

ST. BARTHOLOMEW'S ANGLICAN PRO-CATHEDRAL IN THE TOWN OF TONAWANDA

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Scripture: Hebrews 11:1-6

"It's a Matter of Faith!" Hebrews 11:1-6 (part 9 in series)

THE BELIEVER'S TEST: "Now Faith Is..."

As we continue our study of Hebrews, we now come to the chapter that details what should be our response to so great a salvation and so great a Savior and Lord, **Hebrews 11**. If the first ten chapters of Hebrews show the superiority of Jesus Christ, these ten also prepare us for the Christian response. **Hebrews 11-13** set forth what the response of every believer should be to so great a salvation. In fact, at the end of chapter ten, we hear a warning of the danger of falling away from the Lord and His salvation in Christ, and then the counterweight to such a failure. And this counterweight is really the believer's test. Unlike anything else in life, it will indicate whether or not you're truly are walking with the Lord. Do you know what I am talking about?

Please turn now to the end of **Hebrews 10:35-39: 35**"***Therefore, do not throw away your confidence, which has a great reward. 36For you have need of endurance, so that when you have done the will of God, you may receive what was promised. 37FOR YET IN A VERY LITTLE WHILE, HE WHO IS COMING WILL COME, AND WILL NOT DELAY. 38BUT MY RIGHTEOUS ONE SHALL LIVE BY FAITH; AND IF HE SHRINKS BACK, MY SOUL HAS NO PLEASURE IN HIM. 39But we are not of those who shrink back to destruction, but of those who have faith to the preserving of the soul."***

So what is the most important response one can have toward God? Faith!

So we shouldn't be surprised at what we now read in **Hebrews 11:1-6: "Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen. 2For by it the men of old gained approval. 3By faith we understand that the worlds were prepared by the word of God, so that what is seen was not made out of things which are visible. 4By faith Abel offered to God a better sacrifice than Cain, through which he obtained the testimony that he was righteous, God testifying about his gifts, and through faith, though he is dead, he still speaks. 5By faith Enoch was taken up so that he would not see death; AND HE WAS NOT FOUND BECAUSE GOD TOOK HIM UP; for he obtained the witness that before his being taken up he was pleasing to God. 6And 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 seek Him."**

So right v.6 says that **"without faith it is impossible to please God."** In other words, if you don't believe God, everything else is a failure. If you displease God, it doesn't matter whom you please; and if you please God it doesn't matter whom you displease. And the way to please God is to believe God; and in order to believe God, you're going have to understand what faith is.

Now if there is a definition of what faith is in the Bible, **Hebrews 11:1** comes close. It really is more of a description of faith that sheds further light as to what Biblical faith really is and why it is so important. And before we look at this description, let me share what the essence of biblical faith really is. And this is demonstrated time and time again throughout God's Word.

The word faith here in Hebrews and in the rest of the New Testament may also be translated "belief" or "trust;" and basically it involves, first of all, an agreement. You mentally agree that something is true. You're persuaded but that agreement is not yet faith. That agreement must turn into an attitude. The attitude that comes out of that agreement is trust. You go from believing in your head to believing in your heart. But you are not yet at the full expression of faith. No, you then have to act on it and then faith has found its full measure. It's why James tells us that ***faith without works (without action) is dead.*** It's not true faith unless there is action. In fact, as you read further into Hebrews 11 it tells what people *did* by faith. Therefore, agreement plus attitude plus action equals true biblical faith.

Now let's look again at the description of faith in Hebrews 11:1, "Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen."

THE NATURE OF FAITH

First of all, what is the nature of faith? A little boy said, "*Faith is believing what you know ain't so.*" That's not what faith is; that's just the opposite of faith. Faith is believing what you know is so. Hence, the word we translate as "assurance" – it can also be translated as "substance." So it means something that is certain and solid. The things hoped for are solid, they are sure. Why are they solid and sure? Because they are based on the promises of God and His Word! Again recall what hope means in the Bible. It doesn't mean something that you wished for or an uncertainty. But what it describes is a certainty that is based upon a divine promise that you are anticipating with gladness. Now, you can have a certainty that is based upon divine promise like judgment, but you don't anticipate it with joy so you wouldn't call judgment a hope. It's just a certainty, but the Second Coming of Jesus is called a blessed hope. You know He's coming and you're praying even so come, Lord Jesus. So the Bible word hope is a certainty based upon the promise of God that you are anticipating.

And faith says I know they will come to pass even though they are in the future. And the reason why I know they will come to pass is because the things hoped for are those things promised by God, and God who cannot lie will bring them to pass. So we are not talking about hocus, pocus, willy-nilly, smoke and mirrors. When you're living a life of faith, you're not walking around on eggshells or Jell-O. True faith has steel and concrete in it - spiritual steel, spiritual concrete. It's something that's solid that you can rest on because its faith in the Living God and His Word. Therefore, faith is the reality, the assurance that we're standing on of things that we know are coming to pass because God has promised them. So, that's the first description of faith, ***"Faith is the assurance of things hoped for."*** Now note the second description . ***"Faith is the conviction of things not seen."***

Now, the word conviction here can also mean evidence. If they get enough evidence against you in a court of law, they can convict you, right? So faith is the evidence, the conviction of things not seen. Now, the world tells us that what we see is what we get. It says that seeing is believing, but God says what you get is what you don't see and believing is seeing. The truth is that there is a seen world and an unseen world and the unseen world, is more real than the seen world so a Christian ought to be living above see level, that is – SEE. He ought to be living above that which he can see with his eyes.

Now, sometimes when we talk about having faith, there are always some who say why don't you talk about things that are real or I can only accept the world I can see. Have you heard that one before? You know like this pulpit, this altar, that organ, these clothes, those pews, the carpet, the walls and so forth, they call all of that real but the reality is that there is an unseen world that is more real than the seen world. Last week we heard from **Colossians 1:16** that Jesus created all things visible and invisible. In fact, He made the things that we can see out of things that you cannot see.

Now, look at **Hebrews 11:3**, ***"By faith we understand that the worlds were prepared by the word of God, so that what is seen was not made out of things which are visible."***

So that means all that we can see and hear and touch and smell and taste all of it was made out of things which cannot be seen! Now that is true on a scientific level and a spiritual level. You ask, how so? For example, this pulpit is made of atoms; and those atoms are invisible to the naked eye, and they're bound together by electromagnetic and nuclear forces and, so that this thing is actually made out of what can't be seen. Let me give you another illustration, in the air tonight, in the atmosphere there is music and drama, sports and news, all kinds of beautiful fantastic pictures in the air, right here in this church; and all we'd have to do to prove it is to get a television set, plug it in, tune it. Or if you have WiFi, just get a computer and we'd just draw all of that right out of the air, and we'd see and hear it. Now, where is it? It's right here, you can't see it now, can you? Cause you don't have a tuner or a cable or a WiFi.

Now, if you told your great-great-grandfather that this could be done, he'd think you were out of your mind. But today we can understand such things. I mean, right here in this room, there is an unseen electronic world all around us; and even if you don't understand how it works, it's still true! Even if we'd never heard of television or computers before, it'd still be true and our disbelief and our denial wouldn't change the fact. There's a spiritual world out there; the fact that you've never heard of it or don't believe in it doesn't take away the reality.

God made the material world out of the invisible world. The invisible world was here first, and the invisible world will be here last. And when all of this passed away and turned to nothingness, that which is eternal will still be here - the invisible realm. That's why it says in **2 Cor. 4:18**, ***"while we look not at the things which are seen but at the things which are unseen for the things which are seen are temporal, the things that are not seen are eternal."*** Everything that you can see passes away, it's temporal, it has time value; but the things that are not seen, they are eternal.

THE NECESSITY OF FAITH

What we have been looking at is the nature of faith; I want us now to look at the necessity of faith. Notice again verse three. ***Through faith we understand.*** In other words, we'll never ever really understand anything without faith. Now, you can go to the greatest universities in our land, you can have more degrees than a thermometer; but if you don't have faith, you will never understand God or life.

You see, in the Bible God is never explained. You would expect to find an explanation of God somewhere in the Bible, wouldn't you? But you don't. Maybe a defense of God? An argument for God? No, nothing. God is never explained, He is never argued, He is just presented. The Bible just starts out ***"In the beginning, God,"*** That's it. He's just simply presented. And the Bible writers never try to prove the existence of God; it's not about proving the existence of God. Why? You can't prove Him. The only way that you're going to know that God exists is by His revelation to you and your response by faith.

And God reveals Himself in two ways - natural revelation - through the natural world, and more significantly supernatural or special revelation - through His Word - all that He has said and done as recorded in His written word, and ultimately through the Living Word, the Son, Jesus Christ. Now look again at **v. 6 - *"For without faith it is impossible to please him, for he that comes to God must believe that he is,"***

Now the skeptic will come to you and say prove there is a God. And do you know what I will say in response? I will say I'm sorry, I can't, and he may just laugh like he's won the argument but then I will say wait a minute, we're not finished yet, I want you to prove there is no God! You see, the finite can never prove or disprove the infinite. Nobody can prove that God exists, but correspondingly nobody can prove that God does not exist. The scientist can never prove how the world came into existence; they can talk, they can posture, and they can have an hypothesis, but they can never prove it. Notice verse 3, ***through faith we understand that the worlds*** (universe) ***were*** what? ***prepared*** (some translations have "framed") ***by the word of God.*** You see, science is limited. Do you know what science is limited to? Science is limited to the laboratory. Science has to study phenomenon and processes that now exist, something that they can weigh, something that they can measure, something that they can feel, something that they can see. BUT when it comes to the creation of the world SILENCE must prevail because the scientist wasn't there. There's no way that the scientist can say how it happened.

Do you remember what God asked Job in **Job 38:4**? Job was arguing with the Lord and God basically says, Now shut up Job, I want to ask you a question - ***"Where were you when I laid the foundations of the earth? Declare if you have understanding?"*** Now, Job you're trying to tell me how I ought to run things. But son, were you there when I made it all? Where were you Job when I laid the foundations of the earth?

The only way that you're going to understand how it all happened is if God reveals it to you

because you weren't there! The truth is you'll never understand it in the laboratory; no scientist on earth ever will; he can't because he doesn't have the tools; there's nothing he can measure; there's nothing he can observe; all he can do is have a hunch. Now, that's the reason when a person says to me, "Prove there's a God!" I just simply say "Hey, just prove there's no God." Now, he or she may say "You Christians just believe there's a God by faith." And I will say, "That's right, and you believe there is no God by faith!" You see, all people are believers. I believe there's a God, another person believes there is no God. The atheist cannot demonstrate there is no God. Someone has rightfully said, "*To go into the world that God made and in a laboratory to try to prove God would be like trying to tear that piano apart to find a song.*" We can never prove or disprove God. Faith is so necessary to understanding. Until you come to God with a *childlike faith*, you'll never understand what God or life is all about.

And it's not a matter of the intellect, either. Somebody says, well, I know a brilliant man who doesn't believe in God. I know some brilliant people who believe in God. Well, you say I know a stupid man who believes in God. I know some stupid people who don't. It is not a matter of reason. Listen, what we believe is not contrary to reason. What we believe is beyond reason, do you see the difference? It's why the Bible says in **Psalms 53:1** "***The fool has said in his heart there is no God.***" Now, notice the fool doesn't say *in his mind* there is no God. In fact, the word for fool here is the Hebrew word *nabal* and it literally means NOT a person who is *mentally deficient*, but a person who is MORALLY deficient. The fool does not say in his head there is no God, not at first. At first he says in his heart there is no God and what he believes in his heart shows up in his head. Have you ever noticed how complicated the arguments for not believing in God are? They're worse than the people who try to prove there is a God. They come with these cockamamie, convoluted arguments, trying to prove there is no God.

Have you ever noticed how simple it is for a child to believe in God? It's easy to believe in God because it comes natural, it's supposed to. The Bible says in **Ecclesiastes 3:11** that "***God has set eternity in our hearts.***" We're all born with a God consciousness. It's why almost everyone believes in something beyond what we can see. The truth is a person has to argue against what he knows innately to be true! Recently, I came across a story about a trucking firm down in Atlanta, Georgia, where they would give a lie detector test, a polygraph test to all of those who were applying to work for them. And one of the questions was, "Do you believe in God?" and every person, one hundred percent who said "No," the polygraph said they were lying. Every one of them, the thing said "Liar!"

So it is by faith that we understand God. Faith is the assurance of God's promises, the conviction of the unseen world, that's the nature of it, and the necessity of it? By faith we understand! You'll never understand anything until you begin with faith. But there are two other reasons why it is necessary - we will look at those next week when we continue our series on faith. Until then may we continue to live by faith, for there is no other way!