

What is Faith?

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[0 : 00] If the guys can move forward, can you do that? Okay, because there's going to be some texts come up on the screen at some point.

But we're going to look at Hebrews chapter 11 today. And then I hope respond, if I get finished really quickly, we can go back and sing these two Psalms in response to God and in response to his word.

But if not, we'll just sing Psalm 62. But we're going to look at faith today and hopefully over the next few Sundays as well, look at the nature of faith and different aspects of it for ourselves in our own lives.

And I think it's really important for us to know what words mean, isn't it? It's quite significant. And we do recognize that words have to have a sense of objectivity.

They have to have an objective meaning, in other words. You know, they can't just mean what we want them to mean. If I'm driving down the road and there's a big stop sign in front of me, it's kind of really important that I understand what that means.

[1 : 09] That it doesn't mean, yeah, on you go, carry on, it's all right. We know that when we see a word like that on the road, that it's very important that we understand that it just means stop.

I know that's a very obvious example. But nonetheless, it's a relevant one. I love you. When a couple are together, it's important that they both know what that means, what it means, what loving each other means.

And that we have a clear understanding of the faithfulness and the commitment and the exclusivity that lies behind that statement and lies behind these words.

It's interesting we have Paul James Griffiths coming into the church and he does a, as you know, many of you know him well, he does a Celtic tour as well. And it's a free tour and it genuinely is free. But there's one or two other tours now that are competing with all kinds of historical facts that they take people around and there's one that's very adamant that it's a free tour.

[2 : 17] Come join, come do the Royal Minecraft, it's a free tour. But at the end of it, they give a really hard sell to be paid. And they kind of go in the huff if you don't give them any money.

Because it's a free tour but it costs quite a lot and we need the money. And so it's a little bit of the trade's description that you wonder if it is genuinely free. I'd be so tempted as well, you know, as you say it's free and it's free.

I'm just very good but it's free. So I'm not going to pay for it because you wonder if they mean free when they're talking about free in that case. And as I mentioned on Wednesday night, I and some others were at a conference this week and Steve Timmons was one of the speakers and he's set up a church in Sheffield.

But they haven't called it church because he thinks that people misunderstand the meaning of church, the word so much, it's called crowded house. And I don't know whether I agree or not with that.

I think sometimes we just have to explain words and give them the real meaning. But nonetheless, I can see where he comes from because people immediately turn off when they hear the word church.

[3 : 22] Oh, it's full of hypocrites or full of self-righteous people or do-gooders or whatever. But it's very important for us to understand the meaning of words, particularly in the Bible.

Very important for us. See, one day all of us, every one of us here will stand before the living God. Absolutely, each one of us on our own will stand before God.

And it will be a disaster if we haven't bothered to find out the meaning of biblical truth or words, if we've ignored them or if we've rejected them.

Absolutely disastrous. And faith is one of these words that's tremendously important and what it says and what it means. Because in verse 6 of chapter 11 of Hebrews, the writer of the Hebrews says, and he's anointed in the spirit of God, and it's the living word of God, he says, and without faith it is impossible to please God.

So you know, that's a big claim and that's a big statement. And he gives this great statement, without faith it's impossible to please God. And so immediately we're drawn into the importance of this word and the importance of this statement.

[4 : 38] It involves pleasing God and we're going to stand before God one day, each of us individually on our own before Him. So I hope it spurs questions in your mind like, well, do I have this faith?

What is this faith? Have I presumed on faith all my life? Am I struggling with faith? What are some of the issues we face? Well, I hope today, just to go through quickly, what Biblically faith is, how it's presented in the Bible, in a 4x4 way, 4 positive, 4 things which tell us what faith isn't, and then 4 things that tell us what faith Biblically is.

Because I think it's very important that we know and understand these things. Faith is not, and I'm sorry I don't have sermon notes today, along with the bulletin sheet which we usually do.

It didn't just quite get organised in time this week. But faith isn't being gullible in a biblical, sorry, in a kind of way that we understand it.

You know, where some people get a workman come to their door and he says he's going to do some work for them, and he does the work really badly and then he rips them off and these people say, well, I just took them in in good faith.

[5 : 56] You know, I just had faith in him, I thought it was okay, and it really is a kind of my word for just being gullible, accepting things about people without really knowing what these people are like.

It's a bit unrealistic. That's not what Biblical faith is. Not is it wishful thinking, hoping for things to happen without any real evidence that they'll happen.

At the beginning of May that I look out the window and I say, it's definitely going to be a great summer. It's going to be hot every day and I'm going to get a great tan.

That's kind of wishful thinking. I have faith that it's going to be great, but we don't really have it based on anything. I'm sick, but I have great faith I'm going to become well.

I just feel it's right. And it's more than, it's not faith, it's more a longing or wishful thinking. That's not Biblical faith either, though many people would equate the two.

[6 : 52] Not is it, in the third place, just a positive mental attitude. And this is one that's very common today. I believe. Believe in yourself. I kind of inflated, maybe an inflated high opinion of ourselves.

Just believe you can be whatever you want to be. X-factor faith. You can be. And all you need to do is believe.

And that kind of positivity, positive thinking, that it's just how we think about ourselves and that we just think positively and have a great faith in ourselves.

That's all that matters. That's not Biblical. And the last thing it's not, is it's not just a feeling. It's not just something that's absolutely subjective.

Oh yeah, I've got faith. I've got faith. It's my faith that took me through. But it's a kind of, it's quite a vague thing. And it's unquestionable. And it's not clear exactly in what that faith rests.

[8 : 01] But it's just a subjective thing. Yeah, I believe in God. I believe in God. And I believe He'll accept me in the end. And it's just, it may even be religious at that level. Maybe even spiritual. But it's just a feeling.

And it's not based on anything tangible. And it's based on what we would like to think God might do with us. Or what we might like to believe about God. And so these are four kind of, maybe sometimes common misconceptions or confusions about what faith is.

But it's not Biblical faith. And we must distinguish them from Biblical faith. So what is Biblical faith? There's four things that I want to say about what Biblical faith is.

And the first is that it's a solid trust in God. A really solid trust in God. Now, faith, verse 1, Hebrews 11.

This is the only definition that we are given of faith in the Bible. If you had the opportunity to say to God, give us a definition of faith.

[9 : 07] I don't think we would have asked for this one. I don't think this is the one we would have wanted ourselves. But this is what God gives us. Faith is being sure of what we hope for.

And certain of what we do not see. This is what the ancients were commended for. It's a really sure and certain trust in God.

Also we see it in verse 6. Without faith it's impossible to believe God because anyone who comes to him must believe that he exists. And they reward those who earnestly seek him. So it's solid trust in God.

That's the first thing. Now, hopefully there will be a text that might come up on the screen here. At some point. Yeah. I can't remember which one.

Is that the one I passed by? Okay, that's good. And that is a faith that comes through again and again in the scripture. It's a confidence. Faith is being sure or being certain.

[10 : 10] And it's a real deep-seated confidence. We'll find it right through the Bible. We'll find it in Job. I know that my Redeemer lives and that in the end he will stand upon the earth.

That great cry of confidence and strength in God. And that's what I say. For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus, our Lord, really strong and real faith.

Or in Psalm 62, he alone is my rock. Remember we were singing about that. And my salvation is my fortress. I will never be shaken.

And we find that this is a strong, solid, unshakable trust in God that is a mark of genuine faith, a deep conviction, sure and certain hope.

And it lies in direct contradiction to the instability of much of our life. The life that's always changing. That's never the same.

[11 : 27] That is insecure. Most of us are kind of shaken by insecurity at one level or another. But here is a spiritual strength and conviction that changes everything we are.

And lies right deep down at the foundations of our being. A deep, you know, this is what the words mean, a sure and certain hope. It's a bit like the sea.

You know, the sea can be really wild on the surface. It can be really tossing itself on the surface and there's waves and it can be dark and it can be wild.

But underneath, you know, if you go deep down, there's incredible calmness and incredible stillness. So that our faith is like that and it transforms very often what's happening on the surface of our lives.

Because we have this deep-seated strength from our relationship with Christ. So that it's very outset, we recognise that our faith oughtn't to be dependent on how good things are going on the surface.

[12 : 43] Or isn't necessarily related to how well things are going on the surface of our lives. It doesn't rely on a good life. Oh, I've got great faith in God. He's so good to me.

Or when things go badly, oh, I can't believe in God anymore because so many rough things have happened in my life. Because our faith is deeper than that. It's based on the character of God, despite what happens in our lives, because we know what He has done for us in Jesus Christ.

So it's not dependent on these things. It is a deep-seated, solid trust that underpins every part of our lives.

So faith should never just be Sunday morning only. It should never be that. It should never be, I've just come along at church now and again.

It shouldn't be just an addition. An odd addition to our lives. Faith is the very core of our being. It's the found, it's the sure and certain hope that we have. Not only in what we possess, but what we look forward to.

[13 : 50] Solid trust in God. That's the first thing that faith is. And it is also, secondly, it's solid trust in a God whom we have come to know.

Okay? It's faith. It's solid trust in a God that we have come to know. Verse 6 tells us that we are to remind ourselves that anyone who comes to Him must believe that He exists.

And as we kind of spread that out to all of what the Bible teaches, we recognize that we come to know Jesus Christ.

We put faith in our God who reveals Himself in the person of Jesus Christ. It's an objective reality. He's a real person. He exists.

He lives. He is revealed to us. Now faith is more than just knowing things about Jesus, because Satan knows things about Jesus. And he's not a believer and he doesn't have faith.

[14:52] And lots of clever people know lots of things about Jesus. And lots of religious people know lots of things about Jesus. Lots of church people know lots of things about Jesus.

But it doesn't necessarily equate with a living faith in Him. But it's the solid trust that is based on our coming to know the living God.

In verse 2 it says that by faith we understand the universe was formed. By God's command. So faith takes us right back to the very beginning.

It's by faith we believe that the world was created by God. It's not because of the science and the creationist debate. However much and our relevance that might have, we can never be persuaded of God as the Creator through our scientific knowledge or through our creationism arguments.

It is by faith. And it's by faith we see that God is created. By faith we see this God who has come to be the redemptive God in Christ Jesus.

[16:08] And it's the faith that helps us to believe that the same Christ will be the Lamb as if slain on the center of the throne that we spoke about when we were looking at heaven.

So it's a faith that takes us right through all of history. And it's the faith in this character of God who is revealed in His Word. Where His promises are revealed, where His character is made known, and it's unsearchably rich.

So God makes Himself known in His Word. He reveals Himself in the Bible. John 1 verse 14. It's a great start to John's Gospel where it kind of links up the Word and the person of Jesus.

In the beginning was the Word and the Word was made flesh and dwelt amongst. But we find in John 1 14, sorry. In the beginning was the Word and the Word was with God in the Word.

Was God. But here we have the Word that became flesh and made His dwelling among us.

Speaking about Jesus Christ. We have seen His glory, the glory of the one and only who came from the Father, full of grace and truth.

[17:13] So we have this faith that knows, has come to know the Lord Jesus Christ. Who has put our faith and trust in this Christ that we have come to know.

And faith is the hand that reaches out and grasps the noble God in the person of the Lord Jesus Christ. So faith is a solid and a deep trust.

But it's solid and a deep trust in a God that we are growing in knowledge of and that we must come to know. And we come to know Him primarily but not exclusively through His Word.

And the encouragement is to you to return to the Word. Be Word based Christians. The trend today is to ignore the Word to regard it as unreliable and as old hat.

But we recognise the Word as the revelation of God which equips us for every good word. Which tells us about Jesus Christ. That gives us the sure and certain foundation on which faith is built.

[18:22] Confidence. And so your faith and my faith, if it's to know confidence and if it's to know surety, must be a faith where the Word plays a really important part.

Where we look to the Bible. Where we read the Bible. Where we spiritually look for Christ in His Word and grow through knowing Him. Where He speaks to us.

Biblical faith sees the relevance of the Bible and the vibrancy of the Bible. And sees our need of the Holy Spirit to bring it to life. So a living faith, a biblical faith is a faith that has a sure and certain foundation in God.

And is a faith that believes in Him. Believes that He exists and believes all that the Word has to say about Him.

So let us put our confidence in the living Word. Let it return to the centre of our lives and the centre of our faith. So that we're not kind of just making up things about God.

[19:30] I quite like God to be like that. So we just do that. And quite like God to be like this.

Maybe because it suits our character, our temperament, our nature. But we can't do that about other people.

God take them as they are. We trust people. We have faith in other people because we get to know them. So it is with God as He reveals Himself.

So faith is regarding whom we have a solid trust. Secondly, it's whom we have come to know through the Lord Jesus Christ. But also, and I guess they're all interlinked, faith is offered to us as a gift.

And this really sets apart and it's such a good thing because it takes the pressure off ourselves. How often have you looked at yourself, maybe heard a sermon about faith and thought, Oh, James, my faith's rubbish.

I'm hopeless. I need to do more. I need to build up my faith. I'm a hopeless Christian. I don't have any faith. And we kind of take all the pressure on ourselves and the weight on ourselves as if it's all our responsibility.

[20 : 32] But here we're reminded that biblical faith is a gift. It comes from God, a spiritual gift. For it is by grace you've been saved through faith.

And this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God. Not by works so that no one can boast. I'm not going to go into all the divisions and separations between grace and faith that may or may not be in this passage.

But clearly we recognise that faith and spiritual life and grace and the pleasure of God all comes from God.

In other words, faith isn't natural to us. It's not a redundant section of our brain which somehow by an electric shock will get made alive. There's not a faith gene in us that one day will be destroyed. Hey, there's a faith gene. Well, then church, there's got a faith gene. And if you don't have the faith gene, you can't believe because it's a gift from God. It's a gift from Him that He's given us.

[21 : 38] And that's what's amazing about salvation. Everything about salvation is actually a gift from God. We are without Christ dead spiritually.

We can't love Him. We can't believe in Him. We can't be sure and certain of Him as Creator or Savior or Judge.

We need the Holy Spirit and so much so that Jesus makes that clear in John 14 up to 16 where He promises the Holy Spirit who will come into people's life and convict them of their need of a Savior, convict them of their need of grace, convict them of the righteousness and the beauty of Jesus Christ and His love for them.

But the great thing is that that's empowering, isn't it? Because it's a gift that He wants to give us. He gifts us the faith that enables us to take hold of Christ.

I think sometimes, I may be wrong in saying this, but I think sometimes we have put too much stress on persuasion and argument.

[22 : 54] Not that I don't think persuasion and argument are important. I think they are. I think they're really important. And I want to use all reason that I can and all intelligence, the little that I have to persuade people and we know the Bible speaks about persuading and being genuine and real.

And yeah, we need that, but we also need to recognize that we'll never persuade someone merely by our own power of persuasion into the kingdom.

We might persuade them into some kind of religious experience or religious movement, but it will not last because it will be based on the power of our argument. We do all we can to persuade them, but we also recognize that it's a gift and we tell people it's a gift that they will never believe in.

They will never accept Christ unless they come to recognize their need of Christ and their need of Christ even to give them the gift of faith. It's not just objective, in other words.

We move from the open book that tells us about this Christ we can know. We move to the bended knee. We move from that place where we move from just the knowledge about God and the knowledge of God and we move to the bended knee where we ask Him to reveal Himself to us and to grant us this gift of grace and faith that we so desperately need.

[24 : 16] That's why the Bible is so full of the whole imagery of being children who ask. Childlike faith is, you know, all of us who have children, we all know how much children ask and are dependent on answers and on learning and having their brain grow through knowledge that way.

And the Bible speaks so much about us as Christians. All we might be the most intellectual and deep-seated in our knowledge, but He continues to ask, want us to ask and to depend on Him. Just as it was with the disciples, even when they had faith, they said, I believe, please help me, unbelieve. And I can't think of anyone who would be here who wouldn't want to make that same prayer. I certainly need that prayer.

I believe, but I don't believe so much. Please help me to believe more. Grant me deeper faith. Help me to understand more clearly what it's about.

Ask. You know, you can't have faith. You can't be a Christian, biblically, if you haven't asked. If it's all just a kind of A4 page in front of you that you've got all sussed mentally, it must be this dependent recognition that faith comes by hearing, hearing through the word of God. It's the gift of God to us.

[25 : 42] And we are to ask Him. As you know, He says that in verse 6, really, in a sense, He says, without faith it's impossible to please God, because anyone who comes to Him must believe that He exists and He rewards those who earnestly seek Him.

So do you have a faith, and do I have a faith, that in an ongoing way is earnestly seeking Him? Because if we don't, it may not be a biblical faith.

It may not be the faith that Christ wants us to have. Is that right? Without faith, it's impossible to please God.

We're going to face Him. Are we an asking people? Are we an asking church? Do we have the humility that goes with that?

So, faith is a solid trust in God, sure and certain. It's a God whom we have come to know. We believe He exists and we come to know Him through Jesus Christ.

[26 : 42] Faith is something that's offered to us as a gift. And the last thing I want to mention today is that faith is something that changes our lives. The letters to John speak a lot about that, how our faith gives us a love for God and a love for one another.

And so, again, I'm moving it not out of the cerebral, not out of the brain, but along with the brain into our hearts. So it's not just a transformation of how we think, not just a philosophical movement, but it's also an emotional heart movement as well.

We know that we live in Him in He and us because He has given us of His Spirit. And we have seen and testified that the Father has sent His Son to be the saviour of the world. If anyone acknowledges that Jesus is the Son of God, God lives in Him and He in God.

And so we know and rely on the love that God has for us. God is love. Whoever lives in love lives in God, in God, in Him. And He goes on to speak about loving our neighbour. So there's this heart movement that has been brought about through God's gift, which has changed our mind and our intellect and our philosophical position, and has utterly changed our lives.

Which is why I think I'm just so kind of moved just now about our singing, because singing is such an emotional thing. It's such an expression of our hearts.

[28 : 10] And if our singing is kind of from kind of bland faces and it doesn't express our soul then, I think it's a travesty because I think that's why it's been given.

It's been given to express our faith. And so we need to really work hard at that, I think. And express our joy or express our fears or express our doubts, express our cries to God, as we do in many different ways.

Through singing, which is such a God-given way of doing that. And I think we need to pray about that and we need to work at it. And not just see it as a kind of an additional bit.

It's a bit we have to get through. And a bit that marks the end of the service. Woohoo! But you know, there's something that's really passionately expressive of our hearts that have been changed, because faith will do that for us.

Faith has this dynamic nature. It's not just that, oh, 26 years ago I came to faith. I became a Christian, as if it was a kind of one-off thing that happened. And that we've just kind of moseyed along since then.

[29 : 16] But there's a real dynamic nature to faith. So that it's something that's like any relationship that is a growing and developing as we get to know Christ more.

As we understand more of His preciousness and His fact that He never lies, and that He never lets us down, and He never treats us badly. But loves us even when we don't understand why we are going through what we're going through.

You know, it's a bit like the kind of the progress of relationship into marriage, where there's that learning about someone, and that learning about someone leads to a response of love, and then that leads to the commitment of marriage and an ongoing.

In the same way, in a relationship with God, as we learn more about Him by faith, as we see more about Him through Christ, we respond in love through the gift of faith, and it deepens our commitment.

So that we give Him the preeminence that He's looking for, and we give Him that place in our lives. And that transforms us, so that in Hebrews 12, which goes on after Hebrews 11, He says, let's fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith.

[30 : 33] The author, He's given us it. The perfecter, it's through Him that our faith is going to grow. Who for the joy set before Him endured the cross, scorned His shame, sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.

Consider Him who endured such opposition, simply, so that you do not grow weary and lose heart. So there is always still that responsibility on us to be asking, to be crying out, to be dependent, to see our freedom and responsibility to come close to Him and be transformed by Him.

So I hope that just gives a little flavour of the nature of faith biblically, a faith that is really strong and solid, a solid trust in a real person, not an airy-fairy thing at all.

I haven't mentioned at all the sure and certain nature of faith as it relates to what we haven't yet attained, I haven't the time to look at it.

I suppose we looked at that last month when we looked at Heaven. But it's that solid trust in what God is, what God has done, what God will do, this character, one that we've come to know and that we're getting to know.

[31 : 49] Do you know God? Can you honestly say that you know Him so much so that your whole life has been transformed and you've put your trust in Him? You've recognised that that gift is a gift, that faith is a gift from Him, and it's a dynamic gift, not a stale gift, but a dynamic one that changes our lives.

Am I a person of faith? Are you a person of faith? Are we a people of faith, not in a vague, esoteric, nebulous kind of way, but the faith that is described biblically?

Because without faith, it's impossible to please God. If you come to the conclusion today that you're not a Christian, that you don't have that faith, that best you believe in a God, but not in the God of revelation and in the gift of faith, miraculous gift of faith that He offers, can I encourage you to talk to someone about that?

Talk to a Christian friend about that. Talk to someone who is a Christian. Talk to one of the elders or to me about that. Because it's just too important not to talk about.

This may well be your time to come to faith and to know the transformation that goes along with that. Let's put our heads in prayer.

[33 : 26] Heavenly Father, as we think about faith, help us to recognize its relevance to us, either because we are people of faith or because we are not.

And because you say that without faith, it is impossible to please God. So may we not rely on anything else for our hope on that last great day, and even today.

May we recognize what God says and why He has said it, because it fits so beautifully in with the work of Jesus on the cross, which would be utterly spurious if we didn't need faith and if we didn't need redeemed.

If we could just go our own way, Lord, remind us that the cross would have been a waste of time. So help us to look at our lives through the prism of the cross and what it speaks to us about a Creator God, a Redeemer God, and a Sovereign God.

And may we realign our lives accordingly, not in our own strength, but by crying out to the Living God in prayer for faith to believe.

[34 : 53] And help us as we sing. May we sing in response to you and to your word. May we sing powerfully. May we sing joyfully. May we sing reminding ourselves of the spiritual nature of such a task.

And may we remind ourselves that heaven will be a place full of singing and praise to the Living God, for we ask it in His precious name. Amen.