

The Footprint of Faith

Hebrews 11:1 & Various Passages

Quentin Smith, November 20, 2023

This is probably the most unusual entrance I've ever made into church. I don't think this has ever happened before, where all three of us have been down and out, but as we talked back and forth on the app about what to do it, it seemed like I was the least sick. And so I really wanted to be with you today to open up the Word of God. So I'm here despite the fact that on the way in, I hit a train. I'm going to talk to you a little bit about the sovereignty of God, but it was interesting to me as I hit that train, how it's such a perfect illustration of the sovereignty of God. On the one hand, it depends on how you view it. You can say "I'm late!" or you can open up your sermon and prepare.

I feel like I need to pray. Let's pray together. Father in heaven, we are so thankful for the opportunity to be together to just open up your word. Father, I feel completely unprepared this morning, and I need Your help. Father, would you send your Spirit to help us to glean from Your word that which You desire to explain. Father, I just pray that You would work through Your word and Your Spirit in our lives to change us. As we open it up, Father, I pray that you will do just that this morning as we gather as a family to learn and to love. So we ask this all in Jesus' name, amen.

Did we manage to read Hebrews 11:1-16? Was that the reading today? Good. I thought I might just talk to you today about something basic. I want to talk to you about faith. It's a sermon that I preached a while ago, and I called it "The Footprint of Faith." I want to talk to you about what it is, how we get it, and how it changes our lives.

Well, first of all, let's figure out what is faith? And I'll invite you to open up to Hebrews chapter 11. I want to take you to a lot of different Scripture today because that's how we understand anything from God. As we look at His word with an open mind, with a clear mind, we want to hear from God what it is. There are so many times when in today's world, people are going to the Scriptures to bolster something that they already believe. In theological terms, that's called eisegesis. How do I prove my point from the Scripture? But exegesis on the other hand is taking something out of Scripture and learning what God's intention was for us. So let's go to Hebrews 11:1. "Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen." The assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen. At its core, it is a conviction, a state of being convinced about something. It's an internal assurance that though we cannot see God, He exists. We cannot see Him and yet we believe; and it's a calm, settled, resolute stance that says this is what I believe. It's an assurance is a steadfastness of mind. A conviction is a proof, a thing by which something is proved or tested. We have lots of convictions.

Picture, if you will, a soldier standing outside Buckingham Palace, not leaving his post, serious about a job that he must do, standing firm against the elements, his jaw is set. He's not bothered by any of the kids who come up and try to make him smile. Doesn't matter if it's raining or baking hot. He's not

distracted. He's firm in his conviction. It's like walking down a road that you've never been on before, going to a destination that you've never been to at the end of the road. And yet, there's the solid trust that you will find that destination at the end. It is the assurance of things that you hope for, the conviction of things that are there that you cannot see.

Point number two, how do we get it? Well, when we come to the Lord in faith we come by two things, by His invitation, and by His enabling. As we read through some of these verses, I want you to be aware of the tension, the connection between His invitation and His enabling. This is one of the tensions in the in the Word of God, which we need to talk about. There is an invitation, but we cannot come to Him unless He enables that. So we're going to do a bit of a Bible study together. Why don't we open up Matthew 11. Let's talk about the invitation part of that equation first. Matthew 11:28:

Come to me, all who are weary and heavy-laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from Me. For I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For My yoke is easy, and My burden is light.

How many of you feel that way this morning? How many of you feel that we are weary and heavy laden in this world? Well, Jesus says you need to come. He says, "Take My yoke upon you, learn from Me, and you'll find rest for your souls." That sounds like an amazing invitation. Let's go to Luke 5:31. We're just going to list off five or six verses here which summarize the invitation that we get. Luke chapter five.

Jesus answered and said to them, "It is not those who are well who need a physician, but those who are sick. I have not come to call the righteous but sinners to repentance."

So if you are feeling that sense of being weary and heavy laden, and you feeling the sense of sin in your life, the invitation is clear. Christ came to call you. John 7:37. One of Jesus's most famous invitations, He says,

Now on the last day, the great day of the feast, Jesus stood and cried out, saying, "If anyone is thirsty, let him come to Me and drink. He who believes in Me, as the Scripture said, 'From his innermost being will flow rivers of living water.'" But this He spoke of the Spirit, whom those who believed in Him were to receive; for the Spirit was not yet given, because Jesus was not yet glorified.

So now we have another metaphor of thirst. We talked about being weary and heavy laden, and finding rest, real rest, rest for your souls. But now He's talking about a thirst, and I think we can identify with that as well. Come to Me all who are thirsty, come to Me and drink. And I think it's fair to say that our souls thirst sometimes. We have a thirst for something that we know is missing. Jesus says when you have that thirst, make sure you go to the right place. Come to Me and I will give you an abundance of

quenching for that thirst, so much so that there will be streams of living water that will flow out from you. Of course, He's talking about the Holy Spirit that comes in.

Acts chapter two. Day of Pentecost, Jesus has risen and ascended. Peter preaches the first gospel sermon. There are tongues as of fire that come down. Everybody is amazed that they're hearing them speak in the languages in fact, the dialects. There are people from all over that have gathered in Jerusalem for the day of Pentecost. It's a remarkable thing. Peter stands up and says this is what Joel had prophesied. These men are not drunk as you suppose but that the Spirit would be poured out and everyone, verse 21, who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved. And he goes on to say "Men of Israel," verse 22, "listen to these words: Jesus, the Nazarene, a man attested to you by God with miracles and wonders and signs which God performed through Him in your midst, just as you know." There was no doubt about what had happened. This is God in the flesh. "And this man delivered over by the predetermined plan and foreknowledge of God, you nailed to a cross. You didn't do it yourself. You did it by the hands of godless men, and you put Him to death. But God raised Him up again, putting an end to the agony of death, since it was impossible for Him to be held by its power." What's the response? Let's go to verse 36 where he drives the final nail home he says, "Therefore let all the house of Israel know for certain that God has made Him both Lord and Christ – this Jesus whom you crucified." Well, their response was 37, they were cut to the heart. "And when they heard this, they were pierced to the heart." That means there was a conviction that came over them. They believed that what Peter had actually told them was actually true, and it was like a knife to the heart. There was, the guilt was inescapable. And he said to Peter and the rest of the apostles, "Brethren, what shall we do?"

What do you think he was asking for? How do we fix this? We've been waiting for this Messiah, we nailed Him to the cross. How do we fix this? "Peter said to them, 'Repent, and each of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins; and you'll receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. For the promise is for you and your children and for all who are far off, as many as the Lord our God will call to Himself.' And with many other words, he solemnly testified and kept on exhorting them saying, 'Be saved from this perverse generation!'" There it is, be saved from this perverse generation. You have to repent, be baptized, you'll receive the Holy Spirit. That's how you fix this. "So then, those who had received his word were baptized, and that day there were added about 3000 souls. And they continued, devoting themselves to the apostles teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer."

So far, we have seen that there is an invitation to which we must respond.

The last one on my list is 2 Corinthians 5:20. You go there with me. Paul, writing to the Corinthian church talks about the great substitution of Christ for us, the core of the gospel in verse 17,

If anyone is in Christ, he is a new creature; the old things have passed away, the new have come. Now all these things are from God, Who reconciled us to Himself through Christ and gave us the

ministry of reconciliation, namely, that God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and He's committed to us the word of reconciliation. [We have that word of reconciliation. What is the message was 20.] Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God were making an appeal through us; [What is the appeal?] we beg you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God.

“We beg you,” says Paul, “be reconciled to God.” That puts something firmly in your lap that you must do in order to be saved. Well, what's our experience? We know that we have a need. We know that we are weary, we know that we are heavy laden, we know that He will give us rest. And so we come to God with a thirst, weariness, knowing in our hearts that something is not right. There's a vague, undefined restlessness, there's an itch. People scratch that itch with all kinds of things, trying to look for a salve for that thing that's in our heart that we know is there. There may be a sense of unsettledness, a sense of darkness, there might be a sense of hopelessness, purposelessness. We may feel sometimes as if we're in a quicksand that no matter what we try and do, things just get worse. And at a higher level, we might recognize that before God, we are guilty and sin stained, but we know that there can be no change. There can be no seeking of God unless there is a recognized need. And so as you sit there and as you ponder your own heart, you recognize that there is that need that we have to be helped. The problem is, the Bible says we can't come unless God enables that. Let's look at some of the passages regarding this. Let's go to John 5:20.

For the Father loves the Son, and shows Him all things that He Himself is doing; and the Father will show Him greater works than these, so that you will marvel. For just as the Father raises the dead and gives them life, even so the Son also gives life to whom He wishes.

So it seems like Jesus is in charge of giving life to those whom He wishes. Stay in that chapter and go to 39-40, Jesus says,

You search the Scriptures because you think that in them you have eternal life; it is these that testify about Me; and you are unwilling to come to Me so that you may have life.

It's the person who heard of Jesus that makes the difference. John 6:44, one over the page there. Jesus speaking, He says,

“No one can come to Me unless the Father who sent Me draws him; and I will raise him up on the last day.” [Keep going over to John 6:64.] “But there are some of you who do not believe.” For Jesus knew from the beginning who they were who did not believe, and who it was who would betray Him. And he was saying, “For this reason I have said to you, that no one can come to Me unless it has been granted him by the Father.”

So here we have a paradox. We have a bunch of verses that we read about being thirsty, and weary, and heavy laden. We've got Peter saying, "Save yourself from this corrupt generation." We've got Paul saying, "We beg you be reconciled to Christ." But over here we've got Jesus saying, "No one comes to Me unless the Father draws." Well what are we to do? This is a paradox. It's a seemingly contradictory statement that nonetheless may be true. That's the definition of a paradox. On the one hand, you can decide that because you can't believe that Jesus holds the keys to your salvation, and that He chooses whom He wishes, and you can't swallow that because that seems unfair, you camp over here. And you decide that it's all up to man to deal with it. On the other hand, if you believe that the Scriptures say that Jesus is the One who has to save us, you may as well just carry on your life until He zaps you. But neither of those are really where we ought to be because you see, the word of God, teach us both.

And as hard as it is for us to understand that, we have to acknowledge that the Scriptures teach the sovereignty of God in salvation, but they teach man's responsibility as well. And as Spurgeon once said, "There's like two train tracks. They will forever say that, but they never meet." And so we realize that our experience of faith is that we respond to the message of the gospel preached. We respond because we understand that there is a need, we know that we are weary and heavy laden, we know that we have scratched the wrong itch and found it to be fruitless. We've tried money, we've tried sex, we've tried drugs, we've tried all kinds of things to fill that void that is within us that has granted us purposelessness and meaninglessness. And we know that it hasn't worked, and so we respond to the gospel. And when we recognize that we are convicted of our sin, we believe. And later on, as we understand more about the Word of God, we understand that it was the grace of God that enabled that so that no one should boast. Because if you think about it, and you stand solidly here, you might say, "Well, at least I had the sense to believe. You had your chance. Sorry man, you blew it." But when you stand here and you understand that your response, even you're coming to Christ was enabled, there is no room for pride. You can't stand with your arms folded looking down at somebody else because you are that somebody else.

What is faith? It's the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen. How do we get it? By our response to the Gospel, by the invitation of God, and by the enabling of God, that we might not boast?

Well, third point, how does it change our lives? It is impossible to come to know Christ, and there not be a change in your life. There are so many of us worldwide who are coming to church, who are not the church. There are so many people that are sitting in pews today that don't know God. We are involved in an institution. And we feel like it's something that we do, but the doing can become our faith. And John 17:3, John says, "This is eternal life, that they may know You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom You sent." Faith connects us with the person of God, and the person of Christ, and the person of the Holy Spirit. And from that relationship of knowing, flows everything else that we do. To come to church and not be the church means that you're a tare amongst the wheat. And so it's a relationship. It changes

our lives because we know God. “This is eternal life, that they may know You.” There is a personhood that we know.

I've got five points under how it changes our lives. First of all, were born again. If you come back to Hebrews 11, there is a sense of radical openness to knowing God. The Bible talks about it as being born again. We read in 2 Corinthians 5 about being a new creation, and He changes us primarily within our heart. And He opens up our eyes to the fact that He exists, and now we have a different worldview. Now we have a view of the world that includes God. And we have a view of the world that we are affected by His word. We are instructed and we learn. We have our eyes open, we think differently about things, we have different priorities, different importance. Moses' experience is helpful here in chapter 11:23-27, I'm going to steal some thunder from Jeremy I hope he's okay with that.

By faith Moses, when he was born, was hidden for three months by his parents, because they saw he was a beautiful child; and they were not afraid of the king's edict. By faith Moses, when he had grown up, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter, choosing rather to endure ill-treatment with the people of God than to enjoy the passing pleasures of sin, considering the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures of Egypt; for he was looking to the reward. By faith he left Egypt, not fearing the wrath of the king; for he endured, as seeing Him who is unseen.

If you have a New International Version, it says “By faith he left Egypt, not fearing the king's anger, he persevered because he saw Him who is invisible.” Love that translation. He saw Him who was invisible. That's what it means to be born again. You have a worldview where you see things that are invisible, you have an assurance of things that are unseen, a conviction of things that are unseen, an assurance of things hoped for.

Any of you who fish will know that when you have polarized sunglasses on, you see things under the water that people cannot see who don't wear their sunglasses. You see the fish coming to the boat. And anybody who's not wearing those polarized sunglasses cannot see that. It's the same as yellow tinted ski goggles, you see the snow better. Mountain biking sunglasses for overcast days, infrared goggles at night. Your equipment affects your performance. If you have a stone heart, you don't see those things. But when God takes that stone heart, and He replaces it with a heart of flesh, you begin to see things that others don't, and that you didn't.

You can see as you read through Hebrews 11, these people of faith whose lives were radically changed. The question I have for us is, are we born again? Do we see things that others don't? And does it matter? Does it show up in our lives? Are we born again? Are we seeing Him who is invisible?

Number two, not only are we born again, we walk with endurance, eyes fixed on that horizon, knowing that our walk is towards the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen. And you

know what, if you are going somewhere, say you're out hunting, and you need to go down that road and there's a tree in the way. You make a plan. You walk around the tree, you step over it, you cut it and remove it, if you've got the equipment. But we endure as Christians. There are things that are going to come along our lives that that make life difficult, but we persevere because we have that assurance of things hoped for. We understand that life is not always going to be a rose garden. We simply navigate the log in the road. We might go around, we might go over, we might go past, but we navigate it. And you know struggling and suffering keeps us humble in the process. It keeps us looking at our compass without the arrogance that is associated with self-made success. Let's go to Romans 8. Keep your finger in Hebrews 11. We're gonna come back there now. So we're talking about endurance. We're talking about the world view. Romans 8:35-39 says,

Who will separate us from the love of Christ? Will tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? Just as it is written, "For your sake we are being put to death all day long; we were considered as sheep to be slaughtered."

But in all these things we overwhelmingly conquer through Him who loved us. For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor any other created thing, will be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

That's the promise. Knowing that fuels the endurance that we have in our faith; that's how we persevere. Some of you have been through incredible trials recently. You persevered. How? Because you know. God has revealed in Scripture, the end. And you know that life is short. And you know that your responsibility is to persevere, and to endure, and to be faithful to the end, and so you just keep doing the next right thing. And you love, and you give, and you serve, and you be faithful, and you cultivate that faithfulness under whatever conditions, and you stay where you're planted, and you love the Lord. That's what faith does.

Hebrews 12:1. "Therefore, since we have so great a cloud of witnesses surrounding us, let us also lay aside every encumbrance and the sin which so easily entangles us, and let us run with endurance the race set before us." Because you have this endurance, you don't stop when you get to an obstacle. You throw the obstacle aside. We throw off the sin that so easily entangles us and holds us back from completing that race, not the opposite.

And in Philippians 1:28. Let me say verse 27, starting there, sorry,

Conduct yourselves in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ, so that whether I come and see you or remain absent, I'll hear of you [that you are what?] standing firm in one spirit, with one mind striving together for the faith of the gospel; in no way alarmed by your opponents- [There's the assurance. You're not afraid of this, you know how it ends] which is a sign of destruction for them, but of salvation for you, and that too, from God. For to you it has been granted for Christ's

sake, not only to believe in Him, but also to suffer for His sake, experiencing the same conflict which you saw in me, and now here to be in me.

Excuse me, did you catch that? “It has been granted to you, not only to believe, but also to suffer for His sake.” It sounds like it's a privilege. It sounds like there is meaning in our suffering. The book of Hebrews says that when you suffer and you endure, you learn perseverance. So that next time you come across that thing that you struggle with, you're going to be prepared.

Number one, we are born again. Number two, we walk with endurance. Number three, we are message bearers. Now, if you grasp this correctly, you will be a message bearer with confidence. You say to yourself, “But how do I know who to speak to? How do I know who's elect?” You don't. It's not your job. It's not our job to try and figure out, “Hmmm, I wonder if Dave is elect or not. Maybe he needs to hear the gospel. No, maybe not. I wonder if Sharne” No, we preach the Gospel to whoever the Lord brings; and we trust that if there's going to be fruit in that, it is because God is working in that person's life. And that's why we've always got to be prepared to give a reason for the hope that is within us.

Do you remember the parable in Luke 5, where Peter and the other fishermen have been out all night? They didn't catch anything. And Jesus said to him, “Set your boat out into the deep water. Cast your net on the other side.” Peter says, “Hang on a second. This is my area of expertise, Lord. We've been out all night; we didn't catch anything. We are the fisherman.” He says, “Just cast your net on the other side.” And when he does, what happens? A massive catch, so big that when they pull it into the boat, up to the knees. You see, God brought those fish. And when we are message bearers; we are message bearers, and God needs to bring those who need to hear that message. We don't discriminate, we don't try and figure it out. We are message bearers. And that's why we say, “We beg you be reconciled to God.”

But you also need to understand this so that you don't become discouraged. That you don't think, “What is it in my presentation that is not allowing people to believe?” You know, your presentation has nothing to do with it as long as you're speaking the truth. You need to be very simple in your presentation of the gospel. You need to understand it, you need to have lived that; and your life needs to be authentic in that way, so that what you do doesn't cancel what you say. But there is no magic in the presentation. God is at work or He isn't. Your job is to be faithful to the message.

Number four, we become aliens or foreigners. go to Philippians 3:18-4:1.

For many walk, of whom I often told you, and now tell you even weeping, that they are enemies of the cross of Christ, whose end is destruction, whose god is their appetite, and whose glory is their shame, who set their mind on earthly things. For our citizenship is in heaven, from which also we eagerly wait for a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ; who will transform the body of our humble state into conformity with the body of His glory, by the exertion of the power that He

has, even to subject all things to Himself. Therefore, my beloved brethren, whom I long to see, my joy and crown, in this way stand firm in the Lord, my beloved.

The term citizenship means that you subject yourself to the laws and the government of a certain place. Many of us are, I think most Canadians are from somewhere else. It just is the way our society is; but we've adopted a citizenship, many of us who live here now, and we've agreed to live under the laws and abide by the government in this place. We are citizens of Canada. I was a citizen of Zimbabwe at one point. But when you become a citizen of heaven, you submit to a different government, the government of Christ, the Lordship of Christ to use a biblical term and your life looks different. If somebody comes here from a different country, their accent is different. It's a giveaway. There are certain things about how they look, how they dress, what they say, and how they say it. That makes you think that that person is from this place. We're watching a documentary on Netflix called *Shamwari Untamed* last night, my wife and I, it's about a game reserve in South Africa, and we became all nostalgic because of the accent. Do you look like a citizen of heaven? Would people know from your accent and what you say, and how you say it, and who you hang with, and what you do? Can people spot you? Would there be enough evidence to convict you of having your citizenship in heaven in a court of law? That's what faith does. It comes into your life and it upturns everything, but you retain those things forever. You retain your Christian accent now. You have a Christian stamp on things you do and approve. And there ought to be enough evidence to persecute you successfully for being a Christian in a court of law.

The other way to say that is do you feel like a foreigner in the world? Right? Many of us who came to Canada felt like foreigners until you settle in. So, is your citizenship in heaven? Are you a citizen? And do you feel like a foreigner here because that is one of the measures of how faith has changed you?

Finally, we follow a new commandment. John 13:34-35.

A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another, even as I have loved you, that you also love one another. By this all men will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another.

He says we ought to love. But did you see in verse 34, how? He says, "even as I have loved you." Well, how was that? It was a sacrificial love, right? We're familiar with the different kinds of Greek words that describe love. There is *storge* for family love, there is *phileo* for brotherly love, there is *eros* for intimate love between a husband and a wife, and then there's *agape*. And the Agape love is what is used here. And it's a love that goes beyond your own personal comfort. It's a love that would sacrifice for somebody else. It's a love that does something even though it's inconvenient, and that's what faith produces. A love for the brotherhood. A love for everybody that is different.

So the challenge again is, has the faith that we have changed us? Can you tell that that person is a citizen of heaven by the way they love, and is a foreigner here on the earth by the way they love? I sure hope so.

So, what is Faith? Faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen. How do we get it? There is an invitation that God gives, but there is an enabling that He produces, so that we would not boast. And what does it result in? Well, we're born again. We walk with endurance. We are message bearers. We become citizens and foreigners. And we love the way Christ loved us.

I'm going to transition right away into the Lord's Table right now, as the men, I think, have prepared that. And if I can ask them to be ready to hand out the emblems. It's really an appropriate thing that we do because the Lord's Table embodies so much of what we've talked about. It was the start, right? Jesus enabled us to be forgiven of our sins by taking that sin that we had upon Him. That 2 Corinthians 5 passage says that He actually became sin for us. And so when He went to the cross, He was absorbing God's wrath that was poured out for sin. Your sin, it might be good to remind us, was not just canceled. God didn't cancel your sin; it was paid for in full by Christ. So that that certificate of death could be nailed to the cross that Colossians 2 talks about. So it all begins with Christ, and then our faith in Him allows us to be forgiven and our sin washes away. That's what we do when we partake of the Lord's table. We remember what happened on our behalf at the Cross.