

The Hall of Faith: An Introduction

Hebrews 1:1-3

December 4, 2022, Pastor Jeremy Cagle

Good morning, everyone. Before we get started in our sermon this morning, I want to mention that next week you are in for a treat because our elders are starting a new sermon series for the holidays called Christmas in the Gospel of John. We're going to walk through the Gospel of John chapter one verse by verse, and learn what it says about Christ because if you've studied it before, you'll know that it's a very unusual part of the Bible. Unlike the other gospels, John doesn't start with Christ's life or His birth or His genealogy. He actually goes back further than that, to say, "In the beginning was the Word," which means you can go back as far as you want to in time, and you will find Jesus there. And you can go as deep as you want to into the past, in eternity past, and He'll go deeper still, because He is the Word of God. Our Savior has the same nature and being and characteristics as God himself. The same chapter also says, "And the Word became flesh and made His dwelling among us and we saw His glory," which means when you look at Christ, you see the glory of God, and you behold the One who created the universe because He's not a normal man. He's the Lord in human flesh, which is an important thing to talk about this time of the year because Christmas can seem so worldly nowadays, you might know what I mean. It can seem pretty superficial with all the lights and glitz and glam, but John chapter one reminds you that it's not. It's a very important time of the year to think about this because we're not celebrating anyone's birth right now. We're celebrating the birth of the Messiah, Jesus Christ, the Son of God. And that's what we're going to be talking about next week here at Grace. So please come back and join us for that, we'll do it in a three part series with each elder taking a sermon, and it should be really good.

But for today, we are in the book of Hebrews. So, if you want to take your Bibles out and turn there with me. Because this morning, we're continuing a series that we started back in February on the book of Hebrews, called the No Greater Saviour series because that's what the book is about. It tells us that there is no greater Saviour than Jesus, because He did something no one else could do; and that is to make you right with God. The Old Testament makes it clear that the law couldn't do that and neither could the sacrifices. The commandments couldn't make us right with God completely, and neither could the offerings. The priests couldn't do that, the Levites couldn't do that, the temple couldn't do that, the tabernacle couldn't do that, and neither could all the things in there, like the altar and laver and lampstand, and the showbread, and incense, and Ark of the Covenant. They all fell short of that because the only One that can forgive your sins entirely is the Lord Jesus Christ. And that's something that we've been explaining over and over and over again, all throughout this letter from Hebrews chapter one all the way through to chapter 10. And this morning, we find ourselves in chapter 11. This is our passage for today. When Hebrews 11 says this,

Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen. For by it the men of old gained approval. (And I want to point out here, as you go on and read this, there's a common expression that's going to be repeated several times in this chapter, and that is the phrase "by faith." You're going to see it more than 20 times, once for every other verse. To say this, starting in verse three.) 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. By faith Abel offered to God a better sacrifice than Cain, through which he obtained the testimony that he was righteous. God testifying about his gifts, and through faith, though he is dead, he still speaks. By faith Enoch was taken up so that he would not see death; and he was not found because God took him up; for he obtained the witness that before his being taken up he was pleasing to God. 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. By faith Noah, being warned by God about things not yet seen, in reverence prepared an ark for the salvation of his household, by which he condemned the world, and became an heir of the righteousness which is according to faith.

By faith Abraham, when he was called, obeyed by going out to a place which he was to receive for an inheritance; and he went out, not knowing where he was going. By faith he lived as an alien in the land of promise, as in a foreign land, dwelling in tents with Isaac and Jacob, fellow heirs of the same promise; for he was looking for the city which has foundations, whose architect and builder is God. By faith even Sarah herself received ability to conceive, even beyond the proper time of life, since she considered Him faithful who had promised. Therefore there was born even of one man, and him as good as dead at that, as many descendants as the stars of heaven in number, and innumerable as the sand which is by the seashore.

All these died in faith, without receiving the promises, but having seen them and having welcomed them from a distance, and having confessed that they were strangers and exiles on the earth. For those who say such things make it clear that they are seeking a country of their own. And indeed if they had been thinking of that country from which they went out, they would have had opportunity to return. But as it is, they desire a better country, that is, a heavenly one. Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God, for He has prepared a city for them.

We'll end the reading there. And as you're reading that, you may be wondering, that's really interesting material here, but why is the apostle talking about faith? At this point in the book of Hebrews, what's the connection here to everything we've studied? And if you look in verse two, the answer is found in the beginning. And that is that by faith, the men of old gained approval. In other words, the reason he makes such a big deal of it at this point in the letter is because this is how the people from the Old Testament were saved. They did it by faith. It happened as they believed because it's not as if they were saved one way while you were saved another; and it's not like they went to heaven through one road, and you got through another path. It's always been the same way. That's a principle that goes all the way back to the beginning of time. Even when the sacrifices were being offered, they were saved by faith. Even when

the temple was still standing, they were saved by faith. Even when the priests were there, and the Levites were there, and the altar was there, and the table was there, and the lampstand, it all happened by the grace of God. That's the point of this chapter. They weren't forgiven by keeping all that and being good people. It happened as they heard the word of God and believed it just like you. That's the way salvation works in the Old Testament and in the new because these people weren't perfect.

In fact, if you do a quick survey of their lives, you'll discover that they were far from perfect. I've heard this chapter called The Hall of Flaws before, I told you that last week, because they were very flawed people. For example, Abel came from a dysfunctional family. We're getting into Christmas time and this is the time of year when we all figure out how dysfunctional our family is, Amen? We get to spend time with the extended relatives and we wonder, "Am I really related to that guy?" Well, if you think your family is bad, listen to this. Abel's brother killed him. That's pretty bad. His brother murdered him out of jealousy. There's only four people on the planet at the time and one of them killed another. And then the list doesn't stop there because Noah got drunk. He stepped off the ark and drowned his sorrows in alcohol because all the death and destruction and devastation of the flood took its toll on him until he couldn't take it anymore and he snapped. Abraham was an adulterer. He slept with his handmaiden. Sarah was a doubter because she laughed at God. Isaac was a polygamist because he had multiple wives. Jacob was a bad parent because he set one kid against another. Moses was a murderer, Rahab was a harlot, Gideon was a coward, Barak was too passive, Jephtha was a fool, and Samson was a bully. Yet they all found their way in here, didn't they? Every one of them had their name written in the hall of faith because they trusted in God, and that's what saved them. They had faith, and that was their one redeeming quality, which is why the word is mentioned so often in here.

If you look back in Hebrews 11, it doesn't say *by works* Abel was saved, and *by works* Enoch was forgiven, and *by works* Noah built the ark. That's not what it was about. It was about the kindness and mercy of God which I wanted to point out on the front end of this, because I don't know about you, but when I read this chapter, I have a tendency to say, "I don't belong in here because these people are too good for me." And I have a tendency to look at it and draw halos around their heads and say, "I'm not worthy of this because there are a bunch of saints. Well, I'm just a sinner." But the truth is, that's not the case, because they're just as much a sinner as you. In fact, if you if you're wondering why all this is placed in this part of the Bible, the answer is that the author is shifting gears at this point in the book of Hebrews. Because so far, he's said a lot about doctrine. And he's been taking the first 10 chapters to show you how Christ fulfilled the old covenant for you, but now as he comes to the second half of the book, he's going to take that high and lofty truth and apply it to your lives. And he does it here by saying that you have to believe it because salvation is a gift, and God gives you Christ freely, but you have to do something to receive it. And that is to trust in God. Otherwise, you'll miss it. Salvation doesn't come by osmosis. You don't go to heaven simply by showing up at church and sitting there like a bump on a log. It has to mean more to you, or else you will be lost.

And this is something that Jews really needed to hear because at this time in history in the first century, a lot of them had become very legalistic in their thinking. And they had begun to adopt a mindset which said, “I have to go to heaven by earning it, and faith is not important. The most important thing is that I keep the law and earn God's favor through the commandments.” And so the Bible puts this here in order to say that's not the case, because Israel's ancestors weren't saved that way, and neither are they.

And maybe some of you need to hear that this morning. As we begin this study of the Hall of Faith, you find yourself thinking like the Jews. Because if you're honest about it, you have a very works oriented mindset. Because you're constantly asking yourself, “Was I good enough today for God, or was I not? Did I do enough to earn his mercy, or did I fail?” And if you're thinking that way, I want to remind you on the front end here, you could never do enough to earn God's mercy. That's not what it's about. Salvation is by faith alone, and this is what we're going to talk about this morning by looking at four introductions to the subject of faith in this passage.

So if you're taking notes, that's our outline for today. In Hebrews 11, in the first couple of verses, in order to dive into the Hall of Faith, we're going to look at four introductions to the subject of faith. And to be honest, I'm really excited about the sermon today. I'm excited, and it's also a little bit of a downer, because next week we're gonna start another series. I was getting all pumped up for this and kind of taking the wind out of my sails for a week. But that's okay. Because I think this is one of the most fascinating subjects of the Bible, or parts of the Bible. It's so fascinating, it has been given different titles throughout the years. It's been called the Hall of Faith, the Heroes of Faith, and the Picture Gallery of the Faith. It's been referred to as the Honour Roll the Saints, the March of the Saints, and the Great Parade of the Saints. Some of call it the Westminster Abbey of Scripture because you can't say enough about this chapter. No matter how many times you study Hebrews 11, there's always more to talk about. And as a result, we're not going to get to it all today; this is just going to scratch the surface. But we're going to look at four introductions to the Hall of Faith, the subject of faith. The first one is that faith is the assurance of things hoped for. And you're going to see all these taken straight from the text, so you can just follow along in your Bibles.

But the first introduction to the subject of faith is that faith is the assurance of things hoped for. Which means that when you have faith, this is what you're doing: you're trusting that God will keep His promises. The promises haven't been fulfilled yet, you haven't seen the completion of them, but you trust that they will be down the road. That's what faith is. And if you look at chapter 11 again, you can see this expression repeated verbatim. When it says, “Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for.” Now if you notice, the verse begins in an unusual way, because it uses the word “now” at the front of it, which ties it into the previous section, where it says in chapter 10:37, it says,

For yet in a very little while, He who is coming will come, and will not delay, but My righteous one shall live by faith.

Now I don't know about your Bibles, but in my Bible that expression is in quotation marks because it's a reference to the book of Habakkuk. Which was written before the Babylonians took over the city of Jerusalem and raised it to the ground because the issue Habakkuk is wrestling with in the book, right before they did that is "why?" Why would God allow that to happen? Why would He let such a tragedy occur? And the answer the Lord gives him is that the just shall live by faith. In other words, God doesn't need to explain himself to you Habakkuk. And the Lord doesn't have to tell you why He does what He does. He just wants you to believe in Him. You just need to trust because verse 38, says, "If you shrink back His soul has no pleasure in you." And that means if you turn your back on God and doubt Him in the midst of a trial, He will reject you; so you don't want to do that. And after saying all this chapter 11 starts off like this: "Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for." In the context, that means faith is the assurance of things hoped for, even when your world is crashing down and everything is in chaos, and Jerusalem is falling apart. Because it's the tool that gets you through that. Your faith is the lifeline that keeps you from plunging into despair.

And just to explain this a little bit, the word "faith" is the Greek word *pistis* which means faith or belief or trust in something. But even more than that it's a word that could be translated *persuasion* because the way it's used here is referring to something that you believe because you're persuaded of it. You trust in it because you've studied it and done your research and done your homework; and you're convinced that it's true. It's very different from the way a lot of people look at the word faith today because when they think of faith, they're referring to something that you don't study at all, you just make it up. So if you believe you can fly, you can fly. And if you believe there are aliens, there are aliens, because that's truth for you. That's not what this word means. This is referring to someone who looks into the things of God first and embraces Him that way. Because you can't see God, can you? You can't reach out and touch Him, but you can open up the Bible and see what it says in the book; and that's what the author is encouraging you to do here, as he goes through the lives of these people. All these people come from the Bible. He's pointing you back to the Word of God, which is what makes this next statement important as well. Because it says "Now faith is the assurance of things." And that's the word that's translated *substance* in one translation or *foundation*. Now, faith is the foundation of things, which means that your faith is the thing that stands when everything else falls. It's the one thing that upholds you when the world comes crashing down, just like Habakkuk was experiencing. When the world goes like this, your faith goes like this. And when the culture goes haywire, your faith is the thing that keeps you from going crazy with them because it makes you stable.

In fact, anytime I see someone who is stable in the Christian life, I know there's one reason for it. And that is because they're walking by faith. That person is trusting in God. That's why they're acting that way. And anytime I see someone who's not because they're anxious and afraid, I know there's only one reason for that. And that's because they're living by doubt. Which brings it to the final part of this, when it mentions the word "hope." "Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for," which shows you what you put your faith in. This is what your assurance is founded upon, and that is hope, or your expectation

of the future. Because your hope doesn't get caught up in the present and the troubles of this world, it looks to something down the road.

As I was studying this, I read one commentator that said that your hope is like a telescope because it enlarges things that are far away. You guys have all looked at a telescope, and you look at there and you see something like a star or a planet in the galaxy, and it makes it look so close. And that's what your hope does with the things of God, because heaven is far away from you now, right? And glory is far away, and your final redemption is far away, and the return of Christ is far away, and the resurrection is far away, and the glorification and transformation and renewal of your body is far away, but your hope is the thing that draws it near and makes it close to you.

And putting all this together, what the author is saying in this one little phrase is that this is what you do in order to be saved now. You have a faith that produces hope and assurance. You trust in God to such a degree that it makes you stable as you look to the future. Even when the world does this, you don't. You stay right here on the Word of God.

I mean, this is quite a thing to say at the beginning of this chapter because it's something you're going to see repeated over and over again in here. And that is that these people in Hebrews 11 never saw the fulfillment of God's promises to them. Men like Moses and David and Samuel, they never saw His word being completed in their lives. It was always a future thing to them, but they kept going anyway because they knew in their heart that God would do what He said He would do. God's faithful. God can be trusted. They knew that. And it gave them the strength to carry on. In fact, if you want to look in verse 13 of this chapter towards the beginning, it says that "All of these died in faith without receiving the promises." And as I was reading that this week, I thought, "Boy, that's not very encouraging is it?" They died without seeing God's word come true in their lifetime. But if you read on it says this, "But having seen the promises, they welcome them from a distance." That's what verse one is saying because even though men like Moses and David and Samuel didn't see how God kept His Word in their lifetime, they weren't discouraged because they knew He would do it someday. And you need to learn how to think the same way they did.

I know some of you are discouraged right now because we're coming to the end of the year. And anytime you come to the end of December, everybody looks back on the year and they do a survey in their minds. And some of you have been depressed over that. Because 2022 has been a bad year for you, and if that's the case, I want to remind you what this is saying. And that is that it doesn't matter ultimately, because your hope is not in 2022, Amen? Your hope is in what comes after that. Your redemption is in the future because God doesn't settle his accounts in 2022, He does it in eternity. So that's what you keep your mind fixed on as you go through life. If you want to an example of this from the Hall of Faith, you can take the life of Abraham, because if anybody had a hard time in this world, it was him. His life was just one disappointment after another, if you look in verse eight, he talks about him this way. And it says, "By faith Abraham, when he was called, obeyed by going out to a place

which he was to receive for an inheritance; and he went out, not knowing where he was going.” And while that verse doesn't go into all the details, the rest of the section says as Abraham went out, the Lord promised to turn him into a great nation, and give him as many descendants as there were stars in the heavens and sand on the seashore. But it's all ironic, because do you know how many descendants Abraham had when he died? Two. You know how many kids God gave him in his lifetime? Isaac, Ishmael. That's it. That's not much of a nation, is it? It's pretty small. And then when his son Isaac came along, you know how many children he had? He had two. He had Jacob and Esau. Then Jacob came along, and he had more kids, but it still wasn't a nation. But Abraham persevered in spite of that, because he trusted in the Lord. I've heard different numbers on this. But it's been said, Abraham was 75 years old when the Lord first called him. And he was 99 years old when he was circumcised, and he was 100 years old, at the time Isaac was born. And you know what he did in between all those years? He waited. He was patient. He didn't tell God to hurry it up, so he can move on with his life. He put his hand on his mouth, and he was silent because he knew God would take care of him. You and I have to do the same thing as well.

And that brings us to another introduction to the subject of faith in this passage. And that is that faith is the conviction of things not seen. You can write these down on your notes, or you can just read them in your Bibles. Because the first one is that faith is the assurance of things hoped for. But secondly, faith is the conviction of things not seen. Which means that our faith is the ability to trust that God will keep His promises with conviction and not with fear. Now he takes us to another level here, but it's our ability to trust Him with boldness and not with trepidation.

And as you move on in this passage, you're going to see that some of these statements are pretty brief, because the author is just introducing the topic of faith to you. And as he does, he doesn't give a long explanation for every point, it's just a flyover. In fact, if you read some of these expressions, and you feel like you don't quite get your mind around, that's okay, because all these things are going to be repeated later on in the chapter. This next phrase is actually so short I just counted up four words in the Greek. But the idea here is confidence because now if you're talking about assurance, the author says, “Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen.” And the word conviction is a Greek word *elegchos*, which means conviction or confidence, or certainty in something. But depending on how it's used, it's another word that's very colorful, because it can mean evidence. The King James Version translates verse one like this. “Now, faith is the substance of things hoped for, and the evidence of things not seen.” And if you think about it, that's an unusual thing to say, because how can your faith be evidence of something unseen? And what does that mean? And what it means is that your faith makes unseen things seem real to you. Does that make sense? Your faith takes objects like heaven and hell, and the resurrection, and it makes them so noticeable to your heart that they look like rocks and trees and flowers. Because you can't see them with the naked eye, but you can see them with the eye of faith. And when he mentions things that are not seen here, I mean, depending on who you talk to, it's been interpreted different ways by the scholars, but, for instance, it's been interpreted to refer to things that are not seen because they're invisible, because they occur in places like heaven and hell and

the supernatural world. Because your faith allows you to observe all of that, and believe it in your heart, that it's real. You can't see heaven, but you know it's there because you have faith. Others have taken it to refer to things that are unseen because God promised them and they haven't occurred yet, like we just talked about. He has sworn these things to us, but we're still waiting for them to occur because your faith enables you to lay hold of that as well. Others have taken it to refer to things that are unseen because God seems to be hiding them from us at the time, because we don't know His will. And the truth is that all that's included in this expression because the idea is that faith gives you the conviction that God is still good to you, even when you don't always know what He's up to. Even when you can understand what He's doing.

Let's be honest, this is what the Christian life is like sometimes. We don't always know what God's up to. Sometimes He hides His plans from us. Sometimes it's revealed in this book, but there's other times when it's not. But we still persevere because we have the conviction that God is a gracious God in the midst of that.

I had someone emailed me this last week, and they asked if they should take a job out of town, or if they should switch careers. They want to know what's God's will in that. And I told him, I don't know. I can't tell you what the will of God is for your life in that department. But I'll tell you what I do know, I know that whichever job you take, God will take care of you, Amen? And whichever path you choose, He will work it for your good. I'm convinced of that. That's the meaning of this word.

And again, I can't say a lot about this, because this is a very short part of the chapter. But tying this into the topic of salvation. I think it goes without saying that you can't be saved without a certain degree of conviction, can you? You can't be converted by hearing the gospel and saying, "I don't know" all the time. "I'm not sure. I don't want to make a commitment to this sort of thing." No, you better make a commitment. Because if you don't, you can't have it. You have to make up your mind when it comes to the person of Christ, or else you'll be lost. You can't be a wishy-washy fair-weather person that's here today and gone tomorrow, you have to be all in. Which is what this chapter is all about as well. I mean, when you read Hebrews 11, you find that these were men of conviction, which is why they were able to conquer kingdoms, and shut the mouths of lions and quench the power of fire and escape the edge of the sword, because they were fearless in the things of God. They failed at times, and they messed up, but they always went back to Him. And that's what we need to learn from their lives.

And for another example of this, you can go back to the life of Abel, the first man in the list. If you want to look back in verse four, or look down in verse four, it says, "By faith, Abel offered to God a better sacrifice than Cain." And what that means is that as Abel brought his sacrifice to the Lord, at the very beginning of history, this is what he did, he had conviction that God would receive it. He knew it in his heart. He couldn't see it with his own two eyes, he believed anyway, and that's what saved him. And Cain didn't do that, which is why the Lord rejected him. Cain was a very wishy-washy person, he just

showed up in church and went through the motions and sat there like a bump on the log. But Abel was different in his devotion to God, and that's why the Lord accepted what he did.

And it brings us to another introduction to this subject this morning. And that is that faith is the means by which the men of old gained approval. A third introduction to the subject of faith is that faith is the means by which the men of old gained approval. Which means that faith is what saved a guy like Abel from his sin. Abel wasn't saved by his works, he wasn't saved by his efforts, he wasn't saved by his deeds; he was saved completely by the grace of God, just like the rest of us. And as you come to this next section, one thing that's going to strike you is that it's more specific than the previous ones. Because it ties this in when it says this in verse two, "For by it (or by faith) the men of old gained approval," and that's referring to the men from the Old Covenant. If you remember, this is the theme of the book of Hebrews. And that is that Christ has come to fulfill the Old Covenant now. He's come to take the place of all the things that were talked about in the Old Testament. So in order to connect that to the topic of faith, the passage says, "For by faith the men of old gained approval." In other words, this is how the people were saved back then. It happened as they believed. Now I don't know if that strikes you is a powerful statement or not because you're a Gentile, but that statement would have shocked the Jews. Because the Jews thought the men of old were not saved that way; they thought it happened by works. They found approval with God by the things that they did under the law. They even had a tradition at the time, which said that Moses stands at the gates of heaven in order to keep out every law-breaking person. Because that's how they looked at salvation, it was about the law and your ability to keep it, and this passage says that's all wrong. From the very beginning, salvation has been about something else.

And when it says here that "By faith, men of old gained approval," this is the first time the author uses the phrase, "by it" or "by faith" in the chapter. And this is what it's known as a preposition of means because it's used here to describe the means through which salvation occurs. He goes through faith. When I go to the Shepherd's conference next year, I plan on going *by* plane. And when I say that, you guys understand the plane is the means by which I'll get there. I'm not walking to the Shepherd's conference. I'm not driving to the Shepherd's conference, some of you have done that, it's a bad idea. It's a long way away. People get really grouchy by the time they get there. I'm not taking a bus, I'm not taking a bike, I'm not taking roller skates, I'll do it through a jet. And it's the same way with this. This passage says their faith was the conduit or the vehicle through which these saints found approval with the Lord. They didn't do it by the commandments. Because some of them lived before the commandments. Think about that. Men like Abel and Enoch and Noah, they were born at a time before the law was written. It's a wild thing to consider. They didn't do it through the temple either. Because many of these people live before the temple. Men like Abraham, and Isaac and Jacob did that. They didn't do it through the official Israel's priesthood. A lot of them were around before that, because their salvation was based on something else. I mention this because this is not the typical way we look at the Old Testament, is it? I mean it's not the way I would normally see it before. Some of us grew up being told that the Old Testament was about the law, and the New Testament was about faith. Anybody else grew up hearing that? When I was in Sunday school, they told us the Old Testament was about going to

God through works. The New Testament was about mercy, because they earned it while we don't. And this one little verse destroys that whole train of thought. It tells us that salvation has been about mercy from the very beginning. This started from the very first few verses in the Bible.

I mean, this chapter was not given to you friends, in order to tell you that the men from the Old Testament were better than you. It's just the opposite. And it's not given to say that they were up here while you're down here. In fact, later on, if you want to look in Hebrews 12:1 it actually tells you this. It says, "Therefore, since we have so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every encumbrance." And that's a helpful verse because this is the way the Hall of Faith comes to an end. And this is the great finale because the author tells you that all these people served as a cloud of witnesses for you. And as we will see when we get to this, that doesn't mean that they're looking down from heaven, witnessing everything that you do, it means that they act as witnesses for the Lord, and they're spurring you on through their example. Because they're not placed in here to say, "Wow, look at Enoch. He's so holy, there's no way I could ever do what he did." They aren't put in this chapter to tell you, "Man, look at Sarah, she's so awesome. I wish I could act like her, but I can't." No, the purpose of the chapter is to show you you can do exactly what Sarah did if you walk by faith as well.

And I've been giving you examples of several people that this relates to, but for another helpful one here, you can look at the life of Rahab the harlot. Because if there's anybody who had to come to God through faith, it was her because she was a prostitute. So there's no way she could come to God by works. All she had was faith. And so that's what she did. And if you look over at verse 30 of chapter 11, it says this about Rahab. It says, "By faith the walls of Jericho fell down after they had been encircled for seven days, and by faith Rahab, the harlot did not perish along with those who were disobedient, after she had welcomed the spies in peace." And when it says that Rahab did not perish here that means she didn't perish physically and spiritually, because even though everyone else in Jericho went to hell, Rahab and her family were spared because she protected the spies. Sounds like a simple thing to do, but it wasn't because Jericho was a small city at the time. You can go there now and you can see the size of the old city and you can walk around in about just a few minutes. There were one to 2 million Jews, and the idea was, there were so many of them that they couldn't circle it all in one circle. There probably would have been layers of circles of them around this city, so she took a major risk in acting this way. She could have easily been found out, but she did it anyway because she knew God, the God of Israel was true and she wanted to identify with His people. Later on the Gospel of Matthew says Rahab would eventually proselytize over this and become Jewish, and ended up being the great great grandmother of David, can you believe that? God put a former prostitute in the line of the Messiah. Doesn't that blow you away? Because that's how deep His grace really goes. He would save a person like that solely on the basis of faith. It's incredible.

And it brings you to a final introduction to this subject of faith in this chapter. And just to review these other ones, the first one is that faith is the assurance of things hoped for. Secondly, it's the conviction of things not seen. And then thirdly, by faith the men of old gained approval, which is really the crux of

this whole section. And that is that whether you come from the Old Testament or the New, or whether you're a Jew or Gentile, church or Israel, we're all the same. Because we come to God the same way. I know that's something I'm repeating over and over again this morning, but I can't emphasize this enough, because you hear some people say today that they don't believe this anymore, because they don't want to have anything to do with Israel. You hear some pastors nowadays say the Old Testament has nothing to do with the New. Oh, really? It has everything to do with it because this passage makes it very clear that God has put you into the same story Israel started. When you became a Christian, He dropped you into the same stream of history, and we have to remember that. There's a connection here, between the church and Israel, you can't sever. They are different. They're different phases of the kingdom of God, but there is a direct correlation, and we're gonna say more about this later. But it brings you to one more introduction to the subject of faith. And that is that by faith, we understand that the world was prepared by God.

A fourth introduction to the subject of faith in the chapter is that by faith, we understand that the world was prepared by God, which shows you that by faith, we understand that God made all of this out of nothing but His own power. And if you notice in your Bibles, verse three starts off another paragraph. And it does the same thing in Greek as well, because in a sense, this is where the Hall of Faith actually begins. Verses one through two serve as an introduction to it, but verse three gives you the first direct reference to the Old Testament or to an Old Testament event. When it says this, "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 as you read that, you can tell that the author is, what the author is doing, because he's taking his mind back as far as it can go into the Old Testament, in order to remind you that this is where your faith has to start. It starts at creation. The very first doctrine in the Bible. And when it mentions the worlds here, that's a Greek word, *ion*, which could be translated ages or epics. Some of your Bibles even have the word universe in here, because it basically means everything. Whether it be the worlds or the ages of the universe, by faith, we understand it was all created by God and not by mere natural causes.

Most scientists today have determined that the universe is something like 93 billion light years in diameter, and it contains 200 billion trillion stars. Which means that there are more stars in the galaxy than there is sand on the seashore. And the people at this time didn't understand all that. They didn't have the technology to determine it in the first century, so they just summed it up with the word *ion*. Because it doesn't take a genius to look at the ions and figure out something made it and you don't have to have a PhD in microbiology from Harvard University to stare at the Gallic Sea, and realize it didn't just happen. There's more to it than that. And that's what the author's referring to here when he said God created all of this with His word. In Genesis one, God said, "'Let there be light' and there was light. He said, 'Let us make man' and there was man." Evolution didn't do that, God did it. The Big Bang wasn't responsible for the world you see around you; God is the one who takes credit, because it happened through His voice.

If you want to be real specific about this, scientists have determined that there are five things that are needed in order to create life in this planet, and they're all mentioned in Genesis chapter one. There's time, in the beginning; force, that's God; energy, that's the term created; space, that is the heavens; and matter, that's the earth. "In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth," that has time, force, energy, space, and matter. And it's all summed up in the first verse of the Bible. And the reason the author uses it here is to point out the fact that the creation of the world is so obvious that if you don't believe it, when will you start to believe in God? And the truth of Genesis one, verse one is so clear that if you don't put your faith in it, when will you begin to have faith in the Bible? Will you do it in Genesis two? Will you do it in Genesis three? Will you do it in Genesis four, or five or six or seven? Will you trust Him in the book of Exodus? Will you do it in the New Testament? Will you believe what He says about Christ? It's a good question. And I would suggest you put your faith in the Bible in the very beginning, because you have every reason to.

And verse three goes on to say this in its entirety. It says, "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 the principle here is that at creation, this is what God did. He took that which was not seen, and He made it seen. He took that which was invisible, and He made it visible, because He brought it out into the open with nothing but His free will. He didn't use the laws of science when He did that. He didn't need them. He didn't use all the principles of chemistry and physics. He just spoke and it was there. Which ties into the topic of faith because when you have faith, you believe God is able to do that, don't you? And when you trust in Him, you understand He's able to make all of this without that, because He's bigger.

And I just can't get away from this subject without saying a few more words about it. Because when you look at the topic of creation in Scripture, you quickly understand how trustworthy the Bible is. Because yes, it defies the laws of science, because creation was a miracle. But it explains it in a way that's very reasonable, and it makes a lot of sense. What I mean is the early church had an expression in Latin, which went like this, it said, *ex nihilo nihil fit*. And that means out of nothing, nothing comes, which explains the very basic law of science. And that is, you can't get something from nothing. And you can't get all of this when you start with zero. But the sad reality is that that's exactly what a lot of modern scientists are saying about the beginning of the world. They try to claim that all of this came from nothing or from nothing logical. The Bible doesn't ask you to buy into that. It gives you a very sensible explanation for creation. In fact, when you ask some modern scientists, how the universe began, they say it began with the Big Bang. You ask them, "Well, how did the Big Bang begin?" They say with an explosion. That explains a lot. And you ask them, "Where did the explosion come from?" And they say from energy? And "where did the energy come from?" It came from light. And "where did the light come from?" It came from hydrogen. And "where did the hydrogen come from?" It came from more hydrogen. And "where did that hydrogen come from?" It came from more hydrogen and on and on and on and on to infinity. Which doesn't answer the question. It's like the Hindu idea that says that the world sits on top of a giant elephant. And when you ask them what's under the elephant, they say a turtle. And when you ask them, what's under the turtle, they say another turtle. And what's under that

turtle? It's another one and another one and another one, which is insane. And the good news is that the Bible doesn't tell you to trust in that sort of thing. It doesn't speak in riddles. It says something very simple instead, and that is that by faith, we understand that the worlds were prepared by the word of God, not by an elephant, not by a turtle, not by some random explosion of hydrogen. That's how the hall of faith begins. This is how it starts out because before it talks about all the people in here, it talks about the Lord. And it tells you that He is the One you should put your faith in ultimately, because He's worthy of it, because He created the universe, which means He created you and me. So you have no reason to be afraid. And it means He is sovereign over all of this world and what happens to us, because there's nothing that's outside of His control.

As I told you last time, next week, or not next week, but in the new year, when we're back in the book of Hebrews, we're going to slow down quite a bit, because I want to take some time in order to look at the lives of each of these people in detail. And so the way it's going to work is that when we dive into the book, we're going to spend one week on the lives of each of these saints, like Abel. And we're going to learn how he offered a better sacrifice than Cain, which is fascinating because if you think about it, it means that Cain and Abel made sacrifices, and who taught them to do that? They brought an offering to the Lord. And where did they learn all that? Well, I'll spend a week trying to explain that to you.

And then after that, we'll spend a sermon on Enoch as well and learn how by faith Enoch did not see death, which makes you also makes you wonder, what is that talking about? How can a man not see death? Before Enoch, everyone died. When he came along, he broke the cycle, why? And we'll look at that together. And then we'll look at Noah, and Abraham, and Sarah, and Isaac, and Jacob, and so forth, and so on. So please make plans to join us for that. I think you'll really enjoy it.

But for this week, let me close with this. It's been said the Christian religion has never had a greater enemy than the French philosopher Voltaire. In the 1700s, he made the shocking claim that a century from then, there would not be a Bible found anywhere in the world, except in a museum because it's so stupid. Not a very complimentary thing to say. He said no one would read it because what it says about God is so dumb. But the irony about the story is that towards the end of his life, as Voltaire was dying, he changed his tune. Because he said, I would give half my wealth for another six months to live, but even then, it won't do me any good because I'm going to hell. Oh God, what a wretched man I am. But the reason he said that is because that's how a person dies without faith. That's how a person goes into eternity without trusting in God, they do it in misery. They have nothing to look forward to. And the point of this whole chapter is that you don't have to do this today. You can die with hope this morning if you put your trust in the Lord Jesus Christ, will you do that today? You have every reason to and let me pray that you would, and that God would bless us for what we studied this morning.

Heavenly Father, Lord, we thank you for putting Hebrews chapter 11 in our Bibles. We all struggle with faith. In fact, one of our greatest prayers oftentimes is Lord give us more faith because we're so anxious and afraid of the things that happen. Life can be really unstable, and this world is a very wicked place.

And yet, as we look at the lives of all these people You've revealed in here, they lived in a wicked world. They lived in crazy times, and yet they stood on the Word of God. And Father, we thank You for this reminder that we can do the same thing as well.

I do pray for my brothers and sisters who are in here. I know many of them are very encouraged in their faith, but I know many of them are not. This has been a rough year, and there's been physical challenges and job challenges and home challenges and their faith has been shaken. Lord, would you give them grace to know that you're a God who does fulfill His promises in the midst of that, and their hope is in the things that are to come? We want to remember this Lord with all our hearts.

And for those who are here this morning without Christ, Lord I pray you would show them that salvation is available through faith. They don't have to clean their life up, like Rahab the harlot they can come to you with all their sins and have them forgiven if they repent, and trust in Your mercies. Would that lesson, be reminded in their souls today.

And as we take communion, Lord, this is a wonderful time to do that. We do this in faith of what Christ has done in his blessing in our lives. We pray this in Jesus' name for His glory. Amen.