

## MOVING ON TO MATURITY

*Faith: Believing is Seeing*  
Hebrews 11:1-3, 6

Most animals have five senses—sight, hearing, smell, taste, and touch. Although having five senses, many species depend on one sense more than the others. Bats and dolphins, for example, navigate their world through the sense of hearing. Dogs depend upon smell. Most of us can't imagine a world without sight.

Some of us, though, have had to adapt to the loss of one or more of our senses. Helen Keller inspires us for excelling despite the limitations of being both deaf and blind.

I once had a friend who was riding his bicycle at a high speed through someone's backyard at dusk. He didn't see the clothesline until he was, as the phrase goes, "clothes-lined" by it. The resulting blow to his head caused him to lose his sense of smell and taste. From that time on, he would be in danger of food poisoning because he could not tell from the smell or the taste whether or not his meal was tainted. When we would have Jeff to dinner, his compliment that the meal was "delicious" didn't mean much.

Although the five senses are important to successful and satisfied navigation in our three-dimensional world, when it comes to thriving in the world of spiritual realities, a sixth sense is necessary. Not a sixth sense as in "ESP," but rather a sixth sense we could call "The eyes of faith." In the world of spiritual reality "seeing is believing" is not the standard, but rather "believing is seeing." Believing by faith allows us to see the reality of spiritual truth. This is what I want to emphasize today:

**"Faith is confidence in the present  
because God has been faithful in the past  
and promises to reward us in the future."**

Let's look at our text for today, Hebrews 11:1-3, 6.

*Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen. For by it the men of old gained approval. By faith we understand that the worlds were prepared by the word of God, so that what is seen was not made out of things which are visible...And 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 seek Him."*

Outlining this section is easy to do:

The definition of faith, verse 1.

The example of faith, verse 3.

The necessity of faith, verse 6.

But creating an outline about faith may not help us to live by faith. Let's look deeper at each of these verses to glimpse "The reality of faith: believing is seeing."

**Definition of Faith** (Hebrews 11:1): **Faith is confidence in the present**

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

Hebrews 11:1 is one of those famous verses you'll hear quoted often, but its okay if you hear it in slightly different words, because the fundamental nature of what is being conveyed is the same whether in KJV, NAS or NIV. The NIV says, "*Now faith is being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see.*"

Regardless of how we translate it, the author of Hebrews encouraging us believers about how we see reality. We can get so caught up in looking for evidence for faith, that we forget that faith does not require evidence—in fact, faith is the evidence of our hope. Faith is the "assurance of things hoped for and the conviction of things not seen."

When you really think about what we Christians believe, you can understand why non-believers shake their head in bewilderment. Our lives are lived in the paradox of faith. As A. W. Tozer wrote (in *The Root of the Righteous*, page 156), "*A real Christian is an odd number anyway. He feels supreme love for One whom he has never seen, talks familiarly every day to Someone he cannot see, expects to go to heaven on the virtue of Another, empties himself in order to be full, admits he is wrong so he can be declared right, goes down in order to get up, is strongest when he is weakest, richest when he is poorest. He dies so he can live, gives away so he can keep; sees the invisible, hears the inaudible, and knows that which passeth knowledge.*"

No wonder, Paul after writing, "if the earthly tent which is our house is torn down, we have a building from God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heaven" has to add "for we walk by faith, not by sight (2 Corinthians 5:1,7)." Believing is seeing!

We believe God knows the number of hairs on our heads outside us, and the thoughts and intents of our heart inside us. We pray aloud or silently to a God whom we can't see, whom we believe hears our every whisper in whatever language we speak. In fact, we believe the Spirit of God actually resides within us, so that we have become His temple.

These beliefs can be difficult for unbelievers to accept.

One time I was alone at McDonalds, intending to eat my lunch. After I sat down at a table next to my tray of hamburger and fries, I did what I usually do. I bowed my head in gratitude—even for fast food—or maybe I bowed my head to pray for protection from E. Coli. At any rate, as I was silently conversing with God, I heard a voice projected from across the room: "Who do you think you're talking too?" "He's not listening?" I hoped whoever belonged to this voice wasn't talking to me. After a hasty "Amen," I peeked up. Uh-oh. A lone man seated across the dining room was, indeed, looking at me and smiling.

Well, I didn't know which kind of agnostic I had encountered. There are two kinds, you know. An Ordinary Agnostic who says, "I don't know if there is a God." And an Ornery Agnostic who says, "And you don't know either." Since I was alone, I waved the man over to join me. And over that table we talked for a long time. He quizzed me about faith. How could I believe in what I could not see? How could I talk with one who didn't speak back? He asked me what he would have to do to get faith like that. Finally, after explaining the Gospel to the man and inviting him to join me in the Faith, he responded, "Well, you actually do know what you're talking about—"

great job in explaining the Gospel of salvation by grace through faith. I too am a believer, and, in fact, I'm an evangelist—I believe he said his name was Arthur Blessed. I'm dragging a cross across the state, looking for opportunities to share the Lord." With that, the man got up, and walked out. Sure enough, as I looked out the window, I saw him shoulder a large wooden cross with a wheel on its base and start off down the street. True story. Strange things happen when you exercise your faith in public.

When we pray, we exercise our faith in the reality of the invisible: by faith, believing is seeing. As Christians we affirm what young children learn through experience, what psychologists call "object permanence." When a six-month old baby plays peek-a-boo, they cover their eyes, and they literally think when they do that you aren't there anymore. As they get older, of course, they realize that out of sight doesn't necessarily mean you are no longer there. The fact that an object has substance beyond their perception is called "object permanence." For the Christian, that is called faith. "The assurance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen." Believing is seeing. We believe God is still there, even when he has disappeared from view. When we are playing peek-a-boo, or God is, faith says we both continue to exist despite the veil between us.

**"Faith is confidence in the present  
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**Example of Faith (Hebrews 11:3): God has been faithful in the past.**

Hebrews 11:3 gives an example of where this kind of sight is necessary. *"By faith we understand that the worlds were prepared by the word of God, so that what is seen was not made out of things which are visible."*

Today many so-called scientists have taught us a different creation story, one that presumes, like the baby playing peek-a-boo, that because you cannot see God, he isn't there. Such scientists promote a belief in a mechanical universe, governed only by laws of physics with no involvement by the Supernatural allowed. It a universe with big bangs, exploding stars, pulverizing rocks, amino acid soups. To that universe scientists call us to have faith.

Now, you might be surprised to hear me say, that scientists call us to have faith. You are taught in school that scientists only rely on observation. The scientific method, after all, is observation and experiment. But scientists call us to have faith in a great number of things we can't even hope to see or repeat by experimentation.

Scientists speculate by faith. They don't like to have that pointed out, but they do. Listen, for example, to this actual wording of the video presentation narrated at the Hayden Planetarium at the Museum of Natural History in New York. Listen carefully and you'll see the object of faith is different between these scientists and those who believe "the worlds were prepared by the word of God," but the need for faith—believing what cannot be seen—is there in the Big Bang Theory too. Accompanied by Hubble Telescope pictures and digitally enhanced images this is the script:

*What happened before the birth of our universe? Our laws of physics don't tell us. But many scientists imagine there was a **void**, existing by itself or within an older universe. In that formless **void**, bubbles of space, far smaller than atoms, were coming into being and vanishing again.*

*Thirteen billion years ago, one of those tiny bubbles grew and suddenly ballooned out in a gigantic explosion called the Big Bang. **Space itself** exploded in cosmic fire, giving birth to all the energy and matter in our universe.*

*The expansion of space carried with it clouds of matter. The universe cooled as it expanded. Gravity pulled together enormous clumps of matter, the seeds of what would become galaxies. Within them, the first stars formed. As hundreds of millions of years passed, entire galaxies fell together, in a cosmic ballet. Smaller galaxies combined to make larger ones.*

*After a few billion years, our own Milky Way Galaxy took shape. It developed spiral arms, made of stars, and clouds of gas and dust. Our Sun and Earth were born in this galaxy.*

*Eventually, life and intelligence arose on our planet. And we came to wonder how our universe began.*

Now I don't know how God formed the world of what was seen out of what is invisible. God's creative act might have produced a Big Bang. But the Universe and all things in it, including us humans, have come forth because the God of all Creation spoke, intentionally and creatively, something out of nothing.

Verse three reminds us of God's powerful faithfulness in the past eons. But God has also shown himself faithful more recently, personally to you. How has he shown he stands behind his promises? How has he been there for you, to bring you through when your strength was gone?

Having personal faith is necessity according to verse 6.

**Necessity of Faith (Hebrews 11:6): God promises to reward us in the future.**

Having faith is necessary to pleasing God. We see that stated in verse 6: *"And 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 seek Him."*

To approach God we must believe two things: That God exists, and that it is worth a man's while to seek him.

Sometimes I have doubts, don't you? Sometimes we wonder if it is worth following him. Sometimes our faith falters. Concerning the intersection of Doubt and Faith, I have four observations to share.

### **1. Faith is not invalidated by doubts.**

There are many times when we doubt God, and that tendency is most common when life comes crashing down around us. Things continue to get worse rather than better. We ask what it is that we have done wrong. We question whether we are really are a Christian or not. We blame ourselves, and then we blame God. We begin to wonder if God cares, and then we begin to wonder if he is there. The pain takes over our lives and we don't seem to have the emotional energy for faith anymore. No wonder the Bible says, "Be merciful to those who doubt" (Jude 1:22).

Does having doubt invalidate the legitimacy of our faith? Doubting does not mean your faith stops. It means you are trying to understand your faith at a deeper level. There is a place for questions, and people who are after the heart of God ask those questions because they want to know.

If there were no place for honest examination and lingering doubt, there would be no place for many biblical heroes who were thinking men of faith. The melancholy David wrote what most of us have wondered about God's inaction in life: "*Awake, O Lord! Why do you sleep? Rouse yourself! Do not reject us forever. Why do you hide your face and forget our misery and oppression? (Psalm 44:23-24).*" Abraham didn't know if he could trust God (Genesis 15:8). Gideon did not know whether God would live up to his promise (Judges 6:17). John the Baptist questioned whether Jesus was the Messiah after all (Matthew 11:3).

### **2. Faith is poisoned by cynicism.**

However, there is one kind of doubt that is deadly. It is cynicism. Cynicism questions, but never attempts to resolve the questions. Cynicism questions merely to question. It is not a true quest—it questions to mock and jest. There is always a smirk on its lips. The cynic is pleased with doubt; looks for ways to doubt; delights in things to be questioned. The cynic holds up experiences of being hurt by Christians, and uses them as an excuse to abandon the faith. They look for inconsistencies and find contradictions. They expect God to jump out of the sky and meet their demands and answer all their questions. In the gospel of John we read about cynics who stood right in front of Jesus: "Even after Jesus had done all these miraculous signs in their presence, they still would not believe in him" (John 12:37). Cynicism is dishonest doubt.

### **3. Faith will not answer all our questions.**

It is important to struggle with God and seek the answers to your questions. But let me sound a note of warning. If you are waiting until you have everything figured out before you come to God the first time or re-submit to God again as a Christian, then you will be waiting forever. God is bigger than you, so get over it. If God came down and sat across the table from you and explained everything, you could not comprehend it. It would be like sitting in an advanced calculus class when you had only gone to pre-school. You can't wait until you agree with everything God does before you surrender your life to him. You can't expect him to prove his existence to you. This is what faith is all about. Our belief in God may be based on intelligent reasoning, but in the end we have no proofs for anything. It is, after all, by faith we please God and come to him.

#### **4. Faith does not alter reality.**

Faith does not make something true, nor does it make it false. Mark Twain said, "Faith is believing something you know isn't true." As with many things the cynic Mark Twain said, this is funny but false. Faith just sees reality through believing. Believing is seeing.

In the passage read earlier today from John 20, Thomas' doubts did not make Jesus' resurrection untrue. Nor did his coming to faith, make it more true. The reality of the truth was the same, whether or not Thomas continued to be "doubting Thomas" or the man who said, "My Lord and My God." After Thomas' confession of his own faith because he had seen the nail scars and spear wound, Jesus talked about you and me. Do you want to know what Jesus said about us? "Because you have seen Me, Thomas, have you believed? Blessed are they who did not see, and yet believed (John 20:29)."

That's you. That's me. We haven't seen Jesus in person. But we believe. And we believe God is whom he claims to be.

God is pleased with those who exercise faith. Faith is like a muscle; the more you use it, the more powerful it becomes. Do you want to have bulging biceps of belief? Do you want to be a person who believes God for great things? Do you want to trust him in the most dangerous and important times of your life? Do you want your life and your church to reflect you believe in a Big God?

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Faith is that sixth sense through which we navigate spiritual realities with the eyes of faith. Believing is seeing!