

Hebrews 11:1-3, 8-16. Now faith is being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see. ² This is what the ancients were commended for. ³ 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. ⁸ By faith Abraham, when called to go to a place he would later receive as his inheritance, obeyed and went, even though he did not know where he was going. ⁹ By faith he made his home in the promised land like a stranger in a foreign country; he lived in tents, as did Isaac and Jacob, who were heirs with him of the same promise. ¹⁰ For he was looking forward to the city with foundations, whose architect and builder is God. ¹¹ By faith Abraham, even though he was past age—and Sarah herself was barren—was enabled to become a father because he considered him faithful who had made the promise. ¹² And so from this one man, and he as good as dead, came descendants as numerous as the stars in the sky and as countless as the sand on the seashore. ¹³ All 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. And they admitted that they were aliens and strangers on earth. ¹⁴ People who say such things show that they are looking for a country of their own. ¹⁵ If they had been thinking of the country they had left, they would have had opportunity to return. ¹⁶ Instead, they were longing for a better country—a heavenly one. Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God, for he has prepared a city for them.

Our lives are blessed with the confidence that comes through faith

- **As we listen to our Father's voice**
- **As we learn from the faith-filled lives of his believers**
- **As we look for the country that is already ours**

We went to an amusement park as part of our family vacation this summer. The kids were excited, but this was our first trip to such a place, so there was more than a little nervousness each time we came up to a ride. The boys especially wanted to get really close to the ride and see the track and see where it went and how many twists, turns, and loops that it had before they went on. They wanted to know what was ahead of them, what to expect, what lay in store, and not knowing made them nervous, even afraid to go on.

Often, we want to do the same with the twists and turns of life too. We want to know. We want to be able to see what's coming and it is somewhat scary to think about not knowing. So we do our best to look ahead at what might come, but it becomes very difficult when that view becomes obscured by uncertainty, by illness, by financial struggles, personal struggles, and the daily changes and challenges of life. What are we to do when we just can't see, when we just don't know? What are we to do when we can't see where we are going and fear settles in, makes us nervous, makes us scared, or worse? What are we to do when we might even be tempted to doubt God's presence and care?

In times of trouble and difficulty and doubt one wonderfully simple solution God gives to us is this: Listen to your Father's voice. The Word of the LORD creates and strengthens our faith so that we are sure of what God promises. We are certain of what we hope for as his children including even those things that we cannot see with our physical eyes but with the eyes of faith we believe. By faith, therefore, we follow, we move forward and move on in life confident of his

care and certain of the eternal treasures that he provides. This gift of faith gives us the blessings of confidence and peace as we live in the security of our Father's care.

To be clear our faith is *not some hunch-following, some blind leaping into the dark. Nor is it some hoping for the best, carelessly disregarding facts and just mindlessly assuming all will be well.*¹ No faith in our faithful LORD means being sure of what we hope for because our faith is in Him. One commentator said it this way, *faith brings the future into the present because it makes things hoped for as real as if we already had them. Christ's second coming in glory and our full enjoyment of eternal salvation are not only hoped for but are real to the believer.*² Yes, these gifts are placed into our hands by the eternal "I am" along with promises of his presence in our daily lives. Despite the daily uncertainties of life with joyful confidence and security we live by faith, right up to our final breath. ***Faith is being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see.*** Our faith is built and strengthened by the Father's voice, that is the Word of God.

At the park that day, as we walked up to each new challenge, I did my best to assure the kids that the ride would be safe. I told them that I would be right there with them. I would be watching, I pointed to the people coming off the ride and how they were fine, and safe, and even happy; and for the most part, my encouragement helped. The kids were reassured that everything would be fine, and even when they couldn't see the whole track they would step into the ride, trusting that everything would be alright.

Our heavenly Father speaks to us words of perfect promise that are absolutely unailing, that are 100% trustworthy. They are always true. And His promises reach through time and into eternity. The facts of the past confirm his love and care for his children in the present day and unto eternity. His Word is true, it is reliable, is credible and confirmed unlike anything else in all of history, and more than that the Spirit works through the Word to create faith that trusts in the promises of God. Therefore, *Though we have not seen the creation or the crucifixion, though we were not present to witness the Flood waters rising above the mountain peaks or the Savior rising triumphantly from the Easter tomb, though we have not heard his actual voice pardoning our sins and promising his return, yet we believe through the power of his Word.*³ The one who spoke and things came to be, he is still in control. The one who created all things out of that which was invisible can see all things and he knows what will be. Even though we doubt, and desert, and wander away from him, he does not forsake, or abandon, or forget about us. He who knew us before time began, promises to hold us close, to watch over us, to keep us safe, and even when danger or disaster comes near, he promises to remain near, to protect, forgive, and deliver us unto eternal life.

The book of Hebrews gives us this memorable refrain, this calming description of what faith is to help us on our way each day. ***Faith is being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see.*** Therefore, as life suddenly presents us with twists and turns and it shakes and jostles us, we are blessed by a faith that knows we are held safely in the arms of our Lord. Even when we can't see where life is taking us, even when it seems that life is taking you to the edge of this cliff and dropping you off, you can be certain that you are held firm in the snug embrace of your Father, your Creator, your Redeemer, and Savior. He holds you secure in his arms. Listen to your father's voice as he says to you, ***Never will I leave you, never will I forsake you.***⁴ Listen as his Word reassures you of his love and care. ***He will not let your foot slip. He***

¹ Lauersdorf, Richard E. The People's Bible: Hebrews, page 129

² Lauersdorf, Richard E. The People's Bible: Hebrews, page 129

³ Lauersdorf, Richard E. The People's Bible: Hebrews, page 129

⁴ Deuteronomy 31:6, Hebrews 13:5

does not slumber nor sleep.⁵ Underneath are his loving arms.⁶ If God is for me, who can be against me?⁷ Listen to your father's voice and know and believe that he has made your eternity sure and certain, and this faith in our Lord brings unparalleled peace and stability to our earthly lives as well.

We listen to our Father's voice. Who better to look and listen to when we have troubles, and doubts, and fears?

It was a slow day at the park, it had rained, it was the end of the summer and so the lines were extremely short. As we waited at the front of the line for the fastest ride there was only a few of us so the ride operator and I made conversation and explained to me and my daughter exactly what was to come and how fast we were going to go and everything, and even though he was throwing out some impressive numbers, there was also a calming effect. Now, imagine if not just the operator, but the architect, and the builder came up to you and explained the design of the ride and the safety features and assured you that everything will be alright. Wouldn't such words bring an irreplaceable calm and security and assurance to ease your fears and to prepare you for what was ahead? I think so.

And so here is God and look how he comes near with words of blessed assurance. Listen as he who is the trusted architect, the builder, of all things speaks to us over and over again with one of the most used phrases in the bible, **"Do not be afraid!"** Listen as he says to us in the gospel for today. ³² **"Do not be afraid, little flock, for your Father has been pleased to give you the kingdom."⁸** The good Lord assures us that the kingdom is ours by faith, given to us by our gracious God. The God who created all things also saw fit to build a way back to his side after mankind ruined his creation. In love he sent mankind out of the garden so that we would not live in sin forever. In his love he promised and sent his Son, who alone would mend that rift between God and man. Jesus has come just as promised and that kingdom of God has been established and brought near and given to us once again so that we may live with God now and forever. Our sins have been paid for in full. We are forgiven, saved, and set apart to be his own forever. And if God would love us so much that he would send his own son to live and die in this world of trouble and uncertainty in order to make our eternal life certain, we can be confident that he will graciously take care of all our other needs as well. What grace he shows to us, and this not because of anything we did, he did it simply because he is our good and gracious Father in heaven. What blessed words of assurance God gives to us to believe and to hold on to each and every day!

Those who initially received the book of Hebrews faced many difficulties in their daily lives. These Hebrew Christians would face persecution and difficulty both from their pagan neighbors and those from their own culture and heritage; family members would even accuse them of deserting the religion of their fathers. Life wouldn't be a constant joyride for them, instead it would often be difficult. They would daily be pressured to abandon their life as Christians, to turn around and never return. And so here the LORD reassures them and strengthens them in their faith in Jesus. The LORD would always be right there for them. He would give them his kingdom and the God who created all things also came to be their Savior and he would come again, just as promised, to bring them to the joys and peace of heaven. The LORD assured his children who were struggling under the weight of suffering and doubt, that a blessed country is coming, a new home. And though they would for a time live like foreigners and strangers in this world God would bring them to their home at his side, a peaceful and unified gathering of all those who

⁵ Psalm 121

⁶ Deuteronomy 33:27

⁷ Romans 8:31

⁸ Luke 12:32

believe. This was God's gift through faith. Believe in the Lord Jesus, for it is through Jesus alone that we are eternally blessed and saved. Faith in Jesus was their anchor sure in difficulty, in persecution, in times of trouble.

These believers facing the difficulties of life were given the wonderful assurance of their father's voice, and they were also pointed toward other believers who had faced the difficulties of life and had come through triumphant on the other side – and now dwelt at the Father's side. Hebrews chapter 11 includes a list, a hall of fame of sorts, of faithful believers who were called to and held firm in the faith and unto eternity. This list included Abraham. As we are blessed with fellow believers who have been upheld by God through life's troubles and who serve as an encouragement to us in our homes and congregations, Abraham continues to be an incredible source of encouragement for believers of every generation.

Abraham was asked by God to leave and go to an unknown land and even though he had to live for a time in tents waiting for his promised inheritance, yet Abraham trust that God would take care of him and give him that land as a rich inheritance for his descendants. Abraham was told by God that he would have a son and that son though he was long in coming, that son came just as promised. Abraham had to wait until he 100 years old, but God was always there to reassure him, to pull him close in times of doubt, and God would indeed deliver on that promise. By faith, Abraham believed in God and trusted in all his promises including those that he would not personally see fulfilled. God was steadfast in always keeping his promises and Abraham believed.

Abraham believed that God would be with him and deliver and provide for him and protect him, that he would forgive this ordinary sinner of his many sins and graciously bring him to an eternal city prepared for all of those who believe in the LORD. Abraham was given that gift of faith and God counted him among the righteous and as a result of that eternal perspective his daily life was blessed with confidence and trust in God that was evident for others to see. ***Faith is being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see.*** We have been given that same blessing of faith. May God strengthen us in this faith so that we are held firm and are even held up as a source of encouragement for others.

We don't always know what is coming. We are sometimes shaken by the unexpected. In our weakness we may express our doubt in God's power, we may act in a way that shows a lack of trust in God and his Word, we may become so anxious, so unsure, so pressured by a dark and unbelieving world that we may wonder if it is worth going on as Christian. But God is faithful. He is steadfast. He comes near to us and he speaks these needed words of assurance. He assures us of his love and faithfulness. By faith, we trust him as we listen to his voice.

Listen as he says to you. ***Do not be afraid, little flock, for your Father has been pleased to give you the kingdom.*** Listen to your Savior's voice and see how he demonstrates his faithful love in the lives of his believers over and over again. Look ahead with confidence as the LORD comes near and reminds us of a city, a place, a gathering of all his children who will rejoice forever in the fulfillment of his promises. These assurances, this faith, that God graciously grants to us through His precious word, keeps us safely held in the arms of God, no matter the twists, turns, doubts, or fears, that life tries to throw at us. What a blessing God gives to us through his gift of faith so that we may live each day in the confidence and peace that his promises bring. ***Now faith is being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see.*** Thanks be to God for his blessed gift of faith in Christ Jesus our Savior! Amen.