

Faith

DAVE BAST

Have faith; don't lose faith. We use phrases like these to comfort and encourage each other all the time. As Christians, faith is huge for us; but what exactly is faith, and how do we get it? Stay tuned.

SCOTT HOEZEE

From Words of Hope and ReFrame Media, this is *Groundwork*, where we dig into scripture to lay the foundation for our lives. I am Scott Hoezee.

DAVE BAST

And I am Dave Bast. So we want to talk a little bit about faith today. We have sort of set the stage for this series of programs about Christian virtue, and the great trio, of course, in the New Testament of faith, hope, and love; and we begin with faith. The New Testament is full of it – the whole Bible is full of the importance of faith – but what exactly is it? What do we mean?

SCOTT HOEZEE

Well, we say we are saved by faith. That is one of the great rallying cries of the Church and of the New Testament...

DAVE BAST

Justified by faith, yes.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Yes, so faith is clearly the linchpin, the key, to everything that we believe; and yet, it is one of those words that we can use so often that we sometimes forget what it really is all about; and sometimes it takes someone else to get your attention back and to refocus you. Years ago my wife had a colleague who was not a Christian, but who was interested in Christianity, and she came home one time and was totally surprised and taken aback when this friend said to her: How do you get faith? What is this faith? You have it; I don't have it; why do some people get faith and other people don't? How does that go? That was a bracing set of questions for my wife to encounter.

DAVE BAST

It is very troubling. I remember a number of years ago as I was serving as a pastor, a young man from the congregation came to see me one day – born and raised in the church, a nice guy, rather quiet, rather shy – and he said to me, “I just cannot believe. How do you do that? You are always telling me to believe in Christ and I don't think I do, and I don't know how to make myself believe.” That was a very difficult conversation. I mean, I found myself really struggling and aching for this person, who was honest.

SCOTT HOEZEE

For those of us who are believers, and as for my wife with that encounter with her friend, you realize faith is just how you see the world. You cannot imagine – if you do have the gift of faith from God – you cannot imagine not having it. It is sort of like C. S. Lewis's great line – again, to quote C. S. Lewis, you know, he said: I believe in God for the same reason I believe in the sun shining in the sky; not just because I can see it,

but because by it I see everything else...

DAVE BAST

I see other things, yes.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And so, faith is clearly the main event because it is the difference between seeing God, seeing God's kingdom and orienting your life around it, as opposed to, in the religion department anyway, not seeing much of anything at all, and just being sort of bored by the whole thing; but when you have faith, you see everything differently, and it shapes us – we will be talking today – it shapes your entire life, it shapes your view of the world – how you interpret things – everything.

DAVE BAST

But there is a mystery to it. It is rather difficult to describe, even, let alone to explain where it comes from and how it comes to us, or to explain to somebody how you get it if they want it. Is it a gift? Is it just something we wait for? Do we sit back and hope that God drops it into our laps?

SCOTT HOEZEE

Yes, and we are going to be digging into Hebrews 11 today in this program, which is a chapter – the soaring chapter on faith in the New Testament. It is a beautiful chapter, well known to many people, that does point to the mystery of faith, and the amazing ability that faith, once you have it as a gift, it connects you to a world, and it connects you to a vision that changes everything, even though you cannot see it. For now, it is more real to you than the things you can see, and that is a great mystery.

I remember years ago at my church – and I think this was a government tax regulation – but the deacons of our church had to start printing a statement at the bottom of some... When we would give people their annual giving statements: here is how much you contributed to the church this year; they were required to add a statement which said: Those who donated these funds did not receive any tangible goods or services in return for their donations.

DAVE BAST

Right.

SCOTT HOEZEE

As a preacher, I read that and I thought: Well, that is me, Mr. Intangible.

DAVE BAST

Yes, whatever I have to give them amounts to nothing.

SCOTT HOEZEE

You cannot see it...

DAVE BAST

You cannot weigh it, or measure it.

SCOTT HOEZEE

You cannot see it in this world. It was kind of funny to think of it that way, that I preach every week and what I give is just invisible, and yet, even through a funny little tax regulation like that, it gets at the mystery of faith; that faith connects you to things that you cannot see, but that you end up believing are more real than the things you can see.

DAVE BAST

And that suggests the famous definition of faith in Hebrews 11:1, that says: Faith is being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see. What a beautiful phrase; but also this idea that as paradoxical as it sounds, faith is the ability to see the invisible.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Exactly.

DAVE BAST

It is laying hold of the realities that are, to use the word of the tax form: Intangible. You cannot touch them, you cannot weigh them, you cannot even see them, but nevertheless, you know they are real, and they transform your life as a result of your conviction – your belief – your faith and trust. But, we still have to address the question of how you come by that. How do you get faith?

SCOTT HOEZEE

And how in the world does it make you more sure of what you do not see than of even what you do see; and I think that is the question we will address when we come back.

DAVE BAST

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Segment 2

SCOTT HOEZEE

Welcome back to *Groundwork*, where we are digging into scripture to lay the foundation for our lives. I am Scott Hoezee.

DAVE BAST

And I am Dave Bast.

SCOTT HOEZEE

We are talking today about the first of the great three virtues: Faith, hope, and love. Faith is a gift that comes from outside you, but once you get it, it allows you to believe in things that are not seen, and believe that they are even more real than what you can see, and that is a great mystery.

DAVE BAST

And a lot of people sort of give up on the mystery and think that faith is just delusion. So, you know, you look around at what people say about it – people who don't believe – and they will describe faith in terms like these: It is believing what you know is not true – an irrational belief in the impossible; that sort of thing.

SCOTT HOEZEE

A lot of secular writers and scientists and people like Richard Dawkins who writes these best-selling books on the God delusion and so forth; basically, for people like that, they say: Christian faith – any religious faith – is really no different than believing in the tooth fairy. It is just ridiculous. You cannot believe in what you cannot see. You cannot believe that what you cannot see is more real than what you can see; that is, as you say, irrational; ridiculous.

DAVE BAST

Except for the fact that everybody lives by faith in one way or another. Everybody believes in things they cannot see; it is just that they identify different things that way. Almost everyone believes that they are real, but you know, it could be like The Matrix, you know that movie where we are all just a dream in some machine's brain – that there is nothing real. That is going to an extreme, but the fact is, we all have basic, bedrock convictions that we build our lives on that are unprovable at least by scientific or mathematical terms.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Right; and in everyday existence, believing in the reality of other people, believing my memories are true, believing my wife loves me, even though I cannot prove these things...

DAVE BAST

Yes, she could be faking it all these years, so...

SCOTT HOEZEE

Right; but you go on faith; but for the Christian, of course, to connect to Jesus Christ and to connect to God, we believe faith has to be a gift. You are not going to come up with it yourself. It is not just a matter of memorizing a certain amount of knowledge, and then once you get there, now faith appears as though it is something you are building. It has to be a complete gift from God; and once that comes, you see everything differently.

DAVE BAST

Yes, and the fact is, there are things can do to put yourself in the way of receiving that gift. I told the story of that young man in my old congregation who just said: I can't believe; and part of what I told him was: Well, act like you do. Do what you would do if you did believe, and eventually I think you will find that faith will be given to you. Paul famously says: Faith comes by hearing – hearing the word of Christ; so put yourself in a position where you hear God's word and you hear God's promises. Those are the means God uses to bring faith; or an even more basic question: Do you want to believe? For somebody who is struggling and saying: I just don't have faith, well, would you like to have it? Because God will give it to you if you ask him for it.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Right; and once it comes, it is, indeed, not just what you know – it is not just in your head – it is in your heart; it is a sure and certain knowledge and a certainty. It influences everything you do, and that brings us, I think, back to Hebrews 11, where we read just a smattering of this well-known chapter, just to get at what faith does.

⁴By faith Abel brought God a better offering than Cain did. By faith he was commended as righteous when God spoke well of his offerings; and by faith Abel still speaks even though he is dead. ⁷By faith Noah, when warned about things not yet seen, in holy fear built an ark to save his family. By faith he condemned the world and became heir of righteousness that is in keeping with faith. ¹⁷By faith Abraham, when God tested him, offered Isaac as a sacrifice. ²³By faith Moses' parents hid him for three months after he was born because they saw he was no ordinary child and they were not afraid of the king's edict.

What is interesting... and of course there is a longer litany there...

DAVE BAST

Yes, that is sort of a reprise of the Old Testament history. I mean, if you have read the book of Genesis, you know all those stories that Hebrews is referring back to.

SCOTT HOEZEE

But what is interesting there... So, we have said faith is a gift. Faith lets you believe in things you cannot see, and you believe...

DAVE BAST

Or prove.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Or prove; and you end up believing they are more real than the things you can see; but what is interesting here, and what I think is important for us to also remember is that faith does not make us less real about the world. It does not lead us to disengage. I mean, this chapter does not say: By faith Moses sat around and thought about starry-eyed ideas from another world. Faith always leads to action. Faith made these people do things in this world, which brought some of the world they could see at a distance to bear on everyday life.

DAVE BAST

It is a beautiful biblical notion that faith is not only life transforming – it changes our way of thinking, our way of perceiving reality – seeing the unseen – but faith is world transforming; faith turns us into activists; faith does not make us completely withdraw and say: Oh, nothing matters. I am just going to wait and go to heaven or fly away. Faith sends us out into the world to be change agents because we are living for the unseen values of the kingdom of God; because we are headed for heaven, it makes us of more value and impact in this world.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Yes; faith lets you see the kingdom of God, and you are so excited about what you see there; it is so clearly a better country that you are, of course, eager to bring as much of that into this life and into this world as you can because it is beautiful; you are in love with it.

DAVE BAST

Yes, you know, another thing, you mentioned Rahab; she is in Hebrews 11, which is interesting in and of itself; hardly a person of virtuous character, many of us would think; and yet, brought in and saved by faith; and in her case, faith made her identify with the people of God. So, it engages us with the world, but it also causes us to become part of a new community – a community that is living for, and in a sense in the kingdom already, and living with those kingdom values.

SCOTT HOEZEE

That is why, oh, it's true, you can find examples of almost anything in history, and so you can find examples of Christian people in the past who, indeed, withdrew from the world or disengaged, and so forth; but that has never been the mainline. The mainline of the people of God has been to live into God's creation already now and to bring in the patterns of the kingdom already now; and that takes so many different forms. So, people of faith are not less realistic or less engaged, they are more engaged. I have seen it, you have seen it, people of faith establish hospices and disaster relief organizations and hospitals, and they do all of that because it has something to do with the world to come, which we believe is real already now; we see it.

DAVE BAST

Sure. There is a wonderful illustration, I think, of that in the life of Mother Teresa, who nobody did more to engage in the needs of the poor, the neediest and the suffering. Nobody was more engaged or involved in the world than Mother Teresa was, and she was motivated by faith from beginning to end. She said it clearly. What is really interesting, I think, is that since her death with the publication of her letters, it has come out that she never had that real feeling of closeness to God throughout her whole, long life. She had an initial experience with God and then it seemed as though he completely withdrew from her, and she found it extremely difficult to believe; and you think: Wow, she did? But she went on living as if she believed, and I guess that rises to the level of kind of heroic faith.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Yes; and she again allowed that faith to motivate her entire life. She knew John 3:16: God so loved the world that he sent Jesus. That is what faith shows us above all: God so loved the world... So how could faith ever make us love the world any less? That is why we work for the kingdom in this world already now; although

that can create some tensions too, and maybe we can talk about that when we come back.

Segment 3

DAVE BAST

Hi. Welcome back to *Groundwork*. I am Dave Bast, along with Scott Hoezee today, and we are talking about faith, which is a kind of full life trust that what is not seen is nevertheless true and real; and we have stressed, Scott, I think, adequately I hope, for people to get the point, that faith does not mean we are world-denying or withdrawing out of the world. Faith actually motivates us to get more involved in doing things to help people and better the world around us.

SCOTT HOEZEE

We mentioned John 3:16 at the end of our last segment. God so loved the world – he loved the cosmos enough to come and save it. So, we do not disengage from that same world; we are more engaged than ever for Jesus' sake.

DAVE BAST

Right; we quoted C. S. Lewis earlier. We tend to do a lot of that on *Groundwork*, but he has a famous passage somewhere where he says: If you look at history, you will find that the Christians who were most heavenly minded were also the ones of most earthly good. There is a kind of tension. He says if you aim at heaven, you get the earth thrown in and you are involved there, too; but if you aim at the earth, you end up with nothing; and we do aim at heaven as our ultimate goal while also engaging here in the world, right?

SCOTT HOEZEE

Exactly; and so, we have been saying that faith does lead to a deeper engagement with the world, and that is absolutely correct; but that does not mean that there are not some tensions too, and that is captured here in Hebrews 11. I will read verses 13 through 16. So, we have this long list here in Hebrews of some of the great folks from the Old Testament – from the book of Genesis: Noah, Abraham, Moses; but then at one point the author of Hebrews stops and says:

¹³All these people were still living by faith when they died. They did not receive the things promised. They only saw them and welcomed them from a distance, admitting that they were foreigners and strangers on the earth. ¹⁴People who say such things show that they are looking for a country of their own, ¹⁵and if they had been thinking of the country they had left, they would have had opportunity to return; ¹⁶but instead, they were longing for a better country, a heavenly one, and therefore, God is not ashamed to be called their God, for he has prepared a city for them.

So there is that tension, that faith does lead us to love the world because it is God's world, it is God's creation. Jesus died to save this world, but it is a messed up world, and when we look around we know this is not the kingdom of God.

DAVE BAST

No, not yet, right. It makes me think of that book title, I think it is by Will Willimon, *Resident Aliens* is what we are. We are really not at home here. We are aliens in a sense. We belong to another homeland; but we are resident here, so we work for the betterment. It is that verse in Jeremiah to the exiles outside Babylon: Work for the good of the city where you are, even though you do not belong there.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Right.

DAVE BAST

We have a different home; but you know, this idea of a bit of a tension... I think it is very helpful for us as Christians because it can prevent us from falling into the trap of anti-faith. You know, the opposite of faith – it has always struck me – is not doubt; doubt is often part of faith; I mean, for anybody who thinks, you are going to question and have doubts; the opposite of faith really is sort of cynicism, isn't it, or despair?

SCOTT HOEZEE

Yes, I think so; and of course, that could be a temptation for us as Christians. We have – by faith we have been given this great gift, as we said. It let's us see into the kingdom – that better country that the writer to Hebrews refers to; but of course, you could turn from that vision of the kingdom and then look back at the newspaper or turn on CNN and watch the news and just say: This world is never going to get any better, so forget it. I am just going to stay home, not work for the good of anybody...

DAVE BAST

Just write it off.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Yes, just, you know... we are heading a better country anyway, so this world can just burn and we won't care. We feel the disparity – we feel the difference between the kingdom – the country we are headed to and this one, but we don't let it paralyze us because God is still real – Jesus is still here; Jesus is on the move and he is on the move through us.

DAVE BAST

Yes, and this tension between our home in the kingdom and our journey toward the kingdom, which is heaven, another word for heaven here on earth someday, and being resident aliens – being engaged in the world – that tension can also help us, I think, not just avoid the temptation to cynicism or despair, but the opposite extreme of thinking we are going to fix it all here and we are going to bring heaven by our own efforts. We are going to create a brave new world and invent human immortality on our own terms; and that never works. We are never able to build utopia here on earth by our own efforts.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Right; by faith we keep the lines clear. We know what is the kingdom and what isn't and we know where it is going to come from, and it is only going to come through Jesus fully when Jesus comes again; and that, too, right – having a better vision that faith gives us of the kingdom, it is kind of a two-edged sword because in one sense I have often said when bad things happen in this world – a tragedy – a mass murder – a tsunami – an earthquake – everybody feels bad, Christians, non-Christians, believers, unbelievers, everybody feels bad; but believers actually have a reason to feel even worse because we know how far that is from God's desire; we actually feel worse, and we have to deal with more complicated questions because we see that better world, and seeing that better world could lead you to be paralyzed and just defeated, but what Hebrews suggests is that it leads to a good restlessness. We are impatient. We are not paralyzed because this world is not the kingdom; rather it is a motivator. It makes us restless. It makes us want to show people that kingdom now; and so it motivates us to work.

DAVE BAST

Sure. As you point out, faith actually creates more problems for us than unbelievers have because we struggle with the problem of evil. Why and how can this be in a world made good by God and a world that is on its way toward the purposes of God – the shalom of God – in the kingdom? So, sure, that is a challenge for our faith, and in our restlessness we keep turning back to God's future and the understanding that, no, we don't have it now, but we still believe and we are still walking. You know, going all the way back to the first question: How do you find faith? Just keep walking – just keep moving toward the kingdom. Realize that we are not home yet.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Right; and that leads also to the hope that we will talk about in a future program. It reminds me of a story that I read a while back – true story: Early 20th Century; a man who had been a missionary to China for all of his life was coming home – he was retiring. So, he had spent his whole life working in China. He was on a ship coming back to the United States, and it just so happened that as they sailed into New York harbor, the ship

he was on also had former president Theodore Roosevelt on it, who had just been coming back from a hunting safari in Africa; and so everybody knew Roosevelt was on the ship and they hailed him and there were people on the docks and they were waving, they loved...

DAVE BAST

Bands playing, flags flying, yes.

SCOTT HOEZEE

They loved Teddy Roosevelt. So the missionary – and there is nobody to greet the missionary – so he is watching all this and he says: Wow, what a lot of fuss for somebody who just shot tigers in Africa for the last four months. Where is *my* homecoming? I am a servant for Jesus and there is nobody to welcome me home. And the Holy Spirit whispered to his heart at just that moment: True; but remember; you are not home yet.

DAVE BAST

Not yet, but someday we will be, as we walk by faith.

Well, thanks for listening to our *Groundwork* program today; and remember, it is listeners like you asking questions and participating that will keep our topics relevant. So tell us what you think about what you are hearing and suggest topics or passages you would like to hear on future *Groundwork* programs. Visit us at groundworkonline.com and join the conversation.

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