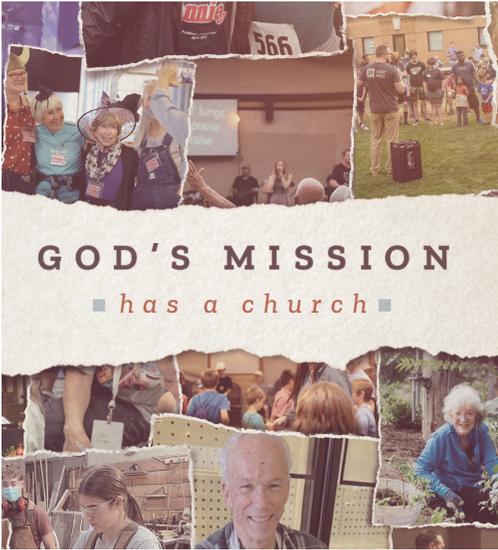




Sermon Growth Guide

January 19, 2025

God Makes Himself Known



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Hebrews 11:1-7

Key Verse: Hebrews 11:1

“Now faith is confidence in what we hope for and assurance about what we do not see.”

Big Idea: We are part of God’s eternal story through faith.

Foundations

There is something a little surprising in these well-known verses about faith. Hebrews 11:3 says that we understand by faith that God created the “universe.” But the word for “universe” here is the Greek word “aionas,” which is usually translated as “ages,” or sometimes “forever” or “eternal.” It’s a reminder that God not only created the material world, but the “ages” in which we live. The writer of Hebrews is trying to help us focus on God’s work of creation and the story he is writing throughout time. And he’s telling us that through faith, we too become part of the story. The writer of Hebrews then illustrates this by cataloguing the faith of God’s people throughout time.

Faith is a key characteristic of the church. Through faith we put our trust in God, believing that he is there, and that he rewards all those who earnestly seek him. (Hebrews 11:6) But that faith will automatically reveal itself in action. Abel, Enoch, and Noah (and many others to follow) all become witnesses to the grace of God through their faith. This witness comes both through the work of God in their lives and their response to God.

We in the church have the same opportunity as these heroes of faith. When our faith is revealed in action, we become part of God’s great story. We become witnesses to God’s grace, both in the age we live in now and in the age of eternal life to come. Through faith, we become part of God’s eternal story.

Understanding God’s Word

Together, read Hebrews 11:1-7

Do you have a sense of the story that God is writing throughout the ages? Do you think you could tell someone the overarching story of Scripture in just a few minutes? What part does the faith of the people of God play in that story?

Consider looking at the backstory of Abel, Enoch, and Noah (Genesis 4:1-7; 5:21-24; 6:11-22). Does their faith in action point toward Christ in some way?

Applying God’s Word

Think back to your discussion of God’s overarching story. What part of the story do you think we are in? What do you think your part of the story might be - in the past, now, or moving forward?

Can you point to some ways that your faith is revealed in action? Do your actions reveal faith in something other than God?

1 Corinthians 12:9 says faith is a gift from the Holy Spirit. Consider praying for one another for an increase in faith.

Witnessing God’s Word

Matthew 5:14 says that we (the church) are the “light of the world.” Our faith together is part of our witness. Is there a ministry in our church or in our city where you feel called to put your faith into action?

Hebrews 11. The Hall of Faith. You have the Pro Football Hall of Fame in Canton, Ohio. 378 players from Jim Thorpe to Dwight Freeney. Their noses look a lot better after the invention of the facemask. Then there's the Baseball Hall of Fame, which nobody cares about. Okay, you guys. There is a Rock and Roll Hall of Fame. My entry application still has not been processed. Hebrews 11 is called the Hall of Faith. Last week we asked, what is history? A list of great men or great moments? Great men and women making the world a different place, or great moments that called the best out of people? You might get to this list and think, "Oh, I guess it is great people after all." But hold on. Yes, we celebrate this list of heroes of the faith, but why are they there? Not fame, but faith. Not just any faith, but faith placed in God. It isn't having faith that matters, but the object of your faith. We want to focus our attention this series on God's mission, what God is doing in the world, asking ourselves, both as individual believers and as a church together, how we can be a part of it.

God's Mission Has a Church. Can we see our church as something God is doing? Not so much something we are doing and asking God to bless, but something God is doing? God has an agenda. God is on the move. God is working, God is on a mission, to save this fallen world. Maybe that is just a small reminder for us. It's not about me; it's about God. That seems like a small thing, but it will change the way you look at your whole life. Rick Warren opens his book *The Purpose Driven Life* with the words: "It's not about you. The purpose of your life is far greater than your own personal fulfillment, your peace of mind, or even your happiness... If you want to know why you were placed on this planet, you must begin with God. You were born by his purpose and for his purpose." We want to understand that purpose. What is God up to in the end? What is this whole project? It starts with God creating all things and making Himself known to us. *God Makes Himself Known*. I want to pick up where we left off last week with Eric Liddell, the Chariots of

Fire guy who didn't run the 100-meter dash in the 1924 Paris Olympics because it was scheduled on Sunday. He didn't run. He trusted God with his story. He wanted to honor God's Sabbath. If he had run, I don't think we would know his name. I wouldn't be talking about him. We wouldn't be inspired by him. Trusting, as he did, that God was there, and God was involved, and God writes our stories for His glory, he didn't run. That's faith. Although he suffered a lot, although he spent more time apart from his family and loved ones than with them, although he died in a prison camp in his forties, Eric Liddell's life had a huge impact. At his memorial service, a few friends shared thoughts about how Eric submitted his will to God's will. One said, "What was the secret of his consecrated life and far-reaching influence? Absolute surrender to God's will as revealed in Jesus Christ. His was a God-controlled life and he followed his Master and Lord with a devotion that never flagged and with an intensity of purpose that made men see both the reality and the power of true religion."

Another friend went on a little longer: "The most noteworthy feature in Eric's life was the regular and rapid progress of his spiritual development. It is as phenomenal as the speed with which in a 100-yards race, after being yards behind at halfway, he would catch up and pass the winning-post an easy first, leaving the other competitors standing. In the athletic world, no one knows how he did it—it remains a mystery; but for his progress in the spiritual race there is a very clear and definite explanation. First of all, absolute surrender to the Will of God. Absolute surrender—those words were often on his lips, the conception was always in his mind; that God should have absolute control over every part of his life. It was toward the attainment of that ideal that he directed all his mental and spiritual energies. It was no more easy for him than it is for us; let no one think that he did not have his temptations... But he won his way through, by persistent study, regular times of devotion, constant meditation, insistent prayer, getting up early in the

morning and spending one hour—two hours—in a concentrated search for God's will as revealed in the teaching of Jesus and the Bible generally." (A. P. Cullen)

How submitted is your life to God? Would someone speak at your funeral about your absolute surrender to Jesus? That's convicting, isn't it? Most of us live as if God didn't exist at all; we live as functional atheists. Let alone submitting all that we are. We not only need to believe God exists, we need to live knowing God exists and makes a difference. "And without faith it is impossible to please God, because anyone who comes to him must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who earnestly seek him." (Hebrews 11:6) God is there. And that makes a difference. God is there and God is good. God is there and it matters whether or not we seek Him. "Take my life and let it be consecrated, Lord, to thee." Do you know that hymn? "Take my moments and my days; let them flow in endless praise. Take my hands and let them move at the impulse of thy love. Take my feet and let them be swift and beautiful for thee...Take my intellect and use every power as thou shalt choose... Take my will and make it thine; it shall be no longer mine." Can we really say that? That is what it means to join the mission of God.

It starts with God making Himself known. Our passage begins with a famous definition of faith. We are not going to be like those who shrink back and are destroyed. No! We will be those who have faith and are being saved. That's what it said at the end of the last chapter. So, what is faith? Some indomitable optimism? Some unshakable confidence that allows a person to push through any resistance to gain the goal? What is faith? "Now faith is confidence in what we hope for and assurance about what we do not see." (Hebrews 11:1) Or let me give you the old King James: "Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen." (Hebrews 11:1 KJV) To put your faith in something

is to trust that what you hope for is actually there, is actually coming, that even though you can't say you see it exactly with your own eyes, you still know it's there and it's worthy of your trust. I like the old image of faith, that faith is like sitting in a chair. You may not be looking at it, but you trust it is there, in fact, you know it is there, but it takes full commitment to prove. It doesn't matter if we have faith, it is the object of that faith that matters. Believing the chair is there is one thing, but that won't make a chair appear that isn't there! God is there. Eugene Peterson's Message puts the same verse this way, "The fundamental fact of existence is that this trust in God, this faith, is the firm foundation under everything that makes life worth living. It's our handle on what we can't see." (Hebrews 11:1 Message). The faith we need is faith that trusts in the God who is there.

"This is what the ancients were commended for." (Hebrews 11:2) "The ancients" translates "presbyteroi" - the elders. So really, it's not the Hall of Fame or the Hall of Faith, it's the Hall of Presbyterians. But no need to make much of that. God is there and God is the Creator of all things. "By faith we understand that the universe was formed at God's command, so that what is seen was not made out of what was visible." (Hebrews 11:3) Faith gives us sight. It's possible to live in this world as though there is no Creator. Many do. But a tiny bit of faith, of believing what we can't fully see, and we come to understand this world in a different way. This is the world God made. We call this creatio ex nihilo, creation out of nothing. Do you know how to put your faith in God? It is an exercise of trust, committing your life into His hands, believing more than you can see right now that God is there, and God is good. God made Himself known to the ancients. "By 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." (Hebrews 11:4) There is a lot to say about this episode. I've always taken

the view that Abel brought first fruits, the best, when Cain brought leftovers. If God exists, God deserves our best. Enoch is lesser known but celebrated for walking with the Lord in his time. If God exists, a posture of absolute surrender is called for. Noah, of course, built a boat, a big boat, on dry land. Why? Just because God told him to do it. He took God at His word, and not only believed what God said, but acted on it. That is faith. Not just believing but doing. "By faith Noah, when warned about things not yet seen, in holy fear built an ark to save his family. By his faith he condemned the world and became heir of the righteousness that is in keeping with faith." (Hebrews 11:7) Noah is the first person in the Bible to be called righteous. What is his righteousness? Perfect obedience? Well, if you read the story of Noah there is some pretty questionable behavior in his life. God told him to build the ark. He built the ark. That faith made room for God to save. The ark is a physical representation of faith. Like the chair, you can get in it, you can enter it, and there is room there for you and your family to be saved. Noah, like all of us, needed to hide in the righteousness built by another, a sinful man in the belly of a great boat safe in the storm. So begins the Hall of Faith.

"And without faith it is impossible to please God, because anyone who comes to him must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who earnestly seek him." (Hebrews 11:6) We can't live into God's pleasure by ignoring His existence. We don't live into God's pleasure by living our lives as functional atheists, making our own decisions, cutting our own course, thinking we can limit God to church and prayers and spiritual things, but the rest of our calendars and days belong to us. Anyone who comes to Him must believe He exists. But not just that, because, as James reminds us the demons do the same: "You believe that there is one God. Good! Even the demons believe that—and shudder." (James 2:19) Believe God is there, and when God makes Himself known, answer with faith that commits, absolute surrender. God still makes Himself known.

How does a person please God? Did Eric Liddell? He was a sinner too. It isn't having faith that pleases God but putting your faith in Him. You can have faith in all sorts of things. God is there. God meets those who seek Him. There is only one who is righteous enough to gain the pleasure of God, to win the pleasure of the Father. That one is Jesus. Jesus is the ark, the shelter we enter into by faith and are rescued from destruction. Jesus is the righteous Enoch who walked with the Father in perfect obedience. Jesus is the better sacrifice than Abel's, the one who gave not just from His excess or leftovers, but gave His very body and blood, His very self. Faith in Christ is like entering the ark. Hidden in Him, we feel God's pleasure, not as a gain but as a gift. "When I run I feel his pleasure," said Eric Liddell. They asked how he won the 400m race with little training after he walked away from the 100. "The secret of my success over the 400m is that I run the first 200m as fast as I can. Then, for the second 200m, with God's help I run faster." Absolute surrender. The righteous will live by faith. In that posture we trust our lives to the God who makes Himself known in Jesus Christ. It still happens. As much as to Abel, as much as to Enoch, as much as to Noah and Abraham and the rest as we shall see, Jesus makes Himself known and we make a choice.

Last note on Eric Liddell. His favorite hymn was "Be Still My Soul." "Be still, my soul! the Lord is on your side; Bear patiently the cross of grief or pain; Leave to your God to order and provide; In every change he faithful will remain. Be still, my soul! your best, your heavenly friend through thorny ways leads to a joyful end. Be still, my soul! your God does undertake to guide the future as he has the past; Your hope, your confidence, let nothing shake; all now mysterious shall be bright at last. Be still, my soul! the waves and winds still know his voice who ruled them while he lived below." Can you trust this God who makes Himself known in Jesus? If you can, if you will, you will know the stillness of a soul that rests on Him.