

Hebrews 11

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[0 : 00] Now the question is, is this really in Hebrews 11, what does it mean to have faith?! Everyone believes in something. So for example, someone might say I believe in ghosts. I've! I've never seen one but I believe in one. Someone else might say I believe in socialism. I've never voted socialist but I've found socialist values. What does it mean to believe? Someone else might say I believe that for every drop of rain that falls a flower grows to prodelvis.

And if you believe that, I'm happy for you. Everyone believes in something. So what does a Christian mean when they say I believe in God? You can believe in ghosts without seeing one. You can believe in socialism without voting socialist. Is that how we believe in God?

Is it like Mark Twain who said simply believe in what you know ain't so? Many people think of it like that. Like the White Queen in Alice Through the Looking Glass. She says, I'll tell you something to believe. I'm just 101 years old, five months and a day. I can't believe that, said Alice.

Can't you, dear? The Queen says. Shut your eyes, draw a long breath and try again. Alice laughed. No point trying. One can't believe impossible things.

Can't you, said the Queen? You've just not had enough practice. When I was your age, I always did it for one and a half hours every day. Why sometimes I believed as many as six impossible things before breakfast. Is that what faith is? What does it mean to believe? Is it holding your breath, shutting your eyes and believing what you know ain't true? Of course not.

[1 : 42] That is not believe. That is make-believe, isn't it? And what is faith? Well, here in this amazing chapter 11 of Hebrews, we have a definition and a demonstration of faith.

As well as the first three verses give us a definition. It's not a comprehensive definition. In some ways, a description. It is more. But then in verse 4, we're given a demonstration a demonstration of Old Testament believers. People who lived by faith. It starts right back at the beginning. And it follows God's plan of redemption right the way through as it nears its climax. And you come to the greatest man of faith, the Lord Jesus, the world has ever known. And the climax is Jesus, the author and perfecter of faith. So first of all, let's look at faith defined. Look what it says in verse 11. Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen. Faith makes me certain of what God has promised and sure of what I cannot see. If I can put it this way, it's a little bit like a sixth sense. How do we know? How can we be sure this morning of this physical world? How can I be sure that I am here and this world is real? Well, because I can see and I can hear and I can touch and I can taste and I can smell. Through my five senses that I experience the world. But we know, don't we, that's not sufficient. That's not enough. There is more to this world and this life than we can actually see and hear and smell and touch and taste. I read a definition from a communist textbook and it gave this definition of a kiss. It said a kiss is the approach of two pairs of lips with a reciprocal transmission of microbes and carbon dioxide. And you wonder why communism died out. Because everyone knows, we know there's more to a kiss than that. Scientifically it might be accurate, that might be true, but there is more to a kiss, isn't there, than you can measure in a laboratory.

There are things that are invisible, there are things that are not seen. And those are the things that make life meaningful and purposeful for us. God is invisible. The spiritual realm is invisible. There are some things which are unseen because they haven't yet happened. But we know that they're going to happen. Because God has said they're going to happen. And that is what this definition is telling us. There are things that you can be certain of, there are things that you can be sure of, there are things that you and I can build our lives upon, foundations that we believe in, and we believe them not because we're whistling in the dark. Not because we come on Sunday and we strike ourselves up to believe in possible things. We believe these things because God has spoken to us for these things.

What are these things? Now, the very first thing I want you to notice, can you notice the first word of verse 1? Now? Now faith is, that is a conjunction, it's a joining word.

[4 : 59] And it joins chapter 11 to chapter 10 on the rest of Hebrews. So if you want to know what these things are, these things that we hope for but we've not yet seen, well then you need to go back to chapter 10. And when you do that, you notice that the writer to the Hebrews is talking to a bunch of people who are suffering. And they're suffering persecution. They are Jews for Jesus. They are converts from Judaism. And the authorities are now beginning to turn their attention to them, towards these people. And they're beginning to suffer. So look at verse 34, it's a shocking verse. But chapter 10.

For you, compassion on those in prison. And then here, and you joyfully accepted the plundering of your property. Would we joyfully accept that? If they came to our brand new building.

It's nearly there, isn't it? Nearly open. And they tore it down. They closed it down. They raised it to the ground. Would you be happy about that? You, look at verse 34 again. It's shocking, is that you joyfully accepted the plundering of your property. Joyfully. Why? Why? Well, because you knew that you yourselves had a better possession. And an abiding one. How did they know that?

Because they knew that God had told them and God had said it. And so there is a difference, isn't there, between believing in God and believing God. Lots of people believe in God.

That doesn't make you a Christian. That makes you a theist. Believing in God doesn't demand anything of you. But believing God means that you take him at his word. Seriously. And reality is for you framed by what God has spoken. So even those people under persecution can be joyful.

It's easy being a Christian, isn't it, when nobody's giving you any bother. It's easy being a Christian when it's tolerated. But when authorities turn their attention to you, and when the church is driven underground, and when people begin to suffer for their faith, well, that's when the hangers on bail out, don't they? And hypocrites disappear. Because only those who have faith will endure to the end. And this is what we're talking about. The definition we're given.

[7 : 22] Notice in verse 36 of chapter 10, he speaks about receiving what God has promised. It's not there yet. It's unseen. You don't have it yet. It's not substantial yet. But you know that you're going to receive it because God has promised it to you. And in verse 36, he speaks about receiving what God has promised. And when you read through the book of Hebrews, you find out what it is that God has promised, that he's promised an eternal inheritance. A Sabbath rest. A heavenly Jerusalem. A world that is to come. An unshakable kingdom. A new creation which is better and greater. And all of those things constitute what is hoped for but not yet seen. Faith is the confidence assurance that all of that one day is coming our way. Faith is the confidence assurance that one day that will come to pass. That the God who spoke the world into existence from nothing will bring these things to pass through Christ. So there's your definition of faith. Real faith is a conviction about things that you can't see. And it particularly involves being certain about the future because God has spoken about it in his word. Let's see what it says in verse 2. For by it the people of old received their commendation. They demonstrated their faith secondly. Who are these people of old? Who are these ancients? Are they the over fifties? Who are the ancients? They are the people who lived in ancient times. Who lived before the coming of Christ. They are the old testament believers. And so he starts in verses 4 to 7 with the antediluvians. The people who lived before the flood. That's what that means. And we're just going to look at this section this morning.

And he gives us four examples of people who lived by faith. Four pillars of our faith. And these are the things that I most surely believed amongst us. And if you believe these four things that these people believed, you will be called a fundamentalist. I hope you don't mind that.

What are these things? Number one, creation. That's the first thing they believed. Verse 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 invisible. It's a really important verse. You cannot prove that in the laboratory. You can neither prove nor disprove God scientifically. I hope you know that.

You cannot prove that this world was created scientifically. You cannot prove that the world wasn't created scientifically. Science doesn't do that. How do we know? How do we know that this world, how do we understand that this is rational? This is something that we thought through. How do we understand that the universe that we live in was formed at God's command?

The only way we understand that is because we've been told that. God has told us. That is reality. He spoke this world in existence. Just think for a moment of the imagination of God. Just think of how wonderful this creation is. God imagined it. God dreamt it. And then he spoke it and it came

into being. Out of nowhere and out of nothing. And that's what the Bible teaches and that's what we believe. That is the foundation of our faith. We are creatures. We have been created. And so we are answerable to the one who made us. Second pillar is atonement. Verse 4. I faith Abel offered to God a more acceptable sacrifice than Cain. Through which he was commended as righteous. It's not true what pirates of the Caribbean say. Dead men do tell tales. And Abel has been dead for centuries.

[11 : 31] And yet Abel's got something to say to you this morning. And it's about how you get right with God. And the point here is that it's not up to us. It's down to him.

Third pillar is in verse 5. It's fellowship with God. By faith Enoch was taken up so that he should not see death and he was not found. Because God had taken him. Now before he was taken up he was commended as having pleased God. Now here is a man Enoch. He knew God and he was known by God.

And that is fundamental. I hope you understand that faith isn't simply mental assent to some proposition. Faith is a relationship with the living God through Jesus.

Fourth pillar is in verse 7. By faith Noah being warned by God concerning events as he had unseen. In reverent fear constructed an ark for the saving of his household. And by this he condemned the world and became an heir of the righteousness that comes by faith.

What was not yet seen? The flood was not yet seen. Judgment hadn't happened. But God warned Noah. And believing what was not yet seen in holy fear he built an ark to save his family.

[12 : 54] Now you put those four things together and they are the pillars. They are the foundations of our faith. Creation Atonement Fellowship with God And judgment Think about those things.

There is nothing, is there, more confronting and threatening than those four things, is there? The belief that this world has a beginning and that this world has an end Well they are truths, aren't they?

That the world mocks and mocks and mocks If you believe that you will be called a fundamentalist But that is, is it, fundamental to how we see reality The way that we look at the world The faith that we have And the very idea that there is one in heaven who you and I need to get right with And that getting right with him is down to him and not to us Well that is like a red rag to a bull in our culture, isn't it?

And to say that you Little old you can have a relationship with the God of heaven and earth and know God and be known by God Well that is just so arrogant, isn't it?

And so presumptive. And yet these are the things we most surely believe And so let's run around and look at them again First of all, creation, verse 3 Have you ever wondered why there is something that says nothing?

[14 : 17] Here I am in this world and everyone else seems to believe that this world just sort of happened That it came into being from pre-existing matter But we know, don't we that it was framed by the word of God And that God spoke it into existence And that everything was made out of nothing by a mighty act of his power That the information stored in our DNA did not come from nothing It is the product of a brilliant mind and an awesome imagination and that governs our whole approach to life on this planet or it should We are not a fortuitous concourse of atoms We are the product of intelligent design How do we know that?

How do we know that? By faith By faith It would be nice, wouldn't it? I always say this when I'm speaking evangelistically It would be nice to have some brilliantly logical argument to prove that God exists and he made the world to kind of go and unveil it But you can't do that Can you? We know these things by faith The reason we believe in creation is because God has revealed it to us By faith we understand that this is God's world The earth is the Lord's and the fullness thereof That we live in it and he made it And we are his creatures But it is a fallen world as well So secondly That second pillar We need to face the fact that this world has gone seriously wrong And anyone with half a brain knows that that is true The first human being born on earth in Genesis 4 turns out to be a murderer And his victim is his own brother And the story of Cain and Abel raises the question What on earth has gone wrong?

Of sin and of atonement that needs to be made How can human beings have murder in their hearts?

How can you and I who've got murder in our hearts which is so offensive to hear isn't it? How can we get right with God? You see the Bible is very very realistic It's realistic about human nature It really does tie in with what you see and hear in our society How can people like us we know what

we're capable of Don't you?

[16 : 46] We see perhaps maybe the tip of the iceberg in us How can people like us have anything to do with a God who is of purer eyes than to even look on iniquity to look on sin?

How can you approach him after what you've done this week? How can we get right with him? The answer of course is the only way God can have anything to do with us is on his terms and not on ours And that's the meaning of the story of Cain and Abel That if we want God to accept us and not reject us then we need to listen to him and listen to his word And we need God to tell us how we can approach him It's not up to us It's down to him You see that's the difference between Cain and Abel the brothers It wasn't just that Cain was a farmer and Abel was a shepherd So Cain brought his fruit and veg and Abel brought his sheep Even though it's significant that Abel brought a lamb in the light of the rest of the Bible We see with animal sacrifices there can be no forgiveness without the shedding of blood But the point of the story is this It's not up to us to decide how we can approach God

That's so humbling isn't it for some of us for all of us That we have to listen to his word We have to hear from him and we have to allow him to tell us And that's the difference between Cain and Abel That's why Abel's sacrifice was a better sacrifice whether he had fully understood the implications of what he was doing But God told him you see It's the difference between religion and revelation Why are there so many religions?

Did you ask that question? Well it's very simple It's us making up the rules It's us deciding We have a God consciousness We know in every culture there is a God who's there We have this sense Every culture has this sense No matter where you're from that things are not right between us and God It's a universal phenomenon And so we have to find a way that we can approach God How can I get on the right side of this God?

How can I placate this God? And so we come up with religion and we have practices and rituals and we hope that somehow religion is going to put us right with God But it won't It won't The only way that we can get right with God is by doing what he says and bringing the offering that he tells us Which is why Jesus says I am the way the truth and the life And no one no one comes to the Father except through me And that is so hugely offensive isn't it?

[19 : 33] So here are the fundamentals of our faith The ABC of our faith God exists And he spoke the world out of nothing He's spoken into existence of something that's gone wrong And you and I have lost touch with our maker And there's only one way back And that is the way he has revealed right from the very beginning that without the shedding of blood the offering of sacrifice there can be no forgiveness of sins Is that what you believe?

It is fundamental to the Christian faith In verses 5 and 6 he tells us about Enoch There are those who want to tell us that this world is a closed system and you've got to make the most of it you kind of get on with life the best you can we call them materialists It takes on different guises Some people think that matter is all that there is Others believe that matter is all that matters In the end it doesn't matter And the idea is that this world is all there is there's nothing outside There's nothing beyond it And people live their lives on the basis of that don't they in our city It's a faith position I'd want to argue But on the other hand there are those like here in chapter 11 whom life is really simply an apprenticeship It's a training ground for the world to come And the most important lesson for you and I to hear is how do you and I prepare for eternity because eternity is a very long time to spend in the wrong place isn't it?

Enoch learnt this lesson Soon after the birth of his son Methuselah they told him that he began to walk with God until one day God said to him Enoch it's hardly worth you going home you may as well come home with me And he disappeared off the face of the planet He was now seen again they put posters up for him they sent out search parties for him but he'd gone because God had taken him And of course the Bible teaches that one day a whole generation of people will be taken like that They will be translated from this world into the next when Jesus comes back a whole generation will experience what it's going to be like to not experience physical death and if you and I are still alive when that happens well it will be us but if I'm not going to live long enough until that day when Jesus returns nevertheless if we are believers you and I will still go home to live with him forever Do you remember what Jesus said to his disciples he said I'm going to prepare a place for you I'm going to the cross to prepare a place for you

I'm going to die on the cross to prepare a place for you and I'm going to prepare that place I will come again and I will take you with me so that you will be where I am because in my Father's house

there's plenty of room and the only way that you can get there is through me I'm the way and I'm going to prepare a place for you and if you trust in me you will be with me and so we shall be forever with the Lord that is what Christians believe that is one of the fundamentals of faith and that is the hope of the gospel now let me ask you do you have it?

have you seen that faith is not something that simply happens momentarily in a meeting it is a lifestyle it is intimacy with God it's not simply nod and mental assent on a Sunday morning to the truth of the creed it is Enoch walking with God and so I'm not asking you if you've made the decision I couldn't care less I'm asking do you know the Lord?

[23 : 09] not do you believe this or do you believe that but do you know the Lord and have a relationship with him? Enoch did and then verse 7 the witness of Noah it's not an easy thing is it to build a boat the size of a football stadium it took 120 years and all the while Noah was working on his ark he was urging people all around him to trust the Lord he was a preacher of righteousness that's our task isn't it?

to be a witness to the world you can imagine the sort of conversations that Noah would have had as he was building his ark what are you doing Noah? building an ark in fact what is an ark?

it's the Lord's provision for you to escape the flood it's a place where you can be safe in fact it's the only place where you can be safe from the judgment of God that is inevitably coming you go to your office tomorrow morning and somebody says do you have a good weekend?

you're at the school gate and they say what did you do yesterday? and you say well I went to church you went to church why did you go to church? and you say well I learned about Jesus there how he took the wrath of God upon himself to save me from judgment it's that sort of conversation you have at work what an inspiration Noah is isn't it?

to persevere in witnessing to the world you can imagine can't you that year after year as Noah worked on that ark laughter would turn to scorn and then to hatred and then to anger so we're going to be judged aren't we?

[24 : 41] you believe in judgment do you? who says so? when's it going to happen? it's a long time coming Noah but when it comes only Noah and his family were saved and we sing in family worship sometimes Mr. Noah built an ark Mr. Noah built an ark people thought it was a ark Mr. Noah pleaded so but into the ark they would not go down in the rain in torrents down in the rain in torrents down in the rain in torrents and only eight were saved it's horrific it's horrific I'm in Auschwitz I'm in the room for my dad and my brother and you go into a room and there's a room of names and things about five million names written on paper of people who died in the holocaust the flood is worse than the holocaust more people died in the flood than the holocaust it's devastating how hard it must have been for Noah to live like that for Noah to continue year after year after year lovingly and faithfully warning people to flee the wrath to come and it's such an inspirational step for us to keep doing the same you see we live in a moral universe and judgment even though it's delayed it is inevitable and judgment will come and this world will not continue forever as it is and people hope don't they that God will never judge and things will continue as they have always been and they take the fact that he's not yet broken in upon us that he never will but one day the Lord will come to judge the living and the dead and the only place you can be safe on that day is not by getting into a boat but it is by getting into the Lord Jesus by trusting in him and taking him as your Lord and Saviour who has actually taken the judgment of God upon himself and so the writer of Hebrews says to you this morning fix your eyes on him keep trusting him and keep pointing to him and keep saying salvation from judgment is in him in him they are the fundamentals of our faith they are the things most surely believed amongst us and they are all fulfilled in Jesus

Jesus is our creator our saviour our friend and our judgment we could almost put it into a creed I thought this week of writing my own creed and then realised how ridiculous that was the Paul Levy Creed but let me give you the Paul Levy Creed of Hebrews 11 I believe that Jesus created the world by the word of his power I believe that Jesus offered himself as the perfect sacrifice for my sins I believe that Jesus has gone to prepare a place for me and he will come again to take me to himself to live with him in his father's house and I believe that God has set a day when he will judge the world with justice through this man whom he has raised from the dead Jesus fix your eyes on Jesus and so is that the kind of faith you have you're trusting in him and looking to him do you remember Jesus said to me he said when the son of man comes not if the son of man comes he says when the son of man comes will he find faith on the earth and it's a question not a statement there are some miserable Christians

I think Jesus is saying the Christian faith is going to dwindle down and disappear Jesus is not making a statement he's throwing out a challenge for you and I and he's asking us a question when I come back will you be believing will there be faithful there might not be church buildings might not be denominations like the IBC there might not be the trappings of religion but there will be faith this kind of faith because we know don't we from this passage that without faith it's impossible to please God and so this is my third point the third point is what faith demands you see what it says in verse 6 it is a shocking verse we're going to learn this with the children before the service and Sunday school it would be a great verse for you to learn because without faith it is impossible to please him it is not difficult it's impossible and people think today don't they that it doesn't matter what you believe as long as you good but what this actually is saying it doesn't matter how good you are if you don't believe and without faith it is impossible to please God so let me challenge you do you have authentic faith is your faith a living faith not just a mental ascent are you living out these truths of creation and judgment to come and walking with God like the people in this chapter and trusting in the atonement of Jesus Christ there's no such thing as inanimate faith just faith in an object it's an oxymoron it's like going to the butchers and buying boneless roots you can't do it the devils have got that kind of faith they believe in

God now all these people in this chapter as you read it over the next three weeks you'll see Abel Enoch Noah all the others they are commended by God as righteous because faith was the animating principle in their lives and God took delight in what he saw there and he took delight in the faith of these people as they lived it out day by day in the decisions that they made in the priorities they set and God saw that that they lived on the basis of their faith and he bears witness to that and he commends them and he says each and every one of these people well done good and faithful and through to the joy of your Lord now do you have that kind of faith and you say to me but I thought you were saved by faith alone isn't that true is it faith alone in Christ alone and yes of course it is true but the faith that saves you is never alone you're not saved by faith plus works but you are saved by a faith that works this is how Martin

Luther puts it he says faith is a living busy active powerful thing it is impossible for it not to do us good continually it never asks what good works are to be done and whether good works are to be done but it's done them before there's time to ask the question and it's always doing them faith works faith acts faith evades faith endures it's not merely the acknowledgement of truths that is Christian it is the means by which we live Christianly listen to that again what is faith it is not merely the acknowledgement of truths that is Christian it is the means by which we live Christianly that's the message of this chapter all these people they lived out their faith because of what God had promised they didn't just believe in God they believed God and belief in God demands absolutely nothing from you believing God demands radical obedience from you and I if you believe God you'll act in certain ways and your life will be shaped by his word and your decisions will be governed by his good news and so is that you would anyone know that is who you are your friends at the school gate your friends in school your neighbours your colleagues would they know that you are a [32 : 12] Christian if you came out as a Christian tomorrow morning would they be surprised what are we to think of somebody who professes faith in Jesus and never lives it out never demonstrates it shows no evidence of faith in their lives somebody has said if it looks like a duck and it quacks like a duck and it walks like a duck what is it it's a duck and if you talk like an unbeliever and walk like an unbeliever and live like an unbeliever what are you most likely you're an unbeliever you like believe in God big deal but you don't believe God in a way that makes a difference and if you're not living by his word and by his warning and by his promises do you know when you're in school sorry when exams came around hopefully it's a few months before they do but what our teachers used to say to me and I would ignore is that when you go into the exam hall and you sit down and you're told to open your paper the thing you've got to do is read the questions carefully do you know

I've been told that don't just go in there and start writing read the questions carefully because time and time again there are people out there who give a perfect answer to what was not actually on the paper people do that all the time don't they I hear that all the time people think that they know what God is asking of them they think they know what God requires of them I live a good life I do my best I do my bit I go to church some of them are good living people and they do try to live up to those standards but it's not what God requires of you because without faith without this kind of faith that we see in Hebrews 11 this faith that is not just intellectual scent but the animating principle of your life without this sort of faith it is impossible to please God it is impossible to get through that final

exam and that is a great challenge to you and I isn't it a challenge to us to understand what real faith is and to put our trust in the Lord Jesus Christ let's pray Thank you.