

Sermon Transcript

06.07.2026

Hebrews 11:1-3

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- Good morning. Please turn to Hebrews 11. We'll be in vss. 1-3 today.
- As we begin this morning, let's talk about the size of the universe.
- Anyone know the distance from the earth to the sun? About 93 million miles.
- To put that into perspective, imagine that the earth was the size of a standard classroom globe. About 16 inches.
- The moon would be a baseball about 40 feet away while the sun would be about the size of the leaning tower of Pisa more than 3 miles away, that's a pretty big ball of fire.
- Everyone's favorite is it or is it not a planet Pluto would be about the size of an orange around 120 miles away.
- Let's say Elon normalizes commercial space travel, but at the speeds of a standard airliner, it would take about 20 years to get to the sun, non-stop, not counting rest or refueling or anything.
- To get to Pluto, you're looking at about 650 years. In other words, if Columbus had boarded a plane in 1492 and set out for Pluto, he'd still be about 120 years away today.
- And that's just our solar system. The Milky Way has billions of stars and astronomers believe there are billions of galaxies.
- There are probably more stars in the various galaxies of the universe than grains of sand on every beach on Earth.
- And yet Psalm 147 says
 - *He determines the number of the stars; he gives to all of them their names.* (Psalm 147:4)
- As the Psalmist says elsewhere, the heavens declare the glory of God.
- And that's just the heavens. What about on the molecular level?
- A few drops of water contain more H₂O molecules than there are stars in the universe.
- And all of this exists by the word of God as we'll see this morning.
- And the reason I wanted to start with this is because the bigger our conception of creation, the greater our perception of the Creator.
- Two weeks ago my family was in Florida at the beach and my kids made a sandcastle. It was about 8 inches tall and about 4 feet square. A pretty standard sandcastle, but imagine walking along the beach and suddenly seeing a sculpture 50 feet tall and 100 feet wide. That's more than impressive. Whoever crafted that would be an instant celebrity.
- Well, that sense of awe should be the effect of thinking about the cosmic scope of creation, to awaken us to the scope of our Creator, not geographical or spatial scope, but conceptual.
- You see, the point of this passage isn't to answer our astronomical whims. The author isn't talking primarily about what can be perceived in a microscope or telescope, but rather what can be ascertained by faith.
- Last week we read those words "the righteous one will live by faith." So what is faith? What does it look like? What does it do? How does it work?
- And how does it deliver us from despair in the midst of suffering?
- Chapter 11 will dive down into the depths to answer those questions.

- So let's pray and then we'll dive in.
- Self, others, me.
- If you're at all familiar with Hebrews 11, you probably know it as the hall of faith chapter. As we'll see over the next few weeks, the author runs through a litany of OT examples of saints who were commended for their faith.
- But how does that fit into the context of Hebrews?
- Well, last week we saw that these Hebrew Christians are suffering. They're being persecuted. Some are being looted, others imprisoned.
- And in the face of that pressure is a temptation. The temptation to recant, to fall back, to drift back to the comfortable confines of Judaism, back to the seeming safety of the synagogue.
- So Hebrews is written to show that such safety is a shadow, a façade. It does so through the use of typology, which is the use of God-ordained analogies between the Old and New Testaments marked by correspondence and escalation.
- By correspondence, we mean similarity. Christ is like Moses in some ways, like Joshua in some ways, like Melchizedek in some ways, like the Aaronic high priest in some ways, like the tabernacle, like the promised land.
- So there is a genuine similarity between the covenants, but there is also dissimilarity, and in particular, escalation. In other words, Christ isn't merely a new Moses, but a better Moses. Not merely like the high priest, but a better high priest.
- All of those OT images, what are called types, were shadows. Christ is the anti-type, the substance, the one in whom all of those pictures have their ultimate and final fulfillment.
- And the rhetorical point that the author makes is that if Christ is better, then falling or drifting would be not only foolish, but futile and even fatal.
- And last week we saw the two choices, the two options, the two paths. The first option is to shrink back, to fall away, to drift. And behind that door one was destruction.
- The second option is to believe, to persevere by faith. And behind that door is life.
- As vs. 39 said
 - *But we are not of those who shrink back and are destroyed, but of those who have faith and preserve their souls.* (Hebrews 10:39)
- Notice the note of confidence. We are not of those who shrink back. That is, Christians are, by necessity, those who overcome, those who persevere. As 1 John 2 says, perseverance is a mark of genuine faith. Those who believe are those who continue, who are kept, preserved. What God begins, He completes.
- As we've said a number of times before, although Hebrews has some of the most distressing warning passages in all of Scripture, it also has the most comforting as the emphasis is on the Christians confidence. Beware of reading the warnings without the promises or the promises without the warnings. We need both.
- And the means by which we are preserved, the means by which we persevere is faith.
- But what is faith? And how does faith relate to suffering and persecution? What does faith look like in action? That's what chapter 11 will clarify. If 1 Corinthians 13 is the love chapter, so we might call Hebrews 11 the faith chapter. So let's begin in vs. 1.

Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen. (Hebrews 11:1)

- This is as close as we get to a biblical definition of faith.

- First, its the assurance of things hoped for.
- If you're reading the KJV, it might say that faith is the substance of things hoped for.
- The NIV says faith is the confidence.
- The CSB says faith is the reality.
- So depending on your translation, you might have assurance, substance, confidence, or reality. The word that's being translated there is hypostasis. You might not know that you know this word, but its where we get the theological term hypostatic as in the hypostatic union, the union of Christ's two natures, His deity and humanity. Originally, hypostasis meant, something which stands under or defines something, its nature or essence or substance.
- These various translations show both the objective and subjective dimensions of faith. Words like confidence and assurance show the more subjective side. They focus on our confidence and assurance, but how can we be confident and assured? Because of the objective nature of the substance or reality.
- We've talked before about how the biblical idea of hope isn't wishful thinking. It isn't merely subjective, but objective. Its grounded in a guarantee.
- In fact, Calvin referred to this assurance or substance as the pillar or support on which the godly lean. Or we could think about it as the foundation upon which we build.
- And the stronger the objective substance, the stronger the subjective assurance. That's the idea.
- If I'm playing a pick up basketball game and a former D-1 player is on my team, I'm feeling pretty good. But if we had Luka, I'd be even more confident. And if we had prime Jordan and Shaq and Curry, at my little HOA court against a bunch of high schoolers, I'm now guaranteeing a victory.
- You see my subjective confidence is grounded in the objective makeup of the team.
- Perhaps you recall Christ saying that even a mustard seed of faith is effective. Why is that? Because it is not the subject, but the object of the faith that determines its efficacy.
- If I encourage my kid to jump off a boulder into the water below and assure them that I'll catch them, the decisive factor isn't the strength of their faith, but the strength of their father.
- That's what the author is showcasing here. Faith is the ability to tap into that objective reality.
- A reality that is even more real than what can be seen. As he writes next. Its the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen.
- By faith, God's people, both then and now, lay hold of realities that are invisible and yet no less real.
- Later we'll read about the creation of the universe though we weren't there and didn't see it. And in subsequent weeks, we'll consider Abraham and Moses, being called to a land they haven't seen. And our own faith is founded upon a resurrected Lord that none of us have seen.
- Faith isn't anti-thetical to sight, but neither is it dependent on it. So the lack of visible, tangible, self-perception isn't an obstacle to faith, its an opportunity for faith to be exercised and strengthened.
- As Christ says to Thomas in John 20
 - *Jesus said to him, "Have you believed because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed."* (John 20:29)
- Again, this doesn't mean that faith is opposed to all evidence. That's not the author's point. Just as faith isn't irrational, but neither is it dependent on our conception of logic, so faith is neither dependent on nor antithetical to evidence.
- In fact, there are myriad evidences that help to supplement our faith. For example, I think the resurrection is the only realistic explanation of all of the various historical data. The idea that the disciples made it up and yet were willing to die for that lie or that the Romans simply forgot

to kill him all the way or that someone stole His body in the greatest prank of all time, all of those ideas are much less realistic than the resurrection. So faith isn't opposed to evidence, and yet our faith is never ultimately dependent on what we can fully verify. It goes beyond that, there is a deeper reality that it anchors to.

- Now, earlier I said that this is as close as we get to a holistic explicit biblical definition of faith. And yet, as close as it is, it isn't really comprehensive.
- As you know, the Bible isn't written as a textbook. So we need to be careful that we don't treat it as such. Each book of the Bible is situational; written to a particular people in a particular time and place and facing particular circumstances.
- And yet people tend to read the Bible as if its an encyclopedia. They read God is love and think, that's all He is. Or worse yet, they reverse the subject and object and say that love is God.
- When I say that this isn't a comprehensive definition of faith, here's what I mean. How do we know that what we hope for is assured? How do we know that what we don't see is really real?
- I've never seen Bigfoot or Nessy, our underwater ally. Each time I go S. Dakota, I hope to see Bigfoot because I hear that's prime Bigfoot country. And if faith is the assurance of things hoped for and the conviction of things unseen, does that mean that if I just hope really hard, they must exist. Kinda like a form of the ontological argument?
- Of course not. As mentioned earlier, what matters with faith isn't the subject who believes, but the object of what is believed. A busload of faith in the wrong thing is worthless. It doesn't matter how sincere your Muslim or Mormon or Hindu neighbor may be if they are sincerely wrong. What matters isn't the sincerity or size of the faith, but the content.
- That's the problem with a lot of new age teaching or so-called prosperity gospel. It turns faith into a magical contract whereby we become omnipotent and our faith gets the credit. It turns faith into the active agent whereas faith is always passive. Faith is always a receiving posture. Faith isn't a power, it is the means by which we are united to that power.
- That's why its technically not correct to say that we are saved by faith. The proper equation is that we are saved by grace through faith. Those prepositions are important. It isn't faith that saves us, its God. And God saves us through the means of faith, which is itself a gift of grace.
- But again, what matters isn't who believes, but what is believed. The object or content of faith.
- So what is the proper content? We'll see it a bit in verse 3. The word of God. And later in the chapter, we'll see an emphasis on the promises of God.
- If we were going to give a holistic definition of saving faith, we would emphasize certain objective truths to be believed. Truths like the deity and crucifixion and resurrection of Christ.
- But notice that this isn't the author's point here. In the context, the purpose is to remind the readers of what they need to persevere in the midst of persecution. They probably aren't tempted to deny the resurrection so much as to simply deny God's providence and provision. They need to be reminded of the faithfulness of God, the trustworthiness of His promises. As suffering & affliction is threatening their faith, they need to remember God's fidelity to His word.
- That's what chapter 11 is aimed to do.
- Faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen. So think about what these Hebrew Christians hoped for and what they couldn't see.
- As they're being thrown in prison, as their homes and belongings are being plundered, as they're being persecuted, where was God? What was God doing? When and how would He intervene? Would they persevere? That's what they couldn't see.
- And in the midst of your own suffering, what do you hope for? What do you not see?
- I would imagine, its many of those same things because affliction has a way of making us a bit myopic, near sighted. Of clouding our vision.

- Satan’s schemes are a bit like sleight of hand, they distract you from the real miracle that God is doing, by focusing all of your attention on the pain or fear or whatever.
- But faith is the ability to see beyond sight, to see beyond the circumstance, to see past the distraction. To know that your sight doesn’t define reality, God’s word does.
- Faith is the ability to see the past. To remember the historical evidences of God’s faithfulness.
- And faith is able to see the present. To see that whatever ails is a light and momentary affliction in the grand scale of eternity.
- And faith sees the future. It sees the day where there are no tears, no suffering, no pain or death. When all that is sad will be untrue.
- Faith is the ability to see backward, forward, upward, and outward despite the trials and tribulations.
- But what should we make of the fact that the author speaks of assurance and conviction?
- Perhaps you’re sitting here this morning and you don’t feel assurance. You lack conviction. In fact, you have a lot of doubts and questions so thus far, this passage has made you less encouraged rather than more.
- Perhaps you’ve heard before that courage isn’t the absence of fear, it’s the willingness to act in spite of it. As RC Sproul writes:
 - “Cowardliness is not the mere presence of fear but the refusal to act because of that fear. In fact, to be courageous requires us first to be afraid. It is no mark of courage to do what we are not afraid to do. Courage means doing what we know we need to do even when we are filled with fear.” (R.C. Sproul)
- Well, likewise, faith isn’t the absence of all doubts, it’s the willingness to keep moving forward in spite of those doubts.
- As the father in Mark 9 cries out, I believe, help my unbelief.
- That’s all of us. That’s the universal Christian experience. Some of our doubts might rise to the level of an existential crisis, but no one is perfectly free of questions and concerns.
- I’ve mentioned before that if you find yourself not wanting to obey, but wanting to want to obey or wanting to want to want to obey or wanting to want to want to want to obey, then that right there is enough of a spark to light your soul with hope because if nothing good dwells in your flesh, then that little sparkle of good has to be from God and that means God is working.
- That’s why a mustard seed of faith can move mountains. Because that mustard seed grows. Maybe you don’t know what to believe about Noah’s ark or the Nephilim or Jonah and the fish, but if you truly believe that Christ is risen from the dead and that Christ’s word is true, then eventually that faith will permeate and propagate. You just have to keep feeding it, not neglecting to meet together, not allowing the doubt to tempt you to despair, but to hold fast and draw near.
- We’ll come back to this in a bit. For now, let’s look at vs. 2.

For by it the people of old received their commendation. (Hebrews 11:2)

- Back in chapter 6 we read this
 - *And we desire each one of you to show the same earnestness to have the full assurance of hope until the end, so that you may not be sluggish, but imitators of those who through faith and patience inherit the promises. (Hebrews 6:11-12)*
- Who are those who inherit the promises? We’ll see a list of examples in chapter 11 of men and women who exercised faith.

- And by faith, they received their commendation as we'll read about. For example in vs. 4, Abel was commended as righteous. As it is in English, the word commended there is related to commendation in vs. 2. And in vs. 5, Enoch was commended as having pleased God.
- But we know from vs. 6 that without faith its impossible to please God.
- So faith is the means by which we are commended or approved or justified, declared righteous.
- Now, in our Protestant tradition, this isn't all that revolutionary, but in the first century, this would have been just as radical as the Reformation was to 16th century Catholicism.
- Within 2nd Temple Judaism, God's approval wasn't merely limited to faith, but to a whole host of virtues such as faithfulness, obedience, zeal, mercy, and moral innocence. In other words, Judaism was infected with legalism. Yes, faith was essential for a first-century Jew, but faith wasn't enough. Faith was a necessary, but insufficient cause of justification. In addition to faith, you also had to have circumcision and food laws and the traditions of the elders and so forth.
- That's why Paul was so fiercely accused of antinomianism, of rejecting the law. Because of his emphasis on the centrality and sufficiency of faith alone.
- And this was the same impulse that fueled the Protestant reformation as well. One of the solas of the Reformation is sola fides, faith alone. Faith and faith alone is the means by which we are commended, accepted, approved, justified before God.
- And though the new covenant clarifies that relationship, this isn't actually a new covenant innovation. Notice, that the people of old received their commendation the same way we do, that is by faith.
- It isn't that before Christ, people were justified by works of the law and now they are justified by faith. It has always been by faith. As Paul writes multiple times, the foundation of justification is that Abraham believed God and it was counted to him as righteousness. It has always and will always be by faith alone.
- The difference between us and the OT saints has to do with the clarity and content of faith, but not the fact of faith itself. Abraham and Moses and David and all of the other saints of the OT were saved by faith and faith alone. Now, that faith was progressively revealed because of the nature of progressive revelation. Daniel saw more than David who saw more than Moses who saw more than Abraham, but each of them was commended for faith in whatever God had spoken to that point.
- As Peter writes in his first epistle
 - *Concerning this salvation, the prophets who prophesied about the grace that was to be yours searched and inquired carefully, inquiring what person or time the Spirit of Christ in them was indicating when he predicted the sufferings of Christ and the subsequent glories. (1 Peter 1:10–11)*
- Or as Jesus says in Matthew 13:17
 - *For truly, I say to you, many prophets and righteous people longed to see what you see, and did not see it, and to hear what you hear, and did not hear it. (Matthew 13:17)*
- Think back to that imagery of shadow and substance. The OT saints were saved by faith in God's deliverance and God's deliverer, but their faith was like looking at a shadow or silhouette, whereas we have a color portrait this side of the resurrection.
- Both of us are saved by faith in Christ, but our post-resurrection understanding of Christ is simply more well developed.
- Now, earlier, I mentioned the importance of prepositions, how its important to clarify that we are saved by grace and not by faith.
- As Ephesians 2:8 says
 - *For by grace you have been saved through faith... (Ephesians 2:8)*

- And yet, notice the preposition used here in vs. 2. By it. What is the it? Faith. So here the author says that we are commended by faith, approved by faith.
- That's why if we are speaking about the particular work of justification, of being declared righteous by God, we can speak of justification by faith alone whereas when we are talking more holistically about the entirety of salvation, we say that we are saved by grace through faith.
- That might sound pedantic to you, but the point is to recognize that faith isn't what actually saves us. Faith is the instrument which God uses to save us.
- As John Murray notes:
 - "Faith is not the basis of our justification; faith is the instrument by which we receive justification." (John Murray)
- Or as Herman Bavinck says:
 - "Faith justifies only because it lays hold of Christ." (Herman Bavinck)
- And this use of the preposition "by" will lay the groundwork for nearly 20 uses of the phrase "by faith" in chapter 11. We'll see it in vss. 3, 4, 5, 7, 8, 9, 11, 17, 20, 21, 22, 23, 24, 27, 28, 29, 30, 31.
- This is what is called an anaphora, which is a rhetorical device in which a word or phrase is repeated at the beginning of successive sentences to create a rhythm, build intensity, and make it more memorable.
- Think about how a good song might repeat the same phrase over and over. Or, for a particularly well-known example of that, consider MLK's I have a dream speech in which the phrases I have a dream and let freedom ring are both repeated a number of times for emphasis. Or Churchill's June 4, 1940 speech where he says we shall fight something like 7 times in one paragraph: we shall fight on the seas and oceans, we shall fight on the beaches, we shall fight in the fields and in the streets, we shall fight in the hills, and so forth.
- I read that speech this week and I was ready to fight. That's what anaphora does. The repetition of a certain phrase can have powerful rhetorical force and that's the way this phrase by faith functions here in Hebrews.
- Lest we want to add in our works or lest we want to draw near by some other door other than faith in Christ, the author says the phrase by faith over and over and over again until we actually begin to believe it.
- And what's the rhetorical point in the context of Hebrews? Well, each of these saints overcame tribulation and affliction by means of faith. Each of them received God's promises by means of faith. And so if we want to persevere and overcome in the midst of adversity, then so must we.
- The repetition of the phrase by faith makes that abundantly clear as he begins in vs. 3 by writing.

By faith we understand that the universe was created by the word of God, so that what is seen was not made out of things that are visible. (Hebrews 11:3)

- Let's talk about pronouns. Not in the expressive individualism sense, in which everyone gets their own pronouns, but in the grammatical sense that you learned in third grade.
- For those who may not recall their pronouns, we have first, second and third person. First person singular is I. Plural is we. Second person singular is you. Plural in Texas is y'all, in Jersey it might be yuse. Third person singular is he or she. Plural is they.
- Notice the subtle shift from third person to first person.
- So vs. 2 spoke of the people of old, that's speaking in the third person, but then in vs. 3, it shifts to first person plural. We understand.
- We've seen that change a number of times in Hebrews.

- For instance, remember back in chapter 10 vss. 26-31, the author uses third person in talking about those who fall away. Then in vss. 32-36 he shifts to second person and addresses the audience directly in saying you have need of endurance, remember how you endured.
- And then in vs. 39 he shifted to first-person
 - *But we are not of those who shrink back and are destroyed, but of those who have faith and preserve their souls.* (Hebrews 10:39)
- That shift to the first person serves a couple of purposes. First, it links the readers to the people of old. As the book has consistently done, it establishes an analogy between the first century readers and OT Israel. There is an analogy there, a relationship. In some sense, they are all part of the same family of faith, the same people of God. There is a sense in which Israel was the OT church and the church is the NT Israel. So the shift to first person establishes that connection.
- Second, it links the readers to the author. The author, who is most likely either an apostle or at least an associate of an apostle, is in the same boat, of the same people. They are a collective we or us. If you were sitting with the apostle Paul and he said, those who believe will be saved, that's hits a bit difference than him looking you in the eyes and saying we will be saved.
- So that grammatical shift helps encourage the readers to remain steadfast and to identify with the people of God throughout redemptive history. Again, salvation has always been by grace alone through faith alone. That hasn't changed, all that has changed is the clarity and exact content of that faith.
- This will be particularly important with this litany of saints that were commended by faith that will mark this chapter. So WE are approved by the same means as they were.
- Now, as we move through Hebrews 11, we'll notice that there is a chronological movement. The author starts with Abel and then mentions Enoch, then Noah, then Abraham, then Isaac, then Jacob, then Joseph, then Moses, followed by Rahab then the judges, then David.
- That isn't a haphazard order, he's following the timeline of redemptive history. That's the order in which those characters appear in the OT.
- He starts with Abel, who appears in Genesis 4 but what if we back up even before that. What if we back up to the very beginning.
- What's the very first verse in the Bible?
 - *In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth.* (Genesis 1:1)
- But how do we know that? Not by science. BTW, no theory about the beginning of the world can be ascertained by science. The Big Bang theory or evolution or whatever other theory isn't based purely on science since it isn't strictly measurable and replicable.
- At the end of the day, whatever theory you have about the origin of the world is by faith. Nobody was there with a video camera. Nobody can recreate it in a petri dish. Science can investigate the present and makes inferences about the past, but every theory ultimately rests on assumptions that can't themselves be established by scientific experiment. The question isn't whether we will approach the origin of the universe by faith or science, but rather which foundational beliefs best explain the evidence we have.
- And as Christians, we believe that God's word is trustworthy, and He says that He created the universe by means of His word or here it says that we understand that the universe was created by the word of God.
- That word understand often refers to something that can only be grasped independently of the senses.
- This is why traditionally the work of theology has been described as faith seeking understanding.
- Or as Augustine says,

- “For understanding is the reward of faith. Therefore do not seek to understand in order to believe, but believe that thou mayest understand.” (Augustine)
- Or in the words of Anselm of Canterbury,
 - “The believer does not seek to understand, that he may believe, but he believes that he may understand: for unless he believed he would not understand.” (Anselm of Canterbury)
- Notice the order between the two. Faith is first then understanding. As mentioned earlier, faith isn’t opposed to reason, but neither is it dependent on it. That’s why Paul writes in 1 Corinthians 2 that
 - *The natural person does not accept the things of the Spirit of God, for they are folly to him, and he is not able to understand them because they are spiritually discerned.* (1 Corinthians 2:14)
- Think back to Israel at the Red Sea. God didn’t say, I’m going to part the sea and then drown the Egyptians. Imagine if the Israelites would have said, hang on, before we step foot in the mud, tell us everything that’s gonna happen. Lay it all out. That’s not what happened. Faith came first. They had to wade into the water before they understood God’s plan.
- And the disciples in following Christ, they had to learn to trust Jesus long before they understood His death and resurrection.
- I mention that because there are always people who want to reverse that order. Who want to say, I’ll believe once I understand. Once I figure out all of my peripheral questions, once I reconcile every perceived inconsistency. Once I get all my intellectual ducks in a row, then and only then will I commit my life to Christ.
- The problem with that is that you can’t understand until you believe.
- Imagine someone saying, I won’t go into the water until I know how to swim. Well, you kinda gotta get in the water to learn how to swim. Or I won’t get married, until I perfectly understand my fiancé. Or I won’t speak a foreign language until I’m fluent.
- Some things can only be understood from the inside. And that’s how faith and understanding function. The Bible isn’t opposed to the intellect, it isn’t opposed to understanding. But it gives primacy to faith. Faith is the doorway that we must enter into order to comprehend. We believe so that we may understand.
- So backing all the way up to the beginning of Genesis, we believe that the universe was created by the word of God.
- Now, there is something interesting that the author does here. That word universe appears all the way back in chapter 1 where it was translated as world. Look at 1:2
 - *but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed the heir of all things, through whom also he created the world.* (Hebrews 1:2)
- So there you have the eternal Son, Jesus Christ, the second person of the trinity, speaking the world into existence.
- Then here in chapter 11, we see that the universe, same word as is translated world in chapter 1, was created by the word of God.
- This is another subtle clue to the author’s view of the deity of Christ. If the world was created by the word of God and the word of the Son, that implies that the Son is God.
- John makes that even more explicit in the first chapter of his gospel:
 - *In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things were made through him, and without him was not any thing made that was made.* (John 1:1–3)

- So the universe was made by the word of God. That isn't something we can measure. It isn't something we can replicate. It isn't something we can recreate in a laboratory. So how do we understand it? By faith.
- Again, there are compelling scientific and logical and historical evidences that would support and supplement that faith, but science is never a substitute for faith.
- And then he writes, so that what is seen is not made out of things that are visible. Think back to how that connects to the idea that faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things unseen.
- Whether the author specifically intended this or not, this has been one of the traditional evidences for the idea of creation ex nihilo, which means creation out of nothing.
- God didn't use some sort of pre-existent, primordial substance in order to create the world, before creation, there was no pre-existent primordial substance. In most pagan mythology, this is not the way that the world was formed. The world was formed out of some existing substance, some primordial ooze, or creation is an overflow of God Himself like in pantheism.
- But in Christianity, all that exists is either Creator or Creation and there is a hard and fast line between the two. The creator has always existed. The creator has aseity, that is He is self-existent. But creation is dependent and had a distinct beginning.
- God made what is visible not only out of what is invisible, but indeed out of what didn't exist.
- Now, why is that important? Well, because it highlights just how powerful and incredible the Creator actually is. Its certainly impressive to turn a slab of marble into the statue of David or the Pieta, but it is utterly impossible to do so with no preexisting materials unless you're a sovereign being. And that's something that Scripture emphasizes, not just God's ability to do what is impressive, but what is otherwise impossible.
- Parting the Red Sea, making manna from heaven, water from a rock, a floating axe head, giving sight to the blind, raising the dead, forgiving sins, these aren't mere magic tricks, they're insights into the sovereignty of the king. Reminders that nothing is impossible with God.
- Second, this doctrine of creation ex nihilo, out of nothing, maintains the fundamental distinction between Creator and creation that we mentioned before. We aren't God, we aren't a part of God, we're created, creatures, dependent and finite and temporal.
- Third, it serves as an analogy for our own salvation experience in which God creates life in our dead hearts in the same way that He created light in the darkness.
- As 2 Corinthians 4:6 says
 - *For God, who said, "Let light shine out of darkness," has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ. (2 Corinthians 4:6)*
- In other words, God didn't take your preexisting, but imperfect faith and virtue and merely arrange them into something pleasing, He took you out of death and out of darkness.
- As Romans 4 says, God "gives life to the dead and calls into existence the things that do not exist."
- Why is that important to understand? Because if we think we contribute something to our salvation, some preexisting will or effort or faith or work or whatever, if we think we contribute anything to our salvation other than the sin that made it necessary, then we rob God of glory and undermine the divine equation in which salvation is by grace alone through faith alone.
- As Paul writes in Ephesians 2
 - *For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast. (Ephesians 2:8-9)*
- Why were you saved by grace through faith? So that you may not boast. Not even a little. Not even a smidge, or iota or molecule.

- Pelagians boast a lot, Arminians boast a little, but in the doctrines of grace, we find no room for boasting. God and God alone gets all the glory, all the credit.
- Now, what in the world does all of this have to do with Hebrews?
- Why does the author talk about creation ex nihilo? Well, because I can think of nothing more hopeless than nothing itself. What are the chances that light or life spontaneously erupts out of nothing?
- There is no chance of light spontaneously shining in the darkness or life spontaneously rising from death. And yet, what is impossible for creation is possible for the Creator.
- Not only is it possible, or probable, but certain. What are the chances that light or life doesn't exist when God speaks it into existence?
- You see, what is ultimate, what is decisive isn't the circumstance, it's the sovereign word of the Lord. Darkness and death don't determine destiny, God does.
- Or, take the resurrection of Jesus. What are the chances that a crucified body would spontaneously rise from the dead after 3 days, escape from a sealed tomb, and appear to hundreds of witnesses in a perfectly healed body over the span of about a month?
- Well, zero. And yet, it happened. Now, obviously not spontaneously, but still.
- My point is that these Hebrews are probably feeling hopeless - persecuted, arrested, plundered, afflicted, suffering. They felt surrounded by darkness, maybe even death.
- And yet, the doctrines of creation and resurrection reveal why darkness and death are never ultimate, and thus why Christianity is inherently optimistic.
- If God can speak light into darkness and life into death, then what possible circumstance are you facing that is beyond His sovereignty? A wayward child, a broken marriage, financial ruin, a terminal diagnosis?
- Don't move on too quickly from that question. What possible affliction, what distress, what condition is beyond providence?
- Is God's arm too short to save your child, your parent, your marriage, your job, your reputation? Are His promises too shallow to comfort and encourage?
- Yes, you don't now see what He's doing. But neither did the disciples while Christ was in the tomb. Neither did Noah while the ark was being prepared. Neither did Abraham when he was asked to sacrifice Isaac. Neither did Moses when he was asked to go tell the most powerful person on the planet to let all his slaves go free.
- And yet faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen.
- Faith isn't the absence of doubt, but a trust in God and continued clinging to Christ in the midst of it.
- So whatever your circumstance, whatever your suffering, whatever your affliction, remember this.
- Christ is better. Christ is sovereign. Christ is worthy of your trust and worship.
- Let's pray.

Communion

- Fence table
- As we prepare to partake of communion, I want to remind you what this meal is. The Reformers talk about communion as a means by which our faith is supplemented and strengthened.
- Like the father in Mark, we all cry out I believe, help my unbelief in part.
- And one of the ways that God helps our unbelief is by means of the Lord's table.

- So as we prepare our hearts to partake, I want to just give you a second to pray. Thank the Lord for this means of grace. Believe that it is made effective by the Spirit and faith. Confess any sins that come to mind and then we'll partake together.
- I want to read the words of institution from Mark's gospel today. Follow my lead as we do.
- *And as they were eating, he took bread, and after blessing it broke it and gave it to them, and said, "Take; this is my body." And he took a cup, and when he had given thanks he gave it to them, and they all drank of it. And he said to them, "This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many. Truly, I say to you, I will not drink again of the fruit of the vine until that day when I drink it new in the kingdom of God."* (Mark 14:22–25)