

# Meditation for the First Evensong of Advent

*'Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not yet seen.'*

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Of the heavenly virtues, there are three: faith, hope, and love; and the first of these is faith.

Faith is spoken of much in the Bible, but rarely defined. This leads to much confusion. We start to think that faith is just belief. If you believe in the invisible God, you have faith. After all, that seems to go right along with what is written: *'faith is the conviction of things not seen.'* God is the least seen of things, so believing in Him must be faith!

Yet some people have a hard time believing in invisible things. Sometimes for scientific reasons, sometimes for personal reasons, and sometimes for no reason at all. Because of this, because it is hard to believe in the unseeable God, we start to think that faith is a quantity, an amount. If you just had more of it, you would be able to believe in God. If you don't have enough, tough luck, or if you are of a more deterministic persuasion, tough predestination.

But this is all wrong, for one saint once wrote: *'faith is but a bag holding a great wealth. It matters not if the bag is woven of burlap, or of silver, it holds the same treasure.'*

What he meant by this was simple. We sinners, when we think of faith, tend to think of *our* faith. But when God thinks of faith, He thinks of *His* faithfulness. He thinks of His promise. It does not matter how big, how great, how strong, how vast our faith is; all of that is meaningless. It only matters that it receives God's promise, for to God, faith is faith that He will keep His word, and nothing else.

This is what is meant by the saying *'faith is*

*the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen.*' The things not seen are not simply invisible things, like God; God can be known by nature without ever being seen. His existence requires no faith.

Then what is *the conviction of things not seen*? It is simple: it is *the assurance of things hoped for*. That is, it is trust. Trust pure and simple. Trust in God. Trust that this God is good. That this God will redeem us. That this God will keep His promises.

The author of Hebrews makes this plain, it is the rare place where faith is defined.

To Abel, faith is not that there is a God to sacrifice to, but that the God that is will accept His sacrifice.

To Enoch, faith was not that there was a God to please, but that God would be pleased by his righteousness.

To Noah, faith was not that there was a God that would judge the earth; but that God the judge would do so in justice, and that if he were to hear God, he and his family might be saved, and give rise to a great generation.

To Abraham, faith was not that there may be a God that could give him a Son, but that the God that surely is would give Abraham a Son, even when it seemed most impossible, and by that son, children more numerous than the stars.

When all these promises were made to these saints of old, they seemed as unseen, as invisible, as anything we might doubt today. And yet they believed, that is, they had faith; they trusted in God, that he would keep His Word. To put it simply, they knew that *God is not a man, that he should lie*.

God is His word. God is His promise, and His Word is God, and His Promise is the reality of faith. For this reason, the people of God are given one commandment above all else: '*Hear O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is One.*' One with His Word, One with His Promise, One with His people, for He is one with Himself.

And He will become one with His people. For this He promised in ancient times, that man would see Him *face to face*.

All of those old saints died never having seen what was promised to them. But

we live, trusting in the promise that will be fulfilled on Christmas night. That a child is born in Bethlehem. That this child is Our Lord. That He shall embrace us in our hour of darkness, and in the depth of doubt, in the loss of our belief.

For faith is not our belief in the Lord, but the Lord remembering His promise to us. For this reason even in the midst of our worst sin, the Lord still draws near to us, writing His commandments in the dust, to hear Him, even as He did before the woman caught in adultery.

For though we may be ashamed to be called Christians, we may be ashamed to be called believers, we may be ashamed to be called hypocrites, criminals, unrighteous. Yet we believe in the most invisible thing of all, that God would have mercy on a sinner.

Because of this *'God is not ashamed to be called our God.'*

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*Preached by Pastor Fields*

*Sermon Texts: Deuteronomy  
6:1-4; Hebrews 11:1-16.*