

Sermon: 'Now these 3 remain: Faith'

Hebrews 11

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Aim: **Grow in faith by learning to trust God more.**

- [] brief video guy about recording

Hook

- Q: Did anyone check the weather forecast last night – and checked it again this morning? (Yes.) Why? Because we know the weather in this country changes. Quickly. Without warning. We've learned it's not fully predictable, even with the best forecasts.

Then without explaining anything:

- Q: Did anyone check their seat today before they sat down? Checking that it wouldn't fall apart?
- Q: Before getting up out of bed and taking your first steps today, did anyone check that Gravity was working as normal?

pause

Reading: Hebrews 11

Maggie is going to read from God's word for us. As always, when we come to Holy Scripture, there are some helpful questions to keep in mind:

- what's surprising?
- is there any repeated idea?
- in the action, what is it that people are doing, and what is it that God is doing?

She's reading from a chapter that you'll instantly see is most relevant. Hebrews ch.11 {reading}

Common themes from the passage

So did anyone spot a repeated idea? Of course! Faith.

- "It was by faith that X did Y"
- confidence
- both about what God is doing or saying, as well as what people do or say
- but there's an order, isn't there? God speaks or acts first, and then the person responds.
- (deeper) each one is a story, about the real God and real people. The stories were recorded and passed down the generations, with the names of the people involved.
- each time there are decisions involved. Faith isn't about some automatic response like a robot. They weren't forced to do what they did. They chose to.
- what sort of people? Well, there we *don't* have common factors. Most, naturally for the OT, are Jews. *But not all*. Some are or become national leaders (Moses), others are ordinary (Isaac), others deliberately described as being without any particular gifts (Gideon), and some looked down (Rahab the prostitute). There are Men (Barak) and women (Deborah). Young people (David), old (Abraham and Sarah).
- what sorts of things they do? All sorts. The passage itself tells us, doesn't it? v33-35: "33 ... who through faith conquered kingdoms, administered justice, and gained what was promised; who shut the mouths of lions, 34 quenched the fury of the flames, and escaped the edge of the sword; whose weakness was turned to strength; and who became powerful in battle and routed foreign armies. 35 Women received back their dead, raised to life again. There were others who were tortured, refusing to be released so that they might gain an even better resurrection."

What is Faith?

So, clearly faith is something about real people deciding to respond to the living God.

And that's quite a helpful conclusion to get to. **Q: But we can we do better than that?** Oooh, yes.

Let me go back to my slightly silly questions at the beginning.

- Yes, we check the weather forecast here, because we can't rely on the weather being the same yesterday as today.
- No, we didn't check our chairs before we sat down. Chairs almost never collapse, and so we've learned not to both checking them. (But of course, occasionally they do. No chair will last for ever.)
- No, we didn't check whether gravity had changed. We've never experienced anything else, so we never need to. But if you were an astronaut up in space station, you must check whether you're in a place with no gravity, or low gravity, or normal gravity. You can't just see it.

Simply put: **Faith is Trust in a person or organisation** that it will do what it says it will do.

Or, **Faith is Confidence in a person or organisation** that they will do what they say they'll do.

Trust

So let's think a little more about Trust.

Q: How do we trust someone?

It takes time. When we first meet someone or hear about an organisation, we probably don't immediately embrace them.

Illustration: For example: At the church we get unsolicited offers and requests most weeks. Liz or I have to look at each, and normally we're putting them in the bin. For even if they are brilliant things, if we've not heard of them already, then we low trust in them. And it's

probably not worth investing our time to work out if we can have a lot of trust in them.

It's the same for all of us, isn't it? **Illustration:** We get unsolicited emails all the time, and so email has evolved to have spam boxes, to hide messages from people we don't know. Because to us they are low-trust.

Trust is only built up over time.

Illustration: me being vetted for 4 months so I could be trusted by HMG to work on TSC projects.

Sometimes it's trust in ourself that we need to build up. Trust that I can speak in public without drying up. Trust that I can be left alone with my new baby and not accidentally kill them.

But if someone I already know and trust tells me that a new organisation or a person is good, then I will approach them very differently. Their trust can be passed on ...

Illustration: ... then working on multi-national TS sharing systems.

We all trust ... the question is in what/who?

I want to take a slight side-track for a minute.

Many in our society think Faith is a different thing. Unfortunately a number of high profile atheists including Richard Dawkins and David Dennett, have twisted the meaning of the word. They've done a good job of convincing the general public that faith is believing *where there is no evidence*. They suggest religions and religious faith is all about blindly believing in fantasies. They want us to look to Science instead. To trust the science. Which, we no know, simply means to have faith in science. They set it up as a "faith vs science".¹

¹drawing on John Lennox

But it's not like that. Atheists have just as much faith as anyone else. Perhaps more so, in their faith that there is no God, which of course they cannot prove. Scientists have just as much faith as anyone else: they trust the scientific method, and certain theories.

But this is a false dichotomy, a false argument. They are not opposing. I trust God, and I trust the scientific method ... when used properly. But where I can trust God all the time, the scientific consensus at any time can be wrong. Because it moves forward idea by idea, and some wrong ideas are settled on before they are later discarded. For example, for a while there was a scientific field of "Craniometry", where you would take measurements of someone's skull, to understand their mental abilities. This was used to underpin some of the overt racism in Europe and America in the C19 and C20. Sounds repugnant now. But for a while people could say, "that's where the science leads us".

The question is not *whether* we have faith.

The question is *who* or *what* we have faith in.

That's a good thing to remember as we're talking with people: "We all have faith in something. What do you put your faith in?"

Trusting God

So what does this mean when it comes to God?

Trust/Faith is commended

This chapter in Hebrews is sometimes called not the Bible's "Hall of Fame" but the "Hall of Faith". v2: "This is what the ancients were commended for." God is giving them a big thumbs-up, and giving them to us as examples to follow.

So spend time in the stories of those who are commended. I've recently mentioned some biographies to read or listen to or watch. Here's another one (Sizzling Faith) ... ???

Trust/Faith only grows if we work on it

v1: "Now faith is confidence in what we hope for and assurance about what we do not see." Those people had confidence, they trusted. They didn't have a security clearance certificate as proof. They didn't have him standing in front of them. But they did have confidence in Him. They had built up trust that when God said something he meant it. They could take Him at his word, whether they could see Him or not.

Gideon is mentioned in this Hall of Faith. But if you read his story (in Judges ch.6) you'll see he started with only doubts. But over time after small steps of trust, he grew to trust in larger things.

Q: What stage of trust are you at? Are you like a baby, not taking any steps at all? Or the wobbly small steps of a toddler? The more confident walk of a 5-year old? Or the fast long strides of an athlete?

A small step might be when chatting with a colleague somehow saying that you're a Christian. When they say: "Did you have a good weekend?" "Yes; I was with my church family on Sunday morning, and it was so encouraging. I felt at peace despite being with lots of others."

A bigger step might be to make a comment from God's perspective about a situation at work even if you feel it won't be popular. What matters is not winning our colleague's approval, but God's. (And often, actually, people respond better than we might imagine. We are made in God's image, and at a deep level we recognise his good design for life.)

A bigger step might be to take God at His Word, and give money to church and charity as he directs. That's trusting that even with giving away 10%, God's goodness means He will more than provide the difference.

A bigger step still might be to hear God saying to move house, or change job, or give away much more still.

In each case we're putting more on the line with God. We're, to put it crudely, taking more of a risk on God.

Testing calls from God

Some of these are, frankly, no-brainers. We don't need a special guidance whether to do it or not. It's not for some people or others. We pray for right opportunities or openings to speak about our faith, and then we take them. We don't ram it down people's throats all the time. But surveys show that people are more interested in our experiences, the Christian faith, and particularly in Jesus, than we imagine.

In the same way, God calls all believers to tithe: we don't any more invitation or permission. (I think the one exception might be if we're in debt ... that needs more careful handling.)

On the big things, though, it's OK to check and test things. God does not call everyone to leave their jobs. Most of us are called to be faithful where we already live and work. In His graciousness God rarely has deadlines, and will normally help confirm a bigger call. He can do this through talking it over with other mature Christians. He can do it when we read the Bible, or at other times we open ourselves up to His influence.

Testimony: me being called to become a church pastor/minister. ... walking round the edge of the Boat ...?

v1: "Now faith is confidence in what we hope for and assurance about what we do not see." It is putting more on the line with God.

Faith/Trust is not like a currency

We're used to hearing about "the economy" on the news, and its ups and downs. We learn very quickly that when we spend our

money we have less of it. That's the way the "world's economy" works. But in "God's economy" things work differently. (Thank God, literally.)

With the things he designed, if you 'spend' something you don't land up with less:

- if you 'give love' you still have love to give
- if you trust Him to provide and 'give away money', you won't have less to live on
- if you 'trust God' you don't use up your trust, but in fact you find it grows.

So if you want to trust God a lot, to have much faith, then you have to step out in trust in smaller ways first.

Not yet trusting at all?

But what if you know you've yet to start your journey of faith with God? That you know about Jesus, but you don't yet trust him? If that's you, then I have an invitation. Spend some time checking out Jesus: what people at the time recorded him saying and doing. Test him out. See if what he said rings true. See if what he did were the sorts of things you'd want a god to do. A great way to do this is CX ...

The Best is yet to come

We'll close with the last couple of verses.

v39: "These were all commended for their faith, yet none of them received what had been promised,"

Remember: all of these mentioned are from the Old Testament times.

v40: "since God had planned something better for us so that only together with us would they be made perfect."

They hadn't yet seen the "something better" God planned for us. We are fortunate to know what that "something better" is. Who it

is: Jesus. They trusted without seeing Jesus. How much easier for us to trust, knowing what great a salvation Jesus worked, and at what cost.

But trust they did. And the promise is that they will be joined with us, and then we will all be made perfect in faith. When? When Jesus returns in all glory. And then will all the hidden acts of faith will be seen. How great the rejoicing will be with those who will finally receive their rewards.

Conclusion & Prayer

Prayer: based on "For we live by faith, not by sight." – 2 Corinthians

5:7 ...

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Service plan notes

Welcome

- Online, buliding
- aware that (Women's) World Cup Final starting as the service finishes. Q: Do we have Faith in them?

Something Different: Testimonies?

or Testimony from Martin Graham, from *Sizzling Faith*. Way too many to choose from, but picked an early one (mid-1990s?) from pp.50-60.

Church Family News

- next prayer meeting: **tonight** 7pm. Focus: children, youth, education
- ??? new Contact QR
- ??? nex CX QR
- online ... get in touch and say 'hello'

After

- [] take photos: Becky P, Stephani, Aneska, Tola, Stephen/Grace, Angie, Una, Helen, Akin, Leanne, Wesley, Amy, Kirsty, Keith M, Ndaga, Shergold, Taylors, Nancy

Word count: 2465