

# TASTE AND TRUST

SERIES: STORIES OF FAITH,  
HEBREWS 11



Catalog No. 20210620  
Hebrews 11:1-3  
First Message  
Scott Grant  
June 20, 2021

*Hebrews 11:1-3*

Perhaps these days we could use a little faith.

We're following up our study of the life of Joseph with a study of Hebrews 11. Joseph's story is a story of faith. Hebrews 11 features multiple stories of faith, including, by the way, the story of Joseph. We learn from stories. We learn faith from stories of faith. This summer we will learn to believe that better days are coming, and we will thus be liberated to live in these days in a different way.

We'll be supplementing our sermons with current-day stories of faith from members of our church. Thus, we will be encouraged not only by men and women from the Scriptures, we will also be encouraged by men and women from our church.

What is faith? The writer of Hebrews answers the question at the beginning of Hebrews 11. He defines faith in a way that defines the function of faith. What does faith do? Specifically, what does faith do for us?

From Hebrews 7:1-10:18, the writer of Hebrews portrayed Jesus as the superior high priest, and then in Hebrews 10:19-39, he exhorted his readers to endure in faith. Beginning in Hebrews 11, the writer moves into another major section, which extends to Hebrews 12:13 and focuses on the qualities of faith and endurance. Hebrews 11 is a unit within the section, being framed by the words "faith" and "commendation"/"commended," which each appear in both Hebrews 11:1-2 and 11:39.

## The function of faith

**Hebrews 11:1:**

**Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen.**

The words translated "assurance" and "conviction" are substantive words. Many people don't think of faith as something substantive, as something grounded in reality. Instead, they think of faith as wishful thinking, more as an escape from reality.

Of course, if one were interested in escaping reality, he or she might choose something other than biblical faith and the demands it places on its adherents to, for example, deny yourself and take up your cross. If I wanted to escape from reality, I don't think I'd opt for biblical faith.

The writer of Hebrews, on the other hand, informs us that faith connects us to reality. Faith, then, can be understood as trust. We trust in all sorts of things, don't we? When I get out of bed, I trust that the floor that will support me. You cannot live without trust. God is the ultimate reality. If he created everything that we see and touch, then he is the beginning and end of reality. Apart from him, there is no floor to walk on.

To have faith is to connect with reality, to trust God. To trust God requires us not least to think about him, to set our minds on him and his attributes. Faith is an understanding of the way things are.

The words translated "assurance" and "conviction" would be better translated along the lines of "guarantee" and "evidence." Faith is the guarantee of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen.

## Guarantee and evidence

A guarantee is like a down payment. A down payment guarantees that more will be coming—more of the same. The writer is saying that those who have faith already have a percentage, so to speak, of the "things hoped for" and that this possession serves as a guarantee that 100 percent of the things will one day be possessed.

The things hoped for concern our eternal inheritance, the heavenly and eternal country that is filled with the presence of God (Hebrews 9:15, 10:34, 11:16). The things hoped for, once they come about, will enable us to enjoy God and the new creation forever. To some degree we can enjoy God now, and that enjoyment is the guarantee that one day we will enjoy him and the new creation completely.

In this sense, the writer agrees with Paul, who says the Holy Spirit, who reveals God to us and nurtures our relationship with God, has been given to us as a “guarantee,” or down payment, of our inheritance (Ephesians 1:13-14).

If the new creation will happen, then what we believe about God is true: he is good and he is powerful. He is good and powerful in the present, even if he has not yet fully expressed his goodness and power. His kingdom has not yet come and his will has not yet been done on earth as it is in heaven, but they will. Therefore, God can and should be enjoyed—and trusted—in the present.

Faith not only provides the guarantee of things hoped for, it also provides the evidence of things not seen. The word translated “things” here is different from the word that implies “things” in the first part of the verse. The word is used of “events” in Hebrews 11:7. The events not seen are those that will transpire in the new creation. Faith provides the evidence that those events are real and that they will happen.

The function of faith, then, is to enable us in the present to partially enjoy God in this creation in anticipation of the day when we will fully enjoy God in the new creation. That’s what faith does. Faith binds us to the reality of what we hope for. Faith provides the guarantee of things hoped for and the evidence of things not seen.

## **Taste and trust**

Faith gives us a taste of what it will be like to be with God forever. When we taste something good, we want more of it. Tasting God, we are motivated to pursue God, the one who satisfies us in the deep and eternal places of our souls—the one who will do so forever.

In Psalm 34:8, David says, “O, taste and see that the Lord is good!” He compares the Lord to a good meal. The first bite is a sign that the entire meal will be delicious. People with faith have tasted of the Lord, and they have seen that he is good. Having seen that he is good, they want the whole meal, so to speak. They want all of the Lord.

Although they taste the Lord now, they know that the entire meal is yet to be served, and they await a heavenly feast, when they will “recline at table with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven” for “the marriage supper of the lamb” (Matthew 8:11, Revelation 19:7).

The fact that they have tasted of the Lord proves that there is more to come, just like the first bite of a meal is the advertisement for more to come. Therefore, taste the Lord now and know that there is more to come. The Lord, in Psalm 81:10, tells us, “Open your mouth wide and I will fill it.”

In *The Chronicles of Narnia* by C.S. Lewis, the children eventually get to “the country where everything is allowed,” which symbolizes the new creation. They eat the fruit there. What is the fruit like?

“All I can say is that, compared with those fruits, the freshest grapefruit you’ve ever eaten was dull, and the juiciest orange was dry, and the most melting pear was hard and woody, and the sweetest wild strawberry was sour . . . . If you had once eaten that fruit, all the nicest things in this world would taste like medicines after it.”<sup>1</sup>

## **Facing fear**

By faith we taste the Lord, that taste is the guarantee of more to come, and that guarantee affects the way we live. The more we “taste and see that the Lord is good,” the more we long to dwell in the better country. The more we long to dwell in the better country, the more we can trust God and face into fear, especially fear of loss, in this country. In fact, the more we are liable to make radical decisions to intentionally let go of seemingly invaluable earthly possessions, attitudes, and relationships.

Dallas Willard observes, “Because of the nature of God and his kingdom, all his created beings and everyone who trusts in him are in a position to say, ‘Let the worst happen! Let the worst happen, and God and I will go together in the abundance of his being.’”<sup>2</sup>

The exemplars of faith in Hebrews 11 do precisely that. Earthly loss is nothing in comparison to heavenly gain, and those who have faith know that and are thereby liberated to live outrageous lives of obedience to the heavenly call of God.

The missionary Jim Elliot, who was killed by the natives he was trying to reach with the gospel, modeled this kind of faith with his famous words, “He is no fool who gives up what he cannot keep to gain what he cannot lose.”

Chuck Colson, who founded Prison Fellowship, tells this story:

*Margaret Mayfield was shopping at a San Antonio store when a gun-wielding man suddenly confronted her. "I'm the man who killed the woman at the restaurant last night," he announced, "and I'm going to kill you if you make one move."*

*Ms. Mayfield had just been abducted by mass murderer Stephen Peter Morin. Terrified, she began praying aloud. Instead of ordering her to drive away, Morin began to sob and talk about his unhappy childhood. Ms. Mayfield told him: "It's not coincidence you're here. God brought you to this car. You think the hell you're going through is bad; it's nothing compared to the hell you're going to. Even though you have committed some horrible things, God still loves you."<sup>3</sup>*

Margaret Mayfield's faith enabled her to trust God and face into fear, especially the fear of loss, even the fear of losing her life.

The writer provides further evidence for the validity of faith in verse 2.

## Further evidence

### Hebrews 11:2:

**For by it the people of old received their commendation.**

The "people of old" are highlighted in the rest of Hebrews 11. Literally, they "were witnessed." In Hebrews, the Scriptures provide witness (Hebrews 7:8, 17; 10:15), but so does God (Hebrews 10:15, 11:4). God witnesses the people of old, and he provides a record of his witness in the Scriptures.

God's testimony through the Scriptures, then, provides further evidence—ultimate evidence—for the validity of faith, that what faith believes in and hopes for is real. God's witness is that these people are righteous (Hebrews 11:4, 7) and pleasing to him (Hebrews 11:5).

The evidence for the validity of faith is the way these people lived, which received God's endorsement. Where do we find evidence of God? We find it in creation (Psalm 19:1, Romans 1:20). We find it in the Scriptures. We also find it in people of faith. The way they live speaks of the reality—and of the greatness—of what they believe. The evidence of the reality and greatness of God is the faith that people have.

## Make them your friends

I shared a few years ago with you how on a retreat I was struck by Psalm 147:10-11:

His delight is not in the strength of the horse,  
nor his pleasure in the legs of a man,  
but the Lord takes pleasure in those who fear him,  
in those who hope in his steadfast love.

The Lord is pleased, simply, with those who fear him and hope in his steadfast love. In other words, the Lord is pleased with people of faith. People of faith receive God's commendation. Therefore, work on your faith, and ask God to help you work on your faith.

How should you work on your faith? If the people in the Scriptures provide evidence for faith, it behooves us to become familiar with them. Study them. Feel with them. Live with them. Make them your friends. Their faith will become your faith.

For the past several months, we've lived with Joseph, as his story is told in the book of Genesis. He was thrown into a pit and sold into slavery by his brothers, falsely accused by Potiphar's wife, and thrown into prison by Potiphar, where he rotted for two years.

Nevertheless, Joseph emerged, in his address to his brothers, to give us this astonishing proclamation of faith: "As for you, you meant evil against me, but God meant it for good, to bring it about that many people should be kept alive, as they are today" (Genesis 50:20). Joseph, by the way, will make an appearance later in Hebrews 11 as one of the exemplars of faith.

Not long after I became a pastor at PBC, I dived into the book of Exodus. It was not an easy time for me. I was struggling to figure out what it meant for me to be a pastor, and I was struggling to figure out a relationship that was going nowhere.

As I studied and taught the book of Exodus, however, I connected with Moses, who wanted to great things in Egypt but failed and ran for his life. Nevertheless, the Lord wasn't through with him. The Lord met him and sent him back to Egypt. Step by step, Moses learned to trust the Lord and face his fears—and the Lord used him for great things. Moses came along at a crucial time in my life.

Moses became my friend. By the way, like Joseph, Moses will also make an appearance in Hebrews 11 as one of the exemplars of faith.

Consider the outcome of Joseph's way of life and Moses' way of life and "imitate their faith" (Hebrews 13:7). One of my mentors, David Roper, would often point out that people are often more prone to imitate someone's methods instead of someone's faith. Faith is more significant than methodology. Methodology, which can vary from person to person, place to place, and time to time, proceeds from faith.

To help us understand what he means by faith, the writer supplies an illustration in verse 3 that is close to home: the faith that "we" exercise.

## Evidence for the unseen

### Hebrews 11:3:

**By faith we understand that the universe was created by the word of God, so that what is seen was not made out of things that are visible.**

By faith we have evidence for the unseen—that is, the "things that are not visible" from which God created the universe. Remember, faith is the evidence for things not seen: events that have not yet happened but most assuredly will happen in the new and eternal creation. The existence of the current universe suggests that there is a creator who will create a new universe.

Paul says, "For his invisible attributes, namely, his eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly perceived, ever since the creation of the world, in the things that have been made" (Romans 1:20). Creation provides evidence for the unseen. Faith is the spiritual ability to look through what is seen and perceive the unseen. It's to see traces of God and see God.

## The best explanation

I recently watched a TED talk by a philosopher who was supposedly answering the question, "Why does the universe exist?" I listened carefully, and near as I could tell, he never answered the question. Why not? Presumably because he can't—or, more accurately, he can't with his worldview.

A secular worldview can't account for creation. Secularists tend not to believe in the supernatural, but there's at least one thing that defies a naturalistic

explanation: creation. You can call it nature or something else if you like, but how did it get here?

The best explanation for why the universe exists is the most obvious one: it began supernaturally, as the writer of Hebrews contends, agreeing, of course, with Genesis 1:1: "In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth."

God gives us something that's relatively easy to believe, almost to the point of being obvious, as Paul says in Romans 1: God created the universe. Once you believe God created the universe, it's not difficult to believe that he will recreate it.

Contrast the TED philosopher with Bernhard Riemann, the brilliant 19th century German mathematician whose work laid the foundations for the general theory of relativity. He insisted that he did not invent differential equations but that he simply found them in the universe where God had hidden them—found them in the universe that was created by the word of God. As Riemann was dying, he was reciting the Lord's Prayer with his wife.

## Face whatever

Remember Margaret Mayfield, who was abducted by mass murderer Stephen Peter Morin? Chuck Colson tells the rest of the story:

*Morin forced Ms. Mayfield to start driving, and as she drove, she continued telling him about the love of Christ and began playing evangelistic tapes. Morin pulled off the road and began to pray. "Jesus, I am sorry for everything I have ever done. Please save me." Morin then picked up his pistol, opened the chamber and dumped the bullets into Ms. Mayfield's hands. "I knew I was witnessing a miracle," Ms. Mayfield would later say.*

*Morin decided to go to Fort Worth to meet with evangelist Kenneth Copeland, whose tapes Ms. Mayfield had played. When police picked him up hours later, Morin surrendered quietly. "This morning I would have got up and shot the gun," he told the officers. "But I met this lady today, and now I'm different."*

*During Morin's incarceration in Bexar County Jail, a Prison Fellowship volunteer picked up where Ms. Mayfield left off, witnessing to Morin until he was transferred elsewhere. Years later, as Morin was about to be executed for his crimes, his last words were: "Heavenly Father, I give thanks for . . . the time that we have been together . . . Allow your Holy Spirit to flow*

*as I know your love has been showered upon me . . . .  
Lord Jesus, I commit my soul to you, I praise you, and  
I thank you.” . . . .*

*There is a wonderful lesson in this—an encouragement  
to all of us. If we trust the promises of God, we need not  
be held hostage by fear, the most dangerous hostage-taker  
of all. We can discover . . . the great joy and power of  
faith, no matter the circumstances.<sup>4</sup>*

What does faith do for us? Faith binds us to the reality of what we hope for by giving us a taste of what we hope for. Faith then enables us to trust God and face into fear in the present. Taste the Lord. Trust the Lord.

## **Endnotes**

1. C.S. Lewis, *The Last Battle* (New York: HarperCollins, 1994), 172).
2. Dallas Willard, *Life Without Lack* (Nashville, TN: Nelson Books, 2018 ), 36.
3. Charles W. Colson, “Fear Not” (*Wall Street Journal*, March 18, 2005).
4. Colson.