

Before we get started, let me say this. I have loved preaching through this book, Hebrews. And so much of what's in this book has been so transforming to me. But I set of preaching through this book so I could preach, specifically, Hebrews 11 and 12, which have been for me two of the most shaping chapters of Scripture in my own heart. And I can't tell you how excited I am that here we are, after sixteen weeks, finally at chapter 11. And so, I'm excited to dive into it tonight. And so, if you have your Bibles, turn to Ephesians chapter 2, because that's where we'll start in order to understand Hebrews 11. And so, you'll understand momentarily.

Let's pray, and then we'll go. "Father, I thank You for tonight, and I just pray right now that You would stir the hearts of Your people towards You. And I think this will make more sense in a minute, but I pray for discontentment, a great deal of discontentment in the hearts and lives of these men and women. And I pray that because I really think it's the foundational element of faith. So, help us. It's for Your beautiful name I pray. Amen."

Ephesians chapter 2, starting in verse 8, "For by grace you have been saved..." Now, you had better get that, because I have done nothing for sixteen weeks except teach it. And so, if you don't get this right here, you had better be a guest with us tonight, because we have done nothing for fifteen weeks but talk about the death of the tabernacle and the birth of the new covenant where Christ pays the bill. Which means your good works and your efforts and your church attendance and you cleaning up your mouth and you lying and saying you don't like the taste of beer does not give you right standing with God. It does not give you right standing with God. The cross of Christ alone gives you right standing with God. There is nothing you've done. There is no merit that you have. You have nothing of value, nothing you can bring to God, nothing that you could lay at His altar and He would go, "Oh, I didn't have one of those. Thank you," and put up behind Him. You have nothing. Christ has everything and imparts it to you. We just sang about it. "...by grace you have been saved..." But it doesn't stop there, alright. So let's keep reading, "For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God;..." So, by grace you have been saved through the faith to believe in that grace, but even the faith to believe in that grace was given to you by God.

This is why 1 Corinthians 4 says this, "Why do you act like you have something that you have not received or that you have received?" He's kind of saying this, "Why are you pretending like you've done this? Why are you pretending like you haven't received this? Why are you pretending like you did this? For by grace you have been saved through faith, and even the faith given to you to believe was given to you by God so that no one would be able to boast." I mean, this is yet another attack on the arrogant style of Christianity that would say, "Look at me." God's going, "Nah, you're not attractive. For the record, you are not attractive. I am immensely attractive." "I" being God not me, okay. "I am infinitely beautiful; you are not attractive. The more you point to you, the more you point away from me and dirty up this thing. You've been saved by my grace, through the faith I gave you to believe on that grace, not by your pettily little works that are really cute, lest you should start boasting in you."

And then, this part doesn't have a lot to do with where we're going tonight, but it's one of my favorite little bits in the Scriptures. Look in verse 10, "For we are His workmanship..." Do you know that that in the Greek is the same Greek word for "poetry?" It just said that we are God's poetry. You know why I love that so much? Poetry is never birthed out of nothing. It's always birthed out of emotion. Poetry is always birthed out of a great deal of pain, sorrow or joy. What ends up happening is you experience a joy or a sorrow that transcends language. And so, you write poetry or you write music

or you go see a romantic comedy. I mean, it moves just beyond verbiage. And what just happened here is it said the love of God was so big and huge within God that it overflowed and we are His poetry. That's such a great text.

Okay, let's get back to the point at hand. "By grace you have been saved..." You should know grace. We've talked about grace nonstop. But the big question and for me the big wrestle is this: why can so many of us define it and so few of us live in it? I mean, that becomes the big question. Why is it that so many of us have this intellectual understanding of the doctrine of grace and so few of us live in the freedom and the beauty that it brings? Well, because there's a second piece to this puzzle. And we've gone through ten chapters of Hebrews with no mention of it, and now we're going to beat it to death for three weeks. "For by grace you have been saved through faith." It seems that faith is the spark that ignites grace in the souls of men and women. That until there is faith grace is an abstract idea, but when faith takes root in the heart, grace is awakened and comes alive in the souls of men and women. So, we have trouble here. In Webster's Dictionary, there are seventeen definitions of this word. I mean, there are so many definitions and so many ideas of what faith is that it becomes difficult to have this conversation about having faith that ignites grace in the souls of men, unless somewhere in the Bible it defined it for us.

Hebrews 11, starting in verse 1. We're going to do seven verses tonight, and let me just tell you what the seven verses are. What we're going to see is there's going to be a definition of faith. Then, there's going to be three stories. The first story is going to be a story of warning, and the next two are what faith enabling grace creates in the lives of men and women. So, we're going to define it, we're going to see a word of warning, and then we're going to hear what it stirs and creates in us and it's really good news. I will promise you that the warning is just that. It's very heavy, very scary, but the other two are easier to hear. Starting in verse 1, "Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen. For by it the men of old gained approval. By faith we understand that the worlds were prepared by the word of God, so that what is seen was not made out of things which are visible. By faith Abel offered to God a better sacrifice than Cain, through which he obtained the testimony that he was righteous, God testifying about his gifts, and through faith, though he is dead, he still speaks. By faith Enoch was taken up so that he would not see death; and he was not found because God took him up; for he obtained the witness that before his being taken up he was pleasing to God. And without faith it is impossible to please Him, for he who comes to God must believe that He is and that He is a rewarder of those who seek Him. By faith Noah, being warned by God about things not yet seen, in reverence prepared an ark for the salvation of his household, by which he condemned the world, and became an heir of the righteousness which is according to faith."

Alright, look back in verse 1. We're going to define faith. It has three parts. Part number one, "Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for." This is going to come a little bit out of left field on you. To hope in something means that the current state of your life is a state of discontentment. If there is hope in you, it is because the current state of things you have found unsatisfactory. If you hope that your marriage becomes this, you're hoping that because it is currently not. Are you tracking with me? If you hope that one day you get married, it's because you're not right now. Is that right? And if that's not right, Jerry Meades over here to the right, you come get him. If you're married and hoping to get married, we got some issues to work through, alright. So, if you have this hope that one day you'll have more money you are discontented with the amount of money you have right now. The foundational element of faith is a discontented heart. It is a realization that although, as Americans, we are well fed, well clothed, we are safe, we are protected, there are hospitals and police at our fingertips. Despite the fact that we are protected, despite the fact that we have all that we need to live life well, there is something gnawing at us, saying, "There's more." And discontentment is the foundational element of faith. Without discontentment, there is no hope for something more.

Whenever people talk about the wrath of God and God's anger and things like that, they always want to talk about natural disasters or the supernatural kind of thing, like fire falling out of the sky and blowing somebody up (which would

be cool to watch). They always want to kind of do it that way. I submit that if this is true, and it is, then could it not be the wrath of God to make you wealthy, healthy and comfortable? Could not the worst thing to ever happen to you be peace?

Alright, we'll try to do it this way. I used to, on Monday nights, speak out at PrestonWorld...and I'm not dogging them. I loved that job. I wish I could have half that building, seriously. Just do one service. That'd be so sweet...I would speak Monday night, and I would go out there early because I didn't want to get stuck in traffic. And so, out there, there's "The Shops at Willowbend", which is just a rich way to call something a mall. Because that's all it is. It's a mall, but they're like, "That's too mallity. Let's call it 'The Shops at Willowbend.'" And so, it's a mall called "The Shops at Willowbend." And I would go out there early, and I would just get a little tea or something, and I would look over my notes and get ready to preach. In the shops, right near the food court, there is an entire store devoted to dogs. They don't sell dogs, they sell stuff for dogs, like sweaters and shoes. You think I'm kidding?

I'm going to rant here. Give me five minutes of ranting then I'll make the point. Three, give me two and a half minutes of ranting, then I'll move on with the point. They sell like shoes and coats and dinnerware and houses and beds and such for dogs. I have an impossible time with this. I do. And I'm not saying you shouldn't have dogs, and I'm not an anti-dog guy. Lassie is great. I find it impossible to chew on the reality that little Bootsie has a sweater and some of the kids in our deal in Guatemala don't have shoes. I find it impossible to chew on that we, as Americans, spend on average two to three thousand dollars a year on dogs, when such a large number of the world's children are starving and unclothed. So, I have a hard time with it. I have a hard time with your dog having clothes. Okay, you get them at Target for two bucks, I'm alright. Maybe I'm alright. Okay, I'm not alright, okay. I'm not alright. It's a dog. I can't get past this, alright. And I know some of you people are like, "Little Rippy is part of our family!" Hey, listen to me. No, he's not. And I am here to speak truth to you. He is a dog. I don't care if he drug your kid out of a well. He is still a dog, a smart dog, but a dog. So, I have an impossible time with this whole deal. I have an impossible time with painted toenails and purses with dogs. I just have a very difficult time with the whole deal. Now, that's just me personally. I'm not trying to say you're sinning or anything like that. I'm just saying I have a hard time with it. Now, here's my point. What I find even harder to grasp is how many men and women are perfectly content living the life of a cultured animal. What I find just as hard to chew on is how many men and women are content living the life of a dog. "I'm going to eat a little bit, I'm going to sleep a little bit, I'm going to amuse myself and I'm going to hope that I die good. Like I just get old, and somebody takes me to the doctor, and they just give me a shot and I just go to sleep forever." What blows my mind even more than us spending an obscene amount of cash on dogs is how many of us are perfectly content chasing our tail. Discontentment, it is the foundational element of faith because it screams out from our guts that there's something more. Without this what Romans 8 calls "groaning," there will never be faith. Which means grace never gets activated. Alright, that's just foundations. That's just the first part. Let's put up the walls, then we'll put up the roof.

Let's put up the walls. Look at verse 6 with me, "And without faith it is impossible to please Him, for he who comes to God..." Here's the second part of what happens in faith. It begins with the discontented spirit. We feel that there's something more. We feel that there's something invisible, that there's this greater authority out there, that there's something there that's unseen, and we begin to long for it and want it, which leads us to Jesus. And then we begin to draw near to Christ, to draw near to God. Discontentment leads the way of drawing near to God. Now, I know some of you got saved right out of the womb. I mean, you came out of the womb, got spanked, "Jesus," in. I mean, it went that fast for you. And I'm not knocking that testimony; I am begging Christ for my daughter to own that testimony. And I know that some of you have that story, and so you can't remember it that well. But for those of us who got saved later on, it was birthed out of discontentment. We knew something was wrong. And we couldn't point to it, we didn't know what it was, there was just something that was not settled. And it lead us to Christ, and we drew into Him, we pressed into Him.

And if you're in here tonight, and you go, "That's my problem. You know, I can feel that discontentment you're talking about, but I have a hard time believing in God." I will tell you this - It is easier to believe in Him than it is to not. And I'll show you why. Look in verse 3, "By faith we understand that the worlds were prepared by the word of God,..." By the way, "word of God" always produces life. "Well, I'll quit doing this and start doing this, and You should have to accept me." The lesson here is that you do not get to decide how you come to God. There is one way, and one way alone, through the cross of Christ, interposing His blood for your sin and my sin. No other way, no other offering acceptable. You don't get to decide how you get to come. And then, here's the thing. If tonight in here, and I promise you I'm not trying to be arrogant with you, I'm pleading for you.

If in here tonight, you're going, "Well, that ain't fair." Well okay, who are you going to tell about it? I mean, what court are you going to take God to? Who are you going to appeal to over this? "Well, that's not right." Okay, well where are you taking Him? Who gets to judge God? You? Me? There's no court to go to. There's no one to complain to. So, you're left with two options: Shake your fist like you'll show Him one day, which is going to lead to this horrific moment in history for you, or to believe on the gift. You don't get to decide how to come. And I'm afraid for so many of you, because I think so many of you, although you come to church on the weekends, you're still buying into this balancing scale, thinking your goods are outweighing your bads and God's going, "My offering shop's closed. I don't take that anymore. You don't get to decide how you come to Me. I made the way, and by faith Abel believed and submitted to it. And though he is dead, he still speaks." There's the word of warning.

The free gift of Christ sounds insane, doesn't it? I mean, it's the one difference between what we believe and what all the other world religions do. If you start looking at other religions, you know other religions had god that came in the flesh. You know other religions have god that died for their people. .Other religions have all these pieces, but the one piece they don't have, that no other religion has outside of faith in Jesus is that our God pays the bill completely. No other believes it, that believe that Christ paid the bill once and for all. It's the word of warning. By faith we come as He calls us, not as we say. You're in no position to barter. You're in no position to argue. There's no court for you to take God to where His ruling will be overturned. I know it's heavy, but it's the truth.

Okay, two more stories. Now, these help the soul a little bit. I love this next one. I was actually thinking about this story on Friday. "By faith Enoch was taken up so that he would not see death; and he was not found because God took him up; for he obtained the witness that before his being taken up he was pleasing to God." Okay here's the story. In the book of Genesis, there's this man named Enoch. He's 65 years old, alright. And when he's 65, he meets God, and God and he, in this really weird way, become friends. In fact, he's always seen walking around, talking to this unseen person, which by the way, when you're a kid, works but when you're 65, "cuckoo" alright. And so, he's just walking around, talking with God. And one day, he just vanishes. I was reading some writings by a guy named Ray Stedman, and he kind of explained it like this, "It was like he went for a walk with God, and when they finished their walk, God was like, 'Hey, we're closer to My house. Why don't we just go there.'" I thought that was great. So Enoch, he just disappears. He never dies.

On Friday night, Paul Matthies and I were flying back from Kentucky right about the same time as everyone else in the Dallas/Ft. Worth area was in their bathtub praying that the tornado didn't hit their house. So, great flight on the way in. And by the way, just for the record, if the stewardess is popping open those little bottles of Jack Daniel's, you got a ride on your hands, alright. So, were in this plane, riding a bull, alright. I'm like, "Is the stewardess drinking? We're doomed." And I knew I was preaching this text this week, so i was like trying to make a deal with the Lord. I'm like, "Enoch. You can come get me if You want." I was like, "If this thing's going down, I sure would love You to go down the aisle and go, 'Um, you wanna get out of here before this thing plummets 30,000 feet?'" And I don't even know what I would do. Would I bring up Paul or would I just go? You know, like, "What about Paul?" When guys do that in Scripture, it goes bad when they bring up other guys. You remember Peter going, "What about John?" "What is he to you?" You know. And I wasn't

going to blow my shot out. So, if He offered, I'd be like, "Paul is on his own, alright. I got a wife and kids. He's single." Alright, sorry. Here's the lesson. What's happening here is He's saying, "Listen, by faith, death lost its sting. By faith, death no longer becomes our enemy but the consummation of our time here." Like one of my favorite verses in the Scriptures, it's written in the front of my journal, is found in Acts 13. And what it says is this, talking about king David, "For David, after he had served the purpose of God in his own generation, fell asleep." Which is a New Testament really nice way of saying "He died."

My wife is a little bit of a worrier and so, when I go on trips, she's always, "Be careful." Like, I don't know how you do that on an airplane. "Be careful." And I always try to joke with her and say, "Hey, when I'm done, I'm done." And I know, listen, when you say something like that, right away you're like, "Don't you have kids?" Um, yeah, but they're not really mine, they're on loan from Him. My daughter, I love her with my whole heart, but she's not mine, not mine. She's His and He loaned her to me, and I'm so unbelievably grateful. But He'll father her better than I ever will be able to. "Well, what about all the stuff you would miss out on?" Okay, I want to see "X-Men 3" just like the rest of us, but in comparison, are you kidding me? The whole consummation, the very purpose for my creation. For what? To be at my daughter's wedding? Don't get me wrong, I so desperately want to be there, so desperately want to walk her down the aisle, so desperately want to love and hate the dude she's marrying. But I want to live with the full on purposes of Jesus, and when He's done with me, I want to go home and be with Him. And by faith, I was nervous on that plane ride home, but it would have been alright. In my journal, my wife knows this so if something ever happens to me, she'll pull it, I have this long list of things that I just entitled "Don't Cry For Me." And it is basically just, "Hey, don't cry for me, I've got to see the world. Don't cry for me..." it's all these things that I got to do. Even as a 31 year old, I got to experience and do. "Don't cry for me, I've kissed a beautiful woman. Don't cry for me, I've been called 'daddy.' Don't cry for me..." And the very last line in that very long bit of paper is, "Don't cry for me, I'm home."

"Where, O death is your victory? Where, O death is your sting?" Enoch, he had faith, and so death was just this blip on the radar. It was just so quick and easy, it wasn't there. By faith, death ceases to be the enemy and starts to be the friend. I know that's weird.

Alright, one more. Verse 7, "By faith Noah, being warned by God about things not yet seen, in reverence prepared an ark for the salvation of his household, by which he condemned the world, and became an heir of the righteousness which is according to faith." I think the story of Noah lost all it's weight when it became a children's fable. For the life of me, I cannot figure out why we have made pajamas around the moment in time where God killed everyone on earth. Is it to scare our kids into submission? "Why are those sheep going into the boat?" "Because God kills sinners, baby...Because God killed everyone once, and it was hideous. Do you want to pray? Yeah. You do, don't you?" If you don't like that I mess around this much, come to the 9:00 or the 11:00, because I'm a little bit more stable then. Noah starts building a boat 500 miles from the nearest ocean, a thousand times too big for his family and starts filling it with animals. Are you with me here? Noah, because God told him, started building a ship a thousand times too large for his family, 500 miles away from the ocean. Because God told him. Absurd. And oh the faith in Christ to follow the absurd.

Okay, three years ago, I was part of a non-profit organization, with a group of guys in "Waiting Room Ministries." I was having a good time, and the Lord was unbelievably blessing that ministry, financially and in scope of influence. And on a given week, between the three of us, we were preaching and singing to anywhere between eleven to fifteen thousand people a week. And we were making good money. And my wife and I built a house in Dallas. Like, I love the urban setting, man. We built a house in Dallas, and my wife built that house. She picked out the floors, the counter tops, the cabinets, the colors. She built that house. And we moved into that house, and about a month and a half later, I got a phone call from Elaine Cottle at Highland Village First Baptist Church, asking me to submit a résumé. I had been to Highland Village First Baptist Church. Philosophically and theologically, I didn't line up a lot of what it was. I'm not

saying it's wrong or bad, I'm just saying I didn't line up with where it was. I didn't think we were a good fit. However, Elaine Cottle had been a very, very supportive friend to our non-profit organizations. The offer on the table to come to this place was to leave speaking to between five and seven thousand people every week, coming to a church of 168 that could not pay me half of what I was currently making. I had not one friend in my network who told me this was the right call.

In fact, Bleecker and I went to Campisi's and we were eating and dreaming about what it could be. But outside of Bleecker, I had not one person in my life who thought this was a good idea. Not my in-laws, not my pastor friends. I had no one. In fact, everyone was like, "This place has had a history with their last pastor. This place is not philosophically where you are. It's not theologically where you are.

This is not going to go well." I even had a good friend of mine go, "When they fire you...." "Oh...hmm....Thank you....I just want to marinate in your encouragement right now, thank you....Shhhhh....Stop there, stop there and just let me drink it in. When they fire me? Are you kidding me? You're paying for lunch." He said, "When they fire you, we'll have a spot for you. You know, you can come and do this while you rebook speaking engagements." It doesn't make any sense, man. My wife was 8 months pregnant. I'm moving out of the house that she built into my little sister's house. So God bless my wife. The Lord haunted me, and He haunted them. And He said, "Listen, this is an arranged marriage. Neither one of you have a say." And I think we thought, at the time, that we had a say, but I think now that so many things have occurred, I think the Lord was going, "No, you don't have a say. This is an arranged marriage. I did this deal. You could have tried to run. I would have just made you miserable." And so, my beautiful 8 month pregnant wife walked out in the front yard of our home in Dallas and pushed a "For Sale" sign into the ground. The good thing is we didn't have to pack much. We threw all that stuff in the storage, and we lived with my little sister and her husband and came to Highland Village First Baptist Church. And outside of my relationship with Christ and my family, it has been the most unbelievable joy of my life to be here.

Praise Christ for the faith to follow the absurd. So may you embrace discontentment. May you not fear that she is an enemy, but may she become your friend. May you quit beating yourself up over your restlessness, but may that restlessness push you into Him. And there in Him, might you find the assurance of the hope that started you on this journey anyway. And may you remember our boy Abel. You do not get to decide how you come, and may death not be your enemy but your friend. And may you be freed up to live in the loony, because the rain eventually fell and waters rose and a slew of men and women who thought they got to decide how they came to God were on the outside of Nutty Noah's boat.

"Father, I thank You for our time together tonight. And I thank You for just how good You are. You are more beautiful and deeper and more spectacular than I did You justice tonight. And I confess that I studied hard and I did my best, but You're just so big and so...I think it's just impossible. I pray that where I've confused that You correct. And I pray that were I pushed too far, You would fill hearts with grace. And I that I have no offended unless that offense was brought on by what is true. And then, that's between You and them, not between me and them. But if I've been dumb or quick with my mouth, Father, I pray that You might cover that sin. And I pray now for my brothers and sisters who have been so frustrated because they are so discontented. And I pray that they would quit looking at that as some kind wicked enemy, but that they might embrace that as it will lead them to You, that discontentment is this foundational piece of pressing people towards You. And so, I pray that we might be like that group of men and women in Romans 8 who inwardly groan for you, that we might say those things like David said when he was like, "I yearn for You. I long for You. I thirst for You. I've got to have You," that we might begin to echo Moses when he just, through tears, goes, "Show me Your glory," that we might be like Peter, who kept saying it over and over again "I love You...I love You...I love You," that we might join the chorus of the Apostle Paul, that said, "I want to know Him," that this angst that drives us to You might be birthed in our

heart and we quit running from it or trying to medicate it or believe in a slew of really poor preachers, who would tell us, "It's not supposed to be there. So, I pray discontentment would lead us to draw to You, and there drawing near to You, we might find assurance and peace, but that longing would never disappear until that day we are home. And I thank You for the work that we get to do while we're here. I thank You that we are Your poetry placed in that verse of time to bring rhyme and reason into what is broken. And so, I thank You for the work that we get to do, but I long for home and look forward to the day where the constraints of this body in the English language are no longer on me. And so, increase our faith. Increase our faith tonight Father. Activate the grace that we've all heard of. So, I pray that all across the room tonight that prayers might go up for You to increase our faith. I mean, You said it in Ephesians 2 that even the faith to believe has been given to us by You, so we cry out to You tonight, "Give us faith. Give us faith in You. Give us faith to believe. You're so good and so right, and I so enjoy You, Father. I thank You for those who hear the gospel tonight. I know it's being veiled to some, but some are hearing it and I praise You for that. We love you. Help us though. Help us. We feel so far away and so broken still and still goofy and still like we sang earlier tonight, "Prone to wander...bind us to You... seal our hearts." We love You. And where we don't, I think we really want to. It's for Your beautiful name I pray. Amen."

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