

“FAITH IN THE MIDST OF CORRUPTION”  
Hebrews 11:1-6, 13-16; Colossians 1:9-14; I Kings 18:1-6  
November 23-24, 2019

“A blind girl, one day, was caught in a fire on the tenth floor of a building. She could make her way to a window, but she couldn’t see anything. She felt the heat and smelled the smoke of the fire. Then she heard a fireman yell, ‘Jump! Jump!’

“She said, ‘I’m scared to jump. I can’t see!’

“The fireman said, ‘If you don’t jump, you’re going to die. Take the risk, and jump.’

“It’s bad enough to jump from ten stories high, but to jump when you can’t see where you’re jumping – that’s terror. In the midst of the chaos and confusion, she heard another voice, ‘Darling, jump, I’ve got you.’ She smiled and said, ‘Okay, Daddy, I’ll jump.’

“Jesus Christ is inviting us to jump into His arms. He knows we’re nervous, but just jump. He knows you’re scared, but just jump. Remember, we’re talking about your Daddy. We’re talking about Somebody you know. You’ve seen what He can do.”<sup>1</sup> Faith demands action, and when we have faith in the One we trust, Jesus can ask us to do anything, and all we have to do is to say, “Ok, Jesus, I’ll do it!” DON’T WORRY, JUST JUMP! Be ready to hear God’s voice and do what He asks you to do

Today we’re looking at hanging onto our faith in those times when it is very tempting to give up that faith and blend in with everyone else around us. It is becoming more and more UNPOPULAR to have and hold onto Christian beliefs and biblical standards, because our world is pushing us to keep our faith silent, to just conform with everything that is going on around us, and to even give up on our Christian beliefs. We’re told that our Christian faith is worthless in our world today, that biblical standards are no longer relevant to our society. But I say, Christian belief and biblical standards are needed even MORE today than any time in the last 100 years. The Bible is more relevant to our society today than it ever has been. The need for us to hang tough with our faith is ever so important.

So what is so important to hanging onto our faith? FAITH ENABLES US TO PLEASE GOD.

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<sup>1</sup> (Tony Evans, *Tony Evans’ Book of Illustrations*, [Chicago, IL: Moody Publications, 2009] pg. 97, #276)

And we see that in our New Testament lesson of Hebrews 11(1-6). This chapter is often called the “rollcall of the faithful,” listing up those of biblical history who trusted in the Lord our God and remained faithful even in the midst of struggle, trial, hardship, and corruption.

The chapter starts out with a marvelous definition of faith. The New American Standard Bible says it like this, “*Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen*” (11:1). That means we are so certain that what God has promised us is going to take place that we do everything possible to make it happen and see it through. We never give up believing that promise. It is living our lives convinced that what we do not yet see of God’s promise will in fact come to happen, but knowing that it will be in God’s time and in God’s way. We many not know what the **OUTCOME** **might be**, but we live with that firm belief that what God said will indeed take place. We may be scared because we cannot yet see it, but when we put out trust in the One who has told it to us, we step up to live as though it could take place even today.

You see, hoping in something we already have is not hope. It’s not faith, either. Faith is being convinced beyond all doubt that it will occur, but it hasn’t as of yet. And in verse 2 of Hebrews 11 we see that “*it was by their faith that people of ancient times won God’s approval.*” When we trust the Lord God so much that we have faith in His Word and become convinced that that Word is right and good and true, having hope in the accomplishment of that Word is faith. Our faith brings **GOD’S** approval to us as we trust in Him with all our heart, soul, mind and strength. God delights in us as we make up our minds to become completely faithful to His Word. And we see a whole list of those who received a promise by God, and trusted in that promise, even though it did not happen in their lifetime. They still trusted that God was able to do what He promised, and that pleased God and brought His approval.

So the writer of Hebrews starts us out on this list of the faithful by stating the very obvious truth, “*It is by faith that we understand that the universe was created by God’s Word, so that what can be seen was made out of what cannot be seen*” (11:3). Faith starts right out at the beginning of creation. And as we look around us, we can give thanks to God for all that He has made for us. Our **faith relies upon**

**PAST** experiences when God's faithfulness has touched our lives with the fulfillment of His promises to us. As we see the greatness of our God, and experience His love and care for us, we begin to put our faith in Him. As we have more and more times when God fulfills His promises to us, it becomes easier, if not even natural, for us to completely trust in our Lord God because we come to understand that He is good to His Word and faithful to His promises.

And the writer of Hebrews gives us a fantastic statement in verse 6, "*No one can please God without faith, for whoever comes to God must have faith that God exists and rewards those who seek Him.*" Without faith in the Lord our God, there is no way that we can be pleasing to Him. We can live very good lives, we can be hard working and diligent in presenting ourselves decent, upright people, but if we do not have faith in the Lord our God, it is all for nothing. Only those who live out their faith in the Lord please God and will benefit from His rewards.

But some might argue, "But Pastor, you don't know how hard it is for me right now! You have no idea the struggles and trials that I have in my life!" While that may be true, right there in the midst of your trials and struggles is the **RIGHT PLACE** to practice your faith and continue your trust in the Lord. Remember how a diamond is made? A diamond is created from carbon experiencing tremendous pressure, enduring overwhelming heat, and being there for a long time, and those three elements, pressure, heat and time, transforms that carbon into the precious jewel, diamond. So when you endure your trial and trouble pressures, when you feel the heat of persecution and oppression, as you endure through time, and you keep your faith in God all the while, He is transforming your life into one that is precious to Him.

So **Faith** looks at the **BIG** picture of life, beyond the present struggles and hardships, to see what God is going to do. Hebrews 11:13 explains, "*It was in faith that all these persons died. They did not receive the things God had promised, but from a long way off they saw them and welcomed them, and admitted openly that they were foreigners and refugees on the earth.*" Having heard God's promise of what would take place, these faithful ones did not give up, but lived every day with the assurance that

God was going to fulfill His promise. So they practiced their faith every day, knowing that God is faithful and trustworthy in all that He promises to them. Even though they did not yet see the fulfillment of that promise in their lifetime, every promise in the Bible will be fulfilled in God's right time.

*“And so God is not ashamed for them to call Him their God, because He has prepared a city for them”* (11:16). We are **REWARDED** **for our faith** if we but remain faithful to His promises and follow His Word, and keep His commands. God delights in us being faithful followers for Him. How can God be pleased if we lose our faith in Him and give up on our trusting in Him? God rewards our faithfulness.

But **FAITH INVOLVES THE SPIRIT'S TEACHING US** so that we can understand the ways of God. It is the Holy Spirit's delight to teach us about the ways of God so that we can be faithful to Him. Through prayer and study we can find the ways that God wants us to go, and as we trust in Him, the Spirit teaches us faithfulness.

In Colossians 1:9-10, we hear the Apostle Paul's desire that the believers in Colossae would continue in their faith in Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord. Paul says, *“...We ask God to fill you with the knowledge of His will, with all the wisdom and understanding that His Spirit gives. Then you will be able to live as the Lord wants and will always do what pleases Him.”* So as we remain faithful to the Lord, **The Spirit gives us WISDOM and UNDERSTANDING**. Now this is not the wisdom and understanding that comes from the world, which is contrary to God's Word, but the wisdom and understanding of God's ways so that as we believe them and begin to live them every day, we become pleasing to God. It is in putting that wisdom and understanding to practice that we begin to follow the Lord God's ways more and more, trusting in God's ways more than in the world's ways.

And it is **This teaching of the Holy Spirit that helps us to “produce all kinds of GOOD DEEDS** (1:10). As we *“grow in the knowledge of God”* our eyes are opened up to all of the things that need to be done here on the earth, and our hearts are drawn to fulfilling God's call on our lives. Ministering to the sick, the imprisoned, the poor, the widowed, the orphan and the refugee are but the beginning of what is possible as we begin to follow the wisdom and understanding of the Lord our God.

But surely, as we begin to live in the ways of God, we will come upon persecution from those of the world that are offended that we are involved in meeting those needs and doing those good deeds. By separating ourselves from the ways of the world, we become different than those around us, and soon we will face ridicule and spite, we will be ostracized and excluded, and then we will face oppression and persecution. Yet Paul tells us from his own experience that it is In the Spirit's **STRENGTH** we can *"endure everything with patience"* (Colossians 1:11-12). If we remain faithful to the Lord our God, He is not going to just leave us hanging out there all by ourselves. The Holy Spirit comes to our aid and comforts us and encourages us and strengthens us to endure the stuff of the world in order to remain faithful to God's ways.

And Paul invite us to Remember what the Lord has **DONE** for us. He tells us, *"He rescued us from the power of darkness and brought us safe into the kingdom of His dear Son, by whom we are set free, that is, our sins are forgiven"* (1:13-14). Again, as we remember how God is faithful to His promises, and recall all that He has done in the past for us, our faith in Him can continue to grow strong so that we might be able to face all that the world has to offer, with gladness and patience and even joy.

Now please understand me. FAITHFULNESS IS NOT ALWAYS **EASY**. In fact, most times faithfulness is difficult because again we have not yet seen the fulfillment of God's promises, but we act and live as if they are going to happen today. Often it is in the middle of the most difficult times that our faith can either grow strong, or grow weak. God desire that our faith grows stronger. So let's look at the life of one who faced tremendous conditions, but remained faithful through them, and even fulfilled God's work in the face of them. I invite you to listen to this account found in 1 Kings 18:1-6. (READ 1 Kings 18:1-6).

In order to get the attention of the King of Israel, God had instructed Elijah to warn Ahab that He was going to be a famine in all the land. In fact Elijah tells Ahab, *"In the name of the Lord, the living God of Israel, whom I serve, I tell you that there will be no dew or rain for the next two or three years until I say so"* (1 Kings 17:1). Why would God do that to His people, to His beloved country? Well

looking back at chapter 16 we see why. Ahab “*sinned against the Lord more than any of his predecessors. It was not enough for him to sin like King Jeroboam (who led the people into sin and idolatry); he went further and married Jezebel, the daughter of King Ethbaal of Sidon, and worshiped Baal. He built a temple to Baal in Samaria, made an altar for him, and put it in the temple. He also put up an image of the goddess Asherah. He did more to arouse the anger of the Lord, the God of Israel, than all the kings of Israel before him*” (1 Kings 16:29-33). God delights in those who follow Him, but rejects those who reject Him. God was trying to turn Ahab back to Him through the famine.

But for three years, Ahab never turns away from his idolatry and continues to be offensive to the Lord by leading the people of Israel away from Him. It is during that time that the queen, Jezebel, begins to systematically kill off the prophets of the Lord God in order to eliminate the competition. But even then, God has His faithful followers working for Him.

When Elijah thinks that he is the only one left still faithful to the Lord (1 Kings 19:10), we hear God tell him that 7000 yet remained who had not bowed the knee to Baal. “They were hidden among the overwhelming crowd of idolaters, but God knew them. In all the kingdom there was not a more unlikely place for a righteous man to be found than in the house of Ahab. Yet there in the house of the most wicked king of all Israel lived at least one of those seven thousand.”<sup>2</sup> **OBADIAH** “*was a devout worshiper of the Lord*” his God (18:3). And God had placed him right there under the noses of King Ahab and Queen Jezebel as the one who was in charge of the whole palace. In fact, his name means “a servant of the Lord,” and he certainly lived up to that name.

So get this! While Jezebel is doing her best to wipe out all of the faithful of the Lord God in order that the people would only worship the false god Baal, God places a faithful man over the whole house of Ahab. In the middle of the corruption taking place in the palace, God lifts up this man named Obadiah to oversee the everyday operations of the king and queen who were the most offensive to God. He lived his faith under **KING AHAB’S** authority. And living by his faith each day, Obadiah begins to

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<sup>2</sup> (Wubbles & McDowell, *Bible Nobodies Who Became Somebodies*, [Shippensburg, PA: Destiny Image, 2004] pg. 204)

use his position to rescue the prophets of the Lord God. Right there, unbeknownst to the king or queen! Jezebel is trying to wipe out the prophets of God, and Obadiah is right there in front of her protecting them. While he can't stop the persecution of God's people, he began protecting the ones he could.

Isn't it crazy how God can work behind the scenes to counteract the wickedness of those who are opposed to Him? Using the most unlikely people, God invites the faithful into often perilous situations to do the exact opposite of what is happening in the world. It is often through faithful people, devout worshipers of the Lord, that God gets His work done. *"God purposely (chooses) what the world considers nonsense in order to shame the wise, and He (chooses) what the world considers weak in order to shame the powerful"* (I Corinthians 1:27). So Obadiah stands as manager of the palace, and does what is good and right, right there in the middle of the corruption of a wicked king's reign.

Yet in faith, he **WORKED** for the Lord, protecting at least 100 of God's prophets, hiding *"them in caves in two groups of fifth, and provided them with food and water"* (1 Kings 18:4). He uses the resources of the king's palace to protect, feed AND water these prophets of God to keep them out of the reaches of Queen Jezebel. Even during the famine, Obadiah funnels food and water to the faithful of God. He was obedient to the king, but remained faithful to the Lord in all his ways. He didn't think only of his own personal comforts, but looked at how he could do the work of the Lord from his position as steward of the house of Ahab.

But even a wicked man knows whom he can trust. Many wicked leaders are glad to have servants who fear God. So when Ahab begins to get desperate enough, in that third year of drought and famine, he trusts Obadiah to go with him to look for any sign of water in order to keep the flocks watered. Obadiah follows the orders of the king, yet he remains faithful to the Lord God first and foremost. He is an obedient servant of the king, but more so an obedient and faithful servant of the Lord God. He's doing his part of protecting God's people.

Yet, looking at the work that Obadiah was doing, we can quickly ask, "Was he **SCARED** about going behind the authority of the king and queen to protect God's people? You bet he was! But he

doesn't let his fear rule his life so that he gives up his faith. He knows what Queen Jezebel is doing to the faithful followers of the Lord God, but he trusts God enough to protect him and yet use him right there in his position.

So Ahab takes Obadiah out to search for water, Ahab going one way and Obadiah going another way. And it is at this point that Obadiah meets Elijah on his way to see the king. Elijah tells Obadiah to go let the king know that he was there to see him, and then Obadiah gets concerned.

You see, when Elijah had prophesied the drought and famine, the Lord led him away from Israel. And as the drought got worse, Ahab used many resources to try to find him, because it was at his word that the drought would end (not really his, but the Lord's). And it got so tough that Ahab put out a warrant for his arrest, not only in Israel, but in all of the surrounding countries. After three years of not finding Elijah, suddenly he shows up right there in front of Obadiah, AND he tells Obadiah to tell the king that he was there!

Here's what Obadiah says to Elijah, *"What have I done that you want to put me in danger of being killed by King Ahab? By the living Lord, your God, I swear that the king has made a search for you in every country in the world. Whenever the ruler of a country reported that you were not in his country, Ahab would require that ruler to swear that you could not be found. And now you want me to go and tell him that you are here? What if the spirit of the Lord carries you off to some unknown place as soon as I leave? Then when I tell Ahab that you are here and he can't find you, he will put me to death....So how can you order me to go and tell the king that you are here? He will kill me!"* (18:9-14).

Even as a devout follower of the Lord, he had to put his trust once more in the Lord to protect him. It may have been the hardest decision he ever had to make. Would God protect Elijah but not him if he did this thing Elijah was asking of him? Surely God would protect Elijah, but would He protect him, too, just one humble servant. But upon the word of Elijah that he would not suddenly vanish again, Obadiah trusted the Lord, and he trusted Elijah, the prophet of the Lord, that he would be protected from the wrath of King Ahab. And so Elijah met with the king, and Ahab did nothing to him, and both he and

Obadiah were kept from suffering any harm.

But here's the tough question for us. HOW WILL WE RESPOND WHEN OUR FAITH IS TESTED in just such a way as this? When God decides to use you right there at your work place, or there at school, or there at conference, or there at the company banquet, will you decide to stand up for the Lord, unafraid but confident that God will protect you?

You see, God has WORK for you do, in faith in Him. Each one of you has your own sphere of influence that God can use to bring change. Can He count on you to be faithful to Him even in the face of persecution or threat? Who will God use to take His message to those He desires to change if not through you? Who knows what God could do even through you as you faithfully, humbly and obediently follow His call and serve Him?

So I invite each of you to stay faithful to the Lord your God! Let Him prepare you for the work He has for you to do. Listen to His VOICE, and obey His commands. Remember, *“without faith, it is impossible to please God, for whoever comes to God must have faith that He exists and that He is a rewarder of those who seek Him”* (Hebrews 11:6). Stay faithful, no matter what, even in the face of corruption and wickedness. Trust in the Lord, in the Name of Jesus Christ. AMEN.