

## Heb. 11:1-16

Last week we could see a strong transition into the more focused topic of **faith**. As we finished up, we came to what has been a foundational verse in Christianity, and that is *the just shall live by faith* (10:38). Which requires us to ask the meaning of “*live*”. Is this saying those who live by faith won’t physically die? That would be absurd, for as we will see in a bit, all but two people in all of history never died physically. And we will speak of a generation who will not die. But for everyone else, death has been, and is, inevitable.

- So, this is either speaking of 1) the way we should live, 2) or resurrected and eternal life found only in Jesus, 3) or both. **And here it is both!** What we have been hearing and will continue to hear is 1) a call to exercise our faith, and 2) how the promise of that faith is eternal life with God in heaven.
- This was and is so important because of those in the past and present who have let their faith dwindle. And in some cases, have relinquished it for what would appear to be the promise of an easier existence now. And that promise has proven to be hollow in this life, and the door to a cursed eternity.
- The call to us is to keep expanding our faith, because faith has no neutral. You are either going forward or sliding backward. These Jewish believers were rolling backwards, downhill. So this letter was given to encourage them to pop their faith back into drive and start moving forward again. Which provides an opportune time right here at the start for us to ask what gear our faith is currently in?

And I believe there are three semi-divisions in this chapter that might be worth noting. Which are loosely outlined in verses 1-3. 1) Verse 1 tells us of **the reality** of faith, then gives examples in verses 4-12, and finally sums up this reality in verses 13-16. 2) Verse 2 tells us of **the cleansing** work of God when we put and keep our faith in the finished work of Jesus, and then gives us examples in verses 17-29. 3) Then verse 3 brings us back to **the object** of our faith. And when we come to verses 30-40, we hear of how in keeping our faith in Him we can overcome anything.

- If you don’t adopt or remember this outline, but do dig into these first three verses, you will still find this to be a powerful encouragement, with powerful examples, in your walk of faith in God.
- And with that, God is going to remind us of what He does when we put our faith in Jesus. But first He’s going to talk about our **faith** in Jesus itself. So let’s dig in.

*<sup>1</sup>Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen.*

This verse is so interesting because it speaks of faith as being *substance* and having *evidence*. To which someone might ask, “then how is that faith, because of it having substance and evidence?” To contrast that, I’ll share the story J. Vernon McGee uses here of a girl in Sunday school who was asked what faith is. She answered, “faith is believing in what you know ain’t so”. And I like that because it reveals the misconceptions that she and others have about faith. Let’s start by examining the text more.

- First, not all bible versions use the same terms here when translating from the Greek. Instead of *substance* it’s translated “certainty” (NASB) or “assurance” (ESV). And instead of *evidence* it’s translated “proof” (NASB) or “conviction” (ESV). So what is it? Let’s take them one at a time and then put them back together.

In the Greek *substance* more literally means “a foundation” or “a title deed”. Which in this letter is significant since the Holy Spirit has spoken about the New Covenant as *the last will and testament of Jesus which comes with a portion of the inheritance of heaven for those who are His*.

- So here are some key pieces to note, 1) the *foundation* is Jesus (we will come back to the proof of that in verse 2), 2) the *hope* is that of eternity with Him, 3) and that hope has not yet been seen. Rom. 8:24 tells us, “*For we were saved in this hope, but hope that is seen is not hope; for why does one still hope for what he sees?*”. And the context there is also on the hope of heaven and the coming restoration of all things.
- And in the Greek, the word translated *evidence* here means proof, conviction, and inner certainty. But *the Greek word is a legal term that signifies the evidence is sufficient for conviction*. Pretty much how it is translated in our bibles. And because it’s also tied to things not seen, it’s the *inner proof and certainty that convinces you* (in verse 3 we will cover our faith not being blind faith). (Think of a jury in a trial).
- I like what Guzik said here, “Faith does not contradict reason, though it may go beyond reason”. And I would add that faith acknowledges that some things not yet experienced are more real than the things we have seen and known in the physical realm.

<sup>2</sup> *For by it (faith) the elders obtained a good testimony.*

When we come to [verses 17-29](#), we will take a more in depth look at the lives of those listed in this chapter in order to first see they were people just like us. People whose record in this life is by no means perfect. As a matter of fact, because God knows some of us have a more checkered past, He has aired the dirty laundry of some found in this chapter in other books of the Old Testament, to show us just how amazing grace is.

- And we can spend a lifetime trying to build a good reputation or testimony and then severely damage it in a single moment. But with faith in Jesus, God does something so amazing. It's recorded for us in [1 Cor. 3:10-15](#) (which I lightly covered a few times in this letter now).
- There we find [1](#)) the foundation (*substance* from [verse 1](#)) is Christ, and [2](#)) that when anyone builds on that foundation (Him and His truth), [3](#)) even after all the things we've done in this life are tried by fire and God first burns up anything not done for Him, [4](#)) then, with only the things done for Him remaining, we will be summonsed to step up to the judgments seat of Christ, which become the awards stand for the believer, *because there is nothing that will appear there other than that which was done for God* (which, again, we will repeat and see incredible examples of next time in [verses 17-29](#)).
- Now **that is the reality of a testimony cleansed by grace**. And its not just the reality of these in this chapter, but of everyone who has placed their faith in Jesus. Incredible!!! (that's next week)

<sup>3</sup> *By faith we understand that the worlds (better translated cosmos [space +time]) were framed by the word of God, so that the things which are seen were not made of things which are visible.* (see also [verse 39](#))

Our faith is not blind faith. Nor is it faith in faith. When people say they have faith, that is an incomplete sentence until they tell you the object of their faith. But faith is still faith. *Here it speaks of grasping with the mind or intellect that which could otherwise not be known*. So let's look at this intellectually while showing the point at which someone has to apply faith- either faith in God, aliens, personal enlightenment, statistical probability, random chance...

- If the things *seen* were made by the unseen, then *what is the unseen? It is God, who is the object of our faith*. You and I have not seen Him, but without a doubt we know He's there. The creation makes that intellectually undeniable (nothing comes from nothing and complexity requires a source of intelligence). That complexity, and the required paraments for life, make the most accredited scholar look like a fool when he tries to explain how this could have happened any other way than by what we know as the causeless first cause. Or, said another way, that the things seen were made by One who is unseen.
- If you didn't finish primary schooling, but know by observation of the material world that God exists, you have more wisdom than someone with multiple university doctorates, who claims what is seen has come about by random chance or aliens (because you have to go back to square one if you cite aliens- who made them, and if they are "advanced", that presupposes a primitive beginning. So, again, who created them?).
- Yet just like those who believe that nothing comes from nothing, **none of us** were around to see it occur. *So faith is still required. But our faith is not blind faith*. And when we hold onto that faith, we can overcome anything that we might encounter in this life.

So now that we have these strong realities laid out for us by the Holy Spirit, He then gives us examples of the reality of faith, or what it looks like in the lives of people.

<sup>4</sup> *By faith Abel offered to God a more excellent sacrifice than Cain, through which he obtained witness that he was righteous, God testifying of his gifts; and through it he being dead still speaks.*

Cain and Abel were the first two children of Adam and Eve, conceived after the fall and their being expelled from the Garden of Eden ([Gen. 3:23-4:5](#)). Meaning Abel never had the opportunity to walk in the garden with God like his parents did. And therefore, had to rely on the testimony of his mom and dad.

- Now I don't know about you, but can you imagine what a bummer it would have been to be Adam and Eve, and to have to share the story of how you sinned and subsequently got all of humanity banished from paradise. There's no way to come out of that one with a good testimony- unless seen through the *righteousness* of Jesus in heaven (we will dig into that next week).
- But they did share the story, and with it, they told what God had done in shedding the blood of an animal in order to cover their nakedness, shame, and sin. And it's apparent that **Abel**, not seeing firsthand the things they spoke of, placed his full faith in God and the blood He shed to cover his

parents sin, whereas Cain chose at best, a limited belief in God, based on his own terms (which unfortunately caught on and persists to this day).

- Abel offered the sacrifice he knew God desired and approved of, and we are still speaking of his faith to this very day. And remember, 1) this is over 1,500 years before God would make the decree that man could kill animals for food (Gen. 1:29-30 & 9:1-4), 2) and thousands of years before the law came through Moses. So, this truly was an offering made in real faith and according to God's will.

Does your faith in God drive you to come to Him on His terms, even when you don't fully understand or haven't fully seen? Or have you opted for faith only in the things of God you think you understand? That's not real faith, because in doing so, you would have made Him less than God, because you've made yourself god. Real faith understands God is big enough to put your faith in even when you don't understand.

*<sup>5</sup> By faith Enoch was taken away so that he did not see death, "and was not found, because God had taken him"; for before he was taken he had this testimony, that he pleased God. <sup>6</sup> But without faith it is impossible to please Him, for he who comes to God must believe that He is, and that He is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him.*

Now Enoch lived before the flood and is one of only two people in all of the Bible that we are told did not die but was raptured (or "carried across") by God (the other being Elijah). And for this reason, many believe this event is a prefiguring of the rapture of the church before the tribulation. I'm one of them.

- But the main point here is that *By faith Enoch was taken away*. And when we go to the genealogy of Adam in Gen. 5, we find that what set Enoch apart in this list is that *He walked with God (5:22)*.
- The only other person in that list this is said of is Noah (who we will hear about in verse 7) who consequently would escape the wrath of God during the flood, I believe also prefiguring deliverance of God's people through the coming tribulation.

And so, as followers of God this should stand out to us as something we want God to be able to say in regard to ourselves; *that we walk with God*. And walking with Him, which is what Adam had done with God in the garden before the fall, should bring the image of sharing real life with Him as our continual companion.

- This is what we see by examining Enoch, Noah, Abraham, David, and many others found in this chapter.
- So, things like 1) talking through situations, 2) hearing His heart on matters, 3) being able to come to Him in victories and defeats, 4) daydreaming and planning with Him, *was the way they lived day to day in the presence of God. And is what that should look like for us.*
- Now it takes real *faith* in His existence to make communing with Him a moment-by-moment part of our lives, or as is said here, "to *diligently seek Him*", when we cannot see Him. But **Enoch** did seek God and therefore God *rewarded* him. *And what was the reward? That he took him straight up into heaven.* It's the same reward and hope for you and me. And since we're still alive, and He's still coming, I think we are to be living in the hope of rapture *by faith* (don't let anyone take that hope from you).

*<sup>7</sup> By faith Noah, being divinely warned of things not yet seen, moved with godly fear, prepared an ark for the saving of his household, by which he condemned the world and became heir of the righteousness which is according to faith.*

Now we are told that **Enoch** had a son he named **Methuselah**, which is derived from two words meaning "his death shall bring" or "in dying it shall come". *Which spoke directly to the flood.* And if you do the math found in the bible, you discover *he died the year the flood came* at 969 years old (our faith is not blind faith).

- God personally told Noah what was coming and 1) tasked him with building an ark some 450 feet long, 2) in the middle of the desert, 3) even though it is believed *none of them had ever seen rain* before.

So I want you to picture this; at age 500 Noah starts building a 450' ark alongside a 869 year old Methuselah, whose name is telling everyone that when he dies a worldwide flood will come.

- And we are told that Noah did not enter the ark until he was 600, meaning it took the better part of 100 years, all the while Methuselah is not getting any younger (thus creating a sense of urgency).
- And knowing that with the condition of humanity being such that God was ready to destroy them, I think our imaginations could help us to see what kind of support he was getting from the community 😊.
- Yet nothing deterred Noah, over a 100 year period, from staying diligent to that project because He believed the divine warning of God and did not budge. Now that's an example of *faith!* For if we're

honest, we often fold under far less pressure, in a much shorter time frame (which also brings us back to the call for us to develop some *endurance*, which the Holy spirit made last time [10:36]).

<sup>8</sup> By faith **Abraham** obeyed when he was called to go out to the place which he would receive as an inheritance. And he went out, not knowing where he was going. <sup>9</sup> By faith he dwelt in the land of promise as in a foreign country, dwelling in tents with Isaac and Jacob, the heirs with him of the same promise; <sup>10</sup> for he waited for the city which has foundations, whose builder and maker is God.

We are not going to go into the missteps of Abraham and Sarah here as they went out, because we will cover that when we get to [verses 17-19](#). The focus here is on the incredible moves of *faith* He and Sarah made in believing God without any previous evidence. Abraham was a wealthy and prominent man, living in a wealthy city (Ur) when God called Him to just pack up and start moving to an undisclosed destination, where he would one day reside.

- And when Abraham did finally arrive, with a lot of time and experience under his belt, he didn't then take the wealth and build himself a big place to settle down in. But rather continued to live in tents because his heart was not content with making this earth his home.
- He, by *faith* in God, believed so fully what God had promised was coming, that it completely changed his desire and focus while on the earth.

And this might be a good place to ask ourselves how our *faith* in the promises of God, and what He has promised is to come for those who love him, has impacted the kind of roots we have put down in this earth?

<sup>11</sup> By faith **Sarah** herself also received strength to conceive seed, and she bore a child when she was past the age, because she judged Him faithful who had promised (that's where the *strength* came from). <sup>12</sup> Therefore from one man, and him as good as dead, were born as many as the stars of the sky in multitude—innumerable as the sand which is by the seashore.

Now before we jump into what is covered here, might I also mention that not only did Abraham leave his plush position in Ur, but Sarah, on Abraham's word that he had heard from God, chose to believe God's promises also. And with the exception of very few, the rest of us know how incredible this act of faith was.

- But what's being spoken of here is **1)** a woman becoming pregnant, **2)** carrying to term, **3)** delivering at 90 years of age. **4)** And all of this after not being able to conceive prior. And **5)** Abraham was no spring chicken 😊. (Talk to any woman who has not been able to conceive or carry to term and you will know how brave one has to be to continue to hope and believe).
- Now we do know she laughed the first time God said she was going to conceive and then lied to God about laughing. But [Gen. 21:6](#) tells us her laughter of unbelief was replaced with laughter in faith when Isaac was born. From that act of faith (a growing faith) their descendants are now innumerable to all but God.

And now he brings it all together.

<sup>13</sup> These all died in faith, not having received the promises, but having seen them afar off were assured of them, embraced them and confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth. <sup>14</sup> For those who say such things declare plainly that they seek a homeland. <sup>15</sup> And truly if they had called to mind that country from which they had come out, they would have had opportunity to return. <sup>16</sup> But now they desire a better, that is, a heavenly country. Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God, for He has prepared a city for them.

I cannot tell you if you or I will be raptured before we die, because only God knows the number of our days ([Job 14:5](#), [Psa. 139:16](#)). But from our place in time, we know **1)** Jesus first coming is complete, **2)** and His second coming is certain. The timing of such belongs to God alone. But our job in faith is to keep looking for what we might or might not see before death, until death or the rapture comes.

- And if we live in *by faith* in the promises of God, we can live like we've been called to. Which is as *pilgrims* passing through a world that is not our home. But some are so rooted here they can hardly think of there (heaven). Is that you?
- I would say I can't speak for you, but I believe I do speak for most of you, in that we are longing for something so much *better*. Actually, something perfect. And God tells us if that is our desire, (not just the location and its perfect condition, but to be there to be with the One who has prepared this place to spend eternity with us), that He will never be ashamed to identify us as being His.

- And (as if that was not enough) next week, when we hear of what He has done with our record **in order to cleanse it with Jesus' righteousness**, **we will hear of how God sees us**. And when we get that, we find ourselves so liberated from all the other voices. Folks, keep the faith in the object of our faith- Jesus!