

Faith Firmly Looking Forward.

Text: Heb 11:1-10

Suggested Hymns:

352, 486, 134, 616, 609

1) What is faith

2) That is the nature of faith

3) That is the action of faith

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, be with you all. Amen.

The text for our sermon today is Hebrews 11:1-10, ¹ *Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen.* ² *For by it the elders obtained a good testimony.* ³ *By faith we understand that the worlds were framed by the word of God, so that the things which are seen were not made of things which are visible.*

⁴ *By faith Abel offered to God a more excellent sacrifice than Cain, through which he obtained witness that he was righteous, God testifying of his gifts; and through it he being dead still speaks.* ⁵ *By faith Enoch was taken away so that he did not see death, “and was not found, because God had taken him”; for before he was taken he had this testimony, that he pleased God.*

⁶ *But 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 diligently seek Him.* ⁷ *By faith Noah, being divinely warned of things not yet seen, moved with godly fear, prepared an ark for the saving of his household, by which he condemned the world and became heir of the righteousness which is according to faith.*

⁸ *By faith Abraham obeyed when he was called to go out to the place which he would receive as an inheritance. And he went out, not knowing where he was going.* ⁹ *By faith he dwelt in the land of promise as in a foreign country, dwelling in tents with Isaac and Jacob, the heirs with him of the same promise;* ¹⁰ *for he waited for the city which has foundations, whose builder and maker is God.* (NKJV)

Lord God, heavenly Father, sanctify us through Your truth. Your Word is truth. Amen.

Dear friends in Christ,

Today's text teaches us about Christian faith. It does not give a full description of faith, but confines itself more to emphasise the fact that Christian faith confidently expects full salvation in the future, and that it is a conviction concerning invisible things.

It might seem strange that, living in the days of fulfilment, we still must hope, believe in things not seen. We have the crucified and risen Christ and yet have no manifestation of His glory as the faithful of the Old Testament had, for example, the fiery pillar, the burning bush, manna, etc.

Our text shows that faith, although having Christ, does not see Him, but yet is divinely convinced of His salvation and the reality of His blessings. That it is the very nature of faith to look steadfastly forward. That is our theme for today. May the Lord bless our meditation.

1. What Is Faith?

What does the author of Hebrews mean with the word "faith"? It is not some hunch-following, some blind leaping into the dark. Nor is it some hoping for the best, happily disregarding the facts and assuming that all will be well.

No, *Faith is the substance of things hoped for* the author states. In other words faith is being sure of what we hope for. "Being sure" means having solid confidence. Faith brings the future into the present because it makes things hoped for, as real as if we already had them.

Christ's second coming in glory and our full enjoyment of eternal salvation are not only hoped for, but are real to the believer. Faith is *the evidence of things not seen* the author continues. This means that we are being certain of what we do not see.

"Being sure" and "being certain" are synonyms, both describing faith's solid confidence. "What we hope for" points more to the future, while "what we do not see" is much wider, covering all the divine realities from the first day of creation to the last day of the universe.

Although we have not seen the creation or the crucifixion, although we were not present to witness the flood waters rising above the mountain peaks or the Saviour rising triumphantly from the Easter tomb, although we have not heard

His actual voice forgiving our sins and promising His return, yet we believe. For the believer faith is a sixth sense making the invisible seen and certain.

Faith is worked by the Holy Spirit through the Gospel in Word and Sacrament. It rests on God's eternal Word, which 1 Peter 1:25 says "*endures forever.*"

In our text the author is describing faith's nature. Pointing to the examples of the Old Testament heroes of faith, he shows his readers that faith trusts God absolutely, that faith is convinced what God says is true, and what he promises will come to pass.

Those "ancients" had this confident trust in both the future and the unseen and were praised and commended by God because of it. Their faith is recorded on the pages of the Old Testament. For the Hebrew Christians who were beginning to doubt God's promises and tempted to walk by sight instead of faith, this record is important. And it is important for us too!

2. Faith Looking Firmly Forward That Is The Nature Of Faith

Faith is the assurance of things hoped for. All faith is the assurance that we shall obtain the things we hope for. And so also Christian faith.

We hope for, look forward to, a blessed deliverance from all evil. We pray in the Seventh Petition, *But deliver us from evil.* We read in 2 Timothy 4:18, ¹⁸ *And the Lord will deliver me from every evil work and preserve me for His heavenly kingdom. To Him be glory forever and ever. Amen!*

And in 2 Timothy 4:7-8, ⁷ *I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith.* ⁸ *Finally, there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will give to me on that Day, and not to me only but also to all who have loved His appearing.*

Faith looks forward to the resurrection. We read in Job 19:25-27, ²⁵ *For I know that my Redeemer lives, And He shall stand at last on the earth;* ²⁶ *And after my skin is destroyed, this I know, That in my flesh I shall see God,* ²⁷ *Whom I shall see for myself, And my eyes shall behold, and not another. How my heart yearns within me!*

And in John 11:25-26, ²⁵ *Jesus said to her, “I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in Me, though he may die, he shall live. ²⁶ “And whoever lives and believes in Me shall never die. Do you believe this?”*

Faith looks forward to the bliss, happiness, and the glories of heaven, of seeing God in eternal life. We read in Psalm 17:15, ¹⁵ *As for me, I will see Your face in righteousness; I shall be satisfied when I awake in Your likeness.*

And in Revelation 21:4, ⁴ *“And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes; there shall be no more death, nor sorrow, nor crying. There shall be no more pain, for the former things have passed away.”*

And Psalm 126:1-6, *When the LORD brought back the captivity of Zion, We were like those who dream. ² Then our mouth was filled with laughter, And our tongue with singing. Then they said among the nations, “The LORD has done great things for them.” ³ The LORD has done great things for us, And we are glad. ⁴ Bring back our captivity, O LORD, As the streams in the South. ⁵ Those who sow in tears Shall reap in joy. ⁶ He who continually goes forth weeping, Bearing seed for sowing, Shall doubtless come again with rejoicing, Bringing his sheaves with him.*

We are looking and walking forward in faith to all of these things.

On the other hand faith is more than merely looking forward. Faith is a divine assurance.

Human faith in temporal things hoped for is not always realised. For example, the faith of the sick person who hopes he will get well; of the poor man who hopes he will be rich; of the lowly man who hopes he will become famous. Yet people go on, hoping and believing.

How much more so a Christian, who has God’s own promise that his hopes will materialise! A Christian firmly believes God’s Word and hence has the unshakeable assurance that all his hopes will be gloriously fulfilled. That is divine certainty of faith or divine assurance. That is what enables a Christian to carry on cheerfully despite disappointed hopes in this life.

Faith is the evidence of things not seen. That is again the very nature of all faith. It does not yet see the objects of its desire, for example, health, riches, fame, etc., but it believes they are there to be had.

So also Christian faith. We do not see Christ, heaven, and its bliss, the Church Triumphant, etc. Faith throughout seeks unseen things. We read in John 20:29, ²⁹ *Jesus said to him, “Thomas, because you have seen Me, you have believed. Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed.”*

Christian faith is a divine conviction of the reality of these things. Faith itself is evidence, proof, and hence conviction that these glorious unseen things are real and are awaiting us. That evidence is not apparent to an unbeliever but only to believers. Faith carries its own divine proof by the power of the Holy Spirit as we read in 2 Corinthians 5:5, ⁵ *Now He who has prepared us for this very thing is God, who also has given us the Spirit as a guarantee.* And Romans 8:16, ¹⁶ *The Spirit Himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God.*

Faith has the conviction of the reality of unseen blessings, which needs no supporting evidence and proof, except God’s Word. We read in John 4:50, ⁵⁰ *Jesus said to him, “Go your way; your son lives.” So the man believed the word that Jesus spoke to him, and he went his way.* Faith is based on the atonement of Jesus Christ, by which He procured these blessings for us.

2. Faith Looking Firmly Forward That Is The Action Of Faith

Let us look at Abraham’s faith in action. Abraham was called by God as we read in Genesis 12:1-4, ¹ *Now the LORD had said to Abram: “Get out of your country, From your family And from your father’s house, To a land that I will show you. ² I will make you a great nation; I will bless you And make your name great; And you shall be a blessing. ³ I will bless those who bless you, And I will curse him who curses you; And in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed.” ⁴ So Abram departed as the LORD had spoken to him, and Lot went with him. And Abram was seventy-five years old when he departed from Haran.*

Abram was called to receive an unseen blessing, unknown to him, namely, Canaan, which would be his inheritance. Being called, he obeyed at once, as the verb tenses indicate. His faith was immediately active, and the action consisted in this, *And he went out, not knowing where he was going* as our text says..

But he was divinely assured by the Word of God that the place was there for him. — On our pilgrimage through life we follow in faith the call to the heavenly Canaan, not having seen it, yet divinely convinced it is real. By faith we now already own that blessed inheritance and eventually shall reach that happy land.

Our text continues, ⁹ *By faith he dwelt in the land of promise as in a foreign country.* His faith was an assurance of things hoped for, although they seemed remote. Yet his faith remained active and did not waver. He journeyed, lived as a stranger in a strange country, dwelling in tents, not having a permanent home in one place.

So also Isaac and Jacob, for they had the same promise that this land should be theirs. Their actual experience was contrary to the promise. Yet their faith actively clung to the promise in divine assurance and conviction of things hoped for.

So we go in faith towards the land of hope, although experience seems to contradict our hope. Yet we go firmly forward towards our eternal goal despite all experiences to the contrary.

What sustained Abraham's hope and faith? He bore the journeying and wandering with its discomforts and clung to God's promise. In faith he was assured that Canaan belonged to him and his children, and he steadfastly looked forward to the fulfilment of this promise, never doubting.

And this faith was borne up by the faith in the promise of a greater and better city, as our text says, ¹⁰ *for he waited for the city which has foundations, whose builder and maker is God.* This faith, stretching and looking forward to the hope of all the children of God, this faith, which was convinced that heaven awaited him, carried along, of course, his faith in the promise concerning Canaan. If heaven was his, then all things were his.

So Abraham looked forward to *the city which has foundations, whose builder and maker is God.* Likewise we read in Hebrews 12:22-24, ²² *But you have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, to an innumerable company of angels,* ²³ *to the general assembly and church of the firstborn who are registered in heaven, to God the Judge of all, to the spirits of just men made perfect,* ²⁴ *to Jesus the Mediator of the new*

covenant, and to the blood of sprinkling that speaks better things than that of Abel.

And Hebrews 13:14, ¹⁴ *For here we have no continuing city, but we seek the one to come.*

The builder is God as we see in Revelation 21:2, ² *Then I, John, saw the holy city, New Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband.*

And Revelation 21:10-12, ¹⁰ *And he carried me away in the Spirit to a great and high mountain, and showed me the great city, the holy Jerusalem, descending out of heaven from God, ¹¹ having the glory of God. Her light was like a most precious stone, like a jasper stone, clear as crystal. ¹² Also she had a great and high wall with twelve gates, and twelve angels at the gates, and names written on them, which are the names of the twelve tribes of the children of Israel.*

Note especially the permanence of this heavenly city as contrasted with the flimsy character of tents.

So we in faith go on through this life with its ills, sorrows, and disappointments, overcoming all afflictions because our faith looks and stretches firmly forward toward our permanent home in heaven and the glorious fulfilment of all our hopes.

Luther wonderfully expressed the certainty of faith in a sermon he preached in 1540, *Faith is the “yes” of the heart, a conviction on which one stakes one's life. On what does faith rest? On Christ, born of a woman, made under the Law, who died, descended into hell, rose the third day, ascended into heaven, and lives and rules eternally, as the children pray.*

To this confession I say yes with the full confidence of my heart. Christ came for my sake, in order to free me from the Law, not only from the guilt of sin, but also from the power of the Law.

If you are able to say yes to this, you have what is called faith; and this faith does everything. ... But this faith does not grow by our own powers. On the contrary, the Holy Spirit is present and writes it in the heart.¹

In conclusion we are approaching the end of the church-year. One year of grace after another passes, yet we do not see the fulfilment of our hopes. But do not be discouraged or doubt. Go forward in faith toward the goal of hope; for faith is certain of its object, and going steadfastly forward, attains its goal.

Strengthen your faith by constant and devout study of the Bible for the basis of all faith is God's Word.

So let us conclude with these words of Scripture, Romans 10:17, ¹⁷ *So then faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God.* Amen.

The peace of God, which passes all understanding, will keep our hearts and minds, in Christ Jesus. Amen.

¹ E. M. Plass, *What Luther Says*, St. Louis: Concordia, 1991, No. 1376, p466