

The Sermon - In 10 Sentences Or Less

Perfectly Imperfect Faith 1 - I Believe



1. St. Paul counsels that "we walk by faith, and not by sight" (2 Cor. 5.7): we'll be sending six weeks together looking at one of the most well-known passages in all of scripture on faith, Hebrews 11.

2. In both English and ancient Greek, what we mean by "faith" or "belief" is multi-faceted and nuanced, and goes far beyond mere intellectual agreement with certain facts (like, "I believe that $2+2 = 4$ ").

3. What Hebrews 11 will be trying to tell us about faith can be introduced by looking at its context, the verses that lead into the chapter and that end or summarize it (Hebrews 10.38-11.2, and 11.39-40).

4. The repeated verb in 10.38-39 tells us part of what Hebrews means by "faith": it means to not "shrink back" (NRSV), that is, cower, desist, or pull back in fear.

5. For those Christians 2000 years ago who first read Hebrews, "shrinking back" would have meant a) retreating from their distinct Christian values, morality, and beliefs in the Greco-Roman world and accommodating themselves to the more acceptable cultural norms, and b) in face of overt persecution, giving their chief allegiance to the empire and its priorities, instead of maintaining Christ as their one true Lord.

6. Hebrews warns that to choose fear and not faith brings "ruin" (10.39): John Ortberg offers a list of that cost, we lose self-respect, God's preferred future for us, our joy, our availability to be used by God, and even our intimacy with Him.

7. At the end of Hebrews 11, we learn a 2nd key piece of "faith" as defined by this author: faith is an awareness that our present is far exceeded by our promised future (11.39-40).

8. The commonality in every Old Testament figure we'll encounter in Hebrews 11 is that they were incomplete, with more to look forward to in their life with God than they actually experienced.

9. To use Martin Luther King Jr.'s well-known metaphor, faith is taking steps a staircase, knowing that you're on the move upward but far from the top.

10. What Hebrews tells us about faith aligns with what the Pastoral Epistles say as well: whatever else it is, faith is a "good fight," a long race to the run, the finish of which none of us have reached (1st Timothy 6.12; 2nd Timothy 4.7-8).

Quotes to Remember

When you hope, you do not yet have what you are hoping for, but, by believing it, you begin to resemble someone who possesses it. (St. Augustine)

If you do a word search in the Bible for the word, "afraid," you'll notice how often it appears with the words, "Do not be"...Virtually every time God calls someone to do something in Scripture, He pleads with them, "Do not be afraid!"...Why? Because cowardice is one of the great life-thieves of all time...Spiritual cowardice worms its way into our souls when our eyes become obsessively focused on our circumstances... (Gary Thomas, writer on spiritual formation in church history)

Book Recommendations

Pastor Chris mentioned two books in yesterday's sermon. If you're looking for a good read, both are worth your while.

One of the single best books on the subject of faith, a good companion to our series on Hebrews 11, is John Ortberg's "If You Want to Walk on Water, You've Got to Get Out of the Boat" - [If You Want to Walk on Water, You've Got to Get Out of the Boat: Ortberg, John](#)

Regarding the pressure Christians, both 2000 years ago and nowadays, face to "shrink back" and lose their Christian distinctiveness in the world, try Michael Frost's "Keep Christianity Weird" - [Keep Christianity Weird: Embracing the Discipline of Being Different: Frost, Michael](#)