

What Kind of Faith Do You Have? Hebrews 11:1-7

This past summer I ended up delivering a few loads of firewood to different people and I used my truck and trailer to do so. When I loaded the firewood I could see the effect the weight was having. As I added more and more wood I saw how the bed of the truck and trailer would get lower, the springs would compress and the tires would start to bulge. I could see the weight was adding stress and tension and would make things more difficult in going down the road.

I think that's what life feels like right now for a lot of people. It feels like there's more and more weight and stress and tension added to our lives because of things going on in our world. Troubling things are happening, and it seems like they've been escalating in the past few years. Some are troubling for everyone, and some are troubling specifically for us as Christians.

- Political division, hatred, radicalism
- School shootings, church shootings, assassinations
- Increasing national debt, inflation, rising costs of health care, food, and housing
- The rapid increase in AI technology and uncertainty of what that will bring
- The spread of godlessness and acceptance of evil in society, schools, universities
- An increasing attitude of hostility toward Christians

Each of these is like the weight of another log being added to our lives, and it's stressful and worrisome. Things are stacking up and I think we're entering unfamiliar territory. How are we supposed to persevere through the trouble and tension?

Well, going through troubling times isn't new for followers of Christ. The Bible and church history makes that very clear. Pressure, hostility, and persecution has been common from the very beginning of the Christian Church. All of Christ's disciples faced it along with most of the early Christians. Life wasn't easy for those who decided to follow Christ. And because of that, there are

passages of Scripture that were written to teach Christians how to live by faith, especially in troubling times.

One of those passages is Hebrews 11-12 and for the next several weeks we are going to be studying these chapters to better equip ourselves to live by faith in the times we're in. There will be 6 sermons in this series over the course of 8 weeks, with a couple breaks for guest speakers. You'll find a study guide each week on the back of the sermon notes to help with personal reflection and small group discussions.

I want to talk a little bit about the book of Hebrews as we get started, so we understand the situation they were in. The original readers were displaced Jewish Christians who had given up family, community, homes, jobs, and possessions for the sake of Christ. But they were also growing weary of the weight and strain and tempted to turn away from Christ to go back to Judaism for an easier life. And the author was writing to convince them not to do that. He was calling them to be faithful, patiently endure, and press in even more to their Christian faith.

In chapters 1-10 he showed them how Christ was superior in every way to their former religion and the only way to be saved. And he warned them that if they rejected Christ and went back to Judaism, they would still be under condemnation for their sin. Their former religious practices were only meant to point them to Christ, not to become a religion in themselves. So they needed to cling to Christ and follow him. And then at the end of chapter 10 he writes this:

Hebrews 10:32-39

But recall the former days when, after you were enlightened, you endured a hard struggle with sufferings, ³³ sometimes being publicly exposed to reproach and affliction, and sometimes being partners with those so treated. ³⁴ For you had compassion on those in prison, and you joyfully accepted the plundering of your property, since you knew that you yourselves had a better possession and an abiding one. ³⁵ Therefore do not throw away your confidence, which has a great reward. ³⁶ For you have need of endurance, so that when you have done the will of God you may receive what is promised. ³⁷ For, "Yet a little while, and the coming one will come and will not delay; ³⁸ but my righteous one shall live by faith, and if he shrinks back, my soul has no pleasure in him."

³⁹ *But we are not of those who shrink back and are destroyed, but of those who have faith and preserve their souls.*

So he's calling them to live by faith in troubling times and he goes on in chapters 11-12 to teach them how to do that. So that's what this sermon series is all about, and I want to challenge you to follow along, but also to memorize the verses I just read. It's 8 verses and we have 8 weeks, so I think it's doable. And if you don't do that, at least try to memorize verse 39: "*But we are not of those who shrink back and are destroyed, but of those who have faith and preserve their souls.*" I'm planning to have us read/recite this passage every Sunday and we'll use the ESV translation to make it easy for everyone.

Today we're going to study Hebrews 11:1-7 and these verses are going to help us begin to understand what faith is. This is the kind of faith the readers were to have and live by and preserve their souls.

Read Hebrews 11:1-3

Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen.² For by it the people of old received their commendation.³ By faith we understand that the universe was created by the word of God, so that what is seen was not made out of things that are visible.

What is faith – Christian faith? Faith is really important to us as Christians, but I think a lot of times faith is misunderstood. When the bible talks about faith, it points out that there are different kinds of faith – one is life-changing and results in salvation, the other has some similarities but ends up being empty and doesn't do you any good. So it's really important to know what true faith is and live by the kind of faith that actually helps and saves. That's the kind of faith that is described in these verses and I want to look at how the author describes it. We're going to see four descriptions.

First of all, he says that "*Faith is the assurance of things hoped for.*" The original Greek word for "assurance" is "hupostasis" (hoop-os'-tas-is) and is defined as: "*standing under a guaranteed agreement; a legitimate claim (because it literally is, "under a legal-standing") – entitling someone to what is guaranteed under the particular agreement.*" So faith is not just a feeling or sense of assurance about something, it's more

than that – it’s the confidence of a guarantee that comes with a signed contract or title.

I’ve gone through the process of buying land, and it’s been a really grueling process for me because it’s a competitive market and when you find a piece of land that’s a good price and you really like it, there’s a good chance somebody else wants to buy it too and you don’t know how much they’re willing to pay or how quickly they might make an offer. So it’s a big relief when you get a signed purchase agreement.

But even then there’s no guarantee because you don’t own the land yet and there are things that can go wrong with inspections, appraisals, and financing, so the biggest relief comes when you actually sign the papers at closing and you have a guaranteed legal agreement in hand. That’s when you can have confidence and that’s the kind of “assurance of things hoped for” that the author of Hebrews is talking about. Even if you don’t set foot on that land for days, weeks, or months, you’re not worried because you’ve got a guaranteed legal agreement.

So faith is having that kind of confidence and assurance, and for the Christian, it’s the assurance of things hoped for, which are the promises of God – the assurance that you will receive the blessings that God has promised to give us in the future that we haven’t taken hold of yet. Things like salvation, heaven, eternal life, glorified bodies, and everlasting joy. Faith is the confidence of receiving those things.

Faith is also: “*the conviction of things not seen.*” Thayer’s Greek Lexicon says that in this context, conviction is: “*that by which invisible things are proved (and we are convinced of their reality).*” So even though they’re invisible and I can’t see them – I am convinced they are real. I have the conviction that wind is real even though I can’t see it. I have the conviction that gravity is real, yet gravity is invisible. Faith is the conviction of things not seen.

When it comes to Christianity, many of the things we believe are not seen or haven’t been seen. This includes the spiritual realm: God, heaven and hell, angels and demons, and the things they’re doing. It also includes all the things written about in the Bible that we weren’t around to see: creation, flood, Israelite history, miracles, Jesus’ crucifixion, resurrection, ascension.

All of these are unseen to most Christians, and faith is being convinced that those things are real.

So faith is the assurance or confidence of things hoped for, and the conviction of things not seen. This is the kind of faith that has substance and can carry us through troubling times. And this is the kind of faith God is looking for. The author says in verse 2: *“For by it the people of old received their commendation.”* He’s referring to the people of the Old Testament and he’ll give many examples throughout this chapter. They received their commendation, which is a good report and approval from God because of their faith. They lived lives that were pleasing to God.

In verse 3 he gives a third description of faith: *“By faith we understand that the universe was created by the word of God, so that what is seen was not made out of things that are visible.”* This goes back to Gen. 1:1 and the origin of all created things: *“In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.”* The conviction that God existed before all things and created all things by the power of his word comes from faith. And faith has to start there. Other ancient philosophies and religions have different stories of origin, but people of faith have the foundational belief that God is the creator of all things and that has a profound influence on how they live their lives.

So the author describes faith in three ways in these first three verses and now he goes on to give some examples. Today we’ll see the first three examples along with one more description of faith.

Read Hebrews 11:4-7.

By faith Abel offered to God a more acceptable sacrifice than Cain, through which he was commended as righteous, God commending him by accepting his gifts. And through his faith, though he died, he still speaks.⁵ By faith Enoch was taken up so that he should not see death, and he was not found, because God had taken him. Now before he was taken he was commended as having pleased God.⁶ And without faith it is impossible to please him, for whoever would draw near to God must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who seek him.⁷ By faith Noah, being warned by God concerning events as yet unseen, in reverent fear constructed an ark for the saving of his household. By this he condemned the world and became an heir of the righteousness that comes by faith.

So each of these men had the kind of faith described in the first 3 verses. They had the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things unseen, and the understanding that God created all things. But you'll also notice that their faith didn't end in their minds. It didn't just affect their thinking; it changed how they lived their lives.

Verse 6 captures that idea. Not only did they believe in the existence of God; they also believed that he rewarded those who seek him, and that's why they lived like they did. They were seeking after God. Their faith in God made a foundational difference in how they lived their lives. Abel wasn't like his brother. He believed God rewarded those who seek him so he offered the first and best of his flock in sacrifice to God. Enoch wasn't like the people around him who lived for themselves. He believed God rewarded those who seek him, so he walked with God throughout his whole life. And Noah was different than everyone else on earth. He too believed God rewarded those who seek him, so he built an enormous ark over the course of 120 years out of obedience to God because of his faith. Their faith changed their lives and they were commended by God, having pleased him.

The faith described in these verses is the kind of faith we need for the troubling times we're in. It's the kind of faith we need to pray for and aim at in our lives.

- It's the assurance of things hoped for
- It's the conviction of things unseen
- It's the understanding that God is our Creator
- And believing that God rewards those who seek him

Therefore, it's faith that changes the way we live. We no longer live ultimately for ourselves and this world, but for God and our eternal reward. In the coming weeks we'll see examples of those who had that kind of faith and how they persevered through troubling times because of it.