

The Ordo Salutis

The Order of Salvation

A Study

As of: 11/14/2021

Step 8: Faith and Repentance

“No sinner ever comes to Christ until the Holy Spirit first comes to him! And no sinner will savingly believe on Christ until the Spirit has communicated faith to him (**Ephesians 2:5; Colossians 2:12**); and even then, faith is an eye to discern Christ before it is a foot to approach Him.” — **Arthur W. Pink**

“Being persuaded that Christ and his promises are factual is not by itself saving faith. That is why some professing Christians will be shocked at the last day, when they hear him say, 'I never knew you,' even though they protest that he is 'Lord, Lord.' Believing that Christ and his promises are true, based on a testimony, is a necessary part of faith. But it is not sufficient to turn faith into saving faith.”- **John Piper**

“It is not the absence of sin but the grieving over it which distinguishes the child of God from empty professors” — **A.W. Pink**

“There are nine conditions that prove genuine saving faith, 1) Love for God 2) Repentance from Sin 3) Genuine Humility 4) Devotion to God’s Glory 5) Continual Prayer 6) Selfless Love 7) Separation from the World 8) Spiritual Growth 9) Obedience”- **John MacArthur**

“The Roman Catholic church teaches ‘Faith+ Works = Justification’. The Antinomian teaches ‘Faith = Justification – Works’ while the Bible teaches ‘Faith= Justification + Works.’”- **RC Sproul**

“The Bible doesn’t teach us to simply ‘Believe’ as though we could believe in anything. Rather the Bible teaches, ‘Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ’”- **RC Sproul**

“A sinner can no more repent and believe without the Holy Spirit's aid than he can create a world.”- **CH Spurgeon**

“There was a day when I died; died to self, my opinions, preferences, tastes and will; died to the world, its approval or censure; died to the approval or blame even of my brethren or friends; and since then I have studied only to show myself approved unto God.” – **George Mueller**

“If you have the data and you are persuaded that the information you have is true- is that

enough to save you? No. Because James tells us that believing to that extent qualifies us to be a demon.”- **RC Sproul**

“For we maintain that a man is justified by faith apart from works of the Law.”- **the Apostle Paul**

“... faith, if it has no works, is dead, being by itself... faith without works is useless ... a man is justified by works and not by faith alone.” – **James, the Less**

“Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen.”- **the writer of Hebrews**

“obtaining as the outcome of your faith the salvation of your souls.” – **the Apostle Peter**

“The Reformers taught that saving faith has three components (Latin) 1) *Noticia*; 2) *Assensus* 3) *Fiducia*”- **RC Sproul**¹

“The recognition of sin is the beginning of salvation.” – **Martin Luther**

“Knowledge without repentance will be but a torch to light men to hell.”- **Thomas Watson**

“Repentance, as we know, is basically not moaning and remorse, but turning and change.” – **JI Packer**

“The vigor and power and comfort of our spiritual life depends on our mortification of deeds of the flesh.”- **John Owen**

“True repentance is no light matter. It is a thorough change of heart about sin, a change showing itself in godly sorrow and humiliation - in heartfelt confession before the throne of grace - in a complete breaking off from sinful habits, and an abiding hatred of all sin. Such repentance is the inseparable companion of saving faith in Christ.” – **JC Ryle**

“Repentance is the true turning of our life to God, a turning that arises from a pure and earnest fear of Him; and it consists in the mortification of the flesh and the renewing of the Spirit.”- **John Calvin**

“Some people do not like to hear much of repentance; but I think it is so necessary that if I should die in the pulpit, I would desire to die preaching repentance, and if out of the pulpit I would desire to die practicing it.”- **Matthew Henry**

“Regeneration precedes both Faith and Repentance- making both of them a Gift and a Response”- **RC Sproul**

¹ 1) the Content, Information, or Data of what you are believing; the Object of Faith- Jesus 2) the intellectual affirmation of the Truth of the Information 3) actually trusting in what you say you believe to the point of having an Affection for Jesus

Why Do We Believe?

What is “Faith”? *Why* do we believe? How did Belief and Faith come to you? Is believing simply a Choice or a Decision- or is there more to it? The Issue of Faith is so central to the Christian Message that the Bible refers to Christianity as the “Christian Faith”. And the Bible teaches that Salvation is totally *dependent* on Faith and yet it also tells us that lost people are pre-disposed to NOT believe. So, how is that dilemma resolved? *From where* does Faith come; and *to whom* does Faith come? Does *everybody* already have the ability to believe or is Belief a Gift? And if Faith is a Gift- why does God judge people to whom He has not given it?

As you can see, there are many Questions about Faith. And they all deserve an Answer. And we can thank God- that He has answered all of them in His Word. But we must take heed to ourselves because the Answers may surprise us. And if we are not careful, they may even offend us.

The closest thing we have in the Bible to a definition about just what Faith is- is found in **Hebrews 11:1&6** where the unknown writer of the **Epistle to the Hebrews** was “moved” by God the Holy Spirit to write:

Hebrews 11:1-3&6

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

2 For by it the men of old gained approval.

3 By faith we understand that the worlds were prepared by the word of God, so that what is seen was not made out of things which are visible.

6 And 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 seek Him.

Now **Hebrews 11** is NOT merely another part of the Bible. What this writer was “moved” by God the Holy Spirit to write here has to do with our lives in the 21st Century. Now just a few verses back- in **Hebrews 10:34**- this writer said that some of the Christians of this small Church in what is now called, “Asia Minor” in the last third of the 1st Century (around 68AD) were imprisoned. And the other believers made the hard decision to identify with them and risk their own property and their lives. And verse 34 tells what happened.

For you showed sympathy to the prisoners and accepted joyfully the seizure of your property, knowing that you have for yourselves a better possession and a lasting one.

And this is the kind of life that the entire **Epistle of Hebrews** is trying to produce in us- a life that looks at the high price of Love (like the seizure of our property or some other kind of abuse or calamity as we can read in **Hebrews 13:3-6,13**), and then accepts that possibility- *joyfully*- and does what Love demands- no matter what. That's the “Abundant Life” that **Hebrews** is aiming at: all the glorious Truths about Jesus that we can see in this Epistle such as:

- ✓ Giving Himself once for all as a final Sacrifice for our sins (**Hebrews 9:14**)
- ✓ Perfecting us for all time by a single Offering (**Hebrews 10:14**)
- ✓ Giving us a clean conscience by His Own Blood (**Hebrews 9:14; 10:22**)
- ✓ Being our sympathetic High Priest before God (**Hebrews 4:14-16**)
- ✓ Interceding for us day after day in Heaven (**Hebrews 7:25**)

- ✓ Putting His Laws in our minds and writing them on our hearts and being our God (**Hebrews 8:10**),
- ✓ Remembering our Sins no more (**Hebrews 8:12**),
- ✓ Promising never to leave us or forsake us (**Hebrews 13:5&6**)

And all these great Truths are aimed at making us into this kind of people:

- Who risk property and life in order to bring the Love of God to others.
- Who do not look for comforts and ease and security as a necessary thing in life.
- Who are free from the American assumptions of style and safety and wealth and leisure.
- Who know there is one life to live and only what's done in the Name of Christ and for His Glory and for the eternal good of others will count in the end.

And what **Hebrews 10:34** makes clear is that the way that such a life comes about in our lives is through an unshakable Hope in God that is beyond anything in this life.

(You) accepted joyfully the seizure of your property, knowing that you have for yourselves a better possession and a lasting one.

And so, the Power to be joyfully sacrificial in the path of Love is "**knowing that you have for yourselves a better possession and a lasting one.**" beyond the grave. And if we don't live by this great Confidence that is brought about by this great Hope- we will be continually thinking about how much we are losing out every time we make a sacrifice for others. But if this life is a brief preparation for eternal Joy- if in this life you and I can reach a place in Jesus Christ where we understand and know that we have a "**better possession and a lasting one**" in Heaven- then we will be free to risk our lives and our possessions on behalf of others in this world because, as Paul said in **Romans 8:18**:

For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory that is to be revealed to us.

So, the entire **Book of Hebrews** was written to give us an eternal and abiding Hope that transcends anything that this evil world has to offer. And this abiding Hope is the Foundation of a Life of radical, risk-taking, and sacrificial Love.

What more could the writer say than he has already said to help us have this Hope so that we live out this radical Love? The writer has surely written plenty- but he isn't finished. And now he writes Chapter 11 to give us even more:

In **Hebrews 11**- the writer gives us several real- life examples of real people who actually laid hold on the future reward of Joy with God to such an extent that it not only revolutionized their lives then- but it also makes a great difference in our lives 21 centuries later if we would believe.

That's what **Chapter 11** is all about. It is meant to deepen our Confidence in God's Promises to the extent that we will turn from the fleeting pleasures of Sin and live out the radical kind of Love that comes from having our Hope in God.

Now like all things that are true about God- the writer of **Hebrews** was not the only one who understood this. The Apostle Paul also wrote about what this great Hope would produce is those who had it- so let's read what he wrote about this by looking at **Colossians 1:4&5**:

**4 since we heard of your faith in Christ Jesus and the love which you have for all the saints;
5 because of the hope laid up for you in heaven, of which you previously heard in the word of truth, the gospel**

Now notice here that verse 5 begins with the word, "**Because**", which also means "**for**" or "**due to**". So, what Paul is saying here is that "**because**" or "**due to**" the fact that the people of the Church at Colosse had laid hold on this great Hope in Heaven- they were able and willing to exercise their Faith and Love toward the people who were struggling against Sin and Persecution.

And what was it that built up that kind of Faith that promoted this kind of sacrificial Love and Good Works? Paul tells us here that the people of this Church had heard the Word of God preached through the Gospel even as you and I are hearing it right this minute.

Romans 10:17

...faith comes from hearing, and hearing by the word of Christ.

So, hearing about the great and mighty Promises of God that God has made to us through the preaching and teaching of the Word of God and believing that those great and mighty Promises are true- *emboldens* us to take hold of this great transcendent Hope. And it is this Hope that brings about radical, risk taking, and sacrificial Love.

So, **Hebrews 11** begins with a definition of Faith that links it with Hope and then goes on to show how this Hope gave Power for all kinds of radical Obedience by people all throughout the Bible. So, I want to read **Hebrews 11:1-3** again together:

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

2 For by it the men of old gained approval.

3 By faith we understand that the worlds were prepared by the word of God, so that what is seen was not made out of things which are visible.

So, the first very important thing that we can do today is to forget all the nonsense that we have been taught about what Faith is; and what Faith does; and look at what God's Word says about Faith- so that we may lay hold on eternal Life.

The writer of **Hebrews** is telling us by these inspired and inerrant and infallible Words that the Power to sacrifice in the Cause of Love; and the Power to joyfully accept the seizure of our property- and even the loss of our lives, which we saw in **Hebrews 10:34**, is something that the Holy Spirit calls "Faith."

That is what Faith is- the Power to willingly and joyfully and sacrificially accept the seizure of our property and even the loss of our lives because we *know*- we don't guess or wonder- we *know* through the hearing of the Word of God preached about the great and mighty Promises of God and we believe that God's Word is true and that hearing mixed with believing produces a great and enduring Hope in us that we have an abiding and a lasting Possession in

Heaven- that God gave to us; that cannot be altered; and that cannot be diminished; and that cannot ever be taken away from us. And this Hope *emboldens* us to act with a radical Love that the world does not know; and that the world does not possess.

The writer says here in **Hebrews 11:1** that Faith is the “**assurance of things hoped for**” - that word, “**assurance**”- remember that word? It is the very *same* word that he used back in **Hebrews 10:34** to tell us about a “Possession” in Heaven that was both “better” than anything else on this earth and “better” than anything that was promised under the Old Covenant; and it was also “lasting”- meaning that it is eternal. This is what the song writer meant when he said,

“I have a home in Glory Land that outshines the Sun”

So, the writer tells us here in **Hebrews 11:1** that Faith is the Confidence that “**you have a better possession and a lasting one**” or in other words, Faith is the Confidence that we believe that what God’s Word promises us in Heaven is a far better and a far more abiding Possession than anything that this earth could ever hope to give.

Now there's the link between the Life of the sacrificial kind of Love that **Hebrews 10:34** describes and the Hall of Fame in Chapter 11. Chapter 11 is a catalogue of people who illustrate that this kind of Faith - the “Assurance” or the “Confidence” of things hoped for - really *does* make a difference in human lives.

So, the first task that we have in this new chapter is to understand more exactly what Faith is. That's what verse 1 gives us - a *twofold* definition of Faith. So, let's look at both parts, one at a time. The Holy Spirit moved upon the writer to write that Faith is:

1. The Assurance of things hoped for
2. The Conviction of things not seen.

Now there is more here than meets the eye at first. The Greek word for “**assurance**” in the first definition (“**the assurance of things hoped for**”) and the word for “**conviction**” in the second definition (“**the conviction of things not seen**”), are very unusual Greek words that are very difficult to translate into English. But if we are to understand what the writer is telling us- we are going to have to struggle with this for a moment.

These two words “**assurance**” and “**conviction**” are, in fact, very serious and important translations. And the importance is not merely academic. So, in order to see just how important all of this is just ask yourself these four simple questions:

1. Do you have Faith?
2. How do you *know* that you have Faith?
3. What exactly *is* Faith- so that you may know if you have it?
4. What hangs in the balance on whether you have Faith or not?

So, we can see that these Questions are *very* practical and *very* relevant to our lives. So, let's get into this and I want to start with the *second* definition of Faith that the writer of **Hebrews** describes for us first:

Faith is the conviction of things not seen."

Now the Greek word that was translated here as, "**conviction**" in **Hebrews 11:1**- is not used anywhere else in the entire New Testament. But *outside* the New Testament- in other ancient Greek literature, the normal use of this word throughout the world back in the 1st Century would be to talk about "Proof" or "Argument" or "Conviction" - something that is very objective. In other words, this Greek word would have to do with objective facts about how the world really is- rather than how a person might subjectively *feel* about the world. And that is how this particular Greek word would have normally been used in literature other than the Bible.

So, what about the meaning here in verse 1? Most modern translations of the Bible don't use the old word, "Proof" or "Evidence" like the KJV does because it doesn't seem to make sense to them. How can Faith *be* "Evidence" or "Proof"? Faith actually *needs* Evidence, doesn't it?

And in order to try to figure this Mystery out- let's look at the illustration of this definition of Faith that we find in **Hebrews 11:3** because verse 3 is directly related to this definition of Faith in verse 1 as "the conviction of things not seen." **Hebrews 11:3** says:

By faith we understand that the worlds were prepared by the word of God, so that what is seen was not made out of things which are visible.

Now I hope you can see the connection here. The end of verse 1 says that "**Faith is the conviction of things not seen,**" and then verse 3 says that Faith understands that the worlds – in other words- the physical universe that is seen- was made out of what is *not* seen - or in other words- the Word of God. So, verse 3 is a specific illustration which was given to us by the Holy Spirit to help us to understand just what the writer meant when he wrote verse 1.

So, here's the question:

How do we know that God made the world out of nothing that is seen?

Not only were we not there when Creation occurred- but even if we *had* been there- we would not have been able to actually "see" the Act of Creation, because you can't see the Word of God until that Word is written down. So how in the world can we "know" or "understand" that the worlds were made by the Word of God? How can we know "**that what is seen was not made out of things which are visible**"- namely the Word of God?

And verse 3 answers that question: "by" or "through" Faith.

By faith we understand that the worlds were prepared by the word of God

Now this starts to sound a little more understandable. Because if it is true that "**Faith is the conviction of things not seen,**" then it might make sense to say, "By faith (or by this conviction) we understand that the worlds were made or prepared by the Word of God."

So, the crucial question is this: Precisely how is Faith the "**conviction**" of things unseen, namely, that God created the worlds by His Word? And I take my clue from the only other place in the New Testament where God's invisible Attributes are said to be "**clearly seen**" by Man, namely, **Romans 1:20**- so let's read that verse together:

For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes, His eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly seen, being understood through what has been made, so that they are without excuse.

Now what is interesting is that the word "understood" that Paul used here in **Romans 1:20** is the very *same* word that the writer of **Hebrews** used in **Hebrews 11:3**:

By Faith we understand that the worlds were prepared by the Word of God.

So there in **Romans 1:20** it says that,

"We *understand* the invisible Attributes of God by what has been made."

And here in **Hebrews 11:3** it says that,

"We *understand* the invisible Word of God behind Creation- by Faith."

So, **Romans 1:20** *seems* to say that the "Conviction" that Faith gives us- that God did indeed make the Universe- is the very things themselves that have been made. In other words- the "Conviction" that things have obviously been made clearly points to the indisputable fact that there *must* be a Maker. And so, **Hebrews 11:3** *seems* to say that the "Conviction" that God made the Universe- is what Faith is.

Now think about that for just a moment. What should we conclude from this? Well, here's what I conclude from all this. Faith - at least in part - is the spiritual "seeing" or the spiritual "perceiving" of the Fingerprints of God on the things that God has made. So, the Fingerprints of God on the things that God has Created- the order of the Universe; the beauty of Creation; the vastness and greatness of Creation; the undeniable complexity of Creation (the "irreducible complexity" (as Michael Behe says, in his book, *Darwin's Black Box*) – all of those things are the "conviction" that God did indeed make the worlds.

But does that then mean that our spiritual "seeing" or our spiritual "perceiving" of those Fingerprints is a kind of "conviction". Yes exactly. Because it's just the other side of the coin.

In other words- if you ask me, "*How do you know that Focus on the Family has a headquarters located in Colorado Springs,*" I could say- "*Well I just believe it is*" and leave it at that. But I *won't* say that. What I *will* say is "*I believe that because I saw it myself when Rhonda and I went there a few years ago*". So, my "seeing" is the "Conviction" that it is there.

And I think that is the way that Faith is the "Conviction" of things that are not seen. So, for example, we all look at the very same Fingerprints of God. And some people are blessed to "see"; and believe- while others do not see; and they do not believe. And those who do see have the Conviction- or the Testimony- in themselves. But how can that be?

Here is an analogy at the physical level. A few years ago, one of the fads going around America was hidden 3-D images. These are pieces of art that, on one level, are one thing, but at another level are something quite different. At first glance all you see is the surface presentation. But if you let your eyes focus more deeply, or more distantly, you may see a train or a boxing kangaroo or a globe not only appearing, but actually standing up off from the page.

Now some people stare at these pages for several minutes and see absolutely nothing but color and chaos. But others almost immediately see the head of Beethoven or a lamb. So, if

someone asks, "How do you know a lamb is there?" the answer is, "**Because I see it.**" So, your *seeing* is the conviction. They may not see what you see- but that won't change anything in your mind- because you *do* see.

Now this is what it is like for some to look at God's Creation. Some, like the poor pathetic atheists can stare at a mountain or a galaxy or the eyes of a child their entire life- time and yet see absolutely nothing but random accidents and evolution.

But others, who may very well not be as intellectually astute as the atheist, have a much deeper "view" and when they look at Creation- they "see" God's Fingerprints come into clear focus. And by "seeing" God's Fingerprints- these people know without any doubt at all- that God Almighty created all things.

But just what is the conviction that these people can offer? Nothing other than they can see it. It is as clear to them as the nose on their face and no one can talk them out of it. Why? Because they actually see it- they perceive it- God has graciously shown it to them and the seeing of it is the conviction. That is what the writer of **Hebrews** is talking about here.

And this tells us that Faith or the ability to believe; the Assurance of things hoped for; and the Conviction of things NOT seen- is a wondrous Gift of God. Now, at this point, some might ask, "*But should that really be called, 'Faith?'*" Didn't Paul say in **2 Corinthians 5:7**:

For we walk by faith and not by sight?

So, if what Paul said is true- then how can Faith be "sight"? Well, this is an example of how we can get off- base very fast- unless we put the Scriptures into their proper context. What the Apostle Paul meant when he wrote this in **2 Corinthians 5** is that Christ is not present *physically* on earth for us to see with our *physical* eyes- but is in Heaven. That is the context of what Paul meant when he wrote that particular verse. Paul did not mean that there is never any spiritual perception of God's Reality- because there is all the time. But Paul also didn't mean that we should never see things.

So, when the writer says in **Hebrews 11:1**:

Faith is the conviction of things not seen.

And then the writer illustrates what he meant by that in verse 3 when he says that, we understand through Faith that God created the world.

He is trying to teach us that Faith is NOT simply a blind and uninformed responding Act of the soul- but true Faith is a "grasping" or a "perceiving" or an "understanding" Act. The writer of **Hebrews** is telling us here that Faith is a spiritual Act that can actually "see" the Fingerprints of God.

Now this does not mean that we can "believe" things into existence or "speak" things into existence as some cults teach. And this also does not mean that we can actually *cause* things to be true- simply because we believe them strongly enough- so that through our belief- things are actually created or things come into existence. No, not at all- that is a *perversion* of Faith. That would be us trying to stand in the place of God and is blasphemy.

We need to know, dear friends, and with all the false Teaching that is out there today trying to deify Man- we all need to be reminded that God alone is the Creator. And God alone has the Power and the Authority to create things that are seen out of nothing. We humans are a *part* of God's glorious Creation. And that fact makes us to be the *created*- NOT the Creator.

We don't create *anything*. We have NOT been given that kind of Power or that kind of Authority- even after we are saved. We do not have the Ability to originate Life; or originate Healing; or originate Salvation; or originate financial Prosperity; or originate an end to Disease or Poverty or Injustice. Only God originates those things in His Capacity as the sovereign Lord and Creator.

God has never authorized anyone to try to "build up their Faith" to the point where we become "God" in the sense that we can now order Creation around; or cause things to appear out of nothing; or cause things to be true that were not true. That kind of Divine Power and that kind of Divine Authority rests only with the three Persons of the Godhead.

Now it is true that we are commanded to be "like" Jesus- but only in the sense that we are to be gentle and kind and holy and loving and forgiving; and that we struggle against Sin; and against the lusts of our flesh; and against temptation; and against the ways of the pagan world- so that we may obey and follow God's Word and be found faithful.

But we are not to be "like" Jesus in the sense that we are now Deity- and as Deity we can now command the Universe; and create healing; and call things into existence by the "power of our spoken word". That is ungodly blasphemy for anyone to say or to teach that- because only God can do that. That is not Faith, dear friends, that is not an example of us rising up in our most holy Faith and "taking charge" over the devil. No, that kind of stuff is nothing more than us trying to sit in God's Throne and be God. And the first person who ever taught that- was the serpent back in the Garden.

And the fact that you can hear that very Theology taught today on what is supposed to be Christian TV or radio- is testimony of how far we have fallen; and how far removed from biblical Christianity we have gone. And it is proof that the ancient Heresies, that the Christian Church confronted and denounced hundreds of years ago, are making a huge comeback in our day to fill the void- because, to a large degree, God's people no longer know God's Word.

Authentic biblical Faith is the assurance of things hoped for and the conviction of things not seen. For example- **Psalms 19:1** says:

The heavens are telling of the glory of God; And their expanse is declaring the work of His hands.

So, you see, beloved, real Faith; true Faith; authentic Faith, is based on real and authentic Truth- not fantasy; and not superstition; and not psyching ourselves up so we can talk ourselves into believing something that isn't true. No, real Faith looks deeply at the world that God has made - and it looks right *through* Creation- so to speak - and by the Grace of God- true biblical Faith actually "sees" and "perceives" and "understands" the Glory of God as standing forth from all of Creation like the hidden image in those 3-D drawings.

Now that leaves us just a few minutes to focus on the *other* part of the definition of faith in verse 1:

Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for.

Now this part of **Hebrews 11:1** may well mean nothing more than that Faith is a deep Confidence that the Promises of God will come true so that we can bank on them. And that would be enough to free us from the Fears; and the Greed; and the Worldliness that block the flow of this radical, risk-taking, sacrificial Love. Because if we have a strong Conviction that God will care for us; and bring us to Glory; and fulfill all His Promises to us forever- then we will be free from self-Indulgence; and free to serve God and others. And if that is all that the writer of **Hebrews** was trying to say here in the first part of verse 1- then that would certainly be enough.

But I really believe that this part of **Hebrews 11:1** means much more than that. The Greek word that was translated here as, "Conviction" can mean "Nature" or "Assurance" or "Reality" or "Essence" in other places. For example, in **Hebrews 1:3**, this very *same* word was translated as Jesus being:

... the exact representation of His (God's) nature.

And if *that* is what the writer meant here in **Hebrews 11:1**- then how should we respond to that? What could the "Assurance" or the "Nature" of **things hoped for** mean?

Well, it *could* mean that Faith actually *apprehends* the Goodness and the Sweetness of what God Promises to us so clearly; and so powerfully that this Goodness and this Sweetness are substantially present in Faith. In other words, true, genuine, biblical Faith grasps – or it literally “lays hold of” - God's Preciousness so firmly- that in the Faith itself there is the Assurance of that Goodness and that Sweetness that has been promised to us.

In other words, Faith itself doesn't *create* what we hope for - that would be a mere mind game. No, Faith is a spiritual “apprehending” or a spiritual “perceiving” or a spiritual “tasting” or a spiritual “sensing” of the Beauty and the Sweetness and the Preciousness and the Goodness and the Majesty of what God promises - *especially* His Own Fellowship, and the enjoyment of His Own Presence.

You see, brothers and sisters, Faith does not just feel confident that all of this is coming someday down the road. True Faith has actually “laid hold of”; and “perceived”; and “tasted” that all of this is real. And this means that inherent inside the DNA of real and true Faith is the “Assurance” or the “Nature” of what is hoped for. In other words, Faith's enjoyment of the Promise of God is a kind of substantial “down payment” of the Reality that is sure to come.

And this is what happens when the Gospel is preached rightly, fully, and fearlessly. It is what is happening right now for many of you listening to this Teaching. The Word of God is spoken –it is broken open like sweet bread and poured out like refreshing water. And the spiritual taste of your heart is awakened, and you know that there is more here than the mere opinion of a foolish man.

So, in summary then, true and real and genuine Faith is a kind of spiritual “tasting” of what God has promised so that we feel a deep, substantial Assurance of things hoped for; and real and true and genuine Faith is a kind of spiritual “seeing” of the invisible Fingerprints of God in the things that He has made.

And by the one- we know God's Power and Wisdom to *make* us; and by the other- we know God's Goodness and Grace to *save* us.

So, I join with King David and agree with **Psalm 34:8** and say to you today:

O taste and see that the Lord is good; How blessed is the man who takes refuge in Him!

Now I began by asking why this Chapter (**Hebrews 11**) is in the Bible; and what this particular Chapter has to do with our lives today. And the Answer that I gave you was that **Hebrews 11** is in the Bible to help us become the kind of people that the writer described six verses earlier in **Hebrews 10:34** when he said:

For you showed sympathy to the prisoners and accepted joyfully the seizure of your property, knowing that you have for yourselves a better possession and a lasting one.

Now look closely at what this verse says because I truly believe that **Hebrews 10:34** is one of the greatest verses in the entire Bible- because this verse explains in great detail what real Christian Faith is all about. These people who were in this small little Church in Asia Minor in the first century were Christians who "**accepted joyfully the seizure (or the confiscation) of your property**" in the Service of Jesus and in the Cause of radical and selfless Love.

In other words- these people were radically free from the love of this present world; and the material possessions of this world; and the values that drive most of what passes for success in America. They were free from this bondage because **Hebrews 10:34** says that they knew, "**that you have for yourselves a better possession and a lasting one.**" And that's where Chapter 11 picks up. **Hebrews 11:1** says:

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

In other words, the "knowledge" of **Hebrews 10:34** ("they knew they had a better Possession and a lasting one") is now called, "Faith." And so, in this Chapter- the writer gives us an entire Chapter of real- life examples of this radicalizing Faith that was alive and vibrant and obvious in the lives of the people of that Church.

So, the main point of the 11th Chapter of **Hebrews** is to flesh out and demonstrate more real live accounts of Faith- so that by hearing and by believing these accounts- we would do two things:

1. We would imitate the Faith that these people had
2. We would inherit the Promises of God.

Now keep in mind that this is not the first time that this writer called these people and us to both imitate and inherit something. Way back in **Hebrews 6**- the writer of this Epistle described the very *same* pattern of imitation and inheritance. Turn and read with me **Hebrews 6:11&12**:

**11 And we desire that each one of you show the same diligence so as to realize the full assurance of hope until the end,
12 so that you will not be sluggish, but imitators of those who through faith and patience inherit the promises.**

Now did you see here that the writer says that he desires that every single person who serves Jesus Christ will show the very *same* Diligence to what?- the full assurance of Hope.

How long? “Until the end.” So, firm; steadfast; unmovable; without being lukewarm; without falling away; all the way unto the very end. And then look at verse 12- so that we will not be sluggish or lazy or slothful and so that we won't neglect so great a Salvation but that we will be followers of those people who, “through faith and patience” actually inherited the Promises of God!

So, the writer doesn't want us to follow those people who open their Bibles on Sunday and then live just like the lost pagan world all week long. No, he wants us to follow or imitate those people who through Faith and Patience, actually got what they believed in; they actually received Heaven- they made it; they actually walk on streets of gold right now. These are the people that the writer wants us to imitate.

So, I ask you today? Who do you imitate? Who do you follow? Whose example do you pattern your life after? Some movie star? Some sports star? Some music star? Some Politician? Who do you know that has lived such a life of radical, selfless Love- who was genuinely willing to lose everything with Joy? Someone, whose life is worthy that you want to imitate them?

And I say to you that this is the main point of **Hebrews 11**. This is why this Chapter is in the Bible- to give all of us more examples of "those who through faith and patience inherit the promises" so that we can imitate *their* Faith; so we can walk like they walked; so we may hope like they hoped. So, we can believe like they believed. And so, we could do what they did; and live our lives- like those people lived their lives- so that we may join them in the very same eternal Inheritance.

And if you are wondering whether you should only look at Old Testament saints in this way for encouragement and imitation, **Hebrews 13:7** says no, you should also look at those who taught you the Word of God and be inspired by *their* faith too. **Hebrews 13:7** says:

Remember those who led you, who spoke the word of God to you; and considering the result of their conduct, imitate their faith.

So, this is a real big issue here in the book of **Hebrews**. So, I beg you- don't let Hollywood or Madison Avenue or Wall Street or the worldly music Industry provide heroes for you. Get some godly heroes who actually serve God- and follow them- imitate their Faith. Begin to investigate and read and study Church History. Find out about people who rejoiced as they died; people who sang hymns as they burned; people who gave God glory for the privilege of dying for Jesus Christ- without complaining and murmuring. And go out and find people today who are so filled with joy and laughter and peace and love that they run from Sin; they abstain from the very appearance of Evil; they would rather die than hurt God's heart.

Read a biography about some great Missionary- rather than some self- absorbed prima donna. Do research about some great Christian businessmen. Get to know some great women- who poured their lives into their husbands and their children and their Church and their community for the sake of Christ. Come to know and understand their Faith; become familiar with their Testimony; get acquainted with their love of life in Jesus Christ and their passion for Truth; and their desire to love God above all else. That's the point of **Hebrews 11**.

Now we could take **Hebrews 10:35&36** and say that this passage expresses what is at stake as we read Chapter 11. Because in those two verses- the writer pleads with us by saying:

35 Therefore, do not throw away your confidence, which has a great reward.

36 For you have need of endurance, so that when you have done the will of God, you may receive what was promised.

I ask you to notice the three-step pattern that the writer shows us here:

1. Enduring Confidence in God
2. Doing the Will of God in the Power of that Confidence
3. Receiving what is Promised

So, what I feel compelled to stress to you as we take another step in our examination of what Faith is- the great Need that we have for our Endurance or Patience, as verse 36 says: "**You have need of endurance**"- which empowers us to endure with Joy and Confidence- whatever confronts us - until we see the Promise of God shining through.

A few years ago- I was on the phone with a brother pastor up in Charlotte, North Carolina. And this man was at the Christian and Missionary Alliance annual meeting. My friend was one of the speakers, and we had a chance for a brief conversation. We talked about the perils of doctrinal weakness spreading in an evangelicalism that defines itself increasingly in terms of methods and relationships rather than by Divine Truth.

And at one point in the conversation, he said something very crucial, and then later repeated it in his message to the Alliance. He said that many people in the modern Church don't realize how vulnerable and how perilous the life of Faith really is.

And what he meant was that we dare not take for granted the faithfulness of our Churches or our denominations or our schools or our families - or even of our own hearts, as if vigilance and conscious Endurance were not continually necessary. Because without earnest attention to Truth and Faith- everything else decays- including our own personal walk with God.

So, with renewed concern for my own Faith, and the Faith of our Church and the Faith of your soul and your family I say to you in the words of **Hebrews 10:36**, "**We have need of this endurance.**" Oh, how clearly I saw this great need recently when I attended the wake of a Pastor, who had suddenly contracted lung cancer and was dead in two weeks. How I see this need when I talk to people on the telephone or in my office- sometimes with tears- who have lost their Joy; and who have lost their Hope; and their Passion; and who really don't know if they can press on in the Ministry. Yes, my friends, the issue of patient Endurance, and Perseverance for the long haul, and staying alive, and thriving and being renewed day after day, and finding the Strength to finish the Race - this is a huge issue for all of us. And there is no resting on past experiences. There is no casual coasting. Because today's zeal can easily become tomorrow's doubt and boredom. And today's sense of spiritual numbness and agony can become tomorrow's ecstasy and power.

And so, that is why our good God gave us **Hebrews 11**. It is in *this* Chapter, that we are given example after example of true abiding and enduring Faith in the lives of real human beings so that we will be able to actually do what **Hebrews 6:12** says to us and that we will be, "**imitators (or followers) of those who through faith and patience (longsuffering, endurance) inherit the promises.**"

Now to make the connection between our previous text and today's, you may remember that I did not say a word about **Hebrews 11:2** in the previous section of our Study. And that's because I was saving it for today. Because verse 2 makes a perfect bridge to today's text. So, let's read **Hebrews 11: 1&2** again:

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

2 For by it the men of old gained approval.

Now by reading these two verses- we see that true genuine and biblical Faith is two things, as verse one says.

1. It's being sure of God's Promises - that they are worth putting our hope in ("**the assurance of things hoped for**").
2. It's being sure that the invisible God and His Hand in Creation do in fact exist ("**the conviction of things not seen**") which we saw illustrated in verse 3.

... and once again, I want to remind you that this kind of Faith is a Gift from God.

And then the writer said this in verse 2:

For by it the men of old gained approval.

In other words, the writer is saying, *"We see this because it's played out in the lives of the Old Testament saints: **"For by it (=by this kind of Faith) the men of old- the men of old gained approval or in other words, by this Faith the men of old pleased God or in other words they brought God the Glory that He deserves).**"*

So, the lives of the Old Testament saints are portraits for us- they are very vivid and colorful illustrations of this kind of Faith. Now keep in mind that these people don't *prove* that Faith is what verse 1 says it is- no, they simply *illustrate* it. In fact, the writer doesn't even try to prove that this is what Faith is at all. No, the writer sees Faith as one of the most basic Assumptions of the nature of Reality. And his whole interpretation of the Old Testament hangs on this. Let me show you what I mean by that.

The first two Old Testament illustrations that the writer gives of the truth of verse 2 (that the men of old gained God's approval by Faith) are Abel, the second son of Adam and Eve, and Enoch, the seventh generation after Adam, mentioned in **Genesis 5**. And he said this in verse 4:

By faith Abel offered to God a better sacrifice than Cain, through which he obtained the testimony that he was righteous, God testifying about his gifts, and through faith, though he is dead, he still speaks.

Now this verse and those that come after are usually used to describe the great and mighty Exploits that these men of old did. And the usual purpose of preaching from **Hebrews 11** is to excite the Church so that we will copy what they did. But that purpose of preaching completely misses the entire point that the writer is telling us here. And the reason that I know that to be true is by going back to the Greek- the language that the writer actually wrote this Epistle in and looking at what this man actually said. The writer is not talking about what all these men did for God in this Chapter- no, the writer is talking about what God did for all these men. This Chapter is not about the great exploits of these men- this Chapter is about the greatness of God in giving these men the kind of selfless, sacrificing Faith that allowed them the ability to believe and trust God for Salvation.

You see, the Faith that these men demonstrated in this Chapter is the evidence; or the proof of that kind of Faith and Love that the writer told us about way back in **Hebrews 10:34**. So go with me as we uncover just what the writer is talking about in this Chapter.

First of all- you need to know that the very same Greek word that is used in verse 2 to say “approval” is the same word used here in verse 4 to say the word, “witness” and the word, “testifying”.

By faith Abel offered to God a better sacrifice than Cain, through which he obtained the testimony that he was righteous, (there's God's approval- Abel “obtained the testimony”- the word here is the very same word as “approval” in verse 2), God testifying (the word, “testifying” here is also the very same word again) about his gifts: and through faith- (by the good report or the right standing that Able obtained with God through Faith) though [Abel] is dead, he still speaks.

So, what the writer focuses on with Abel is that God approved Abel’s offering. And in that approval- God counted Abel as being “Righteous” or “Just”. Now please listen to this because this is very important.

The writer tells us very clearly here that the key to Abel being approved by God to the point that God counted Abel as being Righteous- was that Abel made his offering “by Faith” and not through the action of his offering. So, Abel was not accepted by God because he gave an Offering- but because he trusted in God by Faith. So, you see, beloved, this Faith that the writer of **Hebrews** describes here is not just the Faith to be healed; or the Faith to get more of this world’s goods.

Now this is not the kind of Faith that we trust in- when we step on the brake pedal. We didn’t see who made the car, but we believe; we trust; we hope- that when we mash the brake pedal with our foot- the car will stop. That is an earthly, human initiated kind of Faith. But that kind of Faith will never forgive a single Sin or save a single soul.

The kind of Faith that made Abel acceptable to God- is a supernatural “saving Faith”- the kind of miraculous Faith that does not originate from ourselves. The Bible teaches that this kind of Faith is a gift of God. And this Gift of Faith allows wretched, fallen sinners to trust in the living God for Salvation.

So, you can see that it is not *what* we "do" that matters so much to God- but rather, *how and why we do what we do*. So, the question for us today is this:

Do our actions accurately express "**the conviction of things hoped for**"?

Now in verse 5, the writer gives Enoch as another example of the Principle of verse 2 (that the men of old gained God’s approval by Faith) - so let’s read verse 5 together:

By faith Enoch was taken up so that he would not see death; AND HE WAS NOT FOUND BECAUSE GOD TOOK HIM UP; for he obtained the witness that before his being taken up he was pleasing to God.

So, before Enoch was taken up into Heaven- Enoch had obtained the witness; in other words, he had gained approval through Faith- using the language from verse 2.

But how did Enoch obtain this “witness” or how did he gain approval”? Enoch obtained this right standing with God the very same way that all the men of old gained approval- by and through this wondrous Gift of Faith- and NOT by something that they did for themselves. So, what the writer is telling us here is that way before Enoch was ever taken into Heaven- Enoch was justified by Faith.

Now what will help us in our journey through **Hebrews** is to remember that this Book was not originally written to Gentile believers. This Epistle was written to Jewish people who fully understood the Law and who, up until the writing of this Book, were all trying very hard to keep the Law so that they could earn God’s Favor.

So, the writer is telling these Jews that God’s Salvation was never obtained by anyone through human effort or through human actions- not even under the Old Covenant. But Salvation- from the very beginning- was *always* obtained by everyone the very same way- by Grace alone through Faith alone.

And then the writer goes about to prove to these Jewish people how that all of their Old Testament heroes that they had been taught about all their lives- were all made righteous; they all gained approval; they all had this holy witness; they were all saved and justified and pleased God- not by what *they* did- but by this marvelous Faith that is the assurance of things hoped for and the conviction of things not seen!

So, the writer says that BEFORE he was taken up into Heaven- Enoch was “pleasing to God.” Or in other words, Enoch was made to be pleasing in God’s sight by this Gift of Faith.

Now two times in **Genesis 5** (verses 22 and 24) Moses says that Enoch "**walked with God.**" And this is why the writer of **Hebrews** says here that Enoch pleased God. So, the writer makes his point here that "by faith" Enoch was blessed by God with translation into Heaven.

Now the writer is fully aware of the problem he has created by saying this. He has chosen two Old Testament saints to illustrate his Principle from verse 2 - that the men of old gained approval or in other words they were justified before God by Faith and not by their actions - when in fact- in neither of these Old Testament stories is the word, “Faith” ever actually mentioned.

But this is not a slip-up. The writer knows exactly what he is doing. And if we are willing to follow him today- we will see just how profound his insight really is.

The writer is not arguing here about the *nature* of Faith from these Old Testament texts. He is not saying: “*Because I find Faith mentioned in these stories, therefore Faith must be the way they pleased God*”. No, his argument is just the opposite. The writer sees Faith in these stories- not because it is mentioned- but because these men did, in fact, please God. And the writer knows a very simple but profound Law of God that we all need to remember: that there is absolutely no way for sinful human beings to ever please God at all in any way other than by Faith.

All of our human efforts put together as we try to do for God always and in all ways falls short of perfection. Our human actions to try to make ourselves holy and righteous in God’s Sight always come short of God’s one single Standard. So, it isn’t that *some* people please God by what they do and others don’t. No, no one can please God by human initiated actions- because all of our actions are frail and weak and they all fall short of God’s perfect Standard.

And you have to understand this, beloved. No man- not one single human being on earth that is born of woman except the one Man- Jesus Christ- has ever or will ever please God fully by what He does. Everybody else must please God “by Faith”- in Jesus and in His finished Work- or else God is not pleased- AT ALL- no matter how “great” our Works/Deeds might be.

Human beings please God “by Faith”- by trusting in Who Jesus is; and what Jesus has already done for us- or else God is not pleased- AT ALL. And as we trust- (and are saved) we then *respond* in Love to Who Jesus is and what Jesus has already done- with a frail, weak, inconsistent, and imperfect Striving to obey what the Scriptures teach.

And that is why the writer makes his point to his Jewish readers in verse 6. So, let’s read that verse again together:

And 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 seek Him.

Now look closely at verse 6. And as you do- catch the flow of verse 5 again. Verse 5 ends by saying that Enoch, "**obtained the witness that before his being taken up he was pleasing to God**"- which is simply another way of saying that Enoch “**walked with God**” (Genesis 5:24). And then, Hebrews 11:6 picks up this fact of Enoch's pleasing God and argues like this:

"And without faith it is impossible to please Him."

... so, verse 5 and 6 are one single thought and NOT separate thoughts. Verse 6 is *completing* verse 5.

And that is *why* the writer sees Faith in the lives of Abel and Enoch- even though Moses didn’t specifically mention it back in **Genesis**. The Bible says that both of them pleased God – Abel, in his "**better sacrifice**" and Enoch, in his "walking with God." And so, the writer concludes in **Hebrews 11:6** that the Sacrifice of Abel; and the Fellowship that Enoch had with God- *must* have been “by Faith”. Why did he conclude that? Because in verse 6 he said,

"without faith it is impossible to please God."

... and both men did please God.

Now this shows us two very important aspects about the Bible. First of all, this shows us what is called the “*Logic of Scripture*”. **Isaiah 55:8&9** says:

8 “For My thoughts are not your thoughts, Nor are your ways My ways,” declares the Lord.

9 “For as the heavens are higher than the earth, So are My ways higher than your ways And My thoughts than your thoughts.

We must understand, beloved, that human logic is weak, frail, finite, and fallen- even after we are saved. And that is why God gave us the Bible. Our ability to think and ponder and use logic or to reason with something- is *lower* than God’s. But it is also much *different* from God’s. And so, we have to learn God’s Logic; and we have to learn God’s Way of thinking. And the only way to do that- is by learning the “Logic of Scripture”.

So, as you spend time with God in His Word- you learn that God doesn’t see things like we do. So, we must learn *how* God sees things by learning the flow and the pattern and the

reasoning of God's Logic through *how* He does; and *why* He does- through Scripture. So that, we do not commit the Sin of trying to make God fit into our human fallen logic.

And secondly, this Passage also speaks about another area of the Bible in that what the New Testament writers say in the 21 New Testament Epistles- is the *result* of them being filled with the Holy Spirit on the Day of Pentecost. And so, the Revelation from God that the Apostles received- is the *final, full, and completed* Revelation of God to Man. So, we understand what the Old Testament means by looking at the Old Testament- "*through the lens*"- of the New Testament. In other words, what the New Testament Apostles wrote- is the correct interpretation of the Old Testament writings.

So, for example, when the writer of **Hebrews** tells us that Abel and Enoch and all the rest obtained God's Favor "by Faith" and NOT by what they did- we know that this is the missing piece that Moses and the Prophets did not fully understand when they wrote their Revelation in the Old Testament.

Oh, how I pray that you will all respect, and cultivate in your own God-given minds, the "Logic of Scripture". If someone had shown me as a youth that the Bible *reasons* rather than just *asserting*, it would not have taken me till I was much older to begin to discover so many of the riches of God's Word. So, this is basic reasoning. And I would say that an average 8 or 9 year- old child can understand this.

So, there are two statements that the writer makes here based on all that we have learned so far:

Statement #1: "*Without Faith it is impossible to please God*" - or positively, "*Only with Faith will our effort at Obedience be pleasing to God.*"

Statement #2: "Enoch pleased God". So, what's the Conclusion? **Conclusion:** Enoch had Faith. Or: it was "by Faith" that Enoch "walked with God" and was "taken up to Heaven". This is how the writer arrives at the Statement of verse 2:

For by it [faith] the men of old gained [God's] approval.

But we are still not at the bottom of things yet. The Argument is still not resting on the deepest Truth about this Passage. Yes, Enoch pleased God. Yes, without Faith we cannot please God. Yes, Enoch (and Abel), therefore, had Faith, and acted by Faith - illustrating the Principle of verse 2. But where does this premise - this statement - come from: "**without faith it is impossible to please God**"? What's the *basis* for that Claim? What's the Bottom of it? What is the Foundation?

And the writer gives his Answer in the last part of verse 6. First, he makes the claim: "**Without faith it is impossible to please [God].**" Then he gives the Foundation. Here's the Bottom of it all: You can't please God without Faith,

... for (because) he who comes to God must believe that He is and *that* He is a rewarder of those who seek Him.

... so, it is because of this Truth that we know that only "by Faith" can we please God.

So, there are actually two parts to Faith in this verse which shows us *why* it pleases God. And beyond this- the writer doesn't go. He rests his case here. This is the bottom of it all.

First, he says that true genuine Faith believes that God exists. Second, he says that this kind of Faith believes that God is the Rewarder of those who seek Him. And the writer concludes then that because Faith is both of these two things: therefore, "Faith pleases God".

Now ponder this with me for a moment and you will get to know your God more deeply, perhaps, than you have ever known Him. That's why this verse is here; so that we will know God. The writer does not say *why* God is pleased by these two aspects of Faith. He just says that God IS pleased by these two aspects. So, there must be something about the very Nature of God that makes this point obvious. It does not need an Argument or additional Proof. It belongs to the very Essence of what it means to be God- that God should be pleased by these two things. So, let's put them in our own words. God is pleased with us when two things about Him are reflected in our relation to Him:

1. We fully trust/accept/believe/hope that God is Real
2. We fully trust/accept/believe/hope that God is Rewarding.

... and behind these two Assertions about God are two great facts:

1. God exists absolutely. God did not come into being and will never go out of being. He is not *becoming* or *growing* or *changing*. He said in **Exodus 3:14**, "**I am who I am**". That is God's Name. God absolutely is. Therefore, God is pleased when His absolute Existence is known and embraced by us. God is pleased when WHO He is- is reflected in our lives.

2. Behind the Assertion that God is Rewarding is the fact that God is so Full and so completely Self-sufficient that He overflows. Rather than needing our Service- God is like a never-ending Spring of Life and Energy and Joy and Beauty and Goodness and Power. Therefore, it pleases God when we come to Him in a way that affirms this; and delights in it. In other words, God is honored when we come to Him as knowing that He is a Rewarder.

And the writer of **Hebrews** simply asserts here that this is what Faith does. True Faith rises up to God with the complete Confidence that God is. But then Faith also comes with the Confidence that God is a generous Rewarder. So, the writer is not arguing that Faith is this way because he finds it defined in the Old Testament stories. So, he is saying that given the absolute Reality of God's Being and God's Fullness- this is what Faith *has* to be. So, this is the End of his Argument. This is the Bottom of his Reasoning.

Now we could say it like this: what pleases God is that our hearts and minds display God's Being and Beauty; that we display God's Existence and His Excellence; that we display how real God is; and how rewarding He is. And that is what pleases God- because coming to God like that- is what Faith is.

And that brings us back to verse 1. Notice how the two parts of verse 6 correspond to the two parts of verse 1.

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

... and now look again at verse 6:

And 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 seek Him.

So, the "Conviction" of things "not seen" in verse 1 corresponds to Faith's belief that God is; and that He exists in verse 6. And the "Assurance" of things "hoped for" in verse 1 corresponds to Faith's belief that God is the Rewarder of those who seek him in verse 6.

So, true genuine Biblical Faith has at least these two components:

1) The Conviction of those who believe that there is a great unseen God, Who exists absolutely; and Who does not depend on us in the least. And the other is the Assurance that this great unseen God is a God of Love and Bounty and free and sovereign Grace for all who seek Him in Truth.

Now I began this section by saying that in our day- the "life of Faith" is vulnerable and perilous. Schools, denominations, churches, families, and souls are vulnerable to the subtle encroachments of the World and Sin and Error and satan. And that means that vigilance and endurance are crucial for your soul and your family and our church and our Christian schools.

And what we have seen here in **Hebrews** now is that the *nature* of Faith; and the *vitality* of Faith is rooted in what *God* is like- and NOT what *we* are like. So, you don't find out what Christian Faith is- by consulting your own "felt needs". You find out by consulting the Nature of God in the Bible. Therefore, if you would have your Faith to be strong; and your soul to be strong; and your family to be strong; and your church to be strong; and your denomination and schools to be strong; and your nation to be strong- then know your God. And know your God by knowing the Scriptures!

Because the more you know what God is like- the more conformed to His Greatness will be your Faith. You will be more and more assured of things hoped for and more and more convinced of things unseen. And God's Existence and Fullness will be wonderfully displayed in your life.

The Faith of Abraham, Noah, and Sarah.

Now let's open our Bibles and read **Hebrews 11:7-12** together:

7 By faith Noah, being warned *by God* about things not yet seen, in reverence prepared an ark for the salvation of his household, by which he condemned the world, and became an heir of the righteousness which is according to faith.

8 By faith Abraham, when he was called, obeyed by going out to a place which he was to receive for an inheritance; and he went out, not knowing where he was going.

9 By faith he lived as an alien in the land of promise, as in a foreign *land*, dwelling in tents with Isaac and Jacob, fellow heirs of the same promise;

10 for he was looking for the city which has foundations, whose architect and builder is God.

11 By faith even Sarah herself received ability to conceive, even beyond the proper time of life, since she considered Him faithful who had promised.

12 Therefore there was born even of one man, and him as good as dead at that, *as many descendants AS THE STARS OF HEAVEN IN NUMBER, AND INNUMERABLE AS THE SAND WHICH IS BY THE SEASHORE.*

Now here in these six verses- we have four real and living examples of how genuine Faith lives:

1. Noah trusts God; and builds an Ark for the Salvation of his household.
2. Abraham trusts God; and leaves his own homeland for an unknown place that God had promised to him.
3. Abraham trusts God; and lives in tents instead of building a city with permanent foundations.
4. Sarah trusts God; and conceives when she is barren and way past the normal age of childbearing.

Now make sure that you don't slip into a mentality here that is common among modern Christians - namely, the mentality that *assumes* (without even thinking about it) that the Faith spoken of here in these verses has nothing to do with personal Salvation - that this Faith is a kind of "add-on" to basic Christianity - that we were saved by an Act of Faith that is somehow *different* from what's being talked about right here.

In other words, many Christians think today that "Saving Faith" is only a single Act (like asking Jesus into your heart) and that everything else that happens in the Christian life is something "added on" to that Salvation. And it is "added on" for our Benefit or "for the sake of" our Maturity- but that it isn't really relevant to our Salvation. And I'm trying to tell you that this isn't true.

So, I plead with you today to resist the temptation to fall into that kind of mentality. You see, beloved, "Saving Faith"- that God given kind of Faith that allows fallen Man to believe- is not merely a single Act of trusting in Jesus" one time. No, "Saving Faith" trusts in Jesus- so that we will be supernaturally transformed- so that we will *go on* trusting Jesus for the remainder of our lives.

You see, true, genuine "Saving Faith" *always* produces an entire "life of Faith". And that kind of a "life of Faith" is what this entire chapter is trying to teach us. In other words- genuinely saved people don't just "pray a prayer" one time. We don't trust in Jesus- one time. So, the Bible doesn't teach about lost people walking an aisle; or raising their hand; or "going down front" and then they have their ticket punched; and now they're free to go and do and live anyway they choose.

No, the people who do that- are simply deceived into thinking they are saved. Truly born- again souls believe in Jesus- so that they may *go on* believing in Jesus throughout their lives. And you can see that very clearly if you look at the verse that leads into the chapter, **Hebrews 10:39**- so let's read that verse together:

But we are not of those who shrink back to destruction, but of those who have faith to the preserving of the soul.

Do you see what is at stake here? The Bible says here that every single human being in every Church will either shrink back to complete Destruction- or we will press on in Faith to preserve the soul. And the way that the Greek actually phrases this verse is in the sense of believing that is *ongoing*- and *not* a onetime Event.

So, “Saving Faith”- the kind of Faith that the writer illustrates here and in Chapter 11- is all about us *persevering*. It is all about truly born- again souls continuing to believe until we finish our Course in this Life and enter into Heaven.

So, since true “Saving Faith” always promotes Perseverance- that shows us that not all Faith is saving Faith. For example, when you step on the gas pedal of the car- you “believe” and “trust” that the car will go forward. And that is type of Faith. You may not even know anything about a car- but you *believe* that the car will go forward. You believe that if you take medicine you will feel better. And that is a kind of Faith that everybody has- saved or lost.

And this kind or this type of Faith operates in the life of lost people the very same way that “human will” or “choices” or “decisions” operate in the life of lost people- only on a *horizontal* level. In other words, human beings dealing with natural things on an earthly level.

But the Fall of Adam was so radically damaging- that every human born after the Fall- lost their ability and their desire to choose or to exercise Faith on a *vertical* level- toward God or the things of God- unless God supernaturally intervenes on behalf of that individual first. Please look with me at **1Corinthians 2:14** that says:

But a natural man does not accept the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him; and he cannot understand them, because they are spiritually appraised.

So, for example- lost people can exercise their own “will” all day long- but only as long as those choices pertain *horizontally* to this life; and to those things that please themselves; or that advances themselves. But lost people can’t make those kinds of choices about things that are vertical or that are heavenly.

So, for any lost person to suddenly choose to believe in and trust in Jesus; for any lost person to suddenly make a decision to repent and trust in Jesus- takes a sovereign Act of God- moving upon the heart and mind of that lost person first- to give that person both the desire to repent and be saved; and the power to do so- or else he would *never* believe and be saved.

So, in order for any lost person to be saved- requires what is called “Saving Faith” or the “Gift of Faith” that **Ephesians 2:8&9** talks about. So, please read **Ephesians 2:8&9** with me:

8 For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God;

9 not as a result of works, so that no one may boast.

Now this is a very familiar passage that people quote all the time. But I want to take the time here to go deep into this verse and tear it apart and put it back together so we can see what God is really saying.

The Apostle Paul is teaching here that the kind of Faith that saves- does not originate from inside of ourselves. And that means that nobody can simply rub the two sticks of your own free will and your own desires together to produce this kind of Faith. And you can go down as deep as you want to inside the heart and soul of any lost individual- and you will never find this kind of Faith lying there. And that is true because the Bible says right here that this kind of Faith does not originate from any of us. This kind Faith- this Gift of Faith- this Saving Faith must be granted to us; it must be given to us- by a gracious Act of a sovereign God. This kind of Faith

originates from Heaven. And Paul says here that this Saving Faith is a Gift of God. And it is, in fact, a miracle.

So, the Bible teaches that this powerful Saving Faith comes down from God as a merciful Gift to unworthy sinners. And this Faith produces in us the both the Desire to *want* God; and this Saving Faith, that is a Gift from God, also produces in us the Power or the Ability to press onward and upward to Jesus- no matter what the Cost.

And then **Hebrews 10:39** says that those who have received within themselves this savings faith *do not* shrink back to Destruction- but they constantly and continuously press onward and upward always believing; always hoping; always trusting in Jesus- with the very same Faith that saved their souls in the first place. And those who are given this Faith- will keep on believing all the way to Glory.

So, those people who only have an *intellectual* curiosity about Jesus; or those who have some kind of an *emotional* tie to Jesus- will not persevere to the end. They may get all excited about Jesus for a while. And they may make the most noise and create the most enthusiasm for a while. But because what they have- is not true “Saving Faith”- these people will not remain faithful long term. They will not stay true until the end. And they will not *go on* with Jesus. The Bible says that these people will shrink back to eternal Destruction.

But even though those who have been truly born from above may get discouraged at times; and while they may become disillusioned with people; or with Church in general; and even though genuinely saved people may even want to throw their hands up and quit- they don't quit; they don't stop; they don't turn back. In fact, the Bible teaches that they can't ultimately turn away from Jesus- precisely because God will not allow them.

So, the difference between saved people and lost people; or people who are deceived into thinking they are saved- is that truly born- again regenerate people don't quit- they press on; they never stop. In fact, they *can't* stop because the very same Faith that saved these people in the beginning *keeps* them saved by the very Power of Jesus Christ.

But those who simply go to Church but who have not been truly born of God will not continue on through their trials or through their Sufferings- and they will surly faint and shrink back to utter Destruction.

In other words, the Evidence of genuine, authentic “Saving Faith” is not the hype; or the shout; or the jump- it is in the pressing on; the continuing on; the Perseverance. The kind of Heaven- sent supernatural Faith that saves from eternal Destruction- is the same Faith that empowers us to live for Jesus- day by day. And that is what Chapter 11 of **Hebrews** is meant to illustrate.

So, just what does this “Saving Faith” look like? **Hebrews 11:1** defines the Faith that saves and that presses on to preserve the soul as being:

The assurance of things hoped for and the conviction of things not seen.

So, the kind of Faith that saves from Destruction and preserves the soul is “future oriented”. This kind of Faith doesn't simply look back to what God did in the Past- but it mainly looks forward to what God promises to do in the Future. So, this kind of Faith gains a lot of its Confidence from God's past Faithfulness- sure it does- but what it *believes* and *trusts in* and *hopes in*- is mainly the Promises of the Future.

So, this is not an “add-on, or second-stage, or super- duper Faith that seeks to display an open show of Glory. No, this kind of Faith is a “basic, ever-growing, always pressing onward and upward; ordinary; normal *saving* and *keeping* Faith”.

So, let's take our four examples of living “by Faith” - the kind of faithful living that leads *away* from Destruction and into Salvation that we see in **Hebrews 10:39**. And then let's look at four things that are always true of this life of Faith. And in looking at this- let's see if we can do these two things:

1. Let us all listen to what this passage of inspired; God exhaled Scripture teaches us about the life of this kind of supernatural Saving Faith that we are all called to live
2. Apply what it teaches to our own lives and our own circumstances.

Now there are at least four things that are always true about the Life of Faith:

1. There is always a promised Work of God
2. There is first an inner Response to this Faith
3. Based upon the inner Response- there is an External Response
4. The Life of Faith enjoys *some* Reward now- but that immediate Reward is not *all* the Reward and it is not even *most* of the Reward

So, let's take them one at a time as they show up in these Biblical examples.

1. There is Always a Promised Work of God.

God speaks and promises that, at some point in the Future, He will do something wonderful. And what God promised- is the Object of our Faith. We trust God, that what He says will come to pass- and that it will, in fact, happen. And so, we believe that God will do what He said He will do. So, in reality- Faith is simply believing that God is not a liar; and that what He promised- He will do.

I remember speaking to a Muslim Iman several years ago about this very subject. I told this man that I would convert to Islam in a second- if he could show me that Allah would keep his promises. I told him that the Qur'an says that Allah is holy and that I am a sinner. And that is the very same thing that the Bible teaches. But, unlike the Qur'an - the Bible goes on to teach that if I trust in Jesus- then Jesus will save me to the uttermost. That is the Promise of the God of the Bible to all who believe: that if we will put all our Trust in Jesus Christ and in His finished Work- God will save us; and God will keep us saved- all the way to Heaven.

So, I asked this man, who was highly trained in the Qur'an, if I put all my Hope and Trust in Allah- would Allah save me; and then would Allah keep me all the way to Heaven? And, of course, the Iman could *not* tell me, “*Yes!*” Because in Islam- like all false religions- Salvation is not about God keeping His Promises. It is not about God doing *for* us- what we *cannot* do for ourselves. No, to those deceived by Islam or any other false religion- Salvation is all about what Man can do for himself and for God.

So, I asked this man a question. If Allah is not powerful enough to save me in the first place; and if Allah is not strong enough to keep me saved- then why in the world would I ever put my Trust in him? Why should I trust in a god, who cannot keep his promises? And his answer was- that he just stood there in silence.

But I say to you today that the one true living God of the Holy Bible- the Father of Jesus Christ- absolutely *does* keep His Promises. And the one true living God has *proven* Himself to be worthy of my Trust. You see, beloved, I trust God- not because I'm brave; or because I'm somebody special. No, I trust in God because God has proven Himself worthy of my Trust.

And Jesus made many, many Promises. And Jesus stands by every single one of them. And those who put their Trust in Him shall never be ashamed. The God of the Bible does what He says He will do. Let's read **Hebrews 11:7-9**:

7 By faith Noah, being warned *by God* about things not yet seen, in reverence prepared an ark for the salvation of his household, by which he condemned the world, and became an heir of the righteousness which is according to faith.

8 By faith Abraham, when he was called, obeyed by going out to a place which he was to receive for an inheritance; and he went out, not knowing where he was going.

9 By faith he lived as an alien in the land of promise, as in a foreign *land*, dwelling in tents with Isaac and Jacob, fellow heirs of the same promise;

Notice that verse 7 says that Noah was "**warned by God about things not yet seen,**" namely, the Flood that was coming. Verse 8 says that Abraham was "**called**" by God to leave his homeland. Verse 9b says that Abraham and Isaac and Jacob were fellow-heirs of a "**Promise**" - so God had made a Promise about the land that they would inherit it someday, but not yet. Now look again at verse 11:

By faith even Sarah herself received ability to conceive, even beyond the proper time of life, since she considered Him faithful who had promised.

So, we see here that verse 11b says that Sarah regarded Him faithful "**Who had promised.**" You see, God had promised. So, in every case the "Life of Faith" is *sustained* by the Word of God. God has spoken. And Faith comes by hearing and hearing by the Word of Christ. So, this is the starting point: God.

So, God has spoken many promises to us in His Word. For example- God has promised in **Philippians 4:19**:

And my God will supply all your needs according to His riches in glory in Christ Jesus

... and in **Psalm 23:6** God has promised:

I will pursue you with Goodness and Mercy

... and in **Hebrews 13:5&6** God has promised:

I will never leave you or forsake you so that you can say, 'The Lord is my helper, I will not fear, what can man do to me'.

... and in **John 15:5** Jesus – Who is God made flesh- has promised:

If you abide in Me, and My words abide in you- you will bear much fruit

In **Isaiah 40:31** God has promised:

Wait on Me and you will renew your strength; you will mount up with wings like eagles, you will run and not grow weary, you will walk and not faint

In **Luke 12:12** God has promised:

I will give you words that you need to speak

In **James 1:5** God has promised:

I will give you wisdom for every new challenge

In **Isaiah 41:10** God has promised:

I will be with you and strengthen you and help you

In **Psalms 32:8** God has promised:

I will instruct you and teach you in the way which you should go; I will counsel you with My eye upon you

So, all of God's Promises are made on the unalterable Fact of God's complete *inability* to lie. And all of God's Promises are based upon the Fact of God being Almighty- and totally *unable* to do anything that is contrary to His Will. And that has the effect of making every single Promise of God Sure and Certain and Steadfast and Reliable to you and me. And so, Faith latches on to the very Character and Nature of God and thus Faith trusts in God and in the Promises of God.

And God has acted in a very powerful and sovereign Way already in your life to bring you to Himself. And God has spoken Words that have been recorded in 66 Books that give a massive Foundation to your Life of Faith that you live every day.

And in God's Providence- He has seen fit to bring you *this* way- to *this* Church to be a part of *this* Ministry in *this* City; in *this* State; in *this* Nation; at this particular time of your life. So, we all have a great need to know just how this Faith manifests itself in us- right here and right now.

2. The Life of Faith Always Produces an Internal Response First

You see, there is an *outer* Response to this Faith, which we will see in a moment. But the *inner* Response comes *first*. And it is this *inner* Response that is the very *essence* of Faith.

So, the *outer* Response is simply the fruit of the *inner* Response. But without the *inner* Life of Faith- the *outer* Acts are mere human Performances, which Jesus calls, "Hypocrisy" and "White-washed Tombs" in **Matthew 23:27**.

Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you are like whitewashed tombs which on the outside appear beautiful, but inside they are full of dead men's bones and all uncleanness.

Now I want to show you a very good example of the *inner* Response to this holy, “Saving Faith”. **Hebrews 11:7** says that Noah operated in “**reverence**”. Now, operating in “Reverence” means that Noah was operating in this holy Reverence as he built the Ark.

And the Reverence that moved Noah to build the Ark is an example of the *inner* Life of Faith: humbly bowing and trembling with Joy before the awesome Word of God.

Here’s another example of the *inner* Response to this Faith. **Hebrews 11:8** describes Abraham's Faith as “**not knowing where he was going**”. In other words, Abraham’s *inner* Response to this Faith was that he went out- “**not knowing where he was going**” when he set out. In other words, *part* of the *inner* Response of Faith is sometimes Perplexity and Uncertainty about the details about God's Call on our lives.

Here’s another example. **Hebrews 11:10** says that the *reason* that Abraham lived in tents instead of building a permanent city was because he “**was looking for the city which has foundations, whose architect and builder is God.**” So, from this we can see that Faith focuses not on the present Reward and Prosperity, but on God; and what God has already promised to do. That is the basic Reality of true, genuine Faith- it fixes its gaze not on the negative circumstances; or the human risks; that we face right now- but Faith focuses on the Reality that God will build according to His Promises. How tragic that so many people today only see how hard things are right now and they never look ahead to see how wonderful it will be then.

And then finally, **Hebrews 11:11** says that Sarah “**considered Him faithful who had promised.**” Again, God is the focus. So, the *inner* “Life of Faith” is a riveting Focus on God. And Faith sees God as being utterly Faithful; utterly Dependable; and utterly Trustworthy.

So, here is what the “Life of Faith” means for you and me as we come to Christ in our day and in this place. It means a kind of trembling Reverence like Noah had- over the Greatness of God- through the Ministry of corporate Worship in this place. And this is not a simple thing. Because this Ministry focuses on Eternity; and on the Throne of God every day- in every word that we speak; and every action that we make- from this place. So, because that is true- anything that has to do with God so directly and so sacredly- calls for the profoundest Reverence in those who are here.

You see, we all come, like Abraham, with all kinds of Unknowns. Only God knows the Future of this Church and this City and this Ministry and us. So, we *all* come to a Place and to a Ministry where almost all the people are Unknowns; and all the expectations are varied; and the possibilities are endless; and the pitfalls are many; and the “god of this world” is deceitful. And so, we come like Abraham- knowing God's Call- but not knowing the details. And so, it will be with every major Act of Obedience you perform.

But we look not to ourselves in this Uncertainty- we look to the Faithfulness of God; and to the kind of thing that only God can build. Because, after all- the Battle belongs to the Lord. And so, Faith does not focus on all the Unknowns. Faith does not brood over how uncertain things are. Faith lifts up its eyes to a City, Whose Architect and Builder is God. And Faith sings the phrase,

*"Ponder anew what the Almighty can do
If with His Love He befriend thee."*

...and Faith joins with Sarah and considers God to be faithful Who has promised.

3. The *Internal* Response to Faith Always Produces an External Response

But the Life of Faith also involves an *external* Response and not just an *internal* one. So, let's look at some powerful *external* Responses in the lives of these people.

Hebrews 11:7 says that Noah built an Ark. Okay, but *why* did he build the Ark? The Bible says that Noah built the Ark- "by Faith"- because he believed God. So, Noah, first, *internally* responded with godly Reverence. But then he also did something *externally*: he built an Ark. Just imagine the ridicule that Noah must have endured building a boat in the middle of the desert- preaching Righteousness for 120 years- and telling everybody that it was going to rain – when it had never rained before! So, why did he do it? Because Noah believed. Noah had Faith.

Here's another example of an *external* Response. **Hebrews 11:8-10** says that Abraham left a secure family and a home in Ur of the Chaldees- so he could wander like a nomad in the hot desert. Abraham chose to live in tents- rather than in a city- to demonstrate that he was looking for God's Act and God's Timing in his life. So, why didn't he just stay where he was? Because Faith moved him, first *internally*, and then it moved him *externally*. Now it doesn't say this- but I presume that after Sarah judged God to be Faithful- she got the diapers and the crib ready.

You see, dear friends, "Saving Faith" changes the way we live. Our life takes on a dimension that can only be explained by "**the assurance of things hoped for.**"

You see, only God makes sense out of building an Ark in the desert. Only God makes sense of an Immigration to who-knows-where; and living in tents rather than building a city; and preparing for a child you are too old to bear. But that's the way of the "Life of Faith", isn't it? It doesn't make sense without God. But with God, it is utterly reasonable.

So, it is with us today. Some of us have left very secure houses and a successful business to come here. Some of us may have emigrated from many different cities and even states. Some of us have chosen to move here to this city with all of its unique challenges and opportunities. And I fully believe that God will grant to us the spiritual offspring that only God can produce. O, that God may grant the miracle of New Birth the way He granted the miraculous birth of Isaac!

4. The Life of Faith Enjoys some Reward Now- but that Immediate Reward is not ALL the Reward; and it is not even the BEST Reward

We must remember, beloved, that while Noah was physically saved with his family from the Flood- **Hebrews 11:7** says that Noah is only an "heir" of the Righteousness that is by Faith. In other words, Noah was still awaiting the full Blessing of Righteousness when he died.

Abraham found the Promised Land, and prospered immensely during his life- but **Hebrews 11:10** says that he still lived in tents and only saw "by Faith" the "**City Whose Architect and Builder is God**". And Sarah did indeed have her miracle baby. But the countless seed mentioned in **Hebrews 11:12** were far in the future for her.

So, from this we can see that Faith tastes the Blessing of God's Goodness now in this age. But it doesn't taste it *all*. And it doesn't even taste *most* of it- because there is so much more yet to come. And what is to come- is *exponentially* superior to anything that we have seen so far.

And this is the point of **Hebrews 11:39&40** which says:

39 And all these, having gained approval through their faith, did not receive what was promised,

40 because God had provided something better for us, so that apart from us they would not be made perfect.

The best way for us to understand this here in Mississippi is that:

We have a home in Glory Land that outshines the Sun!

So, however Good God has been to you so far; however many prayers God has answered; however sweet God has been to you here- *you ain't seen nothing yet!* What is over there- is so much greater than what is over here- that there is no way to explain it or compare it.

And so, we await the full ingathering of all God's people from all the nations of the world, so that the full Inheritance of God's Kingdom will come together; and God's Plan for us and this earth will be accomplished!

And so, it will be with us and our families as we labor together for God's Glory. We will be blessed in this place. And we will be a Blessing to each other. And we will have a *measure* of Joy. And we will see fruitful Ministry. And we will taste the Salvation of our God. And we will see a *measure* of the Glory of the Lord.

But it will all be, as Paul says, "**through a mirror dimly.**" It will all be partial. Every Joy- will have its limits; Every Fruit- its bruise; Every Relationship- its disappointment; Every Service- its critic; And every Birth and Wedding- its nearby Funeral. All the Good that we will experience now- will pale by comparison to the greater Glory and the greater Joy that we will have when we stand before God on that day.

Hebrews 13:14 takes up the very thought of Abraham's Faith:

For here we do not have a lasting city...

So down here- everything breaks; everything ages; everything spoils; and everything rusts; and everything dies. Only God remains unchanged; and only God remains glorious. But I say to you that God makes all the difference!

So just what is this Faith? Read with me one of the greatest Passages in the Bible- **Hebrews 10:32-34:**

32 But remember the former days, when, after being enlightened, you endured a great conflict of sufferings,

33 partly by being made a public spectacle through reproaches and tribulations, and partly by becoming sharers with those who were so treated.

34 For you showed sympathy to the prisoners and accepted joyfully the seizure of your property, knowing that you have for yourselves a better possession and a lasting one.

So, Faith is being able to endure a "**great conflict of Sufferings**". Faith is being made a gazing stock by Reproaches and Persecutions and of becoming companions of those who are "**so**

treated". Faith is having Compassion and Mercy on those who are in bonds. And Faith is *joyfully* "**accepting the seizure of your Property**"!

Why? How do you say that this is Faith? Because of what verse 34 says. These people did all of this- they were willing to go through all of this- with Joy. Why? How? Because they knew:

... that you have for yourselves a better possession and a lasting one

These people didn't guess or wonder or hope. But because they had the kind of Faith that was both Assurance and Conviction- and because they had the Faith that allowed them to know that what they had in Heaven awaiting them was exponentially greater than anything that they had here on earth- they could go through all that they went through- with Joy! And that is the kind of Faith I *want*, dear friends, because that is the kind of Faith I *need*.

That is the kind of Faith that moves upon a Self- centered people and that moves upon a Self- satisfied Church- first *internally*- and then *externally*. And this selfless Faith *inconveniences* these people to go; and to speak; and to move; and to do; and to leave their Comfort; and leave their Safety; and to leave their Security; and to leave their Possessions; and to be perplexed at times; and to endanger themselves; and risk it all! Why? So, the world may see Jesus! So, the world may hear from Jesus! And so, the world may know and love and follow and obey and value Jesus!

And so, that is what we are about here in this Church: The kind of Faith that allows us to *connect* with God; the Faith that allows us to *know* God; the Faith that allows us to *love* God; and to *follow* God; and the kind of radical Faith that allows us to see God as being *worth it all*; and the Faith that allows us to see the great Value in prizing God above all else; and to actively rejoice in the Supremacy of God in all things- so that God may be worshipped in the manner in which He is entitled to be worshipped; and so that our Joy may be full!

Now as you recall- **Hebrews 11** is a very popular Chapter among us today- because this is the Chapter that describes just what true genuine Faith is; and what it looks like; and what it does in those who have it. And the writer gives us many examples in this Chapter of real people who possessed- not just Faith- but the *gift* of Faith- or what is called "Saving Faith"- which is the *kind* of Faith that we all need in order to be saved.

Now we need to keep in mind that **Hebrews 11** is not a separate Book sitting off by itself. Most of the time when this chapter is read or studied- it is looked at as being separated from the rest of this Book. But that is the wrong way to look at **Hebrews 11**. **Hebrews 11** is the 11th Chapter in a 13 Chapter Book that makes absolutely no sense at all; and will be taken out of context; unless you tie this chapter in with the first 10 chapters that came before it; and the other two chapters that come after it- and then with the rest of the entire Bible.

The descriptions and the testimony and the great exploits of the people of **Hebrews 11** is based upon a small seemingly insignificant Passage found in **Hebrews 10: 32-34**- that I personally believe is one of the *greatest* passages in all the Bible. Because this is the passage that accurately describes just what Biblical Christianity really is- so let's read that passage again:

Heb 10:32-34

32 But remember the former days, when, after being enlightened, you endured a great conflict of sufferings,

33 partly by being made a public spectacle through reproaches and tribulations, and partly by becoming sharers with those who were so treated.

34 For you showed sympathy to the prisoners and accepted joyfully the seizure of your property, knowing that you have for yourselves a better possession and a lasting one.

Now just what kind of Faith is it; what kind of Power is it- that allows people to endure a great “conflict of Sufferings”; and allows them to be made a “public spectacle”- in both Reproaches and Tribulations? What kind of Faith is it that allows people to be willing to associate with those who are being persecuted- without fear? And what kind of Faith is it that allows people to lose all of their earthly possessions- with Joy? So, this is way beyond simply *enduring* Persecution. These people were able to suffer- with Joy!

The people of this small little Church were able to do all of this because of what the end of verse 34 says:

... knowing that you have for yourselves a better possession and a lasting one

These people were able to suffer with Joy because they *knew*- they didn't guess; they didn't wonder; they didn't hope; they *knew* that what they had in Heaven was infinitely better than anything that they had down here. They knew that what God had promised them in Heaven was more certain and more- sure and was more lasting and was more enduring than anything that they could ever have down here- up to and including their own lives. And this Knowledge based in this supernatural Faith empowered these people to not simply *endure* their Suffering- but to go through all of it- with Joy!

Now that is Faith! And this is the kind of Faith that the writer is describing to us here in **Hebrews 11**. So, this is Faith that is way beyond Hope. This is Faith that is both Assurance and Conviction. And now the writer goes through the people of the OT Scriptures- who these Jewish people would have been intimately aware of- the OT heroes who actually possessed this kind of radical dangerous Faith that is able to risk it all and lose it all- with Joy!

Now the words that I am going focus on today are "seek" and "desire." These are the elements of Faith that our writer wants us to grasp today. Another way of understanding what the writer is teaching us here in this Passage- is to see that this Passage is divided into two groups. For example, in verses 13-16 we are looking into the heart of those who live and die “in or by Faith”. And in these verses- we are focusing on the *inner* Experience of Faith, rather than the *outward* Acts that come *from* having Faith. And then, in verses 17-19, we see that *outward* Demonstration as we watch Abraham act out Faith in an incredible demonstration of utter Confidence in the Promises of God against all human odds. Then we see Isaac, Jacob and Joseph at the end of their lives give expression to their Hope in the Promises of God- even in the face of death.

And there is a very powerful Statement about this great Faith that we need to know and keep in mind as we travel through the struggles of this life:

The Promises of God are NOT Mainly for this World

Let's look again at verses 13-16:

13 All these died in faith, without receiving the promises, but having seen them and having welcomed them from a distance, and having confessed that they were strangers and exiles on the earth.

14 For those who say such things make it clear that they are seeking a country of their own.

15 And indeed if they had been thinking of that *country* from which they went out, they would have had opportunity to return.

16 But as it is, they desire a better *country*, that is, a heavenly one. Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God; for He has prepared a city for them.

Now verse 13 says: "**All these died in faith.**" Now the writer has just mentioned Abraham and Sarah, and earlier - in verse 9 - he mentioned Isaac and Jacob. So, now he is saying that all of those whom he has already mentioned- all died in a Way that accords or testifies that all these people absolutely had great Faith and were saved. But how do we know that? Because verse 13 says that these people did *not* receive the Promises that they had believed for in this life. So, even though they *believed for* those Promises- they never actually touched them- during this life. And that means that all these people died "in Faith".

And the Lesson that the writer wants us to get here, right off the bat, is that the Promises of God are NOT mainly for this world. Now some are- absolutely- but not *mainly*. And that is what this writer is teaching us here in the first part of **Hebrews 11:13**: that the majority of all the Promises of God are NOT going to be seen or touched or experienced or apprehended down here.

Most of the Promises of God have nothing to do with this Life- but they are for us- in the next Life. And that is why the Life over there is infinitely more important and infinitely more valuable than this Life down here. And the writer works this out for us.

And in the rest of verse 13- the writer says that the Promises of God are like a great friend or lover coming to meet you. And you see her in the distance; and your heart leaps up; and you greet her in the best way you can from a distance; and then you say to others, "*I am waiting for her to come. That is what I want. This time and this place are incomplete without her. I don't really belong here; I belong with her.*"

So read verse again 13 with me:

All these died in faith, without receiving the promises, but having seen them and having welcomed them from a distance, and having confessed that they were strangers and exiles on the earth.

So, here we can see that the writer wants us to realize that the Patriarchs (Abraham, Isaac and Jacob) were what the Holy Spirit calls "Strangers and Exiles". And so is everyone else, who lives by this Faith. You see, we're not going to be down here very long- 60, 70, 80 years- tops. But we are going to live *eternally* over there.

Now many of us who have been saved for several years remember a whole lot of Preaching and Teaching about believers being "Strangers and Exiles" when we were first saved. But lately- we don't hear about that much anymore. And that is a real tragedy.

You see, as God's people become more oriented to the "here and now"; and as we are constantly being fed a diet of "physical healing"; and "financial prosperity"; and "material blessings" down here; and as we become more and more acclimated about what is going on

“down here” in our Politics; and in our Culture; and with our Health; and our Money; and our Relationships- we begin to lose sight of the fact that as believers- we have been called to be “Strangers and Exiles” on this earth. And that means that we’re not supposed to put down roots here- because we are just “passing through”. We’re not supposed to get entangled with the affairs of this life- because all those things cloud our vision of being over there.

Now the first thing that happens every time I mention this is a cry "*But Brother Blair- look what is going on in our Culture! We need to stop the moral decline of our Nation and we can't afford to just focus on 'over there.'*"

And that is a legitimate Concern- but please hear me out before you turn me off. First of all, I totally agree that as believers we are called to cry out against the Evil in our world. And we are to labor to do what we can to stop Evil from triumphing. That is taught in the Bible. And I believe that. And I endeavor with all my heart to practice that on a daily basis. So, I hope all of you heard me say that.

But we cannot and we must not make that kind of Statement and then stop as though we just solved the Problem- because we didn't. Yes, as individual citizens of the United States- we are supposed to do those things. But we are cautioned over and over in the Holy Bible not to make these things the *primary* Focus of our lives. Because we are more than just citizens of the United States- we are also “Strangers and Exiles”; and we are citizens of *another* Country; and we are looking for a City whose Architect and Builder is God. And that means that this world is not our home- because we are just “passing through”.

And so that is why I say that the *primary* focus of the Church of Jesus Christ is *not* to elect more Republicans into Office. It is *not* to reduce the size and scope of the Federal Government. The primary Focus of the Christian Church is *not* to promote Capitalism; or to affect lower taxes; or campaign for sympathetic Supreme Court Nominees, who will fight for our Cause. That has *never* been the *primary* Focus of the Church.

Our primary Focus is already mandated in the Bible. And that primary Focus is to preach and teach the Gospel to every Creature. It is to know and to study and understand and love and enjoy God- through the Word of God. It is to herald the glorious Gospel to as many people as we can- every day- using every means available to us.

The Church is supposed to defend the Truth; and to cry out against those who would add anything to it; or take anything away from it. We are called to preach and teach the Word of God- *rightly and fully*- in Love- so that men may hear the Good News; believe the Good News; repent; and trust in Jesus- so that all their Sins can be forgiven. And then the terrible and frightening Wrath of God can be averted from them- forever.

That is the primary Focus and Agenda of the Christian Church- not to try to “rescue the lost pagan Culture.” And that means that most of our time; and most of our energy; and most of our money; and most of our prayer time; and the overwhelming majority of our effort and mentality should be invested in that Gospel effort. Because, ultimately, nothing else matters. But we're not finished.

Because after facilitating the Preaching of the Gospel- we are to teach and hold accountable- all those who are already saved- so that they will obey all the things that Jesus said. So, we are to systematically teach the Word of God as it pertains to Science and Art and Music and History and Money and Sex and Marriage and Success and our view of the Origins of Life; and how we view other nations; and cultures- so that God's people may have a “Biblical World View” rather than the “pagan world view” of the lost world.

And if we get through with that- then we are to train young men to be godly Fathers and Husbands. And we are to train young women to be godly Mothers and Wives. We are to facilitate women to escape the godless Feminist lifestyle that permeates our Culture; and to help encourage them to find Peace and Safety and Fulfillment in the arms of a loving and godly man. And we are to facilitate men to escape the tyranny of loving Pleasure and to escape the deceitfulness of Riches and to encourage them to live their lives- sacrificially- to provide and protect and teach and lead their own families.

And if we get through with that- we are to raise our own children in the Fear and the Nurture of the Lord- teaching and learning the Bible at home in daily devotions rather than getting so busy trying to keep up with the Jones' that we are too tired or too busy working to ever influence the fruit of our own bodies.

And if we get through with that- we are to pray and struggle and labor to live our lives in such a way that we stimulate one another to Love and to good Deeds; and to live in such a way that we do not cause unbelievers to blaspheme the Word of God; and to live in such a way that will make unbelieving Jews jealous of what we have in God; and to live in such a way to cause the lost world to ask, "*Show me your God!*"

And only after we get through doing all of those things should we then branch out and try to affect the pagan Culture for Good. So, I am not saying don't do it at all. But I am saying that if you try to reach out to the Culture before you preach the Gospel; or before you teach your own children; or before you affect change in your own home- your Priorities are all messed up- and you are out of balance.

Because the only way that a lasting and permanent change is going to be made in our Culture- is if more people get saved. That is why they act the way they do- they're lost. And that is why they vote the way they vote; and why they promote what they promote- they're not saved. But we have to believe and know that neither Politics nor Government nor Law nor Medicine nor Technology nor Finance can make that kind of change- only Jesus; only Jesus; only Jesus.

So, we may get all upset about what is going on in our Country- and we should. But we need to remind ourselves that nobody gets saved at a political convention- because that is not what Politics is for. Politics and Government was given to us by God. And they are necessary to live effectively in this life. But they do not and they cannot affect Salvation or even a spiritual Transformation. They do not have that kind of Power.

Remember dear friends- the greatest growth and the greatest demonstration of the Power of the Gospel throughout history has been under pagan Governments- that persecuted believers unmercifully. So, if anything is true- living our whole lives in unprecedented Wealth and Prosperity and Peace and Safety- doesn't really do anything except make us fat, dumb, happy, and unproductive.

God does NOT need the United States to succeed in His Plan to save all those He has chosen from before the Foundation of the world. The Church did just fine before the United States was ever begun. Now I hope our nation *does* succeed. I love my country; and I weep over its sins- but the Church is not the same things as the United States. The Church is separate from and superior to the Government of the United States- always has been and always will be. And the Church does not need anything that the Government has to offer in order to do what God told us to do.

So, I think we all need to realize that right here in **Hebrews 11**- we are called to be “Strangers and Exiles”- not political activists. And we are told here that we have a home in Glory Land that outshines the Sun. And so, our focus and our attention needs to be primarily on that.

And we know this is true because, you see, even though Jesus has lived and died and risen again- He has not brought all the Promises of God to us down here. There is *infinitely* more to come to us after we die; and we are in Heaven- than what will be done down here. And so, like these people here in **Hebrews 11**- there are many things that we have been promised by God that we are yet to see and yet to receive.

Now what the coming of Jesus *has* done is to put the foundation of those Promises on a visible, demonstrable footing. For example- **2Corinthians 1:20** says:

For as many as are the promises of God, in Him they are yes; therefore also through Him is our Amen to the glory of God through us.

So, here we see that in Jesus Christ- all of the Promises of God are “*Yes!*” But even though the Promises of God are sure and certain and “*Yes!*” and we can rely on them and put our trust in them- most all of those Promises are *not* manifested down here on this earth. They are *not* manifested during our lifetime. And they will never be manifested while we are in this physical body.

The great and breathtaking Promises of God are mainly going to come to pass in the future- “over there” and not “down here”. And so therefore- in that sense- even though we are in Jesus- we are still “Strangers” and we are still “Exiles”- we are “Sojourners and Pilgrims”- waiting and believing and trusting to see and inhabit a City- Whose Architect and Builder is God. Because this world is not our home- we are just passing through- just like the fathers and like the other Old Testament saints that the writer is talking about here.

Now here is the sequence of “Stranger and Exile” texts. And you need to be able to turn in your Bibles quickly with me to get all of this. Ready? Here goes. Turn to **Genesis 23:4**. In this verse- Abraham pleads with the sons of Heth for a grave for his wife- and he says:

“I am a stranger and a sojourner among you; give me a burial site among you that I may bury my dead out of my sight.”

Now look at **Genesis 47:9**. In this verse- we read that at the end of his life, look what Jacob said to Pharaoh in Egypt,

... “The years of my sojourning are one hundred and thirty; few and unpleasant have been the years of my life, nor have they attained the years that my fathers lived during the days of their sojourning.”

Now turn to **Psalms 39**. In this Psalm- King David looked back over these testimonies and included himself in the lineage of sojourners on the earth. Now look at what David wrote in verse 12:

“Hear my prayer, O Lord, and give ear to my cry; Do not be silent at my tears; For I am a stranger with You, A sojourner like all my fathers.

And over in the New Testament- please turn to **Philippians 3:20**. Here Paul says:

For our citizenship is in heaven, from which also we eagerly wait for a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ;

And then over in **1Peter 2:11**, the Apostle Peter says:

Beloved, I urge you as aliens and strangers to abstain from fleshly lusts which wage war against the soul.

So, the point here is that the life of Faith is the life of an “Exile”; a “Sojourner”; a “Refugee”; and a “Stranger”. The Promises of God are our *real* Home- and we have seen these Promises from afar; and we have greeted them; and we have tasted them; and they have made us restless and uneasy and uncomfortable with what we have down here. They have begun to shape our whole way of seeing and thinking and feeling. And they have colored all our values and all of our goals and all of our desires. And because of that- we have been put out of sync with *this* world because our Treasure does not exist anymore on this earth- our Treasure is in Heaven.

Now look back at **Hebrews 11** at how the writer argues for this life of Faith. Read verse 14 again with me:

For those who say such things make it clear that they are seeking a country of their own.

Now the writer says here that those who speak this way- in other words- those who refer to themselves as being Strangers and Exiles and as Sojourners and Pilgrims- those who do not consider this land to be their home- but who are living their lives with a deep longing to be over there- that those who say such things are actually declaring very plainly that they are seeking another country that cannot be found anywhere on this earth and in this Life.

And there is the key word that I mentioned to you at the beginning of this part of our journey- the word, "seeking." You see, dear friends, a Sojourner or a Pilgrim or a Stranger or an Exile living by Faith in God's Promises is "seeking" another Country. Look what Jesus Himself said about this in **Matthew 6:33**:

But seek first His kingdom and His righteousness, and all these things will be added to you.

So, a genuine Stranger and an Exile- is *not* settling in down here. Why? Because this world is not his home. He knows that he has a home in Glory Land that outshines the sun! And as a result of being a Stranger- he is unwilling to try to fit in with this world; he is unwilling to be conformed to this age. He is "seeking" the One he has greeted from afar. Now let's read **Hebrews 11:15** again:

And indeed if they had been thinking of that *country* from which they went out, they would have had opportunity to return.

Now here in verse 15- the writer argues that if the country the Patriarchs were seeking was on the earth and obtainable by human means- they would have gone after it. But they didn't. Verse 9 says that they lived in tents and refused to go back to Ur of the Chaldees. So, the writer says here:

if they had been thinking of that *country* from which they went out, they would have had opportunity to return.

But they didn't, did they? Well, why not? Well, verse 16 gives us the answer, and it is in this verse that we meet that other great word, "desire." Verse 16 says:

But as it is, they desire a better *country*, that is, a heavenly one. Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God; for He has prepared a city for them.

So, you see, beloved, the life of Faith "seeks" a "country of its own" (verse 14) and this life of Faith "desires" a better country - a heavenly one (verse 16). This is what the writer is focusing on in these verses. He is not focusing here on the *outward acts* of Faith, but the *inward desires* of Faith.

You see, this kind of Faith considers this world and what it has to offer- but then this Faith considers the Promises of God and what they offer - and then this Faith "desires" the one over the other. The Bible says that Faith "seeks" another country. It sees the Promise of God from afar; and it is stunned by what it sees. And so, this Faith greets those Promises; and begins to confess those Promises. And then Faith makes sure that we stay here on earth as a Stranger and Sojourner as long as we are in this life. Now why is that? So, we can be at home in the next life.

And that is what we need to hear today about Faith. Faith sees the Promises that God offers- and Faith "desires" them. Now please dwell on that for a moment, dear friends. There are many people in the modern Church who water down what saving Faith is- by making it nothing more than a mere decision of human will with no change of what one "desires for" or "seeks after." But the point of *this* text is that living and dying by this kind of Faith means having *new* desires and seeking *new* satisfactions that *cannot* be found anywhere on this earth.

Verse 14 says that these people were seeking a different kind of country than this world offered. Verse 16 says that they were desiring something better than what earthly existence, as we know it, could offer them. And the writer says that they all did this- they all desired this; and they all sought after this- as a natural and normal response to having true genuine Faith.

So, as we look at how these people desired and sought after *these* things and *not* the things of this world- we need to remind ourselves that this is how we are to live our lives too.

You see, beloved, the people that this writer portrays for us right here in this passage have been so utterly gripped by God that nothing short of Heaven can satisfy them.

So, what is true Faith? Here is true Faith. Faith is *seeing* the Promises of God from afar; and so, *valuing* those Promises; and putting such a high premium on those Promises- that you experience a massive, radical change of Values- to the point that you honestly and earnestly and joyfully *desire* the Promises of God far above anything that this world has to offer.

Now here is another way to look at this Faith that the writer gives to us in this passage. Faith is a glad greeting of the Promises of God from a distance; and a heart that seeks to know those Promises and that seeks to cherish those Promises and to be so satisfied by those Promises

that a new kind of life emerges out of you- a life that is completely out of sync with this world – a life like the examples that we saw previously:

- A life that builds an ark in the middle of the desert
- A life that causes you to preach Righteousness for 120 years with little or no visible results
- A life that leaves the securities and the safeties of your established home and goes out into a country that you have never been in and builds a tent and lives in a tent when you are ninety years old- even though you already had a nice home back where you came from
- A life that allows you to be willing to lift a knife over your most treasured earthly possession and slay it.

But before we look at that demonstration of this awesome Faith, there is one more wonderful thing to see in verse 16. Notice the amazing "**therefore**" that is in the middle of this verse:

... Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God

Do you see that God is not ashamed! Now that is a very striking phrase. There is nothing quite like it that I know of anywhere else in the entire Bible - connecting shame with God and saying, God *might* be ashamed to do some things- but He is *not* ashamed to do this.

You know, I really want God to be able to say that of me. I want God to be able to say,

"I am *not* ashamed to be called Blair Bradley's God."

Now this is not just some sentimental desire that I have here, no, because if God were to say the opposite, if God said,

"I *am* ashamed to be called Blair Bradley's God,"

... then that would mean that God would not be my God, because God will never do anything that is shameful. So, you can see what is at stake here!

The writer tells us here that God is not ashamed to be called the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. Recall **Exodus 3:6**: at the burning bush, and God says to Moses,

"I am the God of your father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob."

Now why is God not ashamed of this? The writer gives two reasons in verse 16: one in front and one behind. Look closely at verse 16. You see the word "therefore" or "wherefore" at the *beginning* of the statement: "**therefore God is not ashamed . . .**" - which means that the *reason* for God's not being ashamed comes before. And then at the end of verse 16- you see the word "for" - "**for He has prepared a city for them**".

So, what are the two reasons God is not ashamed to be called the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob? The reason at the back is that He has prepared for them a city - a heavenly city of Promise. And the reason at the front is that they have seen that city from afar and they honestly and earnestly *desire* that city. Verse 16 says:

... they desire a better *country*, that is, a heavenly one ...

And because these people *desire* what they have seen from afar- Therefore, God is not ashamed to be called their God. God made the city for them; and now they desire what God has made. And that is why God is not ashamed to be called their God.

Now think about this for a moment. Do you want God to be ashamed or unashamed of being your God? If you want God to be unashamed at being your God- what must you then do? What must you seek after? What must you desire?

And the simple, stunning answer is this: Desire Him. Desire God. Desire the City that He has made for you. Desire the City of God over the city of Man. Desire Heaven over earth. Desire God over everything but God. This is what true genuine Faith does on the *inside*.

Faith desires God and the City that God has made for His people more than it desires anything that this world can give. So, Faith in God means *desiring* God; *craving* God; *hungering and thirsting* after God; It means *enjoying* God more than you enjoy anything or anyone else. It means that you honestly delight yourself- not in what God does; or what God gives you or what God blesses you with- but that you honestly delight yourself in Him as being the sole Prize and Delight of your life.

But think on this a little more. What is the opposite of being ashamed? If God were to state it *positively*- how would He say it?

"I am *not* ashamed to be called your God, rather I am _____ (what?) to be called your God - "I am *proud*; or I am *pleased* to be called your God."

Now why in the world would God be proud to be called the God of someone who desires Him and His City over the city of the world? Because when we honestly and earnestly desire God- we honor God. When you desire someone- you call attention to their worth. Desiring is no great achievement on our part. Nobody brags about getting hungry, especially when you are hungry for the best food in the world. There is no nobility in simply being hungry. So, nobody will brag about desiring God- especially when you consider that God is more desirable than anything else in the universe. So, we can see that desiring God doesn't call attention to *our* value- it calls attention to God's Value. We are the ones who have the need for Safety; and He is the One Who has the City of Heaven.

And what a marvelous City it is! No pollution, no graffiti, no trash, no peeling paint or rotting garages, no dead grass or broken bottles, no harsh street talk, no in-your-face confrontations, no domestic strife or violence, no dangers in the night, no arson or lying or stealing or killing, no vandalism and no ugliness. The City of God will be perfect because God will be in it. He will walk in it and talk in it and will manifest Himself fully in every part of it. All that is good and beautiful and holy and peaceful and true and happy will be in that City because God will be there. Perfect justice will be there and recompense a thousandfold for every pain suffered in obedience to Christ. And it will never deteriorate. In fact, it will shine brighter and brighter as eternity stretches out into unending ages of increasing Joy!

So, when you reach a place where you honestly and earnestly desire this City above everything else on the earth- that is when you honor God- Who, according to verse 10, is the Builder and Maker of that City.

You see, it is only when God is honored that God is pleased and not ashamed to be called your God. So here is the \$64,000 answer- The great battle for Faith does not begin at the level of our *behavior*- true genuine Biblical Faith *begins* at the level of our *desire*. So, the real question- the important question for us today is this: What do you desire? What do you crave after? What are you hungry for?

So, we can see that the kind of Faith that would allow a people to lose everything they owned in this life with joy begins- not by what we do- but by Who or what we desire. But true Faith doesn't stop there. It begins in us to change what we love and what we desire and then it moves outward from our inward desires- and outward to our behavior and our behavior changes to reflect the great work of Faith that God has done to us and in us on the inside.

So, we must take a brief look at the *behavior* of Faith from **Hebrews 11:17-19**:

17 By faith Abraham, when he was tested, offered up Isaac, and he who had received the promises was offering up his only begotten son;

18 *it was he* to whom it was said, "**IN ISAAC YOUR DESCENDANTS SHALL BE CALLED.**"

19 He considered that God is able to raise *people* even from the dead, from which he also received him back as a type.

So, Faith not only *desires* what God promises more than anything, but it also *does* things that can only be explained by the *Assurance* that we have that God will do exactly what He has promised to do in spite of humanly impossible obstacles. So, Faith *desires* the God of the Promises. And then Faith *trusts* the God of the Promises to deliver. And so, Faith acts in ways that are out of sync with a world that does not *desire* God and does not *trust* God.

So, consider what Abraham did – look what he did! Verse 17:

" By faith Abraham, when he was tested, offered up Isaac" -

... that is, Abraham laid Isaac on the altar and was ready to end his life. No why is this astonishing? Because this goes way beyond a father loving a son. And it also goes way beyond that the Ten Commandments, which commands us not to murder. Here's the great impact of this action by Abraham.

God had given Abraham a Promise that Abraham would have many descendants and this very son – God called him Abraham's *only* son- the son of his old age - would be the one through whom the descendants would come. Look at verse 18:

..."IN ISAAC YOUR DESCENDANTS SHALL BE CALLED."

So, if this boy dies- *everything* in our human experience says, the Promise of God will also fail right at that point.

So, here's the test: will Abraham reason his way out of Obedience or will Abraham trust that God will make that which is humanly impossible to come to pass? We find the answer in verse 19:

He considered that God is able to raise *people* even from the dead, from which he also received him back as a type.

Abraham believed God. Abraham accounted that even if he killed his own son that somehow God was able to raise him up from the dead so that the Promise that God had given to Abraham might come to pass- regardless of what it looked like right now. So, this outward “Act of Faith” is based upon the inward Assurance that what God has promised- He is able also to perform

Now apply this to your life. For many of you- Obedience feels like the end of a dream. You feel that if you do what the Word of God or the Spirit of God is calling you to do- it will make you miserable or cost you everything- and that there is simply no way that God could turn all the things going on in your life for Good.

Perhaps the Command or the Call of God you hear just now is to stay married; or to be satisfied that you are single. It may be to stay in that job or leave that job. Perhaps it is to get baptized; or to speak up at your workplace about Jesus; or to refuse to compromise your standards of honesty; or to confront a person who is in sin; or to venture into a new vocation; or to leave everything you own and become a missionary. Perhaps you think that unless you date or marry this lost person- that there will never be another chance to get married. So, as you see things in your limited mind, the prospect of obeying God about this particular issue is not a Joy at all- it is all work; and it is all terrible - it's like the loss of Isaac. You have considered every human angle; you've run the numbers over in your mind and it is simply impossible that it could ever turn out well.

Well, now you know what it was like for Abraham. Now you know why this verse is in the Bible. This story is in the Bible for you. It is in this message today for you. It is at the end of the message so that you will not easily be able to walk away from it.

Please hear me, beloved. I beg you to allow yourself to be confronted with this question today: *“Do you desire God and His Way and His Promises more than anything; and do you believe that He can and that He will honor your Faith and Obedience by being unashamed to call Himself your God, and to use all His Wisdom and Power and Love to turn your path of Obedience into the path of Life and Joy?”*

This is the crisis you face today: So, do you *desire* God? Do you desire His City? Do you *value* God? Will you *trust* Him? The Word of God to you today is this: *“God is Worthy. And God is Able. And they who put their Trust in God will never be ashamed.”*

Looking at the Reward Frees us to Love

Hebrews 11:23-28

23 By faith Moses, when he was born, was hidden for three months by his parents, because they saw he was a beautiful child; and they were not afraid of the king's edict.

24 By faith Moses, when he had grown up, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter,

25 choosing rather to endure ill-treatment with the people of God than to enjoy the passing pleasures of sin,

26 considering the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures of Egypt; for he was looking to the reward.

27 By faith he left Egypt, not fearing the wrath of the king; for he endured, as seeing Him who is unseen.

28 By faith he kept the Passover and the sprinkling of the blood, so that he who destroyed the firstborn would not touch them.

Faith Makes the Difference When we Walk Through Crisis

Now as we look at four more instances of what this radical, inconvenient, being willing to lose everything with joy kind of Faith produces- please keep in mind the definition of Faith from **Hebrews 11:1**:

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

So, each of the four Acts in this Passage (**Hebrews 11:23-28**) is produced by this Faith, that is, by the Assurance of something that is hoped for- namely, God's Promise to be all that the believer needs. So, watch for that. Watch for the way that Hope in God produces a new kind of Behavior (which I think we should call, "Love").

And notice too that these four Acts of Faith cover a period of eighty years from Moses' birth to the time he led the people out of Egypt. And finally notice, as we read, that in these four moments of Moses' life- the Stress is tremendous. Each of them is a "life and death" Situation that would cause you to be knotted up inside and scarcely able to sleep at night- like some of you may be experiencing right now because of various Threats looming in your life. So, watch now what Faith produces.

Hebrews 11:23&24, 27&28

23 By faith Moses, when he was born, was hidden for three months by his parents, because they saw he was a beautiful child; and they were not afraid of the king's edict.

24 By faith Moses, when he had grown up, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter,

27 By faith he left Egypt, not fearing the wrath of the king; for he endured, as seeing Him who is unseen.

28 By faith he kept the Passover and the sprinkling of the blood, so that he who destroyed the firstborn would not touch them.

Now these are four Crisis Points in Moses' life. And the point of these verses is that Faith - the Assurance of things hoped for - makes all the difference at those Points in our lives. Let's look at them and ask God to teach us how to walk through our crises by Faith.

Crisis #1 in Moses' Life - Were his Parents Afraid?

The first has to do with the Faith of Moses' parents when he was born. You recall that the King of Egypt was fearful of the growing number of Jewish males. So, he ordered them to be killed at birth- **Exodus 1:22** says:

Then Pharaoh commanded all his people, saying, "Every son who is born you are to cast into the Nile, and every daughter you are to keep alive."

Notice that there are two Threats in that Edict from the king: one is *explicit*, that all Jewish baby boys are to be killed; the other is *implicit*, that if you disobey this Command and keep a Jewish baby boy alive, you will be disobedient to the King's Law and risk your own life. In other words, parents had two choices:

1. They could kill their sons and save themselves
2. They could try to save their sons and risk their own lives

... but there was no middle way.

Now that's important to see, because **Hebrews 11:23** doesn't make sense if you don't see that. It says,

By faith Moses, when he was born, was hidden for three months by his parents, because they saw he was a beautiful child; and they were not afraid of the king's edict.

Now someone might respond to that and say, *"Of course, they were afraid of the King's Edict; otherwise they would not have been hiding the baby. They would have been showing him off to the neighbors if they weren't afraid of the King's Command that baby boys be killed."*

So just what does verse 23 *mean*, that they hid their baby son "**because . . . they were not afraid of the king's edict**" You would expect the Bible to say something like:

"They hid their son because they *were* afraid,"

... not,

"they hid their son because they were *not* afraid."

And surely that's right: if they had *not* been afraid for their son's life, they would have carried him around in public.

The Answer is that there are two Threats in the king's Edict- not just one. One Threat was against their babies; and one was against the parents who don't kill their babies. The King said, *"If you kill your baby you save your life. But if you don't kill your baby- you will risk losing your own life."*

So, at some point- Moses' parents decided that they were *not* going to drown Moses in the Nile River but hide him. And at that point- they are risking their own lives. In other words, they looked the fear of Death (and perhaps brutal Torture) in the face; they understand it perfectly; they fully realize the risk and then they say:

"We will not give in to Fear. We will not kill our son out of Fear for our own lives. The Fear of our own Death will not control us."

And the point of this verse is this:

That Act of Courage toward their son and against the King, and that Act of Love toward their son- comes from the Faith that we have been talking about. **Hebrews 11:23** says:

By faith Moses, when he was born, was hidden for three months by his parents, because they saw he was a beautiful child; and they were not afraid of the king's edict.

Moses' parent's Faith in God that God was well able to do *something* to rescue them and the child and the Fact that this Faith was more than human Courage or human Belief but was, in reality- Assurance and Conviction- moved them to *disobey* the King's Commandment and save their son.

But how does Faith produce that kind of Courage and Love? The definition from **Hebrews 11:1a** gives the answer.

"Faith is the assurance of things hoped for."

Real, genuine Faith *frees* us for this kind of radical Courage and risk-taking Love because it is the substantive Assurance that what God promises to those who die in the Path of Love is *better* than what the world promises those who shun Risk and save themselves.

More simply, Faith in God's Promises *frees* us from the Fear of Death and makes us brave in the Risks of godly Love.

Human Ingenuity or Faith in God?

There's a minor Point here as well as this main one. It's important for all of us who want our lives to be on the cutting edge where there are Risks and Dangers and great Crises and great Needs. It's a point of Realism and Balance. Notice, Moses' parents risked their lives by *not* killing their baby. But also take Notice: They *did* hide the baby! Now in some people's minds - immature minds with little real-life Experience and out of touch with the complexities of the soul - might say, "*If Moses' parents really had Faith, they would have entrusted the child's Care to God and just walked around the community with their new baby. That would have been real Faith.*"

Now how would you respond to somebody like that? People who say, "*They don't trust God; they're using human ingenuity to protect their baby instead of entrusting him to God*"? Perhaps the best way to respond is simply to tell them to read their Bibles and read them carefully.

Because the Bible says, in **Hebrews 11:23**, that Moses' parents *did* indeed have Faith. But it also says that they hid their baby. That's what the Bible says. So, what God defines as being Faith in His Word- that is what *real* Faith is- NOT some arbitrary Definition that we might make up ourselves. Not killing the baby put their lives at risk and was a great act of both Faith and Love. The Bible says it was. And hiding their baby was an act of human, but God-given, Wisdom (and no less from Faith). And so, to do otherwise would probably have been sinful Presumption- like the idea of Jesus jumping off the roof of the Temple to see if God would catch Him in **Luke 4:9-12**.

So, how should we apply this Truth to ourselves in the 21st Century? One way would be to say that following God's Call to work with AIDS patients is an Act of risk-taking Faith; while wearing rubber gloves during that Treatments is an Act of faithful Wisdom. Or, following God's Call to live in a rough neighborhood is an Act of risk-taking Faith; while and buying deadbolts is an Act of faithful Wisdom. Or, following God's Call to Guinea or Tanzania or Khazakstan or

Uzbekistan with your children is an act of risk-taking Faith; while giving your children Vaccinations and malaria Treatments is probably an Act of faithful Wisdom.

In other words, living by Faith is often perplexing - which is why, I think, Paul prayed incessantly in **Colossians 1:9-11** that his converts would have "spiritual wisdom . . . and bear fruit in every good work"

Which risky, inconvenient, dangerous, inopportune "good Works" we should do will seldom be written in the sky or spoken in a dream. (That is why Paul prays for spiritual Wisdom.) No, these selfless Acts of Love and Kindness will be wrestled into Reality by agonizing Prayer and biblical Saturation and self-Mortification and - above all - Faith, the Assurance of things hoped for.

Radical Confidence in God's Promise to take care of us is the main Key to unlock the Power and Path of this risk-taking Love.

Crisis #3 in Moses' Life - Was Moses Afraid?

Now jump with me over the second act of Faith in **Hebrews 11:24-26** to the third act of faith listed for us in verse 27- so let's read that verse together:

By faith he left Egypt, not fearing the wrath of the king; for he endured, as seeing Him who is unseen.

Now I make this move because what we see here in verse 27, forty years later, is a Crisis that Moses faced- which is a lot like the one his parents faced at his birth. And we will understand it better if we see it in connection with what we saw in verse 23.

According to **Exodus 2:11&12**, Moses began to identify himself with his Jewish kinsmen and to become indignant at their enslavement. One day, he found an Egyptian beating a Jew and Moses intervened and killed the Egyptian. Now he thought this Act had been done secretly, but the next day he discovered the word has gotten around. **Exodus 2:14** says,

... Then Moses was afraid and said, "Surely the matter has become known."

Then the very next verse says,

When Pharaoh heard of this matter, he tried to kill Moses. But Moses fled from the presence of Pharaoh and settled in the land of Midian ...

Now here is a Crisis in Moses' Life just like the one we saw in verse 23. Is Moses afraid when he leaves Egypt or isn't he? Were his parents afraid when they hid their baby or weren't they? **Hebrews 11:23** says that his parents hid their baby because "**they were *not* afraid of the king's edict.**" And here in verse 27 it says,

By faith he [Moses] left Egypt, not fearing the wrath of the king; for he endured, as seeing Him who is unseen.

Yet we saw that Moses' parents were at least afraid enough to hide their baby. And in **Exodus 2:15** we read that Moses was afraid enough that when he heard that his violence was known...

... Moses fled from the presence of Pharaoh and settled in the land of Midian ...

... so, I hope you can see the similarity between these two Crises.

So, did Moses leave Egypt out of fear or didn't he? It's like asking: "*Did his parents hide Moses from Pharaoh out of fear or didn't they?*" And the Answer for his parents is that they *did* fear for the child's Life- but they did NOT act out of fear for *themselves*. They risked their own lives, and they did it by substantive Assurance in God's Promises.

Now it is somewhat different here with Moses- but not completely different. Moses probably did save his own life by leaving Egypt. But was fearful self-Preservation his motive in leaving? When verse 27 says, "**By faith he left Egypt, not fearing the wrath of the king**" did the writer of **Hebrews** forget about **Exodus 2:14** and the fear Moses felt, or is he pointing us to something very crucial and very deep in Moses' heart so that we won't misconstrue **Exodus 2:14**?

The key to understanding this is found in the word "**endured**" in verse 27. So, let's read verse 27 again:

By faith he left Egypt, not fearing the wrath of the king; for he endured, as seeing Him who is unseen.

In other words, it wasn't basically Fear that caused Moses to leave Egypt, it was "Endurance." Endurance? Endurance in what?

The word, "Endurance" implies that you are on a chosen Path of great Difficulty that you are tempted to forsake because things get very difficult- but you don't yield to the Temptation to quit- and you hang in there. You "endure." And the result of your enduring is that you see God's Promise come to pass.

So, what is the writer referring to when he says in verse 27 that Moses "**left Egypt . . . for he endured . . .**"? What Path had Moses chosen that required Endurance to stay on; and even led him out of Egypt for 40 years before he came back to rescue his people? The answer is Crisis #2.

Crisis #2 in Moses' Life - He Endured

Now we can go back and pick up the second Act of Faith that we passed over. So, let's read **Hebrews 11: 24-26** together:

**24 By faith Moses, when he had grown up, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter,
25 choosing rather to endure ill-treatment with the people of God than to enjoy the passing pleasures of sin,
26 considering the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures of Egypt; for he was looking to the reward.**

Now these verses describe a radically dangerous and costly Path that Moses had chosen before he felt threatened by the Pharaoh. Now mark what I just said. I said that these verses

describe a radically dangerous Path that Moses had chosen BEFORE he felt threatened by Pharaoh. What was this Path? Look again at verses 24-26:

24 By faith Moses, when he had grown up, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter,

25 choosing rather [there's the chosen Path] to endure ill-treatment with the people of God than to enjoy the passing pleasures of sin,

26 considering the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures of Egypt; for he was looking to the reward.

Now here the writer of **Hebrews** expresses the dangerous and painful Path that Moses had chosen in two ways:

1. (Verse 25) It is, **“choosing rather to endure ill- treatment with the people of God than to enjoy the passing pleasures of Sin.”**
2. (Verse 26) It is, **“considering the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures of Egypt...”**

Now don't miss this! This Choice that Moses made- was made BEFORE the Threat of Pharaoh. So, the bridges had already been burned between Moses and Egypt before Pharaoh ever threatened him. The Choice had already happened in Moses' heart- not physically- not yet- but *spiritually* and *morally* Moses was completely separated from Egypt; and was fully yielding to his Divine Calling already in his heart. Do you see that?

So, now the only Question was- NOT would he choose rightly- because he had already done that- but the only Question left for Moses was, *“Would he endure?”* Would Moses persevere in this chosen Path of Suffering for the people of God and the Glory of the Messiah; or would he cave in - like so many cave in today to their Egypt - the passing Pleasures of this world?

So, a very important Question that we need to ask and answer is this:

Was Moses' flight from Egypt a capitulation to a self-Serving, fearful, Pursuit of Ease and Comfort and Safety away from the Threats of Pharaoh?

And verse 27 gives us the answer. Verse 27 says, *“No.”* The first part of **Hebrews 11:27** says:

By faith he left Egypt, not fearing the wrath of the king ...

The Bible says here that Fear was NOT Moses' basic mindset. Well then what *was* the mindset of Moses as he fled from Egypt? Look at the very next part of verse 27:

For he endured ...

Endured in what? Moses endured in the very same deep Motive that caused him to choose ill-Treatment with the people of God and Reproach for the Sake of Christ, namely,

... he endured, as seeing Him who is unseen.

In other words, Moses endured, "by Faith." He endured by looking to God's Promise- not Pharaoh's Threat.

And it was this same Faith that was the very same Motive that drove his radical Choices in verses 24-26. And you can see the Power and the Results of this radical kind of Faith in what Moses did in verses 25 & 26:

25 choosing rather to endure ill-treatment with the people of God than to enjoy the passing pleasures of sin,

26 considering the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures of Egypt; for he was looking to the reward.

The Bible says here that Moses chose ill-Treatment with God's people; and he chose the Reproach of Jesus Christ, **"for [because] he was looking to the reward."**

Moses believed God. Moses believed God when things were Good; and Moses believed God when Pharaoh threatened his Life. Moses was looking to the Reward. Moses didn't see the Promises of God as being a "pie in the sky" fantasy- but Moses was looking- NOT merely for the Promises themselves- but notice that Moses was looking TO the Reward. In other words, Moses trusted not only that God was NOT a liar; and not only that God's Promises were true- but Moses trusted in the fact that he personally was going to receive exactly what God had promised him- even though the King of Egypt was trying to kill him at that moment.

So, it was Moses' Trust in the Reality of the Promises of God that gave him both the Desire and the Power to endure. So, the phrase, **"he was looking to the reward."** in verse 26 correlates with the phrase, **"seeing him who is unseen"** in verse 27.

Moses had, "by Faith", burned the bridges in his mind (by **"the Assurance of things hoped for"**), and then, "by Faith", he burned them in his flight (by **"the Conviction of things unseen"**).

Yes, absolutely, Moses experienced Fear when the word spread that he had killed an Egyptian while saving a Jew - just as his parents had experienced that same Fear when they saved their baby boy and risked their own lives.

But what the writer of **Hebrews** is telling us in this Passage is that hiding their baby was *not* an act of fearful, self-Serving Unbelief in Moses' parents. And Moses' leaving Egypt was not an act of fearful, self-Serving Unbelief either.

On the contrary- their Actions were actually an "enduring"- in *spite* of Fear- in the full Obedience of Faith. So, Moses wasn't driven merely or even mainly by Fear. No, Moses looked to the unseen God to work out some Purpose for his people, and forty years later- he would discover what that Purpose was- and he would be back.

Burning our Bridges by Faith

The Bridges were burned between Moses and Egypt well before he was threatened by Pharaoh. They were burned in his heart; and they were burned, "by Faith". And that's what Faith does all through this Chapter. Faith is a "hunger for God" that triumphs over our "hunger for the

pleasures of this world”. And so, Faith unleashes radically God-centered, risk-taking, people-loving Behavior.

The Faith to be Delivered and the Faith to Suffer

Now read **Hebrews 11:29-38**:

29 By faith they passed through the Red Sea as though *they were passing* through dry land; and the Egyptians, when they attempted it, were drowned.

30 By faith the walls of Jericho fell down after they had been encircled for seven days.

31 By faith Rahab the harlot did not perish along with those who were disobedient, after she had welcomed the spies in peace.

32 And what more shall I say? For time will fail me if I tell of Gideon, Barak, Samson, Jephthah, of David and Samuel and the prophets,

33 who by faith conquered kingdoms, performed *acts of righteousness*, obtained promises, shut the mouths of lions,

34 quenched the power of fire, escaped the edge of the sword, from weakness were made strong, became mighty in war, put foreign armies to flight.

35 Women received *back* their dead by resurrection; and others were tortured, not accepting their release, so that they might obtain a better resurrection;

36 and others experienced mockings and scourgings, yes, also chains and imprisonment.

37 They were stoned, they were sawn in two, they were tempted, they were put to death with the sword; they went about in sheepskins, in goatskins, being destitute, afflicted, ill-treated

38 (*men* of whom the world was not worthy), wandering in deserts and mountains and caves and holes in the ground.

Now this is one of the most important sections in the entire 11th Chapter of **Hebrews**. And so, I want to go slowly over this so that we can get everything out of this section of inspired Scripture that the Holy Spirit put into it. Now in addition to this being a very important section of **Hebrews**- it is also highly controversial because it deals with the issues of Suffering and Deliverance.

Now there is a great Division in the modern Church over the Issue of human Suffering and Tragedy. And I really regret that the modern Church is divided over this Issue- because we shouldn't be. As believers and children of God- we should just take what the Bible says; and whether that subject is easy or hard; whether it is simple or profound- we should gratefully and joyfully bow our knees to its Authority and say, "*Yes, Lord*" to what the Bible says.

And if we would all struggle very hard to do that- there wouldn't be any divide about Issues like this. And we would all have harmony; and we would all be on the same page. But sadly, there are many in the modern Church who make a career out of taking verses out of context; and of applying very sloppy exegesis to the Scriptures. And the result is they get a message that God never said; and they trust in something that the Bible didn't declare; and they put their Faith and Hope and Trust in things that never came out of God's Mouth.

And when those things that they trusted in so much don't come to pass- these poor souls get very disillusioned; and they get very discouraged. And many of them go back out into the

world- beaten and broken and defeated- because they think that God failed them- when in reality- God is faithful and cannot lie. But these people were led astray by others, who are either ignorant of Truth themselves; or by those, who know the Truth, and are *purposely* trying to deceive them.

And I have held people like this in my arms. And I have wept with them in my Office- as their lives have become a wreck- because they trusted in something that the Bible didn't really teach. And this has put a great fear in my own heart to be very careful what I say- and to analyze what comes out of my own mouth. And this Fear has driven me to my knees- to beg God to help me- so that I will not lead people astray.

You see, when a person stands up and says, "*Thus says the Lord*" we, who belong to Jesus, need to know that what this person says is true or not. We need to know whether or not God has spoken or if some person with a bright idea has just said whatever is on his mind- because he thinks it's a good idea.

The person, who speaks in God's Name, is purporting to speak on behalf of the Owner and the Creator of the Universe. And they are signing God's Almighty's Name to what they are saying- and that is one thing. But we are now expected to listen to what this person has said- because he has spoken on God's behalf. And we are expected to believe what he has said. But what is even more important- is that we are now supposed to act on what he has said. And yet- at the same time- we are commanded in God's Word to not just take whatever the dog drags in through the front door and run with it. We are *supposed* to "test the spirits" to see if they are of God because the Apostle John says in **1John 4:1** that:

... many false prophets have gone out into the world.

So, not because of anything that I say; and not because of anything that I think- but only because the Apostle John commanded us right here to be careful about this- because evil men are, in fact, out in the world with a mandate from satan to deceive as many people as they can- we simply can't afford to be naïve or simple minded about this and assume that simply because this person looks good; or because he seems to be a nice guy; or because he appears to have an air about him; or because he claims to have heard from God- that any of that is true.

We need to understand that people are not led astray because satan walks up to them with a pitchfork and horns and says, "*What do you think? How about we all just go to hell?*" Nobody would be fooled by that. No, people are deceived because nice sounding and nice looking people speak in God's Name what appears to be God's Word; and because these people hold themselves out to be holy men; and because they have a charismatic personality about themselves that makes it easy for people to follow them.

So, since that is true- we simply *cannot* afford to base the integrity and credibility of what they say on their outward appearance; or their personality. If we do- then we are sitting ducks. And sooner or later, we will be led astray. And that story has been repeated over and over and over again now for 6,000 years.

No, there must be a Standard that we can go by that is Unchangeable; and that is unmovable; and a Standard that does not waver; and a Standard upon which we can place our trust in and on which can depend; that will never ever fail us- so that we can cling to that Standard; and so we can stand on that Standard; and so we can run to that Standard for help- so that we will not be led astray.

And thank God- He has provided us with just such a Standard- one that is true and inerrant and infallible and authoritative and eternal; and one that is reliable; and a Standard that is trustworthy; and a Standard that never ever changes; and that never wavers; and listen to this- a Standard that is the *only* Source; the *only* location; the one single place in the entire earth- that we can find Words that are pure; Words that are perfect; Words that are true and Words that were literally exhaled out of the very Mouth of God Himself. And that one single standard is the 66 Books of the Holy Bible.

So, there are not two places to look. There are not five; there are not seven- there is only one. The Holy Bible- the Scriptures- contain the *entirety* of all that God wanted us to know about a life of godliness. And that is so true- if something isn't in the Bible- then God is silent about it. If it isn't in the Bible- then we can cry and ask and hope and dream and talk to men and angels- but we will never in any way find out one iota more information about that subject than what God has already chosen to reveal.

And if anyone did lay claim to have more information- we would not be able to trust what they said- precisely because we have no way to verify if what they say is true or not until after the fact- but then it is too late.

The Bible was not given to us so we can be in bondage to only so much information, dear friends. The Bible was graciously given to us so we will not be led astray by slick sounding wolves. We can trust the Bible. We can trust every Word in it. We can rely on its Integrity and act on its Commands. We can hope in its Promises; and we can lay down our lives on its Truth because the Bible is perfectly true in both Theology and in History and the names, dates, places and events that it describes happened exactly as it says.

And the Reality is that as accurate and as honest and as truthful as we may be trying to be- we are all flesh. And we are all frail and weak and sinful. And we really don't know much. And even what we do know- we don't know very well. And what we do know well- we won't know for very long.

We must realize, dear friends, that what we think and say is biased. And it is always prejudiced and partial. And whatever we think or say- is motivated by a thousand different motivations - many of which are not even noble at all. And so, we say things all the time that we don't mean to say; and that we wish we hadn't said. And we speak when we should be quiet; and we put things out of context; and we misjudge situations; and we act out of fear and ignorance all the time.

And that is why we must take what *any* human being says- with a grain of salt. And we who preach and teach God's Word must go to great lengths to check our spirit; and to verify what we say; and to make sure that what we *think* God's Word says- is in fact what it actually says. And we must fear and be guarded and be cautious and be humble and be willing to see our mistakes- and to quickly repent when it is proven that something we said isn't true. And we need to do whatever it takes to assure that what we teach is true and in accord with Scripture- and not just popular or exciting.

What you say may or may not always be correct. And what I say may or may not always be correct. And because that is true; and because it has always been true; and because it will always be true- the issue in the Church must *never* be about the person or about personalities. It must never be about somebody's own personal experiences; or their own personal revelations; or their own personal and private interpretations; or their own personal thoughts. All of that put together- no matter how sincere or earnest it might be- is not inspired. It is not infallible; it is not

eternal and therefore it is not reliable. It is very untrustworthy; it is not dependable and it might not even be correct.

So, the issue in the Church- among the saved- must *always* be about Scripture itself: “*What did God say? What came out of His Mouth?*” And all we have to go by- are the actual Words of the Bible themselves. We can't walk up to the Apostle Paul or Moses and ask them what they meant by what they wrote down in a particular verse or passage.

So, we have nothing else to go on except the actual Greek, Hebrew, and Aramaic Words themselves that these men were moved upon by the Holy Spirit to write down. And these Words have a very *specific* meaning to them. These Words were spoken and written down in a very *precise* context. And these Words were addressed to a very *specific* person; for a very *specific* reason. And so, as we deal with Scripture- we must know that nouns are always nouns; and verbs are always verbs; and plural nouns are not singular nouns; and the tense of the verbs matter.

And then we must resist the temptation of trying to take what God said out of context and try to make it mean something that it doesn't mean. So, we need to ask very important questions like, “*Who is doing the talking here? And who is being told to do what? And is this statement an eternal moral Truth that never changes or is this only temporary?*”

And once we go through the effort to find out exactly what God actually said- we then need to struggle to find out what God *meant* by what He said. And, finally, we need to try to find out exactly how we can apply that Divine Truth to our lives in the 21st Century.

Now I fully realize that much of this is not nearly as exciting as having somebody walk up to you and lay their hands on you and say, “*Thus says the Lord*” but this is the only way we are going to understand the Bible correctly, dear friends and not be deceived. And the truth of the matter is that the reason there are so many false teachers out there today making merchandise of the people of God and wrecking so many lives is because we are *not* doing this.

Now the overall message of the Bible is clear- a child can understand it: “*God is holy and we're not. And so, by fully trusting in the Life, Death, and Resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ allows unworthy sinners to pass through God's Judgment on their lives and live with God forever in Heaven.*” So that is very simple and straightforward.

And there are many verses and passages in the Bible that are very simple. And they are easy to read; and easy to learn; and easy to understand. But we cannot escape the fact that there are also very difficult verses and passages in the Bible that are hard to learn; and they are hard to teach. And there are things that are written in Scripture that defy human logic and that run counterintuitive to human reasoning. And yet those verses and those passages are equally as inspired and equally as true as the easy ones. And when you go through a whole Book of the Bible- verse by verse- like I am doing on these broadcasts- these things come up more frequently than if you are just reading random parts of the Bible.

So, if we are going to be honest at all with God- we must deal with both the easy and the hard parts. And we must deal with the very deep and the very simple parts- with equal love and equal passion and equal effort. And that is what I am trying to do here in this passage of **Hebrews 11**.

Now the reason that I am going through all this preliminary information with you before we dive right into the Scripture itself is because this passage deals with a very controversial subject - *especially* in the modern Church. And I will tell you again- this really shouldn't be controversial at all. The Bible is very clear about what it says here. But because of a whole lot of

real bad Teaching; and because of an entire industry that has risen up in the last fifty years that makes a living by twisting the Scriptures- this Issue has become very, very controversial.

And the Issue before us in this passage is whether or not strong vibrant and Biblical Faith will always; and at all times- deliver us out of Trouble; and heal our sick bodies; and deliver us out of Persecution and out of Afflictions. In other words- the Issue before us- is whether or not it is God's Will at times that His own children suffer in this life? Is it God's Will, at times, that His saved people are *not* delivered out of Suffering- even when they have strong and powerful Faith? So, the Issue is this: *“Is God sometimes glorified in, by, and through the Suffering of His people?”*

Another way to ask the Question is: *“What is the criteria as to why God's people are or are not delivered out of our Suffering?”* Is it an Issue of a lack of Faith; or is it an Issue of God's Will? Yet another way to ask the Question is this: *“If I am suffering- will I always be delivered if I ‘rise up in Faith’ and ‘lay claim to Victory’”? or “Is it sometimes God's Will that people with very strong and dynamic Faith- suffer and are not delivered?”* These are the Questions that I'm going to try to answer through this Section of **Hebrews 11**.

Now I pray you can see that this is not just an academic exercise of how many angels can dance on the tip of a needle. This is a very important issue that God wants His people to know about; and understand. And that is why God put it in the Bible- precisely so we *will* know; and so, we will not have to wonder or guess or be confused about this Issue.

And that is what this passage in **Hebrews 11** is all about: real human beings- who lived real lives on earth “in Faith” - who all trusted in God; and who all were saved; and who were all God's people; and who all pleased God by and through their great Faith. And yet the writer says here that some of these people were mercifully delivered out of their Sufferings- but some of them were not.

And so, since there is absolutely no doubt whatsoever that this is exactly what this passage of **Hebrews 11** teaches- we are left then with trying to put this all together in our minds so it makes sense to us- especially since many of us have been taught for many years now that it is always God's Will to deliver us and it is always God's Will to heal our sick bodies and it is always God's Will to bless us financially and materially and so if we are not healed and if we are not blessed and if we are not delivered- it is a matter of a lack of Faith on our part or maybe there is sin in our lives or who knows what.

Now it is true that Christians and non-Christians alike can have wrong and unbiblical views of what the Christian life really is all about. We are all very heavily influenced by our pagan Man- centered Culture that does not know Truth. We are exposed to it; and it rubs off on us. And over time- we begin to agree with what the Culture says. And we begin to talk like the Culture talks; and we begin to act like it acts. And we do that- because we have begun to believe what the Culture around us- believes. So, many times, we do *exactly* what the Apostle Paul told us *not* to do in **Romans 12**. And we become “conformed to this world.”

And because we all struggle with this- that is the why we are told over and over all throughout Scripture to conduct ongoing, deep, serious, line upon line; precept upon precept Studies of the only inspired, inerrant, infallible Book that exists on the planet. Because it is only by being exposed to what God has infallibly revealed to Man through Scripture; and by us actually understanding what the Bible means by what it says- that you and I will be able to see where we are off base; and to see where we are wrong about what we believe and what we do.

So, we preach and teach and read and study the magnificent Word of God- so that it will bring our views of God and His Ways- more and more into line with Divine Truth. And we do this for two reasons:

1. We do this for *unbelievers*- so that they may embrace Christianity on the basis of seeing and hearing a *true* picture of it, rather than a distorted one
2. We do it for *believers*- so that we may live our lives on the basis of absolute and true views of God and His Ways- rather than distorted and deluding and discouraging views.

The Faith to be Delivered and the Faith to Suffer

Now the passage of Scripture that has been read to us today is tremendously important for blowing the fog of confusion away from what real Faith actually is; and what kind of life- this Faith guarantees.

There are many who teach today that the life of Faith will *always* bring Health, Wealth and Prosperity to God's children. And where those things are lacking- they say- it's only because Faith is lacking.

Now I personally rejected that Teaching over thirty years ago when I first heard it- because it never seemed to square with what I saw in the Teachings of Jesus or His Apostles. And I can say to you today that, after listening to this Teaching for over thirty years; and after analyzing it very carefully and prayerfully in Scripture- I despise this Teaching and I reject it more today- than ever.

But even though this Teaching is patently false and is a very poor representation of what this passage in **Hebrews 11** is talking about- this passage does mean something very powerful and glorious and wonderful for us today.

Now I remember the very first time that this passage and this chapter hit me with its incredible impact on this particular subject of human Suffering. And I pray that it has the same effect for good on you during this series.

And as we go through this section together- I will try, by God's help, to make five brief points on the basis of these ten verses.

1. Through Faith- God can and He absolutely does work powerful "Miracles" and "Acts of Providence" to bring practical earthly Help and Deliverance to His people.
2. God does *not* always work Miracles and Acts of Providence for our deliverance from Suffering; and sometimes- by this very same Faith- God sustains his people *through* their Sufferings.
3. Having Faith or not having Faith is *not* the ultimate determining factor in whether you suffer or you are delivered. God's sovereign Will and Wisdom and Love takes precedent over our Faith.
4. The common feature of the Faith that *escapes* Suffering; and the Faith that *endures* Suffering is this: both of them involve believing that God Himself is better than what life can give to you now; and He is better than what death can take from you later.
5. Those who love God more than life; and who suffer willingly- awaiting something better than what this earth can offer- are God's great Gifts to the world.

So, let's go over each one

1. Through Faith- God can and does work “Miracles” and “Acts of Providence” to bring practical earthly help and deliverance to His people.

29 By faith they passed through the Red Sea as though they were passing through dry land; and the Egyptians, when they attempted it, were drowned.

30 By faith the walls of Jericho fell down after they had been encircled for seven days.

31 By faith Rahab the harlot did not perish along with those who were disobedient, after she had welcomed the spies in peace.

32 And what more shall I say? For time will fail me if I tell of Gideon, Barak, Samson, Jephthah, of David and Samuel and the prophets,

33 who by faith conquered kingdoms, performed acts of righteousness, obtained promises, shut the mouths of lions,

34 quenched the power of fire, escaped the edge of the sword, from weakness were made strong, became mighty in war, put foreign armies to flight.

35 Women received back their dead by resurrection;

Now that is the point of verses 29-35a- that through Faith- God absolutely *can* and He absolutely *does* work “Miracles” and “Acts of Providence” to bring practical earthly Help and Deliverance to His people. Now what I mean by "Miracles" are those Works of God that involve some extraordinary interruption in the natural cause-effect way that the created Universe normally operates. For example- in these six verses- the writer of **Hebrews** refers to five miraculous events:

1. The dividing of the Red Sea (verse 29)
2. The falling down of the walls of Jericho (verse 30)
3. The shutting of the mouths of lions when Daniel was in the lions' den (verse 33)
4. The quenching of fire by Shadrach and Meshach and Abednego, when they walked through Nebuchadnezzar's furnace (verse 34)
5. The resurrection of the son of the widow of Zarephath (verse 35a).

All these things are what we usually call, “Miracles”. God sovereignly breaks into the normal way that things work and in an *extraordinary* way- makes them work differently. And in every case that the writer of **Hebrews** lists for us here in these verses- the people of God were helped; or they were rescued from Danger or Death.

So, that is one way that the Bible teaches that God works through our Faith – namely- by supernatural miracles. And this is wonderful and true. But sadly many people stop right there. And they then come to the *wrong* conclusion that this is the *only* way that God moves through Faith. But then they try to explain why everybody does not receive a Miracle- by fabricating a Man- made theology around this wrong conclusion that says: unless you *do* receive a supernatural Miracle- then you must be lacking in Faith. And that is simply not true.

We should all be so grateful to God because He marvelously works Miracles and supernatural Manifestations; and that He does that- by and through Faith. But we must be biblical enough to know that this is not *all* that God does by and through Faith.

A few minutes ago- I mentioned another term that may have sounded strange to some of you. I mentioned something called, "*Acts of Providence*." And I want to talk about that now.

You see, through our Faith- not only does God work Miracles- but God also helps us by what Theologians call, "*Acts of Providence*". And what is meant by the term, "*Acts of Providence*" is those Works of God that control situations but in a less extraordinary way than Miracles. So, for example- if you were to see an Act of Providence- you would not necessarily say that a Miracle had happened, but by the eye of Faith you "see" the "*invisible Hand of God*" - as R. C. Sproul calls it.

Let me show you what I am talking about. Over in **Hebrews 11:31**- The writer refers to a harlot named, Rahab. And the writer said that Rahab didn't perish because she had heard of the Power of the God of Israel and she cared for the Jewish spies. Now this rescuing of Rahab was NOT a supernatural Miracle- but it WAS an Act of Providence. And the writer says that it was brought about "by Faith".

Then in **Hebrews 11:33**- the writer refers us to King David- how by this very same Faith that wrought great supernatural Miracles in other places- this same Faith- moved upon David to conquer Kingdoms and establish Righteousness. Again, this is not a Miracle- but the Hand of God's Providence.

And then in **Hebrews 11:34**- the writer tells us of the Prophet Elijah escaping the sword of Jezebel by this very same Faith; and of Gideon being strengthened in weakness by this same Faith; and to others putting foreign armies to flight by this same Faith.

In all *these* cases- God is the One Who was working behind the scenes. But in these cases- He did NOT work through Miracles. Instead, it was the Hand of God in transforming events to be sure- but NOT in a miraculous way. So, these Events are what we may call the more *ordinary* working of God's Providence.

But even though they are not supernatural Miracles- we must know that these Acts of Providence are indeed no less profound than the many Miracles that God performs. And they are no less important than Miracles because they too are the Works of God- moving and doing what they do- and the writer is careful to instruct us that these Acts of Providence were all accomplished by the very same Faith that brought about the Miracles.

And the point of the writer here in verses 29-35a is that all these wonderful and powerful Acts of God - both the *extraordinary* Miracles and the more *ordinary* Acts of Providence - come about- he says "by Faith." Let's look again at what the writers says here:

- ✓ **Hebrews 11:29**- By faith they passed through the Red Sea . . .
- ✓ **Hebrews 11:30**- By faith the walls of Jericho fell down . . .
- ✓ **Hebrews 11:31**- By faith Rahab . . . did not perish . . .
- ✓ **Hebrews 11:33**- By faith [they] conquered kingdoms . . .

So, the point is that God works *through Faith* to perform supernatural Miracles and Acts of Providence to bring practical, earthly Help and Deliverance to His people. And we believe that. So, now let's begin to look at the 2nd Point:

God does *not* always work Miracles and Acts of Providence for our Deliverance from Suffering; sometimes- by this same Faith- God *sustains* His people *through* their Sufferings.

Now we have just seen that the writer of **Hebrews** teaches here that God does indeed perform Miracles and Acts of Providence- “by Faith”. But does the writer also teach that there are times when God does *not* perform Miracles or Acts of Providence? Let’s see. Let’s now read **Hebrews 11:35b- 38**:

35b ... and others were tortured, not accepting their release, so that they might obtain a better resurrection;

36 and others experienced mockings and scourgings, yes, also chains and imprisonment.

37 They were stoned, they were sawn in two, they were tempted, they were put to death with the sword; they went about in sheepskins, in goatskins, being destitute, afflicted, ill-treated

38 (men of whom the world was not worthy), wandering in deserts and mountains and caves and holes in the ground.

Now that is the point of verses 35b-38. That even though verses 29-35a teach that there are times that God does perform Miracles and Acts of Providence- verses 35b- 38 teach us that God does *not* always work Miracles and Acts of Providence for our Deliverance from Suffering. And that sometimes- ***by this very same powerful Faith***- God chooses to *sustain* His people *IN* their Sufferings rather than merely deliver them.

Another way to put this would be to say that having true Faith in God is no guarantee of Comfort and Security in this Life. And this is a side to Faith that is very seldom preached in the modern Church. And as a result of its scarceness- this is a side of Faith that is not ordinarily understood. Because this side of Faith does not “Wow” us like the great and powerful Miracles do. And this side of Faith does not necessarily thrill us like the Acts of Providence do either. But I suggest to you that *this* Action by God in sovereignly *sustaining* His people *IN* their Sufferings and *NOT* delivering them out of their Sufferings- is by and through the very *same* Faith that God did perform those mighty Miracles. And so, in that sense- it is no less a wondrous Act of God!

And that is the point that the writer makes here in these verses. And so, since this is just as much a part of the Bible as the other- we must accept this; and we must believe it; and teach it; and proclaim it; and love it- just as much as we do the other part.

Now it is absolutely *crucial* for you to see that the writer of **Hebrews** is careful to teach us here that the Miseries that God's people went through here in verses 35-38 come “by Faith”- and NOT because of a *lack* of Faith. And this is very, very crucial. The Bible says that these people suffered- not because they didn’t trust God enough- as so many teach today. No, the writer says here that these people suffered and were NOT delivered or healed- *by or through* their Faith.

Now I am perfectly aware that many of you have never heard preaching like this before- but I beg you to hear me out and see for yourself if this is not *exactly* what **Hebrews** is teaching here.

There is not one word written here that would give any of us even the slightest hint that the people who suffered so many terrible things in verses 35b- 38 had any *less* Faith than the

people who received great Miracles and Acts of Providence in verses 29-35a. Nothing at all is mentioned here as to some failure on their part to believe or to trust in God as the reason why they suffered. And yet one group received great Miracles and Acts of Providence- while the other group suffered. And so, we are left with trying to figure this out. And I am suggesting to you that my second point answers this puzzling Mystery:

That even though it is *sometimes* God's Will to perform Miracles or Acts of Providence to deliver and heal and rescue His people- it isn't always God's Will. And sometimes- by this very same Faith- God chooses to *sustain* His people *in* their Sufferings rather than heal or deliver them.

And we can see this in two ways. First, in verse 33, notice that the list begins with, "**who by faith conquered kingdoms. . . etc.**," and without a break the writer then continues into all the Miseries of verses 35a-38. So, beginning with the last part of verse 35- the writer says that it was by or through this very same Faith,

- **others were tortured...**
- **others experienced mockings**
- **and scourgings**
- **yes, also chains and imprisonment**
- **They were stoned**
- **they were sawn in two**
- **they were tempted**
- **they were put to death with the sword**
- **they went about in sheepskins, in goatskins**
- **being destitute, afflicted, ill-treated**

And then the writer tells us that all this Misery was *received*; and it was *endured* by and through the very *same* Faith that saw life changing and supernatural Miracles and Acts of Providence in verses 29-35a.

So, it is wrong and unbiblical to believe or to teach that strong and vibrant Faith will *always* bring forth Miracles and Acts of Providence; while the *lack* of Faith is what allows Sufferings and Afflictions. As we can easily see here- that is simply not true.

The Bible clearly teaches that the Faith that brought about the great and mighty Miracles that gloriously delivered God's people in verses 29-35a is the very *same* strong and powerful Faith that did NOT heal or deliver God's people- but *sustained* them in their Struggles in verses 35b-38.

Now the other way to see this is in verse 39 which looks back on all the Sufferings of verses 35b-38 and says,

And all these (both the people described in verses 29-35a *and* the people described in verses 35b-38)... **gained approval through their faith...**

In other words, all these [that is, all the people who WERE healed or

delivered AND all the people who were NOT healed or delivered- all these- gained *approval* through their Faith. And this tells us that the fact that some of these people suffered and were NOT delivered or healed had NOTHING to do with some *lack* of Faith- but rather the Will of God.

In other words, the Bible teaches here that God's Approval is resting on these “suffering saints” precisely *because* of their Faith. So, what are we to make of this? We are to understand that the powerful and great Faith of these suffering saints *sustained* them and *kept* them- IN their Miseries and Sufferings.

In other words- with one group- God in His absolute Sovereignty- decided to bring about supernatural Miracles and Acts of Providence to mercifully deliver His people out of their Troubles. And with the second group- God sovereignly decided to supernaturally strengthen and sustain these believers- *IN* their troubles and *NOT* deliver them.

And as humans- we are tempted to say that the people who were delivered were obviously pleasing to the Lord while the ones who were not delivered must have somehow failed to please the Lord or else God would have delivered them too. But that is precisely *why* this part of God's Word was given to us- to teach us that the human logic that teaches that it is *always* God's Will to heal or deliver- is simply not true.

So, the point that I am making here is that those who suffer and who are *not* delivered; and those who are *not* rescued; and those who are *not* healed; and those who are *not* brought into safety; and those who are *not* financially prosperous- are *not* weak in Faith. They are *not* failures. They are *not* second class citizens. And the fact that they suffered and were not delivered- has *nothing* to do with Sin in their lives. No, the Bible says that these suffering saints were just as strong in Faith; and they pleased God just as much- as those who were prospered; and those who were healed; and those who were rescued from danger. And I am telling you- that this is *exactly* what this passage in **Hebrews 11** is teaching us.

In fact, I believe that History will confirm to us without any doubt at all that the Truth of this matter is- that the overwhelming *majority* of all truly saved people, who have ever suffered throughout all of history- were *NOT* delivered. The overwhelming majority of all truly saved people, who were sick were *not* healed. And the overwhelming majority of all truly saved people throughout history- never saw a single day of their lives where they were what we would call financially prosperous.

And that is true- not because of some failure on their part- but simply because it was God's Will that those people be sustained *in* their Sufferings by and through their powerful Faith rather than be delivered out of their Sufferings or healed or prospered. In other words, it is infinitely MORE common for people to suffer and NOT be delivered than it is for them to be delivered.

And I suggest to you that not only has this *always* been true- but that regardless of how powerful you think you are building up your own personal Faith- you will not *always* be delivered out of Suffering in this day either.

What many of us in the modern Church seem to have forgotten- that the saints who came before us seemed to understand is- that, many times- it is God's perfect Will that His people suffer in this life. And that may not sit well with you; and that may sound contrary to everything you have ever been taught- but that is *exactly* what the Bible teaches. Jesus Himself promised that all who follow Him will go through Persecution; and unfair treatment; and injustice; and pain; and agony; and torture; and financial and physical struggles-

and these things have been part and parcel to the people of the Church since the very beginning. And that will continue until Jesus comes.

Luke 21:16-19

16 But you will be betrayed even by parents and brothers and relatives and friends, and they will put some of you to death,

17 and you will be hated by all because of My name.

18 Yet not a hair of your head will perish.

19 By your endurance you will gain your lives.

1Peter 5:10

After you have suffered for a little while, the God of all grace, who called you to His eternal glory in Christ, will Himself perfect, confirm, strengthen and establish you.

And so, the Abundant Life that Jesus promised to all who believe really doesn't have anything to do with us always *escaping* our Struggles; or having new cars; or nice homes; or plenty of money to shop in all the fine stores. But it has everything to do with a strong and vibrant and powerful Relationship with the Lord Jesus Christ. And the fact that we have been mercifully forgiven for all our sins; and that we are now just Pilgrims and Strangers on this earth- passing through; and that this world is not our home- because we look for a City whose Builder and Maker is God. And so, we trust that whatever our Sovereign God has chosen to allow to come into our lives- is working together for the greater "Good" of the Glory of God and ultimately the fulfillment of our own Joy as well- because that is what God has promised us.

Now please allow me to get very specific here so we get the full impact of what this is saying. Look again at **Hebrews 11:35b**:

... And others were tortured...

Now here at the middle of verse 35- we can see that God does not always turn the hearts of evil men away from torturing His people- although He very well could do that. So, the Question that begs to be answered is, "*Why?*" "*If God could turn the heart of evil men so they would not torture His Own children- why wouldn't God do that?*"

And that is a very good Question; and one that many people have sought to answer by either denying that God is Sovereign at all- and therefore incapable of changing the hearts of these evil men; or by saying, "*Well, the torturers have "free wills" and God cannot intervene because He has voluntarily limited His Own Sovereignty so as not to intervene with human Choice.*"

And whereas that may bring some level of Comfort to some people on some level- that answer is simply not what the Bible teaches at all. The Bible clearly and repeatedly says that God is Absolutely Sovereign over everything all the time. And the Bible frequently shows us that God can and does violate "Human Will" all the time. And the Bible teaches that God has on many, many occasions completely changed the heart and the mind of evil people- completely *against* their Will all throughout the Bible.

For example, in **Genesis 20:6** King Abimelech almost committed adultery with Abraham's wife- but he didn't. Well, why didn't he? Because in that same verse- God Almighty said to Abimelech,

... I also kept you from sinning against Me; therefore I did not let you touch her.

... but Abimelech *wanted* to touch her. He didn't know that Sarah was Abraham's wife and his desire was *absolutely* to touch her. So, why didn't he? Because God violated his will and sovereignly stopped him. Now you can tap dance around this all day, dear friends, but the fact of the matter is that God sovereignly intervened and stopped a man from doing what he wanted to do; what he had chosen to do; and what he willed to do. And that is called, "violating human will" or "violating human choice." So much for the notion that God would never violate human free will, right?

And the point is that if God can step in and stop a sinful man from fulfilling his own lust on a defenseless woman- then God can certainly change the heart of a wicked jailer- who is about to torture a Christian in the back room of a Mozambique jail. And yet every day- all over the world- Christians suffer inhuman torture at the hands of evil men. So, what are we to make of this? I just destroyed the notion that God will never violate human free will. So, we can't use that as a reason as to why God doesn't stop some of the Evil that is carried out every day against believers. God violates human will all the time. But it is also crystal clear that God doesn't *always* do that. And that is what verse 35b says.

Now here is another example: God does not always lessen the Agony of His children, but, sometimes, He permits them to experience not just Suffering- but *horrific* Suffering- *unbelievable* Suffering. Look again at verse 37:

They were stoned, they were sawn in two, they were tempted, they were put to death with the sword; they went about in sheepskins, in goatskins, being destitute, afflicted, ill-treated

Now this is almost too horrible to think about. But this is the way that tradition says that the prophet Isaiah died- he was placed between two boards and sawed in half. So, are we then to assume that God was angry with the prophet Isaiah? Are we to assume that this man who wrote down some of the most powerful prophecies about Jesus that are found anywhere in the Bible didn't have enough Faith to be delivered or that his Faith was weak? I really hope you don't think that.

Imagine how forsaken you might feel if death lies in front of you, and a person devises a way for your death to be just as horrible as an evil mind could possibly invent. But even though we might not want to think about this- we must admit that this has indeed happened to godly men and women all throughout time. These things happen today all over the world and it happens to people of whom the Bible says that the world is not worthy.

And God *could* absolutely stop it- without nullifying any human Responsibility. And I suggest to you that this is the point of verses 29-35a - God can and God does stop evil like this all the time. And God does do great and glorious Miracles and Acts of Providence to interrupt what evil men want to do and to relieve His people and to deliver them. And we rightly rejoice over that sovereign Intervention. But all I'm saying is that as true as that is; and as wonderful as that is- the Bible also teaches that God doesn't *always* do that.

And this is perhaps made clearest by contrasting a phrase in verse 34 and one in verse 37. In verse 34 the second clause says,

"escaped the edge of the sword."

So, we see here that “by Faith”- some escaped the edge of the sword. And then in verse 37- the fourth clause says,

“ they were put to death with the sword ”

So, in one instance- “by Faith”- *some* people *escaped* the edge of the sword, while in another instance- by this very *same* Faith- others were put to death with the sword. And the Bible is clear to teach us that the difference between those who died and those who were delivered had absolutely *nothing* to do with a lack of Faith. The difference between those who died and those who were delivered was the Will of God for that person at that time.

Now please turn in your Bibles and read with me **The Acts 12:1&2** that says:

1 Now about that time Herod the king laid hands on some who belonged to the church in order to mistreat them.

2 And he had James the brother of John put to death with a sword.

Here is an evil king, who was allowed by God to persecute the Church and to kill the Apostle James. Now in our mind we would say, “*But wouldn’t it have been better if James had lived so he could teach and preach Christ to the lost?*” And yet God- Who is absolutely Sovereign- and Who wants people saved more than we do- allowed this great Apostle to be killed and did not stop it- even though He certainly could have stopped it. And also please notice *how* James was killed. The Bible says that James was killed with the sword- which is *exactly* what the writer of **Hebrews** is talking about here- that God chooses to deliver *some* of His children from being killed with the sword; while at the same time- allowing others to be killed by the same sword.

Now please read **The Acts 12:3**

When he saw that it pleased the Jews, he proceeded to arrest Peter also...

So, now this evil king sees that what he is doing in persecuting the Christian Church and killing its leaders is very pleasing to the Jews. And so, he is then encouraged to do even more evil- and he goes about to arrest Peter- no doubt planning to kill him too.

But the next several verses tell the story of how he arrested Peter for the same purpose- but God supernaturally intervened and miraculously delivered Peter.

The Acts 12:4-19

4 When he had seized him, he put him in prison, delivering him to four squads of soldiers to guard him, intending after the Passover to bring him out before the people.

5 So Peter was kept in the prison, but prayer for him was being made fervently by the church to God.

6 On the very night when Herod was about to bring him forward, Peter was sleeping between two soldiers, bound with two chains, and guards in front of the door were watching over the prison.

7 And behold, an angel of the Lord suddenly appeared and a light shone in the cell; and he struck Peter's side and woke him up, saying, "Get up quickly." And his chains fell off his hands.

8 And the angel said to him, "Gird yourself and put on your sandals." And he did so. And he said to him, "Wrap your cloak around you and follow me."

9 And he went out and continued to follow, and he did not know that what was being done by the angel was real, but thought he was seeing a vision.

10 When they had passed the first and second guard, they came to the iron gate that leads into the city, which opened for them by itself; and they went out and went along one street, and immediately the angel departed from him.

11 When Peter came to himself, he said, "Now I know for sure that the Lord has sent forth His angel and rescued me from the hand of Herod and from all that the Jewish people were expecting."

12 And when he realized this, he went to the house of Mary, the mother of John who was also called Mark, where many were gathered together and were praying.

13 When he knocked at the door of the gate, a servant-girl named Rhoda came to answer.

14 When she recognized Peter's voice, because of her joy she did not open the gate, but ran in and announced that Peter was standing in front of the gate.

15 They said to her, "You are out of your mind!" But she kept insisting that it was so. They kept saying, "It is his angel."

16 But Peter continued knocking; and when they had opened the door, they saw him and were amazed.

17 But motioning to them with his hand to be silent, he described to them how the Lord had led him out of the prison. And he said, "Report these things to James and the brethren." Then he left and went to another place.

18 Now when day came, there was no small disturbance among the soldiers as to what could have become of Peter.

19 When Herod had searched for him and had not found him, he examined the guards and ordered that they be led away to execution. Then he went down from Judea to Caesarea and was spending time there.

So, here you have one Apostle, who died by the sword- while the other Apostle escaped that same sword. And **Hebrews 11** was written to teach us that both the Apostle who died and the one who was rescued- had the very same Faith.

James was NOT weak in Faith. James was a powerful Christian. And yet he was allowed by God to die- while Peter was allowed by God to live- at least for now. Because history tells us that the day would come - a few years from this time- when it will be God's Will for Peter to die also.

So, I pray you can see this. Because several years later, Peter was again captured. But that time God did NOT deliver him. And according to history- Peter was crucified upside down. And it took him four days to die. And all the while he was dying- Peter was preaching to those who stood by watching. And many of them as well as some of the guards- were saved.

So, I think that the Scriptures prove my second point- that God does not *always* work Miracles and Acts of Providence to deliver His people by Faith. But sometimes- by this very same Faith- God chooses to sustain His people in and through horrendous Sufferings and not deliver them.

Now from these first two Points- the 3rd one follows that says:

Having Faith or not having Faith is *not* the ultimate determining Factor in whether you suffer or you are delivered. God's sovereign Will and Wisdom and Love always takes precedent over our Faith.

Now I realize that to many, who have bought into the “Kingdom Dominion” Doctrine- this Statement must be a horrible insult to their own significance. But I will tell you that this Statement is repeated over and over and over again all through the pages of the Holy Bible: that it is God, Who is Sovereign- not Man. It is God, Who is above and we who are beneath. It is God, Who is wise- and we are foolish. It is God, Who is wiser and more important and more beautiful and more valuable than we are. And that is why God tells us to do small things- while He does large things. God tells us to do what is possible- and He does what is impossible. God tells us to do foolish things- while He does wise things. God tells us to do what only Man can do- and He does what only God can do.

God's Ways are not like our ways, dear friends. And we must resist the temptation to think that God owes us an explanation; or that God is answerable to us.

To me- the Biblical Truth of the Supremacy of God and the Humiliation of Man is extremely comforting. And I am greatly comforted because God is Sovereign- because now I know that my Trials are not arbitrary. I know my Suffering is not without Purpose and Meaning. And the fact that I am not always delivered- has nothing to do with any lack of Faith on my part. And it is a great relief for me to know that there is a Higher and a much wiser Explanation for my Pain or my Pleasure than whether I have enough Faith or not.

Would it not be horrible to have to believe that on top of all the Suffering you are going through- you had this tormenting thought going through your mind-

If only I would have believed more- I would not have had to go through all this.

May God help us that we will never buy into that Joy- destroying Thinking. May God help us that we will never look into the face of a dying saint and say, or even imply: *"If only you had enough Faith- you would be healed and live."* May God help us to never ever be so Self-righteous to think that the genuine believer, who does not enjoy the nice luxuries and conveniences that we have, is somehow to be pitied for their lack of Faith.

But God help us to say, rather, *"Trust in God, dear dying friend, because whether you live by Faith or die by Faith God will take care of those who trust in Him. The Bible says that to live is Christ, and to die is gain."*

Dear friends- our material Wealth and our financial Prosperity is more a matter of God's Mercy and our physical location than it is a matter of how strong our Faith is. We have been blessed by God to be born and to live in a Country that is the freest and the most prosperous nation in the history of the world. And while it is true that God is the Source of that Freedom and Prosperity- we need to know that both the Freedom and the Prosperity that we enjoy in this Country blesses lost people as well as saved people.

And we also need to be reminded that as sinners- we are not deserving of any Good thing in this life. All of us have sinned wickedly before God. And we have sinned repeatedly. And we deserve nothing but Eternal Judgment for those sins. But it is God's Mercy that allows us to

live and breathe and function in relative Peace and Safety. It is God's Mercy that allows us to eat and to live as we do.

It is God's Mercy that gives us sunny days and the laughter of our children. We don't deserve any of that. But God has been very Merciful to allow us to enjoy our lives and to enjoy His Blessings. And we need to know that more than anything else- even more than the amount of Faith we may or may not have- our good health and our material blessings and our freedom and our safety is a matter of God's great Mercy towards unworthy sinners and not something we have earned or that we deserve.

And so, because that is true- ultimately beloved- it is God, and not we- Who decides when and how we die. IT is God- Who decides whether or not we are delivered; or whether or not we are chosen to suffer. We do not make those kinds of decisions- God does. God has His Own Will and Purposes for every action and every individual on earth. And for the most part- that Will and those Purposes are hidden from us. And that is where true Faith really comes in.

We must understand that Faith is not a tool that we can use to get out of God what we think is best for us. Faith is the Power and the Ability to trust in God- even when things look real bad to us in our limited vision. And so, even though we don't know what God is doing- true powerful and biblical Faith gives us the power and the ability to trust and to know and to rest in the knowledge that God knows what God is doing. And we can be comfortable in resting in the Everlasting Arms of a God Who is Both Good and Sovereign.

Faith doesn't mean that we always understand God's Purposes. But true Faith means we always believe that those Purposes are always Good and Right and Holy- regardless of how it looks to us.

We must remember, dear friends, that our vision is very, very limited. As finite humans- we basically only see in the here and now. But God is unlimited. And He is infinite. And He is Omniscient. And so, God knows everything about everything. And that means that God sees the past, present and future all at one time. And God knows just how to work all things together so that His Will is always carried out.

So, while something may look very bad to us- it may even look evil; and it may seem as though God has forsaken us; and it may appear that God has forgotten about us; and has abandoned us- the inspired infallible and eternal Word of the living God says that God *cannot* lie. And the Bible says that God will never leave us nor forsake us. And so, true Faith places its Confidence in the written Promises of God. And true Faith refuses to lose Hope- even in the face of impossible odds or certain destruction.

And as the 11th Chapter of **Hebrews** teaches us here- true Biblical Faith- strong and vibrant Faith *refuses* to lose Hope even when we do not ever see the answer in this life. In other words- sometimes we won't fully understand everything until we get over there.

And that is why the 14 year old girl who jumps off the pier into the water on a beautiful sunny summer day and breaks her neck can rest in the Promises of God that God has not forsaken her. And so, she is not weak in Faith because she is not healed. Because the Holy Bible teaches that satan is not strong enough or big enough to touch her flesh unless God Almighty has allowed it. And that is precisely why the Books of **Job** and **Ruth** were put into the Bible- to teach her and us that many times- our Good and Sovereign God works through our Tragedies and our Sufferings in that He does *not* always deliver us out of them. And God does *not* always heal our sick bodies. And He does not always bless us financially- so we can get what we think we deserve. And God does not always rescue us out of danger- not so He can be mean or harsh against us and not to punish us for some sin we committed. No, the Bible says

that all of God's Wrath against truly saved people has been forever removed from us through the Life and Death and Resurrection of Jesus Christ.

But there are times that God allows Pain and Suffering and Persecution and unjust Treatment against us to go on. And there are times that God does not deliver us so that God may sovereignly bring about His Will- not only in our lives- but also in the lives of others as well.

And so, true holy powerful and biblical Faith whispers to us that if God Almighty has seen fit to allow Suffering and Tragedy to touch our flesh- then the Promise of God to us is that God is sovereignly working that terrible Event together with every other Event that God has sovereignly brought into our lives –for the greater Good of the Glory of God and ultimately for the fullness of our Joy as well.

Now let's look at the 4th Point that says:

The common feature of the Faith that *escapes* Suffering and the Faith that *endures* Suffering is this: both of them involve believing that God Himself is better than anything that this Life can give to us now, and it is better than anything that Death can take from us later.

In other words- true, genuine, and biblical Faith says that if it were possible for any of us to actually have it all in this life- true Faith would say that God is still infinitely better. And if and when it becomes necessary for any of us to actually lose everything that this earthly existence can offer to us- up to and including our own personal lives- true, genuine, and biblical Faith says that God is still infinitely better.

And this goes back, dear friends to whether our theology is Man- centered or God-centered. In other words- if your understanding of the Bible is that God exists for no other reason other than to make your life better down here- that this is your "best life" here on this earth- then you will see absolutely no reason why God would ever want or desire for you to ever suffer in this life.

If all that God exists for is to make us happy; and healthy; and wealthy; and strong; and vibrant; and give us tons of stuff in this life- then it is perfectly reasonable for us to conclude that it would never be the Will of this God for us to ever in any way suffer; or to go without; or to even have a "bad day" for that matter.

But if you find yourself caught up in that false and Man- made theology- then you have to ask yourself these Questions:

What are we to do with the hundreds of millions of believers, all over the world, who never one day have what we have over here in America? What do we tell them? That they lacked Faith? That there is Sin in their lives? That God is angry with them? What do we tell them is the Reason why their children are murdered and not rescued; and why their wives are sick and not healed; and why their businesses and their money is confiscated by evil people; and why they're not driving around in Cadillacs; or shopping at the finest stores; or eating in the finest restaurants? What do we tell the overwhelming majority of all these brave and humble and godly Christians throughout the world today as to why they don't live as nice and as safe and as luxurious as we do over here in America? That they're not quite as saved as we are?

Don't you see how Arrogant and Self-righteous and just Wrong it is to tell a genuine believer, who is being persecuted; or a dying saint who has cancer; or a fellow soldier who is

going through the death of his child- that if only he had more Faith he wouldn't have had to go through all this?

We need to realize, dear friends, that most all of the genuine Christian believers- not only who live on earth today- but who have *ever* lived throughout all of history- never saw one day of air conditioning. They never went shopping for clothes. They never one time went out to eat- not one time in their whole lives. They never sat and watched television for hours every day. And they never knew anything about the unbelievable Wealth and Prosperity and Safety and Security and Blessings and Luxuries that we enjoy here in America in the 21st Century.

And we also need to get down off our high horse and realize that the only reason that we enjoy those things- is because God allowed us to be born into a country that is more Blessed; and more Safe; and more Productive- than any other Nation in the history of the world- and not because of our own personal Faith.

Look, lost sinners- who blaspheme God all day long prosper here in America just as much or even more than we do. So don't get so puffed up to think that God has done all that He has done for you because of something you have done; or because of your great Faith; or because of your own prayers; or because of your own actions; or because of some words that you have spoken.

God has chosen to graciously bless you; or heal your sick body; or go before you- out of His sovereign Mercy- and NOT because you deserved it; or because He owed it to you. The Truth is that even as we *try* to love and serve the Lord; and as we *try* to be faithful to His Word; and as we *try* to pray; and as we *try* to believe; and as we *try* to have Faith- we fail. And we fall short. And we trust in God very clumsily; and very awkwardly. And all the while we are *trying* to do these things- we sin; and we sin; and we sin; and we sin.

And yet in God's Mercy- He kindly blesses us. He graciously heals us. And He lovingly goes before us- to change Circumstances and to change Situations – not because He was *required* to do so- but simply because God is Good; and He is Kind; and He is Merciful. And so, our Blessings; and our Healings; and our Miracles; and our Deliverances and our times of seeing God move for us- is so Great; and so Wonderful; and we do and we should praise Him for that. But we must realize, my beloved, that all of this is based on God's Mercy and not our Faith.

And even though this isn't taught much anymore- nevertheless the Bible does teach- that the issuance of Mercy is solely based on God's Prerogative and not ours. And therefore, God is in charge of who gets Mercy; and how much Mercy he gets; and how long he gets it.

And so, all I am telling you in these broadcasts is that since all of these good and wonderful things are based solely on God's Mercy and not our Faith- then while it is true that God absolutely *does* do those things- He doesn't *always* do them.

And what I am trying to show you is that when God sovereignly chooses *not* to deliver you out of your troubles; when God sovereignly chooses *not* to heal your body; when God sovereignly chooses *not* to bless you; or when God does *not* allow you to get what you want so badly- but when God sovereignly chooses rather to sustain you *in* your Troubles; when He chooses to allow you to be sustained *in* your Persecution; when God allows you to be sustained *in* your Sickness; and when God allows you to be supernaturally sustained in those many hard and terrible things that these great heroes of Faith went through in here in **Hebrews 11: 35b- 38-** it isn't because of a lack of Faith on your part. And it isn't because God is mad at you; or that He has abandoned you. And it isn't because you have sin in your life either- because *everybody* on earth, who is being blessed; and who is being healed; and who is being delivered- has Sin in their lives too.

But it is simply because just like God promised us- He is working those hard and terrible Things *together*- with all of the other good and wonderful Things that He has also sovereignly allowed to come into your life. And God is very busy working all of those Things- both the “good things” and the “bad things” *together* for the *greater* “Good” of the Glory of God; and ultimately, for the fullness of our Joy as well. And that is the Promise of Scripture.

And true, genuine, biblical Faith trusts that. And strong, powerful, mountain- moving Faith rests secure in knowing and trusting that even though things may look real- bad to us right now- God said that He will never leave us nor forsake us. And God said that He will be an ever-present Help in time of need. And God said, He, who began a good Work in us will complete that Work. And so, *true* Faith; *strong* Faith; *powerful* Faith; *biblical* Faith trusts that God is not a liar. And it trusts that God is trustworthy. And Faith trusts that God’s Word is true.

And so, when things do not look Good at all to us- it is at *that* moment when true Faith rises. And it is then when true Faith reaches up; and looks up. And that is when true Faith sees a God, Who cannot lie. And so, even though we may suffer horribly in this life- even though we may not always be healed; or always get what we want. And even though we may not always be delivered- true Faith rests in the Promise of God that this Trial is not Arbitrary; that it is not without Purpose and Meaning. And even this hard and difficult Trial is working together with everything else for the Glory of God; and for the fullness of our Joy in Jesus Christ.

So, the Goal is not always to be removed from the Hardship. The Goal is not always to be healed or rescued or delivered. The Goal of true Faith is to remain faithful in the Storm. And to remain faithful in the Persecution. And to remain faithful in our Suffering- so that our Lord may say to us, “*Well done, good and faithful servant*”.

And the clearest illustration of what I am talking about is today's text down in verse 35. The writer says here that by this strong and vibrant and powerful Faith-:

Women received their dead raised to life again: and others were tortured, not accepting deliverance; that they might obtain a better resurrection:

So, I want to ask you a question. By any honest examination of verse 35- we can clearly see that while these women did indeed receive their dead children raised back to life again- the very next phrase in this very same verse clearly says that by and through this very same Faith- other people went through horrible things and were *not* delivered.

Now like I have been telling you- the most common Teaching about this in the modern Church is that the people here in **Hebrews 11** who did *not* receive great miracles; and who did *not* receive healing; and who were *not* delivered- simply didn’t have enough Faith.

Many teach today that the reason why these people suffered was simply because they didn’t “claim it”; or they didn’t “speak the creative word”; or because they “had sin in their lives”; or because “God was mad at them”; or because they “didn’t rise up in Faith”; or some other nonsense. And some even teach it was because the people who suffered were not even saved.

But for some reason the people who teach this forget about the first part of verse 39 which says:

And all these, having gained approval through their faith...

So, what does that mean? Well, it means that ALL of the people that the writer of **Hebrews** has been talking about here in the 11th Chapter- *all of them*- gained approval from God because of their Faith. In other words- the writer is telling us here that all of these people- the ones who were delivered and the ones who suffered – both groups- all of them- were operating in a pleasing way to God through the Faith they had.

And yet some were delivered while others were not. So, I hope you can see how wrong it is to teach that the only reason you are not healed or not delivered is because of a lack of Faith on your part- because the Bible doesn't teach that.

So, just what does Faith actually believe in the moment of our Suffering? Does true Faith say, "*Well, if God really loved me- He would get me out of this?*" No, it doesn't. And please don't ever think that. Listen to me- what the writer of **Hebrews** is teaching here is that true Faith believes that there is the Reality of a Resurrection for genuine believers- which is infinitely *better* than the Miracle of escape.

And this Faith whispers to the believer- who is dying by the hands of evil men- that this Resurrection is *much better* than the temporary kind of "Resurrection" experienced by the widow's son- who was returned to life- only to die again later.

In other words, Faith is utterly in love with all that God will be for us beyond the Grave. And that means that Faith loves God more than life. Faith loves God more than family. And Faith loves God more than job or retirement plans or ministry or writing books or building the dream house or making a million dollars. Faith says, "*Whether God handles me tenderly or gives me over to torture, I know that He loves me and, by His Grace, I love Him!*"

Faith repeats what was said in **Hebrews 11:6b**-

... He is a rewarder of those who seek Him.

... and **Hebrews 11:10**- "*He is the Architect and Builder of the City I long for!*" And **Hebrews 11:26**- "*He is the Treasure beyond the riches of Egypt*". And **Hebrews 10:34**- "*He is the Possession that surpasses all other possessions because He abides forever!*"

So, the great challenge of the book of **Hebrews**, and the entire mission of our Church, is to cultivate and to spread a "death-defying Passion" for God. All of the Preaching; every Service; all the relationships of love; all the Prayer Meetings; and the untold Ministries inside and outside the walls of this Church aim at this one thing:

To cultivate and to spread a deep and satisfying Relationship with the one, true, and living God through the finished Work of the Lord Jesus Christ. And so, whether we live or die; whether we are comfortable or miserable- we rest in Him. Our Goal is to cultivate and spread the unshakable Confidence that God is infinitely better than anything that this Life can give us now. And God is infinitely better than anything that Death can take away from us later.

And this leads to one final point.

Those who love God more than Life and who suffer willingly- awaiting something better than what this earth can offer, are God's great Gifts to the world.

Look again at verses 37 and 38,

37 They were stoned, they were sawn in two, they were tempted, they were put to death with the sword; they went about in sheepskins, in goatskins, being destitute, afflicted, ill-treated

38 (men of whom the world was not worthy), wandering in deserts and mountains and caves and holes in the ground.

Now this is *real* Value! This is *real* Worth! This is *real* Success! These were lives that were not wasted. These were lives that counted; lives that impacted their own generation; and these are lives that still impact us here this morning 6,000 years later. These people had Faith- *great* Faith- *powerful* Faith; and their Faith was not wasted on silly mindless television programs; and Self- centered endeavors; and foolish diversions. These people had great Faith. Now they weren't delivered- but they had Faith. They were killed- most of them- but they had Faith.

Now just what does it mean when the writer says here that the world was not worthy of these obscure, destitute, unsightly, seemingly-cursed people? What does that mean - the world was not worthy of them? It means they were a Gift to the world- and the world does not deserve them.

You see, dear friends, many things in this life are utterly opposite from the way they seem. And here is one of them. When the precious children of God are permitted to suffer; and be rejected; and mistreated; and go destitute; afflicted; and ill-treated, God is giving a Gift to the world. He is *gracing* the world. He is shedding His Love abroad in the world. Because in those who suffer and die in the unshakable Assurance of Hope in God- this world is given a message and a picture that cannot be ignored:

"The Lord himself is better than life. So, turn- O turn and believe!"

Who would have thought it - that the Faith of the suffering people who are *not* delivered; and who are *not* rescued by glorious Miracles; and who are *not* rescued by powerful Acts of Providence are in fact a Gift to the world?

O the depth of the Riches and Wisdom and Knowledge of God! How unsearchable are His Judgments and how inscrutable His Ways! For who has known the Mind of the Lord, or who has been His Counselor? Or who has given a gift to Him that he might be repaid? For from Him and through Him and to Him are all things. To Him be Glory forever! Amen.

Fixing Our Eyes on Jesus

So, now let's look at what the writer of **Hebrews** taught about, "*Fixing Our Eyes on Jesus*" So, let's read **Hebrews 11:39-12:2** together:

39 And all these, having gained approval through their faith, did not receive what was promised,

40 because God had provided something better for us, so that apart from us they would not be made perfect.

12:1 Therefore, since we have so great a cloud of witnesses surrounding us, let us also lay aside every encumbrance and the sin which so easily entangles us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us,

2 fixing our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of faith, who for the joy set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.

Now some Christians come to the end of their lives so suddenly that they don't have a single moment to say anything. No final words. No memorable sayings. But while they may not have a parting Statement- they *do* leave behind a Legacy of Deeds and Words. And we who are left have the Duty to put the pieces together and interpret what their Life really meant.

But it was different with the Apostle Paul. As he approached the end of his life- he saw it coming. And he had time to tell us what he thought of his life. Here's what he said in the last Book he wrote- **2 Timothy 4:7:**

I have fought the good fight, I have finished the course, I have kept the faith:

So, at the end of his life Paul said, "All my Life has been like a Fight and like a Race. Keeping Faith has been, for me, a huge Struggle. Trusting God's Promises (Romans 4:20) and walking by Faith in the Son of God (Galatians 2:20), resting in the easy Yoke of Jesus (Matthew 11:28), being anxious for nothing (Philippians 4:6) has been like a strange kind of War all my Life. Nothing has been easier (Matthew 11:30) and yet nothing has been harder (Matthew 7:14) than for me to stay satisfied with God and with all that He is for me in Jesus (John 6:35). Day and night, by every Means graciously given to me (1 Corinthians 15:10), I have fought the good Fight and I have run the Race of Perseverance."

And just before he died- Paul made clear that this view of his own Life was his view of the Christian Life- that *everybody* is called to live. For example- Turn with me to **1 Timothy 6:12**. In that verse- Paul says:

Fight the good fight of faith; take hold of the eternal life to which you were called, and you made the good confession in the presence of many witnesses.

And to explain this- he tells us in the verse just before it- verse 11,

But flee these things, you man of God...

... okay- but what things are we to flee from? Look at verses 3-10 of **1 Timothy 6:**

3 If anyone advocates a different doctrine and does not agree with sound words, those of our Lord Jesus Christ, and with the doctrine conforming to godliness,

4 he is conceited and understands nothing; but he has a morbid interest in controversial questions and disputes about words, out of which arise envy, strife, abusive language, evil suspicions,

5 and constant friction between men of depraved mind and deprived of the truth, who suppose that godliness is a means of gain.

6 But godliness actually is a means of great gain when accompanied by contentment.

7 For we have brought nothing into the world, so we cannot take anything out of it either.

8 If we have food and covering, with these we shall be content.

9 But those who want to get rich fall into temptation and a snare and many foolish and harmful desires which plunge men into ruin and destruction.

10 For the love of money is a root of all sorts of evil, and some by longing for it have wandered away from the faith and pierced themselves with many griefs.

So, the Apostle tells us here to flee all of these worldly traps. And then in verse 11- Paul tells us to pursue after- **“righteousness, godliness, faith, love, patience or perseverance, and gentleness.”**

Now please notice the two words: **“flee”** and **“pursue”** that Paul used in this passage. First, we are to flee- or *to run away from*- the Love of Money; and all the other Evils that grow out of that false Love. And secondly- we are to pursue after- or *run toward*- Righteousness, Godliness, Faith, Love, Perseverance, and Gentleness. So, these two words, “Flee” and “Pursue” are the words of War!

Now Paul knows nothing of what I call, “Coasting Christianity”- which is just “coasting” through Life; just “going along to get along”. Coasting Christianity- a “laid back” people; serving God in a “laid back” manner; and calling that lackadaisical attitude, “Faith”. No, the Apostle Paul does not recognize a Christianity that is not a *running* Christianity- a Christianity that is *running from* something and *running toward* something else. A Christianity that is running *away* from Worldliness and Sin; and running *toward* Jesus Christ- Who is the Prize! So, Paul was certainly not coasting- he was not just occupying space- Paul was running a Race and he was fighting a Fight.

And this is the very same way that the writer of **Hebrews** describes genuine Faith in Jesus Christ. And that is why the main point in this text is the imperative of **Hebrews 12:1**,

“... Let us run... the race that is set before us.”

Now the situation here seems to be that the Hebrew Christians had gotten tired. And a lot of time seems to have passed since they were first “fired-up” for Jesus. Read **Hebrews 10:32-34** with me:

32 But remember the former days, when, after being enlightened, you endured a great conflict of sufferings,

33 partly by being made a public spectacle through reproaches and tribulations, and partly by becoming sharers with those who were so treated.

34 For you showed sympathy to the prisoners and accepted joyfully the seizure of your property, knowing that you have for yourselves a better possession and a lasting one.

Now as we have been studying now for several weeks- this Passage in **Hebrews 10** is probably one of the *greatest* Passages in the entire Bible- because it gives us a very accurate picture of what genuine Christianity actually looks like. This writer is exhorting this small little Church in Asia Minor- late in the first century that is comprised primarily of Hebrew believers- to remember the former days when they were first saved- how that they had such a Zeal and Passion for the Lord; and for the things of the Lord; and each other. He wanted them to remember how love flowed among them like a river; and how they were so horribly persecuted.

But rather than their Persecution causing them to retreat or to live a mediocre Life of Compromise and Worldliness- their Persecution brought out of them a pure and undefiled Christianity. If you want to see what Christianity really is- read that Passage again:

32 But remember the former days, when, after being enlightened, you endured a great conflict of sufferings,

33 partly by being made a public spectacle through reproaches and tribulations, and partly by becoming sharers with those who were so treated.

So, not only were these people persecuted- which is *guaranteed* for *all* believers- but these people were not afraid or ashamed to be associated with others- who were also being persecuted. These saints didn't run for the hills when trouble came. And they didn't sit around and feel sorry for themselves either. No, these saints of God *willingly* joined themselves to those who were being persecuted and proudly identified with them.

And by doing this publicly- they were saying to everyone who saw them *"I'm with them! I believe what these persecuted saints believe. I serve the same God that they serve. I trust in the very same Savior that they trust in!"*

But it gets even greater than this. Look again at verse 34:

For you showed sympathy to the prisoners and accepted joyfully the seizure of your property, knowing that you have for yourselves a better possession and a lasting one.

Now here, the Bible says that these people suffered the Loss of all their earthly possessions. But that wasn't enough. The Bible also says that they suffered that Loss- *joyfully!* Those people actually rejoiced when they lost everything that they owned in this life! Now how in the world could they do this? What in the world could cause these people to lose everything for the cause of Jesus Christ and do so joyfully? Read the last part of verse 34 again:

... knowing that you have for yourselves a better possession and a lasting one.

So, we see that these people did not guess; they did not wonder; they did not hope; they did not simply believe. No, these people *knew*; they *knew*; these people had firsthand knowledge that what they had in Heaven was infinitely superior; much more valuable; much more wonderful than anything they had on this earth- that they could part with *everything* and do so with Joy! Now that is real Christianity!

To value what is in Heaven to such an extent that what is on earth is- by comparison- something that brings Joy when you lose it! That is real Faith! And we need to remember that this section of Holy Scripture is in here not simply for us to admire these people- but to actually

follow them; and be just like this; and have this same Faith; and to look at all of earth's Treasure the very same way.

In other words- there is a tendency among many in the modern Church to think that we live under different Rules than they did back then. That we are, somehow, *exempt* from the Sufferings that they went through; or that the way of Faith that governed the people in the Bible somehow doesn't apply to us.

And so, many actually believe that it is okay if we love money today; or it is okay if we are worldly; or it is okay if we love our possessions more than we love God. And here is how you know if you actually do love your possessions more than you love God. When everything is taken away- can you go through that with Joy? Not bravery; not temporary Joy until the insurance can replace what you had- but genuine Joy at losing all that you own in this life through terrible Persecution and evil men- precisely because you know that you have in Heaven a better and more enduring Reward!

And that is the kind of Faith that the writer then goes on to describe for us in great detail in Chapter 11. In fact, that is the only reason that he wrote Chapter 11. This man wrote Chapter 11 to give us real life Examples of just how this kind of Faith works; and what kind of radical Life this kind of Faith produces in those who have it. And as we have studied- it is the Faith that believes for miraculous Deliverances. But it is also the kind of Faith that sustains us when we are not delivered and are called to suffer.

But notice that something terrible happened to this Church. Something entered in and these people, who were at one time so zealous of good Works, began to be weary of "well doing"; and they began to love this present evil World; and they began to coast. Partly because the great Persecution had stopped; and partly because they began to accumulate some of this world's Goods. But they soon began to show up for Church alright- but their heart was on the game; and they couldn't wait for the preacher to get through; so, they could all hurry home before kickoff. And God knows if the Saints are in the Playoffs- that surely God doesn't mind if we just skip Church all together so we can go to the Superdome. And on Super Bowl Sunday- we'll just all cancel our Sunday night Services; and we'll all meet in the Fellowship Hall and eat chili and watch the game on the big screen; and we'll call that a "time of Fellowship"; and we'll just let the Man, Who hung on a Cross and screamed in agony as He died for our Sins, just sit over in the corner by Himself.

