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Sermon Notes

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The Nature and Effects of Saving Faith

Hebrews 11:1-3

^{ESV} 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.

I. Hebrews 11 Set in Context

A. The Most Famous and Beloved Chapter in the Book of Hebrews

1. The “Hall of Faith”
2. The sheer joy of tracing out these astonishing examples of men and women of faith
3. The “Heroes of the Faith”... the power of their example has electrified generations of God’s people for two millennia
4. But WHY IS THIS CHAPTER HERE? What did the Author intend by giving us this amazing chapter? And how can it benefit us today to contemplate these amazing heroes of the faith?

B. Immediate Context

Keep in mind that the original letter did NOT have any division between so-called chapter 10 and so-called chapter 11... the argument flowed immediately from one section to the next

So, to understand why this chapter even exists, we have to look backward

Indeed, the grammar of the beginning of Hebrews 11:1 urges us to do that... look backward:

“NOW faith is ...”; the Greek construction implies the author is illuminating a point he’s just made

So... we LOOK BACKWARD

1. Back to 10:38-39: The Righteous will Live By Faith, the Unrighteous Shrink Back and are Destroyed

Hebrews 10:38-39 But my righteous one will live by faith. And if he shrinks back, I will not be pleased with him. ³⁹ ¶ ***But we are not of those who shrink back and are destroyed, but of those who believe and are saved.***

- a. The author is writing to Jewish people under persecution and pressure to renounce their faith in Christ and go back to Old Covenant Judaism
 - b. He is warning them of what saves their souls... he is speaking of the SALVATION OF THE SOUL
 - c. Therefore, it is essential that we not set Hebrews 11 aside as merely referring to a way we ALREADY SAVED people can have an improved life of service to Christ and be more fruitful and get a bigger reward, but not to a way by which we MUST BE SAVED FROM HELL, SAVED FROM OUR SINS
 - d. NO... the author ends Hebrews 10 with a clear description of how it is we are saved (BY FAITH), and the dire warning of the opposite:
 - e. You are either going to live (walk) by faith as these ancient heroes did, or you're going to shrink back to destruction
 - f. So Hebrews 11 is a long discourse displaying plainly the life of faith that ends in the salvation of the soul
2. One Step Further back to 10:36: You NEED ENDURANCE in OBEDIENCE in order to INHERIT

^{ESV} ***Hebrews 10:36 For you have need of endurance, so that when you have done the will of God you may receive what is promised.***

- a. The author had made it plain that the Hebrew Christians needed ENDURANCE in the Christian life
- b. Why? Because the promises have not come yet; they seem to tarry, they seem to delay; and all we're seemingly left with here on earth is trouble and distress and persecution and suffering
- c. Without ENDURANCE, you will quickly fall away when trouble or persecution comes because of the word; you will be what Jesus called a "STONY GROUND HEARER" (Matthew 13:20-21)

- d. In order to give this kind of endurance in the face of suffering while WAITING for a promise that HAS NOT YET COME, he gives us Hebrews 11
 - e. These heroes were characterized by amazing endurance even when NONE OF THEM had received the promised eternal inheritance
 - f. So, the order given us by Hebrews 10:32-39 is
 - i) HOPE in God's Promise
 - ii) OBEY God's commands with ENDURANCE
 - iii) INHERIT God's promise in the end
3. One Step Further back to 10:34: To Create THIS KIND OF PEOPLE
- a. To persuade them to this kind of life, the author had reminded them of the way they were when they first received the gospel
 - b. They were their OWN "heroes of the faith"
 - c. Remember the circumstances:
 - i) Christianity had somehow become illegal
 - ii) some of their number had been publicly persecuted and arrested and put in prison
 - iii) the rest of the church had a tough decision to make: to go into hiding and keep their Christian faith under wraps (or even worse, to renounce Christ) OR to stand publicly with their brothers and sisters and risk losing their property, their freedom, their health, and perhaps even their lives
 - iv) they BOLDLY made their decision:
- Hebrews 10:34 You sympathized with those in prison and joyfully accepted the confiscation of your property, because you knew that you yourselves had better and lasting possessions.***
- v) John Piper: the entire book of Hebrews was WRITTEN TO PRODUCE this kind of Christian
 - vi) These are otherworldly people: JOYFULLY accepting the confiscation of their property BECAUSE THEY KNEW they had a better possession and a lasting one

vii) So, Hebrews 11 was written to show them examples of other people who also lived this exact same way

- Noah who turned his back on his reputation and built an ark in the middle of the dry land
- Abraham who left a comfortable and lucrative life in Ur of the Chaldees and left to go wander in some land he knew nothing about
- Abraham who chose to live in a tent rather than to settle down and build a city with walls of protection
- Moses who chose to endure suffering with the people of God rather than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a little while; Moses who was LOOKING AHEAD TO HIS REWARD (that is EXACTLY the same attitude as Hebrews 10:34)
- All these heroes of the faith were LOOKING AHEAD to a promise they had not yet received and lived lives of aliens and strangers on earth
 - d. So, it was to produce this kind of people: those who JOYFULLY ACCEPT an earthly poverty, an earthly suffering, an earthly deprivation that you would not be suffering if you were not Christians... JOYFULLY ACCEPTING reverses and opposition and diseases and rejections and even beatings and imprisonment and death because of the promise of the gospel
 - e. The “HALL OF FAITH” (Hebrews 11) was written to help produce this kind of people

4. Finally, One Step Further Back: 10:26-31: Dire warning against apostasy

Hebrews 10:26-27 If we deliberately keep on sinning after we have received the knowledge of the truth, no sacrifice for sins is left, ²⁷ but only a fearful expectation of judgment and of raging fire that will consume the enemies of God.

- a. All this is in the context of the alternative... if you do not live a life of faith in this pattern, you are among those who shrink back to destruction
- b. The dire warning of apostasy is always hanging in the background
- c. Hebrews 11 (the Hall of Faith) is to strengthen us so that we will NOT renounce Christ to gain the pleasures of this age

C. The Power of Examples and Heroes

1. To achieve all this, the author gives us HUMAN EXAMPLES...

2. Already established in Hebrews 6:11-12

Hebrews 6:11-12 We want each of you to show this same diligence to the very end, in order to make your hope sure. ¹² We do not want you to become lazy, but to imitate those who through faith and patience inherit what has been promised.

3. Not only dead ancient heroes, but living ones, men and women who lived their faith out in front of you

Hebrews 13:7 Remember your leaders, who spoke the word of God to you. Consider the outcome of their way of life and imitate their faith.

4. So, Hebrews 11 establishes the power of godly examples for strengthening our faith... so that we will have a strong HOPE, so that we will DO THE WILL OF GOD in our generation, to have ENDURANCE, and in this way finally, to INHERIT what has been promised

5. We all know the negative power of poor role models; every parent of growing children is very concerning about the negative example of PEER PRESSURE; scripture actually heightens this concern

Exodus 23:2 "Do not follow the crowd in doing wrong.

Proverbs 1:10-15 My son, if sinners entice you, do not give in to them. ¹¹ If they say, "Come along with us; let's lie in wait for someone's blood, let's waylay some harmless soul; ¹² let's swallow them alive, like the grave, and whole, like those who go down to the pit; ¹³ we will get all sorts of valuable things and fill our houses with plunder; ¹⁴ throw in your lot with us, and we will share a common purse"-- ¹⁵ my son, do not go along with them, do not set foot on their paths

1 Corinthians 15:33 Do not be deceived: "Bad company ruins good morals."

6. BUT Hebrews 11 goes the opposite direction: the indispensable power of POSITIVE role models for the perseverance in the faith

Proverbs 13:20 He who walks with the wise grows wise, but a companion of fools suffers harm.

- a. Without these role models, we will quickly fall away
- b. When Elijah thought he was the only one who still believed and still obeyed God, he was ready to give up
- c. When God showed him that 7000 had not bowed the knee to Baal and that a godly man like Elisha was to follow him in the ministry, and that a zealous man like Jehu was to be anointed king over wicked Israel, his faith was revived

D. Major Outline of Hebrews 11

1. Faith described by its EFFECTS (vs. 1-3)
2. Faith displayed by EXAMPLES (vs. 4-40)
3. Bookends to the chapter

a. Introduction: vs. 1-2

Hebrews 11:1-2 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.

b. Conclusion: vs. 39-40

Hebrews 11:39-40 And all these, though commended through their faith, did not receive what was promised, ⁴⁰ since God had provided something better for us, that apart from us they should not be made perfect.

4. Stylistically: Middle section in two parts
 - a. “by faith...” (18 times in vss. 3-31)
 - b. Summary catalogue (vss. 32-38; the word “faith” only appear once, but many actions that flow from faith are displayed)
5. Content outline:
 - a. Vs. 1-7: faith in the invisible... the invisible God using His invisible word to promise us invisible things
 - b. Vs. 8-22: faith of Abraham and his descendents; people who lived in tents and wandered about waiting on the promise of God; who died without receiving these promises
 - c. Vs. 23-31: faith of Moses; who left a secure life of Egyptian power and earthly pleasure to wander in the desert with the people of God
 - d. Vs. 32-40: other examples of faith in action

E. Now... Faith Described in Terms of the EFFECT on US (vs. 1-3)

II. Faith is the Assurance of Things Hoped for (vs. 1)

ESV Hebrews 11:1 Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for

A. Hebrews 11:1 Notoriously Difficult to Translate

1. Various major versions DIFFER:

- a. KJV the most different of them all

^{KJV} Hebrews 11:1 Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen.

- b. ESV, NASB, and RSV all identical

^{ESV} Hebrews 11:1 Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen.

^{NAU} Hebrews 11:1 Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen.

^{RSV} Hebrews 11:1 Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen.

- c. NIV two halves of verse seem to be merely a repetition

^{NIV} Hebrews 11:1 Now faith is being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see.

- d. Holman Christian Standard Bible

^{CSB} Hebrews 11:1 Now faith is the reality of what is hoped for, the proof of what is not seen.

2. Two Key Words: “Substance” and “Evidence”????

- a. Basically all the translations have the same concept for the rest of the Greek words but two

- b. The pattern is

i) Now faith is the _____ of things hoped for, the _____ of things not seen

- c. So it all seems to come down to two Greek words that are VERY DIFFICULT to translate here

i) First is what KJV translates as “substance” of things hoped for

ii) Second is what KJV gives as “evidence” of things not seen

- d. “substance” comes from Greek word **u`po,stasij** ; the KJV translators merely took it straight from Greek over through Latin: *substantia*... literally “that which STANDS UNDER”... in one sense, they didn’t even translate it, but just transliterated a literal LATIN translation

e. “evidence” comes from Greek word **ελεγεοι** which is used NO OTHER PLACE in the NT (although there are some similar forms which I shall discuss)

f. Two VERY DIFFICULT words giving us a wide array of translations

B. How Faith is the Assurance of Things Hoped For

1. Faith operates in the realm of HOPE... actually, in some ways faith and hope are almost impossible to distinguish from each other
2. HOPE has to do with an internal disposition of the heart... a buoyant sense of CONFIDENCE in something
3. Hope ALWAYS deals with the future... AND with things you deeply DESIRE to come true
 - a. Who hopes for what he has?

Romans 8:24 hope that is seen is no hope at all. Who hopes for what he already has?

- b. Who hopes for what he DOESN'T WANT?
4. Biblical hope is founded on the promises of God... the unshakable nature of God's WORD
 - a. In this it is completely unlike normal everyday hope
 - b. Normal everyday hope is a vague wish for something good in the future
 - c. But biblical hope is ALWAYS founded on God's PROMISES for the future... ultimately founded on the CHARACTER OF GOD to keep His promises

Hebrews 10:23 Let us hold unswervingly to the hope we profess, for he who promised is faithful.

Titus 1:2 a faith and knowledge resting on the hope of eternal life, which God, who does not lie, promised before the beginning of time

5. As we've already seen in Hebrews 6, hope is an ANCHOR for the soul

Hebrews 6:17-19 Because God wanted to make the unchanging nature of his purpose very clear to the heirs of what was promised, he confirmed it with an oath. ¹⁸ God did this so that, by two unchangeable things in which it is impossible for God to lie, we who have fled to take hold of the hope offered to us may be greatly encouraged. ¹⁹ We have this hope as an anchor for the soul, firm and secure.

Our hope is based on nothing less than the CHARACTER of GOD to keep the PROMISES of God

C. What are the Things Hoped for?

1. John Newton's "Amazing Grace"

The "Lord has promised good to me; his word my hope secures"

2. What good things has the Lord promised to us?

a. Ephesians 1 summary

Ephesians 1:3 Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ.

b. Hebrews overview

i) A perfect world to come

Hebrews 2:5 the world to come, about which we are speaking.

ii) Personal glory

Hebrews 2:10 In bringing many sons to glory

iii) Freedom from death

Hebrews 2:15 free those who all their lives were held in slavery by their fear of death.

iv) A heavenly calling (literally, an invitation to heaven)

Hebrews 3:1 Therefore, holy brothers, who share in the heavenly calling

v) An eternal Sabbath rest from all our labors in the presence of God

Hebrews 4:1 Therefore, since the promise of entering his rest still stands

Hebrews 4:9-10 There remains, then, a Sabbath-rest for the people of God; ¹⁰ for anyone who enters God's rest also rests from his own work, just as God did from his.

vi) Full access to God's throne room

Hebrews 4:16 Let us then approach the throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need

vii) Eternal salvation

Hebrews 5:9 once made perfect, he became the source of eternal salvation for all who obey him

viii) The resurrection of the body

Hebrews 6:2 the resurrection of the dead

ix) A powerful coming age

Hebrews 6:5 who have tasted the goodness of the word of God and the powers of the coming age

x) Rewards for helping God's people

Hebrews 6:10 God is not unjust; he will not forget your work and the love you have shown him as you have helped his people and continue to help them.

xi) Guaranteed salvation right to the end

Hebrews 7:25 Consequently, he is able to save to the uttermost those who draw near to God through him, since he always lives to make intercession for them.

xii) Christ as our High Priest and Mediator at the Right Hand of God

Hebrews 8:1 we have such a high priest, one who is seated at the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in heaven

xiii) Transformed hearts

Hebrews 8:10 I will put my laws into their minds, and write them on their hearts

xiv) Adoption as God's people

Hebrews 8:10 I will be their God, and they shall be my people.

xv) Full knowledge of God

Hebrews 8:11 they shall all know me, from the least of them to the greatest

xvi) Full forgiveness of sins

Hebrews 8:12 For I will forgive their wickedness and will remember their sins no more.

xvii) An eternal inheritance

Hebrews 9:15 Christ is the mediator of a new covenant, so that those who are called may receive the promised eternal inheritance

xviii) The second coming of Christ resulting in our final salvation

Hebrews 9:28 he will appear a second time, not to bear sin, but to bring salvation to those who are waiting for him.

xix) Holiness

Hebrews 10:10 we have been made holy through the sacrifice of the body of Jesus Christ once for all.

xx) Perfection

Hebrews 10:14 because by one sacrifice he has made perfect forever those who are being made holy.

xxi) The heavenly Jerusalem

Hebrews 12:22-23 But you have come to Mount Zion, to the heavenly Jerusalem, the city of the living God. You have come to thousands upon thousands of angels in joyful assembly, ²³ to the church of the firstborn, whose names are written in heaven. You have come to God, the judge of all men, to the spirits of righteous men made perfect

xxii) An unshakeable kingdom

Hebrews 12:28 ... we are receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken

3. These are just SOME of the rich promises made to us in the gospel of Jesus Christ

4. These are the THINGS HOPED FOR

D. Faith is the HUPOSTASIS of those things hoped for

1. Alright... that doesn't help me

2. The word can either be taken in a SUBJECTIVE sense... what faith DOES TO ME; or in an OBJECTIVE sense... what faith IS in and of itself

3. In the subjective sense, faith is the "ASSURANCE" that these hoped-for things will MOST CERTAINLY come true

a. Faith is the gift of almighty God by which you perceive invisible realities

b. I have often called faith the "eyesight" of the soul

c. It is by the eyes that your "whole body is full of light" (if your eyes are good)

Matthew 6:22 "The eye is the lamp of the body. If your eyes are good, your whole body will be full of light.

- d. By eyesight you see the visible world around you accurately; you are absolutely certain that you are at 414 Cleveland Street, sitting on a pew, surrounded by specific people, some of whose names you know; you see that I am standing here, I am waving my arm right now... you see it, you know it is happening, your mind is unshakably convinced it is so
 - e. In a similar way, it is by faith that your WHOLE SOUL is filled with an unshakable assurance that EVERYTHING GOD HAS PROMISED will come true
4. BUT the word "hupostasis" itself in other places never means ASSURANCE or CONFIDENCE; So many scholar rule it out as a possible meaning
 5. They go rather for an OBJECTIVE sense of the word
 - a. Faith is the REALITY or SUBSTANCE of what you are hoping for
 - b. It literally means "that which STANDS UNDER" ... like Aaron and Hur HOLDING UP MOSES' arms while Joshua defeated the Amalekites (Exodus 17); faith stands under the promises of God and sustains them in your soul like a structural support beam or the foundation of a building
 - c. Your hope reaches ahead for a vaporous promise, your FAITH makes it REAL, almost like you can touch it
 - d. Faith is something objective, in the here and now, that gives a reality to the promised thing
 - e. So God has promised that someday all Christians will be resurrected from the dead; faith makes that promise something as REAL in the furniture of your mind as the place you are presently in... it is as real as the existence of the pew on which you are sitting
 6. This is more ETYMOLOGICALLY correct... but friends, I can scarcely separate the two; the objective reality of a future event AND the sense of confidence and assurance are almost identical to me
 7. In any case, the sweet positive side of faith is this: I take the promise of God and faith makes it AS REAL TO ME as any physical thing in the universe
 8. The thing God promises is as real to me as the sunlight streaming through that stained glass window
- E. Faith is a Gift of God to Go With the Promises of God

1. Faith is a gift of God

Ephesians 2:8 For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith-- and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God

2. Faith goes with the promises of God

- a. Without faith in the promises of God, those promises are completely unhelpful to us
- b. It is like giving a beautiful painting to a blind man; he cannot possibly appreciate the magnificent colors and brushstroke techniques... he's BLIND
- c. God's promises are as incomprehensible to a faithless man as a magnificent sunset is to a blind man
- d. So God opens up the EYESIGHT of the SOUL to receive streaming in the light and colors and contours of the promises of God

III. Faith is the Conviction of Things Not Seen (vs. 1)

^{ESV} Hebrews 11:1 Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen.

A. The Word "Conviction"

1. Again, Greek word translated "evidence" is **e;legcoj** which is used NO OTHER PLACE in the NT
2. One word very similar found in 2 Timothy 3:16
3. Two other ways we can get at this meaning
 - a. Ancient writers' use of the word

e;legcoj, o`, (**evle,gcw**) *a cross-examining, testing, for purposes of disproof or refutation, e;cein e;legcon* to admit of disproof, Hdt., Thuc.; **eivj e;lã pi,ptein** to be convicted, Eur.; **oi` peri. Pausani,an e;l.** *the evidence on which he was convicted*, Thuc.

- b. The use of the VERBAL form in the NT

Matthew 18:15 "If your brother sins, go and show him his fault in private; if he listens to you, you have won your brother.

Luke 3:19 But when Herod the tetrarch was reprimanded by him because of Herodias, his brother's wife, and because of all the wicked things which Herod had done, Herod also added this to them all: he locked John up in prison. [NASB]

John 3:20 Everyone who does evil hates the light, and will not come into the light for fear that his deeds will be exposed.

John 8:46 "Which one of you convicts Me of sin? If I speak truth, why do you not believe Me? [NASB]

John 16:8 When he (the Holy Spirit) comes, he will convict the world of guilt in regard to sin and righteousness and judgment:

Hebrews 12:5 And you have forgotten that word of encouragement that addresses you as sons: "My son, do not make light of the Lord's discipline, and do not lose heart when he rebukes you

[There are in all seventeen verses where this verb is used, and in every case without a single exception, it means "reprove" or "rebuke" or "expose" sin.]

B. Faith Convicts You of Sin

1. By faith, "things not seen" reprove or rebuke us of the existence and gravity of our sin
2. By faith, these "things not seen" stand in front of us like Nathan the prophet did for King David after he had sinned with Bathsheba, points a finger at us and says

YOU ARE THE MAN!!!

3. Faith spreads out the evidence of our sin in front of us and paces back and forth like a prosecuting attorney, sharply proving to the jury that you are guilty as charged
4. Faith takes the invisible realm of a holy God, seated on His throne, radiant in glory, and shines it in your heart at the same time as demonstrating to you how deep is your own sinfulness and need of Christ

Isaiah 6:5 "Woe to me!" I cried. "I am ruined! For I am a man of unclean lips, and I live among a people of unclean lips, and my eyes have seen the King, the LORD Almighty."

Romans 7:24 What a wretched man I am! Who will rescue me from this body of death?

- 5.

C. Conviction of Sin is Necessary to Ongoing Salvation

1. Sin's convicting work is necessary as long as sin goes on living within us (as Romans 7:17 says it does)
2. God promises to keep convicting us of sin as long as we live in this world, as long as we have a bitter struggle against sin as Hebrews 12:4 says we do
3. The essence of our sanctification journey is putting sin to death by the power of the Spirit (Romans 8:13); if we cannot detect or identify sin, we will not be able to put it to death
4. God uses many means to do this:
 - a. A good sermon
 - b. A convicting book
 - c. A rebuke from a loving spouse or friend or elder
 - d. A good devotional time in the word in which a text of the Scripture is pressed to our hearts by the Spirit
5. Sometimes we are blind to our indwelling sin, and God needs to use more aggressive means to bring us to conviction of sin and repentance... that's where the discipline of the Lord is needed (MORE IN HEBREWS 12:4-11)
6. Jesus promises to do this for us:

Revelation 3:19 Those whom I love I rebuke and discipline. So be earnest, and repent.

D. What are the "Things Unseen"?

Faith is the ... conviction of things not seen

1. Hint: verse 7

Hebrews 11:7 By faith Noah, when warned about things not yet seen, in holy fear built an ark to save his family.

The "THING NOT SEEN" was the wrath of God expressed in a flood; it convicted him of sin and of the need to obey God and build an ark

2. Anything in the Bible that brings the existence and magnitude of our sin smartingly home to us is a "thing unseen"
 - a. Past "things unseen": examples from the Bible of saints doing great things or sinners doing vile things: Moses' anger, Israel's idolatry with the golden calf, David's adultery, Uzzah's pride

- b. Present “things unseen”: the holy throne room of God, His eyes of blazing fire, the invisible holy angels, the surrounding “cloud of witnesses”
- c. Future “things unseen”: the Second Coming of Christ, Judgment Day, heaven, hell

E. A Spiritually Mature Man EXPECTS to be Constantly CONVICTED of Sin

1. Such a person will not bristle up with pride whenever someone confronts him/her about sin in his/her life
2. Such a person will be GRATEFUL for the rebuke and accept it BY FAITH

IV. Application

A. Come to Christ

B. Feed Your Faith Daily

C. Stoke Up the Positive Aspect of Faith: Things HOPED FOR

D. Stoke Up the Negative Aspect of Faith: Conviction for Sin

E. Understand the Essential Nature of Faith

F. Understand the Temporary Nature of Faith