

## INTRODUCTION

A Catholic nun was also a nurse who worked for a Catholic home health service. One day while driving to her patients she ran out of gas. A gas station was nearby so she walked there, only to find their gas can had been borrowed and never returned. She walked back to her car to see if there was something she could use to hold some gasoline. She found a bedpan, so she walked back to the station and filled it with gas. She carefully walked back to her car beside the road and started pouring it into the tank. A couple of Baptist preachers were driving by and one of them said to the other, "Man, that's what I call faith!"

We're starting a wonderful study of the faith chapter of the Bible, Hebrews 11. In this message we're going to learn the basics of faith. When a freshman begins college they take a lot of 101 courses, which means they are the most basic. This is a basic message to introduce the subject of faith. In the world people say, "Seeing is believing." But when you understand Biblical faith, you'll say, "Believing is seeing!"

Before we jump into the faith chapter, remember that the chapter divisions in the Bible weren't created until the Thirteenth Century, so as we start reading Hebrews 11, let's go back and get a running start from Hebrews 10:39 (CSB), "But we are not those who draw back and are destroyed, but those who have faith and are saved." Some people had lost faith and left the fold, but the writer is celebrating those of us who have faith and remain. Then in Hebrews 11:1-3 we find the definition of faith. "Now faith is the reality (substance) of what is hoped for, the proof (evidence) of what is not seen. For by it our ancestors won God's approval. By faith we understand that the universe was created by the word of God, so that what is seen was made from things that are not visible." Now skip down to see the importance of faith in Hebrews 11:6 "Now without faith it is impossible to please God, since the one who draws near to him must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who seek him."

Faith is not some mysterious force. It's not positive thinking, or being optimistic. Faith involves trust. You may often hear someone say, "I just can't have faith." They are wrong. Because everyone expresses some kind of faith every day. We all exercise faith every time we drive across a bridge; we trust the designer and builder of that bridge. Whenever we sit in a chair, or take a pill, or eat a meal, we are exercising faith. For a Christian, it's not that we have a different faith; it is the OBJECT of our faith that sets us apart. When you drive across a bridge or sit in a chair you trust something you can see. When we trust God we trust Someone we can't see with our naked eye but He is more real than the things we can see with our physical eyes.

We'll be talking about faith over the next couple of months. In this message I want to talk about the reward of faith; the source of faith; and the evidence of faith.

### 1. KNOWING GOD IS THE REWARD OF FAITH

Faith begins with believing God exists. How many of you believe God exists? Faith also believes that He rewards those who seek Him. So what is the reward? It is knowing God. That is the reward of faith. It's not enough to just believe there is a God, that's not saving faith. Faith isn't

just making an intellectual affirmation, "I believe in God." Faith is knowing God personally. One of the most important verses in the New Testament is John 17:3 Jesus defines eternal life. He is praying and He says to His Father, "This is eternal life: that they may know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent." Please say this with me: Eternal life is knowing God by knowing Jesus.

Faith doesn't come naturally to us. We all have a tendency toward skepticism. If we see a sign on a park bench that says, "wet paint" most people are going to touch it to see if it's true. So we must overcome this natural skepticism to have faith in God.

### **FAITH FACT: Faith is believing that the invisible is more real than the visible**

The Bible often makes a principle, and then gives an illustration. That's what we find in the first three verses of Hebrews 11. We learn that faith is the reality for what is hoped for and the proof of what cannot be seen. And we find the illustration of faith in verse 3. It says that by faith we understand that the universe was created by the Word of God. So believing in God's creation of the universe is a great place to start your faith.

It doesn't say by faith we understand *how* God created the world. It just says we understand that the universe was created by the Word of God. There was nothing except void and darkness and God spoke and said, "Let there be light." And there was light.

Scientists have devoted centuries of studies trying to figure out how the universe was created. You've heard of the Big Bang Theory, and the theory of evolution. But to this day, those are only hypotheses. No one has ever disproved that God spoke the universe into existence. And sometimes you'll hear a renowned scientist declare that He now believes there is intelligent design behind the universe. It doesn't give me any more faith in God; it just gives me a little more faith in that scientist.

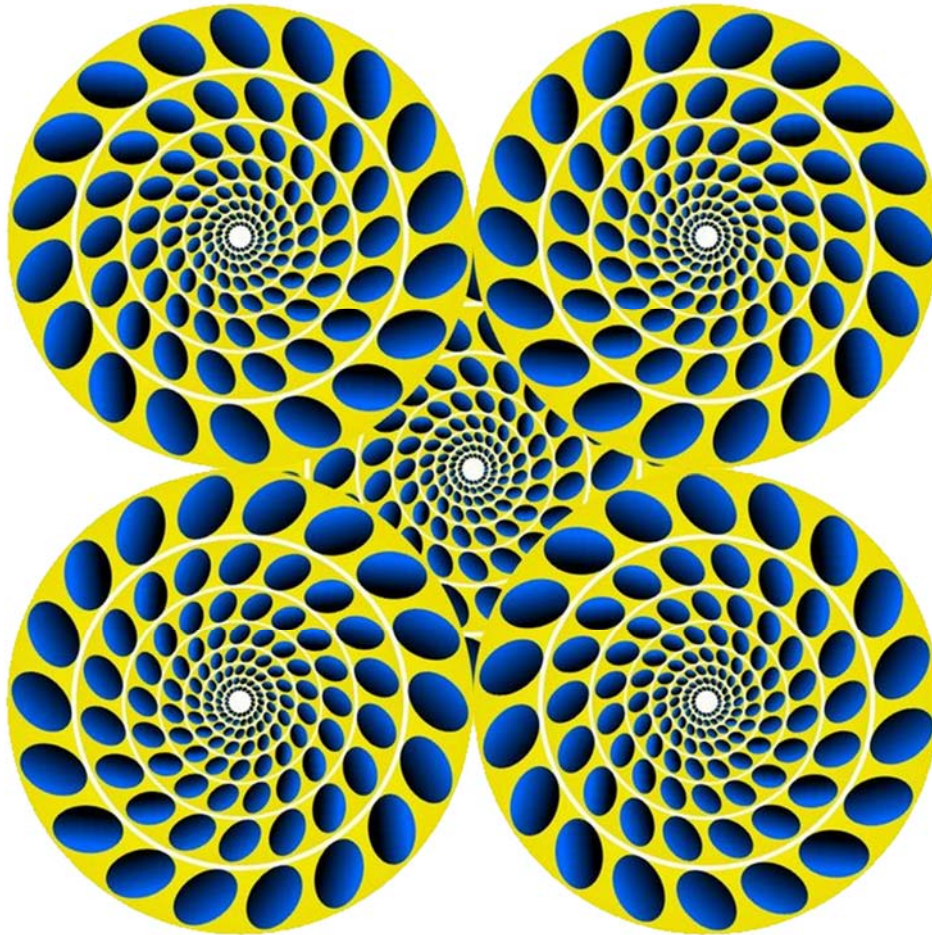
But the Bible isn't so concerned with HOW it happened, it's more about WHY God created the universe. Scientists aren't even interested in the "why," they just want to know the "how." God created the heavens and the earth. Then He created plants and animals. And finally, His ultimate creation was a man and woman. If you can understand why God made them, then you can understand why God made you—it's the same reason.

God made Adam and Eve so He could have a loving relationship with them. Our Creator made you and me so we can know Him and have a personal relationship with Him. But sin disrupted that relationship. And God had a perfect plan to restore that broken relationship—He sent His son to die on a cross so that his loving fellowship can be restored.

Now, you can't see God with your naked eye. The Bible says He is immortal and invisible. So faith is entering into a world that isn't known by the five senses. That's hard for us to do because we are programmed all our lives to believe what we taste, touch, smell, see, or hear.

When you have eyes of faith, you look for the unseen. There's a great principle found in 2 Corinthians 4:18 (CSB), "So we do not focus on what is seen, but on what is unseen. For what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal." So how do we focus our eyes on the invisible? First, we must admit there are many things that we cannot see with our naked eye. Actually, we look at things are unseen all the time. For instance, until the invention of the telescope about four hundred years ago, people couldn't see beyond what we can see with our eyes. But now with the Hubble Telescope we can see things that were once invisible. Scientists believe there are about 2 trillion galaxies in the Universe. One of the largest is Galaxy IC 1011, which is a billion light years away from earth, it contains 100 trillion stars, and is sixty times larger than our Munchkin Milky Way. We live in a huge universe—most of which cannot be seen. Yet in Isaiah 40:12, we read that God has measured the universe with the span of His hand. But you don't need a powerful telescope to see God; you just need eyes of faith.

Another reason it's difficult for us to focus on the unseen is because we've looked through our physical eyes for so long we've come to believe the only things that are real are the things we can see with our physical eyes. But you can't always trust what you see even with your physical eyes! When I was in the ninth grade I won first prize in our high school's science fair by doing a project on optical illusions.



For instance, you can look at this picture of circles and you would almost be willing to bet that the circles are moving, but this isn't a video, it's a still picture. To prove it, focus for a few seconds on the small center white circle and the other circles will stop moving.

It's not a trick your eyes are playing; it's your brain that is fooled. Ophthalmologists call this lateral inhibition. That means the eyes throw away much of the input they receive and rely on the brain to fill in the gaps. So since our physical vision can be fooled, we need to learn there is a more reliable way to see reality: Through eyes of faith.

You've heard the expression, "There's more than meets the eye." That is true, spiritually. There are spiritual realities around us you just can't see. Now I don't want to spook you, but there are people in this room you can't see. For instance, there are three ex-NFL players talking about the upcoming NFL exhibition games today. At the same time, there are talking heads bringing coverage of Hurricane Harvey. And over here is a western show and cowboys are chasing the bad guys on horses. Do you see it? No? Of course, I'm talking about the invisible television waves passing through this room—all you need is a receiver and a screen and you'd see it.

There are things in the heavenly realm all around us you can't see with your naked eye.

There's a great story to illustrate this from the life of Elisha. In 2 Kings 6 the prophet Elisha and his servant were caught in a trap. Hundreds of Aramean soldiers surrounded them with orders to capture him. Elisha's servant was scared and said, "Oh, what are we gonna do?" Elisha said, "Chill out, because those on our side outnumber those on their side." The servant must have looked puzzled as he counted "one, two" and then looked at the Arameans and counted, "one, two, three, four...six hundred...two thousand. What do you mean, Elisha?" Then Elisha prayed a prayer we all should pray. He said, "Lord, open his eyes so he may see." Now the servant wasn't blind, he could see physically. Elisha was asking God to open his spiritual eyes to see the invisible. And the Bible says, "Then the Lord opened the servant's eyes, and he looked and saw the hills full of horses and chariots of fire all around Elisha." (2 Kings 6:17) God had stationed His angelic army around Elisha. They were invisible to the servant until God opened his eyes. Would you be willing to pray the same prayer? "God, open my eyes so that I can see the invisible, see the eternal, see what really matters to You."

Faith is not believing facts about God or believing that God exists. Saving faith is knowing God—that's the Reward of faith.

## **2. HEARING GOD IS THE SOURCE OF FAITH**

As I mentioned, faith doesn't come naturally to us. We tend to be skeptical. But faith isn't just some emotion or thought process you can create yourself. God offers to give you the gift of faith. So where do you get this gift? It comes from the Word of God.

People sometimes challenge God to reveal Himself in a dramatic way so everyone would believe. They say, "God give me a sign!" That's what they demanded of Jesus. But He said a crooked and depraved generation demands a sign. But then, He honored their request said,

"Okay, you want a sign? The only sign I'm going to give you is the sign of Jonah. Just as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of the fish, so the Son of Man will be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth." (Matthew 12:40)

So Jesus was crucified and laid in the heart of the earth for three days. And then, "Boom!" He came forth alive and said, "Here's your sign." But still the Jewish leaders didn't believe Him.

Some people are what I call miracle-mongers. They demand some kind of miracle from God to prove His existence. And of course, God is a God of might and miracles. He can do anything. For instance, if He wanted to He could reach down right now, lift the roof off of all our buildings and lean over and say, "Howdy!" Then He could twirl the roof around a couple of times and set it back in place.

And if that happened people would be Facebooking, Instagramming, and Tweeting away. People would have been stopping by to come into our services within a few minutes. And then can you imagine the crowd we'd have next Sunday? You think parking is difficult now! We'd have twenty thousand people show up next week. But if God didn't perform another magic trick, they'd be gone within a few weeks.

The source of faith is not miracles. The source of faith is hearing from God. The Bible says, "So faith comes from what is heard, and what is heard comes through the message about Christ." (Romans 10:17 CSB)

God is speaking, are you listening? Are you cramming your mind and ears with so much junk and static from the world that you can't be still and quiet and listen to the still small voice of God? So how does God speak today? He speaks primarily through His written or spoken word. That's what Jesus told the skeptics. He said, "For if you believed Moses, you would believe me, because he wrote about me." (John 5:46 CSB)

### **FAITH FACT: Faith grows when you saturate your mind with God's Word**

You may if I've ever heard from God. I don't hear voices, but I believe I've heard from God thousands of times in my life. 99% of the time it happened as I was reading or listening to a portion of God's Word, and suddenly the words jumped off the page and grabbed me by my shoulders and said, "Pay attention! This is for you right here, right now." That's when the written Word of God becomes the living Word of God. But that won't happen unless you saturate your mind and heart with the Word. As I mentioned a couple of weeks ago, part of the problem we face in America is that we are a generation of news junkies. Whether it's Fox News or CNN, or printed media, if you are spending more time filling your mind with their propaganda than you spend in the Word of God you are going to live in fear and embrace a faulty worldview.

Faith is a gift that comes from God. One of the most powerful verses in the New Testament about salvation is found in Ephesians 2. The Bible says, "For you are saved by grace through faith, and this is not from yourselves; it is God's gift—not from works, so that no one can

boast. For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared ahead of time for us to do." (Ephesians 2:8-10 CSB)

You may ask, "So which one is a gift, grace or faith?" They both are. Grace is God's free gift of mercy and forgiveness, and He even gives you the gift of faith to receive His gracious offer. If you are going to understand salvation, you've got to get your prepositions in order. We are saved BY grace (not saved by faith or by good works). We are saved BY grace THROUGH faith. Grace is God tossing us mercy and forgiveness; faith is me catching it, receiving it. And He gives me the ability to do that. We are saved BY grace THROUGH faith FOR good works. You don't get to heaven by performing good deeds, but as we will see in a moment, you will work for Jesus once you have been saved. For years, I've quoted a little poem that says, "I cannot work my soul to save; That work my Lord has done; But I WILL work like any slave; For the love of God's dear Son."

### **3. OBEYING GOD IS THE EVIDENCE OF FAITH**

Over the next few weeks we're going to study the lives of people who are named in God's Faith Hall of Fame. They lived different lives, but they all had one thing in common: They obeyed God. Even when they didn't understand why they were doing what they were doing, they obeyed. That's the evidence of faith. God told Noah to build a big boat. He said, "Aye Aye, Sir." God told Abraham to pack up and leave without a destination in mind. He said, "Yes, Sir!" That's what we're going to see in the lives of all those who are listed.

#### **FAITH FACT: Faith only becomes faith in the act of obedience**

Now faith is not a static thing; it's not like a museum artifact that can be studied or analyzed. In its purest form, faith is an ACT. For a follower of Jesus, faith always is proven by the good works that do in obedience to our Father.

The half-brother of Jesus understood this. James wrote about how faith is dead unless it is accompanied by obedience. He wrote: "But someone will say, 'You have faith, and I have works.' Show me your faith without works, and I will show you faith by my works. You believe that God is one. Good! Even the demons believe—and they shudder. Senseless person! Are you willing to learn that faith without works is useless?" (James 2:18-20 CSB)

### **CONCLUSION**

I borrowed the words in the Faith Fact from the great German pastor, Dietrich Bonhoeffer, who wrote the classic book, *The Cost of Discipleship*. He wrote: "Faith is only real where there is obedience, never without it, and faith only becomes faith in the act of obedience."

Bonhoeffer was a pastor when Hitler rose to power. But Bonhoeffer saw the demonic spirit at work, so he was part of a group of pastors who opposed Hitler. He visited the United States and could have stayed and been safe during the war, but he returned to his congregation. He believed that Hitler was the antichrist that he was part of an underground Nazi resistance

movement. He was involved with one of many plots of assassinate Hitler. That's radical obedience. The plot failed and Bonhoeffer was arrested and thrown into a prison camp. For two years he suffered in the prison camp and used that time to write. Just days before the Allies captured the prison camp, he was taken out early one morning and hung. His last words were "This is the end. But for me, the beginning of life." He understood that there is no faith without obedience.

## OUTLINE

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### 2. HEARING GOD IS THE SOURCE OF FAITH

"So faith comes from what is heard, and what is heard comes through the message about Christ." *Romans 10:17 CSB*

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"For you are saved by grace through faith, and this is not from yourselves; it is God's gift—not from works, so that no one can boast. For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared ahead of time for us to do." *Ephesians 2:8-10 CSB*

The powerful prepositions of salvation:  
Saved by grace; through faith; for good works.

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For the Joy...  
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