

**The Rock: 08-02-2020**

**Series: By Faith**

**First reading:** Colossians 3:16-17

**Title:** Things hoped for

**Scripture:** Hebrews 11:1-10

**Theme:**

Faith has to be exercised in order to please God -and each one of us is living out a faith-filled life. I want us to understand that faith is not an unreasoned out philosophy.

**Introduction:**

One of the unique things about faith, that I have found anyway, is that many people have the opinion that it is nothing more than someone's personal belief, their own personal truth.

While, that isn't wrong, it isn't right either. Faith, any faith, needs to be rooted in evidence. Evidence which gives a reliable reason as to why you have faith in what you believe.

At the same time, it is rooted in that which is not seen, that is what ultimately makes it faith:

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

**-Hebrews 11:1 ESV**

Every human being exercises faith, every day. Even the atheist. Faith is not a Judeo-Christian concept. Our faith in so many things - such as the mundane:

"Will my car start?", "Will my favorite coffee shop be open today?" is so normal for us we actually don't see those things as faith based.

Why? Because they have been so reasoned out to the place of dependable expectation, that we just simply see it as trusted truth. That is until everything went 2020 on us.

That is why it is, as the writer of Hebrews describes, the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen.

It is important to understand that faith is not simply an opinion, but it needs to be rooted in fact and evidence.

In our Bible study a couple weeks ago, Kevin shared with us that he jumped out of a perfectly good airplane. Sky-diving they call it.

We were talking about faith and belief, and he said something very interesting and true. That the information given to us, gives us understanding.

The jumpmaster explained how all of the equipment worked, of all the safeguards in place, and that you can expect them to do their job when the time comes.

Kevin said, you have to then take that information and "step out" in his case literally, in faith that it will actually do what the instructor said.

And obviously it did. Exercising faith in a sky-diving company with a 100% success rate is wise. Doing so in one with a 50% success rate is foolish.

So you see, this is so much more than just personal opinion or truth. Neither is it some abstract belief in silliness. No, faith has to be rooted in something or someone inherently faith-worthy.

It is not a matter of opinion or subjective reasoning, absent any evidence. That is foolishness.

### **The Story:**

The faith exercised by these people in Hebrews 11 is rooted in that type of reality, in evidence-based belief that

the God who is calling them out, was actually who he says he was.

"For by it the people of old received their commendation."

**-Hebrews 11:2 ESV**

This is the faith the people lived by, not just hoped that it was real, but actually lived by. And at the very outset we have to understand that this God-YHWH- The God of the Hebrews is the one who created everything we see.

Whoever the writer of this letter was, is placing us right in the middle of the creation story, doing so by reframing Genesis 1 and John1 here in verse 3:

"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 11:3 ESV**

Genesis 1 -In the beginning God created..

Really? Prove it. You weren't there, so why believe it? In other words, if you don't see it, it can't be true.

Fair enough, but I don't "see" my wife's love for me either. How do I know that is real? By the evidence I see every day in

how she lives and functions and acts toward me.

There is enough evidence that we see as we look at creation itself to know that this was no accident. The world and all things we see were created by the very word of God.

That is what John tells us in chapter 1:

"In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things were made through him, and without him was not any thing made that was made."

**-John 1:1-3 ESV**

Jesus, the Word, seen, heard, touched by those who followed Him, rooted in our time and in history, died, buried, risen and ascended.

I believe that by faith, because I wasn't there either, but the evidence we have - the information left for us, both Biblical and non-biblical give me very good reason to believe.

I take this kind of time, not to put you into some sort of semi-comatose state, wondering when this guy will stop droning on, but to help us all to understand that

in our world of subjective-reality,  
opinion based personal truth -

There is in fact an objective moral truth  
which is absolute -with enough evidence  
to believe, but not so much evidence that  
we don't have to have faith.

All life, all belief systems are this way  
and have to be tested this way, not just  
the Judeo-Christian worldview.

From Abel all the way through to Samuel  
and the prophets in verse 32, we see a  
people who believed in God because of the  
things they had seen, and yet had never  
actually "seen" God, or the completion of  
His promises to them.

Abel, Abraham -two men of faith, men of  
obedience who brought their best to God.

Abel was the second son of Adam and Eve,  
and the one of Cain and Abel fame. We  
find him in Genesis 4:

"Now Adam knew Eve his wife, and she  
conceived and bore Cain, saying, "I have  
gotten a man with the help of the Lord."  
And again, she bore his brother Abel. Now  
Abel was a keeper of sheep, and Cain a  
worker of the ground."

**-Genesis 4:1-2 ESV**

He was a shepherd, and his brother was a farmer, it seems. We don't know much more than that, except of course, their character before God.

"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."

**-Genesis 4:3-4 ESV**

Cain brings just some fruit from the harvest, while Abel brings the "first fruit." In other words, the best of what he has harvested, along with the fat.

Ok - kind of weird and gross, I admit, but why did God accept one and not the other? Did he prefer fatty lamb, instead of a fig newton?

No, this is a heart issue, a faith issue, not an offering. If God created everything, and really doesn't need anything, then it (the offering) is about faithful obedience, which reveals your heart.

Abel understood and believed. Even though he probably didn't get the entire concept -we just don't have all that information. But we have enough.

Abel knew that by giving to God the best he had, and that's KEY, God would bless and honor everything else.

You see, there is a very real danger for us in giving to God our sloppy seconds. That applies to every aspect of our lives, not just Sunday mornings.

Everything we do, in however we are gifted, we are to give the best, our first fruits.

Paul, in his letter to Colossae, frames out for us what our heart attitude ought to be:

"Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, teaching and admonishing one another in all wisdom, singing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, with thankfulness in your hearts to God. And whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him."

**-Colossians 3:16-17 ESV**

Cain didn't give his best, he just brought some of the harvest. No big deal, right? At least he tried. I don't think so. His heart was revealed, and sadly that faithlessness won the day:



"...but for Cain and his offering he had no regard. So Cain was very angry, and his face fell. The Lord said to Cain, "Why are you angry, and why has your face fallen? If you do well, will you not be accepted? And if you do not do well, sin is crouching at the door. Its desire is contrary to you, but you must rule over it."

**-Genesis 4:5-7 ESV**

Now, I'm not saying that if you don't give to God that you will have Cain's attitude and you'll kill your brother.

But it does reveal your heart. Do you believe that God has your life under His care and control? Or do you believe that you are master of your own destiny, having to control and determine everything to ensure that "God gets it right"?

You see, that is a lack of trust, a lack of faith. Abel's faith still speaks that way to us today. God accepted his gift, and even though his brother killed him - Abel has become an example of faithful living and giving to God the best of the best because he trusted Him.

But what if it wasn't just the best of you He is looking for? What if we are

called to pack everything we own and are told to: "Head west young man."

And what if that is actually the wrong way to go, at least from our perspective. What if we were very successful where we were, and living in the most advanced culture of our time?

Then one day a voice tells you to pack up and go:

"Now the Lord said to Abram, "Go from your country and your kindred and your father's house to the land that I will show you. And I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing."

**-Genesis 12:1-3 ESV**

That is our friend Abram. His journey was one of stepping out his door and away from all that was normal and made sense. Thomas Cahill, in his book: The gift of the Jews says this of Terah (Abraham's dad) and the family:

"We cannot be sure of what these citizens of Ur had in mind when they set out. Probably not much...They traveled northwest along the Euphrates from UR to Haran...there is some reason to believe that they meant to permanently settle in Haran. For Avram however, Haran was but a

stage. What is odd about this passage is the assumption that the family's ultimate destination is to be "the land of Canaan", a hinterland of the Semitic tribes, who (at least in Sumerian culture) ate their meat raw and didn't even know how to bury their dead. No one whose family was established at Ur would have thought to leave it except for a similar city. So, what we may be witnessing here is a migration in the wrong direction, a regression to simpler roots from which the urbanized Semites who had settled in Sumer had been cut off for centuries. But this particular migration would change the face of the earth by permanently changing the minds and hearts of human beings."

**-The Gift of the Jews: Thomas Cahill Pg. 58-59**

In other words, in all the reality of normal thought, Abram was off his nut! Crazy...

It is in light of that though, where verse 8 of Hebrews 11 becomes so profound, the hinge of history as I call it:

"By faith Abraham obeyed when he was called to go out to a place that he was to receive as an inheritance. And he went out, not knowing where he was going."

**-Hebrews 11:8 ESV**

By faith Abraham obeyed. How counter-intuitive, how counter-cultural! When he was called in Genesis 12, this became the beginning of the journey for the people of God, and the writer of Hebrews in verse 9 tells us that as crazy as it was it was:

"By faith he went to live in the land of promise, as in a foreign land, living in tents with Isaac and Jacob, heirs with him of the same promise."

**-Hebrews 11:9 ESV**

Why? Well, just as with any Jesus follower, we are looking forward to that day when Jesus returns, when the heavenly city of Jerusalem becomes our earthly reality.

The New Heavens and the New Earth that we as believers hope for, by faith, will then be seen. Why? Because just like Abraham:

"For he was looking forward to the city that has foundations, whose designer and builder is God."

**-Hebrews 11:10 ESV**

**Application:**

Each generation since Abel and Abraham, has its calling, its assignment given by God and through our obedience By Faith - He will bring it all to pass, through us.

We believe because of those who have gone before, giving evidence and assurance of their faith. Reassuring us that our belief is not in vain.

This is why it is good to be reflective, and to read about Church history. All of those men and women who have gone before us, living out the call of God in their lives.

By faith, they too believed and did so without inheriting what was promised. But they believed God to be faithful.

Twice we are told in this one chapter:

"These all died in faith, not having received the things promised, but having seen them and greeted them from afar, and having acknowledged that they were strangers and exiles on the earth.

**-Hebrews 11:13 ESV**

"And all these, though commended through their faith, did not receive what was promised, since God had provided something better for us, that apart from us they should not be made perfect."

**-Hebrews 11:39-40 ESV**

Think over your life, all the ups and downs. All the good and the bad. All the trust and faith in God, and you prayed, that even in times when it wavered and you questioned it, HE showed Himself faithful to His promises.

Unseen, but not really. If we carefully examine the trajectory of our lives, we will see the hand of the Holy Spirit weaving together a tapestry of faith and fulfilment. Even in the struggles, we are kept by God, and in faith we will see Him one day.

For the unbeliever, and perhaps even the believer, I want to challenge you, where is your faith rooted? In yourself, your abilities, someone seen or some system that you think perhaps will fix everything someday and make the world right.

I offer you this Jesus of Nazareth, the one who is called The Messiah. We can never believe ourselves into a better existence, nor can we fix ourselves by hoping that from within we can change things. You see, that hope too, is faith.

But if you are honest with yourself, if I am honest with myself, the harder I try,

the more I find that I need help from  
outside of myself.

And that help in outside a city, on a  
hill, where a cross stood, and Jesus  
hung. Come to Him, examine Him, Accept  
Him for who he says He is, by faith,  
because all evidence points to Him being  
exactly who he claimed to be: Lord, risen  
KING, and

-Savior...