

Faith Defined (Hebrews 11:1)

One of the devil's oldest and most effective tricks is to take biblical language and to infuse it with unbiblical and even heretical ideas and then to promote that amongst the masses in order to create confusion amongst people. The devil has no problem with unbelievers or the world or rank pagans using biblical words and biblical concepts and talking about biblical things so long as what those pagans and unbelievers mean is not the biblical meaning and the biblical concepts that actually rest behind those things. This is how the cults flourish. If you have ever had a conversation with a Mormon or a Jehovah's Witness or a Seventh-day Adventist or somebody who belongs to some offshoot of some quasi-Christian cult or aberrant group, then you have had that experience where you're having a conversation about things but you seem to be talking past one another, right? It is because they use terms like *trinity* and *salvation* and *grace* and *faith* and *God* but they have infused into those terms meanings that are biblically foreign to those terms, and then in their use of those terms and your use of those terms, you think you're talking with each other about the same thing, but as it turns out you're talking with each other about completely different things.

The word *love* is a great example of this. The world loves the word *love*. The world loves to use the word *love*. The world is in love with love. And the devil is fine with the world and pagans loving using the concept of love, talking about love, and even loving love so long as what the world believes and means by that is not the biblical idea of love. But because love is connected to the character and nature of God and because we cannot understand anything about true and genuine love apart from divine revelation, unbelievers who are cut off from the nature and character of God and reject divine revelation never are able to understand what love actually is. And so when they speak of love, they're speaking of a hollow-sounding shell of what biblical love actually is.

And so it is with the word *faith* as well. Another example of this is faith. The devil is fine with people having faith. People with faith don't bother the devil. Pagans who talk about faith, that doesn't disturb him. In fact, I actually think that the devil prefers that people have faith and that people have beliefs and that people actually have faith in their faith and that people receive some sort of comfort from their faith so long as what they do not have is biblical faith in the biblical God. As long as they have some sort of conviction of things that they have never seen, the devil is fine with that.

In fact, he requires this of atheists and evolutionists. He requires that they be absolutely assured and confident of things that they've never seen, that they believe that

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everything around us came into being through chance and random natural processes as a result of the collision of atoms and chemical reactions and that all of that aimless, purposeless, mindless process just produced all of the purpose and aim and design and intention and order and information that we see around us. The devil wants people to have a confidence of something that they have never seen. They've never seen that happen in the physical realm, and the devil's fine if they believe that. So long as we're not talking about biblical faith in the biblical God, the devil is fine with people having faith and even receiving some solace from whatever their idea of faith is.

And in fact the world is fine with a faith that everybody just has to have. It's just like the great prophet of the 1980s, George Michael, said—you just have to have faith. You gotta have it. You gotta have faith, faith, faith. You gotta have faith. Yeah, baby, you gotta have faith. Now, for George Michael, that was just faith that his current woman was not going to burn him like his previous woman did. That happens to be faith in something completely irrational since nobody should trust George Michael to have any better judgment concerning a second woman than he did the first woman. But as long as you just say you gotta have faith, you gotta have faith, whatever that faith is, baby, you just gotta have faith, the world is fine with that.

In fact, the world is fine with an idea of faith even that is a religious idea of faith, and even a religious idea of faith that is connected in some vague and mysterious way to a man named Jesus. The world is fine with that. No less of a great theologian than Oprah Winfrey herself says that she has that kind of faith. She said in 2012, “I am a Christian. That is my faith.” Are you happy to know that? I'm going to read you some more, but I'm going to spoil the ending for you. Oprah Winfrey is not a Christian. If you didn't know that already, that shouldn't come as a shock to you. Oprah Winfrey is not a Christian. She then quickly clarified, “I'm not asking you to be a Christian. If you want to be one I can show you how.” I'm sure you think you can. She didn't say that. That's my commentary. But she says, and now I'm quoting again, “But it is not required. I have respect for all faiths. All faiths. But what I'm talking about is not faith or religion. I'm talking about spirituality.”

Now that is a complete dog's breakfast. She's talking about a faith that's not a faith, that's really a spirituality. She has faith. She has to need faith. And you might need faith, but you really don't need faith because what she's really talking about is not faith at all, she's talking about spirituality. Then she goes on to define what she means by spirituality. Here's what she says. “My definition is living your life with an open heart,

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through love, allowing yourself to align with the values of tolerance, acceptance, of harmony, of cooperation, and reverence of life. There is a force, energy, consciousness, divine thread, I believe, that connects all spiritually to all of us to something greater than ourselves.” Then she went on to say—because she's just clarifying for us, right? Is all of this really clear so far? Here's more clarification. She went on to say,

One of the mistakes that human beings make is believing that there is only one way to live and that we don't accept the fact that there are diverse ways of being in the world and there are millions of ways to be a human being and many paths to what you call God. There couldn't possibly be just one way.

Now, I vaguely remember someone saying once somewhere that there was one way, one truth, and one life. The name escapes me at the moment. It might actually be the Jesus that she claims to believe in. She went on to say that her favorite verse in the Bible is in Acts 17, the verse where the apostle Paul, preaching on the Areopagus to all of the pagans there, said, “In [God] we live and move and have our being” (ESV). She said that's her favorite verse in all of the Bible. In God we live and move and have our being. She missed just a couple of verses later where Paul says that God commands all men everywhere to repent, “because He has fixed a day in which He will judge the world in righteousness . . . , having furnished proof to all men by raising [that Judge] from the dead” (Acts 17:31). She missed obviously the verse a few chapters earlier where Peter said there is no other name given among men whereby we must be saved (Acts 4:12).

Now, Oprah said this, and really critiquing her statements and showing how they contradict Jesus and Scripture and themselves, that would be low-hanging fruit and it's really not worth the rest of our time together to do that. And I could just spend a whole hour doing that, demonstrating the insanity of what she is believing and the nonsense that she is teaching. But I just want to point that out to tell you this. She said these things in front of a theater that had probably five thousand people in it, and she said it to a throng of adoring, applauding, clapping followers. The world is fine with Oprah's idea of faith. The world is fine with George Michael's idea of faith—you just gotta have it. And it's fine with Oprah's idea of faith—you don't really gotta have it. I have it, but you don't need to have it. It's just a spirituality, or it's just a trust in some woman. The world is fine with all of those concepts of faith.

And the world is fine also with other concepts of faith like this one, that faith is a personal belief in whatever works for you. It doesn't matter what it is that you believe in as long as it is a personal, sincere, useful trust that you have in something else,

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whatever it is, a higher power. It doesn't matter as long as you have that personal belief in whatever and it works for you. If it's true for you, then it's true. Even though it's just true for you, you have that truth, and that becomes true when you believe that it's really true. So in this way faith acts kind of like a security blanket. It gives me comfort when I'm scared, it gives me confidence when I'm anxious, it gives me comfort when I'm fearful. I've just got to have this belief, this capacity, this trust in something, no matter what it is.

Or the world is fine with the definition of faith that views it as a spiritual power that all of us can access, some inherent quality inside man that is deep down inside of all of us and when you tap into that capacity that's in your soul, you touch the divine, and when you get into that capacity, you drill down into the faith part of you. It's like getting a power-up in a video game where suddenly you have all of these extra abilities, and now you can connect with the world around you, you can connect with other people, you're in sync and in harmony with nature, and your business goes better, and everything goes better. If you can just have faith, whatever it is, in whatever it is, however it works for you, this personal belief, this capacity inside of you that puts you in touch with the divine. That's the type of drivel that you would hear from somebody like Deepak Chopra for instance. This is his view of faith.

George Michael, Oprah Winfrey, Deepak Chopra, they all get faith wrong. Oprah, Chopra, and George do not know what faith is. Oprah, Chopra, and George sounds like a law firm in Clark Fork. It's not. I checked before I came up here. They have no idea what biblical faith is. They have no idea how to define it, they have no idea in whom you put it, they have no idea what it actually does for you. And the world is fine with Oprah, Chopra, and George telling us what faith is just so long as we don't have a biblical definition of faith and we don't have a biblical faith in the biblical God. The world is content with that. And some would even say that as long as we can just all agree that faith is necessary, if we can at least meet on the common ground of George Michael's lyrics, that you gotta have faith, then we can share in common Christian enterprises and we can recognize one another as brothers in Christ.

No, actually the definition of faith is entirely more profound and robust and beautiful than that. And that is what brings us to Hebrews 11. Scripture cuts through all this confusion and provides for us a definition, a description of faith, as well as the multiple illustrations of faith that come in the lives of Old Testament saints that follow us through Hebrews 11. Last week we just did an overview of this chapter. Today we're

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diving in at verse 1 and looking at this definition of faith that the author provides. “Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen. For by it the men of old gained approval” (vv. 1–2). That is, by faith, the men of old gained approval.

Today we're looking at verse 1. Next week we're going to be looking at verse 2, what it means to gain God's approval by faith. And coincidentally, actually I didn't plan this, but it works out really well that next Sunday is Reformation Sunday. October 31, 1517, is when Martin Luther nailed his ninety-five theses on the door of the church in Wittenberg, launching the Protestant Reformation, and at the heart of the Protestant Reformation is this question: How is a man made right before God? Is it on the basis of faith and faith alone, or is it faith plus something else? That's at the heart of that issue. Well verse 2 answers it. “By it [that is, by faith] the men of old gained approval.” They were made right with God.

So that is next week, and today we're just looking at this definition. “Faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen” (v. 1). So we have here a definition of faith. We might even say a description or a commendation of biblical faith. You'll notice that there are two phrases here that are used. They're parallel phrases. Though they overlap and they are in some sense synonymous or in some sense similar to each other and they're really saying the same thing in two different ways, they're not entirely synonymous. In other words, one is not a completely equal restatement of the other. Faith is the assurance of things hoped for and the conviction of things not seen. *Assurance* and *conviction* in those two statements are parallel, and *things hoped for* and *things not seen* in those two statements are parallel.

And it is fine to regard verse 1 as a definition of faith as long as we understand something, and this is key. Verse 1, though it is a good and adequate definition of faith given its context, it is not a complete and robust and full theological definition of faith. Understand that. There is a lot more about faith that could be said than just what is contained in verse 1. Faith is the assurance of things hoped for and the conviction of things not seen; that is a true statement. But this does not tell us the nature of that faith or the enduring quality of that faith or who grants that faith or where this faith comes from. It doesn't tell us whom this faith is in.

Verse 1 is a good definition of faith, but just keep in mind that the rest of this chapter is really going to add more flesh and bones and sinews, if you will, to the structure of the skeleton that we have in verse 1. Verse 1 is a very good outline of what faith is and does in the heart and life of a believer, but it is not all that can be said about faith. In fact,

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chapter 11 is not all that can be said about faith, but by the time we get through the end of chapter 11, if you're still alive, by the time we get through the end of chapter 11, you will at least have a fuller and more robust understanding of what biblical faith is. So it is a definition, though it is not a full definition.

Faith is only as good as the object in which it is placed. You wouldn't know that necessarily from verse 1. Faith has no power in and of itself. This is why Oprah, Chopra, and George's definitions of faith all fail. Because they think that faith, this capacity to believe and this ability to believe, somehow has a power in and of itself, divorced or separate from whatever the faith is placed in or whatever the faith is hoping for. And that's not true. So it doesn't have a power in itself. Faith must be in God, His truth, His Word, His revelation, His name. Faith is not a capacity within fallen man. Faith is a divine gift. You wouldn't get that from verse 1, but it is something that is true. Faith is something that God grants to His elect. Faith is connected to truth, revealed truth, particularly truth revealed in the pages of Scripture. Faith is connected to our understanding of God's works, God's nature, God's character, and God's revelation. These are the aspects of faith that we'll see illustrated in the lives of people through the rest of chapter 11, but they're not things that are necessarily stated in verse 1. So as far as definitions go, this is an adequate one given its context.

And remember that the purpose of the author in describing faith this way is to show us what faith does in the lives of believers in terms of strengthening them to endure the hostility that he has mentioned in chapter 10. Do you remember that? "You endured a great conflict of sufferings" (Heb. 10:32). You were reproached, you faced tribulations and imprisonment and sufferings and affliction. How does faith equip the believer to endure all of those things? This context is not describing and this definition is not telling us how faith is able to move mountains or how faith is able to make us do miracles or faith is able to grant us healing if we're sick or raise the dead or any of those things. That's not what is in view. What is in view is what faith does in strengthening and giving power and backbone to the believer who is facing the hostility of the world. How is it that I endure like the saints of old? It's by faith. Just like the saints of old. That's the purpose of this definition.

So let's take a look at each of these two phrases, and we'll take each one in turn. First, faith is the assurance of things hoped for. Now, there is a lot of misunderstanding regarding this statement, and some of our understanding of faith, in fact, I would say all of our understanding of faith in this definition, is going to hinge upon how we

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understand the word *assurance* here, the word translated “assurance” in this context. And we're going to have to consider what is meant by “things hoped for” and “things not seen,” and our definition of that is going to hinge on how the word is used.

Our translation of that word is going to hinge on how the word is used and what the word means, and this is why you will notice in your Bible and whatever version you have—if you're familiar with various versions of Scripture, you're going to notice there are some translation differences between the King James, the NASB, and the NIV. For instance, if you're familiar with the King James translation, the older translations like King James or even the New King James, then what you will read here is that “faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen.” The NASB translates it, “Faith is the assurance of things hoped for.” Substance and assurance. Now those are two totally different things, are they not? Substance suggests something that's solid. Assurance suggests how I kind of feel about that thing that is solid. It's a little bit more subjective.

The NIV follows the NASB translation also with more of a subjective feeling when the NIV translates it, “Now faith is being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see.” See, there the NIV translation is focusing in on the subjective feeling of assurance that we feel regarding the things that we hope for and the things that we don't see.

The difference in translation is largely due to the variety of ways in which the word translated “assurance” or “substance” in the King James and the New King James, the variety of ways in which that word was used and the variety of meanings, and it is quite a wide variety of meanings. Let me give you some of them. As I start to give this to you, you're going to be like, How in the world is any of this connected? I'm not going to be able to answer that question, but I am going to at least propose the mystery for you. To give you some idea how widely the word was used, it was often used to describe sediment that would collect at the bottom of a pool or the sediment that would collect at the bottom of a jug at the end of a fermentation process. It was also used to describe a foundation or a support. Now, those are different, aren't they? Just think about that for a second. The sediment at the bottom of a pool and the foundation of a house—this word could describe both of those.

Now, in terms of the sediment that would collect at the bottom of a pool, when you put water into a pool and eventually the dust kind of settles out, have you ever seen a swimming pool that hasn't been cleaned in a while and you put the little robotic thing

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that goes on the hose, the pool cleaner or sweeper or whatever it is. You put it in there—I don't have a pool so I don't know these things. And you put it in and it goes across the bottom and you can see the little path that it leaves when it sucks up the sediment that is collected off the bottom of the pool because of the water. What was that? That's this word that was used to describe that, that sediment. You see, it is unseen in the water when you put it in the pool but after it sits there for a while, it settles out, comes to the bottom. That's the substance that was in the water that was unseen but then becomes visible as it all collects together at the bottom.

Same thing with the fermentation process. You put grapes in a wine vat and you add some sugar in there, you let it ferment, and over the course of time what settles out to the bottom is what was called the substance. It's unseen—the substance itself—it's unseen in the liquid until it settles to the bottom. Then you see the substance of it.

It was also used to describe a foundation, as I said, or a support. It was translated as “existence” or “being.” Right, sludge on the bottom of a pool, existence, or being. You've probably met people where you say, “I can see how those would be synonymous in some people's cases,” but they really have kind of a widely different semantic range here that we're talking about. The nature of something, the essence of something, and it was also used to describe a lease. A lease on an item, a piece of property for instance. So there's a wide variety of meaning to this word that is translated “assurance” or “substance.”

In the Old Testament when it was translated into Greek, hundreds of years before Jesus was born—that translation is known as the Septuagint. This Greek word was used twenty times in the Septuagint translation to translate twelve different words, twelve different Hebrew words. So there is a wide range of meaning for this word. So is it referring to substance? Is it referring to the stuff that settles at the bottom of a pool? Is it referring to a lease? There are a number of meanings for it. I'm going to give you four of them, I think, that have bearing upon the meaning of the term here. I do not believe that the author used this word in order to create in us confusion or mystery. I think it's the opposite. I think he uses this word specifically to give clarity in our mind, as there are a number of definitions of this word that could accurately describe faith. Let me give you four of them.

First, the word *substance* or the essence of something. The King James translates it “faith is the substance of things hoped for.” And that's a good translation. It means the reality of the thing or the true and very nature of something. In fact, that's how the

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author uses it when he uses this word elsewhere. This word is used five times in the New Testament, twice by Paul in 2 Corinthians to speak of his confidence for boasting, something of substance in which he boasted, and three times by the author of Hebrews. Once here, obviously, in Hebrews 11:1. Another time that the author uses it is back in Hebrews 1:3, where we read that Christ “is the radiance of [God's] glory and the exact representation of His nature.” *Nature*, that's the word that's translated here. The exact representation of God's essence, His being, His nature, that which is substantively His. Jesus Christ is the exact representation of the very essence of God because He shares the divine nature. He shares the divine being.

And this perfectly fits the definition of faith here, since the way that it is used in Hebrews 1 describes that which is actual and in reality part of the essence and not something that is a mere appearance of something. In other words, Jesus is the exact representation of the essence and substance of God and not merely an appearance of divine qualities, but actually the essence of divine qualities. So faith is the essence or the substance of those things that we hope for. This perfectly fits the definition of faith because faith is not actually just an appearance or an image or something that we feel good about. It is actually something that creates in us and for us a substance or a reality and makes real to us some essence of something.

And when the author says that faith is the substance of things hoped for, here's what he does not mean, and don't confuse this. He does not mean that faith is equal to the thing that we hope for. Those things that we hope for, which I'm going to describe here in a moment, those things are not the same thing as faith. He's not saying that faith equals everything we hoped for so that if you have faith, that's all that you have to hope for. In other words, there's nothing else that you're hoping for. Once you have faith, you have everything that you could possibly hope for. That's not what the author is saying. He's not equating these two things. But he is saying that in some way faith treats as actual, substantial, real, and solid things that right now we're only hoping for. That's the idea. Do you catch the difference between that? It's not that if you have faith, then that's all you have or it's all you need, that's the substance of everything else that you might have hoped for. No, but faith treats as real, sees as real, experiences as essence and substance the things that we do not yet experience truly as essence and substance.

Second, the word was used to mean a foundation or a support. The word described that which lies under something. It actually meant to stand under or that which stands under. If you break the word into its constituent parts, it means an understanding, that

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which stands under something else. It was used of a foundation. It was used of a pillar or a support. That's how the word is used elsewhere. It describes that which gives support to something else. And in this sense, it is a good description of faith. Faith is that which lies under and supports a life of faithful obedience and endurance. Do you want to know what it is that gives you strength to build a faithful life and an enduring legacy and an enduring life? It is faith. That's what lies under it. That is the foundation of all that we do. It is faith that lay underneath of the obedience of Abraham. It's faith that supported the obedience of Moses. It's faith that supported all of the endurance of the Old Testament saints. It was the foundation upon which those Old Testament saints built their faithful lives.

Third, the word was used to describe a confidence or assurance. And in this way, it is describing something that is a little bit more subjective. It is how the author uses this word in chapter 3, verse 14 when he says, "For we have become partakers of Christ, if we hold fast the beginning of our assurance firm until the end." And there he is describing the subjective confidence that we have. He says that those who have become partakers of Jesus Christ are the ones who hold fast their confident assurance, their faith, all the way to the very end. The one who abandons their confidence in their assurance, they never had that faith to begin with. So here he uses the term *faith* to describe a confidence or assurance that we have.

Our faith is always a confidence about something that is true and real, and never a faith or confidence about something that is not true or real. See, the world thinks that you can have faith in things that do not actually exist. That's how the world views faith. Like George Michael, I gotta have faith that this woman is not going to burn me like the last woman burned me. There's no substance to that. It's just a belief that you have. Well, when we talk about faith being something that we have confidence and assurance in, we are describing our confidence and assurance in something that is actually real. It is substantive. It's not something we want to be true necessarily. It's not something that we hope to be true. It's not something that we're wishing for to be true. It's not our best guess at what we think is true. We're actually placing our confidence in something that is revealed by God to be true. And thus faith rests upon that revelation, and in that sense, it is confidence and assurance.

Fourth, the word was used to describe a guarantee or an attestation of something, and this is why it is translated as a lease, like a down payment or a seal of ownership to something. And in this way, this is a very good definition of faith as well. What is the

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evidence that I will receive everything that is promised to me? It's my faith. My faith is the down payment. Those things which God has reserved for me and set apart for me, and those things which God has set me apart for in the future, He has given to me a seal of that, a promise of that, and that is the faith that I believe Him. That faith is the attestation. It is like a title deed to my future blessings. And the fact that I possess that faith, the fact that I believe that and have that confident assurance, is the down payment on that future promise. The future fulfillment of those promises are sure and secure for those who are in Christ Jesus who have this faith because faith is an attestation. It's the title deed to something. It's the lease. Like the Holy Spirit is a down payment given to us, which is a taste of future blessings, so our faith and faith making those unseen things real to us, that is a future taste of those actual unseen things that someday will be actually materially real to us. It's the down payment on that.

Faith is both the objective substance as well as the subjective experience and assurance of it. Faith is the foundation of all of our obedience, and it is the guarantee of all future rewards and blessings. All of those notions are wrapped up in this word *faith*, and that is why I say to you that the author did not use that word to confuse us or to make faith a mystery but actually to bring clarity to the idea of what he means by faith.

Now what are the things that are hoped for? When Scripture uses the term *hope*, it doesn't use the term *hope* in the sense of wishful thinking about something, like I hope my football team wins this afternoon or I hope we get through Hebrews 11 faster than we got through Hebrews 10 or I hope for an apocalyptic snowfall this winter. We have no certainty of those things, particularly the thing about the Hebrews bit. But there are things that we might wish for or kind of might bring us some little comfort as we expect them, and we use the term *hope* in that way. But when scripture uses the term *hope*, it's describing a confident expectation of something. It is something that we know for absolute certainty that we have and possess, that is true, that we are banking our expectation on, and that becomes our hope.

The resurrection of the body is described in Scripture as a hope. The return of Christ is described in Scripture as a hope. Our future reward and blessing is described in Scripture as a hope. These things are not things that we're just wishing would be true, that may or may not be true. They are things that we have every confidence of asserting are true. We know them to be true and we have placed our confidence on them. That is our hope. That's what Scripture describes as hope.

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Now there are things that we are hoping for that we have not yet received. Hope is something that we believe is true, not contrary to reality, but actually in keeping with revelation. This is where hope and faith are connected to what God has revealed in Scripture. The future things include—though these are not real to us now, they are absolutely certain, and they are as real as anything is real—the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ with all His saints. We anticipate the return of Christ and all of the eschatological blessings that will entail. We hope that when the Lord returns, He will destroy the kingdoms of this world, not that we want it to be true, not that we're wishing for it and it might not happen, but this is our hope. Daniel promises that this is the case. That He will establish the long-awaited messianic kingdom, an earthly kingdom, that His saints will rule and reign with Him over that kingdom, starting here and continuing into the new heavens and the New Earth. We hope for the resurrection of the dead, the possession of our resurrected and immortal bodies. We are confident and certain that we await yet the redemption of our body, the redemption of creation, the eternal rest, a new Jerusalem, eternal glory, rewards for service, and joys and pleasures forevermore. That's what we hope for.

We don't experience and have not seen any of those things yet. But we have placed our hope on those things. Faith makes all of those things which we have not yet touched or seen—faith makes all of those things as real to us as this pulpit is real to us. It puts it right into our lives and our minds so that these things are not mysterious vagaries. They're not distant things that are kind of just images and clouds and all blurred in our minds. Faith takes those things and makes it real so that we live our lives in light of the truth that Jesus Christ is going to return. That is a certainty. That is a verity of the future that I know for certain. Faith makes me live my life like that could happen tomorrow or the next day or this afternoon. Faith takes that thing which I have not yet seen in experiences yet and puts it into my life in a very real way.

By those things, by faith, those things have substance in our lives right now. And if they don't have substance in your lives right now, you do not understand and are not having biblical faith. You have just “wisherries.” You have vagaries. You have notions of spiritual things that float around out there in the ether. But if the thing that you are looking forward to and hoping for that is yet future to you, if it does not have substance in your life, real essence today so that you live in light of that, then you really do not have faith, biblical faith, that that thing is going to take place. Faith is the substance, the essence, of what it is that we yet hope for. Because faith takes the thing that we yet hope for and makes it real in my life right now so that the judgment seat of Christ, His return and

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glory with all His saints, the resurrection of the body, the new heavens and the New Earth, the judgment that is to come, the destruction of all the nations, Heaven, Hell, all of the verities that are attached to that, must be as real to us as if we were living them right now. Faith does that. It gives substance to the things that we are just yet hoping for, those future realities.

Abraham lived in a land that God promised him. He never possessed the land. He lived in the land that God promised him, wandered around in his tent with his people, lived as if it were his land, doing commerce with his neighbors, burying his loved ones there, buying the parcel of land. Abraham did that even though he never took possession of the land. Why did he do that? Because God promised him that he would dwell in this land some day. And Abraham said, "If that's what God has promised, then that is as real to me today as if it was going to happen tomorrow." But Abraham never possessed it. Abraham's son never possessed it. Abraham's son's son never possessed it. Abraham's son's son's sons, plural, never possessed it. For four hundred years they didn't possess it. But Abraham acted as if it were true.

Moses walked out of Egypt because the messianic hope was as real to him as if he were living it and experiencing it. And so he looked at all the treasures of the land of Egypt, he looked at all the passing pleasures of sin, he looked at all the fame and the reputation of what he was offered and what he had right there in his own hands, and he said, "This is nothing, but I'll tell you what is real, what is substantive, is the reproaches of Christ." So he chose to be with the people of God, the Israelites. Why? Because of the messianic hope, which was more real to him than all the treasures of Egypt. That's faith.

The promise of a deluge and a flood was so real to Noah that he spent over 100 years building an ark for the salvation of his family. These were things that he had not seen, things that he yet hoped for, things that were future. They were certain, but Noah lived his life in light of that every single day for 120 years knowing that it was going to certainly come to pass. Faith is the substance of things that we have not yet seen, that we're only hoping for.

Now having laid the foundation for that, the first phrase helps us to break down a little bit the meaning of the second phrase. And don't panic by the clock because we'll do our best to get through this because we've laid a good foundation now. Faith is the conviction of things that are unseen. The NIV translates it as "certain of what we do not see." The King James uses the phrase "evidence of things not seen." The word is only used once in the New Testament. It's used right here. Though it is used in the Septuagint

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to translate certain other words. Here the word has the idea—the word *certain* or *conviction, evidence*—it has the idea of an evidence or a proof or a verification or test of something.

Faith is the evidence of unseen things. Faith proves the reality of unseen things. It gives veracity to unseen things. It is itself the evidence that the object of faith is sound and secure. So when a believer puts his trust in an unseen God and rests his life upon His unseen promises, that faith in that unseen God and those unseen promises is evidence to the rest of the world that those things which nobody can see are actually real.

Think about how this would have been in the lives of the people mentioned in Hebrews 10. The author says to them, “You endured a great conflict of sufferings and imprisonment and you joined in with those who were so treated and you were reproached and you suffered all of these things, and yet you look forward to knowing that you had a better possession. You did all of this. Even suffering the confiscation of your own possessions you accepted joyfully because you knew you had a better possession.” They had never seen the better possession. They had never possessed the better possession. But they knew that they had it. The fact that they had placed their faith in that unseen God and the way that they lived in light of those truths, that they had a better possession, was evidence to all of the unbelievers around them that that thing was true, that that better possession actually existed. So when a believer places his faith in God and God's promises and lives his life according to those promises, it gives evidence or proof to everyone around them that what the believer is hoping in and trusting in is actually true and real. It makes real in the eyes of unbelievers what is otherwise unseen by those unbelievers.

When Abraham abandoned all of the comforts and conveniences and his family and left his land to go to a land which he had never seen, he was giving evidence, when he lived his life in obedience to God's commands, he was giving evidence to everyone around him that his God was real, that those promises were real, and that those promises were certain. Moses left the land of Egypt with all the treasures, giving evidence that the messianic hope was real. There are numerous other examples. You see them down in verses 33–37: What would we say of those who

33 conquered kingdoms, performed acts of righteousness, obtained promises,
shut the mouths of lions,

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34 quenched the power of fire, escaped the edge of the sword, from weakness were made strong, became mighty in war, put foreign armies to flight.

35 Women received back their dead by resurrection; and others were tortured, not accepting their release, so that they might obtain a better resurrection;

36 and others experienced mockings and scourgings, yes, also chains and imprisonments.

37 They were stoned, they were sawn in two, they were tempted, they were put to death with the sword; they went about in sheepskins, in goatskins, being destitute, afflicted, ill-treated. (Heb. 11:33–37 NASB)

When they endured all of those things, they demonstrated to the watching world that their faith was real and that the God in whom they had placed their faith was real. Because when the people of God live their lives in obedience to an unseen God, they give evidence to the world around them of that unseen God. The unseen God is made visible in the lives of His people when we obey Him and we endure in faith. That's the key. And listen, the unseen God is made visible in the lives of His people when we endure and obey Him by faith. It makes visible the truth of God to everybody watching.

Now you might be thinking to yourself, Jim, if that's true, then how come when I am obedient and faithful, unbelievers don't repent and trust Christ? If they see the evidence of God in my life, then why don't they repent and believe and become believers? To ask that question is to answer that question. It's because an unbeliever is not an unbeliever because he lacks evidence but because he loves darkness. So the unbeliever will reject the plain evidence of God in the life of God's people for the same reason he rejects the plain evidence of God in creation. Both the lives of the faithful as well as creation testify to the reality of the divine essence and being and to the truthfulness that God exists, but the unbeliever rejects both of those kinds of evidence for the same reason, not because the evidence is not persuasive, not because the evidence is not there, but because he wants to suppress the truth in unrighteousness. Because the cause of unbelief is never due to a lack of evidence. There is evidence galore. The cause of unbelief is a love for darkness. Always has been, always will be. The nature of men has not changed. It certainly hasn't changed since we went through the gospel of John and you heard me say that every single Sunday for however many years it was that the cause of unbelief is never due to a lack of evidence but always a love for darkness. But

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that does not negate the fact that our faith and living in obedience to that faith and to an unseen God gives evidence to a watching world that that God exists.

Now what are the unseen things? To a degree, this is parallel to the previous statement, though it is a bit of a larger category. The things that we hope for are things yet future. The things that are unseen include the things that are hoped for that are yet future, but it also includes a bunch of other things, including things present and things past. In terms of things past, there is an example of that provided in verse 3 when the author says, “By faith we understand that the worlds were prepared by the word of God, so that what is seen was not made out of things which are visible.” He's describing there the creation of the world. Anybody here at the beginning when God created the whole world? Anybody see that with your own eyes? No, that's an unseen thing.

You know what else is an unseen thing? The global flood, the ark, the ark of the covenant, the Old Testament priesthood, the tabernacle. You know what else is an unseen thing? All of the events of the Old Testament, the exodus, the plagues upon Egypt, the crossing of the Red Sea, the manna. Nobody here has ever seen those things. We accept those things by faith, though, don't we? Why? Because of the testimony of Scripture, the revelation that God has given to us. And by accepting those things by faith and embracing them by faith, those things, including things unseen, the creation of the world, the exodus from Egypt, all of those things the Scripture records that our eyes have never been privy to, all of those things are just as real to us as anything in this world and in the present is real to us. It's faith that does that. It gives substance to the things that we cannot yet see and the things that are unseen, past and present.

By the way, there are a whole bunch of present realities, things you have experienced, things that are true of you, but things you have never seen. Did you ever see your sins forgiven? How many of you saw that? Nobody saw that. You never saw any kind of a ledger where your sins were wiped out. How many of you ever saw the imputation of Christ's righteousness to you? Anybody see that with your own eyes? You never saw that, did you? Nobody ever saw the—yet it's true of us. I had the righteousness of Christ imputed to my account before I could even spell *imputation*. I'd never even heard the word *imputation*. And yet, imputation was true of me. My sins were imputed to Christ. His righteousness was imputed to me. I've never seen that with my eyes. Have you ever seen your heavenly adoption certificate? Have you ever seen your regeneration? Have you ever seen your election? Have you seen your justification? Have you seen your glorification? Have you seen any of those spiritual realities? Those spiritual things that

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are true of you are true of you, and though you have experienced them, you've never seen them with your eyes.

There's all kinds of present things about you that you've never seen with your eyes. You are free to approach God today. The way to stand in the presence of God and come before His throne with great confidence, it is clear for you, it is open. Have you seen that way with your own eyes? You've never seen it with your eyes, have you? Have you seen the priestly ministry of the Lord Jesus Christ interceding for you, praying for you, keeping you and sustaining you and interceding for you? Have you witnessed that with your own eyes? All of these things we take on the basis of what Scripture has revealed. They're all true.

By faith, these things that are spiritually true of me, they are evidenced in my life. Now, I have seen the evidence of all of those things. I've never seen those things happen, but I've seen the evidence of them. Your new heart, your new affections, your love for the brethren, your love for the Word of God, your sanctification, your growth and holiness, your victory over temptation, all of those things you have seen in your life. Those are the results of your justification, your sanctification, your election, your regeneration, your adoption, all those things that you've never seen happen, the imputation of righteousness, the forgiveness of your sins. Those things have all taken place. You have not seen them, but they have worked out in your life and they give evidence to you that those things are actually true. If there's no evidence of those things, you have no reason to believe those things are true.

It is by faith that in our lives we bear evidence to the truthfulness of justification, election, regeneration, adoption, imputation, forgiveness, the intercessory ministry of Jesus Christ, all of those things that I have never seen. The evidence for them is produced in my life by faith. So it makes real and substantive in my life things that I have never seen but that are actually true of me. And of course there are things yet future that we are waiting for, and we covered those under the last point. Unseen things include things in the past which we have not seen, those realities revealed in Scripture. They include things in the present which we have not seen but we have experienced and we know to be true. And they include things in the future that we hope for but we have not seen. Faith makes all of them real, demonstrates the truthfulness of them, and it gives evidence of the fact that these things are true. That is the role of faith.

It is by faith that you lay hold of things that are unseen. It is by faith that you and I embrace the truthfulness of Scripture. It is by faith that the things which are hoped for

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in the future are made real to us. It is by faith that we experience unseen and future things presently in our lives. It is faith that does that.

My time has gone, but fortunately I don't have to say everything there is to say about faith in one sermon since there are at least one or two that I can think of in the weeks ahead. But I will close with this quote from John Calvin. Calvin said this—now understand the context of what he is saying here. He is describing Hebrews 11:1. And what you are going to hear Calvin say is that sometimes the faith that we have in God runs contrary and looks like it is not true in light of everything else going on around us. But faith helps us to realize that these things are true, and it lifts us out of that. Here's how Calvin said it: “The Spirit of God shows us hidden things, the knowledge of which cannot reach our senses. We are told of the resurrection of the blessed, but meanwhile we are involved in corruption.” Now by that, he doesn't mean that we're involved in doing corrupt works. He's simply saying that we are told of the resurrection of the blessed and yet our bodies are decaying right while we sit in them, are they not? So Calvin says,

We are told of the resurrection of the blessed, but meanwhile we are involved in corruption. We are declared to be just and sin dwells in us. We hear that we are blessed, but we are overwhelmed by untold miseries. We are promised an abundance of good things, but we are often hungry and thirsty. God proclaims that he will come to us immediately but seems to be deaf to our cries. What would happen to us if we did not rely on our hope and if our minds did not emerge above the world and out of the midst of darkness through the shining word of God and by his Spirit? Faith is therefore rightly called the substance of things which are still the objects of hope and the evidence of things that are not seen.

See, we're promised these things, and we're experiencing these things, and there seems to be no connection between those two realities. Faith is what connects those two things and helps us to see that what we live in now is not really the substance of what we are in Jesus Christ and what we have been provided. Faith is what lifts us out of this world and allows us to get a taste and a glimpse of the next.

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