

What would you do if you were responsible for feeding 300 kids and you had no food?

One day in Bristol, England in the mid to late 1800's, George Müller was faced with that issue. He had no food for his 300 orphans. Nevertheless, he had them sit and pray. In his life, he never asked directly for money, but prayed and believed God to provide for their needs.



After a short while there was a knock at the door, and a baker said he could not sleep and 'Somehow knew you need the bread this morning. I got up and baked three batches for you.' A few minutes, there was another knock. A milkman's cart had broken down in front of the orphanage and would spoil before the wheel was fixed. He brought in ten large cans of milk.¹

- Such was the faith that George Müller had for God to provide for the ministry.
- 'Faith does not operate in the realm of the possible. There is no glory for God in that which is humanly possible.' - George Müller
- Faith believes and acts upon what is not yet but will be.
- Müller would establish 117 schools and offer education to over 120,000 children, all without asking for money.

We are going through **the book of Hebrews** this fall, and we paused the series for some baptisms and a mission's convention. So, let's catch everyone up.

Hebrews is 'a strange and difficult book'² for several reasons.

It is 'strange and difficult' because ...

1. Five different cultures (Roman, Hebrew, Hellenists, Hellenistic Christians, and our culture).
2. It is a sermon to a very specific audience.
3. It uses symbols from Judaism to make two arguments:
 - Don't go back to Judaism!!

¹ Roger Steer, *George Müller: Delighted in God* (??), ?.

² N.T. Wright and Michael F. Bird, *The New Testament in Its World: An Introduction to the History, Literature, and Theology of the First Christians* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Academic, 2019), 710.

- Jesus is better (fulfills) than Judaism!!

Okay, that was the background, now for a quick review.

Minute Review

- Jesus is better than the angels, 1:4-2:18.
- Jesus is better than Moses & Joshua, 3:1-4:14.
- Jesus is better than the High Priest, 4:14-7:28.
- Jesus is better than the OT Covenant & Sacrifices, 8:1-10:18. Then he encourages his people *to* ...
- Draw near and persevere, 10:19-39. Near the end of that segment, our preacher quotes a passage from the prophet Habakkuk.

“But my righteous one will live by faith. And I take no pleasure in the one who shrinks back.”³⁹ But we do not belong to those who shrink back and are destroyed, but to those who have faith and are saved (He 10:38-39 NIV).’

- After **quoting the passage** he then explains it. Today’s message is the first part of the preacher’s explanation.
- But if he had finished his thought, it would be: (Therefore,) ‘let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us,² fixing our eyes on Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of faith (He 12:1-2 NIV).’ (Ray, add this to the prior verses’ slide, please)
- So, chapter 11 is really a side note, where he dives into explaining the essence of faith and gives us some examples.

Something Better

The Essence of Faith, 11:1-31



Paul also quoted this great passage on faith from Habakkuk, but he understood faith as an ‘intellectual acceptance,’ I *believe* and I *accept* Christ as savior.

- But our preacher uses the **word faith** to mean ‘an attitude of commitment and ... trust in a God who is real and who keeps his word ... (more like) what we would call faithful.’³
- For him, faith is holding on, persevering, and *not* falling back.
- Our preacher knows they **might be facing Nero’s persecution** and that the *temptation* is to return to Judaism – which was legally recognized by Rome.⁴

³ France, *Expositor’s*, 142.

⁴ Wright, *The New Testament in Its World*, 724.

- Yet, he knows they must **look forward not backward** – Jesus is better, Jesus is the fulfillment of everything that Judaism pointed towards.

Let's jump in ...

1. The Essence of Faith, 11:1.

'Now faith is confidence in what we hope for and assurance about what we do not see (He 11:1 NIV).'

- Faith is about living our lives trusting God.
- We see in a limited fashion, like in reverse image that is cloudy; but God sees things clearly and in order.
- Even though we may not see it, God does; God can even create things not yet seen.

When Connie and I came to New England by faith. The superintendent, Otis Stanley, had thought I would be a good fit at two churches, but both of those churches went with a different pastor. He said, 'I've got nothing your size.' To which I said, 'what if size does not matter?' He said, 'really? I've got a church of 21 that can afford a FT pastor.'

We interviewed over the phone and then flew to Hartford to try out.

- They showed us the Grange building where they were meeting – not impressive at all. They asked us if we were going to call them back. Their two prior candidates did not even bother to call them back.
- They showed us the downtown – nothing but trees, it was so rural.
- They showed us the four acres they owned – again, more trees and not even a driveway.
- I just did not hear from God one way or the other.

That Sunday night we were elected 16 to 5 – not an overwhelming vote. Because we did not have clear direction from the Lord, I told them that we needed a couple of weeks to pray.

Two weeks later we still did not have direction from the Lord. I went to call the board member and Connie asked me, 'are we moving or not?' I said, 'I don't know,' as I dialed the number.

Faith operates in regions of the unseen.

- *If it is humanly **possible**, there is no need for faith.*
- 'Faith is the organ which enables people to see the invisible order.'⁵
- When there is **no other option but God**, the eyes of faith are opened.
- I believe we hear of more miracles of healing in places where there are fewer hospitals. People have no other choice but to trust God.

As I spoke to the board member, something Connie said jumped to my mind. She said, 'I can **see a little white church** on the property they showed us.'

- Risk – have the kids sit down and give thanks for what is not there.
- Faith believes and acts upon what is not yet but will be.
- The Bible says, 'Whether you turn to the *right or left*, your ears will hear a voice behind you, saying, "This is the way; walk in it (Is 30:21 NIV)."' God was **asking me to trust him *whether* I accepted or rejected** the offer. I could have said 'no,' but instead I said 'yes.'

Here is a picture I pulled off their website. We let the congregation choose the building's color.



God probably is not calling you to build a church, but he might be asking you take a risk, to step out in faith.

Let's call this story's faith, Triumphant Faith – faith that results in changed circumstances. A gift of faith (1Co 12:9), a gift that can move mountains (Mt 17:20).⁶

Now, our preacher goes chronologically through heroes of the Jewish faith.

2. Early Examples, 11:2-12.

'This is what the ancients were commended for. ³By faith we understand that the universe was formed at God's command, so that what is seen was not made out of what was visible. ⁴By faith Abel brought God a better offering than Cain did. By faith he was commended as righteous, when God spoke well of his offerings ... ⁵By faith Enoch was taken from this life, so that he did not experience death (He 12:2-5 NIV).'

- Creation itself is a reminder; God can make something out of nothing.

⁵ F.F. Bruce, *NICNT Hebrews* (Grand Rapids, MI: Willam B. Eerdmans, 1990), 277.

⁶ The 3 Ts are from: Tony Cooke, *Miracles and the Supernatural Throughout Church History: Remarkable Manifestations of the Holy Spirit from the First Century Until Today* (Shippensburg, PA: Harrison House, 2020), 312.

- Paul says that God can ‘call~~ing~~ into being things that were not (Ro 4:17 NIV).’ Connie saw what was not; George Muller saw what was not.

He continues ...

‘And without faith it is impossible to please God, because anyone who comes to him must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who earnestly seek him (He 12: 2-6 NIV).’

Please God? That means that Faith is relational term, even an emotional term. **We cannot please God if we are in control of everything.**

- Yes, there is a **belief** side – that he exists.
- But there also a **subjective, relational** side – that he rewards those who seek him – that must trust Him.

Life in a daily interaction if filled with adventure and joy – sometimes is a little scary.

‘By faith Noah, when warned about things not yet seen, in holy fear built an ark to save his family ... ⁸By faith Abraham, when called to go to a place he would later receive as his inheritance, obeyed and went, even though he did not know where he was going. ⁹By faith he made his home in the promised land like a stranger in a foreign country; he lived in tents, as did Isaac and Jacob, who were heirs with him of the same promise. ¹⁰For he was looking forward to the city with foundations, whose architect and builder is God (He 11:7-10 NIV).’

- While **Noah’s faith** is triumphant – building an ark far from the ocean during a time when there was no rain.
- But **Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob’s example** is of a life of faith and *not* a specific incident.
- They **quietly moved** from place to place, living a life of faith.
- They pleased God by trusting him. As Paul said, ‘The life I now live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God (Ga2:20 NIV).’

I think of the widow who gave ‘all she had to live on (Lk 21:4 NIV).’ A few weeks ago, I spoke on trusting God with our finances. It did not make sense for that widow to give away everything she had to live on ... unless she knew God would provide for her. She must have had a history of trusting God, she knew she could give without fear. Her God would supply.

Let’s call this type of faith Transformational Faith - faith that changes people. It is in cooperation with the Holy Spirit (2Co 3:18).

- When we really trust God and have faith, holding onto Him, it changes us.

- Like Abraham pulling up his tent stakes and thinking ‘Okay God. Where to today?’

Surprisingly, ‘And by faith even Sarah, who was past childbearing age, was enabled to bear children because she considered him faithful who had made the promise. ¹² And so from this one man, and he as good as dead, came descendants as numerous as the stars in the sky and as countless as the sand on the seashore (He 11:1-12 NIV).’

- At some point barren Sarah must have had faith to see herself as a mother.

Our preacher pauses the heroes to highlight the unseen future part of faith.

3. The Patriarchs, 11:13-16.

‘All these people were still living by faith when they died. They did not receive the things promised; they only saw them and welcomed them from a distance, admitting that they were foreigners and strangers on earth (He 11:13 NIV).’

What? Where was their triumphant faith? Ah. Let’s call this third type of faith

Transcendent Faith – faith that trusts God despite negative circumstances (He 11:35-38).

- This type of faith plays a large part of next Sunday’s message.
- Like Abraham and Sarah, all of us who walk through this visible world **look forward to something better**, even if we do not see it now.
- Faith believes and acts upon what is not yet but will be.
- **Having faith** *does not mean* we are always triumphant from our perspective. This pastor is **preparing his people** for tough times ahead.
- Often there is a future element to faith; the future is seen, but it is far away, transcendent.

‘People who say such things show that they are looking for a country of their own. ¹⁵ If they had been thinking of the country they had left, they would have had opportunity to return. ¹⁶ Instead, they were longing for a better country—a heavenly one. Therefore, God is not ashamed to be called their God, for he has prepared a city for them (He 11:13-16 NIV).’

Our preacher circles back to triumphant faith.

4. Abraham, Moses, & Jericho, 11:17-31.

‘By faith Abraham, when God tested him, offered Isaac as a sacrifice ... ²⁰ By faith Isaac blessed Jacob and Esau in regard to their future. ²¹ By faith Jacob, when he was dying, blessed each of Joseph’s sons, and worshiped as he leaned on the top of his staff. ²² By faith Joseph, when his end was near, spoke about the exodus of the Israelites from Egypt and gave instructions concerning the burial of his bones. ²³ By faith Moses’ parents hid him for three months

after he was born, because they saw he was no ordinary child, and they were not afraid of the king's edict. ²⁴By faith Moses ... left Egypt, not fearing the king's anger; he persevered because he saw him who is invisible (11:17-24 NIV).'

- One of my favorite passages is: 'So we fix our eyes not on what is seen, but on what is unseen, since what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal (2Co 4:18 NIV).'
- Wow. Moses 'persevered because he saw him who is invisible.'

How well did Moses see God? Moses did see God's back one time, because God's face would have killed him (Ex 33:23). But most of the time, Moses is a lot like us, **seeing the effects of God** rather than a direct physical sighting. 'By faith he kept the Passover and the application of blood, so that the destroyer of the firstborn would not touch the firstborn of Israel. ²⁹By faith the people passed through the Red Sea as on dry land (He 11: 28-29 NIV).'

- Moses saw the **daily manna**.
- Moses saw the **shoes** not wearing out.
- He saw the effects of God's working.

'By faith the walls of Jericho fell, after the army had marched around them for seven days. ³¹By faith the prostitute Rahab, because she welcomed the spies, was not killed with those who were disobedient (He 11:30-31 NIV).'

Rahab is the most surprising on the list. She was an outsider, she was sex-worker, but she trusted God and was rewarded with a new life.

God is really good at changing lives. Rahab was transformed into a woman of great faith.

Conclusion.

Several years ago, at the end of one of the messages here a dear lady came and testified that God has given her faith to believe her son would return to Jesus.

- Her son was far from God, and God does not force Himself on anyone.
- Faith believes and acts upon what is not yet but will be.
- She took a risk and stated it out loud.
- Several years later Claire joyfully reported that her son Jacob had come back to Jesus.

It says in Romans, 'For it is with your heart that you believe and are justified, and it is with your mouth that you profess your faith and are saved (Ro 10:10 NIV).'

- Claire professed faith – a gift of faith was given to her.

- Jacob, her prodigal son, knew that God existed and eventually stopped running and had faith that God would transform him from sinner to saint.

Questions:

- *Where in your life is God inviting you to act on something unseen – something not yet visible but deeply hoped for?*
- *What is a bold statement of faith you can speak out loud today?*

Come and profess your faith with your mouth today.

- State with your mouth that God is going to help you through your situation. Say it out loud. Like sitting down and thanking God for food for 300.
- State with your mouth that God is going to move that mountain. Like there will be a little white church there.
- State with your mouth that God is changing your heart or someone else's heart. Like my son will come back to Jesus.
- Perhaps God is calling you to step out in faith, to take a risk. Come, say it out loud to someone who will stand and believe with you in faith.
- Saying it out loud is a step of faith.
- It is the first step to seeing what is **not yet** but will be.

- **Triumphant** Faith – faith that results in changed circumstances.
- **Transformational** Faith - faith that changes people.
- **Transcendent** Faith – faith that trusts God despite negative circumstances.

Pray.