

The True Discipleship Broadcast-1983-12 True Discipleship

by William MacDonald

Faith is unbounded confidence in the Lord and in his word, and it must have a foundation, the word of God.

Duration: 23:16

Scripture: Genesis 3:4-5, Genesis 4:4, Hebrews 11:1, Hebrews 11:3-6

Topics: "True Discipleship"

Description

In this sermon, the speaker discusses the concept of faith and its role in understanding the creation of the world. He emphasizes that faith is necessary to believe in the record that God has given regarding creation. The speaker also highlights the story of Adam and Eve and their decision to believe either God or Satan. He explains that faith comes before knowledge and seeing, and that by faith, we can understand that the worlds were framed by the word of God. The speaker concludes by stating that the influence of a life lived in faith can continue long after one's passing.

Transcript

Today, we're going to think about the subject of faith, and perhaps you would turn in your Bibles to Hebrews chapter 11, because this is very important in the whole subject of discipleship. Now, faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen, for by it the elders obtained a good testimony. By faith we understand that the worlds were framed by the word of God, so that the things which are seen were not made of things which are visible.

By faith Abel offered to God a more excellent sacrifice than Cain, through which he obtained witness that he was righteous, God testifying of his gifts, and through it he being dead still speaks. By faith Enoch was translated so that he did not see death, and was not found because God had translated him, for before his translation he had this testimony that he pleased God. But 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 diligently seek him.

By faith Noah, being divinely warned of things not yet seen, moved with godly fear, prepared an ark for the saving of his household, by which he condemned the world and became heir of the righteousness which is according to faith. By faith Abraham obeyed when he was called to go out to the place which he would afterward receive as an inheritance, and he went out not knowing where he was going. By faith he sojourned in the land of promise as in a foreign country, dwelling in tents with Isaac and Jacob, the heirs

with him of the same promise, for he waited for the city which has foundation, whose builder and maker is God.

By faith Sarah herself also received strength to conceive seed, and she bore a child when she was past the age because she judged him faithful who had promised. Therefore from one man and him as good as dead were born as many as the stars of the sky, and multitudes innumerable as the sand which is by the seashore. These all died in faith, not having received the promises, but having seen them afar off, and were assured of them, embraced them, and confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth.

For those who say such things declare plainly that they seek a homeland. Truly if they had called to mind that country from which they had come out, they would have had opportunity to return, but now they desire a better, that is, a heavenly country. Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God, for he has prepared a city for them." Now, first of all, we should come to a definition of faith.

Some people say that verse 1 is a definition of faith, but I'd like to suggest to you that it is not. That isn't what faith is. This is what faith does for you, but it's not what faith is.

Faith is unbounded confidence in the Lord and in his word, isn't it? Isn't that what faith is? Unbounded confidence in the Lord and in the word of God. And I would like to emphasize that faith must have some word or promise of God to rest on. Otherwise it would be mere presumption.

Let me illustrate that. You have a loved one, and the loved one is taken seriously ill, maybe cancer. And you say, I have faith that God is going to raise him up.

Well, the question is, has God said he was going to raise him up? If God has given you that promise in some way, in some very definite way, then you can have faith that he's going to raise him up. But in the absence of such a promise, in the absence of such a word from God, it's mere presumption. Now, this has been a problem with a lot of Christian people.

They think that they can go breezily down the street just believing something, and if they believe it hard enough, it'll come to pass, but that isn't true. No matter how hard you believe a thing, if God hasn't said it, it won't necessarily come to pass. Faith must have a foundation, and that foundation must be the word of God, and we're going to see that as we go through this passage today.

Some people define faith as a leap in the dark. They say that faith takes a leap in the dark and then finds the solid rock underneath. Watch out for these clichés in the Christian life.

I mean, that's pretty. It really sounds nice, but it isn't true. Faith is not a leap in the dark.

Faith demands the surest evidence and finds it in the word of God. What I'm saying is there's no risk to faith if we can only get that in our heads. There's no risk to faith.

There's no risk to believing God. Faith is the most sane, reasonable, logical thing that a person can do. Why? Why? Because God is the only one in the universe who can be completely trusted.

If God says something, that settles it. It'll come to pass. And to believe God involves no risk, it's just sensible to believe God.

God can't lie, he can't deceive, and he can't be deceived, so would you please tell me what risk there is in faith? Why faith is a leap in the dark? It's not, at all. God's word is the surest thing in the universe. Faith

rests on the word of God, either in the Bible, as it's given in the Bible, or transmitted to you subjectively.

Sometimes God can and does convey a promise to his people subjectively. That means there's an inner witness of the Holy Spirit, but you've got to be awfully careful about this. That's why I almost hesitate to say it, because so many people are going around today saying God told me, and God didn't tell them at all, and subsequent events prove that God didn't tell them.

You know, you've got to be awfully careful in this area when you say God told me. Years ago in Chicago, I got a phone call early in the morning that the chairman of the board of trustees of the school had taken a serious heart attack and was close to death. And I got up from my devotion, and I read that morning, This sickness is not unto death, but for the glory of God.

It's funny that that was in my devotions that morning. I wish I had really claimed that as a promise of God, because it was a promise of God, and the sickness wasn't unto death. It really was for the glory of God.

And God had spoken to me that morning through the word, but I didn't have the faith to lay hold of it. I mean, I got all these medical bulletins, and they were all, you know, pronounced in the name of death practices. If you embark on the life of faith, there are going to be difficulties.

Somebody has said, I think it was Mueller that said, difficulties are fuel for faith to feed on. That's good. Difficulties are fuel for faith to feed on.

Also, I think we should mention that faith often deals in the realm of the impossible. Faith, mighty faith, the promise sees and looks to God alone, laughs at impossibilities and cries, It shall be done. And we'll see that as we go through the lives of these patriarchs.

Faith often deals in the realm of the impossible, that is, the humanly impossible. God says it, and no way it can come to pass, but it does, because God said it. Now, please look at verse 1, and let me see if I can explain this verse to you the way I see it.

Faith is the substance of things hoped for. Well, that seems like a contradiction. If you have the substance, then you don't hope for it.

You only hope for what you don't have, what you don't see. So, how is faith the substance of things hoped for? Well, let me explain it to you. Faith makes the thing hoped for as real as if you already had it.

I think that's what it means. Faith makes the thing hoped for as real as if you already had it. Hope in the New Testament is different from hope in the world today.

When you hope for something in the world today, well, it may or it may not come to pass, but the Christian's hope is based upon the Word of God, a different positive, right? You'll always find it that way, and hope maketh not ashamed. What? You'll never be ashamed if you grasp the hope of the Christian faith, because God said it, and it will come to pass. Faith is the substance of things hoped for, okay? You and I have the promise of heaven.

You and I have never been in heaven, but heaven is as real to us and as sure to us as if we'd already been there. Is that an exaggeration? No. We sometimes think more happy, but not more secure, the souls of the blessed in heaven.

The blessed who are already in heaven are enjoying it, they're more happy than we are, but they're not more sure of heaven than we are. Why? Because God said it. God said that no sheep of Christ would ever perish.

So, heaven is positive for every believer, every true believer in the Lord Jesus Christ. Faith is the substance of things hoped for. And then it says, the evidence of things not seen.

Well, you say, if it's the evidence of things not seen, then you've already got it. What it really means is that faith deals in the realm of the future, the substance of things hoped for, and in the realm of the unseen, and it makes the invisible visible. Have you ever seen Jesus? Yes and no.

Right? None of us has ever seen the Lord Jesus with the physical eyes, but we've all seen him with the eyes of faith. And he's very real to us. More near, more intimately nigh than in the closest earthly tie.

Is that an exaggeration? Is it an exaggeration to say that the Lord Jesus is nearer and dearer to us than the closest earthly tie we have? I don't think it's an exaggeration. That's what faith does. It's pretty wonderful, isn't it? Faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen.

You have an illustration of that in verse 27, one of those wonderful divine paradoxes. Speaking of Moses, it says, By faith he forsook Egypt, not fearing the wrath of the king, for he endured as seeing him who is invisible. Faith enables Moses to see him who is invisible.

You say, what kind of double talk is that? That's divine double talk, and it's true, and it's good. So that's why I say that verse 1 of chapter 11 of Hebrews is not a definition of faith. I contend for that strongly.

But it tells you what faith does for you. It makes the future present. Heaven, for instance.

And it makes the invisible visible. Jesus, for instance. Are you with me? Now it says, by it, verse 2, by it, by faith the elders obtained a good report.

The elders here refers really to the patriarchs that you're going to be reading about in the following verses. And what that verse says is God bore testimony to the patriarchs of the Old Testament because they had faith in him. That's really what it says.

By it, by it, the elders obtained a good report. Literally, God bore testimony to the patriarchs of the Old Testament period for no other reason than that they believed him. They believed him.

Okay, now the writer to the Hebrews, he wants to talk about the life of faith, and he says, where shall we begin? And he says, well, let's begin at creation. Verse 3, by faith we understand. How did the world come into being? How was matter made? By faith we understand.

Stop there. By faith we understand. That's one of the greatest principles in the spiritual life.

You understand by faith. That isn't what the world says. That isn't what you'd learn in a science class in college or in high school.

They'd say, seeing is believing. But God says believing is seeing, and God is right. How do we know? How do we know what happened at creation? There's only one way to know, and that's ask the person who was there.

And who was there? God was there. And what does God say? That's it. By faith we understand.

We believe the record that God has given concerning creation. This is a great principle in the Christian life. By faith we understand.

Jesus said to Martha, said I not unto thee that if thou wouldest believe, thou shouldest see the glory of God? Believe first, and then see. And John says in his first epistle, These things have I written unto you that believe on the Son of God, that ye may know, see, believe, and then know. With God, faith comes first, and then knowledge and seeing come afterwards.

By faith we understand. What do we understand? The worlds were framed by the word of God. What does that mean? It means God spoke, and the worlds came into being.

Is that scientific? I don't care whether it's scientific or not, but it's true. And it just happens to be scientific too. Because some years ago Einstein came out with his famous formula, and his formula says E equals MC squared.

Now you can live a normal life without knowing that, but basically what it says is energy equals matter times the square of light. Or just let me simplify it. What it really says is energy equals matter.

That's what this says. Energy. God spoke.

Matter came into being. Speaking is energy. Power in the word of God.

God spoke, and matter came into being. So I see nothing unscientific in this at all. Although don't tell them at the University of California.

They might not like it. By faith we understand that the worlds were framed by the word of God, so that the things which are seen were not made of things which are visible. How true.

How true. How many years has it been since we knew about the atom, and the neutron, and the proton, and a lot of other invisible things that go to make up matter? The things that are seen are not made of things that do appear. Absolutely true.

So, to me this verse is very, very satisfying. And I don't think it can be improved on. Now, if you look closely, between verse 3 and verse 4, there's a gap.

Because we jump from creation to Cain and Abel. We've skipped something. What have we skipped? Adam and Eve.

We've skipped Adam and Eve. Why are not Adam and Eve included in this chapter on faith? Well, I think if you think for a minute you'll find out why. One day, the serpent came to Eve.

God said, now don't eat of the fruit of that tree, and the day you eat of the fruit of that tree you'll die. The serpent came and said, go ahead and have some, you won't die. And Eve had a decision to make.

She had to decide whether God was lying, or whether Satan was lying. She decided God was lying. And she and her husband plunged the world into sin.

I'm not surprised that their names are not listed in the honor roll of faith. Mind you, I think they were saved later, don't you? I think that when God clothed them in coats of skin, that was symbolic of their salvation, at

least. Because in order to clothe them with skin, the blood had to be shed.

But, they're passed over in the honor roll of faith. Because Eve, she believed that Satan was telling the truth and that God was lying. That's not pleasing to God.

So then it goes over to Cain and Abel. Now, it doesn't say this in the Bible, but sometime in their lives, those fellows learned that a holy God can only be approached by sinful man on the basis of an atoning sacrifice. I don't know where they learned that or how they learned it.

Probably through their parents telling them about the coats of skin. But I know they knew. I know they knew that the proper way to approach God was through a sacrificial animal.

An offering to God of an animal where the blood had been shed. Cain said, well, I never did care about that slaughterhouse religion. And he came with his basket of fruit and vegetables.

And Abel probably said, well, I don't understand all the theological intricacies of atonement by blood, but God said it, and I'm going to do it. And as a result of that, you read, by faith Abel offered to God a more excellent sacrifice than Cain, through which he obtained witness that he was righteous, God testifying of his gift, and through it he being dead, he'll speak. How did Abel manifest faith? By believing the revelation that God had given to them.

Although the verse doesn't say it, it presupposes a definite revelation. God didn't hold Cain responsible for something he didn't know about, did he? Cain knew, and he was acting in disobedience to God. He was the beginning of the whole world of salvation by works.

He's the one who started it all. He was the original modernist, the original liberal. I like the last part of the verse.

It says that the life of faith enables you to go on talking long after your body has returned to dust in the grave. Isn't that a wonderful thing? Abel still talks to us today. What does he say? He says, look, friends, the right life is the life of faith.

Believe God and you won't make any mistakes. Come the blood-sprinkled way. Come as a guilty, hell-deserving sinner and receive the Lord Jesus as your Savior.

He's still saying that today. How does he say it? He says it through Hebrews 11, there's no other way. It's a whole record in the book of Genesis.

I like that, you know. You might pass off the scene and your name might never appear in the headlines. Just a small obituary notice when you die.

And yet if you live the life of faith, the influence of that life can go on long, long after you've left the tomb. It's a wonderful thing, isn't it? A wonderful thing.

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