

(Hebrews - Part 32): Faith Demonstrated

by A.W. Tozer

Faith is the substance of things hoped for, and the evidence of things not seen, giving us assurance and confidence in the things that are not seen.

Duration: 27:36

Scripture: Hebrews 11:1-27

Topics: "Expositional"

Description

In this sermon, the speaker emphasizes the importance of not taking for granted that all people mean well. He warns against trusting individuals like Kushev and Nautikung, who have malicious intentions of conquering and enslaving others. The speaker uses the example of a child who joyfully interacts with two large dogs without understanding the potential danger they pose. He encourages listeners to face the reality that evil exists in the world and that there are temporary forces of darkness, such as Hitler and Stalin. However, the speaker also reminds believers of the eternal city, built by God, that is not subject to time and will endure beyond the passing years. He encourages faith in God's promises, which give substance to our hopes and provide evidence of unseen things.

Transcript

Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen. For by it the elders obtained a good report. Through faith we understand that the worlds were framed by the word of God, so that things which are seen were not made of things which do appear.

We'll stop there because he plunges on then, illustrating what he has to say by Abel and the rest of them. Now this is the faith chapter of the Bible, and here faith is demonstrated. Its deeds are recorded.

And yet there is no definition of faith given here, nor is there a definition of faith anywhere given in the scriptures. For let us remember that when it says, Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, and the evidence of things not seen, it is not giving us a definition. Just as when it said, God is love, it is not giving us a definition of God, nor a definition of love.

There are very few definitions in the Bible. The reason being that definitions have to do with philosophy and reason, whereas the Bible is not a book of philosophy and reason, but a spiritual book directed to the heart. It is a book of morals, and it is not a book of ethics.

Ethics is another word for righteousness or morals, and the ethical book reasons concerning good and bad. But the Bible is not a book of reason about good or bad. The Bible is an authoritative book telling us what is good and what is bad.

We need no textbook on ethics when we come to the word of God. God has written the only textbook there is that is valid and that is binding upon all men. So there is no definition of love given, and there is no definition of righteousness, and there are very few, if any, definitions given in scriptures.

There is none of faith here. Faith is demonstrated, not defined. And I should like to point out to you that this is God's ideal for his church.

Not that love should be defined from the pulpit, but that it should be demonstrated in the pew. Not that faith should be defined from the pulpit, but that it should be practiced by the people in the pew, as well as by the man in the pulpit. So we have here faith.

Faith is the substance of things hoped for. Now, let's get a little illustration to know what we mean by this. Suppose that a father tells his boy that he is going to give him a bicycle on his 10th birthday.

And he just tells him that. The boy is yet a couple of months away from his 10th birthday, but he says to him, Now, Junior, on the morning of your 10th birthday, you may have a bicycle. I am ordering one for you, and it will be here, and it will be yours.

Now, the boy knows his father, and he knows that barring death or illness, the father will make good on his promise. He has known that from the time he can remember. So he has faith in his father.

He has faith that he will have that bicycle on the morning of his 10th birthday, and he expects it with the keen and enjoyable anticipation. Now, that is giving substance to the thing that's coming. It's the faith he has in his father that gives substance to those.

So he talks to his friends about the bicycle, and he dreams about the bicycle. And he plans what he'll do and where he'll go and where he'll ride and how he'll share it with his friends. To him, it's just as good as if he had it, because it has been promised, and he has faith in the Promiser, so faith gives substance to the promise.

Faith is the substance of things hoped for and the evidence of things not seen. And the boy talks excitedly about his bicycle, and his cynical little sister says, You don't have any bicycle. She ribs him about it, but he's talking about it just as if he had it, because faith has given substance to it, and there is evidence of it.

Now, that doesn't define faith. That doesn't even describe it. That simply tells how it's demonstrated.

Now, it is by faith that we have to walk here. God compels us to live in a state of benign ignorance. I want you to know that.

I like to hear it, but it's true. We live in a state of benign ignorance. Now, there are various kinds of ignorance, you know.

There is the ignorance of the man who refuses to learn, and there is the ignorance of the man who just will not learn. And then there is the ignorance of the person who has never been anywhere much. He lives, say, in the country.

And there's a difference, you know, between lack of intelligence and ignorance. It means not knowing. A person can be totally ignorant on a subject or on many subjects.

Everybody's ignorant on a certain number of subjects, but some of us just... And so you can be ignorant, or we can be. I can be on very many subjects and yet be intelligent, and sharply intelligent, but ignorant. For instance, I'm ignorant on space flight.

All I know is what I read in the papers and hear over the radio. But I couldn't run one of those things. I would not.

I'd have overshot the thing. I couldn't handle it because I'm ignorant on it, but I don't sit my chin down on my chest saying that I'm unintelligent. It's not unintelligent.

I had had his training, so I'm not going to... Now, it's... I say God keeps us in a state of benign ignorance. By that, I mean that everything that matters, we're ignorant of, and the things that don't really matter, we know. That's the odd thing.

The things that matter, we don't know and we can't know. And this is that God, no flesh should glory in God's presence, but that he that glorieth let him glory in the Lord. You know, human reason has always been the rival of God.

The race fell in the day that the devil persuaded the first pair that if they were to eat of the fruit, and when they said, ye shall be as God's knowing, and the devil said that, they fell for it and took the bait. And the result is, instead of being as God's knowing, human reason has always been God's rival, I say. And yet, there is nothing which a man is surprised by as man's reason.

God hasn't allowed him to understand one fundamental fact of life. We use a word there at the end of that sentence, life. Now, I don't know, nobody knows.

You can't explain life because you can't understand life. You can explain anything you can understand. But life is one of those glorious things that escape us.

Now, consciousness. I was thinking this morning about consciousness. You know you have consciousness, but you don't know what consciousness is.

I said to myself, well, conscious. Very good, brother, very good. But what is awareness? And so we define one with the other, because nobody knows.

And when you're unconscious, you don't know it. And after you've come back to consciousness again, you don't know what you've come back to. Now, that's literally true.

I'm not trying to be facetious. It's literally true. We don't know.

The psychologists talk about state. Then there is love. Nobody knows what love is, and nobody knows if it is a thing or not.

And trying to explain it or define it makes us foolish, because it's wonderful that we can enjoy and experience things that we cannot define. And you know to experience without understanding is the act of a child. The child eats its food and hasn't the remotest idea of what's in it nor whether it's good for it or not.

And it experiences many, many of life's varied facets and doesn't understand any of them. It just enjoys them. When we were in Florida, we saw our seven-month-old, a dandy little fellow, and we really fell in love with him.

His name is Raleigh Browning. Raleigh for his father, and Browning for his wife's grandmother's maiden name. I don't know where they went astray for that one, but they got it.

And little Raleigh Browning is a lovely little chap. And he just experiences without knowing. They have two huge Great Dane dogs, big as ponies running around the place.

First thing I'd do with them would be tie them in the backyard. But they came around the house, and this little guy can't walk yet. If you hold him on his two little wobbly legs, he just yells with delight, looking at those two huge dogs.

Now, he doesn't know that one of them could just reach over and bite him in two. He doesn't know that. And enjoying it tremendously, and a big smile breaks out on his little face when he looks at these two huge dogs.

He's experiencing them without understanding them. My father used to say about horses, he'd say when he saw them pulling and leaning forward in their great body tents, he'd say, if a horse only knew his own strength, he couldn't handle them. They didn't know.

They experienced without knowing. And it's this experiencing without knowing that we find delightful about a baby. So God smiles at our vaunted reason and compels us to live all the time like children.

And it's just as we should, for our Lord says, that except you become as little children, you cannot enter into the kingdom of God. That's why the learned college professor tries to come in head first and never gets in at all. And that is why the simple-hearted man, he can come in and spend.

So God compels us, I say, to live by faith, a kind of a sub-faith it is indeed. The so-called thinker who scorns religion because it requires faith is forced to live by faith every moment of his life, a kind of a sub-faith. He gets up in the morning and he expects the sun to be in a certain position, the time.

And when he eats, he expects that food. He doesn't really give it much thought because he's in the newspaper while he's eating. But he knows in a general way where it is and where he's mouth has managed to get through it while he's reading the report of the hockey or baseball game the day before.

But the point is, he has faith. It's a kind of a sub-faith. He walks out on the sidewalk and he expects that sidewalk to hold him up.

He knows, or thinks he knows by faith, that it won't suddenly collapse. And so would everything. He lives by faith all the time.

Goes down to the university and stands and argues learnedly before his class that religion is a passé and a burnt-out thing because it doesn't rest on reason. He only goes by reason. From the time he got up in the morning and shook himself awake to that minute, he'd been living by faith.

Kind of a sub-faith, I admit. Certainly not saving faith because saving faith is on a much higher level. It is a mystery, you see.

I mean biblical faith as distinguished from ordinary faith which I have described. At the door of the kingdom, the god Reason is dethroned. And instead of being a king, he becomes a servant.

And as soon as we're in the kingdom of God, then Reason takes its right place. Reason waits on us as a useful servant instead of ruling us as a false god. And so the Christian is not unreasonable.

He simply suddenly plunges into a realm where Reason becomes a servant. He lives by faith. By faith, you see.

By faith. And any attempt to equate faith and Reason is ridiculous. It can't be done.

Jesus said, I thank thee, O Father, Lord of the heaven and earth, that thou hast made. And so faith becomes an organ of knowledge. Now it says here in the opening verses that through faith we understand that the worlds were framed by the word of God so that things which are seen were not made of things which do appear.

You see, he had in mind here when he wrote this the doctrine of the eternity of matter. If you will remember, there was a doctrine held that matter is eternal. That there never was a time when things were not.

They all were. And that all that we see is the result of a rearrangement of matter that never began to be, but always was. That's the doctrine of the eternity of matter.

That there is no invisible eternal world back of the visible temporal world. But the Holy Ghost here gives us the truth. The Holy Ghost says that the visible came out of the invisible.

That things that are seen came out of the things that are not seen. That matter came out of spirit, and before all things was God. And so faith becomes an organ of knowledge.

What I cannot know with my reason, I can know by believing. Faith becomes an organ of knowledge. By faith we understand.

And by saying faith we understand, we mean by faith we know. So faith is an organ of knowledge. Faith is not a substitute for reality, but it is the organ that apprehends reality and God and spiritual things.

Now faith doesn't create these things, and faith doesn't certainly imagine these things, but faith gives evidence to them. The little boy waiting on his bicycle doesn't imagine he's going to get it as far as human knowledge can go. And he doesn't create the bicycle by believing, but he just gets it because his father is true and doesn't lie to his boy.

And so you and I don't create these things by believing. That's the mistake that a lot of them make. They write books to the effect that if you just project out of your subconscious... I remember one time going to take in a series, and that fellow said that the subconscious was that, and that there it was underneath there, and you... It was the boss of your whole life, really.

Not your consciousness, but your subconscious. So that if your consciousness... That, incidentally, was the fellow. Every day and every way I'm getting better and better.

He even had a rosary. And you get up in the morning, take a hold of your string and go down. Every day and every way I'm getting better and better.

And people... It was an odd thing, but he just dropped off one day. Every day and every way... So I know a better way. Instead of telling your stomach, now digest, eat and thank God and go about your business.

If the Lord cares. Now... I say faith is an organ of knowledge, but it's not an organ of imagination. It doesn't project imaginary things and look at them and say, there they are.

It sees what is with the eye of faith. We do not project out of ourselves a millennium to come, but we see the millennium to come by the eye of faith and know that it will come. We do not by faith project out of ourselves heaven and say, someday I'll enter that heaven.

I wouldn't want to enter a heaven that... I'd want something more substantial than a projection of my intellect or imagination. And there is such. Jesus Christ our Lord said, If I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you unto myself that where... He went to prepare a place.

It's a real place. How do I know? I know by faith. It's the organ that tells me it's true.

I know because he said it was so. And he's never failed on anything. Everything that his mouth promised, his hand has fulfilled or will yet fulfill.

So we can count on that. So you and I are not living in a world of imagination. It's the world that lives in imagination.

I hear things all the time and read things all the time that I don't believe. I haven't any faith in it. I heard a speech made by that fellow whose name I never can pronounce.

Hugh Fent, is that his name? The acting Secretary of the United Nations. Pretty good speech, I suppose. But it's all imaginary, you see.

We take for granted that all people mean well and that if we just trust people we'll be all right. There are people that don't mean well. And only a fool will take it for granted that Khrushchev means well or that Mao Zedong means well or that any of them mean well.

They mean to conquer and enslave you. And only an idiot, if a man is rushing at him with a bloody knife, will stand and say, he means well. That'll be the last thing he ever says.

Some people don't mean well. Evil men and seducers shall wax worse and worse till the end comes. Read the book of Revelation and see if all men mean well.

And all you have to do is stroke their dandruff a bit and scratch their necks and they'll be all right. And, oh, my brother, you've got to face up to reality. There's a reality that we can see and grasp and then there's a reality that we can't see nor grasp but we can believe.

And I want to live for that reality, for all the things, however real, however many Hitlers and Stalins and Lenins and the rest that there are. They're only temporary. They're real.

They were real, but they're temporary. And they're now gone. And these others will go with them.

But that eternal city that has foundation whose builder and maker is God did not begin on the earth and it won't end in the earth. It is not a victim of time nor a child of the passing years that came out of the heart of God. And the mansions there are made by the hands of God for the people of God.

By faith we know this. Faith is an organ of knowledge. So we are not imaginary men filled with vain imagining running about, trusting things that aren't so, pulling ourselves up by our shoelaces.

We are those who have heard the voice from beyond matter, the voice from beyond creation, the voice that called creation into being. We have heard that voice and we believe it. And that voice says, matter was not eternal, there's only one eternal, that's God.

But that matter is the hand the work of the eternal. And that the things visible were made by the things that are invisible. The things material were made by the things spiritual.

So you and I, we're Christians, live for another world than this. If you want to be disappointed, now if you're just a child and you're in the wrong sense of the word, and you're ready to believe anything that's got pretty paint on it and makes a nice noise, okay. But if you've got something up here, you'll be disappointed when you go to Florida.

I've been down there before, but I never got a chance to look it over quite as much as I did this time. At Causeway, across from Miami to Miami Beach, they call it the Jewish Passover. Because the Jews pass over that to get over to their beautiful mansions on the other side.

I went over there twice and looked it over and I was sick to my... It represents decadence. If it wasn't for things like that and other things like it on the North American continent, Communism would be stopped dead in its tracks. It's because we accept that artificial, corrupt, putrefied decadence as being real, that they can push us and push us and push us and erode and take away our... I see another city.

Another city. Abraham saw it and never would live in a city after that. He lived in tents from that hour on.

Every time that somebody said, Abraham, why don't you build a city? He said, after seeing that city, I'd be ashamed. He said, I'll stick by a tent, just an old tent, till I see the city that has foundations. That's faith.

So we're saved by faith. And our Lord says, Come unto me and believe on me and follow me. Come and believe and follow.

That's it. Come is not a journey, as I have said often, for the feet, but a journey for the heart. Believe is not an act of reason, but an act of the will.

And following is not an act once done, but a continuous act that begins when we're converted and never ends while the long ages roll. So that's faith. Faith is substance.

Faith is assurance. Faith is the rock foundation. Faith is that which translates the invisible into the visible, the things that are not and makes them as though they were.

In the eleventh chapter of Hebrews, we see faith busy at work, being demonstrated over the centuries. It's a good chapter, and I hope that Sunday after Sunday, you'll come and hear it expounded.

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