

Title: Pure Faith  
Text: Hebrews 11.1-3  
Theme: Living by faith  
Series: Hebrews #35  
Aim: I aim to inform and challenge my people to understand what it means to live by faith and call them to it.  
Prop Stmt Living by faith is banking all that I am on the promises of God.

Read Text: 10:39-11:3

We are a restless lot. In fact, of all of God's creatures who inhabit this terra firma we are unique in that we resent what we are. Birds do not resent air or flying. Fish do not despise water or swimming. But we constantly long for more and live unsatisfied lives marked by chasing dreams, like a dog going after a school bus. If we ever catch the dream, we wouldn't know what to do, because either the dream usually does not live up to our expectations or now we have to find another dream. What is it about life that people hate so much that some will drink themselves stupid or abuse narcotics until they are numb? Can anyone understand why a human being, a person, a who, not a what, the most glorious, creative, relating, engaging, feeling, thinking, learning, discerning and capable aspect of all creatures would cut themselves or starve themselves, or sit alone for hours in despair or think about ways to harm themselves or others? What is it about us, that causes us to feel so lonely, even in the midst of others? What is this colossal unsettledness about the human race that hangs over us like a fog that has given birth to thousands of philosophers asking why, thousands of psychologists asking why, thousands of psychiatrists exploring how and why?

This much seems as obvious as clouds in a Michigan November; we were not made to be satisfied with what we see. Intuitively, we know there is more to this life than what we can see and touch, because we can see and touch a lot. And we can see and touch a lot but we are a dissatisfied and restless lot because something inside of us tells us, that we were made for more. This longing reveals the belief in and in fact the existence of a reality that cannot be analyzed in a Petri dish under the most powerful of microscopes in the most sophisticated of labs. We want to know the unveiled and see the unseen because what is seen and felt is not enough. But, what is it that is unseen that we desperately want to see? What is the unrealized that we long to experience that will quiet this restless heart of ours? It is God. God is the unseen seer, who graciously gives the vision of faith that he might be seen. Nothing else will do. Nothing else will satisfy you. But this is not a God that you are stuck with. This is the God who made you that you might be overwhelmed with his majesty, beauty, mercy and joy. This is the God who loves you so fiercely and intensely with a love that is so holy, and perfect, and pure and powerful that it seems at times if it would consume us.

I fear that when most people think of the God of Christianity, that they think of a cheap and plastic imitation of the real thing. The God that I am speaking of is unlike the God that many have conjured up. I am speaking of the God of the universe, who in his eternal counsel as God, in the eternal presence in which he existed, thought of the concept of

time and then made it be, so that there would be time, so that there would be a time where there could be a beginning. This magnificent and eternally existent One thought of the concept of space and then made it be, so that there would be a sphere, a place, so that not only could there be a now, but there could now be a place. And this glorious, self-determining, self-existent One thought of the concept of mass so that he would have something to place into this place that he was going to create in time. You see, stuff is not eternal, which is why what we see and what we touch will never satisfy. Fact is, time isn't even eternal, but that's a bit more difficult to capture in our mental grids, isn't it? But now, the stage was set. In the beginning of time as we know it, God created the heavens, that is the universe as far as we can see with our most penetrating telescopes, and in the midst of this immeasurable vastness now punctuated with galaxies and teeming with stars he made a rather average arrangement of planets to hover around a rather average star called the sun to house this rather small and seemingly insignificant planet called earth. Nothing, it seems holds her up in space. She tilts and orbits and spins creating the sense of day after day and night after night to those billions of creatures who call her home. Why? For what purpose? That is the unique cry of homo-sapiens, the pinnacle of his creatures, the human race uniquely made to most reflect this magnificent Creator. This cry for reason and longing for purpose was set into the DNA of each person in order to give us a thirst for an experiential knowledge that could only be satisfied by Him. He, God created us with questions, so that after speaking the world into existence and everything in it, he spoke again and again and again. But this time his speaking was the giving of answers to our questions and in those answers he spoke of things that are yet unseen and he revealed to us things that are yet to be experienced.

Chapter 11 stands as the peak in the majestic range of revelation called the book of Hebrews. In fact, Hebrews does not start with a slow incline that gradually gains altitude, but like creation itself this book begins as a volcanic explosion that in mere moments erupts before our eyes.

#### Review of 1-10

Long ago, at many times and in many ways, God spoke to our fathers by the prophets. He told them of his plan to create a place where he would live with and enjoy people in such a way that they would know him and be eternally satisfied with him and in him. God kept revealing these things and for those who wanted to know about them he kept telling them more. This human race that he had made for his glory and pleasure had rebelled against him. But, there were a few who longed to be set free from the rebellion and longed for a real king to reign who would always speak the truth, whose reign would never end and whose might would never wane. They longed for this because God told them that this was his plan. This is what the prophets wrote about. But in these last days God did not speak through prophets anymore. He sent the One whom the prophets wrote about. He sent The Prophet who was the culmination of all revelation. In these last days he has spoken to us by his Son. When his Son came to this average planet in this average solar system organized around this average star in this average galaxy, he looked like an average baby, who grew to be an average height and average weight and average in every way to the eye. But what was unseen was that this One was appointed the heir of all

things, and was indeed the One through whom also he created the world. So, while the Father may have done the designing, it was the Son who did the speaking. His word creates and therefore his word commands. He is the radiance of the glory of God and the exact imprint of his nature, and the reason why this planet along with the billions upon billions of others keeps its place in place is because he upholds the universe by the word of his power. He spoke this universe into existence and keeps speaking her in place.

This was the one who came to this earth and surrendered himself to the fragile confines of a human body and subjected himself to the limits and awkwardness of human development so that He, the infinite and almighty could pay the infinite and ultimate payment for our sins, that was demanded by the infinitely just and righteous character of the infinitely holy God. In these last days God spoke! And OH, did he ever speak!! He has spoken to us through his Son. He has spoken grace to us through the humility of His Son. He has spoken forgiveness to us through his death. He has spoken righteousness to us through his life. He has spoken joy to us and power to us, and victory to us and peace to us through his resurrection. He has spoken future to us through his ascension and has spoken authority to us by seating him at the right hand of the majesty on high until that day comes when he returns, not to die but to reign. Do you understand who it is that has come and has spoken? This is no mere angel. Angels are awesome and amazing, but to which of the angels did God ever say that you are my son? Not a one. To which of the angels did God ever command worship? Not a one. To which of the angels did God ever say, here is your throne where you will be a king? Not a one. To which of the angels did God ever say, sit here, next to me until I crush your enemies into a pile of dust that I will deposit under your ottoman? Not a one. No, we are not dealing with an angel. We are dealing with the very Son of God, who is the 2<sup>nd</sup> person of the very Triune God himself. Of him the father said, I will be a father and he will be to me a son. Of him he commanded the angels to worship at his birth. Of the Son he said, "Your throne, O God is forever and ever. This is the One who has come and in his coming He has spoken.

So, when you hear his voice, you had better not blow it off. If those who failed to take to heart what was revealed by angels were severely dealt with, and those who rebelled against Moses and the prophets were punished, how much more will those who, being exposed to the message of Christ will be judged because this is no angel, and no Moses. As great as angels are and as great as Moses was, this revelation is not simply a voice who communicates the Word, this is the Word. This is not only one who speaks of the King who will reign, this is the King. This is not only the one who tells us of a priest that will stand as our perfect representative before the throne, this is the Priest. This is not only one who tells of a perfect sacrifice that perfectly satisfies the infinite payment for our sin, this is the Sacrifice who, as Priest is the One who offers and as Lamb is the offering so that in one decisive and final act of dying this sacrifice pays forever our debt so that there is nothing left for me to pay. Oh yes, God spoke in the past through the prophets, but now he has spoken through the perfect prophet and the perfect priest and the perfect King, his infinitely glorious Son.

If it was important that you listen to the voice of God through the prophets (and it was), how much more important is it that you listen to God himself!! The consequences of

rejecting Him are staggering. The stories of such people hold sway over human history and tarnish the past with an evil prominence. Yet, in the midst of earth's history, and in conflict with most of her inhabitants walked another race of man. This was the race of the people of God. This was a race that is not inherently ethnic because it is not based on skin, but on belief. This is a race of heroes and heroines some of whose names were never engraved on stone tablets, or inked upon the official documents of kings. This is a race of men and women who took to heart the promises of God. They believed in what God said, even though it was yet unseen. If you had lived when they lived, they would have appeared to be ordinary people, no different than you. And indeed that was the case, except that, they in spite of their world and in a stunning contrast to it, believed God's Word – no matter what. Because of that, these are no ordinary people. They lived on this earth but their home was somewhere else. They were pilgrims and they were giants. In spite of the odds, these ordinary people pressed on because the promises of God had an extraordinary hold upon them. They are heroes of the faith whose experiences have an unusual tie to us and whose examples left footprints in which we now walk.

Their stories are told in Hebrews 11. The opening of this chapter is akin to entering a cathedral-like wing of a large, impressive and ancient museum. Tall imposing doors slowly swing open to reveal a long, narrow corridor of marble floors resting under a beamed and vaulted ceiling. Before you step over the threshold your attention is taken by the doorway for over the entrance, the granite is engraved with the words, "Hall of the Faithful." A whisper in here would reverberate down and back and up and down for at least a minute. No one has to tell you to be quiet, it is instinctive. Entrance is limited to a select few and those chosen to enter are met with a series of displays that house an image of a person and their story on a placard that begins with the words "by faith" and end with "to be continued."

At the end of the hall is a display that appears to have no image, you think that perhaps it is closed for repairs, but only when you stand in front of it do you see. Instead of an image, there is a mirror. And as you look at your reflection you now see the words on the wall behind you. They read "But we are not of those who shrink back and are destroyed, but of those who have faith and preserve their souls." This life is yours to live by faith and to add to the stories of the faithful and to the heritage upon which you stand. The display awaits your part. As you exit back through the doors, you are reminded of your place in this hall. Over the doorway that leads out it reads, "And all these, though commended through their faith, did not receive what was promised, since God had provided something better for us, that apart from us they should not be made perfect." And now, it becomes even clearer. Their stories are continued in you. Your faithfulness will cast a reflection upon them. The fulfillment of their stories and the completion of what they began is placed in your hands.

In the next several weeks, we will make our way down this hall knowing that this is our story, these are our people. This is our hall. This is our heritage. This is our calling. This is our life. This is our past, our present and our future. The people of God are the people of faith. We are the people who do not rely upon ourselves. We rely upon, we have faith in another and not ourselves. We have exchanged reliance upon ourselves for reliance

upon God and with that decisive transaction; we have exchanged a distrust of God for a distrust of ourselves. We know that without faith (v.6) it is impossible to please God. And since this is such a defining aspect of our lives, it only makes sense that before the AH tells us the stories of faith, he wants to make certain that we understand what faith looks like so that we can identify it, appreciate it and reflect it.

### 1. **The Function of faith.** (1)

Verse 1 is really not a formal definition of faith as much as it is providing an example of how faith functions. It is like the AH is saying, "Here is what faith does." So, when we look at verse 1 we see that *faith is that which securely fastens the believer to the reality of what he has not yet seen*. There is an entire realm of existence that is unseen to us. It is there. Our believing it does cause it to be, it is already in existence. Our disbelieving it does not cause it to stop. Our faith does not create anything (contra Joel Osteen). There is an entire branch of false prophets who say that when you speak, you create the reality. When you believe and speak it, then it causes it to become real and happen. Beloved, that is heresy. Only God can speak and create. Only God can speak and set into motion events that due to his Sovereign authority are guaranteed to occur. Our response to God's speaking is to believe in what he has said. When God speaks he makes promises, many of which have to do with the future that is yet unseen and obviously not experienced. But faith acts now and behaves now in a manner that reflects an unflinching certainty in God's promises in spite of the current circumstances because one is absolutely convinced of the power and integrity of the One who made the promise.

So, you can see that verse 1 is a general statement about faith. Faith is not being sure of what you do not know. Faith is being certain of things that are yet unseen but have been promised. Now, we have not dealt with what those "things" are. We will see that in verse 3. But before we get there, verse 2 tells us about the results of faith.

### 2. **The Results of faith.** (2)

Whenever people in the past lived their lives on the basis of yet to be fulfilled promises of God, God commended them. God said, "That's my boy. That's my girl. That's what I'm talking about." And the rest of this chapter tells the stories of people who did the most ridiculous things because they knew something that was going to happen. But what we are going to see is that the commendation of God did not always result in "your best life now." Abel pleased God and was murdered by his brother. But, Abel died in faith and died pleasing God, which is exactly how all of us want to die. Beloved, when you come to the end you want to be resting in the promises of God.

### 3. **The Foundation of faith.** (3)

Verse 3 ties this all together and establishes the foundation for how they lived lives that pleased God and how we are called to live. Remember, *faith is that which securely fastens the believer to the reality of what he has not yet seen*. "By faith we understand that the universe was created by the word of God..." Did anyone see that happen?

Nope, just the angels. Strictly speaking we cannot speak of origins in pure scientific terms since no human being observed the process. If you believe in creation, then you do so on the basis of faith. But if you believe in evolution, you also do so on the basis of faith. Creation is based on the premise that God spoke and things happened. Therefore, faith is rooted in believing that God spoke and that things happened, with the evidence being all around us. Evolution is a flawed, doomed and desperate attempt to create an explanation for the universe without God. Evolution is driven by a philosophical premise that there cannot be a God. But, what do you do with this universe?

Think of the person who sees a car for the very first time. What kind of logic would cause him to conclude that in a moment of time there was an enormous explosion that created steel, plastic, leather, aluminum, rubber, alloy that formed themselves into hoses, pistons, rings, manifolds, gaskets, wheel housings, wires, computers, brake lines, batteries, locks, instrument panels, transmissions, headlamps, frames, doors, steering assemblies all in such a way that it formed a perfectly functioning automobile. We would that say that a person who postulated that was a flaming idiot! But, if someone says that about the earth and the universe which has ecosystems and balance of life intricacies infinitely more advanced than vehicles, then we give him a doctorate degree and seat him in prestigious chair in a leading university. Does that make any sense? Logically, NO! But, personally, yes because if you believe that the universe was created by God, then you are forced to not only believe that God exists, but you are forced to admit that you are accountable to him. And human nature wants to do anything it can to avoid that, so it creates the stupendously absurd notion of evolution, falsely calls it sophisticated science and finds a ready audience because the goddess of chance does not demand anything from us.

There is no accountability to chance. You can make your own rules, live your own life and go your own way if we all exist by chance. But neither will chance make your soul sing. What is this colossal unsettledness that hangs over life like a fog? It is the denial of the unseen God by denying the unassailable evidence of his fingerprints in what he has made. It is the banking of one's soul upon the heartless, bankrupt, vacuous, unsatisfying goddess of chance. Faith is banking on what God has said, confident because of his power and integrity that he will deliver, no matter what.

I promised Cathi that I would get new floors completed in two rooms in our house by this weekend. She asked me if I was sure. Yes, of course I was sure. She wasn't as sure as I was sure, but I was sure because I had gone to that place that told me over and over and over that "You can do it and we can help." In fact, of the two components of that equation, I was a bit more skeptical of the "you can do it" part than I was the "we can help" portion. So, I ordered the floor and was told that it would be in, in two weeks, maybe sooner. I was hoping for sooner, but planned on the two weeks. Well, the two weeks came and went. And with each passing day that the flooring did not show up I began to realize what "we can help" actually means. We can help drive you crazy. We can help test your sanctification. We can help your prayer life. We can help you get illustrations for your sermon. I had faith, but the object of my faith did not have the power or perhaps the integrity to do what they said they would do. My belief did not make it happen; my belief was useless because what I believed in did not deliver.

So, what do you believe in? What is the object of your belief? Do you trust in the promises of God, no matter what? Do you believe what he says about your sin and your guilt and your liability for punishment? Do you believe what Christ has done on the cross for you? Do you believe that there is a coming a day when all that is seen will be removed and replaced by Him who makes all things new? Look at your habits, your values, what you spend your time and money on. Look at what has captured your attention, what you dream about, what your desires are, what you are passionate about. Look at what you order your calendar around. That will tell you a lot about what you really believe.