

Understanding What Faith Is (Part I)

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[0 : 00] All right, Hebrews chapter 11, verse 1, in fact, the first three verses, and then I'll include tonight, which is understanding what faith is. And so let me read those verses. Now, faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen, for by it, that is by faith, the elders obtained a good testimony. We're not talking about Tom and Mike and James, elders in that sense. We're not talking about office in the church. We're talking about elders in the sense of the people that are going to be listed here, those who have come before us, kind of the foundation of faith. The elders obtained a good report. How did they obtain a good report? Through faith, their faith. By faith, we understand that the worlds were framed by the Word of God, so that the things which are seen were not made of things which are visible. That's a very interesting verse of Scripture. We're not going to get to that verse tonight. That will be saved for next Wednesday. And then verse 6, but without faith, it is impossible to please Him, for he who comes to God must believe that He is, and that He is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him. All right, so understanding what faith is. I think most of us would agree that we're living in difficult times. I think we ought to have a positive outlook on life and not be defeated and discouraged by the things that are going on in our culture, our country, our world. But that doesn't mean that we're blind to the reality that things are in pretty bad shape. I mean, they really are. At about every level that you could think of, every context you could possibly name, we live in fearful days, in a sense, not that we should fear. And someone has said that everything that's not nailed down is coming apart, and the devil is pulling nails as fast as he can.

And that's just kind of the way you could describe what's going on in our lifetime. Now, it's not that this is something brand new. There have been troubling times all the way through the history of mankind, and America has had troubling times. But I'm not talking about troubling times that are created by man-made events like wars and such as that. I'm talking about spiritual conditions. And we're living in, I would venture to say, the lowest that we've ever been spiritually as a nation. Need of revival.

In need of revival more than we ever have before. And it's been well over a century since we've experienced what we would call true revival and spiritual awakening in our nation. And we're in desperate need of it. I don't know if God's going to grant that for us before Jesus comes. I don't know if we'll see it in our lifetime if Jesus does not come until after we're gone. But we're in desperate need.

Now, having said that, we're to live according to faith, regardless of the times, and regardless of what might be happening in your small circle of life, as well as the larger circle, our culture, our country, our world. We are to be living by faith and a life that is full of faith. That's what I need. That's what you need. What our church needs. What the Christian community in this country and in our world must have, must live according to, and that is faith in Almighty God and faith in His Word, His Holy Word.

[4 : 40] That's what we need, what we must have. And now, we don't just need to possess faith. In a sense, and we'll talk about this a little bit later, that we just need to have it and have more of it.

It's not just simply possessing it. It is really, in reality, it is that the faith, the true faith would possess us. And that then would make it all conclusive of our lives and our outlook on life itself and how we live it.

So, not just possessing yet and more of it. I mean, it's important. But it is that the faith, the true faith, would absolutely possess us.

And Adrian Rogers used to say, a little faith will take your soul to heaven, but great faith will bring heaven to your soul. You might want to jot that down. I don't think I put that in your notes.

That's an interesting saying. You know, just kind of a turn of a phrase, but, you know, we're not just talking about faith to cope and faith to get by and faith to, you know, to ward off discouragement.

[6 : 00] We're talking about a life that is full of faith and joy and that we're actually captured by the one true faith in God and in His Word.

The Bible says, and I think I quoted this verse, well, I don't know if I did this last Sunday, I can't remember, but I have recently. Matthew 9.29, the Bible says, according to your faith, be it unto you. Now, that's the King James. I've memorized it that way. That's what Jesus said, according to your faith, be it unto you. And that's very similar, in fact, the same idea of what we find here in Hebrews chapter 11 and verse 2 when it says, for by it, by faith, the elders received a good report. It was by faith, according to faith, or through faith that the elders received a good report. According to your faith, be it unto you.

Now, again, elders, what is meant here is our fathers in the faith. Those who have come before us and way before us, according to what we have listed here in Hebrews chapter 11, there are, quote, elders.

[7 : 16] And so, by faith, they received a good report. A good report. A good report from whom? From God. And they're listed here.

God, the Holy Spirit, has inspired Paul to highlight these men and women of faith. He's giving a report. It's God, the Holy Spirit, giving a good report about these particular people in history, our fathers of faith.

He's highlighting their faith here. Some of you might remember when you were in school that you, I don't know if they still do this today, but you had to take your report card home and give it to your parents.

Do you remember that? I imagine today they probably email them to their parents. So, I kind of skipped the middle man there because sometimes the report card didn't get home.

And I really suspect, at least in my case, I should get an A just for the courage to bring the thing home. When I was in school, I didn't get to be a serious student until I got to seminary.

[8 : 24] I kind of just, well, anyway. I need to share that with you. But there's, in a sense, a heavenly report card. And, you know, the heavenly report card is going to grade us according to our faith.

And that really defines what will take place at the judgment seat of Christ. We're not going to be judged there, graded according to our sins because that's all been judged and been acquitted. Not because God is just a nice guy to us and we're deserving, but because of Jesus. And He took our sins to the cross. But when we stand before the judgment seat of Christ, we'll be judged according to our works.

And what sort they are. And were they done by faith? And so the heavenly report card is according to your faith, according to your faith, be it unto you.

And by faith, the elders received a good report. All right, so I think it's safe then to say that God measures us today as believers, looks at us, examines us according to our faith.

[9 : 40] Do you ever worry? No? Do you ever lie? Okay. We ought to just get our heads like that.

You know, nod. Yes, because we all do from time to time. Well, worry, what is it? It's a lack of faith. And, you know, to some degree or another.

And we can trace all worry back to a lack of faith. Do you ever feel lonely?

Ever get lonely? Think you're all alone? Ever had experiences like that? Well, for a believer, that is connected or is manifested because of a lack of faith.

Because what did the Bible say? The Lord said, I will never leave you nor forsake you. And so he's with us all the time. And so it is our faith then that makes his presence known to us, real to us.

[10 : 55] And so if he's not real to us, even in the darkest of times, the times of loneliness, when we think we're all alone and nobody cares, if we ever feel that way, then his presence is not known to us.

And it's faith that makes his presence known to us. And just kind of listening, if you ever break God's commandments, you'd better shake your head, nod your head, yes.

We're all lawbreakers. And just because we're saved, redeemed, you know, spirit-filled doesn't mean that we don't break God's laws all the time.

Whether the letter of it or the spirit of it. And really it's both. And so if you're a lawbreaker, it's because you don't have enough faith. Just plain simple.

Because if you really believe the Word of God, that it is His Word, and you know who God is, and this is His Word, if you really believe that, and you believe then that God's Word is the best thing for us, then you would always obey it.

[12:09] And so it can be tied right back to our faith. All right, so now, enough of an introduction, better get to it. We'll talk about faith, what it is. According to Hebrews 11, it's not that it tells us one thing and another part of the Bible tells us another.

It's a perfect unity. But it's a good place to go when you want to find out what faith is, what it does, how to understand it, how it's described here.

And the outline for the study is really very simple. And you really have it all there. We're going to flesh out the first two points, which are the need for faith.

That's number one. I told you it was simple. The need for faith. The second thing I want you to notice is the nature of faith. The need for faith.

The nature of faith. And then next week, we'll come back and look at the necessity of faith. That sounds very much like need. But we'll go just a little bit different direction there.

[13:17] The necessity of faith. All right, so the need for faith. Verse 1. Let me read it again. You've got it, I think, printed there in your notes. Faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen.

And what I want you to focus on there is this phrase, things hoped for. Every part of these verses, I mean, I can make this argument about all of God's Word and every word of it.

But some verses are maybe more profound, packed with more truth.

That's not even a good way to put it. Bread. I guess just every word is so important here. Every word has great weight. And every phrase, and consequently.

And so the thing that carries such great weight in this first verse is this phrase, things hoped for. What does that mean? Well, the implication is that we don't have everything we need yet.

[14:29] We're not complete yet. I think maybe I've got that in your outline there. It means we're not complete yet. Because there are some things we need every day.

I mean, do you have everything you need? Sometimes we'll say that. But in reality, we know the truth is we don't have everything we need yet. And there are some things that we want, that God wants us to want, wants us to have, but we don't have them yet.

And certainly there are things promised us in Scripture that we do not have yet. And we'll not have some of these things. We'll not have until this life is over.

And we can kind of take Scripture and kind of map out some of those things out into the future that God has promised us. We don't have them yet. So these are things hoped for. And so we're hoping for things, and we don't have these things, not yet, in reality.

And someone might think, well, that's kind of a bad thing. The truth is that's good. It's a good thing that we don't have everything yet. And it's a good thing to have hopes.

[15:41] And the truth is that God has made us incomplete for a purpose. Have you ever thought about that? Or maybe you would rather think, well, God, why don't you just give me everything I need now?

Why wait for it? God has made us incomplete for His purpose. And it's a good purpose. Because there is within every single one of us a divine dissatisfaction.

I know there is a demonic dissatisfaction or a sinful dissatisfaction.

That's another issue altogether. I mean, we sometimes and oftentimes want things that God does not want for us. And things that are bad for us, but we still want them. We're not talking about that.

We're talking about our hopes that are based upon things that God has promised us in His Word. And so we always are in a state of divine dissatisfaction.

[16:50] And I'm saying to you that that's a good thing. And God has made us that way. You know, a dog can be pretty satisfied. It doesn't take very much to satisfy a dog.

It doesn't take very much to satisfy them. All in the world they need is a warm place to sleep, something to eat. Every now and then a little achievement in life.

That's why I think some people ought not to have dogs. They put them out in a little cage in the backyard. And they just stay out there and don't have anything to do. So they need a little achievement, you know, catch a squirrel or a stick.

Or maybe a stick would be better, or a cat. So they need a little achievement. All right, so that's all a dog needs. Warm place to sleep, something to eat, a little achievement in life, and some affection.

Our dogs really do need that. They crave that. And you give them those four things, and they're happy. The problem is that there are a lot of people who are living for those same things. And they are content to be satisfied with those things.

[17 : 53] You know, a nice place to sleep, something to eat, a sense of achievement, and a little affection. But what is that but just a good dog's life? You know, we're meant for something more than that.

These things are good, and God wants us to have these things. And yeah, we do need them. And they contribute to our contentment and peace and things. But there's more to it than that.

We want to live more than just a dog's life. So there needs to be this kind of divine dissatisfaction for something more. And our hopes are always in something more that God has in store for us. And we live always in the expectation of those things and joy of even the thought of some of those things that God has promised us.

Some cynic has described life in three phases. You can jot this down. I don't think I put this in your notes. This is a cynic.

[18 : 55] He described life in three phases. We are born crying. We live complaining. And we die disappointed.

That's sad, isn't it? And that's how this guy describes life. In fact, he went on to say, Youth is a blunder. Maturity is a struggle. And old age, a regret.

Boy, what a happy guy. Pediful. He's living a dog's life. In fact, worse than a dog's life. We're not to live that way.

Some people are content to live that way or think that's all that they deserve or all that they could ever hope to have. And they're just living a dog's life. And someday they're going to die.

And they're going to just be buried and dissolved in the grave. And that's all there is to it. Pediful. But we have a divine destiny, don't we?

[19 : 52] In fact, even those who are unbelievers have a divine destiny. They don't know it. And if they really did know it, then they would turn to Christ.

But we have a divine destiny as believers. We've been given hope. And here's the key. And it is faith that gives substance to that hope. See how important faith is.

If you didn't have faith, then this hope would be just willy-nilly. Just kind of like a mist. Nothing really tangible about it.

So we've been given hope. And it is faith that gives substance to that hope. The need of faith, then, is this. To turn all of our hopes one day into realities.

And one day that will be the case for them. Now, that's the need for faith. Let's consider the nature of faith. The nature of faith.

[20 : 53] And here's where we focus on how God describes faith. The description of faith. It's not really a definition. Faith is like you would read in a dictionary.

This is a description of it, isn't it? We have it right here. He gives a description of faith. And he describes faith under three headings.

First, he says faith is the what? Substance of things hoped for. All right? Substance.

So faith is substance. Second, faith is the evidence. See, this is a description. Faith is the evidence of things not seen.

And then third, through faith we understand. Worlds, we're not made, you know, and so forth. All right? So there are the three kind of descriptions.

[21 : 54] They all come together. These three things form a description of faith. Substance.

Evidence. Understanding. And that's it. Right out of the Bible. So, first of all, faith gives us substance.

Faith gives us substance. What does substance mean? You know, just pick the word apart. It means the same thing in English as it does in the Greek, by the way.

That's not always the case. That's the case here. The word substance means, well, just pick it apart. Sub. Sub. That means something beneath.

All right? And stance is something to stand on. Sub, beneath. Stance, stand on. So, it means something beneath us to stand on.

That's the meaning of the word substance. And that really is very informative when we apply that to faith.

[23 : 04] It's substance. It's not some concept kind of out there that can change or be changed according to whatever you might feel like on a certain day.

It's not something, you know, some dynamic. It's a substantive thing. Faith is substance. Now, we've got to understand what that means. It's something that's beneath us.

So, this faith is founded upon something, isn't it? Which is what? God's word.

You could say God. God's word is the same. He and his word are the same. God and his word. God and his word are the same. It's something beneath us that's firm.

It's solid. It's unshakable. It's unchanging. Unchangeable. And we can stand firmly upon it.

[24 : 13] So, it's substance. Substance is something very substantive. Some people say, you know, don't give me this stuff about faith. I want something solid.

Solid to stand on. Solid to believe in. Well, you never find anything more substantive than faith. Because you'll never find a better place to stand than when you are standing upon the firm foundation of God's word.

That never changes. And it's absolutely true. So, faith is substance. We've got something beneath us that is real.

We move on to the second thing. It's not only substance. The faith gives us evidence. It really is evidence. It is the evidence.

How do you know there is a God? Somebody tell me. I will test it. That's right. You know, you can make some arguments.

[25 : 21] And some have. Some philosophical arguments. You know, the great cause of all things. I mean, it's just reasonable belief. And some holy other.

And so forth. You can make some philosophical arguments. But when it really comes down to it. You've got faith. You've got faith.

How do you know the Bible is true? Now you can't say it. Because the Bible tells me something. Actually, it does.

But I'm just saying, you know, people can argue with you and say, oh, you just believe that. It doesn't mean it's true. How do you know?

And I'm not talking about how do you make a case for that. That's another issue. And you can make a pretty convincing case about the Word of God and its truthfulness, its accuracy, and inerrancy.

[26 : 26] All you have to do is do some study about the origin of Scripture. And, you know, the manuscripts and fragments of manuscripts that we have that date way back and how they all still stand in agreement.

And you can make, again, some philosophical arguments about the, you know, the truth of Scripture, the reliability of Scripture. But, again, the question, how do you know?

Because all of those philosophical arguments, though they carry some weight, will come to an end at some point. And then you must say, I believe it.

But it's more than just, you know, well, it's just what I believe. You have something that's in you. It's called faith.

It's not just something you've decided upon at some point. Or something you've grown into. It's something that's substantive, that God has gifted you with.

[27 : 36] It's called faith. And the faith itself is the evidence that this book is true. And that God is, there is a God.

And how do you know there is a heaven? You've never been there, have you? Some have claimed to have been there. But how do you know? How do you know? How do you know that Jesus is coming again?

What by the pastor? Know it. Well, and that's part of what I'm getting at. I just know it. It's that I just know it is part of the evidence that it's true.

Faith is the evidence. You've got faith. Faith is the evidence that these things, and many other things we can mention, are true. Now, let me make a point here, because faith does not make these things true.

That's kind of faith in faith itself. Faith doesn't make things true. A lot of people, you know, they don't really know what faith is.

[28 : 46] They think that faith is, you know, if you just believe hard enough, you don't just have a positive belief about something, and believe it hard enough that you can make it so.

That somehow wishing makes it so. But that's not what faith is. Sometimes, you know, you hear somebody say, you know, well, I don't know if I can do this.

I don't know if this is going to work. And someone else will say, well, just have faith. You ever said that to yourself? Just have a little faith. Well, you know, I think I know what we mean.

But the reality is that's not faith. That's not what faith is. You know? Well, it's not positive thinking. It's not optimism.

We ought to be thinking positively. I think that's a good thing. And we ought to be optimistic about things and not be pessimistic.

[29 : 47] But that's not what faith is. That's something different. You know, just thinking that everything is going to somehow work out all right. That's not what faith is. Things don't come into being because I have faith.

I have faith because certain things are already into being. And understand the difference between those two things. Let me say that again.

Maybe you want to write it down. Things don't come into being because I have faith. You know, just have a little more faith and this is going to happen. No, I have faith because certain things God has promised in His Word already are.

They already are. I have faith because they've already come into being. Faith is the evidence of it. You ever watch TV and, you know, you probably never really thought about this, but how do you know there's a television station out there?

In fact, maybe it's local enough that you've driven by it. But otherwise, how do you know it's out there? Well, you know it's out there because you're getting the television program. You know the station is there because you're receiving the television program.

[31 : 06] And so the program that you're watching on TV is the evidence that the station is real. That it exists. Faith then is the evidence of hope.

Of those things you're hoping for. It's the evidence that those things are real and true. And they're yours. And one day will be yours. And so forth. Believing doesn't make it so.

But I believe because it is so. And God has revealed it in His Word. So my faith is the evidence that it is so.

I know this is a philosophical kind of thought, but it's really more than that. I mean, this is true.

Because, you see, you can't have faith for anything that is not true.

I mean, that's another side of the argument or a different side of the same argument. My faith doesn't make something true. It turns something from false to true or not so to something that is so.

[32 : 08] That's the same argument. You can't have faith for anything that is not true. It has to be true before you can have faith. Faith is rooted in truth.

The Word of God. That's important. So important in our understanding of faith. And God gives me the faith, gives me my faith, to prove that these things are true.

What God has said in His Word are true. A little boy was flying a kite. I may have used this illustration before. It's one of my favorites.

A little boy flying a kite one day. You know, and he's got that kite up in the air. And he's got a lot of strings. So it goes way up there.

He just keeps going up and up and up. And it's a cloudy day. And pretty soon the kite goes in behind the clouds. You can't see it anymore. And so he's just standing there, you know, flying his kite.

[33 : 08] He's got the string in his hand. And this fellow comes by and says, what are you doing? And the boy says, I'm flying my kite. He looks up there. I don't see it. How do you know it's there? The boy said, I know it's there because I feel the tug on the string.

That's, you know, a good way to illustrate this. Because faith, I did put this down there, I think, in your notes.

Faith is the tug on the heart. The spirit, I mean, it's a believer. I mean, a believer's heart. It's a tug on the heart that you sense, you feel.

You know it's there. It's a tug on the heart that you feel that tells you that the hope is there. All the hopes that God has promised, they're real.

And faith is the evidence of it. Faith is the evidence of things not the same. Faith is substance. Faith is evidence. And then finally, faith is understanding.

[34 : 14] It gives us understanding. Understanding, the kind of understanding we're talking about here is not a kind of understanding about truth that is based upon seeing.

All right? It's not based upon seeing. You know, someone would say, now, preacher, I'm a practical person, you know. Just practical, you know, bread and butter.

I see things as they are. I've got to see it. I've got to see it. And you can't talk to me about this kind of mystical kind of faith business.

I want something that's real. That's what some people will say. Seeing is believing. You know, that kind of thing. But what that person really means is he or she wants something that can be experienced with all the human senses.

Touch and hear and smell and taste and see. So, you know, as long as I can experience it with my physical senses, then I'll believe in that.

[35 : 26] You know. But understanding what's true, understanding truth and the things that God has given to us to hope for, that's not based upon seeing what you see.

Those things, by the way, that you see, touch or hear or smell or sense in some of those ways, those things are really not as real as you think.

You say, well, what do you mean by that? I mean, this building is not real. The floor we're standing on is not real. Well, it's not as real as you think.

Things you see and experience with your physical senses, they're not as real as you think because those things are passing away. 2 Corinthians 4.18.

I think I did put that in your notes. While we look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen. So, we're really admonished here to look at the things not seen, not the things that are seen.

[36 : 30] We don't put our faith in the things that are seen. And he goes on, for the things which are seen are temporal. They're temporary. But the things which are not seen, what are they?

Eternal. They're eternal. All right, so let me just ask you, which is more real? What is passing away or that which can never pass away? That's eternal.

And then, also I would say to you that understanding, this kind of understanding, not based upon observable, measurable facts.

So, we go beyond just the physical senses, but even what is said to be facts. They're observable. They're measurable facts, like scientific facts.

Or this would be kind of the empirical evidences. Understanding of truth and understanding of reality is not based upon these things.

[37 : 34] Someone might say, well, don't give me this business about faith. I want the scientific facts. Well, the greatest fact is God.

Right? The greatest fact is God. And the Bible says, by faith we understand that. So, if you're not proving that scientifically, but that's what people want, you know.

They say, you know, you can't understand things by faith. You can't evaluate things by faith. You can't make conclusions by faith. You've got to understand by science, by something measurable, observable, testable.

Of course, you know, today we believe in all sorts of things that aren't scientific. Evolution is one of them. It's not science. But, in fact, they accept it by faith, don't they?

They take a whole lot more faith than to believe just what the Scripture tells us about how things were made and so forth. But there are people that still hold on to that, you know.

[38 : 44] You can't understand by faith. You've got to understand by science. And so, all right, let's just interview the scientists and say, all right, you tell me how everything got here. Huh?

Can you tell me that? And scientists say, well, it was the Big Bang. Yes. So you say what? What banged? What banged? What banged?

Well, you know, gas is solidified. Somebody said, where did the gas go? Yeah, where did the gas go? Who put them there? You know, that kind of thing. And so, you know, you can ask scientists, ask philosophers, you know, all these thinkers.

But there's really only one way you can understand how things came to existence, and that is by faith. And not just, well, you've just got to believe it. By faith.

We're talking about something substantive. You know, by faith, it's by this substantive thing God has given to us. It is the evidence of everything we hope for.

[39 : 42] And it's by this faith that we understand that the worlds were framed by God, created by God. Understanding is also, I'm going to have to quit, but I'm about done.

Understanding is not based on human reasoning. Or you could use the word wisdom. And what we kind of conclude with our own minds, our own way of thinking.

So, I mean, this is very willy-nilly. People just believe all sorts of things because that's just what I believe. You know, and they've kind of worked this out in their brain, and it might be some far-out weird kind of thing.

But, you know, that's just what I think. Think what you believe, but, yeah, I mean, it's just almost ridiculous. And so a person will say, I don't believe anything I can't understand.

And the answer is, you know, the truth is, you don't even understand how a black cow can eat green grass and give white milk that turns into yellow butter.

[40 : 54] How are you going to understand? You understand by faith. By faith we understand the worlds were framed by the word of God so that the things which are seen were not made by things which are visible.

that appear. And so that's the nature of faith. Faith is not something willy-nilly. Now you see it. Now you don't. Faith is substance.

It's evidence. It's understanding. And then next week we'll consider the necessity of faith. The necessity of faith.

Thank you.