

WHAT IT MEANS TO HAVE FAITH

Hebrews 11

Introduction:

A. [A tourist came too close to the edge of the Grand Canyon, lost his footing and plunged over the side, clawing and scratching to save himself.

- After he went out of sight and just before he fell into space, he stumbled upon a scrubby bush which he desperately grabbed with both hands.
- Filled with terror, he called out toward heaven, "Is there anyone up there?"
- A calm, powerful voice came out of the sky, "Yes, there is."
- The tourist pleaded, "Can you help me? Can you help me?"
- The calm voice replied, "Yes, I probably can. What is your problem?"
- "I fell over the cliff and am dangling in space holding to a bush that is about to let go. Please help me."
- The voice from above said, "I'll try. Do you believe?"
- "Yes, yes, I believe."
- "Do you have faith?"
- "Yes, yes. I have strong faith."
- The calm voice said, "Well, in that case, simply let loose of the bush and everything will turn out fine."
- There was a tense pause, then the tourist yelled, "Is there anyone else up there?"]

B. It's one thing to talk about faith – it's quite another to act on faith.

- Beginning today and running through the month of February we are going to discover what it means to have *Faith for Everyday Living*.
- I want to try to help you to discover what faith is, and how it can help you in your struggle to be everything that you can be in Christ.
- Today, we simply want to get a grasp on what faith is -- and there isn't just one easy way to define it, so this morning we are going to define it with six different statements that are derived from the 11th chapter of the book of Hebrews:

FAITH IS...

1. ... BELIEVING WHEN I DON'T SEE IT

[It seems the pastor's small son was told by his mother that he should wash his hands because there were germs living in all that dirt.

- He refused and complained: "Germs and Jesus! Germs and Jesus! That's all I ever hear around this house and I've never seen either one."]

- *"Now faith is being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see."*

– Hebrews 11:1

- It sounds like a contradiction, but the Bible teaches that faith is visualizing the future in the present.

- It's being sure of what you don't see – It is seeing it in advance.

- Man says: "Seeing is believing." God says: "Believing is seeing."

- [In 1960, JFK stood up and said: "Let's put a man on the moon by the end of the decade."]

- When he said that, the technology had not been invented to put a man on the moon - But some things have to be believed before you can see them.

- You've got to believe it in advance.

- Everything that's happened in life was an impossibility before it became a reality and somebody had to believe it.

- Faith is simply trusting God to turn dreams into reality.

- Because nothing happens until somebody believes it's possible.

- What do you see in your own future? What is your dream? What impossible thing is God going to do in your life?

- You have to have faith that it is going to happen for it to happen – you have to be certain that God can and will do these things in your life.

- What do you envision as the future of this church? – what can we be sure of, what can we know with certainty that God is going to do through us?

- I can tell you what I can see by faith – I can see a beautiful church facility built to the glory of God – I see a church ministering to hundreds, perhaps thousands, reaching the unchurched for Jesus Christ, discipling them to maturity – I see us training workers for the harvest and sending them out onto the mission field and to plant churches.

- I don't *think* this is going to happen – I *know* it by faith – I can see it as clearly as I can see you this morning.

2. ... OBEYING WHEN I DON'T UNDERSTAND IT

- *By faith Abraham, when called to go to a place he would later receive as his inheritance, obeyed and went, even though he did not know where he was going.* – Hebrews 11:8

- Now you know this story – Abram is living in the land of Ur – He's 75 years old.

- God tells Abram that He is going to send him on a journey – He doesn't tell him the name of the place he is going and He doesn't tell him how far away it is.

- The question is – Would you go? – Would I go?

- Faith is obeying when you don't understand it.

- And at 75 years of age, Abraham starts out on the greatest journey of his life and becomes the father of a nation.

- Faith is obeying when you don't understand it.

- Now, there are a lot of people who want a guarantee of success before they try anything, but God says, "No."

- Because faith always involves risks – God wants to force you to trust Him.

- As a kid, did your parents ever tell you to do something you didn't want to do, that didn't make any sense?

- Then later, with 20-20 hindsight, you said, "Oh, that was pretty wise."

- That's the way God is with us.

- Faith is doing the right thing even when it seems absurd.

- Faith is believing when I don't see it and faith is believing when I don't understand it.

3. ... GIVING WHEN I DON'T HAVE IT

- Did you know that? – Faith is giving when I don't have it to give.

- Giving and faith go together.

- In fact, God uses finances to test us all the time.

- Have you ever had to make a decision whether to pay a bill, or tithe?
- This is a test – God's testing you to see how much you trust Him.
- There are 2 ways that you can give—You can give by faith, or you can give by fear - Giving by fear is when you say, "How much can I afford to give?"
- Giving by faith is when you say, "How much does God want me to give, whether I've got it to give or not?"
- That's what it means to give in faith.
- *"...by faith (Abel) was commended as a righteous man, when God spoke well of his offering ... "* – Hebrews 11:4b – He gave in faith.
- Paul was taking up a collection among believers to help their friends in Jerusalem who were having a really tough time of it.
- He tells us about the giving of the Macedonian Christians in 2 Cor. 8:2-3:
- *"Out of the most severe trial, their overflowing joy and their extreme poverty welled up in rich generosity. For I testify that they gave as much as they were able, and even beyond their ability..."* – 2 Corinthians 8:2-3
- Now it's one thing to give when you've got it to spare – It's another thing to give when you don't know where it's going to come from to pay your bills.
- That is a test of faith – Giving when you don't have it.

4. ... PERSISTING WHEN I DON'T FEEL LIKE IT

- Now, you know our culture says, "Base everything you do on how you feel."
- In other words, if you feel like doing it, do it – If you don't feel like doing it, don't do it.
- That is a guaranteed formula for immaturity – Because immature people build their lives on feelings rather than on commitments.
- What happens when you live your life based on how you feel?
- You end up being manipulated by moods – You flip-flop around because you feel different from day to day.
- One of the marks of maturity is when you live your life by commitments rather than by feelings.
- The truth is, I don't always feel like doing what's right – Do you?

- I don't always feel like being nice to my wife – I don't always feel like spending time with my kids – I don't always feel like praying and reading God's Word.
- But the issue is not what do we feel, but do we do the right thing?
- Let me give you a definition of success: "Successful people do what most people don't feel like doing." – That's it – That's how you become a success.
- Successful people simply develop habits that unsuccessful people don't feel like developing.
- Like using their time wisely, being persistent, and sharpening their skills and stuff like that.
- You don't become a master musician by practicing only when you feel like it.
- Master musicians practice in spite of their feelings.
- Super salesmen don't make calls just when they're in the mood – "Oh, I don't feel like I'm in the mood today. I think I'll stay home and watch Oprah."
- And godly men and godly women don't get that way just by feeling it.
- But they develop some habits in their lives, some disciplines like having a daily time with God, and they do it whether they feel like it or not. And that pleases God.
- "You mean even if I don't feel like doing it, spending time with God, pleases Him?" – Yes – Why? – Because you're doing it in faith and faith, which pleases God, is *believing when you don't see it, and obeying when you don't understand it, and giving when you don't have it, and persisting when you don't feel like it.*
- That's what it means to have faith – Faith is being persistent – It's refusing to give up, no matter how tired you get.
- How do you get that kind of persistence?
- Well, look at this verse, "*By faith (Moses) left Egypt , not fearing the king's anger; he persevered because he saw him who is invisible.*" – Hebrews 11:27
- What made him persistent? – It's that last phrase – He saw Him who's invisible.

- You might write this down: *We can only accomplish the impossible when we see the invisible.*

- If you keep your eyes on God, He'll give you the power to keep on keeping on.

5. ... THANKING GOD BEFORE I RECEIVE IT

- Now, a good example of this is Joshua. - *"By faith the walls of Jericho fell, after the people had marched around them for seven days."* – Hebrews 11:30

- During Israel 's wanderings, they come up to the most fortified city in the world: Jericho – Enormous walls.

- Now here are people who've been slaves for 400 years – They're not a trained army – They have no weapons.

- And God says, "Okay, guys. Here's my plan: I want you to walk around this city, once a day, for six days. Just march around it in silence. And then, on the seventh day, I want you to march around it seven times. And I want you to be thanking Me in advance, all during this time. Trust in Me. This is going to be a statement of faith, by your marching around, because you expect Me to work."

- And they're marching around just like God told them to, and just like the old black spiritual says, the walls came tumbling down – they had victory.

- What were they doing? – They were thanking God in advance–That's what faith is. - Faith is not believing God can do it. – God can do it whether you believe it or not. - His ability is not dependent upon your faith.

- Faith isn't even believing he will do it – That's hope – "I hope He will. I hope He'll answer my prayer. I hope He'll save my marriage. I hope He'll get me a job. I hope He'll find me a marriage partner. I hope I'll get well."

- That's hope – Faith is thanking God in advance.

- It's believing that God is already doing it – In the present – That the answer is already on its way.

- Look at this verse, *"...I tell you, whatever you ask for in prayer, believe that you have received it, and it will be yours."* – Mark 11:24

- Notice the past tense, *"...believe that you have received it..."* That's what faith is. - Believe you've already received it – If you waited until you received the answer to thank God, is that faith? No – That's just gratitude – "Thanks, God."

- It's thanking God in advance.

- For instance, if I were to give you a check for \$1,000 and I said, "You know, I want you to have this gift."
- Would you wait until you cashed it in order to thank me? – Well knowing my balance sheet right now, you might.
- But, let's pick Bill Gates, head of Microsoft, he's got a lot of money.
- If Bill Gates wrote you a check for \$1,000, would you wait until you cashed it to thank him? No! – You'd go ahead and thank him because you knew you could cash it and the money was on its way.
- The bible is full of stories that show this principle that faith is thanking God in advance.

6. ... TRUSTING IF I DON'T GET IT

TWO FACTS ABOUT PRAYER:

1) God always hears and answers every prayer.

- Always – God always hears and answers every prayer.

2) God does not always answer the way we want Him to.

- Have you found that to be true? Sometimes His answer is, "You've got to be kidding!" or "No way!" or "Not yet" or "Later" or "Wait a while".
- God answers in many, many different ways.
- And, sometimes, God says *No* – Why? – Because He doesn't love you?
- No, because he does love you.
- God is not a vending machine you put in a prayer and get out whatever you want.
- Because a vending machine will give you stuff that'll kill you.
- But God will only give you what's for your benefit.
- Now here in Hebrews chp. 11 there are a list of people who suffered for their faith. - Some of them got their heads cut off, and some of them were burned at the stake and some of them got their eyes poked out and some of them were drowned, and all kinds of gruesome stuff happened to these people and yet, it says they were heroes of the faith.
- What is He saying here?
- The point is that living by faith does not exempt you from problems.

- Did you know that by experience, that as a Christian, you still have the same problems you had before you became a believer.
- A Christian has the exact problems a non-believer has, it's just that now you have a new power to help you with them.
- Something to help you cope and handle the stress and deal with it.
- God doesn't say you won't have any problems and faith doesn't exempt you from them.
- In fact, sometimes, we pray for God to remove a difficulty, or a problem, and instead of taking it away, He gives you the strength to go through it.
- Now, why does He do that? Because God is more interested in your character than He is in your comfort.
- God wants to make you a person of integrity and stability and values.
- And the only way you get character is by going through tough times.
- You don't know God is all you need until God is all you've got.
- And then you have to depend on Him.
- Look at these verses, *"They were all commended for their faith, yet none of them received what had been promised. God had planned something better for us so that only together with us would they be made perfect."* – Hebrews 11:39-40
- Now hold on here – He's talking about heroes of the faith – He said these people had promises and dreams and they didn't come true and they're still heroes of the faith? - Yes – Because they trusted even if they didn't get it.
- Anybody can trust God when things are going great.
- But real faith develops in the valleys of life when the dream is delayed.
- Martin Luther King had a dream for racial equality.
- He didn't see it happen in his lifetime.
- We still hope and pray for it today – But that didn't mean he didn't have faith.
- Moses had a dream of going into the promised land – But he died in the desert.
- He never did get to go into the promised land – But he's still a great man of faith.

- In fact, the bible says later he did get to see it because God, on the Mount of Transfiguration, brought him, with Elijah, to Jesus Christ and they talked.

- He did get to see it, eventually.

- What am I saying? I'm saying that faith is trusting God even when you don't get the answer that you want.

Conclusion:

- Now let me just close this morning by saying, some of you are trying to face a full-time problem on part-time faith and that won't work – It just won't work.

- You need a full-time, head-on, full-born faith to handle the problems you're going to have in 2009.

- And the starting point is to establish a relationship with Jesus Christ.