



## Living by Faith

*Series: Hebrews – An Anchor for the Soul*

Hebrews 11:1-3

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When you really think about it and boil it all down, there are really only three ways, or three philosophies, or three views of reality that influence how we live in this world. Now there are variations of course, and this is kind of a broad brush, but there are really only three basic philosophies of reality. The first is what I'll call, chance/fatalism, two sides of the same coin. It is the view that life is a product of chaos and chance, that there is no real purpose to life, that life is random, that nothing is inherently moral, that this world isn't really going anywhere, that is all a product of accidental and unplanned events. This view sees human life as coming about by chance. It is the "whatever will be, will be" view of things. In this view, the great god, Chance rules everything. There is no ultimate meaning to anything, so you just do your thing because nothing matters.

The second view is what I'll call fantasy. This is the view that I have the power to give whatever meaning I want to life and reality, that reality is whatever I want it to be. It is the view that I have the power to make my reality. I give meaning to reality. Whatever I say it is, it is. I have the power to bend all things to my will. We are all "little gods" if you will. Reality, purpose, meaning, truth, morality is whatever I say that it is. I am my own authority and I have the power to create my own reality, even if it contradicts yours and you cannot tell me that I am wrong. I lean on my own understanding. That is the sum of human wisdom.

But the third view is that of faith. It is the understanding that is God who made all things by the Word of His power, that He upholds all things, and it is He who gives meaning and purpose to everything, defines reality. Faith is the view of reality that that is based on the facts and the evidences of the Bible and it is spiritually discerned or understood. It is the view that says God is the source and the center of everything, that His Word is the determining and only truth, a view that is rooted and established in the character and revelation of God. Reality, meaning, purpose, morality, truth, is what God has revealed it to

be and he is sovereign over it all. God rules everything. Faith enables you to see reality and understand things as God sees them. Faith says the only and correct view of reality can only be understood by trust in God and in Jesus Christ.

Now look, only one of these can be right, right? You either live by chance/fatalism, by fantasy, or you live by faith and which one you choose makes all the difference in the world. Do you see that?

Now, the writer of Hebrews understood that. He understood that the Christian life, real life, is the life of faith. Faith is the doorway to eternal life. It is the channel by which we receive the blessings and benefits of Christ's saving work. Faith is the fuel of Christian endurance and perseverance. Now this pastor understood this. He understood that the Christians to whom he was writing were undergoing incredible pressure, trial, hardship, and testing as a result of their faith in Christ. He realized the grave temptation they faced to back away, to turn away, to shrink back from a robust and full faith in Jesus Christ in order to make their present circumstances easier but to do so would be spiritually destructive and cost them their souls.

As a pastor who loved his flock, as a man of enduring and persevering faith himself, he was convinced that the soul and future of this flock hinged on their faith. That's why he says what he does at the end of chapter 10, ***“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)

The writer of Hebrews knows that it is absolutely essential for these Hebrew Christians, and for us, to know and to understand the nature of enduring faith. And so to that end, he devotes this entire chapter to a description and illustration of genuine faith that endures, faith that lasts, faith that receives the approval of God, faith that perseveres to the end. The focus in this text is not so much the aspect of justification by faith, salvation from sin's penalty that comes from faith in God's grace to us, ultimately displayed in the sacrifice of

Jesus Christ on our behalf – although that is the underlying reality of the whole chapter. The emphasis is on living by faith, the outworking and the operation of saving faith in the face of the trials, hardships, difficulties and circumstances of life. He wants to show us how to live by faith using examples from the Old Testament, from the heroes of the faith. But before he does that, in these first three verses, he wants to teach us some things about enduring faith in Christ. And the first thing he wants to show us is

**The Character of Enduring Faith (1)** He writes in verse 1: ***“Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen.” (Hebrews 11:1, ESV)*** Now this is not a comprehensive definition of faith as much as it is a description of persevering faith. The writer of Hebrews is less concerned with giving a full blown definition of faith than he is with describing the character of real faith and living by faith. Faith is more but it is not less than ***the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen.***

In other words, the writer of Hebrews is first telling us that real faith, enduring and persevering faith is marked by certain kind of certitude about things – a confidence, a sureness, a certainty about things. There are certain things about which the one who has enduring faith is absolutely certain. There are things that the one with enduring and persevering faith reckons as absolutely true and settled – all the promises of God and their fulfillment in Jesus Christ. In other words, the one who has enduring faith is the one who takes the promises of God at face value, who knows that the promises of God are not word games, not empty phrases, not make-believe, but absolutely true. There are hopes, which the one with enduring faith, sees as unshakable reality.

The one who has enduring faith establishes his life on the certitude, on the absolute assurance, that these certain hopes are true – that we are the chosen people of God, that our sins – past, present, and future – are forgiven and forgotten by virtue of Christ’s sacrificial death and the shedding of His blood on our behalf, that Jesus is our High Priest and that He is ever interceding for our good, that He is our King who rules us for our good, that we have the indwelling strength and power of the Holy Spirit, that we have the armor of God, that the peace that God gives to us passes all understanding, that the joy of the Lord is our strength, that God is our Father and we have been irrevocably adopted as His sons and daughters, that God will not ever leave us or forsake us, that Christ will return for us and we will be glorified like the exalted Christ, that we will dwell with Him and reign with Him forever, an imperishable inheritance, a place where there is no more sin, sorrow, sickness,

death or pain, and where God and His Christ will be our light forever, all because of God's grace. Faith is a rock solid trust in God's promises; those we have seen we build on, those haven't seen we trust in.

Though we cannot see these things with human eyes, enduring faith sees them and is sold out to these hopes as present and defining reality. This is the reality that rules the life of the one with enduring faith, this the foundation of their lives – the assurance of things hoped for. Hope in Scripture is not something that is marked by uncertainty, as for instance when we say, "I hope it rains today." It may or may not. Biblical hope, the way the word is used in Scripture, speaks of those things that are now hidden but will be fully and finally revealed as the undeniable truth. Enduring faith is real and durable. It has a weightiness, a substance to it. Faith is not just a feeling, not just an earthly hope, not just optimism or positive thinking, not just faith in faith, a believing minus substance – it is real thing based on spiritual realities. Faith grabs hold of what is hoped for as something real and substantial that we only understand by God's grace, imparted to us by the Holy Spirit given to us by Christ. ***"Now we have received not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, that we might understand the things freely given us by God. And we impart this in words not taught by human wisdom but taught by the Spirit, interpreting spiritual truths to those who are spiritual. The natural person does not accept the things of the Spirit of God, for they are folly to him, and he is not able to understand them because they are spiritually discerned."*** (1 Corinthians 2:12–14, ESV)

And assured of these things that he cannot see with his physical eyes, the one with persevering faith lives his life with the conviction that what he can see only with spiritual eyes and spiritual understanding is the ultimate reality that trumps the circumstances, trials, testing, and hardship that he can see with his physical eyes.

The one who has enduring faith in God, as He is revealed in His Son Jesus Christ, is enabled to live with a confidence, a strength, a fortitude, a steadfastness, a resilience, and a courage that the things not seen are of greater worth and greater reality than the things that are – an insight and understanding that the one without faith cannot possibly have. They live not by what they can see around them, but by the unseen realities, by faith in God and in His promises, by faith in God as the sovereign ruler over all.

Let me illustrate what I mean by using an example to which the writer of Hebrews alludes in verse 34 where he speaks of those who **“quenched the power of fire.”** (Hebrews 11:34a, ESV) He’s speaking of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego. You remember the story from the book of Daniel. The nation of Judah had been taken into captivity in Babylon by a king named Nebuchadnezzar. On one occasion, Nebuchadnezzar had ordered a golden image to be erected on the plains of Dura and commanded that everyone worship it. Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego refused to do it and determined to worship only Yahweh, only Father God.

Furious, Nebuchadnezzar had them brought before him and commanded them to worship the idol or they would be cast into a burning, fiery furnace. They stood before an enraged Nebuchadnezzar whom they could see. They faced a blazing furnace that they could see and feel because of their open confession of faith in Christ. If they were living only by what they could see, this was no contest. Placate the king, bow down to the image, and save yourself from the fire. But the man of God doesn’t live by sight or circumstances. He lives by **the conviction of things not seen**, and that is just what they did. They confessed the conviction of things not seen.

When Nebuchadnezzar offered them a way to save their lives, **“Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego answered and said to the king, “O Nebuchadnezzar, we have no need to answer you in this matter. If this be so, our God whom we serve is able to deliver us from the burning fiery furnace, and he will deliver us out of your hand, O king. But if not, be it known to you, O king, that we will not serve your gods or worship the golden image that you have set up.””** (Daniel 3:16–18, ESV)

They trusted that the God who loved, them, who had saved them, in whom they trusted, would sustain them through their ordeal and whether they were delivered from the fire by life or by death, they would triumph through faith in God’s grace. Even if they died, God would reward their faith abundantly throughout eternity in heaven. They actually believed this and it was all the evidence they needed.

And we all know the end of the story. They were thrown into the furnace, and Daniel records: **“Then King Nebuchadnezzar was astonished and rose up in haste. He declared to his counselors, “Did we not cast three men bound into the fire?” They answered and said to the**

**king, “True, O king.” He answered and said, “But I see four men unbound, walking in the midst of the fire, and they are not hurt; and the appearance of the fourth is like a son of the gods.”” (Daniel 3:24–25, ESV)** Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego all lived by conviction of things not seen, and the validity of their faith was made manifest.

This is how the one with enduring faith lives. Enduring faith gives us the power to stand firm, to endure, to persevere, to strive against sin, to strive against our fleshly inclinations to quit or shrink back, and to live against the grain of the world courageously, confidently, and joyfully. It is just what the Hebrew Christians needed to see and to understand. They needed this kind of confidence and certitude that comes from a settled confidence, trust, and faith in God through Christ – a faith that is the blessed gift of God.

Paul writes in Ephesians 2: **“For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast. For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them.” (Ephesians 2:8–10, ESV)** God had given them, and He has given us this faith, this faith to trust Christ for salvation and to walk in the good and right way, the faithful and commendable way, that He prepared for us to walk. We have been saved to walk by faith with the absolute confidence that what we face is working for us an eternal weight of glory, that it is for our ultimate spiritual good and for the maximum glory and honor of Christ when

**“the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven with his mighty angels in flaming fire, inflicting vengeance on those who do not know God and on those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus. They will suffer the punishment of eternal destruction, away from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of his might, when he comes on that day to be glorified in his saints, and to be marveled at among all who have believed, because our testimony to you was believed.” (2 Thessalonians 1:7–10, ESV)**

This is the kind of life, the kind of enduring faith to which the writer of Hebrews is calling these Hebrew Christians and us, because it is this kind of faith that brings the commendation of God.

**The Commendation of Enduring Faith (2)** Look at it, verse 2, **“For by it the people of old received their commendation.” (Hebrews 11:2, ESV)** Those who put their faith in God and in His promises are those whom God commends, those whom God receives. He is going to go through OT saint after OT saint that was accepted by God, commended by God, as evidenced by their inclusion in this chapter, and in each and every case, what brought them commendation from God was their faith. It is not that they were perfect; they had feet of clay and they often failed, just as we do. They underwent trials, tests, and all manner of hardships. They battled with sin and sometimes with passing doubts, but they had enduring, unquenchable faith. God did not commend them for their perfect record, for their personal attainments, for their gifts, for their beauty, strength or popularity, but their faith.

In fact, think about, these people of whom we will read – Abel, Enoch, Noah, Abraham, Sarah, Moses and the rest – are largely unnoticed and unmentioned in secular history. The world admires power, fame, wealth, and worldly glory. There are no great monuments to Abraham and the others, no books in ancient libraries celebrating them, because what they had – firm and resolute faith in God – is not celebrated by the world. But their faith, mocked by men like Pharaoh and Nebuchadnezzar, and a host of others, made them commendable, accepted, and honored in the eyes of God and whose approval would you rather have? It’s God’s approval that matters, since He is the judge of the living and the dead.

That is the heart of the writer’s argument, do you see that? He will go on to say in verse 6, **“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)** God rewards those who have faith in Him, who hold fast to Him, that is point of all of this. These OT saints, for whom the Hebrew Christians would have had the highest regard, received the reward of God – His commendation and approval and nothing is better than that. So seek the same thing.

It is by faith that we run the race with endurance. Faith enables us to see and to count as real what our physical eyes cannot. It sees the power and work of God, His sovereign hand at work, His grace to us, and Christ having conquered all of our enemies. It is by faith that we receive God’s approval and receive His reward.

This phrase, **people of old**, reminds us that there is a long record of believers throughout the Old and New Testaments, and down the corridors of time after the NT was written, that gained God's commendation by faith. Faith sustained them, even in the most challenging of times, and faith will sustain you. And there is a solid foundation for such faith, as he shows us in verse 3.

**The Foundation of Enduring Faith (3)** Look at what he says, ***“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)*** Notice what he does here. He encourages them to settle their confidence and their certitude on the all the promises of God and their fulfillment in Christ, all that Christ is and all that they have in Him by reminding them of truth they had already grasped by faith.

He is not making an argument to prove the existence of God or for the truth of Creation. He is reminding them of what they already know by faith. He reminds them that they understand, they comprehend, by faith, that by His word, God created the universe. Really the word for universe is a word that means “the ages.” They knew that God created the world and everything in it, but also the ages, the times, the purpose and direction of the universe – it has its start and its direction, its ultimate destiny to display the glory of God in Christ – all of it created and established out of nothing by the Word of God.

How did they know this? Not by sight. None of them saw the creation happen. They understood this to be true by faith. It was all by the Word of God. Nothing that they could see was created by what they saw, but by the invisible Word of God before the ages began. They were convinced of that fact. God's Word was powerful to create the world and set its course and direct its path, and His Word and His promises in Christ will be enough to sustain them in their walk of faith.

Why is this important? Here's why. Ours is a time that is committed to a view of the universe that excludes God, trying desperately to explain this universe from a godless perspective. The consequences of this pervasive worldview have been catastrophic. If all of life can be explained by evolutionary theory apart from God, and if there is no God who created us (or at least if we cannot know anything about Him with certainty), then there is no supreme



Judge to hold us morally accountable. Therefore there are no moral absolutes in human life, and people's moral ideas are only subjective preferences, good for them perhaps but not to be imposed on others. In fact, in such a case the only thing forbidden is to say that one knows that certain things are right and certain things are wrong. Naturalism is therefore a formula for futility and meaninglessness, erasing the image of God from our race's collective self-image, depreciating the value of human life, undermining human dignity, and subverting morality.

But we know that God is the sovereign creator and rules it all by His providential power. He is the great reality of this universe and His power and His word, His will and His purposes, in you and in me, in all of His redeemed, and in all this world – they cannot be undone. That is the writers' point. Just as we said earlier, reality, meaning, purpose, morality, truth, is what God has revealed it to be and he is sovereign over it all. God rules everything. Faith enables you to see reality and understand things as God sees them. Faith says the only and correct view of reality can only be understood by trust in God and in Jesus Christ.

I love what John Piper says in this regard: “Here's what faith does, it sees the fingerprints of God at work in the details of life so that the believer gains new strength to persevere as a Christian. Faith lays hold of God. It is not the power of positive thinking but a genuine perception of the Lord, seeing him at work, tasting of his goodness, gazing upon his glory, and being satisfied in his beauty.”

That's the kind of faith that will be illustrated for us throughout this chapter. It is the kind of faith that we are to have, a faith that will make us to endure and persevere and preserve our souls. Faith that is ***the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen.***

## **We Need a Revival**

What we need is a revival, a rebirth of this kind of unflagging and unfailing faith. A faith that give us such courage and confidence that we will persevere in the face of unrelenting pressure because we see by the eyes of faith a greater reality than what is around us. Only

through enduring faith in Christ do the people of God find the strength and the courage to stand fast in this world and in the midst of the tumults and trials that we face. This is the kind of bold Christianity that we need and that the world needs to see if we are going to make a difference for the sake of the gospel.

Think about what happens when our faith wavers -- our love for Christ begins to cool, earthly stuff become more important to us than eternal things, we have little confidence in or no desire for prayer, our Christianity becomes joyless and passionless, we hold truth in our heads that we don't practice in our lives, we make little effort to witness to the lost, we fall to the pressure to adopt worldly values, secular philosophies, and ungodly lifestyles, we become more concerned about what others think about us than what God thinks about us.

JC Ryle said, "In walking with God, a man will go just so far as he believes, and no further. His life will always be proportioned to his faith. His peace, his patience, his courage, his zeal, his works -- all will be according to his faith... Faith is the root of a real Christian's character. Let your root be right, and your fruit will soon abound. Your spiritual prosperity will always be according to your faith. He that believes shall not only be saved, but shall never thirst, shall overcome, shall be established, shall walk firmly on the waters of this world and shall do great works."

May the Lord increase our faith! The writer of Hebrews does not want us to have a weak, a flimsy, an ineffectual faith that shrinks back to destruction, but one that wins the commendation of God and makes a difference in this world. It's what I want for us too.

Some of you this morning are looking for something to believe in. Something on which you can place your feet, your hope, your trust, and find stability and strength, something that won't be shaken. You want to believe in something, your heart is longing for something that is real...

The fundamental reality: Jesus is who He claimed to be -- the only Savior of sinners, the only redeemer of rebels, and you can know Him this morning by faith.

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