

Psalm 33:1-8 and Hebrews 11:1-3  
“Faith”

**Song – Faith**

It is one thing to say that you gotta have faith, and it quite another to actually have faith and even understand what it is. Today, the passage that we are about to read in Hebrews is described universally as the meaning of faith. If you wanted to know what faith means, this is the passage that you go to in order to understand it.

I want you to reflect on some of your most powerful faith experiences, when you knew that God was present with you. I shared with you already some of my faith experiences. When I audibly heard the voice of God who told me to stop living for myself and to follow him. A few years later, about 4, I found myself in Interlachen Switzerland, just randomly got off a train there, in the middle of nowhere, not near the town, I saw a cemetery down the hill and in that cemetery was a tower that was about 5 or 6 stories high, a tower built out of stone and I climbed that thing all the way to the top. Interlachen means between the lakes, and there were the alps in front of me, and a lake running between the alps, I felt God present there as the birds of prey were flying below me.

This week as I came to church to the voices of nearly 50 youth and adults praising God and going out to do mission. God is present in this church, God is able to be experienced as you worship here and as we live life together here, I know it, I have experienced it, there is no doubt in my mind. The more I live in the presence of God the more I realize that faith is not something that I have done, or something that any of us do. But rather a gift from God built upon God's faithfulness. There is a book called the Little Prince and in it a fox tells the little boy the greatest of life's secrets: It is only with the heart that one can see rightly; what is essential is invisible to the eye. Let's hear what the author of Hebrews has to say.

**READ**

Psalm 33 and Hebrews 11, the meaning of faith, overlap extensively. We read clearly in the psalm that the presence of God is most clearly revealed in creation. If you look at vs.6-8 we get that confirmation that is repeated later in Hebrews that by the Word of the Lord the heavens were made. My routine for my sermon is that I do research all week long, I outline what I am going to say, and then Saturday morning, early, I tend to get up and write it word for word, and this is the product. Yesterday morning I heard as I was working what I was sure was a bobwhite outside. So I took my sermon and my notes and found myself in this section where it is clear

that God's presence is revealed in creation as the Bobwhite was singing away. Let all the inhabitants of the world stand in awe of him. When was the last time you stood in awe of the Lord because of the creation around you?

Hebrews echoes that in vs.3 where we read that the worlds were prepared by the Word of God. Where else in the Bible do we read about the Word of God and creation. There are two places that are very clearly the Word of God creates and shapes and forms. Let's start with Genesis 1, how does God create, does he wave a magic wand, does God do something. God says something, let there be light, let there be waters, let the land be formed, let there be plants, let there be the sun and moon, let there be living creatures. Finally, let there be humankind. The word of God, God speaks and creation is formed is attested in Psalm 33, in Hebrews 11, in Genesis 1.

But wait, there is more, John chapter 1 tells us that in the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us. And all things came into being, John says, through the Word, the Word of God. More than anything else creation should point us to the direction of God and should build up and strengthen our faith because all of God's work is done in faithfulness and Scripture attests to that. Creation underpins our faith and has to be that which strengthens it and sustains it.

But this generic approach may be powerful, but it is not sufficient and it is not all that encapsulates what it means to have faith and what faith is. So let's turn to Hebrews and see the definition of faith and see how we are able to apply it to our own lives. We find in the first verses a two part definition of faith. The author calls it the assurance of things hoped for and the conviction of things not seen. Let's start with that first phrase, the assurance of things hoped for.

The term assurance in the Greek is hypostasis which means a done deal, a certainty, something that absolutely has no doubt. Throughout his ministry Jesus speaks to his disciples and laments about their small faith. It is a faith without hypostasis, it is a faith built upon seeing and not on the assurance of things not seen. Jesus says that not much faith is needed, even just that of a mustard seed that is not surrounded by a forest of doubt would allow us to move mountains. Faith is trusting that God's work and God's presence and God's Word has already done everything that needs to be done.

Our faith has to be the result of us believing the trustworthiness of God. Calvin states: If God should remove his hand a little, all things would immediately perish and dissolve into

nothing. Our faith is based upon a confidence that God does not and will not ever remove his hand. But in the midst of life we do doubt. In the midst of life our faith is not shored up by the presence of God, but we build it upon the sand of culture and society and all those things that we think we have to have to give up security and happiness. But our hope is built on nothing less than Jesus' blood and righteousness.

It is doubt that leads to sin. It is doubt that leads to isolation. It is doubt that leads to apostasy. Yes, we are absolutely in good company as doubters, but today we are talking about faith and what it is and what we ought to have and who we ought to be. We are not talking about doubt not being a big deal. It is a big deal. We need to be assured of the things that we hope for in Jesus Christ, it has to be a done deal for us.

The second part of the definition of faith is the conviction of things not seen. That brings us back to that discussion of creation and that term that Presbyterians absolutely love and claim as their own, the Providence of God. We cannot see God at work behind the scenes, but we know that God is at work to bring all things for good for those who trust in him. We know that God's plans for us it to bring about a future of hope and all that God wants for us is our welfare.

We have the definition of faith, the assurance of things hoped for and the conviction of things not seen. Vs.2 then goes on to describe for us what faith is able to do, it gives us case studies of faith, in case we are not fully sure or aware of the power of faith. We read that our ancestors by faith received approval. You are worshipping in a church that has nearly 200 years of faith lived out by those who went before us. Does that do anything for you? It should. Founded in 1832 this church has been a faithful witness for God year in and year out without interruption. Folks, that means something, God has blessed this church.

But we so strongly believe here that faith is not just a one on one experience that is lived out in isolation. No, Christian faith is an inward assurance, but we have to embody that faith as an outward manifestation. Inward faith moves the heart. Outward faith moves mountains. Through faith Abraham was willing to sacrifice his son, through faith Moses was able to have the Israelites cross the Red Sea, through faith Joshua was willing to fight a battle with trumpets, through faith Elijah was able to bring fire down from heaven.

What is your faith ancestor story? How has God been revealed to you over the years if not in your family then in your own life. You have to dig deep to discover that, but know that God has been faithful, he has walked with you through the valley of the shadow of death not just

in your heart but also in your actual life. Family, faith arises when a person lets himself be convinced by God. With that, there comes an undeniable security characteristic of faith that is powerful. You see, faith is more about the future, it allows us to venture forward into the future supported only by the Word of God.

Communion is an act of faith. Thomas said unless I see the his wounds I will not believe. Our doubt often gets in the way of our following Jesus as he would want us to follow. Come to the table today and get rid of your doubt, live your life as a reflection of the faith that Christ has gifted to you, which is witnessed in the bread and in the juice. Amen.