't be *your* works that He'll acknowledge, it'll have to be *His* work that *you* acknowledge, that you're a sinner in an impossible situation. and The only hope for your salvation, is through the cross of Jesus Christ If you're ready to repent of your sin, He's ready to make Himself real to you, to forgive you, and to give you new life...by faith.