

August 11, 2019  
Pentecost 9/Proper 14  
Hebrews 11:1-2

<sup>1</sup> Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen. <sup>2</sup> For by it the people of old received their commendation. (ESV)

## **Saving Faith is an Informed Faith**

Have you ever stopped to consider that we exercise faith every single day? I'm not referring to religious faith but to everyday faith.

For example, I didn't observe any of you come into the sanctuary this morning and closely examine the pew before you chose to sit on it. You simply had faith that the pew would support you. You based your faith on the fact that it has supported you dozens or even hundreds of times before.

Let's talk about the medication you take. You go to the pharmacy with the prescription in hand, buy the pills, and go home. You take your first pill without much thought and go about your business. In doing so, you exercised faith. But was it a blind or irrational faith? Hardly! It was a reasonable and informed faith.

How so? Well, you've read the doctor's medical credentials on his office wall. Over time, you come to know him and you see that he demonstrates professional competence. So far, so good. When you go to the pharmacy, if you're like me, you ask the pharmacist a question: "Is this medicine commonly prescribed for, say, high blood pressure?" If the reply is yes, you now have even more confidence. So then, when you swallow your first pill, you have a great deal of data upon which to base your trust or confidence. Your faith is anything but blind.

So now, let's apply this to our text. It tells us that saving faith trusts in things that we haven't seen. It asks us to trust in what other eyewitnesses have seen and heard. Saving faith is not a leap into the dark unknown. It is a faith based upon historical facts.

Yes, our faith is founded on facts, i.e., ... in historical data. God did not confine himself to heaven and tell us to blindly trust in him. But this is what the Muslim or the Hindu is asked to believe. They are asked to believe in a god who has not revealed himself in human history.

But faith as the world uses it is not saving faith. For example, suppose a man is rushed to the ER. The family members gather and one says to the others, "We've just got to have faith." But faith in what? Or in whom?

Typically, he means that you must exercise a kind of blind faith that everything will end up all right. This kind of faith merely hopes that the family's combined "wish-power" will bring about a positive result.

We Christians, on the other hand, are asked to believe in historical facts. Yes, our faith is founded on facts. We are asked to believe ...

- that God's Son became a true man in the person of Jesus Christ,
- that God has revealed himself to humanity in the person of his Son,
- that for the three years of his public ministry, he performed miracles, answered the thorniest questions, and spoke about things only God could know, and
- that Jesus lived among us as a real human being for 33 years before his crucifixion, resurrection, and ascension.

He revealed God's plan to save sinners by the death of his Son. He even validated everything he taught by rising from the dead. All historians know his resurrection to be a fact of history.

It is not the historians who deny Christ's resurrection but the philosophers and theological liberals who are desperately committed to the belief that miracles are not possible. They assume this to be true despite the fact that over 500 eyewitnesses saw the resurrected Christ in the forty days between his resurrection and ascension. (See 1 Cor. 15:3-8).<sup>1</sup>

Moreover, Jesus revealed his teachings to his apostles. They, in turn, recorded them in the pages of the New Testament (NT). There are at least 5686 Greek manuscripts of the NT.<sup>2</sup> And these NT documents have been available for historians to scrutinize for nearly 2000 years. Their conclusion is that these documents are reliable sources of data regarding the life, ministry, death, resurrection, and teachings of Jesus.<sup>3</sup>

What, then, is saving faith? Saving faith does not merely accept the truthfulness of the events recorded in Holy Scripture. It, indeed, accepts them, but it goes one crucial and necessary step beyond. Saving faith trusts that Christ's sinless life and sin-atonement death, bring forgiveness of sins and salvation to your soul and mine.

If you believe that Christ alone has earned your salvation, then you possess saving faith. And so do I.

Let me say it again: Saving faith is an informed faith. Suppose, for example, that heaven and earth are on opposite sides of a deep, wide canyon. Suppose, furthermore, that at the bottom of the canyon is hell itself. Suppose, finally that the only way to cross over the canyon and get to heaven is by way of a mile-long tightrope stretched out over the canyon's jaws. There is no other way.

How many of you would have the confidence to walk across on your own? No one? What if somebody promises to get you safely across? Well that would depend, wouldn't it? Consider the following offers:

- Suppose the prophet Muhammad says to you, "I know Allah. And he has told me that if you take my hand, he will get us across." Any takers?

- Suppose that Hinduism’s chief god, Brahman, or Buddhism’s Dalai Lama offers to help you across. Would you trust in either of them? Anyone?
- Now suppose that the Lord Jesus promises to cradle you in his arms and carry you to the other side ... to heaven. Would you trust in him?

I would ... in a heartbeat! I would trust Jesus because he is God! If he can speak creation into being by his mere utterance; if he can calm a tempest by saying, **“Peace, be still”** (Mark 4:39); if he can cure the sick and raise the dead by commanding sickness and death to depart; and if he subjects all of his truth-claims to the test that he would rise from the dead on the third day ... and it actually came to pass, I would trust him implicitly!

What has Muhammad ever done for you? What has Brahman done for you, or the Dalai Lama? Nothing, nothing at all! Only Jesus has credentials worthy of your trust!

We trust in him alone for forgiveness and eternal life. We are certain that we will one day be in heaven because our Lord earned it for us. Moreover, since Jesus is God, who cannot lie, we trust his promises. To cite but one, Jesus says, **“Truly, truly, I say to you, whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life. He does not come into judgment, but has passed from death to life.”** (John 5:24).

So, we are certain of our eternal destiny. This is precisely what our text teaches, for it reads, “Now faith is being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see.”<sup>4</sup> Yes, our faith is certain because it rests on the rock-solid life, death, and promises of the Lord Jesus Christ ... all of which are validated by the empty tomb.

I’ve read somewhere that over 80 percent of Americans say they believe in God. I suspect that what they mean is that they believe in the existence of a “Supreme Being.” To believe this, however, is a far cry from having saving faith. In fact, Psalm 14:1 says, “The fool says in his heart, ‘There is no God.’” Faith that God exists is hardly saving faith. Even the demons believe this, and yet they tremble in fear.<sup>5</sup>

Post-Modern people think all religions are worthy of your trust. One man said, “Look, we all agree that there’s some good, big thing out there, but we’re not going to put a label on it. Let’s worship together.”<sup>6</sup> My friends, there is only one, true God in the universe. He is not amused when sinners try to lump him together with make-believe gods.

William Saroyan, the distinguished American author, was on his deathbed in May of 1981. He placed a phone call to the Associated Press. He reached a reporter whom he trusted and issued a final statement, which was not to be released until after his death. The reporter was stunned to hear him say, “Everybody has got to die. But I have always believed an exception would be made in my case. Now what?” And then he hung up the phone.<sup>7</sup>

It’s never changed. The death rate is always one per person. Thank God that we have come to know the true God through his Son. We know what we must believe to have saving faith. We believe, teach, and confess that we are poor, miserable sinners who trust in the enfleshed Son of

God who has paid for all our sins, reconciled us to God, and redeemed us from sin, death, and the devil, and was raised up again for our justification. (2 Cor. 5:18-21, Rom. 4:25, Gal. 4:4-5).

And to trust in Christ alone to get us to heaven is to possess saving faith. And it's comforting to know that, on the cross, our sins were imputed to Christ's account and his perfect righteousness to our accounts. Through faith in Christ alone, God pronounces us "not guilty" of our sins ... all of them.

And if God pronounces us "not guilty," we are not guilty indeed!  
In the saving name of Jesus: Ἀμήν.

**Soli Deo Gloria!**

## Endnotes

<sup>1</sup>In 1 Corinthians 15, St. Paul writes, "For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received: that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures, and that he appeared to Cephas, then to the twelve. Then he appeared to more than five hundred brothers at one time, most of whom are still alive, though some have fallen asleep. Then he appeared to James, then to all the apostles. Last of all, as to one untimely born, he appeared also to me. (1 Corinthians 15:3-8, ESV)

<sup>2</sup>See Josh McDowell, *The New Evidence that Demands a Verdict* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1999), p. 34.

<sup>3</sup>Check out, for example, <https://crossexamined.org/10-reasons-accept-resurrection-jesus-historical-fact/>, [https://www.issuesetcarchive.org/issues\\_site/resource/archives/maier4.htm](https://www.issuesetcarchive.org/issues_site/resource/archives/maier4.htm), [http://digitalcommons.liberty.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1105&context=lts\\_fac\\_pubs](http://digitalcommons.liberty.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1105&context=lts_fac_pubs), and <http://www.equip.org/articles/the-search-for-jesus-hoax>.

<sup>4</sup>See Hebrews 11:1-2.

<sup>5</sup>In James 2:19, we read, "You believe that God is one; you do well. Even the demons believe—and shudder!"

<sup>6</sup>Source: "Issues, etc." 10/06/2009.

<sup>7</sup>Adapted from Michael P. Green, ed., *Illustrations for Biblical Preaching* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1989), p. 98