Faith Works
Hebrews 11

Introduction:

Probably the truth that I have learned more about in the last three years than almost anything else is the truth that I will be sharing with you tonight. This is a very important truth because it hits right at the heart of salvation and life in general. It is simply this: **faith works**. More and more as I read the Scripture, I am confronted with the reality of the nature of true faith. My misconceptions about faith were some of the same misconceptions that many have today. It doesn't take someone with a Ph.D. to recognize that men of faith were men who lived differently than men who had no faith. From the Bible, it is clear that a faith that doesn't change your life is not a real faith. A faith that goes no further than the head is not real faith. A faith that does not work is not real faith. This is a clear teaching all throughout the Scriptures.

There is a school of thought which is called **easy believism**.... Matthew 7:21 "Not everyone...." and 2 Corinthians 5:17 "If any man be...."

This gives you somewhat of an idea of where we are going in our message tonight. In preparing for this message, I was clear on the theme of the message, but unsure of the text from which to preach it. The book of I John is an excellent text for the message. James 2 is also a well-known faith works passage. But tonight I believe the Lord would have us look at Hebrews 11. If you have already noticed, our text is the entire chapter, but we will not read it because of time.

Like I said I had the same misconception that many have, that faith is just to believe something. And I'm sure if I were to ask you, "What is faith?", many would say that it is to believe something. This is definitely true, but it does not cover all that faith is. You see, faith has three aspects to it. **1.** First, there is **the level of understanding.** No man can believe the gospel without understanding the gospel. (I'm not referring to a complete understanding, but a general understanding of the facts. But just because you understand something doesn't mean you believe it. I understand the facts of evolution, but I surely do not believe it is true. **2.** Second, there is **the level of belief or accent**. You understand the facts of what is being said and you also agree that they are true. You believe that what you are told is true. This is where far to many people stop the boat, and for years I thought that this was it. This kind of "faith" merely understands the facts of the gospel and accents to the truth of the gospel, but this kind of faith is intellectual and it ends in the head. It merely affects the way you think, but not how you live. James 2 tells us that the devils believe and tremble. **3.** Third, there is **the level of reliance or trust or dependence**. This understands the facts and believes them true, but also throws all of one's trust and reliance and dependence upon its object.

Let me illustrate this truth this way. You all have probably heard the story of the man who walked a tight-rope across the Niagara Falls, but it so well illustrates this truth that I will tell it again. Let's say that you and your family were up in New York at the falls. You had just unpacked and were getting settled into your hotel when a very excited man came running through the lobby and said, "Come see the man who is tight-rope walking across the falls." Now here is level one. You understand what the man is saying and you decide to go and see for yourself. But you say, "I don't know if I believe that a man is really doing that." But when you get there, sure enough, you see the man walking across the rope, and not only that but he has a wheel-barrel in his hands as he walks across. He comes back to the other side where you are standing and says, "Who believes that I can put a man in my wheel barrel and walk to the other side. Up your hand goes. He did it with such ease without a person in, surely he can do it. (Here is the level of belief, level two.) Out of the crowd the man notices your hand, he says, "You believe that I can do it, then come and get into the wheel-barrel. Here is level three, trust. It goes beyond the position of an onlooker and moves one to action to show that he really does trust the man. Spurgeon said this of faith, "The pith, the essence of faith, lies in this - a casting oneself on the promise." I have read another definition of faith that has stuck with me, and it says that "faith is believing in the promises of God and acting upon them."

You are probably wondering if we are going to get to our text or not. We will in just a few minutes. I believe that what we have said is necessary in laying the foundation for what we will see in Hebrews 11.

Before we go there let us turn to one passage of Scripture. Turn to James 2:14-26. Let us read this passage and then we will make some comments on it. James will help us understand this very concept of faith

works. A lot of what James says here can be easily misunderstood if you don't understand what James is trying to attack. For example, in verse 14 he says, "Can faith save him?" His implied answer is no. But we say, "Wait a minute, Ephesians 2:8-9 says that we are saved by grace through faith." The Bible teaches that faith is the only way to be saved, and James says that faith cannot save. Is this a contradiction in Scripture? For this reason many argued that James is not canonical. But this is not the answer. When James uses faith he is using it in the way some had misunderstood faith to be. He is referring to a level two kind of faith, that intellectual level that some were mistaking for saving faith. So when you read faith in this verse read it as "can a workless faith save?" The answer is no. So when we read verses like Ephesians 2:8-9 we must understand Paul to be referring to a level three kind of faith, a true saving faith.

Let's read these verses.

What phrase did James repeat 3 times? "Faith without works is dead (v 17, 20, 26). In other words a faith that does not produce works is not real saving faith.

Now let us turn a few pages back to Hebrews 11. This is a very familiar text which is often referred to as the Hall of Faith or the Hall of Fame. In our text we will notice two main things. First of all we will see **faith explained or described**. And secondly we will see **faith exemplified or displayed**. Or to put it another way we will see **what faith is** and **what faith does**.

PRAY

If I were to ask you to in one word give me the dominant characteristic of the life of a Christian, what would you say? We probably would get a number of answers. But I think that it would be faith. What separates saved men from lost men? Faith. **23 times** faith is mentioned in this chapter alone as characterizing great men of God. It is also interesting to note a name by which Christian people are called. They are called believers. Faith is very important to our lives. That is why it is good for us to discuss faith this evening.

What is faith? Is the author of Hebrews referring to saving faith or the faith of a Christian? In Scripture there is no distinction made between saving faith and sanctifying faith. I think this misconception comes from the idea that faith is a one-time act that a person does to get saved. But this is not true. Faith is not just a one-time act that stops after a person is saved, saving faith is a lifestyle of continued faith in God. I think we will see that to be abundantly clear from our text. Don't misunderstand me; we are saved in at a definite point in time at the first exercise of faith, but faith doesn't stop there. Look with me up at 10:38-39. READ A just man or a saved man lives by faith. He continues to believe with the result of his ultimate salvation. If I were to preach a sequel to this message, I would entitle it: Faith Perseveres. This is the context which brings in this great chapter of faith.

I. Faith Explained/Described *(What it is.)* 1-3

Here in our text, we learn much about the nature of faith. This is not really a formal definition of faith, but rather a description or explanation about certain aspects of faith. Let's read verse 1. If you are anything like I used to be when I looked at this verse, you would not know anything more about faith after you read it than you did before. Let's examine this verse and see if we can gain a better understanding of what faith is.

1. Faith is confidence in regard to things hoped for. 1a

First of all it says that faith is the substance of things hoped for. What does that mean? Well, first let us explain the meaning of substance. The Greek word in very literally rendered, to stand under, and it has the idea of a foundation, something solid, something of substance, something that gives confidence. What is under us this evening? A concrete floor. It is something that is solid and will hold us up.

This word is used only 5 times in the NT. Something that I have found to be of great help in Bible study in understanding a word is cross referencing. You have heard the old saying that the best commentary on the Bible is the Bible, well this is a good tool for us to discover the meaning Scripture. We have a little saying in Greek class, that use determines meaning. In other words, what a word means is oftentimes determined by its

use. So let's briefly trace this word through the NT. If you are one to write in your Bible I would recommend that you write these down. If you are not one to write in your Bible I would recommend that you write these down as well. This will do a couple of things. It will help you understand the meaning of this verse better, and as you read through your Bible and come across one of the other occurrences it will remind you that it is this same word and help you to understand that verse better as well. The person who writes in his Bible will more often than not, know his Bible better than the person who doesn't.

The first use of this word is found in 2 Corinthians 9:4. The idea here is that Paul was very confident in the generosity of the Corinthians. So in the margin here you can write down the next reference: 2 Corinthians 11:17. Paul here is defending his apostleship of which he is very confident in. Again the idea is clearly of confidence. In the margin here you can write Hebrews 1:3. Our last three occurrences are found in Hebrews. The word here is person, and it has the idea of reality or existence. And you can see the same type of idea. Next is Hebrews 3:14, and here again it is translated confidence, referring to the believers confidence in Christ and His promises. And our last one is found back in our text, Hebrews 11:1.

So in other words, faith gives a real confidence, a reality, an actual existence or substance to things hoped for.

Before we go on let us determine what are those things that are hoped for. We are clearly talking about future benefits for a believer, some near, some far. What is the basis for the believers faith? The text does not come out and say it, but it is easily understood. A believers faith is based upon the promises of God which we find in His Word. Without His Word we would have no basis for our faith to rest. Faith is not the power of positive thinking. Your faith is only as good as the object of your faith. Just to hope for something that you have not been promised is wishful thinking, not faith. Real faith is always based on real truth. Some people think that if I just think hard enough that I will have what I want - that is foolishness not faith. What God has said is always the basis of faith.

The promise of answered prayer, of final glorification, of heaven as your home. **All of these hopes, these promises, when embraced by faith gain a real substance, a confidence, an actual existence.**

Look with me at verse 13. This is the kind of faith that moved men of God to action. They first of all died in faith, there faith had continue and endure and persevered in spite of the fact that they had not yet received the promises. I think reference here is made to the coming Messiah that was promised to Abraham. Second, they hoped in the promises of God. Third, they were persuaded and confident in them so that they embraced them. So much did their faith move them that they did not even view this earth as their home.

2. Faith is proof in regard to things not seen. 1b

Second, faith is the evidence of things not seen. This word means proof, or conviction, or evidence. It is used only one other time in the NT. 2 Timothy 3:16 says that God's Word is profitable to convict, reproof, convince of sin. To show us we are wrong, to prove as guilty. So the idea here is that faith is proof or evidence in regard to things not seen.

And again we must ask here, "What are unseen things?" Well, clearly unseen things are things of the past. For example, creation. Notice verse 3. It is by faith that we believe in creation. I believe there are two ways by which faith proves creation. First, God's Word says it and faith embraces it as truth. This is clear objective truth. Second, the heavens declare the glory of God, and as Romans says, that which may be known of God is clearly seen in creation. So subjectively, faith sees the fingerprints of God on His creation.

Other unseen things include the flood, miracles, the life, death, and resurrection of Christ. Other unseen things would include the existence of God and spiritual things. These are all proved as true by faith. Again here our basis is the Word of God. Without the Word of God telling us that these things are so, faith would not be faith. Again, your faith is only as good as the object of your faith. It's not how hard you believe, but in Whom you believe.

So faith here gives a real proof of the invisible things.

II. Faith Exemplified/Displayed *(What it does.)* **4-40**

As we move now into our final point I would like to point out one very important truth as to why I

choose this title for this text. Here we are in the very chapter of faith, and after every name in the chapter the person is doing something. Do something for me, go through this chapter and underline every name, like Abel, Abraham, Isaac.... Then go through the chapter and circle all the action verbs that are connected to these people. I find it very interesting that it does not say, "By faith Abel believe this, by faith Noah believe this about God." No, in each instance it says, "By faith Noah did, by faith Abraham worked, by faith Moses did something." Here we are talking about faith and each of the examples of faith are working, they are doing. This should be enough for us right here to understand that true faith goes beyond a level two head knowledge, to a level three of dependence and commitment that is moved to action.

At this point I feel it necessary to say a few words about the relationship between faith and works. If faith is so closely tied to works, what is the difference between faith and works. We obviously don't believe in a works salvation, but it seems as if we are including works as necessary to being saved. This doesn't make sense. Well I'm glad you asked.

First off, because of the heresy of the Roman Catholic Church and other pagan religions who teach a works salvation, Christians have done much to attack and oppose this false doctrine by a great emphasis on justification by faith alone. While this is absolutely correct, works has been looked at as not important, non-essential, or even as bad. And the necessity of works as a demonstration of true saving faith is not emphasized.

Here is what I believe to be the key distinction between a works salvation and salvation by faith alone that works. A works salvation believes that God is pleased with my good works, and they can earn me a righteous standing with God. He depends upon his own ability to gain favor or merit with God. By his church attendance or partaking of the sacraments or going to confession, he believes these things will get him to heaven. Here is the distinction, a Christian man will do good works, this is undeniably taught in Scripture, but his motivation is much different. He realizes that in no way can anything he does earn Him any merit or favor with God. Only by the merits of Christ imputed to him by God's free grace does he have any hope for eternal life. And because of his faith alone in Christ as his only righteousness, grace causes him to work as a demonstration that his faith is real and that he truly is born again. As James says, "He shows his faith by his works." They key distinction all comes down to the motivation for your good works. Yes, the Bible teaches the necessity of good works, but only as a demonstration of a living faith.

With these next 13 points we will do our best to be brief. I only want to show you that men with true faith work.

1. Abel, the obedience of faith. 4

Abel, by faith, offered a blood sacrifice to God in obedience to God command. Faith knows what God wants and does his best to completely fulfill it. It says, "God's way not my way."

2. Enoch, the walk of faith. 5-6

Enoch, by faith walked in close fellowship with his God and always desired that which pleased Him. If something were to be said of your life when you die, would it be that you walked with God and pleased Him?

3. Noah, the work of faith. 7

Noah, trusting in the invisible, in spite of the mockery, was moved to obey God by his faith. He had never seen rain, but his faith cause him to work for many years in building the ark.

4. Abraham, the submission of faith. 8-10, 17-19

Abraham, by faith, submitted to God's calling and followed God, trusting in His promises. He submitted even his own reason to that of the command of God, trusting God that he would keep His covenant promises.

5. Sarah, the trust of faith. 11

Sarah, by faith, trusted in the promise of God, in spite of being well past the age of child bearing. She took God at His Word, trusting in His faithfulness.

6. Isaac, the perception of faith. 20

This is one that is rather difficult, but let me try to explain. Isaac blessed his sons by faith. How did he do that if he was deceived? When Jacob came before Isaac, Isaac was given a revelation from God concerning their future blessings. God gave Him the right revelation for the right person. Isaac trusted in the revelation of God and gave it by faith. His faith is then seen by the fact that when he knew he had been deceived, he did not try to reverse the blessings or question God for His revelation.

7. Jacob, the anticipation of faith. 21

Jacob, by faith blessed the sons of Joseph. By faith, he anticipated the making of a great nation their in Egypt and laid hold of God's promise.

8. Joseph, the conviction of faith. 22

Joseph, knew that God would redeem His people from Egypt, so he made sure he was buried in Canaan, the promised land to encourage the people that their redemption for coming.

9. Moses' Parents, the fearlessness of faith. 23

By faith, Moses's Parents did not fear the laws of man when they contradicted God's laws. Their fear of God far surpassed a fear for their own lives.

10. Moses, the decision of faith. 24-29

Moses, by faith, rejected sinful pleasures and chose rather to suffer for Christ. He by faith saw the future, the invisible, having His eyes set on the promised Messiah.

11. Joshua, the victory of faith. 30

Joshua, by faith, obeyed God until he had obtained the victory. His faith caused him to march around the wall day after day, even though nothing seemed to be happening. Is your faith causing you to continue to pray even though nothing seems to be happening?

12. Rahab, the help of faith. 31

Rahab, because of her belief in Jehovah, aided the men of God. By faith she saw a need a did what she could.

13. Others, the endurance of faith. 32-40

All these other martyrs endured affliction and suffering for their Lord. Their faith impelled them forward no matter what the obstacle.

Folks, I don't know how to say it any simpler than this, **faith works**!
If this list were to continue, would your name be found here, if so, what would it say.

Conclusion:

In closing tonight, we have seen faith explained or described. We have learned that faith is confidence and proof in regard to the promises of God and invisible realities. We have learn that faith is a firm persuasion that motivates a person to action. Faith is much more than a mere mental assent to truth, but it actually goes a level further to step out upon that truth. We have also seen faith exemplified or displayed. We noticed that all these men and woman of faith were confident in the promises of God and had a real and living faith that worked, not to earn righteousness, but to demonstrate that Christ's righteousness had been freely imputed to them through faith. They didn't work to get saved, they didn't work to stay saved, they worked to show that they really were saved.

Tonight you are in a couple of groups. You are a person who is trusting in Christ to save you, or you are trusting in yourself to save you. To those who believe that their faith tonight is not a level three kind of faith, a faith that depends and rely and commits all to Christ and works for Christ, to you I say, "Come to Christ." Embrace Him for yourself personally as your only hope of eternal life. Not just as a bystander with a head-knowledge of the gospel, but with a personal experience of Christ.

To those who believe that they are trusting in Christ alone for salvation, but yet your faith is not a working faith as it ought to be I exhort with Paul in Philippians 2:12-13, "Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God which worketh in you both to will and to do of His good pleasure." And with Peter in 2 Peter 1:10 I exhort, "Give diligence to make your calling and election sure." May there be no doubt in your mind and in the mind of others that your faith is a real saving faith in the Lord Jesus Christ that works and perseveres unto the end.

Faith works, does yours?

PRAY