

# The Book of Hebrews – The Superiority of Christ

...God has spoken to us in His Son...(Hebrews 1:2)

## The Content of Faith Part 1(A Primer on Faith) Hebrews 11:1

*Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen.*

The story is told of a man, who despairing of life, climbed the railing of the Brooklyn Bridge and was about to leap into the river when a policeman caught him by the collar and pulled him back. The would-be suicide protested, “You don’t understand how miserable I am and how hopeless my life is. Please let me jump.” - - - The kind-hearted officer reasoned with him and said, “I’ll make this proposition to you. Take five minutes and give your reasons why life is so hopeless and not worth living, and then I’ll take five minutes and give my reasons why I think life is worth living, both for you and for me. If at the end of ten minutes you still feel like jumping from the bridge, I won’t stop you.” - - - The man took his five minutes, and the officer took his five minutes. Then they stood up, joined hands, and jumped off the bridge!

Not what you had expected, was it? And yet for a society that has abandoned God and His Word, that has reduced humanity to some cosmic accident, full of meaningless suffering and hardship, there really is no point, no purpose and no hope. Yet for the believer in Christ there is something markedly different. There is a hope, a purpose, meaning to be had both in this life and the life to come. And how does the believer know this hope? Because they know and have come to experience the promises of God’s Word. By a mechanism called “faith” – the true believer in Christ has full assurance and unwavering hope in God’s promises to live in him, work through him and deliver him safely to a place called glory – heaven, the dwelling place of the living God. But just what is faith? To be sure, it is a word we hear and use much in the church. But what is faith?

We begin this morning one of the most famous and significant chapters in all of Scripture. I don’t have much of an outline until later as I desire to give some background concerning our text. There are very few chapters of Scripture that have as many titles or descriptions given to it as Hebrews 11. 1 Corinthians 13 is called “The Love Chapter”, but Hebrews 11 has been referred to as –

- God’s Honor Roll of Faithful OT Saints
- The Saints Hall of Fame
- The Heroes of Faith
- The Faith Chapter

Contained in Hebrews 11 is the inspired account of a number of OT saints whose lives were characterized by this little word “faith.” These then are the great examples of the faithful, who are given to inform and inspire us concerning this topic of faith. This is a walk through the OT, summarizing in one chapter the singular, vibrant faith of those who walked with God. These are people of action – each of which are crying out encouragement to us today, saying, “Live by faith, walk by faith, trust in God; regardless of your circumstances, run the race in such a way to win – this walking with God is the best investment of your life.”

This chapter serves to remind us that the only way to live for God, the only way to have an impact for God, the only way that we might see God is to have developed within us this

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God-given, Christ-manufactured faith. For Christ is clearly the author and perfecter, the source and the completer of faith according to Hebrews 12:2. Faith then is to be cultivated carefully and fully in the life of the believer. Faith has been called the currency for every transaction with God. Faith is the fuel that fires the spiritual engine of our lives. If we would do much for God, we must, by faith, ask much of God. If we would desire more of God, more love to God, more obedience to God, be of more usefulness to God, then we must cultivate a greater faith. Here beloved it is not an issue of spiritual age, with how long you have walked with Him. For the spiritual babe, he who has but walked with Christ for a short time, as well as for the spiritual adult, greater faith yields greater usefulness to God. Greater faith yields a greater hope in the promises of God. We must desire this greater faith. Why, because there is nothing in the Christian life that does not involve faith. There is no action, there is no attitude, there is no hope, there is no promise, there is endeavor, there is no true fellowship, there is no worship, no prayer, no reading or hearing of the word, no witnessing, no following after Christ that does not involved full, whole-hearted faith.

Our regeneration, conversion and salvation is by faith, is it not? According to Ephesians 2:8, “For by grace you have been saved through faith...” According to Colossians 1:23, we are to “continue in faith”; according to 2 Corinthians 5:7 we “walk by faith”. Jesus commands us to pray in faith, saying in Matthew 17:20, “*if you have faith the size of a mustard seed, you will say to this mountain, ‘Move from here to there’ and it will move; and nothing will be impossible to you.*” We worship by faith, as 1 Peter 1:8 describes for us, “*and though you do not see Him [Jesus], you love Him, and though you do not see Him now, but believe in Him, you greatly rejoice with joy inexpressible and full of glory...*” Even that beloved verse of Galatians 2:20 reminds us that we live by faith – “*For I have been crucified with Christ; and it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself up for me.*” In the early church, when the Apostles were overloaded with work, what did they do? In Acts 6, they called the congregation to choose seven men, and in verse 5 we read, “*This statement found approval with the whole congregation and they chose Stephen, a man full of faith and of the Holy Spirit...*”

From all these things we must conclude that the Lord wants to see this kind of faith cultivated, expanded, built up and increased in the lives of His people. This is the kind of faith that keeps a person from falling away, from forsaking the Lord and His people. This is the kind of faith that is being expressed to us in Hebrews 11. Now, it may already be quite obvious, but this morning it is my intention to expand upon this topic of faith. If we are to rightly understand and apply the meaning of Hebrews 11 to our lives, we must have a right understanding of faith. Therefore, consider this message a primer on faith, faith 101.

This topic of faith is more properly introduced to us not in Hebrews 11:1, as this is an unfortunate chapter break, but rather the subject of faith begins more formally in Hebrews 10:38 and the quotation from Habakkuk 2:4 – look at Hebrews 10:38,

***But My righteous ones shall live by faith, and if he shrinks back, My soul has no pleasure in him.***

There are a couple of things that we need to note here. First, those who are righteous are so by the declaration of God. He is the one that says they are righteous, the one’s of His

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righteousness. Second, we are told that those who are made righteous by God live by faith, and to be understood here, by faith alone – Soli Fide – nothing but faith. Here is expressed for us the very key to living for God – it is lived by faith, a faith that God develops in every one of His righteous ones. Such persons will never shrink back or turn away from God. Yes, the righteous ones will have their moments of weakness, their moments of sin, but they will never shrink back or fall away.

Then in Hebrews 10:39, we read this momentous statement, **“But we are not of those who shrink back to destruction, but of those who have faith to the preserving of the soul.”** May it be that we are of those who have faith, who do not shrink back. How might we know this faith? What does it look like? How does it act? God is looking for such a faith. Is it found in you?

This brings us to Hebrews 11, which is actually an expansion, a discussion of what is meant in Hebrews 10:38-39. Hebrews 11 is the picture of what faith looks like. Here is faith in action in lives of people you know, you have read about them. But let us be clear. While some lofty titles have been given to Hebrews 11 like “The Heroes of Faith” – God does not have two levels of faith, or two levels of spirituality. We are not to read Hebrews 11 and think, “Wow, these saints were given some extra or supernatural faith beyond what I have.” Beloved, is not all faith supernatural faith? All faith is given by God and makes us useful for the kingdom. The point of Hebrews 11 is not really meant to show us the heroes of the faith, but to reveal what faith looks like in anybody who avails themselves to God. That same faith that allowed, Able to offering a better sacrifice, for Enoch to walk with God, for Noah to labor for 120 years on the ark, for Abraham to leave the land of his father and to offer up Isaac, the same faith that caused Sara to conceive and Moses to forsake Egypt, this is the same faith that God wants cultivated in each and every one of our lives today who would name the name of Christ. To be sure, we will all walk in different circumstances, face different trials and be offered different opportunities, but we are all to walk in the faith of these saints as it was a faith that pleased God, that glorified and exalted Him.

How is that for an introduction? I know that I have not given you much direction as of yet so let us now turn our attention to Hebrews 11:1 and notice if you would the first three words of the text – **“Now faith is...”** In light of the call of Hebrews 10:38-39 to be those of faith, what is this faith? Or more directly, what does the author of Hebrews want us to know about faith. I submit to you that from these three words, “Now faith is...” there are two fundamentals of faith. If we are to walk, or rightly follow after Jesus in faith, we must...

- I. Know the significance of faith; and
  - II. Know the substance of faith
- 
- I. **We must know the significance of faith.**  
*“Now faith is...”*

Our text begins with a little word “now” – a conjunction, linking was just said about the righteous living by faith and this coming exposition of faith together. This is how important, this is how significant this faith of Hebrews 10:38-39 is, as the author points his readers to this expansion of faith. Our author is rolling up his proverbial sleeves saying in effect, “Let’s get

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down to business – let me show you what the faith God is looking for in us really looks like.” Just how significant is this topic of faith – notice that it is the sole subject of the next forty verses. Just how significant is faith? Beloved, the word “faith” (*pistis*) is used 243 times in the New Testament. The book of Hebrews uses this word “faith” 32 times in its 13 chapters and yet of these 32 times, “faith” is found 24 times in Hebrews 11 alone. That is 24 times of 243 NT usages, meaning 1 of every ten readings of this word faith in the NT is found in Hebrews 11. How significant is faith? How important is this subject to the author and the readers of this text? As someone has rightly said, “Hebrews 11 is a literal mountain of faith.” And we are going to climb that mountain.

But before we make our glorious ascent up this mountain, let us survey its beauty from afar. The most repeated phrase, that key by which we will learn to unlock the fullness of living for Christ, is what – “by faith”? Some 19 times we read this “by faith” – let us notice this - “by faith” in verses 3, 4, 5, 7, (8, 9, 17 Abraham), 11, 20, 21, 22, (23, 24, 27, 28 Moses), 29, 30, 31 (Rahab), 33. Beloved, what is important here? What stands out? What does this chapter cry out? “Live by faith!” “Know faith!” “Experience faith!” to which we ought to respond, “Lord, increase our faith – show us the fullness of faith that we may walk even as these have walked before you.”

I would also call your attention this morning to the very names listed in this text. There is no doubt we have some so-called “spiritual giants” – Able, Enoch, Noah, Abraham, Moses and the like. These characters stand out to us as the epitome of faith to the point that we place them atop an ivory pedestal. But this is not the point of Hebrews 11. While these were certainly people of great faith, they were yet people just like you and me. Abraham was a liar, Sara laughed at the pronouncement of the Lord, Noah got drunk, Moses was a murderer, Jacob a deceiver and most of you know what Rahab was. These are real people who lived in real life situations not unlike our own, with influences and pressures that often challenged their faith – and yet, in the final analysis, their lives were characterized by faith. This is what God wants for each of us – to have lives characterized by faith. Do you see how significant is faith?

## II. We need to know the Substance of Faith

Before we take aim at the summit of this mountain of faith in Hebrews 11, let us take some time to know the substance of faith. What is faith? What does it look like? What are its pieces? If faith were a cake, what ingredients would we find in it? There are two ways in which we ought to examine this issue of the substance of faith. First, what does the word mean technically, that is what are the definitions of faith and second what the word mean practically, that is what the biblical application of faith in our lives.

What does the word “faith” mean technically. The word “faith” or *pistis* has a great variety of meaning. The most simplistic definition of faith is “a belief or trust in someone or something.” Faith is assurance that something or someone is trustworthy. Faith can refer to a solemn oath or promise. It can refer to a strong conviction of that which is true. Often the word faith speaks of personal acceptance, surrender, and allegiance to a specific person or belief. One preacher has said that “faith is an omelet” – made up of equal parts of commitment, trust, reliance, persuasion, surrender, submission, obedience, allegiance, loyalty, confidence, conviction, and assurance. All of these thought are components of true,

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supernatural, vivid faith. True faith is dynamic, active and aggressive rather than static, passive and timid.

But what is of more use to us is to consider what the word faith means practically – how is it used biblically. You might ask, “what is the systematic theology of faith?” It is interesting to note that theologians through the ages have generally agreed that taken in full Biblical context, the concept of faith has three non-negotiable parts – three essential elements that comprises true faith. Charles Spurgeon noted these three parts as being “knowledge”; “belief” and “trust.” Probably a bit more understanding to us would be the mind, the heart (emotions) and the will. True biblical faith will affect our minds, our hearts (emotions) and our will. Let me expand on this a bit.

## 1. Faith affects the mind

The starting place of faith is grounded in a right knowledge of God as found only in His word. If a person is without the truth of God, they will be without faith in God as Romans 10:17 so adequately speaks –

***So faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of Christ.***

True faith is founded in recognizing the Word of God as the only positive source of truth. True faith will never be discerned by our own reasonings, but comes as a result of rightly responding to God’s revelation. As one preacher put it, “I cannot have God in my heart if He is not first in my head.” Faith then is not for the mentally lazy but is for those who hunger and thirst after God and His truth. For no one’s faith will ever exceed their knowledge of the truth of God or as John Calvin put it – “faith rests upon knowledge, not upon pious ignorance.” Faith is not sticking your finger up in the air to find which way the wind is blowing. It is not subject to the reasonings, whims and fickleness of man. I love what Martin Luther has said about faith and the mind –

*“I have made a covenant with God that He sends me neither visions, dreams, nor even angels. I am well satisfied with the gift of the Holy Scriptures, which give me abundant instruction and all that I need to know both for this life and for that which is to come.”*

Beloved, in the word of God, faith is associated with the revelation of the person and work of Jesus Christ. Turn to Acts 6. After the seven were selected to help the apostles we read this in verse 7 –

***The word of God kept on spreading; and the number of the disciples continued to increase greatly in Jerusalem, and a great many of the priests were becoming obedient to the faith.***

“Obedient to the faith” – to the full counsel and teaching concerning the work of God through Jesus Christ for the salvation of men. In Jude 3 pick up this same idea –

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***Beloved, while I was making every effort to write you about our common salvation, I felt the necessity to write to you appealing that you contend earnestly for the faith which was once for all handed down to the saints.***

Here again we see the idea being that “the faith” refers to the fullness of the teaching concerning the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ for the sins of His people. Thus faith is tied to the revelation of God’s Word and God’s Word is first grasped in the mind, in the head.

## 2. Faith affects the heart

But true faith does not remain only in the head. Many people have a knowledge of God and His Word but it does not affect their heart or emotions. For faith to be practical, it must be received and adopted in the heart as truth. There is to be a joy found in the Word of God that goes beyond simple knowledge. A recognition of His love, His presence, His working in your life – such things bring a sense of delight to the heart and soul. Of this thought, John Calvin wrote:

*“It now remains to pour into the heart itself what the mind has absorbed. For the Word of God is not received by faith if it flits about in the top of the brain, but when it takes root in the depth of the heart.”*

True faith that reaches the heart cares not what others say or think. True faith in the heart maintains the conviction that even if all others forsake the Lord and His Word, you will yet believe and remain true. True faith affects deep convictions within the faithful causing the heart to rejoice in doctrine and to live out doctrine. True faith of the heart does not see that doctrine divides but rather that it alone bring lasting meaning and purpose. Show me a church that only believes that music and drama will bring people together and I’ll show you a church that by and large will be lost.

Is such an emotional and heart-felt tie to the truth really that important. Do you realize that many of the martyrs of the faith died for what some today would consider secondary or non-essential doctrines? In 1555-58, the Roman church taught that that the so-called real presence of the Lord’s body and blood – that is His deity and humanity – was truly there in the bread and wine after being consecrated by the priest. But those who did not receive and believe such a monstrous claim were burned at the stake. Under Bloody Mary, some 300 martyrs were burned at the stake over this issue. That is a faith that has affected the heart. How about your heart, do you have a growing desire for the truth, to know it not only in your head, but also in your heart? That is faith.

## 3. Faith affects the will

So true faith begins in the head, works its way into the emotions of the heart, but it is not finished there if it true faith, for true faith will now affect the will. This is where faith becomes real as the a person acts upon what the mind knows and the heart feels. We have an example of faith that stops short of action. In James 2:19 we read –

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***You believe that God is one. You do well; the demons also believe, and shudder.***

The demons know in their head the reality and truth of God; they even are affected emotionally, shuddering in the knowledge of the faith, but they never act in accordance with the faith and are therefore condemned. Faith is commitment, it is action, it seek ways to get beyond the head and the heart into every day living. Faith is obedient to the truth, it moves the believer from theory to reality. True faith enlightens the mind, it fills the heart and moves the will to surrender and service to God. This is the faith that God is looking for in His people. This is the faith by which God's righteous ones will live. This is the faith that we will spend the next several weeks seeing worked out in the lives of God's people of the past so that we might learn how see worked out in the lives of God's people of the present. It is a faith that disregards the thinking of the world to know the mind of Christ. It is a faith that encourages us that we don't have to live like the world in its fading follies destined for hell. It is a faith that reminds us that we have the Word of God, the love letter of God to mankind, the testimony of God that reveals we can know Him by faith, we can love Him by faith and we can serve Him by faith.

Beloved, let us be wary of simply knowing of truth in the head and even in the heart but yet has no real action in our lives. Let us pray that God would build up His church and this local expression of it in this real mind, heart and will affecting faith that points us to Jesus as the only way one is able to know and live for God, as the only Redeemer who has given His life for those who call upon His name for mercy and grace to be delivered from their condition of sin, as the only Savior who will take the sinner and convert him into a saint, a holy one, a righteous one, who love to live in this faith we have sought to better understand this morning and of which we will see more clearly as we work through Hebrews 11.

Let us then live by faith in God, His Son and His word, not being moved by what other churches, what other people or polls say, but by God alone. As someone has said, "If you are not rooted in the Word, you are rooted in jello." Let us be those who so live by faith that if we had the opportunity to speak to one wanting to jump off a bridge, we would tell them and show them of a life giving faith that brings true hope, joy and the promise of a blissful eternal life with Jesus.

*Soli Deo Gloria*

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