

Title: "A Living Faith"
Text: Hebrews 11:1-3

We have entered into a new year, and so we are beginning a new phase in our sermon series.

The series, as you all know, is called "Living Faith in 3D."
-And through the Fall we were exploring primarily the 3D aspect of our faith lives.

-The upward, inward, and outward dimensions of our faith lives.

-But now as we move into this new season and new year,
-I'd like us to shift our focus slightly to more fully develop the "Living Faith" part of this title.

What does it mean to have a "living faith" in all its dimensions?

-What does a "living faith" look like?

-How do you know if you have a "living faith?"

-And if you don't have one, how do you go about getting one?

Well, I'd like you to turn with me today to the Letter to the Hebrews in the New Testament, chapter 11.

-There is no better place in the Bible to learn what living faith is, and what it looks like, than Hebrews 11.

I am going to read through the whole chapter today in an edited sort of way to give you the full scope of what the writer is saying here.

-But then I am going to focus today on just the first verse or two as we prepare for communion.

By edited, I mean I am going to read through all the various people mentioned throughout the chapter,

-but I am not going to read all that the writer to the Hebrews says about each person.

In the weeks to come we will take a more careful look at each of these people, and what is said about them,

-in order to see what a "living faith" looks like in the lives of these real people of the Old Testament.

But listen now as the writer speaks to us about "living faith."

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

This famous definition of faith stands at the head of this entire chapter about people who lived by faith.

-And as I read through the chapter, you heard that almost every paragraph begins with the words, “By faith...”

“By faith Abel offered a better sacrifice than Cain.

-By faith Enoch was taken from this life without experiencing death.

-By faith Noah built an ark

-By faith Abraham obeyed and followed God’s calling to the land of Canaan.

-By faith Isaac blessed Jacob and Esau.”

And the list goes on and on as the writer recounts the various men and women of the Bible who were commended for their faith.

But the reason that the writer pens this whole chapter on biblical faith is found in what comes before it in chapter 10.

-There we are told quite clearly what the recent history of these 1st Century Hebrew Christians had been like.

We are told that when they had first received the good news of the Gospel of Jesus Christ,

-they had stood their ground in the face of suffering for their new faith.

-They had faced public insult and persecution.

-Some of them had been imprisoned for their faith,

-Some had had their property and housing confiscated.

But amazingly, this had not shaken their faith at all.

-The writer reminds them of how they had endured the insults with boldness and joy.

-They had stood side by side with other Christians in faithfulness to Christ.

-They had not abandoned those who were thrown in prison for their faith, but had cared for them and visited them.

They had not tried to protect themselves by disassociating themselves from those in jail.

-No. It says in 10:34, "You sympathized with those in prison and joyfully accepted the confiscation of your property."

Why did they do this?

-The writer says it was "because you knew that you yourselves had better and lasting possessions."

Those were amazing days for the Church of Jesus Christ, even in the midst of persecution.

-But something had happened in the years since those days.

Now these Christians seem to be struggling.

-They are feeling weary in body, mind, and soul.

-They are questioning their faith.

-They are in danger of giving up the faith.

So the writer to the Hebrews writes this whole letter to these Jewish Christians,

-exhorting them to not throw away their confidence and faith, for it will be richly rewarded.

-He ends chapter 10 saying, "You need to persevere so that when you have done the will of God you will receive what He has promised."

-For in just a little while, He who is coming will come and will not delay.

-But my righteous one will live by faith.

-And if he shrinks back, I will not be pleased."

"But," the writer says in conclusion, "we are not of those who shrink back and are destroyed, but of those who believe and are saved."

"Now faith," he goes on then in chapter 11, "is being sure of what we hope for, and certain of what we do not see."

And this whole chapter then, is filled with examples of men and women throughout Israel's history, who persevered in faith.

-Men and women who did not shrink back, but in tough times maintained their confidence and trust in God.

They exhibited “living faith.”

And I give you this wider context of what we are reading here,
-because I don’t want us to misunderstand what this “living faith” is that they were being commended for,
-and that we, the readers of this letter, are being exhorted to.

1. The first thing I want us to be clear about, is that the kind of faith we are talking about here, is not “wishful thinking.”

Sometimes when people read this famous first verse of Hebrews 11 out of context, it sounds to them like faith is wishful thinking.
-And people use this verse that way all the time.

They say, “Since faith is the assurance of things hoped for,
-then I am going to hope for a new living room set.
-And I am going to believe God for it.
-And even though I don’t see my new living room set yet,
-I am going to trust with assurance that I will get it.”

My friends, there are a lot of people who think that this kind of wishful thinking is biblical faith.
-It is not.
-And in the context of this letter to the Hebrews,
we can clearly see that this is not the definition of faith that is being promoted.

The Hebrew Christians of the 1st Century are not being exhorted to that kind of wishful thinking.
-Nor are we.

No. When the writer to the Hebrews says faith is the assurance of what we hope for,
-it is not a new living room set, or a better car, or a new job, or a cottage on Lake Winnepesaukee he has in mind.

What we are hoping for as Christians, are the promises of God.
-Those “better and lasting possessions” that are spoken of in chapter 10:34, and again here in chapter 11.

The writer is reminding these Christians of that earlier day when they had a strong biblical faith.

-And what did it look like?

“You stood your ground in a great contest and in the face of suffering.

-Sometimes you were publicly exposed to insult and persecution, at other times you stood side by side with those who were so treated.

-You sympathized with those in prison and joyfully accepted the confiscation of your property!
(your new living room set, your new car, your cottage on Lake Winnepesaukee.)

Why did you no longer care about your health and wealth and reputation?

-Because you knew that you yourselves had better and more lasting possessions awaiting you in the future.

You had the assurance of things hoped for, and the certainty of things not seen.

-You were confident that what God had promised you in Christ was so great and so precious and so real,
-that it was worth anything you might lose in this world.

That's why you no longer cared about material possessions. That's why you were willing to give them up for the sake of knowing Christ.

-Because your affections were set on things above.
-Your hope was in the promises of God and in all that He had done for you in Christ,
-and all that He had promised yet to do for you in Christ.

A “living faith” is simply a deep, down trust in God.

-It's a trust that enables believers to press on steadfastly whatever the future holds for them.

-It is a trust that they know they can rely on God.

That is a living faith.

-And there are three elements to this kind of living faith that we see exhibited all through this chapter.

1. Such faith is “Christ-centered.”
2. Such faith is “beyond worldly reasoning;”
3. Such faith is motivational and leads to decisions and actions.

1. By Christ-centered, I mean that the writer to the Hebrews presents Jesus Christ as the “author and perfecter” of all true living faith.

He is the hope of the fulfillment of all God’s promises that the ancients looked forward to long before Christ had come.

He is the hope of the fulfillment of all God’s promises that the writer is exhorting the 1st Century Christians to hang on to in their day.

Jesus Christ is the passageway to a deepening fulfillment of the ultimate promises of God for all of us.

- And a living faith will always be centered in a hope in Christ,
- and it will also always inspire Christ-like behaviors: sacrificial love, humility, grace, hope, endurance, reconciliation, redemption.

A living faith will somehow transform us to become more and more Christ-like.

2. Secondly, a living faith is not irrational or unreasonable, but it is not based on rationality, or reason, or logic.

It extends our “knowledge” beyond worldly reasoning and beyond our senses.

In terms of a 3D faith life, this is the “other dimension” which transforms us.

-It is faith that opens our minds to realize that there is more to reality than simply what we can see with our eyes.

A living faith learns to trust in this other dimension of life.

- It learns to expect God to show up in one’s life.
- We begin to expect that God will really answer prayer.
- We begin to trust that our sins are forgiven.

-We begin to look forward in hope to the future, no matter what the present circumstances are like.

That is not always logical.

-And such a faith often calls us to do things and hope and trust in a way that seems unreasonable to others.

3. Which brings us to the third element of a living faith as it is portrayed here in Hebrews 11:

-Faith is motivational.

-It is the driving force in helping us to make decisions and act upon them.

A living faith in God's call and His promise is what motivated Abraham and Sarah to leave their homeland and go to a place they had never been before.

-It is what motivated Moses to leave the sheep in Midian with his father in law, and go back to Egypt to confront Pharaoh.

-It is what motivated Joseph to persevere through all kinds of ups and downs in his life,

-and ultimately to be used by God to save his people and all of Egypt from famine.

All of the people here commended in Hebrews 11 had a living faith that was Christ-centered, that was beyond logic and reason, and that was motivational and led to life decisions and actions both great and small.

This is the living faith we will be exploring in all its dimensions in the weeks to come.

-We will spend time here in Hebrews 11, but we will be spending time looking at the real lives of the real people mentioned here.

-We will also spend time looking at our real lives, as we continue to try and grasp just how wide and long and high and deep the love of Christ is for us,

-and begin to live our lives with a living faith, trusting in that love,

-and so be filled to the measure of the fullness of God.