

**Hebrews**



**Promises  
Faithfully  
Kept**

**Hebrews 11.1-3 (ESV)**

**We Start and Endure by Saving  
Faith**



Title: We Start with Saving Faith

To start, I need to make a confession.

It is so much fun getting to dig deeply into the text of Scripture.

[Sandcastle picture]

Many times when it comes to writing sermons, I feel like a kid who sets out to build a sandcastle. I pray and ask God to help me build the castle. But then I get slowed down by realizing just how great it is to be at the beach playing in the sand. Then someone asks how the sandcastle building is going, and I say that I'm getting really familiar with the sand.

Then I start to build and build some more. I build it according to what is available to me by the text and how I think it may connect to our church and our circumstances. The castle starts to take shape. I'm piling the sand up and then scrape off the excess parts in order to allow the proper points of the text to show in the light of the sun. Then I realize there's little left in the day for me to build the castle.

But it has already taken shape. Then I finally finish. And my hope is that others hear a sermon that displays the truth and beauty of Christ according to God Word, but for me I just loved getting to be in the sand.

By the time the next day is upon us, I'm further down the shoreline building another castle. Then next day I'm either further along. The castles and the sermons start to disappear. But the hope is that others were compelled to delight in the simple glory of God in Christ and so construct their temporary lives according to faith in Him.

Our efforts and lives on this side of heaven will end, but God and His Word will endure. Will we endure by faith until God calls us home?

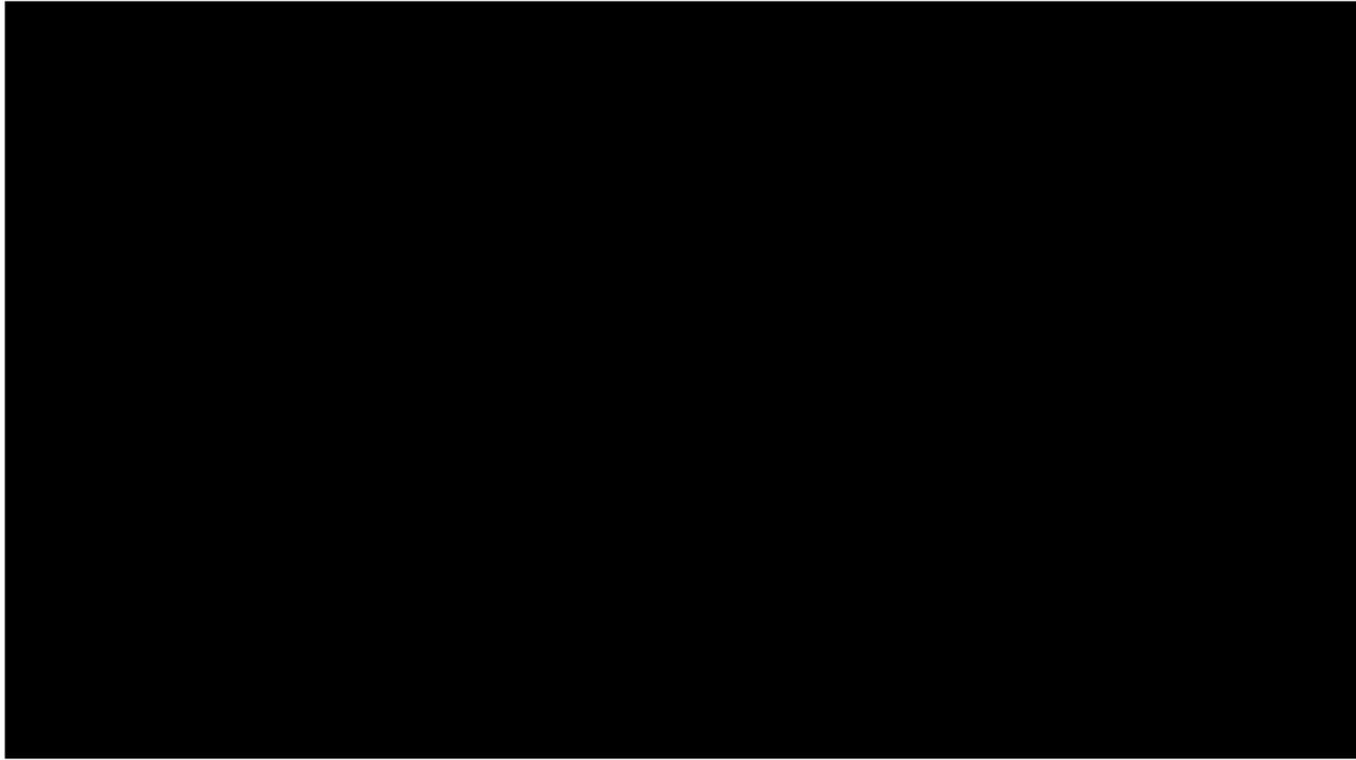
Our lives will one day end. All our efforts will feel like sandcastles that eventually disappear with time.

But when our time to go be with the Lord comes, will we have been found to be those who persevere? For that is what faith does. If we have saving faith, we will look forward with hope; we will persevere with conviction, seeing this world for what it is according to Scripture and seeing the life to come as true.

**11:1 Now faith is the assurance  
of things hoped for, the  
conviction of things not seen.**

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

**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.**



Pray

# **Saving faith in Christ is the starting point for relating to God (vv. 1–2)**

Many Christians know Hebrews 11:1 as a helpful definition about faith and the beginning of a chapter known as the hall of faith. But it is often not remembered in context of the whole book, much less the surrounding chapters.

Keep in mind the recent warnings and exhortations.

22 let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith,

23 Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for he who promised is faithful.

Let us consider how to push one another's buttons for the sake of love and good works

"The Lord will judge his people." 31 It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God.

32 But recall the former days when, after you were enlightened, you endured a hard struggle with sufferings,

35 Therefore do not throw away your confidence, which has a great reward. 36 For you have need of endurance, so that when you have done the will of God you may receive what is promised.

we are not of those who shrink back and are destroyed, but of those who have faith and preserve their souls.

Saving faith requires that the object of our faith be Christ Jesus and that we personally respond to the message of Christ with trust, entrusting ourselves to Him to save us from sin and the judgment of God and to bring us into the acceptance and love of God.

So when the author of Hebrews starts his next line about faith, understand that he has already been talking about faith. He has specifically been speaking about faith in Christ that endures.

So he is not offering a definition of faith as if he has not been speaking clearly about salvation by means of belief and trust in Christ.

He is preparing us to see how saving faith, which endures, has been characteristic of all the saints that have come before. We should find ourselves in this same momentum of enduring belief that has described God's people from the beginning and will continue to propel us to run after Christ until the end.

For all who would approach God, the only proper starting point is saving faith.

Being made in the image of God is not enough to make us right with God. God is revealed in nature, but that revelation is enough to convict, not bring into salvation.

Sin has ravaged humanity. Man is spiritually dead. People cannot reason their way into salvation. Apologetically, we can and should consider arguments from design, arguments from causality, and arguments from morality. Those are helpful in leading people to at least acknowledge that a god exists. They help propel someone toward acknowledging the need for relating to this god. But apart from God revealing Himself by means of the communicated message that is about Christ and calling for faith that is oriented toward Christ, we have no starting point for relating to the one true God.

Anselm was a church leader at Canterbury nearly 1000 years ago who helped state this matter succinctly.

He wrote, "I do not seek to understand that I may believe, but I believe in order that I may understand. For this also I believe, that unless I believe, I will not understand."

Only by means of the good news about Christ is someone able to approach God. So when the author speaks of faith by which God approves us, he is speaking of faith that is directed and oriented to Christ.

In leading us to identify with all the saints who have had enduring faith, the author is going to tie that faith explicitly to Christ Jesus as the center point of all Scripture and all the entire human story.

**Saving faith looks at the promises of Christ previously fulfilled and those still to be with trust and confidence so that we persevere in hope.**

2) Saving faith is what is needed to press on in hope in God's promises and the demonstration of confidence in what God has already brought according to His Word. Remember how I said that digging into Scripture is like playing in the sand on a beach. One of the aspects of Scripture that delighted me this week was the rhetorical design of this chapter.

The author does not use as straight forward of language as he has elsewhere. He uses a good deal of infinitives and participles. He splits phrases, filling them in the middle with powerful, expressive references.

At the very beginning of the chapter, he starts off with a statement about faith that is packed full of meaning. There are a few words just in the first verse that translators find difficult to express just what the author is getting at.

Let me show you different ways the first verse has been translated by good translations.

**Now faith is the reality of what is  
hoped for, the proof of what is  
not seen.**

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

**Now faith is confidence in what we hope for and assurance about what we do not see.**

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

**Now faith is the assurance that what we hope for will come about and the certainty that what we cannot see exists.**

**Now faith is being sure of what we hope for, being convinced of what we do not see.**

**Now faith is the assurance (title deed, confirmation) of things hoped for (divinely guaranteed), and the evidence of things not seen [the conviction of their reality—faith comprehends as fact what cannot be experienced by the physical senses].**

**Saving faith looks at the promises of Christ previously fulfilled and those still to be with trust and confidence so that we persevere in hope.**

The last translation I showed you is from the Amplified Bible. Whenever a word or phrase contains within it an implied thought according to the original language, the Amplified Bible sacrifices succinctness for the sake of clarity. So, it's not the best translation for memorizing Scripture, but it often can be helpful for explaining it. The term translated in the first phrase as assurance or reality or confidence or substance could mean any those meanings, depending on the context. The translators of your copy had to determine what gloss the author is bringing out. Is it that faith is the essential basis for having hope? Yes. Is it that saving faith gives us the confidence to move forward toward God and the promise of life eternal? Yes. Is faith the appropriate outcome of interacting with the real God, and so is the realization of what is hoped for. Yes.

So, the main idea I read is that faith, saving faith that is given by God, is necessary to propel you forward toward God in hope. If you have it, you will endure. If you do not, you will give up and not persevere. If you have the Spirit of God in you, you will be assured by the Spirit and according to the Word that Christ is worth it, that you will be with God who will set everything right, and that you will experience life, eternal life without anymore suffering or death.

The term translated as conviction, proof, or evidence, refers to the consideration of an individual about evidence so that the individual comes to a conclusion. As the Amplified Bible adds, faith comprehends as fact what cannot be experienced by the physical senses. The matters to be considered according to Hebrews 11:1 are the past events detailed in Scripture of God's actions as Creator and Lord. According to the very first verse of Hebrews, these actions include speaking by means of the prophets, who spoke authoritatively. Jesus included with such authoritative prophecy every stroke of their pens when they first wrote Scripture. In Matthew 5:18 affirms every iota, the smallest letter in one biblical language, and every keraia, the curvature of the pen in shaping a letter of the OT.

Saving faith in Christ is a trust explicitly in God according to His Word. We do not need to see with our own eyes and own ears God saying, "Let there be light," to believe that God created simply by His powerful Word.

Schreiner writes, "Creation out of nothing can't be demonstrated empirically (though neither can the contrary!), and it is embraced by faith.

Having faith in Christ as our starting point means that we believe as He believed, endorsing all of God's Word. The consistent belief among Israelites in Jesus's day was that the Hebrew Bible contained those books which we now have translated into our OT, not any apocrypha or pseudepigrapha, nothing more and nothing less. Jesus affirmed full confidence in the Law, the Writings, and the Prophets, the TNK, the whole OT. In Luke 11:50-51, Jesus references the contents of the OT canon. He cites the blood of faithful martyrs, from Abel, the first to die for faith, to Zechariah, whose death is the last martyr recorded 2 Chronicles, which was the closing book for certain Hebrew canons, apparently including the one Jesus references.

Re: NT

All of the books of the NT we have were written during the lifetime of the apostles and were either written by an apostle or a close companion of one with the apostle's endorsement. All of these 27 books were used by the early church as Scripture, as they were accepted as inspired by the Holy Spirit through the style and words of the authors to speak truthfully and accurately about all things, looking back at Christ and the gospel while speaking to the church in their current situation and looking forward to Christ's second coming. As Paul says of Scripture, which he and Peter both cite NT books as Scripture, is God-breathed. While working through the human authors, who were of their own minds and styles, God somehow inspired every stroke.

There were false books presented, but the early church did not accept them. There were also helpful letters later shared between leaders and churches, but they were not of the same standard as the NT canon.

To paraphrase Augustine and Luther together, I wish all believers could read fluently in Hebrew and Koine Greek, as reading from a translation is like a groom kissing his bride through a veil. Still, I'd rather the groom kiss his bride, even through a veil, than not to kiss her.

So, take in God's Word. Take it in from multiple trustworthy translations. Ask an elder more about good translations if you are not familiar with them. But as you read, do so trusting God who has spoken clearly by means of Christ, who is the central focus of all of the writings of the prophets and apostles.

If we have saving faith, we will read Scripture from a place of trust. As we do, we will begin to see the world as Scripture describes it.

**Saving faith is the only means for  
rightly seeing and interpreting  
Scripture, which is then the lens  
for us to rightly see the world.  
(v. 3)**

The preacher is telling us that if we are to believe Christ according to the Scriptures, we actually have to believe the Scriptures, that we actually WILL believe the Scriptures. We don't have the right to reduce God to our own personal-sized psychiatrist that makes us feel better about our own existence. Either He is the Creator and therefore the only Redeemer or he is a cruel joke. To trust Him by faith is to take Him at His Word.

As Al Mohler states, "just as we begin our Christian lives by faith, we also embrace the Christian worldview through faith in the Word of God. . . . We affirm the divine creation of the cosmos because by faith we receive it from Scripture and affirm with Scripture that everything exists to display God's glory."

We are to read the Scripture with a starting point of faith in Christ for salvation. And as we do, Scripture is to become the lens by which we see the world. The world of the Bible is the real world.

Verse 3 reads, "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."

This is the doctrine of ex nihilo, that God created the universe out of nothing. Some have tried to claim that there were things known as nothings that God used as building blocks. No, I don't think that makes sense.

Rather, the text asserts that nothing existed, nothing as in...nothing except the Triune God. He didn't start using invisible legos to construct the world. Father, Son, and Spirit alone existed and the Father spoke by means of the Son, bringing the heavens and the earth into being.

"Creation comes first in the series of works of the triune God, and is thus the beginning of all things distinct from God himself." -Barth

"God creates the world directly without the use of any kind of mediator. Various heresies have proposed that the Lord created the world either by use of preexisting

material substance or by use of a created mediator that then carried out the actual task of making the physical world. But these all fly in the face of the magisterial and simple words of the first three verses of the Bible: God made the heavens and the earth, the Spirit hovered over the surface of the deep, and God brought creation about through the agency of the Word.” Chad Brand

The result of God speaking is that which did not yet exist, not only came into existence, but was created in such a way that was physical and visible. If you are someone of saving faith in Christ, then you accept that God is Creator. He created by His powerful word, not by evolutionary accident.

We are not evolutionary accidents seeking to prolong our own biological line in competition with other mere material beings for limited resources so that we show ourselves as superior. And if you want to do a scientific calculation of all the time and chance that it would take for two non-existent particles to collide, don't waste your time. It started with a premise that they didn't exist. Even if you allow for physical existence before life existed, how would two non-living particles be able to collide in such a way as to create a living thing? And how many trillions upon trillions of years are said to have been needed for such an event to happen according to those who endorse such a view?

I don't have enough faith to be an atheist.

But isn't that the point the author is making? To form any kind of a worldview, you start by trusting someone according to his or her claim about the world.

To take on a stance about the origin of the world, you must believe and trust those who told you that is how the world is, you must believe their claims, their evidence, their findings, and their interpretations, trusting that they provided all the pertinent data to make such a claim.

From the view you have about the origin of the world, you are able to then say what is the purpose of the world and all that inhabit it. You demonstrate trust by following through consistently with the claim you have believed.

One of the saddest kinds of people in existence are those who try to claim they are Christians yet deny the trustworthiness of Scripture, assigning to mere historical documents that are not revelation. They are those who desire to affirm themselves while denying the very basis for confidence that God exists and finds them acceptable. Theirs is a life riddled with questioning, inconsistency, guilt, and self-righteousness.

Such claims are not claims of faith that persevere in running after Christ.

By faith, we are able to accept what we did not see happen. So as we trust Christ by faith, we are able to see the nature of mankind. We are able to see by faith how sin wrecks and divides and cruelly destroys those under its control.

As we trust Christ by faith, we will come to the Word, take it in as an act of faith, and read it from the stance of faith. As we read it from the stance of faith, it will shape how we view everything else in life, including our pursuits, so that our lives are oriented to Christ and toward being found faithful on that final day.

Btw, the preacher is connecting the original creation to the end times, especially to the new creation.

Just as you can't see the Garden of Eden with your eyes now, you can't see the new heavens and new earth with your eyes now. But just as you trust that God created the heavens and the earth and shaped it in 6 days simply by His powerful Word, so we also trust that God will restore all things by means of His Son. That original event of Creation was not captured on camera in order to be watched yet it is true as recorded in Scripture. Also, what is still to come is not yet seen but is true.

As it says about Noah in v. 7 and the impending flood, that judgment was not yet seen but was shown to be true.

Can you see the Risen Lord Jesus physically and visibly right now? No. He has not returned yet. But is He risen and will he return? Yes. Faith/trust in Him leads us.

Again, Schreiner is helpful in writing, “Faith doesn't rely on the contemporary events or perceptions but puts its trust and hope in the Word of God and in his promises for His people.” (347)

Faith is NOT a blind leap but an act of trust in a person, confidence in the Godhead.

We trust Him. For now, we live by faith and not by sight, but one day we will see. Faith leads us forward toward that day when there will be no more tears, no more pain, no more death, when there will be perfect peace, endless merriment and joy, eternal gladness, unending fellowship. When Christ the Lord, the Lion and the Lamb will reveal himself and we will revel in his glory.

The faith you have now is leading you somewhere. You can see the evidence of it in your life. Is it saving faith? Or is it faith in someone or something other than Christ? Who or what are you trusting to shape you? To shape your beliefs? To inform your affections? To lead you into action?

Again, I'm not worried about yesterday's sandcastles that either of us have built. Those have washed away. But the Word of the Lord stands firm. Christ the Lord stands before us.

Have you placed your faith in Him for salvation? If so, then how is your life taking shape today?

Is your life so oriented by faith so that your hopes are actually set on Christ?

Next week, we will begin considering the OT saints of Hebrews 11 and how they set an example for us as those who looked forward to the Messiah who would come fulfill God's promises.

