

We Must Believe
Christ is Enough Series
Hebrews 11:1-12
Pastor Bryan Clark

The writer of Hebrews says that the righteous shall live by faith. He says that we draw near with a sincere heart, in full assurance of faith. He said we endure to the end by faith. He'll tell us without faith it is impossible to please God—which does raise a question, “What exactly do we mean by that? What exactly does the writer mean *by faith*?” That's what we want to talk about this morning so if you have a Bible, turn with us to Hebrews 11, certainly the most familiar chapter in the book of Hebrews, often referred to as the *Faith Chapter*, or the *Faith Hall of Fame*. So in chapter 11 the writer is wanting to get very practical in the sense of, “What do we mean by faith and what does this look like lived out in real life?” He starts with what we're going to call the Hebrews' definition. I don't think Hebrews chapter 11, verse 1, is meant to be the all-inclusive definition of faith but it is the Hebrews' definition—its clarity in terms of how he is using the term. Verse 1:

Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen. For by it the men (or saints) of old gained approval. (*NASB, Hebrews 11:1-2)

So again the idea of *hope* is not wishful thinking. It's a term that can be misleading. We say, “I hope it doesn't snow tomorrow,” but that's not what the biblical term hope means. It's always future but it's also always certain. This has been a major theme in the book of Hebrews. The hope of the gospel is not that everything in this life is going to work out and make sense. It is the promise that ultimately our salvation is completed and we are ushered into a new heaven and a new earth where it will be everything our heart desires. That's the hope of the gospel. For people headed into persecution, that was their hope—that one day it wouldn't be like that. So he says **it's the assurance of things hoped for**.

Now that word **assurance** is a word that can be translated a couple of different ways. There is lots of discussion; all of the translations in the room would pick one or the other. In my opinion the difference between the two terms isn't all that much. The idea of **assurance** is the idea of *confidence*—that this is what I believe and I have great confidence in that. The other possible interpretation carries more the idea of *substance*. It's taken the idea of confidence, but I think it pushes it a little farther. It is a term that could be used to describe like the substance or the foundation of a house. It is the foundation on which everything else is built. So the idea is: this isn't just something I firmly believe, but I believe it so much that it actually creates the foundation or the substance of my life. It is what I live for. It is what defines my values; it is what defines my worldview; it is what defines my priorities. As a matter of fact it goes so far that, because this is really what I believe and I believe it so strongly, I actually live that value system in the here and now, and by doing that, I create a glimpse today of the world to come. That's probably the right way of understanding what the writer is talking about—that faith is such a deep **conviction**, there's so much confidence, it isn't just an intellectual assent, it isn't just getting the right answers on a test, it actually creates the substance upon which I build my life, and in so doing I give people just a glimpse of the world that is to come.

The conviction of things not seen—that word **conviction** is a legal term. It carries the idea of weighing the evidence and coming to a *conclusion* or a conviction. It is a reminder that biblical faith

isn't a leap of faith; it isn't an emotional, careless, reckless, wishful thinking. It's actually thoughtful; it's reasoned out and this is my **conviction**—this is what I believe is true. That is illustrated then in verse 3:

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

Basically going back to Genesis, chapter 1, **by faith** we believe God created. "*In the beginning God created.*" Can I prove that to you? No. Were any of us there then? No. By faith we believe that God created. The second part of that verse, **So that what is seen...**that is this world. It takes no faith to believe that the world exists; that is the walk of sight. Of course it does! The faith step is, "How did we get here?" ...and what it says is, **so that what is seen was not made out of things which are visible.** So the idea is even though this is what we see, we do not believe that the world created itself. We don't believe that the world self-created, but rather there was something or someone that was invisible that created what is visible. So this reminds us that the issue is not being a person of faith or not being a person of faith. Everybody lives by faith. The issue is, "What is the object of our faith?" So, for example, if we believe as some do that the universe created itself—that something came from nothing—that's not science; that is a faith statement. Most of us in the room would simply say we don't have that much faith. Something doesn't come from nothing. The universe can't self-create; if it doesn't exist, it can't cause anything to happen. We just don't have that much faith. So, based on the evidence, we have concluded there must be a God and that God created.

Another way to think about it is, as science has advanced more and more, we have been blown away by the complexity of the universe. It's far more wondrous than anyone could have imagined even ten years ago. There are those who believe all those amazing complexities simply happened by chance. That is not science; that is a faith statement. But most of us in the room would say we simply don't have that much faith. Rather we believe, on the basis of thought and reason and science, that the universe indicates there is some sort of an intelligent design behind the universe. Therefore we have concluded, with conviction, that Genesis 1 is true. It is not contrary to science; it is based on science. So, "*In the beginning God created.*" That's the idea, then, of verse 3. Starting in verse 4 the writer begins to tell stories to illustrate what he's talking about:

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.

The text is not saying that Abel's performance made him righteous. The text is saying that by faith, what he believed was the basis of his righteousness, but that faith manifested itself in action. Cain and Abel were Adam and Eve's first two sons. We're not really privy to what the conversation was with God, but clearly there was something that had to do with sacrifice to God. Abel believed in God; Abel believed God tells the truth; Abel believed that God's way is the best way; Abel believed that God is God—Abel believed! And he believed to such a degree that it became the substance of his life, which is reflected by what he was willing to give to God. There's a lot of conversation about what made Cain's offering unacceptable. Some think it's because it wasn't a blood sacrifice; I don't really think that's correct. We know from the law that a grain offering was acceptable to God. We also know from the Genesis 4 text that Cain was a farmer. That's what he had; he was to give out of what he had. If you go back and read the text in Genesis 4, what it says exactly is that God had regard for Abel and his sacrifice; He did not have regard for Cain and his sacrifice. The emphasis of

the text is there was something wrong with Cain's heart that then was reflected in what he gave; and God was pleased with Abel's heart, which too was reflected by what he gave. It is interesting to note it is essentially the fourth page of the Bible and we are already being told that what we believe will be manifested in what we are willing to give to God. It just is a reminder that at the end of the day everybody lives out his or her belief system. Ultimately your belief system is not what you *say* you believe. Your belief system is *how you live your life*. That becomes the substance that defines your life. So what the text is saying is Abel believed; he believed God's way is the right way; it's the best way. He believed that God tells the truth, and it was reflected in his gift. What the text goes on, then, to say is **by faith**, even though Abel has been dead for thousands of years his story still speaks, because what he believed was true and eternal. Verse 5:

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

Literally *his life brought pleasure to God*. I love the way that's worded because it's really helpful to think about. What God asks in return for what He has done for us is that we believe it. We believe it to such a degree that we actually live like it, and when we actually live out of what is true, it is a life that brings God pleasure. The story of Enoch is in Genesis, chapter 5. There isn't much there; the way the text is worded it appears that when Enoch had a son by the name of Methuselah, something happened in that moment that turned his heart to God, and from that moment through the rest of his life he lived in a way that it brought God pleasure. It had to do with what he believed *by faith*, to such a degree it became the substance of his life and that's how he lived. It's an odd story because at one point Enoch disappears. He can't be found because God simply took him to heaven. Enoch never died; he just walked into the presence of God. Now it's really important that we don't misunderstand. The text is not saying, "If you really believe with all your heart, you won't die; you'll just walk into the presence of God." It's good to remember Enoch, **by faith**, didn't die; he walked into the presence of God but Abel, *by faith*, was violently murdered. So there is a reality to the story that *by faith* it is not necessarily predictable; we just believe and live our lives according. Verse 6 is a very important verse. I want to come back at the end of the message and end there. So I am going to skip to verse 7:

By faith Noah, being warned by God about things not yet seen, in reverence (or fear) 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.

Now the story of Noah is really a remarkable story when you think about it. God comes along and tells Noah that He is going to bring judgment on the earth through this flood, but He is going to save Noah and his family. Noah chose to believe God tells the truth, but what would be required is he would now dedicate his life to the building of a gigantic ark through which they would be saved. The warning period was a hundred and twenty years. Most scholars think the actual building of the ark took somewhere between fifty and seven-five years. Now again, think about this: Faith isn't intellectual assent; faith isn't just sitting around in a group talking about what you believe; faith is something you believe so strongly it becomes the defining substance of your life, to such a degree that Noah believed that something would happen that has never happened before. Imagine spending seventy-five years of your life building a gigantic ark. You're at least a hundred miles from any significant body of water and the world has never known a flood before. Noah just simply chose to believe God tells the truth, and if that's what God said, then that's true, and it defined his life. The text says the **reverence**—the awe, the worship—of God was so strong in Noah, he

believed! The fact that he was building this gigantic ark **for salvation** was also a message to the rest of the world of **condemnation**—that judgment is coming and, if you're not in the ark, then you will suffer the judgment of God. That's what the text means there. Verses 8:

By faith Abraham, when he was called, obeyed (*the text means obeyed promptly*) by going out to a place which he was to receive for an inheritance; and he went out, not knowing where he was going. 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; for he was looking for the city which has foundations, whose architect and builder is God. (Vs. 8-10)

Abraham is just another remarkable story. Abraham and his family lived in what would have been a relatively modern city in the day, and along comes God and says, “I want you to move. I’m going to give you a land; I’m going to make you a great nation.” Perhaps Abraham said, “Where are we going?” And God said, “Don’t worry about that.” The text says Abraham *obeyed promptly*. God said it and Abraham believed it. But again, this isn’t an intellectual assent; this isn’t just a group sitting around talking about what they believe. He actually took his family and left. Having been in that part of the world a couple of times, you get a sense of just how courageous that was. It’s not a very friendly land. Food, water, safety, protection—these all would have been significant concerns. He left the comfort of where he was to go to a place; he didn’t even know where they were going. He just believed God tells the truth. When he got to the land of promise, it would have been wonderful if immediately he would’ve moved into a lovely mansion by the sea. But he lived as an alien, as a stranger, as a wanderer, in a tent the entire rest of his life! Now just think about this. God promised he would inherit the land, but for the rest of his life—in an ancient world it was very unsafe unless you lived in a walled city—so imagine for the rest of your life you live in a tent as a pilgrim, as an alien, as a wanderer. But he believed some day God would keep His promise. That was equally true of Isaac; it was equally true of Jacob. They all lived in tents. They, never in their lifetimes, ever actually possessed the land; they just kept believing God tells the truth. It says they were looking for a city whose foundations—in other words not a tent, it’s a house, it’s a building with a foundation—**foundations whose architect and builder is God**. Ultimately the land of promise was a shadow, but it was only that. It was a shadow of the land of promise, which is the land to come in the presence of God. Abraham, never in his lifetime possessed the shadow, but he does possess the fulfillment of the promise in the presence of God. The text goes on in verse 11:

By faith even Sarah herself received ability to conceive, even beyond the proper time of life, since she considered Him (*God*) faithful who had promised. 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 the discussion moves to Sarah, and Sarah often gets a bad rap. We fail to really understand the faith and the courage of this woman. Imagine the conversation with her husband when they are quite nicely settled in a relatively modern city and Abraham says, “We’re leaving.” “Where are we going?” “I don’t know. We’re just going out into the wilderness, and God will tell us.” But she believed; she trusted her husband and she believed. It’s true there were moments where she struggled; there were moments when Abraham struggled. But try to get your head around this. She is told at age sixty-five, as a barren woman, that she is going to have a child, and ten years later, still no child. So she comes up with plan B: “Maybe Abraham should sleep with my maid; we’ll do it

that way.” God shows up and says, “We’re not going to do it that way. You’re going to have to trust Me.” Fifteen more years go by, and what the text tells us is: she believed! She believed that God tells the truth; she believed that God would be faithful. She believed so much that she stayed with her husband. She believed so much that she was still having relations with her husband and, at age ninety, she had the child. That is unbelievable faith! That’s not intellectual assent. That’s not a group of people sitting around talking about it. That became the very defining substance of their lives! It caused them to take significant, courageous steps of faith, based on the belief God tells the truth.

Back to verse 6, which I consider to be a very significant verse—in some ways a life-changing verse for me: He says in verse six:

And without faith it is impossible to please Him, (...not difficult, not challenging...it’s impossible! I cannot live a life that brings God pleasure without faith, without really believing that God tells the truth.) ...for he who comes to God must believe that He is and that He is a rewarder of those who seek Him.

Now what does he mean when he says we *must believe that God is*? He is not merely saying you believe God exists; James says the demons believe that God exists. It is much more like when Moses is before the burning bush and he asks God His name and God says, “I Am.” It’s a very similar statement in the sense that you must believe that God is...that God is who He says He is... that God tells the truth...that He has done what He says He has done...and I believe that to such a degree that it actually becomes the substance of my life! It creates my worldview; it creates my value system; it creates the tracks upon which my life will travel.

So now let’s get really practical with this. Last week in chapter 10, verse 22, we talked about the imagery that we brought back from the book of Galatians of the idea of the *Light Room*. When the writer of Hebrews tells us—commands us to draw near—it’s the invitation into the *Light Room*, into the very presence of Jesus, to experience the intimacy and the depth of the relationship, to dance with Jesus to the music of *Amazing Grace*. But he says, “When you do that, you come with a sincere heart, a true heart, rightly motivated. I’m not doing that to earn anything or prove anything, I’m just coming because of what I believe is true.” He says, “Draw near to God with a sincere heart in full assurance of what? ...of faith!” In other words it’s based on the fact I really do believe God tells the truth!

I cannot prove to you this morning that Jesus died for your sins. I cannot prove to you this morning that the blood of Jesus is sufficient to cover your sins. I cannot prove to you this morning that there is nothing else that needs to be done. I cannot prove to you that you stand right in the presence of a holy God. I cannot prove to you that Jesus is coming back. I can’t prove any of that to you. You choose to believe it *by faith*. Oh, we could talk about things like the authority and reliability of the Scriptures; we could talk about the record of God’s faithfulness throughout history; we could talk about changed lives, but at the end of the day I can’t prove any of that to you. You’re left with wrestling with the question: “Do you or do you not believe God tells the truth?” The alternative is to believe God is a liar. So the idea of drawing near with a sincere heart, in full assurance of faith is saying, “I believe that and that is the basis by which I dwell in the *Light Room*. Even on my worst days when I’ve blown it again, I still believe what God said is true, and I dwell in the *light*!”

But here’s the thing you have to wrestle with. If you find yourself so often in the *Dark Room*, with your shame and your guilt, in the dark room with your definition again of being Loser Christian,

and somehow you have to, to some degree pay for your sin again, the only thing you can conclude is you don't believe God tells the truth. The only basis by which you dwell in the *Dark Room* again and again is apparently you don't yet believe God tells the truth. Why else would you be there? Now part of it is just learning and understanding the truth. I understand that. A lot of people have been taught a lot of things that aren't correct. I also understand that a lot of people have been taught a lot of lies and those voices can be very powerful. That's why we gather; that's why we open up the Scriptures to study together, to learn, to understand what God says. At some point I can explain it to you, but I cannot believe it for you. You have to decide whether or not you believe God tells the truth. That's the essence of his definition of faith: "I believe it to such a degree I actually live that way. It becomes the defining substance of my life!"

He says those who come to God must believe that He is and that He is a rewarder of those who seek Him. What's the reward? The reward, in this case, would be to live in the *light*, in the presence of Jesus, the life that your soul longs for. That's the reward of your faith if you choose to believe God tells the truth.

The other place that I see this has to do with the reality that we all understand, and that is sometimes life is really painful. Sometimes life is really confusing. Sometimes life is really disappointing. Sometimes life makes no sense and we wonder what is God doing? We often become angry at God and feel like somehow God has let us down; sometimes like God hasn't kept His end of the deal.

This is a big part of my own personal story. The first twenty years of my life, all I ever knew was my dad in deep, excruciating pain twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week, for twenty years! I don't ever remember my dad out of bed; I don't ever remember a moment that wasn't defined by that. My dad died a cruel death when I was twenty-three. When Patti and I began to have children really was the moment for me when I began to realize what I had grown up with, that isn't normal. That was all I had ever known but all of a sudden I started to realize all the moments I never shared with my dad, all the things I never got to do with my own dad, because I was now doing them with my own children. And I really started to process, "How do I make sense of this idea that God is good and God is kind and God is loving and God is compassionate and God is faithful and God is powerful, when it seems contrary to pretty much everything I'd known?" At that season of my life I was actually a pastor. I was preaching on Sundays and coming home thinking, "I don't know that I believe any of this. I cannot reconcile how God describes Himself with pretty much all I've known." I had a long list of questions of trying to make sense of it. How do you make sense of the pain and the suffering with a description of God that He is so kind and loving and caring and compassionate and powerful? I reached a point where I realized: either I could become angry and bitter, and that will become the substance of my life, or I have to choose *by faith* to believe that God is who He says He is, even if it seems contrary to the experiences of life. Those who come to God must believe that He is. At some point, releasing the answers to those questions and realizing I'm never going to get answers—no one is ever going to say anything that will cause those twenty years to make sense to me, but at some point you choose, as an act of your will, to say, "I choose to believe God is who He says He is—that He *is* kind, that He *is* loving, that He *is* compassionate, that He *is* powerful, even when it makes no sense with my circumstances." I've often wondered if I would have made a different choice and chosen to become angry and bitter at God, what would have been the damage to Patti? What would have been the damage to my three girls? What would have been the collateral damage of that choice? No question it would have been extensive. I can say thirty years later, I don't have the slightest doubt in my heart God is good, He is faithful, He is kind, He is loving, He is

compassionate. Do I have answers to those questions? Absolutely not! Will I ever? I don't think so, but those who come to Him must believe that He is. He meets you there and He is a rewarder of those who seek Him. In that moment God meets you there and He affirms in your heart that He is indeed who He says He is, that what He says is true is true. That's the reward! It hasn't been thirty years of anger and bitterness...it hasn't been! Just the opposite—it's been thirty years of joy and deep satisfaction. I have given my life to teaching what I believe is true of God, but not true because everything makes sense. True because I choose as an act of my will to believe God is who He says He is, and He meets me there, and He affirms in my heart again and again, that is indeed who He is!

I don't know what your story is this morning. I don't know what you're going through. I do know that life gets really confusing and it gets really painful. You can waste an entire life being angry and bitter because you're not getting answers to your questions or you can choose as an act of your will to believe that God does tell the truth. He is who He says He is, and in that moment God will meet you there and God will affirm who He is and He will heal your heart! It's a choice we make—to believe *by faith*, or not. My prayer is that you will choose as an act of your will to believe God tells the truth, because I have no doubt God will meet you there and He will give you what you need!

He is a rewarder of those who seek Him!

Our Father, we celebrate Your faithfulness this morning. Lots of us in the room would say sometimes things just make no sense. They're painful, they're confusing, and sometimes they just seem cruel and contrary to who You say You are. God, those are the moments we choose to live by faith. We believe that You tell the truth and that You are a rewarder of those that seek You. Lord, may that be true of us this morning. In Jesus' name, Amen.

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Christ is Enough

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Opening Discussion

1. Faith is one of those terms we use a lot as Christians but can be hard to define. How would you define faith?
2. In what ways does everyone live by faith?

Bible Study

1. Review Hebrews 10:22, 38, 39. How important is faith and why?
2. Read Hebrews 11:1-7. What is faith according to verse 1? Put it in simple terms.
3. According to verse 2, it's by faith that we create opportunities for God to manifest His power and presence in our lives (give witness). Can you site some examples from your own life?
4. How did faith manifest itself in the life of Abel, Enoch, Noah and Abraham? What do they all have in common?
5. What does the writer mean in verse 6? Rewrite it in your own words.
6. Think about verse 6 as it relates to our conversation about 10:22. How does verse 6 relate to living in the light room? What's the reward of truly believing?
7. Is the key to the Christian life having everything figured out or making sure everything makes sense to us all the time? Or is it choosing to believe God tells the truth and acting on that belief in significant ways?

