

8th Sunday after Pentecost  
August 7, 2022

“God’s unseen glorious realities only confessed with God-given saving faith”  
(Hebrews 11:1)

By Rev. Ed Weber

“Grace to you and peace from God the Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, Amen.

Dear brothers and sisters in Christ, today’s text for this 9th Sunday after Pentecost is from our Epistle reading Hebrews 11:1.

**“Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen.”**

Here ends our text.

The faith that God describes here seems like a contradiction, doesn’t it? Substance and evidence are words that describe concrete real things. Whatever the substance is or evidence is, it is something that can be perceived with the senses. If it is a substance, it can be tested, analyzed, touched, tasted, smelled. If it is evidence, it can viewed, scrutinized, used in trials to determine innocence or guilt.

What lawyer would argue a defense on evidence that cannot be produced for all to see? What lawyer would say, “Just trust me, that although I can’t show you the evidence, it’s real?” It doesn’t work that way, does it?

Elon Musk’s purchase of Twitter is contingent on whether the number of Twitter accounts is based on an actual real number of people and not just duplicate or made up accounts. If you are going to buy something, you want to be assured that what you’re getting is real, right?

And yet, your entire life, my life as Christians is based not on what can be seen, tasted or touched, but what is hoped for and what is unseen. It’s called faith - God-given faith that He has created in your heart to believe His promises. He has given you the remarkable gift to be assured of things that you can’t behold and trust that they are real! For faith beholds the reality of these things and counts them as evidence!

What things are we talking about? Well, most importantly, we are talking about the promised land – heaven itself. God has given you by the power of the Holy Spirit the conviction that He has prepared your eternal home of heaven through suffering, death and resurrection of His Son, Jesus Christ.

Faith is a divine gift. It is saving faith. For God gives to you what you do not have and could never produce by yourself – your eternal salvation. The faith that we are speaking about here in Hebrews 11 is the conviction that this world, as real as it is, is not our true home. It's not our fatherland. We are but nomads here, sojourners in a foreign land. Our true home is yet to come. Our true home remains unseen. We will not see it until we leave this temporary land.

First of all, it is very important to differentiate between what is this gift of divine faith in Jesus and His work which promises you the eternal inheritance, and what is man-made faith.

Man-made faith is something we hear about all the time. “You gotta have faith”. You have to believe in yourself that you have the capacity to accomplish something great. Athletes say that to accomplish a great feat, you have to accomplish it twice. First, you have to accomplish it in your mind. That is, you have to absolutely believe you will achieve it, and then you physically achieve it. Sometimes a gold medal is achieved, sometimes an athlete falls short. It's never a sure thing.

Sometimes you see sports fans wearing T-shirts with the word “Believe” on it. In solidarity they gather in numbers to wish their collective will on their favorite team and hopefully influence their team to rise to new heights. Sometimes they do, sometimes they don't. It's never a sure thing.

Even in our daily conversations, you might say to someone, “I have faith in you that you will get the job done and do it right.” With man, it's never a sure thing. Have you ever been let down by someone you trusted and put your faith in? It happens because all mankind is imperfect and incapable of being fully trusted.

Psalm 118 tells us:

**“It is better to trust in the Lord than to put confidence in man.  
9 It is better to trust in the Lord than to put confidence in princes.”**

Hebrews 11 begins by giving us some examples of Old Testament Christians who did just that. They believed in promises given to them by God, not man. Abel,

Enoch, Noah, Abraham, Sarah, Isaac, Jacob all were heirs of the eternal inheritance of heaven through the faith given to them by God.

**“13 These all died in faith, not having received the promises, but having seen them afar off were assured of them, embraced them and confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth.”**

They all died because death is the consequence of sin, that we will return to dust. But, they received something special that made their eternal inheritance real. They received God’s righteousness through the coming Messiah.

Our reading specifically points this about about Noah.

**“By faith Noah, being divinely warned of things not yet seen, moved with godly fear, prepared an ark for the saving of his household, by which he condemned the world and became heir of the righteousness which is according to faith.”**

And we know from Genesis 15 that God showed him all the stars in the sky and promised him that he would have as many descendants, though he had no children.

**“6 And he believed in the Lord, and He accounted it to him for righteousness.”**

To enter the eternal kingdom, God’s righteousness through Christ, the Seed of Abraham is required. It is given through faith.

**“The just shall live by faith.” (Romans 1:17)**

And again Paul says in Romans 3,

**Romans 3:28**

**“Therefore we conclude that a man is justified by faith apart from the deeds of the law.”**

We especially hear more about Abraham in the Hebrews 11 for he is the father of all believers. And his example of trust in God is so important. As we will hear in Hebrews 12 in a couple of weeks, we have cloud of witnesses as we continue to endure in our earthly race.

For Abraham and Sarah, their earthly race was a pilgrimage. Abraham was told to leave his home and go to a land that God promised – the land of Canaan. By faith,

he went. And also by faith, he lived by God's promise even though that meant never having an earthly home that he could call his own. He lived in a tent, as did Isaac and Jacob as our epistle reading tells us. They were nomads. He even had to buy a piece of land to bury his wife Sarah. Again, God was making clear to him as well as us that our true home, our true fatherland is not of this earth, but heaven itself.

And entrance into this fatherland is only possible by the offspring of Abraham and Sarah – Jesus. By faith, Abraham and Sarah believed that this was possible even though they were 100 and 90 years old respectively. What was impossible for man, is only possible by God.

Jesus, the Messiah, ran the race that we could never run. His perfect life of obedience and His death on the cross satisfied God's wrath for our sins. And through faith, we are given what Jesus has won for all people. It is all God's doing! He even creates the faith in us by hearing His word. With Abraham and all the saints before us...

**“Therefore we also, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which so easily ensnares us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, 2 looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith, who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.”**

God was not ashamed to call His Old Testament believers His people. **“Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God, for He has prepared a city for them.”**

And by the same faith, God is not ashamed to be called your God. He lovingly has sealed your faith in your baptism in His most holy name. And today especially, He gives you His forgiveness through faith as you receive the very body and blood of Jesus. That's saving faith! It is the faith that receives the forgiveness of Jesus won for you on the cross and you receive it personally. That's substance. That's evidence that's absolutely true as is your true fatherland of heaven. Amen.

**The peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your heart and minds through Christ Jesus.” Amen. (Philippians 4:7)**