

Faith by Example
Hebrews 11:1-2
Message 114
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Introduction

The Difficulties of Serving an Unseen God

One of the hardest things for me as a Christian is serving an invisible God. A God I can't see, I can't touch, and a God I can't talk directly too. We live in a world that says "show me, show me, show me." In a world that says show me, we can't show people God. In fact, we are forbidden by the second commandment to make an image of anything either on earth or in Heaven and worship as an idol.

The Argument: "You Can't See God"

Those who do not believe in God have the argument, "you can't see God." This is true. I won't argue with that point, you can't see God. But does not seeing mean not existing?

Walk through your house, do you see electricity?

But let's take an imaginary walk around your house to demonstrate your faith. You wake up for the morning and flip on your light switch. There! You just demonstrated faith. "I didn't demonstrate anything, I just hit the switch." I didn't see any electricity, did you?

Is that cow milk? Could be cat milk . . .

Now let's move to your pantry to make a bowl of cereal. You pick out your favorite cereal. Your pour some milk. I pose the question "how do you know that is not cat milk." Now I happened to look at my milk carton out of curiosity while preparing this study. The key ingredient is listed as "milk." In fact, nowhere on the carton does it say "from Cow." So who's to say it's not cat milk, may be hamster milk, or duck milk. Truth is, it doesn't say on the box. But you happily down a glass of milk every morning assuming it are from a cow.

My point is this, unless you have a cow, and squeeze the milk yourself, you are by faith drinking cow milk.

TV, Electricity, Radio Waves, all Invisible

A walk through my house I find countless items I use by faith. I have a TV, I'm not completely sure how a TV works. I don't really know how it works, but we all seem to have enough faith to use one. Electricity, radio signals, cell phone signals, all invisible. Yet we have so much faith in them you never stop to think about them.

What is faith?

In Hebrews chapter 11, we learn the answer to the question "what is faith?"

Faith, a Foundation

Verse (1) Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen.

No need for a Bible dictionary to define faith, God defined it for us in the Bible. This verse says “faith is . . .” Faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen.

What do we mean by faith is an assurance? Here the word is used with the image of laying down of a foundation. So faith is the foundation of the things hoped for.

Foundations are Important

Foundations are important. Jesus apparently thought so too. Jesus used a foundation in two different parables, one in relation to building a foundation (Luke 6:48), and once in relation to counting the cost of building something (Luke 14:29).

Illustration: A Tale of Two Houses

You go looking at a house. It is a brand new house, completed only a few weeks ago. It is full brick, large bedrooms and living area, has all wood flooring, real marble counter tops, silver fixtures, etcetera, and etcetera. All for the low price of \$20,000. It sounds too good to be true, so you ask the realtor “what’s the catch?” “He says “Well it doesn’t have foundation.”

No foundation, are you kidding me? Listen, within five years, that house will be in shambles. Without a foundation your house could easily be leveled during a storm.

Faith, a Foundation of “things hoped for”

In the same way, faith is your foundation. A foundation for what? A foundation of “things hoped for.” Hope here isn’t talking about wanting or wishing, but with expecting and trusting.

Faith is a Trust

Somebody complete the phrase, relationships are built on. . .

The word assurance used here also has the meaning of trust. If you think about it, they are essentially the same thing. We would rewrite this saying as “Trust is the foundation of a relationship.”

Is this not true in the Biblical context? If a man or woman commits adultery with his or her spouse, what do we call them? We call them “unfaithful” do we not? At which time God Himself allows for the marriage to be dissolved, the relationship no longer exists.

I think that this issue of trust is one of the biggest barriers for people to get over when it comes to have a relationship with God. We have become a very skeptical society, and not without reason. Each one of us could describe account after account of being burned by somebody we trusted. As a result, we have a hard time allowing ourselves to trust anybody besides ourselves.

But still, we really do yearn to trust people. We like to be around people who when they say they will take you back, you don’t have to look back and make sure they are there. We also want people to trust us, and get frustrated when they don’t.

What I want to get at is that when you are leaning to trust someone, you have to make yourself a little vulnerable; you have to take a risk. Take for example the old method of falling backward into somebody's arms. You have the risk that they may just let you fall.

Example: Jump Travis, I'll Catch You!

Let me give you an example of trust.

My dad loved to create opportunities for me to learn how to trust him. One year we were finishing putting up Christmas lights. My dad went down as I was finishing up. When I wrap up what I am doing I go over to where the ladder is and it's. I look around, and it's vanished. So I yell for my dad and ask him where the ladder is. He just looks at me and hold out his arms and says, just jump and I will catch you.

My first reaction was, "just put the ladder back." My dad said he wouldn't put the ladder back and again asked me to jump into his arms. I start to realize he's not kidding so I start getting scared. I get emotion and start crying. Being a young kid I was traumatized; I mean I was only 16 or 17 years old.

After a minute or two I face the fact I'm going to have to jump. I ask my dad "Are you sure you are going to catch me?" My dad promised he would. "You double sure your going to catch me?" Every time I would hear him say "Yes, just trust me."

I remember thinking how scared I was. But at the same time I knew my dad. I knew my dad would do whatever it would take to catch me, even if he broke his back in the process. My fear was still very real, but my trust in my dad overpowered the fear. As a result, I took a big breath, closed my eyes, and took a step off the side. The next thing I know I'm in safely my dad's arms.

This is what faith is, trusting in something or someone so much that you respond with action. Without faith, you have no hope, and you have no trust. If it was anybody besides my dad, I would have been able to bring myself to jump. No faith, no hope.

As Christians, What Do We "Hope" For?

So the logical question is, as Christians, what do we hope for?

1) Undistracted time with God

As a Christian, am so hungry to spend eternity doing nothing but worshiping God. In this world, I can barely get five minutes in with God without being distracted by something. My phone rings, my dog whines for food and attention, a bill that I have to figure out how to pay, there is an important project at work due the next day. All this happens largely out of my control. When I do get to prayer, I spend so much mental energy just trying to do concentrate.

My hope is that in some day I will struggle to figure out a reason to stop worshiping God. I want worship to come as natural as me messing up the announcements or making a fool out of myself. That is what I hope for.

2) A Time of No Temptation

Here is what I hope for. I look forward to the day when I no longer struggle with sin and temptation. I can't wait to not have to be worry about pride, a day I couldn't be selfish if I wanted to, a day when the only addiction is a whole hearted worship and praise to the God who saved me. That is what I hope for.

3) A Heavenly Home

I also look for the day I am going to my home in Heaven. The emphasis not being on Heaven, but the emphasis is the word home. Heaven is not a Disney Land in the sky, it is home. It is where my true family is, it is where I was created to go.

Godly Hopes are Not "wants" but "waits"

These are my Hopes. And as Christians, I think you can identify with these. These are not worldly hopes as in "I want these to happen." They are Godly hopes, as in "I am confident these will happen."

Without faith, these hopes would be just day dreams. With faith, it is merely a matter of time.

No Shirt, No Shoes, No Service

You ever walk into a restaurant, and see a sign on the door that said "No shirt, no shoes, no service?" Occasionally you may see on in the drive through. I always wondered "How will they know if I'm not wearing shoes in the drive through?"

Let me adapt this for the Christian faith. "No faith, no works, no hope." Faith is the foundation of hope. So in a very real sense, if you have no faith, you have no hope.

What I am not saying is that works earn your way to Heaven, what I am saying is that your faith will prompt you to action. It will prompt you to areas of service. God doesn't save people so they can continue doing whatever it is they were doing before they were saved.

The Opposite: No Hope, No Faith

Interestingly, the opposite is just as true. As we see here in this verse, if you have no faith you have no hope. But just the opposite is true. If you have no hope, you have no faith. Going back to our illustration of houses, we see the similarity. You don't many houses without foundations under them. Nor do you find much hope in a person who doesn't have a foundation for faith.

You talk to people outside of the church, and they don't really have much hope in anything. Why? The simple answer is they don't have a foundation to build any hope or trust on. When they do try to reach out for hope, they only find them blown away in a storm because there was no foundation.

So the world is looking for hope. Unfortunately, the only hope the world provides is the hope that has no foundation.

The World Doesn't Want Christianity, It Wants Hope

Let's be honest, most people outside the church don't really understand worlds like sin, repentance, grace, mercy, or atonement. Then again, I don't really grasp the entire meaning of these words. But the when they see that you have hope within you, they

start getting curious don't they? Why they see you respond a little differently to trials and temptations, they know there is something special there. Then when somebody starts asking you explain your hope, you provide them your foundation.

Support Verse: 1 Peter 3:15

“1Pe 3:15 But sanctify the Lord God in your hearts, and always be ready to give a defense to everyone who asks you a reason for the hope that is in you...”

By the way, the same Greek word is used for hope in both Hebrews 11:1 and 1 Peter 3:15.

Illustration: Looking for a House Not a Foundation

For example, about a year ago, my wife and I started looking for a house. We got with a realtor, told him what we were looking for and off we went looking at houses. Let me say that again, we were looking at “houses.” Not a single time did our realtor take us to a lot with a bare foundation on it. I confess, a foundation is the most important part, but without the house on top of it, what value is a foundation?

I'm not trying to devalue the foundation; it is by far the most crucial. But just like when people see your house, they don't see a foundation they see a house. When people look at you, they can't see your faith, but they can see the hope that is built on top of it.

Don't Feign Hope

I'm not trying to down play the significance of the foundation, but I am trying to explain that your hope you have through faith is what the world is really looking for. And it is that hope that allows you explain your foundation.

Nor do I advocate putting on “look pretty” hope. People have been burned enough by false hopes to know the real thing when they see it. And what makes your hopes different from their hopes is your faith.

Example: Looking at a “Look Pretty” House.

We look at one house while we were looking around. The house was only a few years old, it was bigger than we were looking for, and it was a good price. In fact, the price was a little too low. In addition, it had been on the market for a little more than a year.

Now of course the realtor really can't disclose much. But something didn't seem right about the price, so we passed it up. Later I was talking to somebody at church who was familiar with the area. I told him about the house and he said the reason why is because they were “look pretties.”

He went on to explain that they were made to look nice from the front. However, when you looked at the actual construction you find that the lumber used was smaller than the standard size, the sheet rock was very thin, and overall it was a below standard house. However from the front it “looks pretty.”

He said people have caught onto that, and as a result, nobody wants to buy them. The same thing holds your hope and faith. I like to call fake Christianity, Ken and Barbie

Christianity, plastic smiles in a plastic world. But the truth always comes out in the trial. Like Jesus taught, you only know the strength of your foundation when the storm comes. Faith doesn't take away your storms, it just helps you stand through them.

Faith, Belief in the Unseen

The conviction of things not seen

This verse also goes on to teach us that faith, by definition is also the proof that we have in the unseen. We all struggle with faith. Even mature Christians struggle with faith. It is hard for us to have faith in things we can neither see nor touch.

Today we are Too Intelligent for Faith

I shared with you a few minutes ago that I think one reason faith is difficult for a lot of people is because it requires trust. A second reason I see is that most people are beginning to think themselves as being too intelligent to accept faith. Their position is that faith is okay for the simple minded, but not for the educated.

Today most people like to believe that they are too rational or too smart to believe in things you can't see, touch, or explain. If you can't do see it, touch it, or explain it, it is simply not real.

I say they like to believe this because they are somewhat haphazard in how they apply this.

Stumped: Explain The Trinity!

For example, skeptics of the faith like to make us look stupid by asking questions about our faith. The most popular I think I have come across is the "how do you explain the Trinity" question. They are pulling out a question that you can't explain, thereby making you, and more importantly your faith, look stupid.

Now I don't personally know any Bible teach that can give a just teaching of the Trinity. And if I did, they would probably do so using a wide array of theological terms that mean nothing to a non believer.

So, we can't explain the Trinity. Does that mean that is not real?

I'm going to ask you a simple question. You can use this question to fire back at those who ask you questions to make your faith look foolish.

Question: Do you Believe in Gravity?

How many of you believe in gravity? It is very possible in and room this size there are a few who are not believers in the faith. However, I doubt anybody in here would raise their hands if I asked "who in here does not believe in gravity." If anybody did raise their hand, I would ask them to keep it raised the remainder of the service. "But it will get heavy" No it won't, gravity is only for those uneducated people who believe in things they can't see or explain.

Who here can really explain gravity? I mean really explain it by going into a discussion of the gravitation pull created by the space time continuum. Better yet, who can properly spell continuum? I had to have spell check teach me.

A Double Standard: Gravity Pulls Down, God Pulls Up.

Do you see a double standard here? You confess to believe in an invisible force I don't think anybody really understands and its okay. In fact, if you don't believe in gravity I would submit that you're kind of stupid. You confess to follow and invisible God, and your being simple minded.

So the next time somebody says they have trouble accepting things by faith, remind them that they do have faith. Remind them they believe in things like gravity, radio, or how about love. All of these things are things they believe in, but I bet they really can't explain them.

Examine the Evidence, Clues of the Unseen

The verse mentions "the evidence of things not seen"

Ever See Your Foundation?

Remember us talking about the foundation before? Have you ever stopped to look at your foundation? I went around my house looking for the foundation, I couldn't find one. Does that mean my house doesn't have a foundation? Well, if you believe you have to see something to believe in it, my house has absolutely no foundation under it.

A Standing House Proves a Foundation

However, we all know that is simply not true. We can use our Sherlock Holmes like detective skills and tell it has a foundation. How do we know it has a foundation? The house is standing!

Word Study: Examine the Evidence

The second part of this verse gives a second definition of faith "the conviction of things not seen." The word "conviction" here can be translated as is the result of looking at the evidence.

Evidence Points to Truth

Evidence is kind of a legal term, but we are all familiar with what evidence is.

Example: The Evidence of Brownie on My Face

For example, as a three year old I decided to eat a brownie my mom made without asking first. I walk into the living room my mom looks at me and asks "Little Travis, did you eat the brownie I just made." "Oh . . . you made a brownie?" I thought I was clever. "Yeah, I just found the empty pan" my mom says. So I pull out the old blame it on my brother routine. "Maybe Justin ate it."

My mom wasn't buying it. But I knew she couldn't prove I did it, after all I was careful to destroy all the evidence. "I bet Justin ate it." My mom stared at me, and said "I have a feeling you ate it." "Oh?" I said. "What makes you think I ate it?" After that, my mom drags me to the bathroom and makes me look in the mirror. I had about half a brownie still on my face.

The point is my mom didn't see me eat the brownie. My mom didn't even have need to see the brownie. The fact that it still covered my face was all the evidence she needed to know that Little Travis ate the brownie.

Faith, not the Opposite of Intelligent

The point I want to get across is that faith is intelligent. Why? We have faith because we have taking time to consider the evidence. Without digging underneath our houses, we can tell that it has a foundation. We can look at our kids face with brownie all over it and know they ate the brownie.

In the same way, it is unintelligent for Christians to examine the evidence around us, examine the evidence of the Bible, and conclude that God is real? No it's not being simple minded; in fact it shows some intelligence.

Seeing is Not Always Believing

Now let me go the opposite direction for a second. Can your sight deceive you? What I mean is, can you see something with your very own eyes and know that it is not real?

Example: A Magic Trick

Have you ever seen a magician do a magic trick? I have been to a few magic shows. The magician has his assistant get into a box, pulls out a saw, saws his assistant in half, and pulls the box apart, and she is still alive.

Now if you really believed she was being sawed in half, you would be screaming. But yet, without knowing how he did it, you still know it's not real. In fact, a lot of magic has to do with deception, which is diverting your attention away from what is actually taking place.

The Devil Fools the Senses

The thing to know is that sometimes it would be foolish to rely on your own senses, without examining the evidence. The Devil is intelligent, and like a magician he holds your attention on one direction, while at the same time taking your eyes off of what he is really doing.

Verse 2: Gaining God's Approval

Verse 2 sets us up for verse 4 through the end of the chapter.

Diverse Bible Characters, Diverse Paths

The remainder of the chapter starts to a lot of name dropping with some very prominent figures in the Bible. Each character has a unique story. However, there is a common theme that you find in each story.

A Context of Endurance

The theme is endurance. We find the word endurance used on both sides of this passage. Before at end of Hebrews 10 in Hebrews 10:36 and immediately after in Hebrews 12:1.

I don't want to jump too far ahead. But we find in Hebrews 11:13 is a brief aside explaining the similarities between all these individuals.

A Preview: Hebrews 11:13

All these died in faith, without receiving the promises, but having seen them and having welcomed them from a distance, and having confessed that they were strangers and exiles on the earth.

A Journey to a Promise Not Received?

Can I get you to notice something? They spent their entire lives working towards a destination they would never get to. Now there is a lot to consume in verse 13, but suffice it takes a lot of endurance to work toward something you will never get too. That is a kind of endurance that only faith can power.

If You are Alive, You Don't Have This Faith

This is a type of faith nobody in this room has. Why? Because you're alive. Nobody here has died. These people died with one foot in front of them, as if they were still trying to take one last step.

Conclusion

Example: A Plane Flown by Whom?

A few of my previous jobs required that I had to fly quite a bit. Flying doesn't really bother me, but there was always an uneasy moment when the plane taxied to the runway then stopped. In a few moments you knew the screaming engines would hurl you straight in the air would be miles above the earth in a few moments. In those cases, I would sometimes have deep spiritual thoughts. Then a few minutes after they would give me my free soft drink and peanuts and all was well.

Once, while flying out of Chicago and there was of course wind. In addition to the wind it was night. In addition to the night was rain. In addition to the rain was freezing rain. As we were taxiing to our run way, I looked out the window and the rain was so bad I couldn't see the end of the wing. Again... a conducive time for deep spiritual thoughts.

Visibility was so bad they may as well have covered the windows, it was pitch black, and they couldn't see anything. But yet, in a few seconds the plane was going to thrust itself into the air in one of the busiest airports in the world. It occurred to me that the pilot had no better viewpoint than I did.

It dawned on me that the pilot himself was having to rely on somebody himself. We had faith in the pilot. But in very real sense, he was blind himself. He was in turn relying on the air traffic controller to make sure our flight path was clear.

Then it occurred to me, I could barely even see the wing, the air traffic controller couldn't see the plane on the runway. If the air traffic controller couldn't see us, who does he have faith in? Just think about the faith every single one of those people had to get on board.

The Beauty of Faith

When I first started talking about faith, I mentioned I would touch on the beauty of faith. Here is the best example I can think of.

Example: Two Blind Neighbors

When my wife and I moved to Enid, we found out our neighbors were very special people. They could teach us more about faith than we would be willing to learn. That is because they are blind.

Both of them had their sight for the majority of their lives. For different reasons, they both lost their eyesight in their middle ages. What I found absolutely amazing is that they have never once seen each other. They have been married for over ten years now, and have never once laid their eyes on one another.

I love my wife for who she is, but I think it would be awkward to never know what she looked like before I married her. But they had no choice, they married each other with absolutely no bias towards physical appearances.

That is what makes faith so beautiful, that despite the muck and mire I was crawling in, God had faith in me. With reckless disregard to the filth that I was wallowing in.

In turn, I accepted God by faith; not seeing who it was who saved me, or not seeing first hand the beauty of the one who saved me. Faith allowed me to make a decision that seemed foolish both to those around me, and honestly, even myself. Praise God for faith!

Closing Statement

So what is faith? Faith is trust. Do you remember the story I shared about my dad asking me to jump? I didn't just jump because I knew my dad was strong enough to. I also jumped because I knew he would.

God may be asking you today to jump. God may be laying something on your heart. Maybe there is something God has asked you to do in the past, and you are still hesitating. Jump.

Perhaps God is asking you to take your first jump. The first jump is the same for all of us. This is a jump into God's arms for the first time. This jump is letting go of the world, and trading it for a world to come. God is down below asking you to trust him. I couldn't trust my dad and decide not to jump into his arms. Nor can you simply tell God "I trust you, but I'm not going to take the jump." Will you make the jump?