

# Seeing What Can't Be Seen—Enabled by Faith

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If you have your Bibles, you can turn to Hebrews 11, believe it or not. We're going to keep looking at that chapter. It's such a good chapter. Oh, I am so tormented every week about what *not* to tell you. I have a lot to tell you, but I am skipping far more. It's painful. This morning we are going to be looking at seeing what can't be seen—enabled by faith.

I just want to ask you some questions. How do you live? When you look back at your life—last week, last month, last year—what captivates your heart? What drives you? Is it clothing, furniture, cars, food, fun, and your job? Is your job the thing that you live for? Do you trust in what you can see and only in what you can see? Are you from Missouri, the “show me state”? Were you born in the town of Doubting Thomas and your life philosophy is, “Well, I'm not going to believe until I see”? Is that where you are? Is your favorite vacation spot the quaint little town of Little Faith and [are] your favorite sport[s] fretting, worrying, and trusting in yourself?

Or, do you live in this world as an alien and stranger [see Hebrews 11:9]? You live in this world, but you feel like you're not part of it. You're really just visiting here. Is your life a fleeting vapor to you [see James 4:14]? Do you feel an anxiety to do more for God, to serve Him more because you know that any day Christ could come back or you could die and go to be

with Him, and you want to make sure you pour your life into the things of eternity? You realize that all of the pleasures and all of the things that the world loves so much and sets before us as the ultimate goal of what we should strive for [are] really fool's gold. It's not really anything that we can take with us. Were you born in the town of Good Trust? Is your life's philosophy, "I believe so that I can see"?

These are the kinds of things that we are engaging in the Book of Hebrews. Is your favorite pastime talking with the King, pondering His Word, listening to Him speak to you as you pore over the Scriptures, meditat[ing] on His Word to you, and talking back to Him in prayer? There are those who live by faith and those who live by doubt. There are those who live by faith and those who live by sight. There are those who live by faith and those who refuse to believe that there is a God, that Jesus is His Son, that angels exist, that demons exist, that there is cosmic warfare going on in the spiritual realm all around us that we can't see, and that they are fighting for the souls of men—for some of your souls.

The author of Hebrews states in Hebrews 10:38: "But my righteous one shall live by faith; and if he shrinks back, my soul has no pleasure in him." I don't know about you, but that verse scares me. When I look at my life and I realize how often I don't live by faith, [I know that] that is how often God has no pleasure in me. If we want to please God, and of course we do if we love Him, we need to live by faith. That's all there is to it. That's why [Hebrews] 11 exists. It exists here, after the statement I just quoted, to remind us that it is absolutely necessary for the followers of Christ to live by faith because that is what defines them as followers of Christ.

Of course, there is a demonic host working against you, behind the scenes, exploiting your fleshly desires and trying to [keep] you from following [and] trusting in Christ, believing in God's Word, living for eternity. The question is: Is Satan succeeding in these things [in your life] or not?

If I had some insight, or some insider information, and I don't, but if I did, and I could tell you that a month from today the Rapture would occur, would that change the way you live? If you're sitting out there thinking,

“Well, certainly it would,” my question to you is: Why aren't you living that way now? Do you believe that Jesus could come like a thief in the night [see 1 Thessalonians 5:2], that He could come [at] any time, that we should live every day as if it is our last day? I know these things are convicting, they're convicting to me.

If you're out there thinking, “Well, Pastor Hughes, what about you?” I just want you to know [that] I have put myself under fire all week. You only get an hour, [but] I'm under the fire myself longer than you. I know these things are convicting, but the reason we're here is to try and snap ourselves out [of bad patterns]. The reason I'm doing this series is because I see a lot of people just going along, loving the things of the world, accumulating the things of the world, and not really getting a clue that this is about eternity, about things unseen. We need to live for eternity now, for things unseen now, and not put our hope, our trust, all our efforts, energy, money, and resources into things destined to perish.

Soon we will have no opportunity to win souls for Christ, to live by faith, to trust in the promises of God, and so, we need to just be snapped out of it. We need to have our choker chain jerked on, so we wake up, and [say], “Whoa! My life is half over. It's three-quarters over. It may be over this afternoon when somebody runs into me with [his] semi-truck.” We don't know when we're going to go, so we need to live for Christ now because now is the only time [we] can do anything about it. The past is the past and the future is unknown.

Look in your Bibles at Hebrews 11 and follow along as I read verses 8–16. This section begins to put forth Abraham as the great example of faith. We read:

By faith Abraham, when he was called, obeyed by going out to a place which he was to receive for an inheritance; and he went out, not knowing where he was going. By faith he lived as an alien in the land of promise, as in a foreign land, dwelling in tents with Isaac and Jacob, fellow heirs of the same promise;

for he was looking for the city which has foundations, whose architect and builder is God. By faith even Sarah herself received ability to conceive, even beyond the proper time of life, since she considered Him faithful who had promised. Therefore there was born even of one man, and him as good as dead at that, as many descendants as the stars of heaven in number, and innumerable as the sand which is by the seashore. All these died in faith, without receiving the promises, but having seen them and having welcomed them from a distance, and having confessed that they were strangers and exiles on the earth. For those who say such things make it clear that they are seeking a country of their own. And indeed if they had been thinking of that country from which they went out, they would have had opportunity to return. But as it is, they desire a better country, that is, a heavenly one. Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God; for He has prepared a city for them.

From this text, I want to show you four effects that true, saving faith produces in the life of a believer so that you can really look at your life, evaluate it, and ask yourself, “Do I have this kind of faith?” If not, seek it, and if you do, but to a smaller degree, seek to have it in a larger degree so that you can give glory to God and so that you can receive that great reward.

First: Your faith should produce trust in God. Abraham is our primary example here. Look at [Hebrews 11:]8. It says: “By faith Abraham, when he was called, obeyed by going out to a place which he was to receive for an inheritance; and he went out, not knowing where he was going.” The Greek indicates that [he obeyed] immediately. Notice the text says: “*When* he was called,” not *after* he was called. It’s as if Abraham was called and while God was still speaking, [Abraham] was packing his stuff. Immediate, instantaneous obedience is what is being emphasized here. As soon as God told him to leave, man, he was getting ready. There was no delay.

We talked about this [in the previous sermon<sup>1</sup> and so I'm not going to go into it in great detail right now, but just [remember] that true saving faith produces action in the direction of God's Word—always. There is no such thing as disobedient faith. It's disobedient unbelief and obedient faith.

Consider that Abraham, before th[e] time [when he was called by God], never knew about God. He lived in Mesopotamia. He was an idol worshipper, a pagan. So, here he is, a pagan living in a foreign land, [and] God appears to him. You [might] think, "I don't remember God appearing to him in Genesis." It doesn't say that in Genesis, but Stephen, in Acts 7:2–3, when he is giving that sermon to the Jews [that] made them so mad they stoned them to death for it, says:

And he said, "Hear me, brethren and fathers! The God of glory appeared to our father Abraham when he was in Mesopotamia, before he lived in Haran, and said to him, 'Leave your country and your relatives, and come into the land that I will show you.'"

Abraham got a vision, dream, theophany, [or] some appearance of God [in which] God said, "Get out of Dodge," and [Abraham] said, "OK, I'm leaving. I'm leaving." The call of God was so strong in Abraham's life that immediately he left his country, his relatives, his house, his people, his false religion—he left everything. That is pretty amazing. We can begin to see why he is such a great man of faith.

It is a good and encouraging sign to see this [type of faith] in a young believer, isn't it? Somebody comes to Christ, and, man, [he's] pitching [his] sin as fast as [he] can unload it. I love it when [someone] come[s] up [and says], "Pastor Jack, is this bad?"

"Yeah, that's bad."

"OK, I'm getting rid of it. How about this?"

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<sup>1</sup>"Obedience—the Fruit of Faith," available at:  
<http://www.calvarybiblechurch.org/Sermons.aspx/audio/sermon/2010/20100207>.

“That’s not good either.”

“OK, I’m not doing that anymore.” [He] just want[s] to get rid of it, and [he’s] eager to get rid of it. Man, [he is] going to pitch [his] old life *right now*. [He] want[s] to get all of that out of there because, man, [he has] found Christ and [he’s] excited about it and [he] want[s] to be walking with the Lord. [He] want[s] to reject what God wants [him] to reject and accept what God wants [him] to accept. [He’s] more than happy to do that.

Consider that Abraham didn’t even know where he was going. He’s starting to pack, and in the back of his mind, he’s probably [thinking], “I wonder where I’m going.” Think about that. That would be a legitimate question. “When I have all my servants and all my stuff [together], do I walk out to the front of the house, spin around, close my eyes, stop, and go, ‘That way’? Which way do [I] go?” He didn’t know.

The *Believer’s Bible Commentary* says: “The walk of faith often gives the impression to others of being imprudent and reckless, but the man who knows God is content to be led blindfolded, not knowing the route ahead.”<sup>2</sup> You start walking by faith in the promises of God, and soon you’re going to have people coming up to you [saying], “Oh ho ho ho ho, you’re being a little rash. You’re being a little bit foolish. I realize God gave these promises, but they were given a long time ago, a lot of people have died trusting in them, and they never came to pass. I wouldn’t throw your life away by trusting in [these promises].” Even people in the church [say things like this]. I’ve even had people in the church rebuke me for trusting God. Be assured: faith in the promises of God correctly understood is never foolhardy. The fools are those who do not trust God’s Word.

John Calvin, speaking of Abraham, said:

He was called from his own country. He indeed did in this way undergo a voluntary exile, while yet he did nothing but by God’s command; and no doubt it is one of the chief things

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<sup>2</sup>Arthur Farstad, ed., *Believer’s Bible Commentary* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 1995), Hebrews 11:8.

which belong to faith, not to move a step except God's word shows us the way, and as a lantern gives us light, according to what David says. (Psalm 119:105.) Let us then learn that it is a thing to be observed through life, that we are to undertake nothing to which God does not call us.<sup>3</sup>

That's true. We need to make sure that we aren't "living by faith in nothing." We live by faith in God's Word and what God has said. We don't take any steps unless God has said it, but we take all steps because He does.

I find it a bit amusing that God didn't tell Abraham where he was going. He merely said, "Go to the place I will show you." Why do you think He tormented him in that way? "Get all your stuff together and get ready. I'll show you where you're going."

"Well, where is it? Should I go north or south, east or west?"

"Just get ready. I'll show you."

[Imagine that] you lose your job. All your bills are still coming in. How are you going to pay your rent? How are you going to pay your mortgage? How are you going to buy food? How are you going to survive? Where are you going to work? What will you do? How will God provide for you? All of these are mysteries, aren't they? All of these are unknown variables. You don't know [the answers]. God is up there, [thinking], "Mwah ha ha ha ha. You're going to have to trust Me *now*. I've put you into a straight jacket. It's either trust Me or die. Are you going to do it or not? Are you going to fret or not? Are you going to worry or not? I'm giving you an opportunity to live by faith. Are you going to live by faith or not?"

All you have [are] things like, "He will never leave you or forsake you" [see Hebrews 13:5]. "God knows what you need before you ask" [see Matthew 6:8]. "Trust in the Lord and fret not; it leads only to evildoing" [see Psalm 37:8]. "He will supply all of your needs according to His riches and grace in Christ Jesus" [see Philippians 4:19]. "God causes all things

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<sup>3</sup>John Calvin, *Commentaries on the Epistle of Paul the Apostle to the Hebrews*. Available at: <http://www.ccel.org/ccel/calvin/calcom44.xvii.v.html>

to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose” [see Romans 8:28]. “I have never seen the righteous forsaken or begging bread” [see Psalm 37:25]. All of a sudden, you realize, “Well, I know *that*.” Yes, but you don’t know any specifics, do you? Why does God hold back the specifics? [It is] because He wants us to live by faith. He wants us to trust Him for what He has said, not what He has not said.

But, of course, what we want to know is what He *hasn't* said, right? As soon as you lose your job, [you ask], “Why, God? Why? Where will I find work now in this world, in this economy?” As if God doesn’t know, as if He could send a little angel to you and tell you. He’s not going to. He wants you to live by faith. God shows up to Abraham, and says, “Pack up and head out to the place I am going to eventually show you.”

Look at [Hebrews 11:]9: “By faith he lived as an alien in the land of promise, as in a foreign land, dwelling in tents with Isaac and Jacob, fellow heirs of the same promise.” He was given the land of promise, but others were in control of it. That’s a bummer. He was a foreigner. He was an alien. He had no rights of citizenship. He never built a house. He lived in a tent. For those of you who go camping, a weekend is OK, but 100 years in a tent? It would be like somebody extremely wealthy buying you all the land from the border of Mexico all the way up through Malibu. [The wealthy person says], “Yeah, San Diego, Huntington Beach, Malibu—it’s all yours. I give it to you.”

“Cool!”

“So get down there and get it.”

“All right.” So you sell your house, have a garage sale, pare down to just your bare necessities. You get your camper and you head down [to the border]. You go into a little camping spot there, and you wait. Other people—campers—[ask you], “So how long are you here for?”

“Well, I don’t know how long I’m going to be here, but I want you to know all this land is mine.”

They're looking at you, thinking, "Oh, one of *those*. He must have grown up in the sixties." People would think you were so weird. "What do you mean this is all yours?"

"Oh, yeah, God gave it to me. The whole coastline here."

"Well, pal, I've got a house down there."

"It's *my* house."

"No, it's not."

"Yes, it is. I just haven't received it yet, so keep good care of it."

That seems radical. That seems insane—if it were not for the promise of God. But when God speaks, it's as good as a done deal. Though [Abraham] never received it, though he was a foreigner in that land that was given to him for 100 years until he died at the age of 175, yet God said, "I'm giving it to you."

R. Kent Hughes points out: "The only land Abraham ever owned was Sarah's tomb, a cave in a field in Machpelah near Hebron, which he bought from Ephron the Hittite (Gen. 23)."<sup>4</sup> Great. "What do you own?"

"Oh, I own a cave. The whole thing is mine, technically speaking, but I did have to purchase this to get it a little beforehand. The rest comes free later." When Christ returns a second time in glory, the righteous will inherit the earth [see Psalm 37:29]. Abraham will get his Promised Land in full, with the King he has trusted in. This is why Jesus said to the centurion with great faith in Matthew 8:11: "I say to you that many will come from east and west, and recline at the table with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven." There will be a kingdom established on earth and that kingdom will then continue on into eternity. They're going to get what they hoped for. They're going to get it. They still haven't got it, but they will because God said so.

Notice that though the patriarchs didn't receive the Promised Land while living on earth, they are going to receive it. Look at [Hebrews

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<sup>4</sup>R. Kent Hughes, *Hebrews: An Anchor for the Soul* (Vol. 2) (Wheaton, IL: Good News/Crossway, 1993), p. 97.

11:]11. Not only that, we read in [Hebrews 11:]11: “By faith even Sarah herself received ability to conceive, even beyond the proper time of life.” This also shows Abraham’s faith. You’re thinking to yourself, “Well, I thought it shows Sarah’s faith.” No, no, it just looks that way. You’re thinking, “What do you mean?” I mean this: when you translate this verse, you have to decide who it’s talking about, because the verse has some things in it [that] make it kind of hard to interpret. The New American Standard, for instance, translates it just as I read: “By faith even Sarah herself received ability to conceive.” But, when you read the Genesis account, both Abraham and Sarah laughed when God said, “You’re going to have a child,” right [see Genesis 17:17]? Yeah. If you haven’t read it, that’s what they did.

Abraham, then, eventually believed, and he is described as having believed many places, both in the Old and New Testament. Sarah is never described as having believed. As a matter of fact, God appeared and said, “You’re going to have a child,” when Abraham was seventy-five and Sarah didn’t believe. She didn’t believe for twenty-five years until the angel appeared again, and said, “At this time next year, Sarah will have a child.” Sarah was now ninety and Abraham was ninety-nine. You hear this giggling in the tent, “Hee hee hee” [see Genesis 18:12]. The angel of the Lord—Christ—says, “Why is Sarah laughing?” [see Genesis 18:13]. In other words, “Why is she mocking Me, when I have just said that you’re going to have a child? Is anything too difficult for the Lord?” [see Genesis 18:14].

Sarah says, “I didn’t laugh” [see Genesis 18:15]. She lies to cover up her unbelief and mocking of the promise of God. The Lord says, “No, but you did laugh” [Genesis 18:15]. It never says she had faith. That’s one reason I don’t think [Hebrews 11:11] is talking about Sarah[’s faith], but about Abraham’s faith. But that’s not all. If you look at the text, you’ll notice something pretty unique in [Hebrews 11:]11. Notice it says, “By faith, even Sarah herself.” Do you see anything unique about that? Are there any other “by faith’s” in the text? [They are] all the way through it. Are there any other “even” put the person’s name there “herself or himself”? No. This

is the only one in the whole passage where it is emphatically stated. It's like this: "By faith, *even Sarah herself*." That's what it is. It's emphatic and it's the only one in the whole text. Why? Something is unique about Sarah that makes this whole discussion of faith—Abraham's faith—both before and after unique. Why is she here? Why is she singled out emphatically? There's something unique [in the phrase] *even Sarah herself*. I believe she is emphasized because she *didn't* believe, but because Abraham believed, *even Sarah herself*, in disbelief, still conceived.

I know you may be thinking to yourself, "Are you sure?" Look at the context. Look at what it says right afterwards [in Hebrews 11:]12. In [Hebrews 11:]12, it speaks of Isaac being born of "one man." "OK," you say, "so it does talk about Abraham before and after, but it does mention Sarah there, right?" True, but the real clincher is the phrase translated "received ability to conceive." That's something you can't really get a grip on unless you have a little Greek: *katabolen spermatos*. It's really *dunamin* [from] *dunamis*, [meaning] "the power" to *katabolen*, "to throw, cast forth, put forth, produce" seed. Sarah didn't do that. She couldn't do that. Women can't do that. That means the text can't be talking about Sarah. Abraham, in [Hebrews 11:]12 confirms that "Therefore there was born of one man."

The NIV tries to capture this, and what it does, is it actually puts Abraham's name in the text in verse 11, though it doesn't appear in the Greek. It translates it this way: "By faith Abraham, even though he was past age—and Sarah herself was barren—was enabled to become a father because he considered him faithful who had made the promise." The NIV's translators justified putting Abraham in there by ellipsis. Do you know what that is? You're thinking, "No, my English is... old." OK, so, [let me give you an example]. We're talking about Tim. (I'm picking on you, Tim.) We're talking about Tim. Tim woke up in the morning, he ate breakfast, and drove to work. Notice how the first time I mention [him], I say, "Tim"—Tim woke up. The second time I mention [him, I say], "He ate breakfast." The third time I mention [him, I say], "Drove to work." I don't even have a subject there, right? It is supplied by the context—the near or far context. The near

context in this case would be “Tim is he who got up, Tim is he who ate breakfast, and Tim is the one who drove to work.” But, we usually just say the person’s name, then we give the pronoun, and then we just describe other things that [he] did, and all of those subjects are supplied by what is called ellipsis. So that is why the NIV translators inserted “Abraham by faith.” Abraham, because he is in view, obviously, in all of the verses preceding and the verses following.

The NET [New English Translation] Bible also tries to do this, and they do it without inserting Abraham’s name. They say: “By faith, even though Sarah herself was barren and he was too old, he received the ability to procreate, because he regarded the one who had given the promise to be trustworthy.” One might argue that [Hebrews 11:]11 does say “she considered him faithful,” but that little “she” there could go both ways—it can be “he” or “she” because the verb here isn’t masculine or feminine. That is why some of the better interpreters—F.F. Bruce, Leon Morris, Simon Kistemaker, John MacArthur, and, less well-known, myself, take this view.

This doesn’t mean that Sarah was godless. Obviously she wasn’t. She appears in 1 Peter 3:1–6 as a woman who trusted God when Abraham twice had the lame-brained idea that in order to spare his life he would say, “She is my sister,” and let another man take her as his wife. She trusted God, [and became] the ultimate example of submission. But in this case, there is nothing in the Scriptures [that] says she trusted God that God would give her a child. As a matter of fact, after twenty-five years, she denied it with a lie [see Genesis 18:15].

So we would have an interpretation of [Hebrews 11:]11—this is kind of the expanded paraphrased interpretation—is this: “By faith Abraham, even though he was past the age of childbirth, was able to produce seed and conceive a child, by even Sarah herself, who didn’t believe, because he considered God faithful who had promised him a male heir through Sarah.”

Paul describes Abraham’s amazing faith in Romans 4:18–21. This is just incredible. He’s talking about how all of us can be children of Abraham through faith. He says this:

In hope against hope he believed, so that he might become a father of many nations according to that which had been spoken, "So shall your descendents be." Without becoming weak in faith he contemplated his own body, now as good as dead since he was about a hundred years old, and the deadness of Sarah's womb; yet, with respect to the promise of God, he did not waver in unbelief but grew strong in faith, giving glory to God, and being fully assured that what God had promised, He was able also to perform.

God told Abraham, "You will have a child." Just think about this. They longed to have a child for seventy-five years, [and still] no child. [Yet] God says, "You're going to have a child."

They [respond], "Oh, praise God, even though we're so old, we're going to have a child." [Abraham] is thanking God, he's praising God, and then what happens? A year goes by; no child. Two, three, ten, fifteen, twenty, twenty-five [years go by]. Think about that. Think about how difficult [it] would be to continue in faith. It not only says [that] he continued to believe God's promise, but as time went on, and it became more impossible for [Abraham] and Sarah to have a child, he grew stronger in faith. I mean, he looked at his body and Sarah's [as] they're shuffling around, [and] he's thinking, "Am I really going to have a child? God said so. I'm believing it." The older he got and the more impossible it became for the promise to be fulfilled, the stronger his faith became until he just knew it was going to happen. It was going to happen because God said so. God made it clear with Sarah.

The question is, when Paul describes this in Romans 4, what is the gem here? [The gem is that] he considered God. He considered God was able to perform what He promised. This is the key. Whenever you begin to doubt, whenever you begin to think, "I don't know. How is this going to happen? How are we going to provide for ourselves? How is God going to fix this situation?" and you're just kind of at the end of you, that's the problem.

You're thinking of you, and you're thinking of your circumstances. You need to take your eyes off of those things and put them on God, and say, "Who is God? What can God do? He is God Almighty. Nothing is impossible for Him." If He makes a promise, He *has* to fulfill it. He has the power to fulfill it, He will fulfill it, and He has a perfect record of fulfilling it. You don't know how He's going to do it, but you know He will because He always does because He is God.

What we can learn from this is: True faith produces a trust in God against all odds, against all obstacles, against anything that seems to render the promise of God impossible, yet God does it. You just go through the Scriptures. There are so many examples of impossible things that became un-impossible because of God. I mean, God tells Jonah, "I want you to go preach to the Ninevites." [Jonah] gets swallowed by a fish! There is no way he's showing up in Nineveh. He is fish bait. Then, soon, he is preaching there [see Jonah 1–4]. Think about it. You see, this amplifies the glory of God, when He waits until things are absolutely impossible.

He does that in our lives, doesn't He? Sometimes people say, "Seeing is believing." That's the motto of those people who don't please God. Others try to escape having faith in God by claiming, "Well, you can't just believe the Bible. You can't just go willy-nilly trusting in God. That's sinful presumption." No, it's not. Presumption is when you trust God for something He hasn't promised. Another kind of presumption is to not trust God when He has promised. We need to trust God. The fool is the one who does not trust God. True faith knows that God will fulfill [His] word because it considers God, who is faithful, who is almighty, who is all powerful, who has never failed. He is perfectly faithful, and just says, "God is going to do it. I have no idea. To me it seems rather impossible, but God is going to do it." He always does.

Second: Your faith should enable you to see what can't be seen. I love this part. Look at [Hebrews 11:]10: "For he," Abraham, "was looking for the city which has foundations, whose architect and builder is God." Look at Hebrews 12:[22]. It talks about this city a little more. "But you have come

to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to myriads of angels.” Look down at Hebrews 13:14: “For here we do not have a lasting city, but we are seeking the city which is to come.” Jesus, in Revelation 3:12 says:

He who overcomes, I will make him a pillar in the temple of My God, and he will not go out from it anymore; and I will write on him the name of My God, and the name of the city of My God, the new Jerusalem, which comes down out of heaven from My God, and My new name.

(Maybe that's a verse that's pro-tattoo, I don't know. God tattoos and you know it's going to be in indelible ink.) He puts His name, the new Jerusalem, My name, we stamp you, barcode: This person belongs to God. Later on, toward the end of Revelation in Revelation 21:2, we read: “And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, made ready as a bride adorned for her husband.” There it is, the new Jerusalem. I just want you to ask yourself: “Is this [my] home, that new Jerusalem?”

Is that the home that you long for, the home [where] you want to be? Do you see all of your existence here as temporary? “Yeah, I'm just here for a while and then I'm going home to that place [that] can only be seen by faith.” Faith sees the city whose builder and architect is God. It's kind of like Christian and Hopeful in John Bunyan's *[The] Pilgrim's Progress* as they are on their way. They come to the Delectable Mountains and they meet the shepherds. Do you remember the shepherds? Shepherds Knowledge, Experience, Watchful, and Sincere? These shepherds first take them to the top of a hill called Error. They look down from the hill called Error and when they look down, they see all these bodies dashed to pieces on the rocks below. They [say], “What happened to those people?”

“They didn't believe in the Resurrection.”

[The shepherds take Christian and Hopeful] to the top of another hill called Caution, and when they look down, they see all of these tombs. [They ask], “Well, whose tombs are these?”

“These are the tombs of those who have died in Doubting Castle.”

Christian and Hopeful are grieved at these things. Then Bunyan writes:

Then said the shepherds one to another, “Let us now show the pilgrims the gates of the Celestial City, if they have skill to see through our looking glass.” The pilgrims lovingly accepted the motion: so they led them to the top of a high hill, called Clear, and gave them the looking glass.

They tried to look; but thinking of the last things shown to them by the shepherds it made their hands shake, and they could not look steadily through the glass; yet they thought they saw something like a gate, and also some of the glory of the place. Then they went away, and sang,

”Thus by the shepherds secrets are reveal’d,  
Which from all other men are kept concealed:  
Come to the shepherds then, if you would see  
Things deep, things hid, and that mysterious be.”<sup>5</sup>

Bunyan depicts what is happening here this morning: A shepherd is trying to get you to see things. Do you see them?

There are times when we wish we could see things better than we could, but we can't. Just this morning, we were driving down [Olive]. It was kind of fresh in my mind after preparing this sermon. We were going down, and I looked across the way and I could see the mountains in the background, but there was the “marine layer.” (That's what you call it when you live here; when you don't, it's smog.) The marine layer was happening and you

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<sup>5</sup>John Bunyan, *The Pilgrim's Progress*, Part 1, The Eighth Stage. Available at: <http://www.ccel.org/ccel/bunyan/pilgrim.iv.viii.html>.

could see the outline of the hill and that there [were] buildings, but it was dim. You couldn't see any detail. It was fuzzy. Faith sees Christ, sees the angels, sees heaven, sees the glories to come. And it may not allow you to see all the details, and you always want to see more, but at least you can see them.

Bunyan pictures, toward the end of [*The Pilgrim's Progress*], when Christian and Hopeful were out of eyesight of Doubting Castle, right before they cross the River of Death, that Christian and Hopeful's vision became clear. This is what Bunyan writes:

Now, as they walked in this land, they had more rejoicing than in parts more remote from the kingdom to which they were bound; and drawing near to the city, they had yet a more perfect view of it: It was built of pearls and precious stones, the streets there were paved with gold; and because of the natural glory of the city, and the reflection of the sunbeams upon it, Christian fell sick with desire; Hopeful also had a fit or two of the same disease: and both lay crying for a while because of their pangs.<sup>6</sup>

You who are older in the Lord, you who have walked with faith for a long time, whose hair has long been silver, you know this. Your body is breaking down, life is hard, just going through the routine of getting dressed and going to bed is about all you can handle. You wish you could eat, but you can't eat very much anymore. Your doctor has told you not to eat so many things that you're down to vanilla wafers and oatmeal. You're tired all the time, so you try to sleep, but when you try to sleep, you wake up. You find more and more comfort in God, His Word, prayer, and His promises. Your mind turns toward the Celestial City more and more. As you approach the River of Death, you ache to be there. You long to be there.

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<sup>6</sup>Bunyan, Part 1, The Tenth Stage. Available at:  
<http://www.ccel.org/ccel/bunyan/pilgrim.iv.x.html>.

I remember Joan Bartholomew, who is now in glory. She was about ready to die one time—she had multiple near-death bouts before she finally was taken home. I remember she told me, when she got back here on Sunday morning, “I’m kind of disappointed.”

I said, “What do you mean?”

“Well,” she says, “when I was really sick and the doctors said, ‘You might not make it,’ I was so excited! I thought, ‘I might see Jesus today. Today I might see Jesus.’” She said, “I [thought], ‘Just take me Lord, I’m ready, I’m ready, I’m ready.’ I was so excited, and then they made me better.”

When you have faith in the afterlife, it just makes you long to be there. The more your body starts breaking down, the more you want to be there because the less this life has for you. You see that Celestial City better as you ripen with years.

Look at [Hebrews 11:]13: “All these died in faith, without receiving the promises, but having seen them and having welcomed them from a distance. . . .” Just stop there. “All these” refers to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. [It’s] mostly Abraham in the context, but Isaac and Jacob were also mentioned in [Hebrews 11:]9. They never received the land they lived in. They were always visitors there. The greatest examples of faith are those that endure for the longest periods of time because that’s what really tests your faith, right? Anybody can have faith for 5 minutes, but [for] 5 years, 10 years, 50 years, 100 years, 175 years? That is herculean. That is massive faith because the world looks at faith as kind of a probability. [The world thinks] that if Christ hasn’t come in the last 2,000 years, then chances are He won’t. There is no *chance*. He will [return], just not in your time. He’s “not slow about His promise, as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not willing for any to perish but for all to come to repentance” [2 Peter 3:9].

You’re at the doctor, and he says, “Oh, I’m so sorry. You’ve got this terrible disease,” and you [say], “Oh, praise God! I can’t wait to see Jesus!” [The doctor] is going to look at you, [and say], “You need some medicine.

What can I give you?” [His] whole thought is “This life is all there is. I must keep you alive forever in this life, and when you die in this life, it is a tragedy!”

You’re thinking, “Listen, don’t do anything heroic here. I’m ready. I’m ready to check out.”

He’s going to look at you, [and say], “You are twisted! What church do you go to?”

Helen Annis Casterline wrote:

I go on not knowing,  
I would not if I might,  
I’d rather walk in the dark with God  
Than walk alone in the light;  
I’d rather walk by faith with Him  
Than to walk alone by sight.<sup>7</sup>

That is what faith says. When [Hebrews 11:]13 goes on to say: “but having seen them and having welcomed them from a distance,” the idea is that faith was able to see through the dimness and to grasp on to these unseen realities that you can’t see unless you believe in the promises of God. It was able to see and welcome the very realities that were promised.

Picture in your mind some sailors on a big, masted ship. They’re all loaded up, ready to go out to sea on a long voyage. The captain says, “Steer by the coastline.” There’s this big, rocky coastline and all the families are there, waving. The sailors are waving, greeting, [and] saluting each other but from a distance. They can’t hug, but they can see each other. As the boat captain says, “Turn away from shore,” [the families] see their loved ones fade, but they know they’re coming back and they’ll see them again. They have a hope.

There [are] many of you who have lost loved ones. They’re with the Lord now—children, mothers, fathers, brothers, sisters, relatives, [and]

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<sup>7</sup>William MacDonald’s, *The Believer’s Bible Commentary*, (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1995) Heb.11:8.

friends. You're going to see them again. [Death] is not good-bye. If you know the Lord and they know the Lord, you are going to see them again.

I had somebody come [up to me and ask], "Will we know each other in heaven?"

"Of course we will! You'll like me a lot better. I'll be fixed then, and so will you!"

Look at the [first] part of [Hebrews 11:]16: "But as it is, they desire a better country, that is, a heavenly one." I like this. They never saw this country with their physical eye, but they [saw] it by faith. They welcome[d] it from a distance and long[ed] to be there. Does that describe you? Do you just long? Do you ever sit around and just get caught up in the glories to come? You're just [thinking], "Lord, I can't wait to get out of here!" (Especially Mondays. It works [well] on Mondays.) The whole point here is that faith gives you a sight that those who don't believe can't see.

Recently I read a book on the way back and forth to England—half there and half back. [It was] a book by Randy Alcorn. It's kind of a fiction book called *The Edge of Eternity*. In that book, this guy gets caught in between the physical world that we live in and the spiritual world. He's kind of pilgriming toward [a] city [called] Charis, [which is] the Greek word for grace. [He's] going toward Charis, because that's where the king tells [him] to go. [He's] walking the Red Road to Charis and on [the] way, every once in a while [he] get[s] on top of a hill and [he] can see this huge chasm, this huge canyon that just goes off down forever and it just reeks. Yet, Charis is on the other side of that and [he doesn't] understand how [he] can get across that chasm, but [he's] supposed to go toward the city. What's interesting is [that] the people who don't believe in the king don't see the chasm at all. They just walk in that direction and fall off into it.

The whole point there is that when those who are on the road believe in the King, they get spiritual sight and they begin to see the things that people who don't believe can't see. The more faith they have, the clearer the vision is of Charis, the chasm, and the spiritual warfare that's going on. (It's great, [the book] fit right in [to this sermon]. I didn't intend to do that, but it did.)

Notice the emphasis on seeing here in [Hebrews 11]. Look at [Hebrews 11:]1. We are told that faith is “the conviction of things not seen.” Look at [Hebrews 11:]3: God made everything out of nothing. In [Hebrews 11:]7], Noah believed in faith after being warned about things not yet seen. Go down to [Hebrews 11:]19. Abraham believes God would raise Isaac from the dead though he had never seen a resurrection before. In [Hebrews 11:]26, Moses was looking to the reward, which he never saw. He just expected he would receive [it] by faith. In [Hebrews 11:]27, we are told Moses endured seeing him who is unseen. Ten times in Hebrews 11 faith is either defined or described as seeing with the eyes of faith things [that] cannot be seen without faith.

That is why people think you're loony when you're a Christian and you live for the Lord. They think, “What is wrong with you?”

“I just believe in things you don't believe in. You believe in... I don't know what—primordial slime? I believe in the promises of God. That's just how it is. I see with the eye of faith. I see angels and demons. I see that there is spiritual warfare. [I see] not with my physical eye, [but] I just know these things because God's Word describes them and I believe it. So, I can see them in my mind. I know what's going on. I know that death is a necessary passage from this life into the next. And you know what? I can't wait to die!” That freaks people [out]. They're almost going to call 911 on you.

[They're thinking], “Man, he's suicidal. He can't wait to die! He's suicidal!”

“No, I just believe what Jesus said: ‘He who believes in me will never die’ [see John 11:26]. That's what I believe. So, yes, I am looking forward to dying. I'm sorry that freaks you [out], but you can look forward to dying, too. Either that, or you can go through life pretending you're not going to die, though everybody does, and then when you do die, all your relatives can say, ‘Oh, he's in a better place now,’ but you won't be.”

[Through faith], you can see the Tribulation. You can see the antichrist. Do you ever just imagine what it's going to be like when Christ comes back in glory, the heavens are rolled back like a scroll [see Revelation 6:14], and

God commands that all men can now see into the spiritual realm? They see Christ, the holy angels, the saints clothed in fine linen coming back in great glory. All the wicked who haven't believed these things, [who] refused to believe these things and never could see these things now see them with their physical eye and are in terror. All the righteous, who have believed these things by faith, and [have] seen them by faith, now they see them with their eyes and they praise God. Is that you or not? That's what we're talking about here. If you can't see these things, you don't have faith and you need to get it.

[Third]: Your faith should keep you from misplaced hope. Look at [Hebrews 11:]13–14. “All these,” and again, [this is] primarily speaking of Abraham, but also Isaac, Jacob, and really anybody who believes, “confessed that they were strangers and exiles on the earth. For those who say such things make it clear that they are seeking a country of their own.” As soon as you say, “I am an alien and stranger,” what you're saying is, “I have a different country that's not of this world.” [Hebrews 11:]15[-16]: “And indeed if they had been thinking of that country from which they went out, they would have had opportunity to return. But as it is, they desire a better country, that is, a heavenly one.” Notice their hope was in heaven, not the world, houses, job[s], car[s], food, [or] fun. Their hope was in heaven. If you lose all your earthly possessions, then so what?

You know, sometimes during these big fires, you [see] people [on the news] that are on their knees, wailing and weeping, “My house burnt down and I lost all my antiques!” Listen, anybody here have antiques? You're losing them. This is the error of the pharaohs of Egypt, right? Didn't the pharaohs of Egypt take their big tombs [and] load them full of a bunch of stuff—gold and all those cool pieces of furniture? I am so glad they did that because now we [have] it. They didn't take a single piece of straw with them. They didn't take a speck of dust with them. It's all been left behind and now it's in the British Museum. You can go look at in Cairo [or] in the Louvre. I'm glad they stored it up. We needed it. It teaches a lot of cool things. It's cool to look at all that gold. They didn't take any with them. You

don't take anything with you. You're going to lose everything you have. Get used to it. If it happens earlier than later, oh well. You don't have to worry about it. That's the good thing about not having anything—you don't have to worry about it.

That is why the people mentioned in Hebrews 10:34 in the chapter [preceding our text] acted the way they did. The author of Hebrews says: "For you showed sympathy to the prisoners and accepted joyfully the seizure of your property, knowing that you have for yourselves a better possession and a lasting one." Yes, the wicked can take my house and take my possessions, and I can lose everything in this world. So? I'm going to inherit the earth. Neener, neener. You can have it if you want, but I'm going to inherit the earth.

Martin Luther said: "Whosoever professes that he has a Father in heaven, confesses himself a stranger on earth; hence there is in the heart an ardent longing, like that of a child living among strangers, in want and grief, far from his fatherland."<sup>8</sup> This is why Paul says in 1 Corinthians 15:19: "If we have hoped in Christ in this life only, we are of all men most to be pitied." Listen, if there isn't an afterlife, if Jesus didn't rise from the dead and go to that afterlife, if He isn't coming [back] from that afterlife to take me with Him [to] that afterlife, then "we are of all men most to be pitied." Christianity is pathetic [without the promise of eternal life]. But if it is true, let's live like it. If you believe these things are true, then live like it. Don't just give it lip service. Trust in this world and this world is going to let you down. Trust in this world, [and] you will lose all.

Have things—they're all given to you by God. Enjoy them. Use them for His glory. Anything His Word allows, go for it. Reach the lost. Make friends for yourself. Win them to Christ. Serve the Lord. Give to the ministry. Use it for eternity. Enjoy it. No problem. But don't fall in love with it. Don't

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<sup>8</sup>Robert Jamieson, A. R. Fausset, and David Brown, *A Commentary Critical and Explanatory on the Old and New Testaments*, Heb. 11:13.

love it before Christ. Don't cling [to] it to the exclusion of obeying God. That would be a misplaced hope.

Four[th] and finally: Your faith should produce a great reward. Think about what we've learned so far from this text, how Abraham didn't know where he was going, he didn't know how Sarah was going to be able to conceive a baby through him, he didn't know when this baby would be born, and he didn't even know the reason why God was doing all this. [He knew] there was going to be a nation, but [about] a lot of the things, [he had to be thinking], "Why wait? [Why do] I have to leave? Why wander in a place [where] I don't know where I'm going?" Think of all the things that God never told him. [Abraham is thinking], "What's the reason for all of this?" But he had the promises and the knowledge of who God was, and that was enough.

We always want to know all the things God doesn't tell us, right? I mean, when something happens, we always want to say, "Lord, why are You doing this to me?"

[The Lord responds], "Well, if I told you, then you wouldn't have to live by faith, now would you? So just trust Me and obey Me, for there's no other way to be happy in Jesus."<sup>9</sup>

Faith says, "Lord, I don't know where you're taking me. I don't know how You accomplish things. I don't know when [things are] going to take place. I don't even know why You're doing this the way You're doing this. I mean, if I was God, I would do it in a different way, but I'm not, so OK, I'm going to trust You."

Look at the middle of [Hebrews 11:]16: "Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God." I love that! You go through the Scriptures and you find these different instances [in which] God describes Himself. Here's just one example, Exodus 3:6, where God says to Moses: "I am the God of your father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of

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<sup>9</sup>John H. Sammis, "Trust and Obey." Available at: <http://www.cyberhymnal.org/htm/t/r/trstobey.htm>.

Jacob.” Think about that. Our text says He “is not ashamed to be called their God.” Who [is He not ashamed of]? [He is not ashamed of] anybody who lives by faith in Him. God’s not ashamed to claim you. Just put your name in there: “I am the God of Abraham, Isaac, and you.” God is glad to claim you when you’re glad to trust Him by faith. He’s not ashamed to be called your God. Even though you’re a sinner—He knows you’re a sinner. Even though you’re weak—He knows you’re weak. Even though you keep blowing it—He knows that, too. [If] you live by faith, He’s not ashamed to be called your God.

Look at the very end of [Hebrews 11:]16, and notice how God responds to those who walk in faith: “for He has prepared a city for them.” I like that. [In] Matthew 25:34, Jesus speaking [of] the rewards that await those at His right hand who sacrificed time, energy, and resources to serve others, says: “Then the King will say to those on His right, ‘Come, you who are blessed of My Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world,’” and He gives them the kingdom, the world, Christ, everything.

Jesus spoke of this in John 14:2: “In My Father’s house are many dwelling places; if it were not so, I would have told you; for I go to prepare a place for you.” He said that to the disciples who were very grieved and distressed because Jesus was going to leave them. He says, “Listen, don’t worry about it. I’m going to leave you, yes, but I am going to come again, and I’m going to take you to be where I am, so that where I am you can be. And guess what? I’m going to prepare a place for you.” That’s good. Do you think God, in His infinite wisdom and knowledge, could prepare you a pretty decent place? I think so. Do you think you’re going to go up [to heaven], and [say], “I was wishing the hallway was a little bigger”? He knows whatever you like. His resources are infinite. He will make all things perfect in His time.

In this life, the true believer lives by faith, trusting in the promises of God. Does your faith cause you to trust God? Does your faith enable you to see what can only be seen by faith? Does your faith keep you from misplaced hope in you, and things of the world, and passing pleasures, but only

in God? Does your faith make you confident that God has prepared for you a great reward? If so, you need to praise God because you are a child of faith, things are good for you, and they will be better. But, if you're sitting out there, and you're thinking to yourself, "Pastor Jack, man, all of this [stuff] you're talking about, it seems pretty Twilight Zone-like. It seems like science fiction. You're asking me to do some things [and] I'm just not there." You know what? No one is there apart from the grace of God. It's not *hard* to believe, it's *impossible* to believe apart from the grace of God. We love our sin. We love this world. We love everything we shouldn't and hate everything we should. You need to cry out to God, and tell Him, "Listen, I don't want to go to hell. I want to love You. I want to have faith in You. I am a sinner. I know I am a sinner. I know I deserve to be judged. I know Christ died on the cross for my sins. I know He rose again on the third day, but you know what? I just have such a hard time believing these things. Help my unbelief."

Do you think God's going to be up there [in heaven], and [say], "Pfft! No way! Get away from Me. I'm not going to help you. I only help the self-sufficient. I only save the righteous. I'm not going to bother with you because you're too needy"? Those are the very people God loves to help. They are the *only* people He helps. So, just cry out to God, and say, "Lord Jesus, save me. Give me faith, the faith of Abraham, so that I can trust in You, so that I can live for You." He won't deny that prayer. For the rest of us, may God grant all of us, like Abraham, to grow strong in faith and to die not receiving what is promised. Let's pray.

Father, we thank You for Your grace to us in this text. May we, as we leave this place, think about the things we've learned from Abraham. May we be like him and trust You and believe in You, in duration, in difficulty, [and] against opposition. Father, may You be pleased with our faith and may our faith be a blessing to others and spur them on, too. We pray all this in Christ's name, Amen.

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