

# Fantasy, Fate, or Faith

a sermon in the series  
Hebrews: An Epistle of Encouragement

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## Hebrews 11:1-3

*Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen. 2 For by it the elders obtained a good report. 3 Through faith we understand that the worlds were framed by the word of God, so that things which are seen were not made of things which do appear.*

We are seeing a collage of theology. A mixture of a little this and a little that, and we're daubing it on the canvas of religion. We look at the finished product and say, "Now this is the way, live in it." This has really become obvious since the terrorist attack on this nation last month. It seems like more and more we are hearing that all world religions are basically good. It is said that we're all trying to get to the same place, just in different ways, but the ultimate objective is the same. We are told that we're all worshipping God in our own unique personal way. Well, there's only one problem with all such smooth talk—you can't find it in the Book. The Bible tells us that Christ said, "I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me" (John 14:6).

There are a lot of different philosophies and views about how you serve God, and never more than now does the church need to go back to the basic fundamentals of the faith and know them well. The Christian life is not necessarily learning new and mysteriously deep truths as much as it is a rehearsal of the basic, simple, fundamental truths of who God is, and who Jesus Christ is, and who He is in you and me. You and I had better know what it means to have faith in Christ. Today, we have many people within Christendom who are trying to confuse us. Perhaps that's not their ultimate goal, but that's what's happening as we listen to different and varied ideas about what faith is. You can find as many different ideas about faith as there are books in a bookstore. It seems like many of the bestsellers are about how to increase your faith, or how to have more faith, or how to have the kind of faith that will literally move mountains. And so it behooves us today to find out what God's word really does say about faith, what it is, and how it operates in the believer's life. And so I invite you to turn with me in your Bibles to the book of Hebrews chapter eleven, verses one through three. I want to speak today on the topic, "Fantasy, Fate, or Faith."

Can I look at a religion, like Islam, and say, you know it's a good religion, and it ought to be respected? Can I truthfully say that and believe what the Bible says? I can't. There's nothing good about anything that leads you away from Christ. And neither is anything good that gives us a distorted view of what faith in Christ is. The greatest danger to the Christian church this morning

is not Islam. Rather it is a false view of reality that expresses itself in a wrong definition of faith. Now what is faith? Well, the writer of Hebrews defines it for us here. He says,

Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen. For by it the elders obtained a good report. Through faith we understand that the worlds were framed by the word of God, so that things which are seen were not made of things which do appear.

One of the most distinguishing characteristics of these three verses is that it tells me what reality is and how I can know it. These three verses are realism at its highest form. Herein is not only the definition of faith but also of reality. You can only know reality through faith.

## **THE OPPOSING VIEWS OF REALITY**

I want to share with you first of all that there are three opposing views of reality today. The first one is fantasy. There is a fantastical view out there that says that the view of reality is what we make reality to be; reality is whatever you want it to be. In Christian circles this existential view of reality is propagated by the so-called “faith teachers.” They try to get us to believe things into existence. Some have called it the “power of positive thinking.” The power of positive thinking says, “What your mind can conceive you can achieve.” If you just believe strong enough, hard enough, and long enough, it will happen.

This type of teaching is not a view of faith, or reality, but is nothing more than wishing. If you wish for something intensely and in the right way, they believe it will happen. That’s a fantasy world. That is not reality, although many Christians are living with that view of reality today. There are some people who do not believe that suffering, difficulty, and adversity should be a part of any born again believer’s life. Now friends, that simply is fantasy! We read in God’s Word “Yea, and all that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution” (2 Timothy 3:12). Why, I heard a “preacher” say that if Paul had had enough faith he wouldn’t have had to go through all of those prisons and persecutions. That is blasphemous, contrary to the spirit of our Lord. Would this same great preacher of faith question whether or not the Lord Jesus had enough faith? He suffered by the hands of sinners at the cross. Was His faith weak or deficient? If His faith had been greater could He have avoided the cross?

A fantasy view of reality cannot make something that does not exist happen by faith. You cannot by faith make something that does not exist, exist. Yet this fantastical idea has a firm root in much of the church world. We are told faith is the power to call things that do not exist to come into existence. You don’t have that ability, and that’s an incorrect view of reality. We will deal with this in more detail later.

The second view of reality that exists today is called fatalism. This view of reality says that chance and chaos came together and made reality. It’s the view of the evolutionist and most of our scientists today. There was a cataclysmic accommodation and acceleration of matter, enzymes, proteins and amino acids, who knows how long ago, and this was the beginning of human life. But the

possibility for such an accident to occur is a probability of one to one with a host of zeros that would cover several pages. Whatever this astronomical number is makes all but impossible the chance that all these basic components of life could collide and work in synchronization together at the precise time. I've heard it said, and I agree, that it takes more faith to believe in evolution than it does in the Bible.

This is a fatalistic view of reality, that the great god Chance rules. Out of chaos, and some primordial slime, came the life that we are today. Fate says nothing is purposed or determined; all that exists is but haphazard coincidence and chaos coming together.

And then the third, and I think the only right view of reality, is called faith. Faith is a view of reality. Perhaps you've not thought of faith like this. I hadn't either until I studied this passage again these last few weeks. Faith is nothing more than a correct view of reality. It's a view of reality based upon the facts and evidences of the Bible, which are spiritually discerned. Now if faith is the only and correct view of reality, which is the Christian perspective, then I must possess faith and exercise it so that I have a good grip on reality today and can speak to the tragic reality of our times. Oh, that's what I see happening right now! God is affording the church the platform to step forward and present reality as it really is, and not some fantastical idea or some undetermined fatalism that rules. There is a sovereign God that has determined all things according to His good pleasure, and His good pleasure is ultimately righteous, wise, and judicial. There is no fate or chance taking place here, nor do we need to close our eyes and pretend there is no pain and suffering. There is a view of reality that is right and has an answer to all the hurt, pain, and suffering that people experience.

## **THE ONLY VIABLE REALIST**

So what is this view of reality called faith? If I'm correct in stating that faith is the appropriate view of reality, then there must be only one viable realist in the whole universe and that's the Lord God. God is a realist and not an idealist. He's a realist because He can see all things as they really are. He ultimately knows how it's all going to happen, for everything's already happened in the mind of God. He sees the end from the beginning. He is transcendent, above and beyond time. If an individual is not bound by time but contains time, cannot he see all things and cannot all things exist simultaneously with him? God never woke up and said, "Well, I never thought of it like that. That's interesting. Now that's a new idea." God doesn't have new ideas. All knowledge is simultaneous with God, all reality is simultaneous, and He's not bound by time.

The book of Revelation has already happened in the mind of God. How could John have already seen it if it wasn't real? God's the ultimate realist. There's a term that scientists use, "empirical data." Most scientists today are empiricists, which means they don't believe anything unless there's hard, proven data, and whatever's hard and proven is what they believe. I tell you, God is the ultimate empiricist because He sees it all and knows it all, and it's all real to Him. Now, if this is true that God is the only viable, true realist, it is because He sees everything. Listen, if He can see everything, that means He knows everything, and the Scripture tells us that He knows

everything because He ordained all things according to His good will. This is the same idea of the apostle in Ephesians chapter one and verse eleven. “In whom also we have obtained an inheritance, being predestinated according to the purpose of him who worketh all things after the counsel of his own will.”

## **Visible Reality**

I want to share with you how everything can make sense to you even when you don't understand everything. The writer of Hebrews does this in our text. Look at verse three. “Through faith we understand that the worlds were framed by the word of God, so that things which are seen,” (notice those words, “so that things which are seen”) “were not made of things which do appear.” These words speak of a visible reality. There are things that you and I can see; we can touch, we can smell, we can taste, we can hear them. They are physical, visible reality. I am not a figment of your imagination. I'm real, you're real, and you're listening to me right now. That's the cold hard facts. Visible reality. I can go out on a starry night, look up, and see stars. Early this morning while you were in a state of sleep, I was out early while the air was still brisk and looked into the darkness of night. The moon and stars beamed. I could see the North Star, and I looked over onto the eastern horizon and I saw this brilliant light shining, which I think was a planet; it was spectacular. What I saw is real, it's visible, and it's reality.

## **Invisible Reality**

But notice what the Epistle of Hebrews' author says after he says, “so that things which are seen.” He says, “. . . so that things which are seen were not made of things which do appear.” Here the writer speaks of an invisible reality. There are things out there that you cannot see, but they are just as real as everything you can see. So reality must be composed of things visible and things invisible. It was not until this last century, the twentieth century, that we even knew what an atom was and could see it. But before there were microscopes and scientists with the knowledge of atoms, atoms existed. They were a part of the invisible reality that makes up things that we can see. Hebrews chapter eleven verse one says that faith is the “evidence of things not seen.” Faith is proof, evidence of something existing that the human mind or body cannot see, touch, hear, handle, or taste. Reality must involve what you can see, and more importantly, what you can't see. Thus, faith involves things we can see, and things we cannot see.

The writer says, “Through faith we understand that the worlds were framed by the Word of God, so that the things which are seen were not made of things which do appear.” God made all creation out of absolutely nothing, “the things which are seen were not made of thing which do appear.” How unlike us is God. We creatures have the ability to create. Some of the most beautiful things that we can behold today are the work of craftsmen, artisans. I think of some beautiful paintings that I have had the privilege to see. They are amazing and so beautiful. It is astounding that an artist can take paint and a piece of canvas and begin to create these masterpieces. But that artist has to have materials to start with in order to create something. He cannot make something out of nothing. He's got to start with the raw materials, such as paint, brush, and can-

vas. A sculptor must have the chisel and the stone; he cannot create a statue out of absolutely no matter, nothingness. But God can. The Almighty can take absolutely no matter and create worlds. The Word of God says that the Lord took perfect nothingness, and out of the word of His mouth came something.

## **Definition of Faith**

Therefore, if God has the ability, knowing and seeing all things, visible and invisible, then, dear friend, what the author of Hebrews is communicating concerning faith is this: that faith is nothing more than the ability to see reality as God sees it. Faith is nothing more than the ability to see things as God sees them. Now of course you and I will never, even in heaven, see all things the way God sees them, that's why He's God and we're not. But faith is imparted of God, a divine understanding given to the believer in order to see that which is invisible. Reality comprises of both what we can see and what we cannot see. Faith is a glimpse into this reality.

Let us pursue this definition of faith that faith is the ability to see reality as God sees it. Verse one of our text reads,

*Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen (Hebrews 11:1).*

If God is the only one who can see things as they really are, then the ability to see things that only God can see is what faith must be. Did not Jesus say to the disciples in Mark chapter eleven verse twenty-two "Have faith in God"? Yes. The word "in" in the phrase "Have faith in God" is a Greek word that literally means "of." Jesus is to be translated most accurately as, "Have the faith of God." When He calmed the storm, and the disciples were amazed, they said, "Lord increase our faith." He answered, "Have the faith of God." Do you want to have more faith? Then have more of God and more of God's perspective on reality and you will have more faith. The ability to be able to believe is the ability to be able to see and understand as God sees and understands. How does this happen? How can you and I see like God sees, think like God thinks, and view reality as God views reality? This is what I call the operation of reality. Let us examine how faith works and operates in the life of a believer.

## **THE OPERATION OF REALITY**

We know that God knows all things, and therefore, He sees the invisible and the visible. But how do you and I do that? Well, let's look at what's happening in our text. Let's go back to the last couple of weeks in these messages through the book of Hebrews. The objective of the writer of Hebrews is to encourage these saints who are going through difficult times. He is very concerned that some in the church would desert their profession of faith in the face of persecution. How I think of our own young people in our churches today. They have grown up in a "Christian" home, and have been taught the truth, and told that there is no other truth apart from God and His Word. But will they stand when persecution comes, or when what mom and dad, the Sunday school teacher, the youth pastor, and the pastor have taught them is being challenged?

The writer of the Epistle to the Hebrews encourages his audience that the faith of Jesus Christ is real. At times you can't see some things; your view of reality is very limited. As I said last week, it's like trying to view the Grand Canyon through a tube; you don't get the full picture. It is when you can't see all that is real that you need faith. Faith will give you the ability to see, sometimes, the things that are not visible, "the evidence of things not seen, the substance of things hoped for."

If you hope for it, it means you don't have it yet; it's still out there to be obtained. And so the author of our text says in Hebrews chapter ten verse thirty-eight,

*Now the just shall live by faith.*

Can't you hear his plea to his audience, "Oh, dear Hebrews, listen, I know you're hurting, I know it's difficult, but do not live by sight. You are to live by faith." He says in the thirty-ninth verse,

*"But we are not of them who draw back unto perdition; but of them that believe to the saving of the soul."*

It is by faith that we run the race with endurance. Faith gives us a line of sight that sees what the physical eyes cannot. It sees the grace of God working and Christ having conquered all of our opposition. It is by faith that we obtain a good report and hear the Master's benediction, "Well done thou good and faithful servant." This is the statement of Hebrews chapter eleven and verse two,

*For by it the elders obtained a good report.*

If you and I have the ability to see reality as God sees it, which is what faith is, we can obtain a good report just like the elders. In this eleventh chapter the writer is going to go through the lives of some of the great men and women of God from the Old Testament right up to the New Testament and demonstrate how faith works. He's going to tell us about Abel, Noah, Enoch, Abraham, Moses, David, and Gideon. He's going to talk about some nameless men and women we've never heard of, but this is one thing we do know about them, they had a good testimony because they were a people who saw things as God saw them and they believed. Having the reality of God's truth in our hearts produces a good testimony. In verse one, the writer of Hebrews shows faith as being able to see things as the Lord does in two distinct ways. This is how faith operates in the believer's heart.

## **The Substance of Reality Implanted in the Believer**

The first part of verse one states, "Now faith is the substance of things hoped for." Literally this means that the substance of reality, (we have already established that faith is the ability to see the reality of a situation the way God sees it) is implanted into the heart of the believer. Look at the word "substance". Now you may have a translation that doesn't use the word "substance." It is unfortunate that they did not translate the word as it ought to be translated. The word is "substance" in the Greek, and it ought to be maintained as such in English. It is not just the as-

assurance as some translators have rendered this verse. For example, the New American Standard Bible translated verse one to read, “Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen.” It means more than assurance, although it would include assurance. Faith is literally the substance, or, in other words, the essence or nature of something that you’re hoping for. Faith is the very quality that makes up the thing that you’re longing for. Faith becomes what you’re hoping for. Now this word “hope” is not wish. It does not mean I’m wishing Jesus would come back. Brother, when I say I hope Jesus comes back, I’m not saying that there is a possibility that He might or might not return. It is altogether certain that He’s coming back. Hope in the Bible is not uncertainty, it’s not wishing, rather it is to have in your heart the certainty that it’s going to happen. And so faith is the quality or the essence of the thing that you are certain will come about. In other words, it is the reality of these things in your heart as a child of God.

Let me show you this from Ephesians chapter one verses thirteen and fourteen. “In whom ye also trusted, after that ye heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation: in whom also after that ye believed, ye were sealed with that holy Spirit of promise, which is the earnest of our inheritance until the redemption of the purchased possession, unto the praise of his glory.” In other words, salvation occurs in multiple stages. You don’t get all there is of salvation at the moment of conversion, although you’re as much saved then as you will be standing in heaven. But there’s more of salvation to come; for example, the redemption of our bodies. At conversion, according to the Apostle Paul, the Lord gave you an “earnest,” which means down payment, to assure you that the remainder will come. The Holy Spirit is given to the new believer as a down payment, if you please, good faith money, a good faith promise, that the remainder will come. Faith is literally having the reality of Jesus Christ in me. “Christ in you, the hope of glory” (Colossians 1:27). You received more than the guarantee that your name was written down in a book in heaven, you received the essence of eternal life, here and now. Therefore, faith is nothing more than experiencing eternal life now in your heart. Faith is the substance of things hoped for. We have implanted within us the very essence of Christ.

Paul says as much to the Corinthians in I Corinthians chapter two and verse nine, “But as it is written, Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love him. But God hath revealed them unto us by his Spirit: for the Spirit searcheth all things, yea, the deep things of God.” I don’t know what heaven is like, but I have the substance of heaven in my soul right now. I can’t tell you what it’s like physically, but I can tell you spiritually, because I know the spiritual reality of heaven now. I experience it when I commune with Christ. Heaven is experiencing the fullness of Jesus in a capacity greater than now, but we now experience the same Christ. The essence of the experience will not change in heaven, only our capacity to enjoy it will change.

## **The Evidence of Reality Given to the Believer**

Secondly, the writer says, faith operates in the Christian life as evidence. Salvation isn’t only the substance of the very reality that you’re hoping for, but it’s also the evidence of that reality implanted in, submitted to the believer. Again, look at Hebrews eleven and verse one, “Now faith

is,” and then go to the last part of the verse, “the evidence of things not seen.” Now the word “evidence” here is a word that means “proof.” The word is used only twice in the New Testament. If I am a prosecuting attorney and you are a juror, it is my responsibility as the prosecuting attorney to present irrefutable evidence that he who stands trial is guilty. My evidence should be so irrefutable that it should prove to you his guilt beyond reasonable doubt. And if the evidence is sufficient and removes reasonable doubt, you must do your duty and pronounce him guilty and pass sentence. That’s the idea behind this word “evidence.” The writer of Hebrews is teaching that faith is the very evidence of things that we cannot see, and they’re just as real as the things we can. It’s the very argumentation or proof of these things. This proof or faith is given to us believers and implanted in our hearts.

The illustration of verse one is verse three.

*Through faith we understand that the worlds were framed by the word of God, so that things which are seen were not made of things which do appear (Hebrews 11:3).*

In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth, and the book of Genesis chapter one verse three says, “And God said, Let there be light: and there was light.” In verse nine it reads, “And God said, Let the waters under the heaven be gathered together unto one place, and let the dry land appear: and it was so.” Again in verse eleven we read, “And God said, Let the earth bring forth grass, the herb yielding seed, and the fruit tree yielding fruit after his kind, whose seed is in itself, upon the earth: and it was so.” As you read along in the first chapter of Genesis you notice two repetitive phrases, “And God said” and “and it was so.” In Hebrews chapter one verse three it says that Jesus Christ upholds “all things by the word of his power.” When John writes that glorious prologue of his gospel we call the Gospel of Saint John, he says, “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. The same was in the beginning with God” (John 1:1-2). Ah dear friends, Jesus Christ is the Word of God and He spoke the worlds into existence. Christ took absolutely nothing and spoke it all into existence.

He does no less within our own hearts. Faith is the product of God’s Word in our hearts. In Romans chapter ten and verse seventeen we are told by the apostle, “So then faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God.” Our hearts are faithless until God speaks, and it is His word illuminated to our souls that produces faith.

Every promise that God has made to you, when quickened to the heart by the Holy Spirit, engenders faith. You do not yet have in your possession the fulfillment of the promise, but faith is the proof or the evidence in your own heart that it’s real and that it is yours. By faith you have already become the possessor of it. Faith, then can be said to be nothing more than God planting in our hearts the evidence that we’re able to see God, not only in the things made, but also in the circumstances of our lives.

Let me see if I can help you by illustrating this. A few years ago it was a fad, these 3-D puzzles called “Magic Eyes.” Do you remember? There were books you could buy where there was noth-



ing but page after page of pictures of chaotic colors and lines, and if you would fasten your eyes upon the page, look directly in the center of the page, and just stare about fifteen or twenty seconds, an image would just seem to pop out of all the chaotic colors and lines. They even had them in the newspapers for a while. Every Wednesday in the Extra edition would be this little picture, and when you first saw it, you saw nothing but chaos, disorder, but when you stared at it, finally an image came from out of the chaos. What the Bible is saying in our text is that faith is the ability to look at all of what you and I call chaotic and see God's reality. Life sometimes isn't very orderly. People hurt others and people are hurt. Often there's more adversity than prosperity. You look at life and you see nothing but chaos. But the child of God can see reality as God sees reality and in the chaos and all the discolored portions and pieces, he sees the picture. The believer by faith sees God behind all of the chaos, and somehow it makes some sense to him.

But those who are of the fantasy persuasion, they can never see the image. And so they invent what they think the image should be from the chaos and fantasize that they see it. And those who are of the persuasion of fate cannot see anything. To them it is some type of structured chaos. But God has given the Christian the ability to look into the chaos of life and see through chaos the wise and sovereign providence of God. He has given to us a confidence, an assurance, a substance, an evidence, that His fingerprint is there and He's working everything according to His good pleasure and for our glory. That's what God is showing us here in this text of Hebrews chapter eleven, verses one through three.

And so as I bring this message to a close, let me make these points of application. Number one, to walk by sight is to walk in non-reality. If you're walking by sight, you're not walking in true reality. How often we judge reality by the things we see, by the things we can touch, by the things we can hear, but reality goes beyond the things we can actually see, touch and hear and takes into account things you cannot see. Dear Christian, if you're discouraged, if you're fearful today, it's because you are not walking in what is really the true reality.

Have you ever jumped to a conclusion, and didn't get all of the facts? Without all the facts you do not have a full comprehension of reality. And, beloved, that's exactly what you and I do when we begin to judge God by our circumstances. When you and I lose heart when circumstances are difficult, we are not looking at reality. We do not have all the facts. It is only by faith can we see things that are invisible, and it is only by faith can we make sense of suffering. When you're hurting, life looks like a 3-D puzzle and nothing makes sense. But by faith you can see into the puzzle of suffering and an image that makes complete sense will appear. Do you know what you're going to see every time? You will see a wise, omnipotent, and loving God working to make you into the image of His dear Son.

I need to close, but I must make this final application, and that is there is no faith in Christ without the essence of Christ in you. Now "faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen." You can't really be a Christian, no matter what you profess, unless the essence of Jesus Christ lives within you. Faith is not saying, "I believe in Jesus." Please dismiss that from your theology, it'll damn your soul if you believe it. Faith is not saying, "I believe in God." Faith is the

actual experiencing of God in your heart so that you can say, "I do believe in Jesus. Not because I believe the Bible as an intellectual book of facts and figures, but because I've experienced the God of the Bible in my soul." And so today, faith is not something to enlarge your bank account or to keep your body well, it's God's gift to you and me to be able to view life the way God views it and thereby walk in harmony with His will and plan for your life. Amen.