

# 1.7.2024 Sermon

## Faith | Hebrews 11:1-2

### SUMMARY KEYWORDS

faith, god, hebrews, life, old testament, christ, author, activated, talking, moment, title deed, promised, love, word, enter, live, kevin, midst, ethereal, church

### SPEAKERS

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Kevin Brisbin

### Rev. Dr. Tracy L. Saletta:

So, we are starting a new series on Hebrews 11. It is the 'Heroes of the Faith' series, and I'm very excited to be starting this. We are going to kind of go back and forth. The way we're doing it, we're taking the stories in the New Testament, bringing them to the Old Testament, and looking at what happened in the Old Testament, then bringing them forward.

What is interesting about this, and what we were just talking about a little bit as elders, is it's going to be far more challenging than we thought. The elders are a little mad at me, because, you know, I'm like, 'This looks like a great idea.'

Even as I was preparing, parsing out who was going to get one and how this was going to work, I'm like, 'Wow, this is going to be a lot harder than I thought.' The verbiage in the Old Testament is very punitive. It's very much about, 'If you don't do this, God is angry, and you're dead.'

How does that fit with the God of the New Testament? Who loved the world so much that they sent their only son to die for us that cannot, self-giving, can Gnosis that's from Philippians, when God emptied God's own self out, right? And came to Earth?

How does that fit with the punitive God of the Old Testament? Even when I went back and looked at what the author of Hebrews wrote about and who the author wrote about, I was like, 'Wow, this is going to be a lot harder than we thought.'

So, I gave Kevin Enoch. I did. So, you know, there are stories that and Enoch, literally, is one tiny sentence, yet he made it into this list of the heroes of the faith. Why and how? So, if this is going to be interesting.

The other part of this that I love, is that you are going to get, we have seven different preachers and you are going to get what faith looks like from each one of us. And even as we were praying and talking out before the service, I was hearing what the elders were saying, and I just went, 'Wow, this is gonna be powerful.'

Because I don't think we know what faith is. I think we use the word, but actually, to really begin to take it apart and look at it. I know that as I was preparing today, I kept thinking to myself, 'How do I? How do I talk about something that is intangible? How do I explain what faith is because I have the first verses that talks about faith is the substance of things hoped for, and the evidence of things not seen?'

What does that even mean? Like, really? What does that even mean? So, what does that look like in our lives? So, trying to explain that this ethereal, unseeing saying is really complicated. And then Kevin said something that I thought was fabulous, is that I might have to ask you to say it, about going back into the Old Testament. To bring it for what what did you say? I'm pulling it out to you, Kevin? Where's the mic? Oh, man, who's hogging it?

**Elder Kevin Brisbin:**

I just said, I think that it's interesting. This is very, half a thought. I don't preach for four weeks. So, I've only started...

I think it's interesting how the author of this unknown author of Hebrews is using this chapter 11, to look back at all these characters from the Old Testament. So, this, it's this. It's this historic retrospective, looking back in order to teach us about faith, which is something that's happening in the future that's not yet happened, to inform how we live our lives in the present. So, it's looking back to understand how to look forward so that we can live now. It's like just a really interesting paradigm.

**Rev. Dr. Tracy L. Saletta:**

Like the Terminator. You know what I'm saying? It's like, it doesn't make sense. Right? But thank you, Kevin, on the spot, you did great.

So, a little bit about the book of Hebrews, more than any other book in the New Testament, Hebrews speaks to the rituals and the ceremonies of Judaism and of the Old Testament, and it symbolically is pointing to the coming Messiah.

So, what this person is doing, who by the way, the Hebrews author is unknown. There are so many speculations that it's not even worth going into. But nobody knows who wrote Hebrews.

And so, what this author is doing is saying we can see Christ in the Old Testament. And let me draw the line between the Old Testament and the law and the New Testament, and who Christ is.

And the author talks frequently, that the rites of what happened in Judaism, the law, were but a shadow of the things to come, the shadow was seen in Christ. And the other important point was this author is continuously writing that Christ is superior to the law, not even the Christ is the fulfillment of the law, but that Christ is superior to the law.

And that's a superior at the superiority of Jesus is really the main theme, and the important part of this letter. And so, the writer to the Hebrews is constantly the writer of Hebrews is constantly comparing the inadequacies for lack of a better word of the Old Testament sacrificial system, to the perfection and the completion in Christ.

And where the Old Testament required continual sacrifices, and once a year atonement by a human priest, the New Covenant offers a once for all sacrifice through Christ, who is our high priest now. So, it's drawing this lineage between the two.

The other point that Hebrews makes is that Israel failed to enter a Sabbath rest that was there for them. So, this author is bringing in the faith, part of the law, that in the Old Testament, they had an opportunity to enter into a rest, there was a rest available that God had planned, but they did not, they were not able to enter it.

And this is interesting, because of their disobedience. Now, if you read the Old Testament at all, it is filled with if you do this, if you disobey, you're basically just in trouble give up. Well, this word here it means disobedience. But it actually means disbelief, or a refusal to believe.

So even in this word that the author is using, there is an aspect of it is they were not able to enter rest, the rest that God had because of disbelief because of unbelief. And that's, that's important.

Because after he talks about this, that's in chapter four, then he begins to build up to what faith is, and what believing God is. And that's where Hebrews 11 comes into it. Because he starts to talk about, well, what does faith look like? And what does obedience and believing look like? And I'm talking in circles, but obedience, and believing actually looks like faith. But what does that mean? So, let's keep going.

In a nutshell for me, and you're going to hear a whole bunch of different nutshells. Right, which is the beauty of our church, right? Because we are looking at Hebrews through centered set through the cross of Christ, and how that lines up.

But for me, faith looks like believing in the unknown. And in the things that we can't see. Faith is faith, because we don't see or have inherited the answer. Faith is faith. When we get what we've been praying for, or when we get what we are wanting. Faith is no longer active, because we no longer need faith. Faith is faith when we don't have it when we can't see it. So our text this morning is Hebrews 11 one, one and two simple text is Now faith is confidence in what we hope for, and assurance about what we do not see. And this is what the ancients were commended for.

Now I cut my teeth on the King James version of this so I like it better, which is Now faith is the substance of things hoped for. And the evidence of things not saying A Peter O'Brien in his commentary said, Faith demonstrates the existence of a reality that cannot be perceived through objective sense perception.

So, faith is ethereal. So, we're talking about something that we can't see that we can't touch that we can't grasp. But we can feel. You can feel you can. You can sometimes sense when there's faith stirring within you. But it's untouchable. It's, it's not tangible.

So, this word now is in the now, faith. And now, I'm not going to go into this whole thing, because it's so there's so much grammar involved here and the Greek, but now and is connected. Let's just say that. And it's an adverb. And what that means is at the present time, it means here, and now.

And what I love about that, because it's what you were saying, it is, how do we live in faith? Here, right here. You know, I've said this time and time again, is we don't live in the past, the past is the past, nothing you can do about it can't build a time machine can't go backwards, nothing you can do about it. We do not live in the future. The future is not here, yet. It's coming. The only place we can live is here. Right now. And then right now. And then right now. So, the only place we have any kind of control, power, movement, faith is right here is in the present.

It's a mindfulness thing, where you're invited every moment into the now. And that's what I believe. This is saying, "Now faith," it's saying in the present moment, "faith," which is the only kind of faith there is. You can't have faith for the past. Because even if you're looking at the past, and you're trusting God to fix or do something different from what happened in the past, you're activating your faith. Now, for the past. Our faith can't touch the future, because it's only activated in the now.

So, when we're talking about now, faith, what the author is saying is, or I believe the author is saying, is the only place you can activate your faith is now, right here, in the present moment. This is the only place that faith is moving. So, what is faith? Webster says faith is a firm belief in something for which there is no proof. So, I believe that faith, and I don't know about you, I

was brought up in the 80s. I got saved in the 80s. And it was all about just believe, right? Put that Cadillac image on the refrigerator, put your hand on it every morning, and start claiming that baby. I never got a Cadillac, by the way. I did try. But I didn't get it. But that is not what faith is, for me, my premise, my belief system.

And when I say that, and the reason that we say that as preachers in this space, is because we all have to build our belief systems, right? So, we, as preachers, when we come up here, and we're doing the study and stuff, it is still our interpretation. And it is still the way sifted through our own lens. So, my interpretation, after looking at these verses, is, I really believe faith has nothing to do with getting something. It has nothing to do with just belief in God. It has nothing to do with the result.

Faith for me is having trust in God. Faith for me is trust in our God, who always promises to be with us. Faith for me is living in the tension of the now and the not yet. Faith for me is trusting in something that I can't see, that I can't touch tangibly, but that I trust in each moment of my life in the one who I know loves me most. Does that mean I don't pray? No, I pray, but I'm not married to the result. I don't believe faith is about results. I believe faith is resting and trusting that God's goodness is always running after us. That He is always chasing us down. That God's goodness really is running after us all the time, and that no matter what is going on in my life, God's life is pressing for, for the gold, God's life is pressing for life.

So, whatever is happening, whatever I might be talking to God about, there is a deep abiding trust and hope that God's life is pressing for God's life in my life. That's, for me, the image of faith. Marvin Richardson Vincent says, "Faith apprehends as a real fact, what is not revealed to the senses." And again, the only time we need faith is when we can't see something. That's when our faith is activated. So, Second Corinthians 4:18 says, "We don't focus our attention on what is seen, but on what is unseen, for what is seen is temporary. But the unseen realm is eternal."

Our journey in this life, we are taught, and it's being human, to recognize, to focus on, to see the tangible and what's going on around us. But we are part of another realm. We are part of a realm that is greater than what we have going on here. And I think what happens to us is we get so caught up in here, that we can't hear a car, what God is speaking to us in any given moment, what God is whispering, what God is doing, and even, you know, that song is just, it's gonna keep coming up because it struck me this morning, "Your goodness, is running after, it's running after me."

Well, then we need to stop. You hear me? And we need to stop running. We need to stop and let it catch us. Right? Why is it running after us? We need to just hold and that's when you

were singing that I just thought to myself, well, stop. Just stop running and allow God to catch up and hear what God is speaking about. In any given moment.

Romans 8, "For this is the hope of our salvation. But hope means that we must trust and wait for what is still unseen. For why would we need to hope for something that we already have?" So, because our hope is set on what is yet to be seen, we patiently keep on waiting for its fulfillment. Faith is about waiting. It's about trusting. It's about knowing that God is in our space with us and doing something that we may not see.

And of course, Second Corinthians 5:7, "We live by faith, not by what we see with our eyes." So that faith there, I'm gonna go through the Greek real fast, but that faith there, *pistis*, means a strong confidence in a reliance upon someone or something. Confidence means, and I love this, a title deed, it's a legal document, to affect a transfer of property and to show the legal right to possess it. That is such an interesting word. And it also means substance, foundation, or undergirding.

So, faith is the substance of things hoped for, and the confidence or the evidence of things not seen. Faith is the title deed, to the things that we're hoping for. It's so hard, but if you imagine the now faith that we hold on to, it's like, we're carrying a title deed, it's like we have a hold of something that undergirds, that's a foundation for our lives that we stand on.

You know, people often will say to me, when I'm talking to them about God, and they don't believe, is there like, "What if you're wrong?" And I, and my response is always, "Well, I don't know if I'm right. Because faith is, it's a theory. Really, there's no proof." So, I don't know, I could be, but my faith says I'm not. So, where I live is in that place of faith in the unseen realm. And I'm uncomfortable. It's okay. It's okay not to see it. It's okay. That, you know, years the church has spent proving, through scripture, proof trying to prove through apologetics, right? That God is true and trying to convince people, well, it's by faith.

Our whole journey of Christianity is built on faith. It is built on the unknowing. It is built on not having tangible things. That's what we do. That's where we are, our whole life as we believe in Christ. So faith holds us steady as we wait in the midst of the now in the night yet, faith is what keeps us and holds us in the midst of suffering and the unknown, and the uncertain and injustices and fears. And when our bodies and our lives break down.

And I think of people like Martin Luther King, who his whole life was, was lived by faith. And he really did not inherit what he had been working towards. So many people do not. And I'm going to get to more of that in a minute. Our faith is what holds us and brings us into God's rest. What faith activates the Israelites were not able to enter into God's rest, because they didn't apply faith to it. It's the same with us. Because Hebrews then talks about today, while it's while

it's still called today, there is a rest you can enter into, don't not enter into it by the hardness of your hearts.

Faith activates the rest that we can enter into. There is a place that we can live in, in this world and in this life, in the chaos that is going on in the world, there is a place of rest that we can enter into. How? By our faith, because we trust in the one who is, who loves us most of all, we trust in the one that we're professing. And this assurance, it says the assurance of things not seen. That is just the evidence, the evidence that makes someone fully agree, understand, or realize the truth or validity of something.

So, in a nutshell, faith isn't an ethereal thing that rises up within us. And that causes us to act different. That's key. You know them by their fruit. If you're spending a lot of time worrying, if you're frantic, if your whatever is going on, check your faith. Check your faith. And it's not that you're bad, wrong, or anything. It's just saying, there's something deeper, that we're not grabbing a hold of yet. Stop running, pause and listen.

I really believe that the reason we move into fear, the reason that we move into making choices that are not the most effective for our lives, is because we lose sight of God. And because we have not taken the time to pause and listen and to say, "God, what are you speaking to me in this very difficult moment in my life?"

So, I want to jump to the end of Hebrews because I believe this is the anchor of Hebrews. And this is the anchor of this whole chapter of faith. And it's this, and it's Hebrews 11, Starting with 32. We're going to go deeper into this, of course, when we get to here to preach on it. But for me, I couldn't preach on faith without going here. And author writes this, "What more shall I say? I don't have time to tell about Gideon, Barak, Samson, Jephtha, David, Samuel, and the prophets, who through faith, conquered kingdoms, administered justice, and gained what was promised. Who shut the mouths of lions, quenched the fury of flames, escaped the edge of the sword, whose weakness was turned to strength, and who became powerful in battle and routed foreign armies.

Women received back their dead, raised to life again, there were others who were tortured, refusing to be released so that they might gain an even better Resurrection. Some faced jeers and flogging, and even chains and imprisonment. They were put to death by stoning. They were sawed into, they were killed by the sword. Does that sound good to anybody? Sawed into, right? They went about in sheepskins and goat skins, destitute, persecuted, mistreated, the world was not worthy of them. They wandered in deserts and mountains, living in caves and holes in the ground."

Why did I ever think that this was going to be a cakewalk? Really? Why did I ever think that faith was going to be easy? Why did I ever think that if I was going to step out by faith with



God, that everybody was going to stand button next to me and cheer me on? Why did we ever think that? Do we hear the suffering that's going on? Do we hear that it was faith that was active in these difficult, painful, sometimes death-dealing moments, it was then that their faith was most active. The stories in these in the Old Testament, the stories in Hebrews 11. They're not about skipping through a field of flowers. It is about if you are going to follow God. And if you are going to follow your convictions. And if you are going to move out by faith, it might look pretty darn ugly. And it might be really, really difficult.

And I think about the journey we took as a church, right? And by the way, the journeys we've taken as a church from the beginning when we put women in leadership. And when we had women who became the senior pastor, and when we have, I can't think of anything else. But I know we've done so much diversity when we became a diversified church. Yeah, yes. And a safe haven, yes. For our immigrants. And, also for the LGBTQIA+ community, it cost us every single time. But we did it by faith. And PS by the way, we're still living by faith.

But this is why I believe God is calling us to a Year of Faith and Gratitude. Because God is going, "Of course, it's by faith. Welcome to the kingdom." And in the midst of it, I want you to begin to develop gratitude. It's a powerful thing, man. How many have already felt a change in you from writing in the gratitude journal? Right. It's a, it's such a different perspective. To go, "Yeah, this is going on. But this is where I see you, God." Such a different perspective. Let's keep going.

Because there's one more really beautiful verse, 39. "These were all commended for their faith. You're ready, yet none of them received what had been promised." Faith is not about getting the answer. As a matter of fact, I really believe that, don't shout me down, it is an immature faith that believes God for this something. I believe the more mature we become, the more we go, "God, it is about you." And what happens in this life is just what happens in this life. But help me find you in the midst of what happens in this life.

And I gotta tell you, life has a tendency to be chaotic. And life has a tendency to be a... show. Not going to swear, can't swear, Janice is here, but here's the key. None of them received what had been promised, since God had planned something better for us so that together with us, they would be made perfect. It's so profound to me.

So, what does this mean? For faith isn't needed when things are going good, and faith is activated when things are challenging. If you have something that is burning in your life that you feel God calling to, do not expect a red carpet welcome. If you are doing something, and excuse me, the harder it is, the more faith is required. The harder it is, the hardest moments of my life that I have not wanted to even face, God has been clear. God's call and God's whisper has been so sharp. It's because God is going to come on. Keep coming.



I also think, and really believe, that it is not about one more time what had been promised. It is about entering into the space of the now and the not yet. And trusting in the one who loves us. Richard Rohr says, what set us on the wrong path was making the object of religious faith ideas or doctrines instead of a person. Our faith is not a faith that dogmas or moral opinions are true, but a faith that the ultimate reality, God, Christ, is accessible to us. And even on our side. That is the beauty of faith. For me, it is when we are in our worst moments that we need faith activated more than any other time. CS Lewis said, faith is the art of holding on to God, in spite of your changing moods and circumstances.

Hebrews 11:13, all of these died in faith, without having received the promises. Here it is. But from a distance they saw and they greeted them. Their faith was activated, to see from a distance what God had promised. And yet when they died, they didn't receive it. But they saw it from a distance, which gave them the ability to keep on going.

You know, I think that there's a space and I'm the older I get, the more I'm learning how to do this. To simply live into the moments that are hard. And even in some cases, to lean into those spaces and just say it just is what it is. Welcome to life. Welcome to things that happen. But God, I know that in the midst, you are here with me, how do I navigate this? How do I walk through this?

So, when I'm looking at the heroes of the faith, number one, they knew God. Number two, they saw it from a distance. And number three, they held the ground of their foundation. They were comfortable in the not yet. And they were comfortable in the unknowing and that is exactly where faith is activated.

So, this series we're about to embark on. It is not about, hey, you just believe and God is going to do it. Hey, pray and fast more, and God will do it. It's not what this is about, which is what we were all talking about. You know, when I proposed this to the elder team. Everybody was like, Yeah, let's do it. Heroes of the faith. It sounds like a great idea. And now out there they were all like, oh my Lord, what did we get ourselves into? And why do you hate us? But guys, here we grow again. Here we grow again. God is bringing us into something deeper. And the other exciting thing is the fact that we're doing this and our word this year is gratitude, a year of gratitude. And my personal word is faith and gratitude that God spoke to me. I can only imagine what we're going to be going through and we're gonna need our faith together collectively as a church.

So, faith is trusting God and trusting the process and believing no matter what that God is in our midst, and that God is working on our behalf. Amen.