

Hebrews 10:37-11:6

Living by Faith

Now the just shall live by faith – 10:38

It's a very popular phenomenon in our culture today to say that we need faith. When you think about it – there's nothing offensive in such a statement so long as you never bother to define it. Don't ask the question – *faith in what?* – for that forces you to narrow the statement. The present day mantra is that it doesn't matter what you believe as long as you have faith in something. And so long as you have faith in something then it's also possible for you to join in the efforts of others who believe in something to try to make our country a better place to live.

Hebrews 11, I'm sure you are aware, is perhaps one of the most well known chapters in this epistle because this chapter addresses the matter of faith. But as we'll see in the course of studying this chapter the Apostle is not viewing faith as some sort of generic belief system that makes it unimportant what you believe. The Apostle is dealing with the subject of faith from a very narrow perspective which suggests that your faith is only as good as its object.

I think it's important to see that there's a very close connection between chp. 11 and the closing words of chp. 10. Paul has raised the issue of faith in 10:38 where he writes *Now the just shall live by faith*. And in the last verse of chp. 10 he makes it plain that he is dealing with a very particular kind of faith or with a particular quality of faith. The kind of faith he has in mind is that faith which leads *to the saving of the soul* (10:39).

Not every kind of faith, you see, leads to the saving of the soul. There are various kinds of faith and not every kind is saving faith. In the parable of the sower in Mt. 13 the Lord makes it clear that there is such a thing as temporal faith. There are those who seem to gain an initial interest in Christ and in salvation but the seed of God's word doesn't take root in their hearts and they soon lose interest. They initially receive the gospel with joy but that joy soon proves to be merely a fleeting emotion.

He also describes those who seem to gain an interest in salvation but eventually the deceitfulness of riches or the cares of the world choke off that faith and it doesn't lead to salvation either. Paul recognizes the possibility of vain faith when he writes to the Corinthians in 1Cor. 15:1,2 *Moreover, brethren, I declare unto you the gospel which I preached unto you, which also ye have received, and wherein ye stand By which also ye are saved, if ye keep in memory what I preached unto you, unless ye have believed in vain.*

The word *vain* is a word that describes an emptiness. It's actually possible to have an empty faith that takes you nowhere. Paul had the same concern for the Galatians and so he asks them in Gal. 3:4 *Have ye suffered so many things in vain? If it be yet in vain.* When you take these verses into account, therefore, it makes the matter very important of discerning what exactly Paul has in mind when he writes to the Hebrews in 10:38 *Now the just shall live by faith.*

And would you note in these last two verses in Heb. 10 that the contrast is between going forward with God by faith or drawing back from God which leads to perdition. Look at the verses again - *Now the just shall live by faith: but if any man draw back, my soul shall have no pleasure in him. But we are not of them who draw back unto perdition; but of them that believe to the saving of the soul.* Do you see the contrast? It's between drawing back or believing to the saving of the soul. It's between perdition and salvation or it's between pleasing the Lord or giving the Lord no pleasure.

This makes it very important to understand, then, what exactly Paul has in mind when he speaks of living by faith. What does it mean to live by faith? Chapter 11 is designed, I believe, to give us a very detailed answer to that question. And so that's the question that we'll begin to consider this morning:

What Does it Mean to Live by Faith?

I. It Means We Live by Unseen Realities

Look with me at 11:1 and notice the definition that is given to faith. *Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen.* You'll notice in the margins of your Bible that the word *substance* can be translated by the word *confidence*. And the word *evidence* can be taken to mean *conviction*. Substance and evidence or confidence and conviction – and in both cases the objects are upon things unseen.

Substance of things hoped for – things hoped for refers to things that are future and therefore unseen as yet. *Hope that is seen is not hope* Paul writes in Rom. 8:24 *for what a man seeth why doth he yet hope for?* Things hoped for, then, refers to unseen things. The object of the evidence or conviction is also *of things not seen*. This is why I say living by faith means to live by unseen realities. This is why faith is contrasted to sight *For we walk by faith, not by sight* Paul writes in 2Cor. 5:7.

And when you go down the list of Old Testament characters that are given to you in this 11th chapter of Hebrews you see that this has always been what it means to live by faith – these men lived by the reality of things that were unseen. Let me cite for you just two of the clearest examples:

Abraham went out we read in v. 8 not knowing whither he went. By faith he sojourned in the land of promise, as in a strange country, dwelling in tabernacles with Isaac and Jacob, the heirs with him of the same promise: For he looked for a city which hath foundations, whose builder and maker is God (vv. 9,10). He saw beyond the land of Palestine. He saw beyond the cities of this world. He looked for a city to come. This was an unseen reality – this city to come.

Heb 11:27 *By faith he* (i.e. Moses) *forsook Egypt, not fearing the wrath of the king: for he endured, as seeing him who is invisible.* In this instance it is God himself who is unseen. This unseen reality of God so ruled in Moses heart that he found himself willing to forsake Egypt even though he enjoyed the comfort and prestige of Egypt. He came to

esteem the reproach of Christ more highly than the treasures of Egypt for he was mindful of an unseen reward.

In the New Testament we find Paul himself living by the principle of unseen realities. Paul understood so well the difference between things seen and things unseen. So we read in 2Cor. 4:17,18 *For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory; ¹⁸ While we look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen: for the things which are seen are temporal; but the things which are not seen are eternal.*

The challenge we face today, then, is the same challenge that the saints of God have always faced and it's the challenge of being governed by the unseen things rather than the things we see. The flesh naturally tends to ascribe ultimate reality to the things we see and it ascribes an abstract reality to the things we don't see.

This is exactly the situation that the Hebrews were facing. The things of Christ seemed like speculative notions especially in comparison to the reality of their present afflictions. They could see and feel their afflictions. They had no trouble perceiving the reality of being persecuted and hence forced out of their homes and their livelihoods. They had no trouble perceiving the reality of prison and the threats of death were very real.

And yet their circumstances were no different from the Apostle Paul. Indeed, I dare say that there were few, if any, that suffered the afflictions of Paul and yet Paul continued to live by the unseen realities and so walked by faith that he could call his afflictions light and fleeting – not even worthy to be compared with the eternal weight of glory that was to come.

And so this is why I say that the challenge we face is the same as the challenge of the saints of old – it's the challenge of living by unseen realities rather than the things that are seen and temporal. And the way this challenge must be met is by knowing what these unseen things are and why these unseen things constitute ultimate reality.

Life itself is an unseen reality. The thing the fleshly eye sees is that life is temporal and death is real. The entire history of civilization flaunts this before us. History itself is the story of men and women who lived for a short time. It's the story of nations that rise to prominence for a brief time and then eventually fade and vanish.

I can remember trying to witness to a man once when I was doing door to door work for a church I use to attend. I asked this man if he knew where he was going when he died. He replied that that he did know and when I asked him where he was going he replied that he was going to the same place I was going which was 6 feet under the ground in a coffin. Here was a man that was governed entirely by sight.

And yet our hope is for eternal life. Thank God this morning that the evidence of this hope is sure. Our hope for life, you see, is grounded not merely in the desire for life it's grounded in the unseen reality that our Savior is alive. Our Savior conquered death. Our Savior is revealed to us in this very epistle as being ascended into heaven seated at the

right hand of God. These unseen realities, you see, of which I speak, are not unrevealed realities. Christ's death and resurrection are revealed. Christ's ascension into heaven is revealed. Christ's return to this world and the ushering in of a new heaven and new earth – these are things that are revealed. Everlasting life is revealed – forgiveness of sins is revealed – a righteousness that qualifies us for heaven is revealed. They are not seen as yet but they are revealed.

And so if you're going to live by faith you must live in the light of what is unseen but what is nevertheless revealed. And you must live in the light of what is unseen but is nevertheless promised. And when we view faith this way then we're able to see that faith is not based on vague notions but faith is based on things that are concrete or certain. I know I emphasized this word some time ago in a previous study but I'll emphasize it again now. Look again at v. 1 and notice the mention of the word *things*. *Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen.*

Things refers to something tangible, something that is real not something that is speculative or imaginary. And so we say that life is real, and heaven is real, and immortality is real and salvation is real and the evidence for these realities is strong because they're based on the person of Christ and the promises of God. And when things hoped for and things unseen are viewed from this perspective then it becomes very reasonable to live by faith. Indeed it becomes quite unreasonable to live any other way.

What does it mean, then, to live by faith? It means to live by unseen realities – unseen, but revealed realities. Would you consider with me next another answer to the question – what does it mean to live by faith?

II. It Means We Believe in a More Excellent Sacrifice

I call your attention now to the first Old Testament character mentioned in this chapter. Notice what is said about Abel in v. 4: *By faith Abel offered unto God a more excellent sacrifice than Cain, by which he obtained witness that he was righteous, God testifying of his gifts: and by it he being dead yet speaketh.*

The excellency of Abel's sacrifice was seen in that it was a blood sacrifice and it was a sacrifice that was offered in accordance with what God revealed and required. Cain's sacrifice was a sacrifice of his own devising and represented the offering of his own works. There is an element of faith in both of these sacrifices insofar as both men recognized that God called for a sacrifice. There is more, however, to Abel's sacrifice than simply being correct in accordance with the requirement of God. And there is something more repugnant in Cain's sacrifice than simply being a sacrifice of his own devising.

Abel's sacrifice pointed to Christ. Christ would shed his blood for the atonement of our sins. The bloody animal sacrifices of Old Testament times were not called for because God had any pleasure in the slaying of animals. They were called for because they constituted clear pictures of what Christ himself would one day do. There was nothing in Cain's

sacrifice to portray that picture. Indeed the picture was seriously marred by Cain's offering.

And so we're told with regard to Abel's sacrifice that *he obtained witness that he was righteous, God testifying of his gifts: and by it he being dead yet speaketh*. I believe that it's important for us to understand that this witness by God to Abel's righteousness did not come about simply because Abel did what he was told whereas Cain did not. I think what we find in Abel, rather, is an Old Testament example of a man who was justified by faith and by faith the righteousness of Christ was imputed to him the same way righteousness would be imputed to Abraham and the same way righteousness would be imputed to David.

Here, then, is another example of something we hope for and something that is unseen. We hope for righteousness. We see our need for righteousness. We are honest enough to acknowledge our lack of righteousness and by faith we receive righteousness from an outside source – even the righteousness of Christ – the righteousness of his perfect life and the righteousness of his atoning death.

When a man is living by unseen realities it becomes possible for that man to be tempted to think that he's living in a world of make-believe. Christians, you know, are sometimes accused of being so heavenly minded that they're no earthly good. And there are some Christians that live their lives in such a way as to suggest that the Christian life is a life of make believe. And especially does this become the case when a Christian develops a *holier than thou* mindset or attitude.

The New Testament counterpart to Old Testament animal sacrifices, I believe, is found in Rom. 6:11 *Likewise reckon ye also yourselves to be dead indeed unto sin, but alive unto God through Jesus Christ our Lord*. I don't think it's a stretch of the scriptures to say that this was the exercise of Abel's faith when he offered his more excellent sacrifice. Based on that sacrifice he would count himself to be dead to sin and alive to God.

Here, then, are two unseen realities – being dead to sin and being alive to God. You know and I know that sin is alive and well in our members. We come short of the glory of God daily and we transgress the law of God often and we find ourselves constantly in need of that blood atonement of Christ.

And we also know that time and time again we feel ourselves to be dead to God. He feels so far from us as to practically make him non-existent to our experience. How often have you felt the heavens to be as brass and your prayers rise no higher than the ceiling in the room where you offer them? How often must you sadly confess that your fellowship with God is more theory than reality?

This is where faith, then, must enter the picture. Even though I'm able to detect the reality of sin and even though I must sadly confess that God is a far off – yet in obedience to the gospel as an act of faith I count myself to be dead to sin but alive to God. This does not mean that I pretend that I'm dead to sin when I feel its presence or that I pretend to be alive to God when he seems so far away.

Living by faith is not living a life of pretending, you see, it's living a life that is viewed the same way God views it. You are to count yourselves to be dead to sin because that's how God sees you. And you're to count yourselves to be alive to God because that's how God sees you. And the reason God sees you that way is not because God is pretending. He sees you that way on account of the more excellent sacrifice of his Son. You were joined, positionally to Christ, you see, when he offered himself to be the sacrifice for your sins. And you were joined to him in his burial and you're joined to him in his resurrection and ascension.

And so there is good reason to say that you're dead to sin. You're dead to sin because Christ died to sin and you were and are joined to him. And you're alive to God today because Christ is alive to God and you are joined to Christ. These are the unseen realities of faith and we understand them to be reality indeed by virtue of our union to Christ.

What does it mean, then, to live by faith? It means that we live by unseen realities and it means that we see those unseen realities grounded in the most excellent sacrifice of Christ. Abel gained his righteousness not in the merit of sticking to the rule that God called for in bloody sacrifices, no he gained his righteousness through the merit of where his animal sacrifice pointed. It pointed him to Christ. We have gained our righteousness from the same source. And if we're going to walk by faith then we must walk in the unseen reality that we are dead to sin and alive to God on account of that more excellent sacrifice of Christ.

There is one more answer to consider to the question – what does it mean to walk by faith?

III. It Means We Live with the Aim of Pleasing God

Notice the words of vv. 5,6 *By faith Enoch was translated that he should not see death; and was not found, because God had translated him: for before his translation he had this testimony, that he pleased God. But without faith it is impossible to please him: for he that cometh to God must believe that he is, and that he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him.*

When you think about it, I think you would agree that such a statement regarding Enoch is a tremendous manifestation of God's grace. Enoch was able to please God. This fallen descendent of Adam who inherited Adam's guilt and Adam's sinful nature was still able, nevertheless, to please God.

And the application is then made into a general application. You and I can please God. We have the potential for being able to bring pleasure to God. Remember 10:38 *Now the just shall live by faith: but if [any man] draw back, my soul shall have no pleasure in him.* By implication the verse tells us, then, that if we'll live by faith then God will take pleasure in us.

I think it's important to emphasize again that faith is not a meritorious act that gains the reward from God. Our very faith is tainted by our sinful natures. We find ourselves having

to cry to God again and again like the distressed Father in Mark's gospel *Lord, I believe, help thou mine unbelief*. So it's not faith, as a meritorious act that enables us to bring pleasure to God. It's the simple truth, rather, that God is pleased with his Son. And if God is pleased with his Son and you and I believe in his Son then God can be pleased with you and with me because he's pleased with his Son.

Let me try to illustrate this matter to you as simply as I can. When I finish this sermon this morning I will hope that the Lord will be pleased with it and that he'll use it. I have tried as best I could to make sure that the sermon is true to God's word and that the applications are accurate and meaningful. But even if I am able to conclude that my sermon is true and I've been exegetically accurate and I've rightly divided the word of God – I will not flatter myself by saying God must be pleased with me.

The flesh, you see, has been present with me during the entire time of preparation and proclamation of this sermon. And so even if I'm able to conclude that I've been accurate and meaningful and even well received I will, nevertheless, plead the merits of Christ's blood over this sermon and over my efforts to proclaim it. And I will by faith offer this sermon to God based upon the truth that Christ was a perfect preacher who preached perfect sermons. You heard me refer to Christ's sermon on the mount as being the best sermon ever preached by the greatest preacher that ever lived.

And I will plead His merit over the message and I will also pray that the Lord will grant that the good seed of his word will find lodging in the hearts of those who listen and that the chaff of this sermon may be blown away from the minds and hearts of those who hear. And I believe that God will be pleased with my offering, therefore, because God is pleased with his Son and it's the merits of his Son that I plead over this sermon.

And it is in this fashion, then, that we are able by faith to please God. And the applications can be extended to all that we endeavor to do for Christ. As you strive to raise your children for Christ you can be pleasing to God – not because your efforts are faultless. God help the parent that thinks his parenting practices are faultless. But you can please God by pleading the merits of Christ over your parenting efforts and you can and should do toward your children what I will do with my sermon this morning. Pray that the Lord will shield your children from the chaff and grant that the good seed of his word will find lodging in your children's hearts.

We can be pleasing to God, then, so long as we realize that God is pleased with his Son. The moment we think that our efforts can stand the scrutiny of God's judgment on their own merit is the moment that we cease to live by faith and as 11:6 tells us *without faith it is impossible to please him*. The moment we look for merit in any other source other than Christ is the moment that we cease to please God because we've ceased exercising faith in his Son.

What does it mean, then, to live by faith? We've begun to answer that question this morning. We live by faith when we live by unseen realities. We live by faith when we ground our lives in the more excellent sacrifice of Christ and we live by faith when our

aim is please God by believing in the merits of the life and death of his Son. I wonder this morning – are you living by faith? Is your faith of the kind that leads you continually to Christ? There is such a thing as temporal faith. There is such a thing as vain faith. I trust this morning that by God’s grace you will live by faith and that the grounds of your confidence in unseen things will be the person and work of Christ.