

1 Faith for heroes – faith for you

Hebrews 11:1: “Faith is the substance of things hoped for, the proof of things not seen.”

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“Faith is the substance of things hoped for.” The key word here is “substance”, which represents the Greek word *hupostasis*. This word is used twice elsewhere in Hebrews. According to Hebrews 1:3, the Son is the exact representation of God’s *hupostasis*, and according to Hebrews 3:14, believers share in Christ only if they hold fast the beginning of their *hupostasis* to the end.

In the Greek language, this word originally meant that which supports something, a deposit or sediment in the ground, or even an item of immovable property. It came to refer in a more figurative sense to the underlying reality behind a thing. Christ is pictured in 1:3 as the exact representation of the reality, substance or being of God. The eternal reality of who and what God is in the eternal, unseen realm is made physical, earthly reality in Christ. In the same way, the things that exist in the eternal realm – the “things hoped for”, the things we do not yet possess, are made into flesh and blood reality in the lives of individual believers in Christ through the exercise of faith. As Christ brings the invisible substance of God into this physical world, so faith brings the things we do not yet possess into our possession. Our faith in Christ reaches out for and secures what is real in the invisible world and brings it into the physical reality of this present world, whereas the outward realities of that world are in fact only passing shadows. What is real in the eternal world but has no substance in the material world gains substance through the exercise of our faith. It is this substance which enabled the heroes of faith, whose lives are recorded as chapter 11 unfolds, to conquer everything the world threw against them, and still emerge victorious, whether in life or in death.

In ordinary, everyday language, the word *hupostasis* was also used to refer to the “title deed” to a property. The title deed represented the underlying reality, the substance laying behind our claim to a piece of real estate or a building. This title deed guaranteed our possession of the property. Faith arises from the Word of God and the good news of the Gospel: *“Faith comes from hearing, and hearing through the word of Christ”* (Rom. 10:17). The Word of God informs us of all the promises available to those who follow Christ. Faith, which arises from the hearing of Word of God, is the title deed which gives us possession of the promises of God recorded in that Word. The Word of God causes faith to arise, which then leads us to claim the promises of that Word for ourselves.

Faith is the proof of things not seen. This second key word – “proof” – is the Greek word *elengchos*. The word means the “proof” that the things which are not seen are the things which are truly real and which will remain forever. These are the things on which we can base our lives. When we hear the Word of God, the proof that what it says is real is placed in our hearts by the Holy Spirit, and is called “faith”. Faith is an unalterable conviction that what God says in His word is true, and we can base our lives upon it. This faith is the proof of what is not seen. Physical eyesight produces a conviction that things exist in the material world just as we see them, and we can base our lives accordingly. We see a chair in front of us, and our physical

eyesight assures us – provides proof – that it is safe to sit upon it. Our physical eyesight considers a financial investment through all the facts visibly in front of it, and assures us that we can spend the money on it and know it will give us a good return. But faith is spiritual eyesight. It enables us to see far beyond the physical world into the eternal realm. As we see these things with our spiritual eyesight, faith produces a conviction that things exist in the spiritual or invisible realm, and that we can take actions in the assurance that a desired result will occur. For instance, we can tithe with the assurance that God will bless our finances, in spite of the fact that tithing, from a purely visible aspect, involves the giving away of our finances, not the adding to them. We can conduct our financial dealings to the highest standards and refuse the gain that comes from evading income tax or cheating others, in the knowledge that, while our neighbour is stealing money from the government or a business to enrich himself, in the long run things will turn out better for us than for him. When we are being spoken evil of by others, we refuse to throw the mud back, even though our reputation is declining at the expense of theirs, for we know that in the long term this situation will surely reverse itself.

According to 2 Cor. 4:18, the things which are seen with our physical vision (Greek *blepo*) are temporary, but the things which can only be seen with our spiritual vision (Greek *skopeo*) are eternal. The first kind of vision is superficial, but the second kind, as the English words microscope, telescope, or the scope of a rifle, suggest, is an intensive focus which sees clearly what normal vision cannot see at all.

Faith is like a muscle which God gives, but which must be used continuously to gain strength. Failure to exercise faith results in our decisions sliding back into the realm of what we can see. What a tragedy and how we thus cheat ourselves! Faith allows us to see into the invisible realm, and hence enables us to stand on the basis of the principles of that world, which are the principles of God's Word, and in fact, if the two are in conflict, to act contrary to the evidence that the physical world affords us.

In our daily lives, we act on the evidence of our five senses. However, the only evidence that faith requires is the Word of God. If the Word of God directs us to act either contrary to or beyond what our senses tell us, we must act upon it. Obviously, ability to discern the will of God is critical. One way of knowing God's will is simply to know our Bible. But in addition to this, the fact that we are joined in covenant relationship with one another minimizes the possibility of error, as we submit our actions to those whose counsel we respect. However, in the end, only we ourselves can take that step of faith which God is calling us to do.

We live in a culture completely dominated by the five senses. It is hard work to step out in faith against all our natural instincts. But remember that the biggest step of faith is the one you have already taken – to trust your life, now and in eternity, to Jesus Christ. You have staked everything on the truth of who God's Word says Jesus is, and you know that He has not disappointed you. Once you have taken that enormous step, everything else by comparison pales into insignificance.

God is calling for a people who will take risks of faith, who will break out beyond the constraints of the natural world around us. How else will we see the sick healed, finances released for God's purposes, relationships restored, lives built on a firm foundation, and the Kingdom of God

extended?

We have the substance of Christ as the support under our feet. He is the reality upon which the whole universe is built. We have the proof that what God's Word says is true. We have the wisdom of the Word of God and the power of the Spirit of God compelling us forward to seize our inheritance in the invisible realm and bring it into this physical reality, to change this world through the power of the world to come.

Nineteen times in Hebrews 11, the phrase "by faith" is repeated to describe the attitude and actions of God's servants through the ages. These men and women of faith lived, died and changed the world by faith. At the end of this list of heroes appears the command addressed to us as their heirs: "*Therefore... let us lay aside every hindrance.. And let us run with endurance the race that is set before us*" (Heb. 12:1). The challenge of these heroes, and that of God to us today, is to follow in their footsteps. They were ordinary people – as the list nears its end, many of them are not even mentioned by name. Faith makes ordinary people extraordinary. Faith takes spiritual pygmies and turns them into giants. Faith takes ordinary folk and transforms them into people who change the world. God never intended that anyone who followed Him be anything other than a man or woman of faith. We are His people of faith today. We are what He has and all He has. If we do not step out in faith, we cannot expect God to intervene in some cosmic thundercloud or bolt of lightning, or to send an angel instead.

Exercising faith is not an option. It doesn't matter how or where we begin, but it does matter *that* we begin. Small steps now will turn into mighty strides later. God's Word tells us that every one of us was born to make a difference. The only way we can do it is by faith. Let's join the ancient crowd of heroes and start changing the world today!