

Saved: God's Plan of Salvation

Week 3: Faith in Jesus Christ -- John 3:16–18; Hebrews 11:1–6

A man comes to Jesus by night. He is a respected teacher, careful and cautious, and he keeps to the shadows because he is not yet ready to be seen. Into that midnight conversation Jesus speaks the most famous sentence in the world: “For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life.” We have heard it so often that it can slide past us like background music. But stop and hear it as Nicodemus heard it, for the first time, in the dark. God loved. God gave. And the whole weight of eternity now turns on a single word: believe.

Everything depends on what that word means. For some, to believe is simply to agree that certain facts are true, the way we believe that water is wet or that history happened. But the faith Jesus calls for is not a tip of the hat to a fact. The word He uses means to entrust yourself, to lean your whole weight on Him, to step off the ledge and rest in His arms. It is the difference between believing a chair will hold you and actually sitting down in it. James reminds us that even the demons believe God exists, and they shudder. That is not the faith that saves.

The book of Hebrews shows us what living faith looks like once it leaves the realm of the head and enters the realm of the feet. “By faith Abel offered.” “By faith Noah constructed.” “By faith Abraham obeyed and went out.” In Hebrews 11, faith is never merely a thought held quietly in the mind. It is a life leaning forward into the promises of God, a conviction so real that it builds an ark, leaves a homeland, and lays a son on an altar. “Without faith it is impossible to please him,” the writer says, and the faith he means is the kind you can watch a person live.

So this week we ask the most personal question in all of religion: do you believe in Jesus? Not, do you agree that He existed. Not, do you approve of His teaching. But have you entrusted yourself to Him, leaned your whole weight on Him, and begun to live as though His promises are true? This is the faith that lays hold of eternal life, the faith that will express itself in repentance, confession, and baptism in the weeks to come. Read these verses slowly, and let them search you.

Group Discussion: John 3:16 promises eternal life to “whoever believes” in Jesus. In everyday conversation people use the word “believe” in many ways, from “I believe it might rain” to “I believe in you.” What do you think most people mean when they say they “believe in Jesus,” and how might that differ from the kind of believing Jesus is actually calling for?

Personal Reflection: Be honest with yourself about your own faith. Is it mostly a set of things you agree are true, or is it a daily, trusting reliance on Jesus with the real weight of your life? Where is the gap between what you say you believe and how you actually live, and what would it look like to close it this week?

Read John 3:16–18; Hebrews 11:1–6

Study Questions

1. In John 3:16 Jesus promises eternal life to “whoever believes in him.” Looking at the way Jesus speaks of believing here and throughout John’s Gospel, what does it mean to “believe in” Him, and why is this far more than simply agreeing that He existed or that His teaching is good?
2. There is often a gap between the faith we profess and the trust we actually live by. In what specific area of your life are you still carrying the weight yourself rather than entrusting it to Jesus? What would it look like to actually lean your whole weight on Him there?
3. Jesus says the one who believes “is not condemned, but whoever does not believe is condemned already” (v. 18). Why does Jesus speak of condemnation as a present reality and not only a future verdict, and what does this teach us about why faith in the Son is so urgent?
4. Many believers live under a low, nagging sense of condemnation even after coming to Christ. Where do you most often feel that weight, and how does the promise that the one who believes “is not condemned” speak directly into that place in your heart?
5. Hebrews 11:1 describes faith as “the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen.” How does this definition reshape our common idea of faith as a blind leap or wishful thinking, and what is faith actually anchored to according to this verse?
6. We are surrounded by a culture that says “seeing is believing.” Where in your life right now are you tempted to live only by what you can see, measure, and control, rather than by trust in the unseen God and His promises? What would walking by faith look like there?
7. Hebrews 11 never simply says these people believed; it says “by faith Abel offered,” “by faith Noah constructed,” “by faith Abraham obeyed.” What do these examples teach us about the relationship between genuine faith and action, and why is a faith that produces nothing not the faith the Bible commends?
8. If faith always expresses itself in action, then there is probably some step of obedience God is calling you toward that you have not yet taken. What is it? What is the “ark” He is asking you to build, or the place He is asking you to go, that will require you to act before you can see?
9. Scripture says even the demons believe that God exists and shudder (James 2:19), yet they are not saved, while Hebrews says “without faith it is impossible to please him” (11:6). Putting these together, how would you describe the difference between a dead faith that merely agrees and a living, saving faith? And how does that living faith naturally lead a person to repent, confess Jesus as Lord, and be baptized into Him, rather than stopping at belief alone?
10. Look back across both passages, the love of God who gave His Son and the long line of people who lived by faith. Name one specific way Jesus is calling you to move from believing about Him to truly trusting in Him this week. What is the next concrete step your faith is asking you to take?

Now or Later

Reflect on these passages: James 2:14–26, faith without works is dead; John 8:30–32, believing that abides in His word; Galatians 3:26–27, sons of God through faith, having been baptized into Christ; Hebrews 11:7–10, the obedient faith of Noah and Abraham; Mark 9:23–24, the honest cry, “I believe; help my unbelief.”