

Text: Heb. 11:1-3, 6  
Title: "What faith is"  
Time: 2/28/2016 am  
Place: NBBC

Intro - There are certain foods that are designed to give us a special kind of power. When my sister and niece were sick last week, Kate asked that I run to the store and pick up some Gatorade because her doctor said she needed some electrolytes in her diet to recover from the sickness she was experiencing. An electrolyte is a water-soluble substance that can carry a charge. "Electrolytes are important because they are what your cells (especially nerve, heart, muscle) use to maintain voltages across their cell membranes and to carry electrical impulses (nerve impulses, muscle contractions) across themselves and to other cells" [<http://health.howstuffworks.com/wellness/diet-fitness/information/question565.htm>; accessed 2/26/2016]. So Kate and Ace needed some electrolytes to have the power to simply function normally again.

Faith is a special kind of power for functioning normally as a believer. In the last verse of chapter 10, we noticed two categories of people. We said that each of us belongs in one of these two categories. We are either of those who draw back unto perdition, or of those who believe to the preservation of the soul. The first category has no faith; the second category lives with faith. Living with faith preserves our souls as believers.

Now after stating that truth, our author is determined to go on to describe what faith is (v. 1), and in doing so he tells us that faith is a power in our lives that makes certain things possible that would otherwise not be possible (v. 6). We all know that faith is important, but do we know what it is, and do we know what is possible with it and impossible without it?

One simple and accurate definition of faith I learned from a children's song when I was very young is this: "Faith is just believing what God says He will do. He will never fail us. His promises are true." That is certainly the sum of it. We are of those who believe unto the preservation of the soul, we have saving faith, when we simply believe that God will save us from our sin on the basis of Christ's death on the cross in our place and His resurrection from the grave. Have you that faith this morning?

If you do, our author wants you and I to come to terms with what it is that the power of faith makes possible in our lives, which would otherwise be impossible. I want us to note three things this morning.

I. Faith is the power to live for things that otherwise cannot be lived for (vv. 1-2).

Ill: We have Pastor Dan Greenfield with us here this morning. He flew from his home in Northeastern Ohio last Thursday evening to speak to a group of pastors on Friday morning about the importance of the American Council of Christian Churches and some issues related to the purity of the church. He has stayed with us away from his family and church in order to minister to us today. What makes a man like that do things like that? In a word, faith. More specifically, faith in what our passage calls things hoped for and things not seen.

Appl: The unseen things hoped for are mentioned by our author in verse 1 of the previous chapter ("the good things to come"). The Bible speaks of good things that are not here yet. We hope for those things, but right now they lack concrete substance and we cannot see them.

Ill: We have all heard the adage that a bird in the hand is better than two in the bush. What makes the bird in the hand better? Well, it is concrete – I know I have it because I can feel it

in my hand, and it is visible – I know that I have it because I can see it.

Appl: It turns out that living the Christian life is very much like letting go of the bird in our hand because God has promised to give us the two in the bush. We are called to give up what has substance and visibility to us now in this world, to live for those things that are only promised to us in the next.

But what happens when a man or woman does that? What happens when a man like Dan comes here because he has faith in good things to come? What happens when a man like Merrick plows our parking lot with a sore foot without getting paid to do so because he has faith in good things to come? What happens when Gretchen shares Christ with her sister in spite of her fears because she has faith in good things to come? What happens when Cera supports our family conference meetings in spite of her terrible illness because she has faith in good things to come? What happens is those good things to come begin to take on substance and form that we can see. Their faith is the substance of things hoped for and the evidence of things not seen. I know good things to come are coming because of the faithful lives of those who believe that.

So the question for us this morning is “Do I have that faith? Is my faith providing substance of things hoped for to someone else?” “Is my faith making the things unseen more evident to those who need to know that they are real?” This chapter tells us how the faithful who have gone before us accomplished that task (v. 2). And it also says that their work is not completed until we have had our turn to live like that (v. 40). Our day needs believers whose faith gives them power to live for things they otherwise could not live for. Is your faith empowering you to do so? Faith is the power to live for things we would not otherwise live for.

II. Faith is the power to understand things that otherwise cannot be understood (v. 3).

III: This verse certainly tells us that we must be creationists and not evolutionists, does it not? Dr. Robert Jastrow was a Columbia University PhD in theoretical physics. He began working for NASA when that organization was founded, and he served as the first chairman of its Lunar Exploration committee. He was the Chief of the Theoretical Division at NASA and then the founding director of the Goddard Institute for Space Studies. He taught Geophysics and Earth Sciences at Columbia University and Dartmouth University. In 1978 Dr. Jastrow wrote a book called *God and the Astronomers*, in which he said the following: "At this moment it seems as though science will never be able to raise the curtain on the mystery of creation. For the scientist who has lived by his faith in the power of reason, the story ends like a bad dream. He has scaled the mountains of ignorance; he is about to conquer the highest peak; as he pulls himself over the final rock, he is greeted by a band of theologians who have been sitting there for centuries."

Appl: Jastrow says that when it comes to creation, theologians have understood for centuries what scientists like himself have only lately figured out. God tells us that the things that are seen were not made of things that appear. Since 1978 scientists who believe in evolution have been confounded by the complexity of life at the cellular level and many other indications from nature that evolution is wrong, things that Darwin never imagined. What is seen did not come from other physical things. They were spoken into existence by God *ex nihilo* (out of nothing). These things can only be understood by faith; not faith in reason and the religious presuppositions of science, but faith in reason and the truth of the Word of God.

Appl2: But the understanding we can have through the power of our faith goes beyond winning the evolution vs. creation debate. Through faith we understand the power of the Word

of God. The Word of God that we read about here, which spoke the worlds into existence, was spoken by God's Son (Heb. 1:2, "by Whom He made the worlds"). It is His Word that upholds all things by His power (1:3). And it is He who gave us the truth of the Old and New Testaments that we have open in our laps as the Word of God (1:1-2a). Through faith we understand the power of the Word of God. When God does a miracle, it is through the power of His Word. Without that faith, we conclude that His Word is irrelevant nonsense and the preaching of it sheer foolishness. With that faith, we understand that we must have our Bibles opened daily and that we must count it a great privilege and blessing to be under the preaching and teaching of the Word of God. Faith is the power to understand some things about the Word of God that we would not otherwise understand.

III. Faith is the power to please God in a way that otherwise He cannot be pleased (v. 6).

III: Who here does not like to be believed when he says something? It is election season, and one of the most severe criticisms that has been hurled back and forth between candidates is that so-and-so is a liar. No one likes to be called a liar, so we can understand how it is that faith pleases God. When He speaks, He deserves to be believed. This pleases Him. So faith is the power to please God in a way that otherwise He cannot be pleased, and I want us to think about three things this power of faith will cause us to do in order to please God.

1. Our faith should make it our goal to please God rather than self (v. 6a, "But without faith it is impossible to please Him"). Christ pleased God (John 8:29, "And he that sent me is with me: the Father hath not left me alone; for I do always those things that please him"). For the follower of Christ, this must be now our goal, to please Him. Do you have the kind of faith that has set before you the goal this morning to please God? Before you make a decision today, will you ask yourself,

“What pleases God?” Or will it only be “What pleases me?” Faith will ask the first question, not the second.

2. Our faith should make it our goal to come to God as He is and as He requires (v. 6b, “for he that cometh to God must believe that He is”). Coming to God as He is is the opposite of making a god as I want Him to be. The idea of *coming to God* in Hebrews includes coming to Him for salvation (Heb. 7:25, “Wherefore he is able also to save them to the uttermost that come unto God by him, seeing he ever liveth to make intercession for them”), and coming to Him for prayer (Heb. 4:16, “Let us therefore come boldly unto the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need”), and coming to Him for worship (Heb. 10:22-25). Do we have faith to come to Him for salvation to the uttermost? Do we have faith to come to Him in faithful prayer? Do we have faith to come to Him in assembled congregational worship?

3. Our faith should convince us that seeking to please Him will be worth it all (v. 6c, “and that He is a rewarder of them that diligently seek Him”). It takes diligence to please the Lord, and it takes finding Him and His power for the task to please the Lord. It also takes the understanding that there will be a reward. It will be worth it all.

Conclusion: Joseph Hart was born in 1712 and died in 1768. In his younger days, he heard a sermon preached by John Wesley on Romans 8:32, “He who spared not His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all, how shall He not with Him also freely give us all things?” Upon hearing that sermon, Hart wrote a book titled: *The Unreasonableness of Religion, Being Remarks and Animadversions [i.e. Criticisms] on the Rev. John Wesley’s Sermon on Romans 8:32*. He had no faith. He could not live for things hoped for and unseen. He could not understand the power of God’s Word. And He could not please God. In 1757, Hart became a believer and literally changed his tune, authoring scores of hymns before his death, one of which was

*"Come, Ye Sinners, Poor and Needy."* Perhaps few lines describe more powerfully the nature of what faith is – what it means to believe to the preservation of our souls:

*"Come, ye sinners, poor and needy,  
Weak and wounded, sick and sore;  
Jesus ready stands to save you,  
Full of pity, love and power.*

*"Come, ye thirsty, come, and welcome,  
God's free bounty glorify;  
True belief and true repentance,  
Every grace that brings you nigh.*

*"Come, ye weary, heavy laden,  
Lost and ruined by the fall;  
If you tarry till you're better,  
You will never come at all.*

*"View Him prostrate in the garden;  
On the ground your Maker lies.  
On the bloody tree behold Him;  
Sinner, will this not suffice?*

*"Lo! th'incarnate God ascended,  
Pleads the merit of His blood:  
Venture on Him, venture wholly,  
Let no other trust intrude.*

*"Let not conscience make you linger,  
Not of fitness fondly dream;  
All the fitness He requireth  
Is to feel your need of Him.*

*"I will arise and go to Jesus,  
He will embrace me in His arms;  
In the arms of my dear Savior,*

O there are ten thousand charms.”

That is what faith is.

“A man came – I think it was actually in Philadelphia – on one occasion to the great George Whitefield and asked if he might print his sermons. Whitefield gave this reply; he said, ‘Well, I have no inherent objection, if you like, but you will never be able to put on the printed page the lightning and the thunder.’ That is the distinction – the sermon, and the ‘lightning and the thunder.’ To Whitefield this was of very great importance, and it should be of very great importance to all preachers, as I hope to show. You can put the sermon into print, but not the lightning and the thunder. That comes into the act of preaching and cannot be conveyed by cold print. Indeed it almost baffles the descriptive powers of the best reporters.”

– David Martin Lloyd-Jones,

*Preachers and Preaching*