



THE SUBSTANCE OF FAITH

“1 Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen. Heb 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. 4 By faith Abel offered unto God a more excellent sacrifice than Cain, by which he obtained witness that he was righteous, God testifying of his gifts: and by it he being dead yet speaketh. 5 By faith Enoch was translated that he should not see death; and was not found, because God had translated him: for before his translation he had this testimony, that he pleased God. 6 But without faith it is impossible to please him: for he that cometh to God must believe that he is, and that he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him. 7 By faith Noah, being warned of God of things not seen as yet, moved with fear, prepared an ark to the saving of his house; by the which he condemned the world, and became heir of the righteousness which is by faith. 8 By faith Abraham, when he was called to go out into a place which he should after receive for an inheritance, obeyed; and he went out, not knowing whither he went. 9 By faith he sojourned in the land of promise, as in a strange country, dwelling in tabernacles with Isaac and Jacob, the heirs with him of the same promise: 10 For he looked for a city which hath foundations, whose builder and maker is God. 11 Through faith also Sara herself received strength to conceive seed, and was delivered of a child when she was past age, because she judged him faithful who had promised. 12 Therefore sprang there even of one, and him as good as dead, so many as the stars of the sky in multitude, and as the sand which is by the sea shore innumerable.”

- Hebrews 11

The Substance of Faith

We understand that we are saved by faith. We all understand that. “The just shall live by faith,” which is essentially foundational teaching in Scripture. It is quoted back in Hebrew 10:38, that’s how the tenth chapter really ends. That is not the only place that that passage is quoted. That passage is taken out of Habakkuk chapter 2 in verse 4 but is repeated by the New Testament writers several other places as well because it’s so very, very foundational. So, when we talk about salvation, we talk about the gospel, we’re always talking about faith and that raises the question, “What is faith? What is the essence of faith? How are we to understand faith?”

And that’s why we want to look at this chapter. This chapter has been called “The Hall of Fame.” It has been called “The Heroes of the Faith.” It has been called “The Honor Roll of Old Testament Saints,” “The Westminster Abbey of Scripture.” It’s been called, “The Faith Chapter,” and perhaps other things as well. What it presents to us is the power of faith, the power of faith, the excellency of faith.

And I think that needs some clarification in the climate in which we exist today because there is a faith movement within the framework, large framework of evangelical Christianity. It is part of the Charismatic Movement; it’s called The Faith Movement. And these people talk about the power of faith. They talk about the power of faith a lot. But when they’re talking about the power of faith, they are creating a faith that doesn’t exist. They’re taking an impotent faith and trying to empower it. When people in the Faith Movement talk about the power of faith, they talk about faith as if it were a personal power that we possess to create our own future, a personal power that we possess to create our own reality, to change the world, to literally define and manufacture our own future.

When they talk about the power of faith they mean that we can use our faith as a power to write our own future history. We can literally believe things into being. We have the power of faith that can create healing. We have the power of faith that can bring about salvation. We have the power of faith that can change how people can treat us. We have the power of faith that can change our economic situation, that can take us from poverty to wealth, that can take

us from having little to having much, from being deprived to being prosperous, from being a failure to being successful, from being a nobody to being a somebody, from having only ambitions and hopes and dreams to experiencing fulfillment.

The – the notion that exists in this Faith Movement, as it's called – and they have largely tried to commandeer the concept of faith – is that faith is a power that you possess to create your own future. Nothing could be further from the truth. That is a lie, it is a deception. Faith is not the power which you possess to create your own future. Faith is a God-given ability to trust the future that God has promised you. Huge difference, huge difference.

I don't want to write about my own future, do you? I really don't want to be responsible for laying out my future. I don't want to be responsible for determining what my future is going to be. I'm more than happy to leave that in the hands of One who loves me perfectly and has ordained for me a future that is purposeful, fulfilling, satisfying, God-glorifying and eternally blessed. We're talking about faith, not the false kind of faith that supposedly can create your own future, but the true kind of faith that can produce in your confident trust in the future that God has promised you. That future is laid out in Scripture.

So, when we're talking about faith, we're talking about trusting in which God has said. Not trusting that you can create something as yet unsaid, a future unwritten, unspoken, unrevealed, but rather believe in that promise which is laid out in Scripture in all its glory and all its detail that has been given to every true believer. In fact, from a human viewpoint, all they hear is a faith that is recorded in the eleventh chapter, and there are many of them as we will see when we go through the chapter. If from the human perspective they had perhaps the option, they might have written their story differently, differently. Because all their stories are filled with difficulties.

Certainly, Abraham's was, and certainly Moses' was. We can start where the chapter starts with the first, "By faith, Abel." You wouldn't say that if Abel had a choice to write about his future he would have written that he would be murdered by his brother. No, these are – these are people who died. These are people who struggled. These are people whose lives were marked with horrendous suffering and its crescendos toward the end of the chapter. So, from the human perspective, if they somehow had the power to write their own future, they perhaps would have written it differently than God wrote it. But the kind of faith that we're

talking about, the faith that God gives a believer is the faith to trust the future that God has written because inherent in what God has written for us is His promise of ultimate blessing and eternal joy.

Now the readers of this book need to understand faith. They needed to understand it desperately. Obviously, the bulk of those who would read this epistle written to Hebrews were believers. This was written, we don't know by whom, can't be certain of that, but it was written by one of the apostles or an associate of the apostles to a community of Jews who had come to faith in Christ. They understood faith. They understood that they needed now to continue to live by faith and that faith would be placed in the gospel, in the person who is at the heart of the gospel, namely the Lord Jesus Christ.

This would be a new kind of life for the Jews. As I said, these are Hebrew believers and, really, for the first time in their life through the gospel and salvation, they have come to understand that their relationship with God is not dependent on works but it's dependent on faith. That's new and it needs to be reinforced. And that's part and parcel of why this eleventh chapter is here so they don't grow, to borrow Paul's words, weary in well doing, that they hold on to a life of faith by looking at the models and the examples of all these people in the past who lived by faith and received their glorious reward.

But it's more than just a chapter designed to encourage believers to continue to walk by faith. You will remember that through the first ten chapters the writer has been laboring to make one major point, and it is this; that the New Covenant is superior to the Old Covenant, right, that Christ is superior to everything else. Jesus and His sacrifice are superior, completely superior to the sacrifices and the animals in the old system. He is a better sacrifice who made a better offering. Jesus is better than angels, the writer tells us in these chapters. He is better than the prophets. He is better than Moses, better than Aaron, better than Joshua. He is a better priest than all other priests. And he is from a better priesthood, a superior priesthood, He is the mediator of a better covenant, and He is a better sacrifice.

The message of the first ten chapters is, "Put your faith in Jesus Christ, He is in every sense superior." Now this reinforces for the believers who are receiving this letter, the superiority of Christ to which they have already asserted their will by the power of God. They already know that. They have trusted in that reality. But at periodic points through the opening ten

chapters, familiar to anyone who studies the book of Hebrews, there are warnings. There are at least four of them by the time you get to this chapter and this chapter constitutes, if you will, another warning. And these warnings are given to non-Christian Jews who are attending this fellowship. They're sitting on the fringe, if you will.

They're apparently intellectually convinced of the gospel, they understand the truth of the gospel in their minds, they understand the power of the proof of that truth by the miracles and signs and wonders which were wrought by Christ. So, we could say they're intellectually convinced. They are hanging on the fringes of this fellowship of Christian Jews, but they never really have come all the way to Christ. And there are these periodic warnings not to fall back, not to go back into Judaism. There's one in – one of them in chapter 2, there are more in chapter 3 and 4, another in chapter 6, another in chapter 10. Don't go on sinning willfully after you have the knowledge of the truth, says chapter 10, or you will bring upon yourself a far more severe eternal judgment.

So, the warning is, "Come all the way to the New Covenant. Come all the way to Christ. Come all the way to faith." This is a big change, a big change because we know that the Judaism that existed in the time of our Lord and thus in the time of the New Testament was a system of salvation by what? By work, by merit. The Jew attempted to earn salvation. This is all the Jews knew. This is what they had been told. This is what they had been taught. This had been ingrained into them for generations by their parents and their religious leaders. And a simple study of the four gospels reveals the fact that the Judaism of the first century was not the supernatural system given by God whereby the sinner knew that he couldn't keep the Law of God and thus was penitent and prayed to God, like David did in Psalm 51, pleading for mercy and grace by faith in a God who was willing to forgive and thus receive salvation as a gift of grace, not earned by works.

The system had long forgotten that salvation was by grace, that Noah found grace in the eyes of the Lord, that Abraham believed, and it was accounted to him for righteousness, and they had created a religious cult built on ethics, built on morality, built on religious ceremony. Salvation came to those who observed all those ethical standards, all those moral thoughts and all those ceremonies.

It was necessary then to teach these people the reality of salvation by faith. They had a lot of other things that they could look at in terms of New Testament literature to be taught that. Jesus said that salvation was by faith – that was clear – and not by works. The apostle Paul made it abundantly clear, Ephesians 2:8 and 9, “For by grace are you saved through faith.” Romans chapter 3, chapter 4, and all the way through indicates that salvation comes by faith alone. Scripture is replete with that emphasis. But the Jews are having a hard time being deprogrammed. Can we put it that way? They’re having a hard time being deprogrammed. So you’re going to have to show them something other than the New Testament.

They would like to be able to accept this reality of salvation by faith – rather than what, by works – coming from Christ, coming from the apostles, coming from Paul, coming from the New Testament writers. But isn’t it possible that there could be some other illustrations of salvation by faith from the Old Testament? This might get them across that barrier that seems to be so formidable for them and that is why the eleventh chapter of Hebrews is written. It is written because it is a necessity to prove to the Jews who are intellectually convinced that Jesus is the Messiah, that salvation is by faith and that people not only after Jesus but even before Jesus was saved by faith, by faith.

So, in verse 38 of chapter 10, the writer of Hebrews states the key. “My righteous ones shall live by faith. My righteous ones shall live by faith.” That is a direct quote from Habakkuk chapter 2 verse 4, “The just, or the righteous one shall live by faith.” And Habakkuk is an Old Covenant prophet, and you can’t shrink back from that. If he shrinks back, “My soul has no pleasure in him,” says the prophet. Verse 39, “But we are not of those who shrink back.” We don’t shrink back from this salvation by faith in Christ.

To shrink back is to end up in “destruction, but of those who have faith to the persevering of the soul.” The plea all the way along in these warning sections is don’t come all the way to Christ, sit on the edge and then reject salvation by faith and fall back into your old works/righteousness system. If you fall back, God has no pleasure in that, and you will fall back into eternal destruction. Come all the way to faith in Christ for the eternal preserving of your soul.

Now how is he going to get this case across? How is he going to penetrate their sort of Old Testament thinking? The answer in chapter 11, by giving us a list of Old Testament saints

whose lives were marked by faith. The true people of God through all the ages have become the true people of God by faith. Chapter 11 is loaded with illustrations. Just looking at verse 4, “By faith, Abel.” At verse 5, “By faith, Enoch.” At verse 7, “By faith, Noah.” Verse 8, “By faith Abraham.” And again, in verse 17, “By faith Abraham.”

And in verse 20, “By faith, Isaac.” In verse 21, “By faith, Jacob.” Verse 22, “By faith, Joseph.” Twenty-three, “By faith, Moses,” and again in verse 24. Going down further, in verse 31, “By faith, Rahab.” And then in verse 32, “There’s Gideon, Barak, Samson, Jephthah, David, Samuel, the prophets, who by faith did all these amazing things.” Verse 39 sums it up, “All these, having gained approval through their faith, did not receive what was promised, because God had provided something better for us, that apart from us they would not be made perfect.”

They didn’t receive what was promised, they trusted that it would come as had been promised. And that’s exactly what I said is the definition of faith you want to work with. Faith is confident trust in the future God has promised. Faith is not the kind of power by which you create your future. It is the power of God given to you to trust in the promises God has made in Scripture. These people hadn’t received the promise, and they trusted in the promise and thus they live by faith. It’s a great, great, monumental, powerful, powerful lesson.

Now we’re just going to kind of look at the opening three verses and then we’ll – we’ll do some character studies over the next Sunday evenings. But let’s just consider a few things. First is the nature of faith, and this is good because the writer gives us a sort of starting point, a kind of basic definition. It’s not really a formal definition of – of faith rather than a – rather it is a description of faith, kind of the basic elements or features that describe faith. And it’s very, very simple, look at verse 1. “Faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen.”

So the first thing we learn about faith is that it is trusting in what isn’t visible. It is trusting in what isn’t received. It is trusting in what isn’t experienced. It is trusting in something not yet manifest. Faith, belief, that’s a noun, the Greek word *pistis*. It is a noun, it means belief, trust, confidence, faith. And I love the fact that he uses a noun because it emphasizes the settled reality of this. It is a commodity that is possessed.

Certainly, believing can be a verb, but we're talking here not about some act of faith but we're talking about the reality of a settled faith. It exists as a commodity. It is a gift of God, Ephesians 2:8 says, "not of works." It comes from God. And when God gives this commodity of faith, it is the assurance of things hoped for. That's what it means to live by faith. It doesn't mean that – that we see something we want and bring it into existence. It means that we put our confidence in something not seen, convictions of things not seen.

Some of your translations will say, "Faith is the substance of things not seen." That's a great translation; I love that translation. Faith is the substance of things not seen. Substance is a word that has substance, doesn't it? It does. It's a word that you can take to the bank. It's a word that you can sort of cash in on. It's a word that basically can be legitimately translated substance, essence. That gives it reality. Faith is substantial confidence in the reality of something not realized. Faith gives present substance to something that is future.

As this chapter will show us, when it unfolds, in Old Testament times there were – well, all the saints, men and women who had nothing but the promises of God., nothing but the promises of God to rest on, nothing but the promises of God to hope for. No visible evidence that messianic promise would come true, no visible evidence that kingdom promise will come true. Yet the promises were so real and the revelation of those promises in Scripture so reliable that people built their entire hope on them. All the Old Testament promises are related to the future.

That's what it says at the end, at the end of the chapter. Those people who exercised this faith exercised faith in what was promised that they did not receive. What would that be? Eternal life, heaven, everlasting bliss, reward, joy, reunion which is promised in the Old Testament of the saints in the presence of God? The very presence of God? The very likeness of God? I will – David says, "I look for the day when I will awake in Thy likeness." The glories of eternal bliss...they didn't see any of it here. They never even saw the ultimate sacrifice. They never knew who the Messiah was. They were people of faith but their faith was anchored in a reliable revelation from a God who cannot lie and so their faith gave substance to the future hope.

Now we're on this side of the cross. But, folks, we understand this, don't we? None of you has seen heaven and you don't know anyone who's been there and back except the Lord Himself. And yet, you have basically put your entire eternal destiny on the foundation, on the fact that the Scripture is reliable and what God has promised you can trust, right? And what that has done is create a substance in the present tense for a future promise.

This is better than the best retirement plan you have ever heard of, and we've lived long enough to know that they don't provide what they promise, right? Faith is so strong, it is a gift of God, it is the gift of God that allows us to – listen – trust the Scripture. And in trusting the Scripture, to trust the gospel in the Scripture and thus trust Christ as Savior. That's a package. I think we need to understand that. It wouldn't do any good to trust in Christ as your savior unless you could trust the Scripture for everything that Him being your Savior means. Do you understand that?

You say, "Oh, I need to put my faith in Jesus as my Savior. What's that going to bring me? What's that going to deliver to me?" It's going to deliver to you everything that the Bible promises it will deliver to you. And the Scripture is reliable, and you believe it and I believe it because we have been given the faith to believe it. It is a gift from God. "Yeah, well that," you say, "doesn't – does that mean that Scripture can't be proven to be true?" No, the Scripture can be proven to be true, which just strengthens our assurance, doesn't it? But we know this to be a reliable Scripture, and the promises of God are reliable, and so we put our trust in Christ because the things that come with trusting Christ can be trusted.

Faith then is that assurance, or that substance in the present tense of things hoped for. So, literally, what we hope for by way of revealed promise has substance right now and that substance is strong, I want you to know it's strong. You – you stood there along with me tonight and you sang all those songs, right? You sang from the heart, and you loved everything you were singing and you believed it, didn't you? And it's all about what is yet in the future. It's all about your future.

But it has substance now. It has weight now. It provides assurance now so that you sing and you pray and you praise and you act and you live and you obey and you minister and you witness because this hoped for reality gives present weight to your life, substance. And

frankly, this is against the grain of all the things that work in a fallen world, is it not? First of all, it's against the grain of your own flesh. Is that not true?

So now that you believe these things and have put your trust in Christ and are now living a life based upon promises for the future that you haven't seen that have so much weight that they control your life, what do you do? You live your life as a Christian battling against the flesh that is your natural expression. Wouldn't it be a lot easier to just say, "Forget it, I'm just going to go with whatever I feel." It would be a lot easier, right? It's the way you used to live, like the godless Gentiles live, in the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, the pride of life, what happened, whatever happens.

But you don't live that way. You restrain the flesh. You restrict your flesh. You limit the pleasures. You fight against your fallenness. You resist sin, you run from it, you flee it. Why? Because you understand that there is a future reward and a future desire to come before the Lord and bring honor to His name by the life you've lived. So, you, literally, have brought substance into your life by the things you hoped for in the future. Why do you have this kind of hope that's so strong that it can change the way you live your life and that you live your life against the grain of your own fallen flesh? Because you believe in the truth of God's revelation.

Why do you believe that? Because God has given you the faith to believe in that revealed Word and everything you ever study in that Word and all the evidence that come around that Word indicate that it, in fact, is true. You not only have such substance to this hope, that you live against the grain of your flesh, you live against the grain of the world. Everybody in the world is living a certain way and what are you trying to do? You're trying to live in a completely opposite way.

You know, you're like a – you're – you're like a – a person trying to fight your way through a massive crowd of millions of people who are all going in one direction and you're going the other way. And yet – I mean, you're getting trampled in the process. You may be trampled by your family, you may be trampled by the people at your school, at your work, you may be mistreated here and there. You're going into collision after collision after collision and to just make it more complicated, you have a responsibility in the process of trying to work your way through this mass of humanity going in the opposite direction of grabbing them here and

there and trying to turn them around, bring them to the knowledge of Christ and get them on your side. What power this faith has. Wow!

This faith is so powerful, it gives such substance to your life that you live against the grain of your own fallenness, and you live against the grain against the world of which you are a part. There's a real sense in which you live against the grain of your own senses, your own senses because you can't do what your natural senses tell you to do. If left to your own natural senses, you'd be out of control in every aspect of your life, would you not? Because those senses are never satisfied. You never have enough of anything cause if you see something else you want it, right? You want it.

This is what it means to have substance in the present based upon promises for the future. This is how we live our lives as Christians. This is what it means to live by faith. Faith furnishes the heart with firm support in the revealed promises of God. Faith believes God. It believes God as revealed in Scripture and that faith, Scripture says, is an anchor. Here we see it as an anchor, laid out in the experience of believers. Real faith gives us a confident substance in the present.

But I want to go beyond that. It is not just the assurance of the substance, or you could even translate it the evidence, *elegchos*, but it is also the conviction. That's the word "evidence." It's the conviction, *elegchos*, of things not seen. This takes it a step further. It is the substance that becomes conviction. Maybe I should have picked that up a little bit earlier because it's conviction that can – that basically defines how you live, okay? You can know something to be true, but until it becomes a conviction, you don't put it really into action. So we have substance that has led to conviction.

What would make you live against the grain of your fallenness? What would make you live against the grain of the world? What would make you live against the grain of your own senses? What would – what would cause you to abandon everything for something you can't see, for promises that have never been fulfilled? What would cause you to live this kind of life? A conviction, conviction. And implied in that conviction is a strong, strong commitment.

For example, borrowing from the chapter, what would make you build a boat in a desert because you were told it was going to rain when it had never rained in the history of the world? A conviction? Well, it would have to be more than just some kind of hope because you would have to spend 120 years building the boat. Can you imagine building a boat as Noah did for 120 years in the desert and dealing with the mockery of his neighbors? Some of you being mocked by your neighbors for a few days perhaps is more than you can handle.

What put his faith into action? There was such substance to what he had been told, he was so confident in the revelation of God to him that it became a conviction that he could literally live his life on. That's what puts faith into action. He acted on it. And we're going to see that's really the story of the chapter, how all these people acted on faith. Because of revelation came action, because of substance came conviction.

Now we understand that in the human realm and we talk about this a lot. You know, we understand that we all live by faith. We drink water. We eat in restaurants. We go to the pharmacy, and we drink whatever the pharmacist gives us, we are clueless about what is in the bottle. We fly along the freeway at a furious pace, and we expect that when the arrow goes this way, there's an off ramp there and not a precipice. We trust the sign. We trust the people who put the signs up. Some parts of the world don't, for good reason. We trust the surgeon. That's natural faith.

But that's faith in things seen, isn't it? Because we have, we have evidence, we have past history. All this has already been proven to be trustworthy. But when we're talking about eternity, we're talking about the unseen. When we talk about the future and heaven and all that is there for us in the promises of God, we're talking about something that no one has experienced. There isn't one person on the planet today that you can go to and say, "You've been to heaven and back, tell me about it." Not one. But there are lots of people who have been to the doctor and been to the pharmacy.

This is a supernatural gift. This is another kind of faith altogether, altogether. This is the way we live. We live on the promise given to us in the Scripture because we believe the Scripture is reliable. We believe it's reliable because the evidence tells us it's reliable and because the Spirit of God has planted in us a faith to believe in its trustworthiness. So that's the nature of faith. A word about the testimony of faith, verse 2, and here the writer sort of introduces us to

what is going to be the emphasis of the chapter. “For by it, the men of old gained approval.” Literally some translations, I think the King James says, “The elders,” meaning the Old Testament saints.

And this is where he sort of tips his approach here. He’s going to help these Jews who maybe are struggling a little bit with this idea of salvation by faith because they’ve come out of a works system, by pointing to the fact that this is in fact how the saints of old gained approval. Approval means praise, approbation. Why would we identify them as heroes of faith? Why did the Jews identify them as heroes of the faith? Why did they look at Abel as nobler than Cain? Why did they look at Enoch as noble? Why did they look at Abraham as noble? Why did they look at Sarah as noble? Why did they look at the others, Isaac, Joseph, Jacob, Joseph and all the rest? Because of their faith and that’s what he’s going to show throughout this chapter.

This is not a new concept. The great heroes of the faith, the saints of old lived by faith. Abel believed God regarding sacrifice, acted on faith that what God said was true and what God expected was the path of blessing. He did what God told him because God told him this is what to do and I’ll bless you. And he did it and was, of course, received and approved. Enoch believed God so much so that he didn’t die. God was so pleased with him that one day he took a walk and walked right into the presence of God and skipped the dying part. Noah believed God and because of it God granted to him righteousness and God vindicated him, brought about what God had promised but spared him and his family. Abraham and

Sarah believed God for a child and God fulfilled the promise. We’ll learn about Isaac and Jacob and Joseph and everybody else, all who believed God and were approved by all who knew them. The record of the Old Testament stands as testimony to their faith. They trusted in what they couldn’t see. They lived their lives based upon promises God made to them, and certainly God approved of that, and they were rightfully honored by the people of the past and even remained the heroes of the faith. God’s Word made their hope real. And based upon what God had told them; they lived obediently by faith and are rightly honored as heroes.

In Acts chapter 7 in verse 54, it says, “When they heard this, they were cut to the quick,” – this is the preaching of Stephen – “they began gnashing their teeth at him. Being full of the Holy Spirit, he gazed intently into heaven and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing at the

right hand of God;” – that’s the first glimpse of heaven by a saint – “and he said, ‘I see the heavens opened up and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God.’” I’m glad he saw that, aren’t you? I’m glad he recorded that in his sermon and I’m glad the Spirit of God let Luke put it down in holy Scripture because that’s eyewitness evidence of who is standing and waiting for us when it’s our time to enter into heaven. But this is new. This is a whole new experience.

“They cried out with a loud voice,” – the people did – “covered their ears and rushed at him with one impulse. When they had driven him out of the city, began stoning him; and the witnesses laid aside their robes at the feet of a young man named Saul.” – later known as Paul – “went on stoning Stephen as he called on the Lord and said, Lord Jesus, receive my spirit!’ Then falling on his knees, he cried out with a loud voice, Lord, do not hold this sin against them!’ Having said this, he fell asleep.”

Every one of the saints of old who lived in hope perhaps would love to have had that moment experience and maybe some of them did. It’s not recorded. But I’m so glad for the testimony of Stephen that what he anticipated to be true was in fact true. Heaven was reality. The glory of God was there, and Jesus was waiting for the faithful to come into His presence. Every one of us, every saint of old who has ever lived by faith would find great comfort in the testimony of Stephen.

So, the nature of faith. It is confident trust in the future promised by God in Scripture. The testimony of faith, it has always been the testimony of the saints, Old Testament and beyond. It was by faith that the men of old gained approval, not only from God but they became the heroes of the faith because of their faith, believing in what they had not yet seen or experienced.

And then there is, finally, an illustration of faith, the first one that he gives. And he gathers us all into the illustration in 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 things which are visible.” Now this is a wonderful little illustration. We could spend an awful lot of time on this. And by the way, the whole creation conference on the weekend really will draw from the reality of this verse.

But understand this, the point being made here is something critical to us. We live in faith that looks forward to what God has promised, okay? This illustration takes us back and gives us a foundation for faith looking forward. 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. That looks back at creation. Creation is things seen in the universe, made out of things unseen. That's creation. Creation is ex nihilo, God made the whole universe out of what? Nothing. What is seen was not made out of anything that was visible. So out of the invisible came the visible, out of nothing came everything. We understand that by faith.

You say, "Why – why do we understand that by faith?" Because we weren't there, right? You say, "Well I can't live by faith. I can't – I can't conduct my life by faith." Well, try this on. The world exists, the universe exists. By faith we understand that God created it by His Word. Now where do we place our faith? In the revelation of God written in Genesis chapter 1 and 2 which tells us that God created the universe by His Word, right? "Let there be light, and there was light." He spoke everything into existence and the record is in Genesis 1.

So, we have an opportunity to place our faith in something in the past as a foundation to place our faith in something in the future. We can look at the effect which is the universe; we understand that it exists. Anybody with half a brain has to understand that it had to have been created out of nothing, there – there had to be a starting point, there had to be a time when there was nothing. That time then ended when God created the universe. By faith we understand how that happened. Our faith is in the revelation of Scripture. By faith you understand that it happened, anybody, any – really, any person who doesn't just hate God and hate Christianity has to say somebody did this. You say that when you look at a watch, don't you? Why not a universe? I mean, how obvious.

But the person who just understands that it happened doesn't know how. Only the person who puts his faith in the Scripture understands how. By the Word of God. So, by faith we understand that the worlds were prepared by the Word of God. Why? Because that's what the Scripture says and that's a reality, isn't it? Scripture says – now follow the thought. Scripture says God created it, we live in it, and we can see the evidence of His creation. So, the fact that we can look back and see that God described His creation, told us how He made it and has left His imprint on it and we are now living in that creation gives us the opportunity to have a foundation for believing in the future.

What God said in Genesis brought about the universe and we now live in it and experience it and know its reality. And we can trust that the same God who spoke this into existence by His Word has said that He has spoken another world into existence which awaits us and that we will one day experience that world. We experience this world which God spoke into existence; we will experience the world which He has spoken into existence in the glory of the supernatural realm.

We can trust Him for that as He is the source of that in the same way He's the source of this. It's not really a stretch. There's really no other way to explain the universe than to say that God created it. No other way. And here we live in a world created by the Word of God, described in detail in Genesis 1 and 2. All true science confirms the creative hand of God in the complexity of this universe.

So, we live now in a universe created by the Word of God, we see His imprint on it and that is the foundation by which we trust that God will, in the future, have waiting for us another universe in the glory of His presence, also promised by His creative power. Well, there's more that could be said about verse 3 but maybe that's enough to get us there. We all live by faith. All of us who are believers, we trust God. We trust God as Creator of this world, and we trust Him as the Creator of the world to come for those who know Him and love Him.