

Hebrews 11 (Part 2) :2-7 • Without Faith it is Impossible to Please God

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Hebrews, as you know, was addressed to Jewish believers who had come to faith in Jesus Christ and His finished work on the cross. We've mentioned many times through our study that it was because of persecution that began to rise up in their lives, that these people were being tempted to return to the law.

Being a Christian was a very dangerous thing back in those days. It's getting to be more dangerous today once again, even here in this country. It's still dangerous in many other parts of the world. But it was very dangerous for these Jewish people. And so, the idea of going back to the law as a means of being made acceptable to God was attractive to some of these people because it was going to take the pressure off them. It was going to remove some of the difficulty and the persecution that was going along with their confession of Christ.

And so, knowing that was the case, this author took time to write this letter to these people. And you'll remember, for those of you who've been through this study with us, he has spent what is to us the last 10 chapters talking to these people over and over again about the superiority of the new covenant that we have through Jesus Christ to the old covenant and the Mosaic Law.

And, along the way we've seen him cite some pretty sobering warnings to the people, highlighting the fact that rejecting this message is not a smart thing to do; rejecting the new covenant is a very serious matter. You'll remember we covered two of those very serious warnings. First in chapter 6, and then again in Hebrews 10, the last chapter, and very challenging warnings.

Now, the author is turning in this chapter to emphasize the role that faith plays in the life of the believer. And the goal of this chapter is to highlight for his readers the fact that faith has always been the means of living a life pleasing to God, even during the Old Testament. And furthermore, it has always been by faith that God's people have lived and endured this fallen world.

In other words, what the author is kind of saying and will say, even more so through this chapter, is, "I know you guys are going through hard times. I know

that things are really heating up for you.” But let me just tell you, believers have always had to turn to faith to endure the challenges that go along with living in this world, because as believers the world is never going to like you, the world is never going to accept you, the world is never going to embrace you. In fact, they're going to do quite the opposite of those three things. And so, you are going to have to endure. How do we endure? By faith.

And it has always been the same. It's never changed. That's the point that he's going to be making in this chapter. God is not asking anything of you that He didn't ask of anybody else ever throughout history who has come to Him by faith. So, he's going to point to that over and over again, and he says, again, beginning in verse 1, this is a review; verse 1 is what we covered last week. He said:

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

And now we move on; beginning in verse 2, he says:

² *“For by it (and of course he's referring to faith there) 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.”*

I want you to stop there for just a moment because he's making two statements here about faith in these verses. First, he says that the people of old were commended for their faith, not for obedience to the law. That's not to say God didn't commend them for their obedience from time to time, but ultimately their commendation was because of faith.

But the second thing that the author mentions here is the fact that it is by faith that we understand that God created the universe from nothing. And of course, this all brings us back to Genesis 1:1. Let me put it on the screen for you so we can see it again together. It says:

Genesis 1:1 (ESV)

In the beginning, God created the heavens in the earth.

Now, those of you who have gone through a study of Genesis, you probably know that word that is translated *created* in Hebrews 1:1 is the Hebrew word *bara*, and it literally means in the Hebrew “created from nothing.” In other words, God didn't gather things together and create the universe. He spoke it

into existence out of nothing. Now, what that means on a scientific level is God created matter out of nothing. He simply called it into existence.

Now, you might be thinking to yourself, “oh man, pastor Paul, you're making this heart on me. I'm sitting here trying to witness to unbelievers, and you're telling me that I need to tell them that God created matter out of nothing? They're going to think I'm crazy!” Well, actually, that's not true. You see, secular science also believes that matter just appeared at some moment in time. The problem is they just don't know where it came from.

Some of you might remember here, a few years ago, I was driving to Minnesota. This is one of the few times I've made a trip back to see my parents by myself. I was all alone in the car, so I was listening to the radio pretty much the whole trip. And I remember I was cruising through – I think it was Nebraska; there's not a whole lot to see in this side of Nebraska – but I was just cruising along listening to the radio, and I was listening to public radio. And this gentle woman's voice came on talking about the creation of the universe.

And she's talking and she says, “And one minute there was nothing, and then all matter appeared.” And then she began talking about the Big Bang and stuff like that, and I was like, “**What?!** What did you just say?” It's like I wanted her to like back up. I wish I could have raised my hand and asked a question; “where did it come from?” She didn't offer any explanations.

This lovely, calming woman's voice. She offered no explanation as to where matter came from. And there's a good reason – they don't know. All they know is that matter appeared. That's all they know. So, you tell me who sounds crazy. We are saying God created matter and has the ability to create matter. They're saying matter just appeared and we don't know where it came from, which actually breaks their scientific laws, their own scientific laws.

So, why do you and why do I believe that matter came from God? Well, because He said so. Let me show you a passage in Isaiah 44:

Isaiah 44:24 (ESV)

Thus says the LORD, your Redeemer, who formed you from the womb: "I am the LORD, who made all things, who alone stretched out the heavens, who spread out the earth by myself..."

"Thus says the LORD, your Redeemer, who formed you from the womb (I guess he made you too): "I am the LORD (He says), who made all things, who alone stretched out the heavens, who spread out the earth by myself..."

So, we believe that God created all things because He said He created all things, and by faith we believe it. We believe that the source of all matter is God. The world believes the source of all matter is “blank” – they don't know.

So, you see, I'm not really making life difficult for you when you try to explain where matter came from. I'm really not. If they say to you, “Oh, bushwa that ‘God made all things’”, just ask them, “well, where do you think matter came from?” And they're going to have to say, “well...” who knows what they're going to come up with; one of the more latest explanations is aliens. You hear the Star Trek theme going off in the back of your head, right? The world tells us that it's unreasonable to believe in a creator God. But I ask the question to them is it unreasonable to believe that matter just appeared from no source?

Now, in the following verses, the author's going to bring us, or I should say maybe bring before us, 17 witnesses. We're not going to get to all of them today, but he's going to parade in front of us 17 witnesses whose lives are shown to us to underscore faith and endurance. And we call these, well, he calls these “the cloud of witnesses” as we get into the first part of the next chapter.

So, you're ready? We're going to begin to talk about the cloud of witnesses. And like I said, we're only going to go through a few today. But it begins with Abel, verse 4, look with me in your Bible:

⁴ “By faith Abel offered to God a more acceptable sacrifice than Cain, through which he was commended as righteous, God commending him by accepting his gifts. And through his faith, though he died, he still speaks.”

And of course, now we're still pointing back to the Book of Genesis, early in the book of Genesis; chapter 4 when we read that Abel was a keeper of sheep and that his brother Cain was a man of the earth who raised crops. And it says that in the course of time, both of these men came and brought an offering to the Lord, and Abel brought an offering from his flock and Cain brought an offering from the fruit of his labors.

But we're told in the book of Genesis quite bluntly, as a matter of fact, that God accepted Abel's offering, but he rejected Cain and his offering. Now, what's interesting about Genesis and the account that's given there is that we're not told why.

People love to speculate, and I've heard many explanations as to why Cain's sacrifice was not acceptable to God. And some people say, “well, it's because Abel brought a blood sacrifice and Cain brought a sacrifice from the earth.” I

honestly don't think that's it, because there were sacrifices even under the Mosaic Law of the earth. They would bring sacrifices of grain and sacrifices of wine, and they would offer those things up to the Lord as well as the fruit of their labors, the fruit of the blessing of the Lord, and so forth.

So why is it then that Abel's offering was accepted and Cain's was not? Well, I believe the answer is actually given to us right here in Hebrews 11. The first part again of verse 4 says, "*By faith Abel offered to God a more acceptable sacrifice...*" And whether it was the specifics of the sacrifice, we're not told. What we are told is that he offered it by faith.

And honestly, that's all we really need to know. I mean, the rest are just kind of details. He offered it by faith. He acted out of faith. I don't believe Cain did. Cain did not have faith, he did not offer his sacrifice in faith, and we're going to learn here in just a couple of verses without faith, it is impossible to please God. So, faith is the key here. Let's not get off the theme of what we're talking about. And we're told here that even though Abel died, his act of faith still speaks to us today. What is Abel saying? He's saying faith is the key. Faith is what makes the difference.

But faith, your faith, is probably also what's going to get you in trouble with those who don't have faith. So, Abel speaks, he preaches even today talking to us about faith, what it's going to get us with God and what it's going to get us with the world. He tells us those things.

The author goes on now, verse 5. We get to the next person here in the Hall of Faith. He says:

⁵“By faith Enoch was taken up so that he should not see death, and he was not found because God had taken him. Now before he was taken he was commended as having pleased God.”

So, the next person here we see is Enoch, a man who we frankly know precious little about except for the fact that he walked with God, and he walked by faith with God. And after living 365 years, you might think “365 years? Oh, he was just a baby. Everybody else at that time was living 900 some years. He was just a kid, wet behind the ears! Probably didn't even have his five o'clock shadows yet.” I'm joking.

But it says that after 365 years, he just simply was taken by the Lord, which is to say we do not believe that Enoch experienced physical death; like the prophet

Elijah, he was taken by the Lord. And the author tells us here that Enoch walked by faith. And of course, that's the purpose of what he's trying to say.

And after citing the lives of two of our witnesses, he makes this important statement, which I've already quoted. But this is the theme, you guys; if there's one verse in this chapter that you should highlight, underline, or memorize, it's this one, verse 6:

⁶ *“And without faith, it is impossible to please (God),”*

That is so important. He goes on to say:

“...for whoever would draw near to God must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who seek him.”

I want you to notice the strength of the statement that is made there in the first part of verse 6. He doesn't just say, “without faith, it's hard to please God.” “Without faith, you're really going to have to work hard to please...” No, he doesn't say that. He says, without faith, it is *impossible*. Okay? It is impossible to please God.

That is why we find out in the New Testament that anything that is not done from faith is sin. And that statement, by the way, really kind of messes with people's minds, but this verse helps us to understand what is being said. It is impossible to please God apart from faith. Faith is what makes the difference.

How's your faith? How's your faith doing? I asked that question because that was on Paul, the Apostle's mind all the time when he wrote to the people to whom he wrote. How's your faith? He would say things like, “I really wanted to come visit you and see how your faith was doing” and “I wanted to come and add to your faith.”

Paul knew it is absolutely critical that as believers, we walk by faith and not by sight; that we put our faith completely in God. Why? It is impossible to please God otherwise. It is impossible. And this tells us even more why Cain's offering, which we talked about before, was not acceptable to God. It's impossible to please him without faith. Abel by faith offered his sacrifice; Cain did not. And so, God, you know what happened; Cain saw that his brother Abel was accepted by God, and he became sullen and angry because he had been rejected because of his lack of faith.

The next witness I absolutely love because there's so much here that speaks to us. But verse 7 says:

⁷ “*By faith Noah, being warned by God concerning events as yet unseen, in reverent fear (note that phrase) constructed an arc for the saving of his household. By this (the construction of the ark) he condemned the world and became an heir of the righteousness that comes by faith.*”

This is a great passage. We learned that Noah was also a man of faith in the sense that even though he had never seen rain before, he was told by God that the heavens were going to open up and rain was going to fall from heaven in such a degree that along with the great reserves of water under the earth bursting forth, there would be such a global catastrophic flood that it would wipe away life on the planet.

He'd never seen that before. We're told that there was a kind of vapor canopy around the earth prior to the flood that used to essentially bring moisture to the planet. And I believe that vapor barrier, and you could read about that in Genesis; you read about the fact that there's water and God separated water from water. So, there were the waters that were on the earth and even under the earth, but there was actually water above the earth in the form of this vapor canopy.

This is my guess. Don't tell people this is what it says in the Bible. Just if you're going to say it, just say, “here's Paul's guess.” I believe that is why one of the main reasons why people lived so long before the flood is I believe that vapor canopy not only watered the earth, but it also completely filtered out the harmful UV rays from the sun that we know today wither us just like a raisin. And that's my opinion, okay? We'll find out later. It'll be the first thing I ask when I get to Heaven. “All right, Lord, here's the deal...” sort of a thing.

But this vapor canopy was just let loose and Noah had never seen rain falling from the sky in that sense. And it says that – and that's why this passage even tells us that being warned of events as yet unseen – he constructed the ark and in so doing condemned the world, it says that his faith is described here as *reverent fear*.

Did you catch that? That's a powerful description for faith – in reverent fear. I really like that. If you have a new King James on your lap, your Bible says, “godly fear.” If you have an NIV, your Bible says “a holy fear.” But it refers to that reverent care or concern for God's Word, it shows a tremendous respect for God's Word. In other words, God says it, I believe it, and that has always

pleased God. That has always pleased Him when His children respond to His word with faith.

Let me show you a wonderful passage in Isaiah 66. It says:

Isaiah 66:2 (ESV)

... this is the one to whom I will look: he who is humble and contrite in spirit and trembles at my word.

I love that verse because it talks of faith. That trembling is not that kind of a fearful trembling that is afraid to look at God's Word. It's that kind of fearful attitude that respects God's Word, and receives it as the Word of God. This is the Word of God. When I say something, people can rightly say, "eh, whatever." But when God says something, our response should be something similar to what is referred to there. That attitude of total faith.

Now you'll notice there's something else that it tells us concerning Noah, and that says at the end of verse 9, you'll notice that it says that he "*condemned the world.*" That's a pretty interesting statement, isn't it? It doesn't mean that Noah went around condemning his neighbors or anybody who would listen.

I remember when Sue and I lived in Washington. In Seattle, we used to take our kids who were really little, the two that we started off with, and we'd take them down to downtown Seattle to Pike Place Market, if you guys have ever been there before. We'd go get some fish and chips and just hang out with the family and it was always a lot of fun. But inevitably there would be a street preacher down there.

And honestly, we're not to judge our brother in that sense, another man's servant. But I'd always get a little uncomfortable because they were preaching condemnation most of the time. They weren't preaching God's love and encouraging people. They were kind of saying "you're dead," sort of a thing. And that can have its place; worked pretty good for Jonah, or I should say maybe the people of Nineveh. But that's not what it says that Noah did when it says he condemned the world. He wasn't shaking his fist and that sort of a thing.

The writer of Hebrews is simply explaining to us that by his faith and by his obedience, to believe God and to do what God said, which was to construct a boat – well, the ark – that he was showing by his actions his faith. And that by contrast the world which was rejecting God's Word was being shown up for what was really going on in their heart, and the fact that his actions condemned them by their refusal to believe.

And make no mistake about it, they refused to believe. We're told in this passage that Noah and his family were saved from the floodwater simply by taking God at His word and getting on the boat. That's really not a tough sort of – well, I'm not a builder. I mean, he had a couple of hundred years to build the boat, so I guess he had some time.

You think about it, you think about what does it take to be saved from the global flood? Well, I've got to believe God and get on the boat. That's what I've got to do. And when you think about that, you think anyone could have done that. Anybody could have just believed God and got on the boat and been saved.

And I think about that in terms of the picture that it creates for us of salvation today. Because the global flood, you guys, is a picture of the final judgment. It is. God's going to do that again. God has told us in His word, "I will judge the world. I am going to judge all those who have rejected My word." (John 12:48-49)

And just like the floodwaters of judgment came in the days of Noah, another judgment is on its way. But just like in Noah's day, anybody can be spared from that judgment by believing God's Word and getting on the boat. The difference is the boat this time is a person. Okay? So, we are saved by believing in God and taking Him at His word and getting on the bandwagon, which is putting our faith in Jesus and His finished work on the cross. We have to remember that.

That's why the story of Noah is so important. I think it's also one of the reasons why the story of Noah is considered by many today to be some fictional mythological imagery that we're not to take seriously. "Noah, the flood, oh, come on." Well, it's this enormous picture of God's judgment and what it takes to be saved. What does it take to be saved? If somebody asks you, if an unbeliever ever comes to you and says, "Hey, how can I be saved?"

Just say, "believe God and get on the boat" and then explain to him what the boat is. The person of Jesus Christ, except what He did on the cross for you when He suffered. That's getting on the boat – receiving Him as Savior.

Get on the boat. Are you on the boat? There's a flood coming, a tidal wave of judgment that is coming upon the earth.

How do people respond today? I suppose the same way they responded back in Noah's day. The people in Noah's day were lost because they did not believe God. They refused to believe what God was saying. The message in Noah's day was a flood of global proportions is coming to wipe out all life from the face of

the earth. And the response of the people was like, “Yeah, right. I’ve never seen rain fall from the sky, and I don’t believe it’s going to happen now.”

Today we have a slightly different message, although it’s really very similar. Today our message is all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and the wages of that sin is death. But the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord. And yet, just like in Noah’s day, some people hear that message and say, “yeah, right.”

We were told it would be that way. Peter actually connects the salvation and Noah story. Let me show you this in 2 Peter 3. He writes:

2 Peter 3:3-7

knowing this, first of all, that scoffers will come in the last days with scoffing, following their own sinful desires. They will say, "Where is the promise of his coming? For ever since the fathers fell asleep, all things are continuing as they were from the beginning of creation." For they deliberately overlook this fact that the heavens existed long ago, and the earth was formed out of water and through water by the word of God, and that by means of these the world that then existed was deluged with water and perished.

“Knowing this, first of all, that scoffers will come in the last days with scoffing, following their own sinful desires. They will say, ‘Where is the promise of his coming?’ For ever since the fathers fell asleep (that means ever since men have died), all things are continuing as they were from the beginning of creation.’

It’s just going on and on. And he goes on to say:

“...they deliberately overlook this fact that the heavens existed long ago, and the earth was formed out of water and through water by the Word of God, and that by means of these the world that then existed was deluged with water and perished.”

Notice he says they forget the story of Noah, but they do it purposely, deliberately overlooking the message of that story because it is a warning that judgment is coming. Peter goes on to say this:

2 Peter 3:9-10

But the day of the Lord will come like a thief, and then the heavens will pass away with a roar, and the heavenly bodies will be burned up and dissolved, and the earth and the works that are done on it will be exposed. The Lord is not slow to fulfill his promise as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing that any should perish, but that all should reach repentance.

"But the day of the Lord will come like a thief, and then the heavens will pass away with a roar, and the heavenly bodies will be burned up and dissolved, and the earth and the works that are done on it will be exposed." He goes on to say:

"The Lord is not slow to fulfill his promise as some count slowness,"

This is the response to people that say, "oh, come on. It's always been the same." He says, "listen, whatever slowness you see is actually God's patience toward you. He is *'not wishing that any should perish, but that all should reach repentance.'*"

So why is it we haven't seen the coming of the Lord? Where's this coming that He keeps talking about?

Oh, He's coming. The day of the Lord will come. The reason that He's delaying is because He wants everyone to be saved. He doesn't wish any to perish. But He wants people to come to repentance, so He's giving them time.

Back in Noah's day, all anyone had to do to be saved again was to believe God and get on the boat. Today, it's Jesus Christ. And if they would simply receive Him as the one who can save them through His sacrifice on the cross, they will be spared the global judgment that is coming upon this earth.

And you can kind of see here, can't you, that what the author of Hebrews is doing with this argument is he's putting forth in these verses for his readers that it has always been faith; that is the key. Ever since the beginning – I've told you this before, people are always asking me, they want to know "Well, I know that we're saved by believing in Jesus; how were people saved before Jesus came? It always bothered me. God just didn't reveal the way to be saved before Jesus came and died on the cross? How were people saved under the old covenant?"

We've said many times. The old covenant had nothing to do with eternal salvation; nothing. It was an earthly covenant that had earthly promises. People were not saved by keeping the Mosaic Law. They're still not saved by keeping

the Mosaic Law. How were people saved back in the Old Testament? Same way; we're saved by grace through faith.

I've been going over the Psalms again, just because I love them so much. And I found an interesting statement in Psalm 49. Let me show you. He writes:

Psalm 49:12-13, 15 (ESV)

Man in his pomp will not remain; he is like the beasts that perish. This is the path of those who have foolish confidence; yet after them people approve of their boasts. But God will ransom my soul from the power of Sheol, for he will receive me.

“Man in his pomp (and that means man's glory and pride) will not remain; he is like the beasts (or the animals) that perish (so his physical body is going to die). This is the path of those who have foolish confidence; yet after them (meaning those who come after them) people approve of their boasts.”

But look what the psalmist writes here:

“But God will ransom my soul from the power of Sheol (that's the grave), for he will receive me.”

I read that last part of that passage there; isn't that interesting? Where did he get that word *ransom*? Where did he get that? Where did he get that idea of being ransomed?

You guys know what a ransom is. We all know what a ransom is. If there's a kidnapping, they hold that person for ransom. In other words, a payback so that person can be set free. Right? Isn't that what a ransom is all about? Guys, this is the language of the New Testament, this whole idea of being ransomed.

He doesn't say here that God is going to lift me up from the power of the grave by my good deeds or my good works, or by keeping the law. No, He says He's going to ransom me. He's going to pay a price to get me from death to life.

Let me show you the words of Jesus. Mark 10:

Mark 10:45 (ESV)

“...the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.”

Same language. There it is. So, was God revealing to people in the Old Testament they were going to be saved by their lives being ransomed? Well, obviously yes. We see it right there in the Sons of Korah who wrote that Psalm.

God has always revealed throughout the course of mankind's history, for anyone who wanted to know, "Lord, how can I be saved?" "I will ransom you. Have faith. Put your faith in me. I will do it. Trust in me with all of your heart. Stop leaning on your own understanding. Trust in me. I will do it."

And the whole sacrificial system that had been established in Israel was a picture of that substitutionary sacrificial offering by which the worshiper is ransomed from death.

You and I have been ransomed. Jesus is the one who paid the ransom with His own life. He's the boat. Make sure you trust God, believe what He says and get on the boat. Let's stand together.

We'll have our prayer team up here to pray with you. For those of you that might have a need that you need to lift before the Lord.

Father, thank You so much for showing us the way to be saved. Thank You for sending your son Jesus Christ as the ransom; the ransom paid on our behalf that we might be set free, that we might be given life, eternal life in Your presence.

Thank you, Lord, for all these incredible pictures that are given to us in the Word. And thank You Lord for the reminders that are ours in the book of Hebrews; that it's all about faith, it's not about works. It's never been about works in terms of Heaven. It's always been about faith, and without faith it is impossible to please You.

Lord, make us people of faith; living by faith, working by faith. Thank you for your grace. In Jesus' precious name we pray, and all God's people said, amen.

God bless you. Have a good rest of your Sunday.