

March 4th, 2012

By Faith

Hebrew 11:1-7

Ryan Habbena

Sovereign Heavenly Father, we come before Your throne confessing that You and You alone are the Ruler of Heaven and earth. You have made Yourself known on the scene of human history in many times and in many ways. You are the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, you are the Father of our Lord Jesus of Nazareth. And You have given proof to us, and indeed to all men, that You have appointed Him indeed as Your King, as Lord and Christ and one day He is returning. You have given proof to all men by raising Him from the dead. And Lord, He is our King and we confess Him as Lord. And Lord, as we have been purchased with a price help us honor Him as we walk in this world. May our minds be renewed by Your Word. We come to You pleading to You that You would change us, that You would transform and renew us through Your Word by the power of Your Holy Spirit that we might walk in a way that is pleasing to You, that we might honor our King, and that we might be well prepared for His soon return. In Jesus precious name we pray, Amen.

Well brothers and sisters we are about to undergo an examination of one of the most powerful and poetic passages in all the Bible. Now we have been progressing through the Book of Hebrews and we have seen the presentation of Jesus as the Supreme One. The author of Hebrews has systematically demonstrated that Jesus of Nazareth is greater than all things and all people that were known and revered under the Old Covenant. Now the author of Hebrews as we have come to Chapter 11 is going to give a grand tour of the acts and triumphs of faith throughout the Scriptures. And we are included, that's what's exciting and humbling as we become immersed in this text.

The author of Hebrews wants us to understand that we are to look at these men of renown, these men and women of renown, and imitate those who were commended by God, commended by faith. So let's remember where we have been and indeed remember the general context. The immediate context here is very important. Because we have just finished

in Hebrews 10, what happened in Hebrews 10, was the author really finished the long portion of him demonstrating Jesus as this great High Priest after the order of Melchizedek. He is greater than all the Levitical priests because He has the perfect sacrifice and He lives forevermore, therefore He always intercedes. And thus we see the beauty of Jesus as being this High Priest after the order of Melchizedek. And then in Hebrews 10 we were warned, there was that severe warning that we are to live with the knowledge of this risen King and not go back to the elements of the Old Covenant. And at the end of Hebrews, it is very important that we see this, because this is the transition from 10 to 11 (Hebrews), and this is some concluding words in this chapter of exhortation.

Starting with verse 36, “For you have need of endurance, so that when you have done the will of God you may receive what is promised. For, “Yet a little while, and the coming one will come and will not delay; but my righteous one shall live by faith, and if he shrinks back, my soul has no pleasure in him.” But we are not of those who shrink back and are destroyed, but of those who have faith and preserve their souls. (Hebrews 10:36-39 ESV)

So there’s a couple of things that are going to be used as a spring board here to all that we are going to read in Chapter 11 and the beginning of Chapter 12. First off (Hebrews 10:36), “you have need of endurance, so that when you have done the will of God you may receive what is promised”. Endurance and the continuing in the life of faith is essential, and we are going to read of men who did such things, who endured. Who through faith did the will of God and have the promise of receiving reward for all matters of which were going to see unfold in Chapter 11.

But second of all there is a key word in that last sentence, that last verse, in Hebrews 10:39, “But we are not of those who shrink back and are destroyed, but of those who have faith”, faith. We are of those who have faith and preserved our souls, that can also be translated, and it is probably a better translated “unto the preservation of the soul”. It is the Father who preserves our souls. It is the Son (Jesus) interceding that preserves the souls. But we are of those who have faith. And thus, this is the transition now to this beautiful portion of Scripture in Hebrews 11, which many have labeled “The Hall of Faith”.

So let's begin this glorious passage in Hebrews 11:1-3, "Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen. For by it the people of old received their commendation. By faith we understand that the universe was created by the word of God, so that what is seen was not made out of things that are visible." (Hebrews 11:1-3 ESV)

So first off we have a beginning definition of faith and there's going to be as we progress through the text here, there are going to be definitions of faith. Now none of these exhaustively define faith. But rather they tell what certain essential components of what faith is. And here we see, "faith is the assurance of things hoped for" (Hebrews 11:1) and in a sense of parallelism here, "the conviction of things not seen", not seen. And that is very significant because as we progress through, we are going to see those who exercise their faith acted in a way, which demonstrated they were convicted and convinced of what was truly unseen. For by it faith the people of old (Hebrews 11:2) which is all we are going to be reading about through this passage, the people of old received their commendation, commendation coming from God, God placing His seal upon these people that they are both believing and acting in a manner that is pleasing to Him.

So faith is the assurance of things hoped for (Hebrews 11:1). And as we reflect on what we have seen in Hebrews thus far, what we hope for is the consummation of our salvation when Jesus of Nazareth returns and finishes what He started by raising us from the dead and placing us firmly in His Kingdom and dwelling with Him in the Kingdom forever. And again we sit back and ask, do we see such things right now. We do not. Faith is the assurance of things hoped for the conviction of things not seen. And thus what the author (Hebrews) does is take us back all the way to the beginning. So he is going to take us on a tour of bringing up examples of people who have lived by faith. And again, going back to the beginning, we-all of us, since no-one created was there to witness this, all of us by faith understand that the world was created by the Word of God.

If you have your Bibles, turn with me to the beginning, Genesis 1. We are going to be looking at the really the beginning of the Hall of Faith and all of what we are going to look at today are of examples from the Book of Genesis. "In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth" (Genesis 1:1). By faith we understand this because none of us were there and we know that this was accomplished by His Word. In Verse 3, and God said, again His Word, "And God

said, 'Let there be light,' and there was light" (Genesis 1:3). And as we progress through the creation account we keep reading that "God said". God said, "Let the waters under the heavens be gathered together into one place, and let the dry land appear." And it occurred" Genesis 1:9). "Let there be lights in the expanse of the Heaven, it occurred" (Genesis 1:15). God speaks! And that what was created, that which was seen that was made out of things that are unseen, out of nothing. Thus we start at the beginning in Hebrews here, we have this definition of faith, and by faith we all understand that the universe was created by the Word of God. He spoke and it came into being. We can't see that. No scientist can go back and view this. And it's not that, it is an evident list, faith. We have evidence all around us regarding the truth of this. In Romans 1 (Romans 1:20), God's eternal attributes are clearly made manifest by that which is created. But we know that it was done by that which is unseen.

And thus we continue in Hebrews 11:4, the next step in the tour of the Hall of faith. "By faith Abel offered to God a more acceptable sacrifice than Cain, through which he was commended as righteous, God commending him by accepting his gifts. And through his faith, though he died, he still speaks." (Hebrews 11:4 ESV)

Now let's just turn forward a couple of chapters to Genesis 4. Now the Lord created and all that was good, we know that there was a corruption in the fall and Adam and Eve, both fallen, were commanded to go forth and make offspring. And we read they bore both Cain and Abel (ref Genesis 4:1-2). Now let's read (Genesis 4):2-5. "And again, she bore his brother Abel. Now Abel was a keeper of sheep, and Cain a worker of the ground. In the course of time Cain brought to the LORD an offering of the fruit of the ground, and Abel also brought of the firstborn of his flock and of their fat portions. And the LORD had regard for Abel and his offering, but for Cain and his offering he had no regard. So Cain was very angry, and his face fell" (Genesis 4:2-5)

And as we continue, we know the story well, the first murder occurred and indeed Abel became the first martyr (ref Genesis 4:8). And the Lord hears Abel's blood, his innocent blood crying out to Him (ref Genesis 4:10). Now what was it regarding Abel's sacrifice that was acceptable? Now some people have postulated that it was because Abel brought forth an animal and Cain brought forth fruit or grain. But the context doesn't tell us that and instead the context and the actual elements of the text kind point us in another direction. What is clear in

Genesis 4 is that Abel brought his best. Abel brought his best before the Lord. He brought the first born and the fat portions (ref Genesis 4:4). Now the Lord was unseen but knowing the command of the Lord and knowing how important it was to come to the Lord with your best, and that the Lord rewards those who earnestly seek Him, as we'll read in a moment, Abel although what he saw was a firstborn calf and things that had value in this world, it was more important that Abel to bring his best to the Lord of Hosts, knowing that all things belong to Him anyway.

Cain just appeared to have brought just an offering from the fruit of the ground which may been some of the less than of his crop. So Abel saw it fit to bring the Lord his best and the Lord commended him, seeing that it was pleasing to Him. And through his faith, though he died he still speaks. Now there's a couple different ways this can be understood. First his example still speaks. Case in point here we are considering this right now and what we can learn from the example of Abel. However there is another portion that we see here, and we know that Abel was the first martyr and his blood cried out (Genesis 4:10). His blood spoke in a sense, it cried to the God.

And that first cry of the blood of the martyrs has continued to echo and in fact as when you read in Revelation 6, it's a very interesting text, but we see under the altar of God these souls (ref Revelation 6:9-11), actually in the Greek its "lives", that are crying out to God for justice and I think that is an illusion going all the way back to Abel. Because at the foot of the altar, it wasn't that they were hiding under the altar, at the foot of altar is where the blood would flow down. So the imagery there is blood crying out to God. And in the same way, Abel's shed blood is still crying out to God and one day the Lord is going to answer that cry by appearing in the sky and going forth and vindicating his people. All this through the first martyr (Abel), through his faith, though he died he still is speaking.

And note here, here is another thing I want us to understand, by faith Abel, it wasn't that Abel just had these elements in his mind and he understood them, faith was expressed through action in the life of Abel. Faith worked! Faith acted! And thus that this is going to be a common thing as we progress. And by the way, we usually go through Hebrews, Isaiah, and Matthew, and I am going to remain in Hebrews until this section is completed because I think the punch and the poetic nature of it will come forth better if we stay with it instead of staggering it too

much. So we are going to be staying in Hebrews when I'm preaching until we finish with the beginning of Hebrews 12.

So we have Abel. First we started with the beginning, by faith we understand that the Lord spoke and things became into being. We see the faith of Abel who by his faith offered to God a more acceptable sacrifice and even now though he died, he still speaks (Hebrews 11:4).

In Hebrews 11:5, we read of Enoch. "By faith Enoch was taken up so that he should not see death, and he was not found, because God had taken him. Now before he was taken he was commended as having pleased God. (Hebrews 11:5 ESV)

Now Enoch is one those mysterious Biblical characters. In Genesis 5:21-24 we read about Enoch, "When Enoch had lived 65 years, he fathered Methuselah (and we know Methuselah don't we, the old man). Enoch walked with God after he fathered Methuselah 300 years and had other sons and daughters. Thus all the days of Enoch were 365 years. Enoch walked with God, and he was not, for God took him."

So we see by faith, Enoch was taken up and by faith and it is clear here, that he was taken up because he had pleased God. Now remember the state of the world at this time. At this time, the world was increasing in violence and in corruption and just in a few verses later, in Genesis 6 which we will get to, the Lord wipes out all of humanity because of the violence and corruption that had come across the whole world. Yet Enoch was taken up so that he should not see death (Hebrews 11:5). God took him. How and what manner? We're not told. But we are told that he walked with God (Genesis 5:22). Now "walked" is just a figurative way of talking of how he lived. He lived in a manner day by day with God, thus he was obedient. By faith, Enoch was obedient and the Lord again, gave him this accommodation. He walked with God and God took him.

So again, Enoch remained fixed on that which was unseen. Recall what he did see. In a world of increasing violence and corruption and sin, those seductive influences surrounded him, that's what he saw. But Enoch lived by what he did not see. He walked by faith in the God, who would come to be known as the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, and he did not see death.

Now we proceed to get a further definition of faith. And in Hebrews 11:6 the author pauses here, “And without faith it is impossible to please him, for whoever would draw near to God must believe that He exists and that He rewards those who seek Him. (Hebrews 11:6 ESV)

So first off it is very clear here, without faith it is impossible to please God. You cannot please God a part from faith. It says, “To ever who would draw near to God must believe that He exists and that He rewards those who seek Him”. We don’t think this way because we think we have some sort of contract with God. Instead we believe this because the Lord has said such. The one who draws near, and that is a very significant phrase there, “draws near to God”, it is one that we have been familiarized in the Book of Hebrews. The only way one can truly draw near to God is through His Son, through, as we read in Hebrews, this great High Priest. Now “drawing near” is a temple term. It is drawing near to the Lord. And with the coming of Jesus of Nazareth, the only one way that one can draw near is through the faith delivered once and for all. And that faith delivered once and for all is the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

Now we have been back in the beginning (Genesis 1-3) and we have seen the Lord created and humanity fell. All of us share the same dire problem. If there is one thing human history attests to is that every single human being is a sinner. The creation is fallen. All of these things we can see plain as day. But God has set forth His plan of salvation. And in the fullness of time He sent forth His Son (Galatians 4:4). Now we read of His arrival in the Word (ref Matthew 1, Luke 2), none of us have ever seen Him but we have heard. We have heard the Good News, the Word was with God, before one molecule existed the Word was with God, the Word was God (ref John 1:1-5). And God sent forth His Son and therefore the Word became flesh and dwelt among us (ref John 1:14). He was born of a virgin and John the Baptist who was sent to make the highway straight for the Lord to come proclaimed the reality of who this Son was, he said “behold the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world” (John 1:29). His first coming was to deal with the problem of sin. Thus He lived that perfect sinless life to be the Lamb. He marched to the Cross of Calvary offering His life, outside the gates of Jerusalem. He traded His righteous life for our wretched one, nailed the sins of humanity to the Cross. Death could not hold Him and three days later He was raised forevermore. And He sent His messengers to the end of the earth to preach the Good News.

The King is risen, repent and believe the Good News! To repent is turn from sin and this is what we are called to do. To turn from sin, from self, and to turn to Jesus of Nazareth in faith trusting in what He has said, in what He has done, and what He has said He going to do. That is how you draw near to God and it must be by faith. And the reason why it is impossible to please Him without faith is because without faith we are in ourselves. But with faith in the Son (Jesus Christ), He now gives us His Son's righteousness. And what is the testimony regarding the Son. "This is my beloved Son, in Him I am well pleased" (Matthew 3:17, Mark 1:11, Luke 3:22). That is such Good News brothers and sisters because if we repent and believe, we receive Jesus' righteousness. And by grace through faith we received the forgiveness of sins, we received His unending righteousness, on this the Lord is pleased. Not of us in ourselves but because we are found in His Son. If you have not repented and believed, today that word has reached you, repent and believe this Good News, for indeed the Lord exists and indeed He rewards those who seek Him.

As we continue now, we see the faith of Noah. And moving on in Genesis, this brings us to Genesis 6. The author of Hebrew notes "By faith Noah, being warned by God concerning events as yet unseen, in reverent fear constructed an ark for the saving of his household. By this he condemned the world and became an heir of the righteousness that comes by faith." (Hebrews 11:7 ESV)

So often the events of the ark and Noah have really just been filled down as something of fantasy because it really has turned into this children's fairytale. But the fact is this is Biblical history. And it is really not a warm, furry, fuzzy story for kids. This is about the destruction of all the world. And this was done as God worked His grace in the life of Noah through faith. By faith, Noah being warned by God that He was going to flood the earth, events as yet what? Unseen! They heard the Word of the Lord and he believed. Now how did his faith become expressed? He was commanded to construct an ark. This very large vessel which is was going to both his household and the animal kingdom.

Now it says (Hebrews 11:7) "by this he condemned the world and became an heir of the righteousness that comes by faith". Now first off we are to understand that we could be quite confident that Noah received quite a bit of ridicule by what was going on. First off from what we read in Genesis, it appears that had not even rained yet on the face of the earth. It appears

that everything was watered through a mist (Genesis 2:6) and God had not sent rain on the earth yet and here is Noah building a large boat when no-one has ever seen rain yet. And we read that Noah was preacher of righteousness from Peter's Epistles (2 Peter 2:5). In reverent fear, Noah constructed this ark because he believed God. And his actions demonstrated he believed God. He constructed this ark and it saved his household.

And as the years it took to construct this ark and the ridicule that came, that came with it, he condemned the world. Because constructing this ark was a manner of preaching. Certainly people came by and said "what are you doing". And I am sure Noah proclaimed what he had heard from the Word of the Lord. Thus very nail into that gopher wood was a proclamation to the world, to repent! And they did not. It was seen as foolishness but we know Noah as vindicated, because we know what came. And we don't think of this often but it was through Noah, the Lord of the Lords re-started the human race. We often think of course we all have descended from our first parents, Adam and Eve, but did you know every single one of us is also descended from Noah. Because Noah became the head of which the Lord re-started the human race.

So Noah heard the Word of the Lord being warned about things yet unseen, believed and again acted. He believed in that which was unseen. He acted by faith and thus we have just begun to see this tour of faith, this Hall of Faith. And we are going to continue to see the common themes and how important it is for us as those who are of faith to imitate those who have endured.

The first point I want us to hear and heed today regarding this text is it is our calling to join the victorious through living by faith. Faith is not simply what starts our walk in the Lord. It is what will continue our walk in the Lord and consummate our walk in the Lord. And we are going to read about the victories that we have seen. Noah being one, Noah was vindicated. He condemned the world and became an heir of the righteousness which is by faith (ref Hebrews 11:7). But likewise, every single human being receives the call to repent and believe and thus progress and live by faith. Like Enoch, like Noah, we are all caught in a very seductive world. There are seductive influences that surround us at every single turn. We are called in the midst of this to live by faith. And in 1 John 5:4-5 we read, "For everyone who has been born of God

overcomes the world. And this is the victory that has overcome the world—our faith. Who is it that overcomes the world except the one who believes that Jesus is the Son of God?”

(1 John 5:4-5 ESV)

So we have read of those who have overcome the world. We read of Enoch (Hebrews 11:5), we read of Abel (Hebrews 11:4), we read of Noah (Hebrews 11:7). The first one we read of died (Abel), the second one never saw death (Enoch) both were victorious because they lived by faith. And remember I want us to recall the beginning at the end of chapter 10 (Hebrews 10:39) we are not of those who shrink back on destruction but we who believe in Jesus of Nazareth, we are of those who believe under the preservation of the soul, like Enoch, like Abel, like Noah.

And brothers and sisters we are in a very blessed position because we have not seen our King. What do I mean by that? Turn with me to John 20, our King Himself declares us as blessed and I think we can better understand why He declares this given of what we read in Hebrews. Now the Lord has appeared as the One who conquered death to His disciples. And Thomas, we know him he was doubtful, and he says, “Unless I see in his hands the mark of the nails, and place my finger into the mark of the nails, and place my hand into his side, I will never believe.” (John 20:25). So the Lord appears and we read this declaration which has ramifications for us. Eight days later, in verse 26 of John 20, “Eight days later His disciples were inside again, and Thomas was with them. Although the doors were locked, Jesus came and stood among them and said, ‘Peace be with you’. Then He said to Thomas, ‘Put your finger here, and see my hands; and put out your hand, and place it in my side. Do not disbelieve, but believe.’ Thomas answered Him, ‘My Lord and my God!’ Jesus said to him, ‘Have you believed because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed.’” (John 20:26-29 ESV)

Faith is the conviction of the things unseen. And thus the Lord pronounces His blessing on those who have not seen Him and yet believe. So thus as we progress, as we walk, we are to remain fixed on the reality of the unseen. This is the evidence of faith. The Lord has given us abundant evidence to know that our faith is not baseless. Nevertheless faith still is the assurance of things unseen and it is our calling to remain fixed on the reality of the unseen.

Paul himself stresses this in 2 Corinthians 4:16-18, “So we do not lose heart. Though our outer self is wasting away, our inner self is being renewed day by day. For this light momentary affliction is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison, as we look not to the things that are seen but to the things that are unseen. For the things that are seen are transient, but the things that are unseen are eternal.” (2 Corinthians 4:16-18 ESV)

Brothers and sisters we are all in different realms of life and we all ride the roller coaster of life where we have joys, we have sorrows, we have afflictions, we have persecutions, we have hardships, and we have times of peace and security. The truth is it is our calling to remain fixed on the reality of the unseen, because (with) most of us, there really is never a time where we say “everything is 100 percent good with me right now”. There’s always something, there is some thorn twisting in our side. But we are called to in the midst of this affliction and difficulty remember that the Lord is working. There is this unseen hand working all things together for the good of those who love God. Hence the promise we read of in Romans 8:28, “God causes everything to work together for the good of those who love Him”. There are going to be times where you don’t see that! That means during the midst of those times you are to remain fixed on the reality of the unseen, the Lord working things all things together for your good.

And what does it mean to remain fixed on the reality of the unseen? Now there are plenty of things that are unseen. There really is one focal point. And for, and I might as well announce this now because it is going to be seen throughout, but in the culmination of this text if Hebrews what does at the beginning of Chapter 12 to fix our eyes on (Hebrews 12:1-2). We have these cloud of witnesses but he says to remember these things fixing our eyes on the Jesus! The Author--Finisher of faith. Our focus is to be on our risen King who we cannot see right now. But we have His Word, we have His command, we have the privilege of prayer where we can go before the Throne of Grace as Jesus as our forerunner.

Granted we don’t see these things but that is what it means to remain fixed on reality of the unseen. Devote yourself to the Word, because the Word will remind you of that which is unseen. Avail yourself of prayer and mainly gather together in fellowship all the more so that we can together exhort one another to fix your eyes on Jesus, the Author and Finisher of faith. He is unseen right now brothers and sisters but one day He will no longer be unseen. The day is coming when the Lord will shut down all the lights in the sky and He will insure that the only

thing humanity can see is the King of Kings coming on the clouds in power and great glory. Brothers and sisters we don't see that day yet but we know it is coming. Let us walk by faith! Live like you know that day is coming! Be like Abel, be like Noah, be like the fathers of old living by faith because we know the Lord exists and He indeed rewards those who earnestly seek Him.

Maranatha, let's pray. Father we do not see You now, but we know You, You exist. And You have demonstrated Your power and glory throughout history and indeed You have demonstrated Your power and glory in our lives by intervening, turning us from sin, and fixing our hearts and minds on Jesus of Nazareth. Father He is our delight, He is our joy, He is our crown. Help us live day by day with Him as our focal point, fixing our eyes on Him. We are surrounded by so many seductive influences, forgive us as so often we become entangled with sin, we take our eyes the prize, we take our eyes off of our King. Lord we thank You that your mercies are new every morning. We thank You that we have this perfect High Priest who has taken our sin past, present, and future and nailed to the Cross. Father as we progress on this path we ask You to fuel us by Your Holy Spirit. Help us be as those who would stand forth like Noah, knowing what is coming upon this world. May we announce Your Gospel to a dying world, may we walk by faith and ultimately in word or deed may we honor our King Jesus and in all things give to you in His name. In His precious name, we pray, Amen!

Sermon By

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