

"Faith: The Substance of Hope"

Text: Hebrews 11:1-3

Faith is one of the most important ideas in the Christian life—we are saved through faith...and we are to live by faith—and yet I suspect it is not always well understood.

Christian/atheist dialogues: faith is a blind leap or a matter of wishful thinking

Mark Twain: "faith is believing what know ain't so."

Just a caricature, but...TRUST

Good news...whole chapter of the Bible devoted to it...Hebrews 11:1-3

READ (in the CSB):

"Now faith is the reality of what is hoped for, the proof of what is not seen. ² For by this our ancestors were approved. ³ By faith we understand that the universe was created by the word of God, so that what is seen was made from things that are not visible."

Big idea: We are called to live out the reality of God's promises and God's truth as we entrust our whole lives to Him.

Background: The book of Hebrews is aimed at Christians, especially Jewish Christians, who are wavering in their Christian commitments. The author argues throughout for the supremacy of Jesus Christ over all things.

In Hebrews ch. 10, don't go back to the old system but, v. 22, "let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of **faith**." and rather than drawing back they need to "live by faith" v. 38 and as a matter of identity v. 39, "we are...those who have **faith** and are saved."

The key to living the Christian life, especially in the face of persecution and difficulty, is to live a life of faith! But all this requires us to understand what faith actually is...

1. Faith is venturing trust in the reality of God and the truth of the gospel.

Biblical Faith is not a wishful thinking and it's certainly not believing what you know ain't so; faith is living out the reality of God as we venture TRUST according to our Christian hope—what we call the gospel.

"Now faith is the reality of what is hoped for, the proof of what is not seen." V. 1

There's a lot here in this verse...difficult passage to translate.

The Greek word that's translated as "substance or reality" refers to something solid, something real, a foundation, a footing, reality.

Faith is not just believing things *about* God; it is standing *upon* God...the reality of God...as on solid ground...it is belief in

- It is venturing our lives where we depend upon and entrust ourselves.
- Mistake...faith as merely believing a certain set of Christian claims

As we find our footing, we find confidence/assurance. Faith is not blind/wishful...it's a place of assurance/proof/evidence/conviction

“Faith is the reality of what is *hoped* for”

Now, we also have another oft misunderstood word here: “**hope**”...Not fingers crossed.

- Negative health report...Will there be hope?

Now, the reality for Christians is that we always have hope no matter what the diagnosis is.

Hope is when, in the midst of difficult circumstances (here, persecution), we can look forward to a solution or resolution...or a salvation!

What bothers us is that hope always involves the **unseen**...we fancy ourselves as only trusting the things that are seen...but that's impossible.

- Is your car still where you left it?

Life is filled with placing faith in the unseen...the story of (doubting) Thomas...John 20:24-29

²⁴ But Thomas...was not with them when Jesus came. ²⁵ So the other disciples were telling him, “We’ve seen the Lord!”

But he said to them, “**If I don’t see the mark of the nails in his hands, put my finger into the mark of the nails, and put my hand into his side, I will never believe.**”

²⁶ A week later his disciples were indoors again, and Thomas was with them. Even though the doors were locked, Jesus came and stood among them and said, “Peace be with you.”

²⁷ Then he said to Thomas, “Put your finger here and look at my hands. Reach out your hand and put it into my side. Don’t be faithless, but believe.”

²⁸ Thomas responded to him, “My Lord and my God!”

²⁹ Jesus said, “**Because you have seen me, you have believed. Blessed are those who have not seen and yet believe.**”

Why does Jesus say this? Why is there a blessing for those who have not seen and yet believe?

Well, Jesus is leaving the earth...

This is a rebuke...Thomas is being faithless in his demands...he had plenty of reasons to believe.

- for most of us, it's not the evidence that holds us back...it's humbling ourselves and submitting to God.

We act like we have to see it to believe it...but you will place faith in all kinds of unseen realities...car, job, paycheck, 401k...what about God?

Are we willing to submit and live out the realities of his promises...that all things will be made new—in short, the reality of the gospel.

Our hope is the truth of the Christian gospel.

Faith is the lived out reality of this hope...Faith is to live like you are saved and venture your life on Christ...how would that change your day/life?

- Not in the hope of your talents, career, wealth, 401k...but in the hope of the gospel.

Your faith needs to have substance, when it does, then our hope has weight.

II. Salvation is through faith alone

"For by this our ancestors were approved." V. 2

The heroes of faith in Scripture—Abraham, Moses, David—are **commended not for their strength, wisdom, talents or status, but for their faith.**

How was it that the saints of old were saved? No less than how you are saved through faith.

[‘Faith alone’ became the rallying cry for the protestant reformation...Martin Luther discovers this in Romans 4:3 “Abraham believed God, and it was credited to him for righteousness”...Notice that’s OT.]

Now, they did not call out to Christ by name...but they placed faith in the reality of God, and in this they were saved...they were approved.

Unlike every other religion in the history of the world, salvation is not by doing things.

God is not impressed by success or talents but by **submitting to God in faith.**

In one sense, this is wonderful news...in another sense this is really difficult.

- Sometimes it would just be easier to have a few things to do...but he wants our hearts.
- In fact, verse 6: “Now without faith it is impossible to please God.”

This is the great importance of understanding faith. It is the means by which we properly relate to God...it's how we appropriate the free gift of God...it's in relating to God in faith that we are saved.

Ephesians 2:8-9:

For you are saved by grace through faith, and this is not from yourselves; it is God's gift— not from works, so that no one can boast.

This is then to say that faith is the means of salvation. We are not earning that salvation through faith, we are appropriating what has already been earned on our behalf.

Faith is, in this sense, not itself a work...but it will be born out in your works...it will undoubtedly be a lived out reality.

- This is why James can say that “faith, without works, is dead.” 2:17

He's not elevating works...or giving a works-based gospel. He saying that true faith is inextricably connected to a lived out reality.

But we could also say that works without faith is dead. This is when we go to church, or help people and think we are storing up credit with God.

This is the spirit of the Pharisees who did many “good works.” But they did it to earn a high status in heaven.

- Jesus called them “white washed tombs”...places of death that were cleaned up on the outside.

What a warning for us today!...don't be those who perform works without those works coming from a deep place a faith.

That is what matters...it's not the works themselves that save us or earn us any credit with God...that's already been earned for you...it is through faith that we accept that gift and submit and surrender to him in all that we do.

Salvation is through faith alone.

Big idea: We are called to live out the reality of God's promises and (God's) truth as we entrust our whole lives to Him.

Challenge

27 examples of faith...Abel, Enoch, Noah, Abraham, Sarah, Moses, Rahab, and others.

They lived out the reality of God.

There are many people who believe Christianity is true.

“Even the demons believe—and shudder!” James 2:19b

**Do you believe? Do you only believe?
Have you placed faith in the reality of the gospel?**