

### Hebrews 11:1-3

“Being sure of the things we *hope* for” – that is wonderful sounding and a wonderful truth. “Being convinced of things we *do not see*” is wonderful truth also, but... it is a reality that sometimes maybe *doesn't sound* so appealing. In fact, it's a matter that sometimes downright gives us trouble. Doesn't it? “Being convinced of what we do not see” is, after all, diametrical opposite to the ever-so-popular ‘seeing is believing.’ We may feel a pull that. But *a need to see everything with our own eyes* does not line up with the description of “faith” that God gives us here.

“Faith is being sure about what we hope for, being *convinced about things we do not see.*”

How often are hearts troubled with doubts that rise up over things that we can't see, things that aren't revealed to us?

Let's go to the subject of creation as an example.

Dr. Doyle Holbird presented a paper on creation at the ELS Synod Convention this past summer. (I can give you the links if you want to see the paper or video.) The ELS is our sister church body. In the opening comments of his essay he quickly arrived at this conclusion: “...the theory of evolution (as an origin explanation of species and of our universe) is one of the great tools in the arsenal of satan...”

Can you see why this idea, popularized by Charles Darwin some 160 years ago, has remained such an appealing weapon in satan's arsenal for attacks on human souls? Think about it. We can see from all the way back at satan's first attack on humanity that he loves to stir doubts. And then from there, he tries to overturn faith. And human beings have shown often enough how much of a pull there is upon us to demand to see, in order to feel certainty about things we are told. So why wouldn't we expect satan to try to stir doubts at these precise points: things that are true, even though we can't see them?

How many a time has it happened that a Christian has heard evolution credited with how we – and everything else – got here, and had doubts stirred within by the ideas they've heard presented?

One of you this past week shared with me a very – I think – perceptive description of what's happening, when one of us as Christians feels doubts churning inside about God's truth. This is a case where “Your mind is the enemy *living within you.*” That's saying: your own mind, in such an instance, is attacking your faith.

Prof. Martin Sponholz (retired from Martin Luther College) describes this sort of thing happening: “The questioning mind of the scientist clinging to God's Word runs into real affliction of the mind and demands an answer from God.... ‘God, it is so difficult to demonstrate Your wondrous Creation and maintenance of it, at least the way You claim it was made and how it now is. Is it really that way at all? Show me!’ The afflicted soul demands an answer.” (Things to Wonderful for Me)

Such occurrences – when your mind acts as an enemy to your faith – aren't of course limited to the topic of creation. The examples of where this can come into play are broad. Prof. Sponholz brings this out citing Job. Job had the same kind of thing happen for him over the topic of God's handling of suffering.

But note this: God didn't answer Job's desire the Job asked – God did not try to explain the suffering he allowed in life.

So where did the Lord take Job, to direct him back on track, away from his doubts about the way our God operates or his demands for God to show him? Here, let me show you:

- The Lord said: “Where you there when I laid the foundations of the earth? ... Who marked off the dimensions? ... Who shut up the sea? ... I fixed limits for it” Job 38:4-11.
- And Job replied: 42:3 “Surely I spoke without understanding... and I repent.”

It was not the Lord answering Job's every desire to understand God's ways and know about the why of suffering that helped Job. Prof. Sponholz again, making this point, wrote: “It was a combination of knowing

God's wisdom together with God's love which gave Job, as it does every believer, the confidence and trust in His Lord to sustain him in the faith."

The same is true about "creation" questions that people ask. The Lord doesn't take us and show us what He did at creation. And the thing that brings and sustains faith is not that kind of approach. Rather, the thing that brings and sustains faith is the Lord bringing us His Word. For through His Word bring us to know His wisdom and His love for us.

Here in Heb.ch.11 we are taken to the same beginning as Job, the truth of creation, and from there onward into God's other truths that cannot be seen: truths like, how is one made right with God, and how does one have the assurance that he / she will have eternal life with God?

So follow through where God takes us here, starting at: the beginning. Think back to the very first words in the Bible. "In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth. ... God said, 'Let there be,' and there was... (light followed by everything else that we see filling the universe)" (Gen.1:1,3). And here Hebrews 11:3 says, "BY FAITH we understand that the universe was created by the word of God."

What a phrase: 3 awesome truths are unfolded. Look at 3 key truths from the forming of our universe 1) What? What happened, what was the cause, for everything we see? God created. That's who is responsible. 2) How was everything created? Simply by His Word. He commanded, and the universe – and everything in it – came into being. 3) We see God's knowledge compared to ours. Who was there? Not any human being. Only God was there to see creation. Adam and Eve were created by God after He already had called everything else into its existence and had put it all in place. And so we are left to this conclusion: we must take the Word of the One who was there. Faith is taking the Word of the Creator, about Creation.

That sets up a pattern that is reality about so many other truths: take the Word of God on all matters that are unseen to our limited human eyes and understanding.

*"Faith is being convinced of things we do not see."*

"Assurance of things" here in the Bible **even if** your experience at present leads you to feel differently. This demonstrates a trust that God is FAITHFUL and TRUE. And that is not the case because the evidence that we see always proves it to be so, but it is true just because He is God, and you can count on everything He says. "If God said it, then I should count on it, even though I cannot yet SEE IT, even though what I do see may seem to convey just the opposite. And this trust is based solely on the fact: I know that it is impossible for God to fail."

So we've looked at vs.1 and vs.3. But what is the thought right between them pointing us to? "...the ancient believers were commended in Scripture." For what? And why is this little thought inserted here? It's what the rest of the chapter will go on to show in greater detail. Here is a summary. They're an example for us. With their eyes, they saw only the visible things that lay in the present. But by faith, they saw the invisible things that lay in the future. By faith they saw things that were not visible as the realities God told them they were. They were convinced – about where they stood with God, about how they were at peace with Him through His saving truth, about the future eternity they had to look forward to in His presence.

Just to be clear, they were not commended for anything they did. What are we pointed to here? Their faith. They had only God's Word on so many matters, the greatest of which was the Promise of the Savior. And they had confidence, certainty, for they trusted His Word.

Paul writes encouraging us New Testament believers in Jesus "...we look NOT TO THE THINGS THAT ARE SEEN but to THE THINGS THAT ARE UNSEEN. For the THINGS THAT ARE SEEN are transient, but the THINGS THAT ARE UNSEEN are eternal. (2 Corinthians 4:18). And...1 Cor 2:9-10: "no eye has seen, no ear has heard, no mind has conceived, what God has prepared for those who love him; but God has revealed it to us by His Spirit."

Jesus says, "Blessed are those who have NOT SEEN and yet have believed." (John 20:29). It was a week after Easter when Jesus declared those words. He spoke this truth as He stood resurrected before His followers.

They saw the reality of Jesus alive after death. And that is proof that God records for us. But someone might say, "I wasn't there to see it, so how can I have confidence that Jesus' resurrection is true?" You hear the answer in Jesus' words as He stood there resurrected before His disciples, right? Jesus pointed to *not needing to see* for assurance. He, and His Word, are the source of the assurance. Here! (Holding up the Bible.) This is where Jesus points you to go, in order to be...

*Sure of things hoped for – certain of things not seen.*

We see "lowly bodies" as we look around our world (no offense to any of you, that's just the facts). That is what we presently have - bodies affected by aging, pain, disease. And eventually we see them die one after another. Our own bodily death will come too. We do not see the "transformation (that is to come) of our lowly bodies to be like Jesus' glorious body by the power that enables Him to subject all things to himself." (Phil. 3:21). But BY FAITH, we have the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen. How so? How do we know? God's Word.

We see our sin, and our captivity to sin. God has convicted us of it. We admit the guilt and punishment it deserves from our Holy God. All the while our physical eyes cannot see how Christ Jesus has "set us, captives, free." But BY FAITH, we have the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen. Think of this. We saw – heard – today already a promise: "I forgive you your sins in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit." We don't hear a voice breaking through from the throne room of heaven. We only see the promise coming from the mouth of a clay pot. But BY FAITH we have the assurance, "Your sins are forgiven in Jesus, for He took and suffered the punishment already in your place. And your God sees and remembers them no more. You're at peace with Him." How do you know? His Word says so. Along with Abraham you believe: the One who made this promise is faithful!

What we see is just plain water (indicating to baptisms here at BSLC) splashing upon and dripping off the skin. What we do not see is a union to Christ and along with that a death and burial and resurrection with Him.

We did not see our God make light shine out of darkness at the creation. And in similar fashion we do not see this same One taking up the work He alone can do – the making something out of nothing – making the light of the knowledge of God, trust in Jesus, shine in our hearts. But BY FAITH, we have the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen.

What we see is bread and wine as we stand before this altar and take a morsel to eat and a small drink. What we cannot see with physical eyes is the body of Christ, given for you. We do not see the blood of Christ shed for you. And how is this possible... And how are we sure that Jesus' body and blood are really present here? Our God's Word. That's it. That's all it takes. That's what brings the miraculous presence and gifts of forgiveness and life. And that's what has brought us to trust these very things to be true. BY FAITH we have the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen.

And so though... we see the creation coming apart, earthquakes and famines and floods. We see nation against nation and wars and rumors of war. And though we do not yet see life where there is no more sorrow nor war nor sin (Rev. 21:1; Is. 65:17). BY FAITH we have the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen.

Like Abel, like Enoch, like Noah, like Abraham, look forward to that better land, the heavenly one. For we eagerly await a Savior from there, our Lord Jesus Christ. With Joseph, with Moses, trust in the One who keeps His every promise – who uses suffering to serve His good plans He has prepared for us – who though kings of the earth stand against Him, He will see His every Word through. He will get His people to the Land He has promised us. By His grace and power, we will have it. Only stand firm. Don't let anything in all world move you from your faith in Jesus. For there are some who have wandered from this faith in Jesus. You, stand firm in it, for the One who has given it to you is the way, the truth & the Life.

As we walk forward, carry this lesson: Turn to the Word. If doubts arise, turn to the Word of God. Let God speak to your doubts. If someone else whom you know & care about has doubts, and you're wondering 'how can I help,' wield the Word. Let the Word of God loose, to work on human hearts. Like a lion, you don't need to defend it. Let it loose, and it will defend itself. Better put, God will defend Himself. It's His truth. Just speak it. Read it for yourself, to be built up and readied for the attacks satan will make on your faith. Turn to it when questioning arises, either from within you or from outside voices.

To Him who is able to keep you from falling and to present you before his glorious presence without fault and with great joy – to the only God our Savior be glory, majesty, power and authority, through Jesus Christ our Lord, before all ages, now and forevermore. Amen.