

## Faith on Display

[Announce Text] Please keep your Bibles open to Hebrews 11:1-3 (p. 1007).

[Scripture Introduction] My name is Brett Sweet and I'm one of the pastors here. We're in a series on the book of Hebrews- which was written to Christians who weren't quite sure they wanted to continue to be Christians.

[Prayer for Illumination] Please pray with me...

[Illustration] Have you ever met one of those people- you know the ones. Her doctoral studies at Harvard forced her to quit her job as a model because she couldn't do both modeling and volunteering with the homeless, so she chose the homeless? Or that guy who is the captain of the football team and valedictorian but he also seems to go out of his way to care for the outcasts at school? When you first watch them from afar it's easy to criticize them, but then you meet them and they're kind and caring toward you. Can people really be this good? This gifted? The sorts they make displays about in the hallways of High Schools and Universities?

In the book of Hebrews a group of people who were raised in Judaism have been introduced to that sort of person in Jesus Christ. The author, through the first 10 chapters, has proved from the Old Testament, that Jesus is better than everyone who's come before. Jesus is better than angels when it comes to delivering God's Word because He's God's unique and only eternal Son. Jesus is better than Moses the bringer of the Old Covenant. Jesus is better than Joshua who led Israel into the promised land and brings us to a better rest. Jesus is a better high priest than Aaron. In fact, Jesus is better than Abraham, the founder of the Jewish faith. Jesus is better than the great mysterious high priest and king, Melchizedek. Jesus is the best high priest because He has brought us a better covenant based on better promises. Jesus, as high priest, has offered a better sacrifice. Instead of bulls and goats, He offered up Himself on the cross. This allows us to enter a better temple than the one in Jerusalem- we can enter the eternal Temple of God's presence in Heaven because Jesus has paid the entrance fee once and for all. Can anyone really be this good? The answer is yes.

Does that mean that Abraham and Moses and Aaron and Joshua and others were just a bunch of schmoes? If the book stopped at chapter 10 the answer almost

seems to be “yes.” If you abandon Jesus for them you can expect judgment and damnation to follow. If you are trusting in these men for your eternal salvation you are doomed.

Today we aren’t likely to abandon Jesus for the respect of our Jewish friends and family like the original audience did. But we have those moments don’t we? Jesus can’t really be this great can he? If I traded him out for something else- influence in school or work, freedom from obligations, more relaxing time off, the respect of people who don’t like Christians, whether a certain person or a whole group of people- would I really lose anything? Yes, in the scheme of eternity, you’d lose everything. So how do you continue? How do you make it through this life of suffering and arrive in Heaven?

**[Proposition] Faith preserves our souls until we reach Heaven.**

You see it turns out that that the people that the first 10 chapters spoke about weren’t schmoes at all. They shouldn’t be trusted in for salvation, but they are heroes worth following. They are worth following because they lived by faith. So for these former Jews and for us, the solution is not to abandon this amazing Jesus and trust in them, it’s to follow their examples. It’s to live by faith and thereby preserve our souls as the last verse of chapter 10 says.

Hebrews 11 has been called the “Hall of Faith” like it’s the “Bible character Hall of Fame.” If that’s the case, then verses 1-3 are something like stepping into the lobby of the Hall of Faith. So I want us to picture ourselves having purchased our tickets, we’ve had our hands stamped and we’re walking through the door. And we see this very first display. And behind a glass enclosure we see three things- A mechanism, a medal, and a microscope. A mechanism, a medal (with a d), and a microscope.

**[Main Point 1] The Mechanism of faith**

As we gaze into the display we see something strange. Something that seems small and insignificant. Maybe something completely unexpected. But for us to make sense of all the heroes that are found in the Hall of Faith that follow, we need to look at this. And ask the most basic questions about this mechanism called faith-

[Subpoint 1] What is it?

I mentioned a couple weeks ago that I inherited a bunch of tools from my dad when he died. The most mysterious of all seems to be from before my dad's time. It was this strange mechanism and we kept asking ourselves "What is it?" If we do the same thing with this soul-preserving mechanism called faith- we get a basic answer:

Look with me at v.1

*Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen.*

Faith is an ASSURANCE of things hoped for. One Bible scholar uses a couple synonyms telling us what that assurance is- it's a "firm, solid confidence" or a "calm courage." It's not wishful thinking. It's not devoid of knowledge. It's a solid confidence that God will accomplish the things He's said He will, even when we can't see exactly what's going to happen. Are you confident that God is going to keep His promises to you? If so, you know what the mechanism of faith is.

Now, in determining what something is we also need an answer to the second question that helps us understand things:

[Subpoint 2] What does it do?

The whole chapter of Hebrews 11 is less concerned about what faith is, so much as what does it do. Faith goes beyond our internal attitudes and turns us to something or someone outside of the believer. And faith itself, as a mechanism, is not to be trusted. It's a means of turning from what's seen in this physical world to God's promises that we often don't see fulfilled in this life. It's the means of taking hold of Jesus. The one who is better than Moses, Abraham, Joshua, your parents, your theological heroes, or yourself. It's an abandoning of trust in anyone but Jesus and trusting Him enough to go where He directs you.

[Illustration] While JRR Tolkien would say that he had no intentions or goals in having his stories mirror the truths of the gospel, I think that he oftentimes couldn't help it. In the Lord of the Rings books there's this great moment where the great captain of the city of Gondor, Faramir is his name, seems to be drifting over the canyon we call death- in fact people are in tears as he lies in a bed. And the rightful King Aragorn comes into the Houses of Healing. In those rooms there's a saying: *the hands of the king are the hands of a healer* (does that sound like Jesus or not?). So Aragorn works together a remedy and he puts it to work on

Faramir- whom he's never met, and we get a picture from Faramir of what saving faith is:

*Suddenly Faramir stirred, and he opened his eyes, and he look on Aragorn who bent over him; and a light of knowledge and love was kindled in his eyes, and he spoke softly. 'My lord, you called me. I come. What does the king command?'*

*'Walk no more in shadows, but awake!' said Aragorn. 'You are weary. Rest a while, and take food, and be ready when I return.'*

*'I will, lord,' said Faramir. 'For who would lie idle when the king has returned?'*

[Application] Have you begun one day not knowing the king and then, seemingly awoken with the a light of knowledge and love in your eyes and your heart? Has King Jesus awoken you? Some of you here are still in shadows. Kids, have you heard the Lord's call to you? Do you have the mechanism of faith? Have you seen that your sin has led you to those shadows- and that you cannot awaken yourself? That every effort you make to give yourself life will only lead to destruction? Do you see that you've broken the laws of God as a great traitor and the king has a right to sentence you to death? At the cross Jesus came for traitors like you and me and paid the penalty for sins so that He could awaken us. Faith in Him is the only way. No other mechanism will lead to salvation.

And those of you who think you've been awoken by the king- is this your attitude? 'My lord, you called me. I come. What does the king command?' Is there an area of your life where you are refusing to come when Jesus calls you. Are you refusing to do what King Jesus commands? Faramir would have had absolute control of the kingdom but he knew it would be better to give up everything- power, control, financial benefits, you name it to the rightful king. The mechanism of saving faith works by using that calm courage and obeying what God has said- even when it points to unseen things. Is there a sin you refuse to kill? Are you greedy with your money? Are you selfish with how you spend your time? Do you treat people like objects to be used and discarded instead of people to be loved? The faith that gets us to our destination is one that is ready and eager to do what the king commands. Faith not only is the assurance of things hoped for- it does something, it doesn't lie idle knowing that the king has come. Faith is active. And every member of the Hall of Faith shows this.

So the display in the lobby of the Hall of Faith has a mechanism in it, but amazingly, there's something else in the display there's an award. There's a prize. Let's look at

## **[Main Point 2] The Medal of Faith**

Let's read vv. 1-2 together but focus in on v. 2

*Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen. For by it the people of old received their commendation.*

Faith comes with a medal of commendation. It comes with an award. The highest award our military can bestow is the Medal of Honor. It is bestowed on behalf of, and in the name of Congress, and since 1980 almost all of the Medal of Honor winners have been personally decorated by the President. Commending the soldier, sailor, airman, or their surviving family that he or she has gone above and beyond the call of duty.

But there is a better Medal to receive than the Medal of Honor. Every true Christian- those who persevere in faith in Jesus, will receive the Medal of Faith. All the people of old received it. And all of need to see this truth. You need faith to receive this medal. And the Bible tells us that the faith we exercise in Jesus is really our faith. But it also says that this faith is a gift from God. So here's the incredible generosity and grace of God. He hangs a medal around your neck. And He commends you publicly for your obedient life of faith. But He knows and you know that He is the One who made it possible! In a sense, He's rewarding you, praising you, commending you for the work He has done. This is the nature of the gospel of grace- it's not your efforts that merit your salvation, it's God's work that accomplishes your salvation- yet you get rewarded for it. You get to wear the Medal.

[Application] Rightfully so, in the United States we make a big deal about people who win the Medal of Honor. But those who have received it usually receive it for their heroism on what, for most of them, was the worst day of their life. Maybe that's where you are. It's the worst day of your life. Or the worst month. Or the worst decade. That's how it was for many of the people we'll see in weeks to come. The decade their promised child again didn't come. The day he was told to offer up his son. The slow agonizing days before his death. The day he gave up his

place of wealth and honor in Pharaoh's court. But how did they respond? They had an assurance, a conviction of things unseen. They had a confident courage that helped them persevere. This is not the faith of the prosperity gospel that faith leads to an easy life- many of them saw great suffering. But in the end they were awarded the Medal of Faith. They received their commendation.

If you are here and you find yourself in a horrible time in your life, we want to pray for you later in the service or after it's over. But remember this: Keep going. Have just enough faith to make it through breakfast. Then just enough faith to make it through lunch. Then just enough to make it through dinner and to bed. And do it again with the help of others. Doesn't seem like much sometimes does it? But in the end. Almighty God, knowing that He is the One who did all the real work of saving you through His Son, will joyfully give you the commendation of the Medal of Faith.

The display in the lobby of the Hall of Faith has a mechanism called faith and has a shiny medal of faith hanging in the display. And then, curiously, there's one more thing. Something we'd expect to see in a high school chemistry lab. A microscope. Let's look at

### **[Main Point 3] The Microscope of Faith**

Read v. 3 with me

*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.*

[Illustration] There are objective realities that exist unseen to us. For millennia people perished because of these things called germs. Illnesses and diseases leading to blindness, respiratory failure, and systemic infections. Yet they went unseen. But microscopes changed that. Now, we see the person coughing in the waiting room and we choose a seat as far away as possible because something invisible- germs- are found near them, and in them, and on them.

[Exposition] The author of Hebrews has told us that faith is a conviction of things "not seen" in v. 1. And here we see that faith involves affirming that God spoke and the universe was created. He didn't take something already existed and mold it like playdough into the universe. Instead he took the unseen and glorious germ of His Word and brought everything we see and more into existence. You think

that the ancients were backwards and wouldn't have believed in creation if they lived in our time? Wrong. It's always taken a level of faith. Faith is a microscope that allows us to "see" in a sort of way, the unseen.

[Apologetic] Perhaps you are here and this is the crux of the issue for you. You, quite frankly, do not believe that God exists- you lack faith. You think the universe arose out of some sort of natural process. And here we are. But let me just address you quickly and note that you might be more full of faith than you think. You believe that what is seen, the universe, is made out things that are invisible. We can't see the Big Bang, which frankly, necessitates a Creator. If you want to argue for multiple universes, there's no visible evidence whatsoever to support that. Every supposedly scientific theory based on naturalistic causes- Vacuum fluctuation models, chaotic inflationary models, those involving quantum gravity or string theory- you believe in something like that though they are unseen. You trust the word of scientists who will tell you that they are making guesses. Instead, trust the word of God who was there.

[Application] What does faith look like? What does having the assurance, the firm, solid confidence that God will deliver on His promises to you. It means, when the doctors have no answers for the pain but you have decades to live, you trust that God is going to give you a resurrection body someday without pain and suffering. It means that when doing the right thing with your children means you look like "the bad guy" you believe that God blesses those who fear Him and that you can receive the resentment of your child by disciplining them the way your Loving God disciplines you. It means living with hope that God will provide for you in some way, even if it's welfare and food stamps. It means investing in discipling the next generation believing that God will accomplish something out of it, even though they all look like a bunch of immature people with no promise. God takes things that are unseen and makes them visible. It means when the culture presses on you and says that people who stand on the Bible's teachings about gender, or human sexuality, or the value of human life (whether very young or very old)- you stand and lovingly press back when needed. Looking to the unseen reality of the final judgment.

You see, just as sure as this universe is now visible, it's just as sure that the unseen realities that God promises will come true in our lives. But what about

when it seems hard to believe God. When it's hard to have an assurance, a conviction- when our firm, solid confidence seems neither firm nor solid? Here's what the faith does- it focuses on the truths found in the first 10 chapters of Hebrews. It focuses on Jesus- the One who is better than anyone who has ever lived- whether Abraham, or Moses, or Martin Luther King or whomever. And faith focuses on what Jesus has done- He offered up a superior sacrifice- His own body in our place so that we can be forgiven and be recipients of the New Covenant which states that we've been given new hearts to know the Lord. And it focuses on the truth that Jesus is alive- He's passed from death to life and is now in the Heavenly Throne Room interceding for us. This is preaching the gospel to yourself. This is using the microscope of faith to look to the unseen but very true realities. What you are going to see in the coming weeks is that it's very common for those people who line the Hall of Faith to have continued to exercise faith in an unseen future because they knew they'd heard from God in the past. Are you preaching the gospel from the past to yourself so that you continue to have faith as the present becomes the future? Do you see that if you don't. If you continue to deny Jesus, then the judgment of God's righteous wrath that Jesus suffered on the cross actually remains for you to take? Give up everything you have to put your faith in Christ.

And here's the incredible thing that the author of Hebrews tells us in Hebrews 11. This display in the lobby of faith that we see in vv. 1-3 leads to the Hall of Faith- and it's a gloriously long hallway. And we see our heroes- Abraham, Moses, David, Sarah, and Rahab. But if we keep walking down the hallway to the end, we see that the Holy Spirit is laboring like a faithful carpenter and more displays are being constructed. There are signs saying that there are future displays coming- and there, you will see the racks waiting for the Medal of Faith to be hung in each display. For people who will get their commendation, not from a President we may or may not like, but from God Himself. And if we look at the plaques carefully we'll see that one of these future displays, now under construction, has each of our names on it.