



BELIEVERS CHAPEL

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The Sermons of Dan Duncan

Hebrews 11: 1-3

2012

"Faith"

TRANSCRIPT

Thank you Mike. We're in the Book of Hebrews, Hebrews chapter 11. We begin this great chapter on faith, and we're going to look at the first three verses.

Hebrews chapter 11, beginning with verse 1,

11 Now faith is the assurance of *things* hoped for, the conviction of things not seen. ² For by it the men of old gained approval.

³ By faith we understand that the worlds were prepared by the word of God, so that what is seen was not made out of things which are visible.

Hebrews 11: 1-3

"By faith we understand..." I'm going to just make a quick statement, (because I won't say this, really, in the service), but that says everything right there; "By faith we understand."

The psalmist really says very much the same thing in Psalm 36, in verse 9, where he writes, "For with You is the fountain of life; In Your light we see light."

It's that simple. In the light of God's revelation we understand reality. The only way we'll understand the way the world really is, the only way we'll understand reality and how to live wisely in this world is with the Word of God: The revelation, 'The light of God'.

And how do we approach that, how do we understand that? —By faith. We believe it. And that's what our chapter's about, a chapter on faith.

Well, may the LORD bless this reading of His Word, and our time together in it. Let's pray.

Father, we do thank You for this time together, this opportunity we have to continue our studies in the Book of Hebrews; and particularly as we come to this great chapter, one of the best known chapters in the book, in fact in the entire Bible—and this very well-known statement on faith in verse 1.

LORD, we can approach these things as though they're rather common to us, and yet, there's so much to gain from these verses that really one sermon is not enough. But we'll give it one sermon and hope, Father, that by Your grace You will enlighten us, that You will give us an understanding of the things that we have read and that You will make the proper applications to each one of us.

Strengthen our faith. That's what this is about, strengthening our faith so that we'll have strong hope. These original readers were lacking hope; their hope had been dashed, it seemed to them. They were very discouraged; and that can happen to us as well.

It's a fascinating thing, Father, when we consider that this book was written 2000 years ago, and that the Bible goes back farther than that, 3500 years ago when Moses began writing this—and so an ancient book is before us. And yet, it is relevant; every bit of it is relevant for today. It's unique. It's Your Light, and it's, "In Your Light we see Light." (Psa 36:9). It's in Your Light that we understand the world; You open it up for us; You turn the lights on for us. We can see reality through this book.

So now Father, help us to understand that this morning as we consider our text and help us to appreciate it; help us in understanding these things and to have a strong faith, which increases the strength and the certainty of our hope. And we have a great hope: We are the only people in this world, the only people in history, Your people, who

have hope that is eternal. Father, may we not lose that hope. We pray that it won't weaken.

The trials of life do that, but we pray that You would give us the kind of faith that buttresses the hope that we have and keeps it from failing. So LORD, we look to You to bless in that way, and build us up in the faith.

We pray for the ministry this morning. We pray for it tonight as we come back to this place. We pray for the ministries that go on during the week; the Women's Ministries, and the Wednesday Night Ministries—and wherever Your Word is being taught; here, there, we pray LORD that the Spirit of God would minister through us, and into us, and open our hearts to receive the truth.

Bless those who are discouraged, LORD; give them encouragement. We pray for those that are sick. We pray for those that are weighed down with economic problems. We pray for those that are just burdened by the trials of life—the pressures of life; they're great and they can get to all of us. And so we pray that those who are discouraged for whatever reason that You would encourage them, build them up in the faith.

LORD, whatever the circumstance is, a hard circumstance, a happy circumstance, it's going to end and we must know that. Life is short; it's going to come to an end. Even if we have the best retirement plan in the world, it's going to end. And that's all fine because the hope that we have is beyond. Help us to realize that and live for that. May our time together be to that end, we pray in Christ's name, Amen.

(Message) In Proverbs 13, verse 12, Solomon made the observation that, "Hope deferred makes the heart sick." —and that's so true. That's true even in the Christian life, and that's when we need patience and perspective. And that's the counsel of the Book of Hebrews. The author told discouraged friends, "You have need of endurance." (Heb 10:36). And that's what he tries to give them.

Their hope had been diminished. They'd been through rough times and it had worn them down. They needed their hope revived. So he reminds them of it, because life without hope is intolerable.

In the book *Two Years Before the Mast*, Richard Henry Dana Jr. tells his own story of leaving Harvard in 1834 to become a sailor on the brig, *Pilgrim*. It was a hard service. The voyage from Boston to California was dangerous, (one sailor was lost at sea). The work was long and difficult. The captain was cruel; he flogged a man for no good reason. At one point, Dana thought his service would extend well beyond the two years he had signed up to serve. He thought he would lose the opportunity for a career and might never return home. He felt hopeless.

And then one day, he and a friend had some shore leave. It was Sunday, "The Sabbath", as he called it. It was their only day off during the week. They had some freedom. They came ashore. They walked together. They talked together. And they talked about the prospect of their return: They planned where they would go and what they would do when they got home. The talk of home encouraged hope—and that changed everything. Dana wrote, "It was wonderful how the prospect brightened and how short and tolerable the voyage appeared when viewed in this new light."

Well that's what the author of Hebrews was trying to do for his friends. He was trying to give them a, 'view of things in a new light'. But really, it was an old 'Light' that they had understood, and they had, but had been greatly diminished. So he's trying to rekindle that, re-encourage that, give them the prospect of reaching their heavenly home. —That was their hope.

And that's our hope. It is a real hope; and having that, having the faith in that hope gives endurance. It makes the voyage, it makes the pilgrimage we're on, appear short; and in difficult times—tolerable. But hope is obtained by faith and they needed their faith strengthened.

They had faith; he's reassured them of that. Remember, they'd been struggling in their faith, but he's told them, confidently, at the end of chapter 10, (vs39), "But we are not of those who shrink back to destruction, but of those who have faith to the preserving of the soul." So he's convinced they're genuine believers and that they're going to persevere—but they needed their hope strengthened, they needed their faith strengthened.

So now he encourages them with a whole chapter on faith and examples of Old Testament saints—who pressed on through hardship with nothing but the promises of God. They never saw fulfillment; the hope they had was deferred in that it was off in the distance. And yet, they didn't despair. They didn't despair because of faith; they had faith in God, therefore they had faith in the promise of the future.

Now that's what the apostles taught. Read through the New Testament, Paul tells us that 'we live by faith'. In 2 Corinthians chapter 5, in verse 7, he wrote, "...we walk by faith, not by sight." Faith is essential. Faith is at the heart of the Christian life.

But what is faith? What is it? That's an important question, and it's one that this great chapter on faith begins by answering. It's a chapter that gives us great examples of men and women who lived by faith. And the author begins that chapter by, first of all, defining *faith*. It starts with a definition of it, (and one of the most, I guess, famous statements in all of the Bible, certainly one of the most famous statements on faith).

Now it's really not a full definition of faith—not, at least, an exhaustive one. Instead, the writer describes some significant features of faith and then he shows how faith works in practice in the various examples of people, the men and women that he gives. But he begins by giving the different directions in which faith operates.

Dr. Johnson gave what I think is a very helpful outline of the first three verses:

1. It is faith in the future against the present
2. It is faith in the invisible against the visible
3. It is faith in God against the world

The chapter begins, "Now faith is the *assurance* of *things* hoped for." You read the King James version, you have a different translation; your translation reads, "Now faith is the *substance* of *things* hoped for." Both translations are valid, because the word that is translated *assurance* and *substance*, (*hupostasis*), has both meanings and here in the Book of Hebrews it's used in both ways—so, both state a truth.

The word *assurance* describes the subjective side of faith. Through it we have a sense of confidence, we have a sense of certainty in our hearts. We're certain that the promises are true and they'll be fulfilled.

But there's also the objective side of faith, expressed in this word *substance*: By faith, the promises of God are made real for us. We apprehend them. We make them ours. The things that are not yet ours are sure to be ours. By faith we know the promises exist, that they are actual; and some day they will be our possession. For example, 'By faith in Christ', as a result of that, we are citizens of heaven. We're not there yet, but we're actually citizens. And *faith* has obtained that. This is a valid way to interpret this. So, both are valid.

But *assurance* corresponds better with the next word, *conviction*, and seems more natural; so I'm going to take it that way. You're not wrong to take *substance* as the meaning because that is a true aspect of faith; but taken in this way, our writer explains that "...faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen".

First, faith gives certainty to our hope. It gives confidence in the promises of God. It gives us the assurance that the future will be ours as He has promised it will be—that we have a glorious future before us—and a glorious inheritance.

Now we have not seen it. We haven't seen heaven, but we believe that it's true. That's faith. We believe it's true, therefore we know it's true. We are sure that our heavenly home is a reality. We've never witnessed a resurrection, but we believe that Christ was raised, and 'raised the first fruits of many brethren', (1Cor 15:20), and therefore we are confident that God will raise us up as well. Faith gives us the assurance that the kingdom will come, that there will be 'a new heavens and a new earth'. That is faith, as described here, "the assurance of things hoped for".

The world gives a very different definition of faith. Bertrand Russell, the British mathematician and philosopher of the first half of the 20th century was a skeptic. And he defined faith as, "A firm belief in something for which there is no evidence." Mark Twain said, "Faith is believing something you know ain't true."

Well that's the world's definition of faith; 'You people of faith, well you believe things that aren't true. There's no evidence for it. You're the opposite of us, people of science.' Well, as I say, that's the world's definition.

The Scriptures define faith differently: Faith is what we know is true—and it's not without evidence. And it's not in spite of the evidence. There is lots of evidence for the things we believe: Evidence from eyewitnesses to the resurrection, to the sheer strength of logic.

There's the night sky. Look up some evening on a clear night when it's ablaze with stars, and remember, as the psalmist told us, "The heavens are declaring the glory of God." (Ps 19:1). And they declare it eloquently, convincingly. They speak more eloquently and truly than the agnostic scientists and skeptics of our age.

Remember this also, and this is an important point, (it's not a point I'm making for the first time; you've heard this before and you've heard Dr. Johnson make it), and it's true: Unbelievers have faith as well. And they have just as much faith as you and I do. Their faith is in different convictions. They begin at a different point than you and I begin. Their convictions are the opposite of ours. —But it's still faith.

They trust in human reason to give them light, to give them truth. We trust in divine revelation. Their thinking brings them to positions like *materialism*: 'All there is, is what we can see, what we can examine. The universe, everything that is, is material.'

Well, we believe in a material universe, but we know there's more to it than that, far more than that. And we know that by revelation. *Faith*. We all begin with faith. The question is, what is your faith in? In human reason, or in divine *revelation*?

But what we also need to remember is faith, true faith, saving faith, the faith of a believer, (that's described here), is supernatural. It's a *gift* of God. It's a *gift* of the Holy Spirit. Apart from the grace of God, we, like all people, are blind—spiritually blind. We are by nature in darkness. But the Spirit of God has 'opened our eyes', so to speak. He's brought us into the Light; that's His work of grace; He's brought us to the truth of Scripture. The reason we know this is God's Word, the reason we believe it, is a supernatural work. It's not natural—it's God's work within us.

Faith is God's gift. Faith doesn't make things true to our minds, rather faith is the recognition of, and the response to, what God has *revealed*. We see it. We understand it. We believe it.

And '*The Revelation*', the Bible, is self-authenticating. Well what I mean by that is when we read it, it 'rings true'. It bears testimony to itself, in and of itself. It has 'the ring of truth'. It claims to be true, and it carries conviction, just as the sun in the sky is self-authenticating. No one needs proof of the existence of the sun on a clear day. I'm going to be surprised if some of you are out in the parking lot after the service and arguing whether there's a sun or not. We don't do that. We know it. It shines, and there's no debate. There's no question about it. It is self-authenticating. The light, the heat, all of it makes itself true to us. We know that it's true. It's self-authenticating.

And so it is with the Word of God. Trying to convince unbelievers that the Bible is true is like trying to convince a man without sight or senses that the sun is real when all he has known is darkness. He can't conceive of light. Light makes no sense ... he has no category to understand that. And so to argue that there's light and there's a sun, it doesn't make any sense to him—until he's given sight. And then it makes sense, and then he understands.

And so it is with us in the spiritual life. Faith is God's gift and it gives assurance of our hope—and it does make the promises a reality for us. And it did that for all of these mentioned in this chapter; they believed the promises of a future. So in response, they

lived for those promises; they lived for that future. They understood that in this world they're pilgrims, they're passing through.

And that's what we are. We often say it, 'This world is not our home.' We sometimes sing the camp song, "This world is not our home, we're only passing through." We live responsible lives, and that 'passing through' doesn't mean we don't live a productive life, a stable life, an honest life. We should, but we don't live for this world. We don't see this world as, 'this is all there is', and 'this is where our hope is', or 'everything that is bound up in our life is in this world.' We don't live that way. —And we shouldn't.

Why? Well, because our hope is not here. We are to be serving eternity, not time. We're to be serving heaven, not earth. We're to be living for God, not man. That's our life; we're 'passing through'. Do you believe that? I think you do. I think you're here because you believe that. Well that's faith. You know that is true because of faith.

But faith is not only 'in the future against the present', it's also 'in the invisible against the visible'. That's the next feature of faith that our writer identifies. Faith is "the conviction of things not seen." (vs1b). By faith we believe in God. How can you believe in God? Have you seen God? No, you haven't seen God. You can't see God. God's a spirit. He's invisible.

No one has seen God at any time, ever, has anyone seen God. You can't see God. 'If you've seen God'—you haven't seen Him; God is a spirit. That's what the Scriptures teach. The world says, 'Seeing is believing'. The Bible says, 'Believing is in what is not seen.' God is not seen. —The Bible reveals Him to be.

Now "The heavens are declaring the glory of God", and Paul makes that clear in the first chapter of Romans, (in verses 18 and following), that God is revealed in nature around us. —But all that nature can reveal is that there is a God—that there is a Creator. It doesn't tell us much about that Creator.

However, the Word of God does, and so it reveals God, (or perhaps we should say), God has revealed Himself in it—in Scripture. If we want to know God, we can only

know Him through His revelation. And He's made Himself known. He's known there—but He's known in His revelation as we believe it. In His Light we see Light. As we believe in His revelation, we understand who He is. He's made Himself known here in the Word of God. And the Holy Spirit confirms that conviction within our heart—confirms within us that this Word is real.

The self-authenticating of the Word of God also speaks of, 'The Spirit of God bearing witness with our spirit that we are children of God', (Rom 8:16), and that 'the things of God' are true. But it's through the study of the Bible, it's through the knowledge of Scripture in God's Light that we see the Light. And that the reality of the world is that it is not simply the visible, it's also the invisible.

There is a whole spiritual realm around us that we cannot see. The world is not just material. It's also immaterial. It's spiritual. It's spiritual and both the Old and the New Testaments teach that; teach that there are angels, good and bad, and that all around us there is a spiritual war going on. We don't see it, we don't feel it, but we know that it is true by faith.

I think one of the best examples of that is given in 2 Kings chapter 6. You know it. It's the account of the prophet Elisha at the town of Dothan. He was being pursued by the king of Syria. And the king of Syria found out where he was located and he sent his army to get him. He sent them to Dothan.

And one day, one morning, his servant, Elisha's servant, wakes up and he goes outside and he was terrified to see this Syrian army, all around them. He cried out to Elisha, cried for help. He said, in effect, 'It's all over. They've come to get us.' And so Elisha the prophet prayed. And he prayed, "O LORD I pray, open his eyes that he may see." And the LORD did. And the servant saw that "the mountain was full of horses and chariots of fire all around Elisha." (vs17). That was the reality, the unseen reality, the invisible reality, but it's reality, according to the Word of God.

How do we know that? By faith. Who had faith in that instance? Well not the servant; it was Elisha that had faith. He didn't need 'the curtain drawn back', so to speak.

By faith, he knew the angels were there without seeing them and he knew that he was safe, without having that visible testimony.

So faith gives us the eyes to see the invisible. We know it's true by faith. Just as physical eyesight produces conviction of visible things, so too faith enables people to see the invisible order. We know it is real by God's revelation which we receive by faith.

And those who live by faith, like Elisha, those who trust the LORD, who believe His promises, who walk by them, who live in that way, well, they're the ones who prosper in this world, and they're the ones who prevail *in* the world and *over* the world, and all of its opposition. That's the assurance that our writer gives in verse 2, "For by it the men of old gained approval." 'If you want to live a triumphant life, live by faith.'—that's what he's saying.

Now, we don't need to say a whole lot about verse 2 because the rest of this long chapter is about that very thing, about the men and the women who lived by faith, and who died by faith, and who by their faith gained the approval of God.

But I think, as I consider this text and what he's saying, I can't help but think of those three Hebrews in the Book of Daniel: Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, and how well they illustrate that. He doesn't develop their experience in the book, but they certainly exemplified the very thing that the writer is talking about here: They lived by faith.

And you'll remember, when King Nebuchadnezzar commanded that all of his subjects worship the golden image that he had set up there on the plain of Dura—and do so on pain of death. But they refused; they chose the fiery furnace over apostasy. And then they gave a great testimony of their faith. They told Nebuchadnezzar, (this great king, this powerful king who had power of life and death), they said, 'No. If we are thrown into the blazing furnace, the God we serve is able to save us from it. And He will rescue us from your hand, O king.' (Dan 3:17). That's faith.

But it wasn't *presumptuous* faith, because they then said, 'Even if He does not, we want you to know, O king, that we will not serve your gods or worship the image of gold you have set up.' (vs18). That's faith; that's reasonable faith.

Those young Hebrews couldn't know what the will of God was, the specific will of God for them, the immediate plan of God for them, at that moment. They knew that He could rescue them, and they probably had confidence that He would, because they know they serve a gracious God. But they also knew that He might not. They knew He could; but they didn't know if He would. They knew His plan was perfect, and they rested in that. They trusted Him, and they left the results to Him. That's living by faith. As Job put it, "Though He slay me, yet I will trust in Him." (Job 13:15).

And, of course, the LORD did not slay them. He did not allow the fire to engulf them. He delivered them—and in fact delivered them in such a way that they were able to see the unseen world. So was Nebuchadnezzar and others: There was a fourth person in the furnace with them whom Nebuchadnezzar described as one, "like the Son of God." (Dan 3:25).

So they had Him with them, and He was seen.

And we have Him with us as well, though we don't see Him. And we don't need to see Him. We're like Elisha, hopefully, who didn't need to see the angels. He knew they were there. He knew the hand of God was with him; 'Help this poor servant of mine, LORD. Help him to see what I know is there by faith.'

And we know the LORD is with us, by faith. He is; we have that assurance. He gives us that assurance. He promises that He is always with us, that He's guiding us through the difficulty of life, the issues of life. He's our counselor. He's our protector.

And we have life from Him. How do we know that? Well, we're told that. The Scriptures are full of these promises. John 15 begins that great promise of the vine and the branches; and that we gain life from Him and we bear fruit from Him. I don't *feel* that, or *sense* that, or *see* that, but I know that's true, because He has said it and He's promised us that. And we know that He's with us, because He promises that all through the Word of God. At the end, the last statement of the Gospel of Matthew gives us that promise that He's with us "always", (Mat 28:20), and we'll come to that same promise,

or a promise very similar to it in Hebrews chapter 13, in verse 5, "...I will never desert you, nor will I ever forsake you."

That's the promise. That's what He says. And faith gives us the conviction that He is really there with us. And that faith leads to a life that God approves.

That faith is fundamentally, first of all, in the God who approves of us. It is 'in God against the world', and that's the *third* direction in which this faith operates.

That's the explanation of verse 3, "By faith we understand that the worlds were prepared by the Word of God, so that what is seen was not made out of the things which are visible." Literally that is, 'By faith we understand that the ages were prepared by the Word of God.' It's the same word that's used of Christ in chapter 1, verse 2, in 'creating the world', (literally, "He created the ages.") And so what it means is, 'God created all things.' He created time and space. He created matter and history—everything: Everything that is, was created by Him.

This is a verse that speaks as directly to our day as it did when it was first written 2000 years ago. It speaks very directly to our age; but it also spoke very much to their age. You'd be surprised how the basic thought of the modern man is very much the same as ancient man.

The ancient pagans believed the universe always existed. Babylonian myths taught that the gods emerged from matter—it's eternal. Hinduism taught the same thing. The Greek religions taught that. The Greek philosophers taught that. Aristotle believed the universe was eternal. They didn't conceive of the universe beginning and being created by God, out of nothing, by divine fiat, by the divine will, by God's Word simply speaking everything into existence.

In their mind, it was always here. The Roman philosopher Lucretius did ask the question, "Why is there something rather than nothing?" He pondered that. He didn't have an answer. He didn't know, but he asked the question. Today, the answer from most astronomers and cosmologists is, 'There is something, rather than nothing, because about 13.75 billion years ago, there was a *big bang*.'

What's especially interesting about that is not the theory itself. That's interesting, but what's particularly interesting is the original response to it from the scientists in the early part of the 20th century. Many of them resisted that theory, and they resisted it vigorously. They liked '*the steady state theory*'—that it was eternal and self-generating. It didn't have a beginning; it's just always been here.

Well, you don't have to think about a Creator then. You don't have to think of someone who's greater than you and has authority over you. It's just, 'This universe has always been here.'

So when the big bang theory was propounded, that disturbed a lot of people, because it meant that there was a beginning. So many rejected it. Einstein rejected it. And it wasn't until shortly before his death that he finally accepted the idea of a 'beginning of the universe.'

Robert Jastrow, who was for years one of the chief scientists at NASA and later a professor at Dartmouth College wrote about this in his book, *God and the Astronomers*. It's a small book, simple book. I can read it, so it's not difficult—it's not intended to be.

Dr. Jastrow was not religious. He, in fact, described himself as an agnostic. But he deals very evenhandedly with his whole subject and he wrote that for Einstein, and for others, "It was a problem not of science—but of theology." The idea that everything had a beginning was disturbing, because a beginning meant there must be a *first cause*, and he, Einstein and others, didn't want to consider what or who that *cause* is.

Even now, with those who believe in the big bang, who believe that there is a beginning, there was a beginning to the universe, when they are faced with the question, 'What happened just before the big bang?', they answer, as one astronomer did, "I refuse to speculate."

They can't answer that question based on their science. There's no way to do that. So they certainly don't want to tackle the question of where it all came from, and how did this *stuff* of the fireball originate? Most, at least it seems, don't want to consider the question of 'Why there is something rather than nothing.'

Now since I'm not a scientist, far from it, I want to be careful about what I say or impute to others, but I know scientists do speculate. They speculate on a lot of things. You don't have to be very informed about that to know that they talk about, 'The string theory of the universe', and 'Multiverses', (in which our universe is one of many universes), which is a contradiction in terms, but how else do you say it?, 'There are many universes, so there's a multiverse.' Well, where does that come from? Where's the evidence for that? This is speculation on their part.

I think Dr. Jastrow was right: It's theological. They want to avoid certain questions because the obvious answers threaten to upset their own beliefs about the universe; their '*Materialism*', which is a faith position—as much a faith position as your position is but without the evidence that you've got, and the conviction that you've got. So they dismiss it as "speculation".

Well, we don't have to speculate; the Creator has revealed what happened at the moment of creation. He spoke everything into being *ex nihilo*, 'out of nothing'. Genesis chapter 1, verse 1, "In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth." That is such a profound statement; that is such a significant statement. Why would anyone think that unscientific? What is unscientific about 'There is a God and He created everything?'

Now when I say that that is not unscientific, I don't mean that we can arrive at Genesis 1:1 by natural science; by observing the physical world, by running experiments. That's not going to get us to that position. But theology and science are not at odds. The first great astronomer, Johannes Kepler, didn't think so. (1571-1630). He was a devout Lutheran. He observed the stars, and he praised the God who made them—and so should we.

It is completely reasonable to believe in God and that He created the universe out of nothing by the Word of His power. That's what the Bible teaches. And believing that is an example of faith being "the conviction of things not seen." (vs1). As God asked Job, "Where were you when I laid the foundation of the earth?" (Job 38:4). The answer

of course is, 'Nowhere'—and it was certainly not there. So no one was at the beginning, no one saw it happen. We are completely dependent on revelation for the knowledge of it, the knowledge of how everything began—and how everything's sustained for that matter. —And that is faith.

But why did our author here give this example, this example in verse 3? He's explained the nature of faith in verse 1: It's "the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen." That gives us a good working definition for what's to follow. And then he said, 'By that faith, the men of old and the women of old gained approval by God.' Why doesn't he then go into the examples of those: Abel and the others that he describes? Why doesn't he move directly into that? Why does he give this third aspect of faith that is given here in verse 3?

Well the reason lies in the fact that the ground of our faith in God's promises and the basis of a life of faithfulness in this world, lies in our faith in God Himself as the God who is absolutely sovereign. He is not sovereign if He's not the Creator of all things. Only the Creator of everything; time and space, of the beginning and the end, the Creator of the ages can be the sustainer and the controller of all things. We can only have confidence in that God.

And that's the God of the Bible. He has revealed Himself as the Creator and the sustainer of all things—the God who is absolutely sovereign. It's not a 'hobbyhorse' to talk about the sovereignty of God and to speak of God as absolutely sovereign. It's not just a sort of arcane theoretical kind of thing. It's very, very practical. It's the ground for your faith and a life of faithfulness. It's only *that* God who can deliver on the promises that He's made and be faithful. And He's always faithful to His people. Always.

So, belief in Genesis 1:1 is fundamental to everything that the writer records in this chapter on faith. God created the universe according to His plan and for His purpose, and He will bring His plan for the ages and for His people to a successful

conclusion in the kingdom to come. That's the promise, that's the hope, and we believe it.

And we're to trust Him for it. That's the life of faith. It's in Him—and it's not in this world. That's 'The beginning of knowledge', the Proverbs tell us. (1:7). And those who trust in Him have, 'hope that will not disappoint.' (Rom 5:5). And hope galvanizes action; and it gives the endurance, the patience, and the perspective to live a faithful life, a sound life, a fruitful life in this world.

God gives us blessing in this world. And we, of all people, are most happy. We're the only ones that have a claim on happiness and joy in this world. And we have reason for that because we have a glorious future. We have reason to rejoice every day.

That's what Paul tells us to do; to 'Rejoice always!', Philippians chapter 4, verse 4. How can we do that in the midst of difficulty? Paul was saying that when he was in prison in Rome; that's where he wrote the Book of Philippians. And throughout that book, he's saying "Rejoice!" He's in chains and he's rejoicing. Why? Because he knew God is in complete control, even in that circumstance. And that circumstance would be over eventually—and that he had glory for all of eternity. That's something to give us all joy about.

So, we have that confidence. We have the confidence in this life that David had in Psalm 23, where he speaks of the LORD being 'his shepherd'. He didn't see the LORD; he was living by faith. And that whole Psalm is one of progress, of walking; and there's this Shepherd who's guarding him and providing for him. He goes before him. He goes after him. He's beside him. 'He's setting a table before him in the presence of his enemies.' (Psa 23:5). That's the God we serve. That's the promise of the Word of God. And we know that by faith. And we know by faith that we will pass through the difficulties of this life, and the joys of this life, and the comforts of this life, and some day leave them all behind and enter into that great home that's ours in heaven.

Richard Henry Dana, Jr. did return home when he had hope—and had the career that he had hoped for. That conversation he had with his friend there on the shores of California came true: He finished his education at Harvard; he became a writer; he became a lawyer. The voyage back was not easy—they sailed through terrific storms around Cape Horn; the work was long and monotonous; there was sickness on the ship. But they finally arrived home, all of them, safely.

And we will, too. Our arrival in our heavenly home is certain. There may be hard times in this life, just like men at sea who experience storms and scurvy. But we will go through those trials, and we will go through them safely. Our journey will end, and it will end gloriously. That's the promise, that's the assurance that we have, that's the confidence that we have—and we have it by faith. Not without evidence, though. We have the sure Word of God, and it doesn't fail. So, we have every reason for courage, for confidence, for endurance.

If anyone of you, though, feels that his or her life is hopeless right now, without any hope at all, that you have uncertainty about what lies beyond the grave, that you don't have any certainty about what lies before you tomorrow, and you're very uncertain and despairing about life, we have an answer for you—and that answer is found in Jesus Christ. It is in Him that the wisdom and the riches of the ages are. It's in Him that there's life—and life everlasting.

And how do you have that? You have it by faith alone, by simply trusting in Him. He's the Son of God, who became a man, who died in the place of sinners, paid for the sins of everyone who believes in Him. Believe in Him and you'll be forgiven, you'll be given life everlasting—and you will be given sight; eyes to see what the world can't see and a glorious future. May God help you to do that, to look to Him. And help all of us to rest in Him and trust in Him. Let's pray.

Father, we thank You for this great chapter that we are about to study, and these opening verses that define faith, or at least give us an aspect of faith, a description of faith. And we thank You for the faith that's described here, that You've given to us who have believed. Our faith is a gift. You opened our eyes. You gave us sight. You have enabled us to, 'see the Light in Your Light.' We give You praise and thanks for that. We thank You for the hope that we have, the hope that our faith has laid hold of, the hope of life everlasting, a kingdom to come, a new heavens and a new earth, a world without end. We thank You for that. Thank You for all that we have in Christ. And it's in His name we pray, Amen.

(End of Audio)