

## Faith That Works Part 1

14 What does it profit, my brethren, if someone says he has faith but does not have works? Can faith save him? 15 If a brother or sister is naked and destitute of daily food, 16 and one of you says to them, "Depart in peace, be warmed and filled," but you do not give them the things which are needed for the body, what does it profit? 17 Thus also faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead. 18 But someone will say, "You have faith, and I have works." Show me your faith without your works, and I will show you my faith by my works. 19 You believe that there is one God. You do well. Even the demons believe--and tremble! 20 But do you want to know, O foolish man, that faith without works is dead? (James 2:14-20)

"Faith"! As we begin our considerations of these precious words today, may I offer to you an honest confession from the depths of my soul, that of all of the relationships that we share with our loving Lord, for me, one of the least understood and most elusive relationships is that of "faith". And no, I don't do very well with the other relationships that I share with the Lord either, especially love, but this relationship of "faith" is especially perplexing for me.

Yes, I do have enough "faith" for the saving of my soul. And if I focus my "faith" hard on certain matters of daily life, I am often able to weather through those difficulties also. But none of it is easy for me.

And may I suggest that the same is true for you also. Yes, we can mouth the words at the proper time, saying all the right things at the right times to our Christian friends. And in times of crisis, we might even be able to "bear down hard" and hold on tight to our "faith" until the storm is over. But it never seems easy! We can identify, so well, with the man in these scriptures who cried out to Jesus, "I believe, help mine unbelief!"

And we saw the same take place with the disciples on several occasions. Even though they had walked with Jesus daily, witnessing His miraculous abilities, and seeing how faithful He was to take care of them, still during times like those on the stormy seas, their faith would falter. And His words to them were, "oh ye of little faith!"

And His words to you and me about “faith” is that if we would have “faith” even the size of a tiny mustard seed, we could do things far beyond our imagination, even move mountains. But folks, I have never moved a mountain. I would love too, so very much, but as yet, my faith has never risen to that level!

But one thing I do find, that as I intentionally seek hard and diligently after the person of Christ, as I read, as I study, and as I think and pray, the Holy Spirit does enable me to gain a more intimate sense of the presence of Christ.

And fortunately for us here today, with these words of scripture, God has again brought us face to face with this matter of “faith”. And if you will bear with me, it is my hope and my intent for us to devote some extended time, two, perhaps three or more of our messages to this precious relationship of “faith”.

And may we begin our quest to understand this precious gift of faith by acknowledging that “faith” can actually be seen and understood from more than one perspective, that the kind of “faith” that we are considering here in these scriptures is not the only kind of “faith” that we experience. As we know, “faith” also comes in other forms. Some forms of faith are “natural” to us, born within our souls. And they are so natural, so simple and so easy that we barely even recognize them as being “faith” as we exercise them.

For our study today, I’ll call that kind of faith “natural faith”. And yes, it is very real, and I am so very thankful for it. Because without that “natural faith” we would question and worry about most everything that takes place around us every moment of every day.

It is by that “natural” kind of faith that we are able to go peacefully through our day believing and trusting in so many of the ordinary natural occurrences of daily life, without questioning their trustworthiness of whether or not those things will take place, simply “trusting”.

We faithfully believe and trust that it is safe to breathe the air. We faithfully believe and trust that we can drink the water that we drink, that the floor that we are standing on will hold us up, and on and on. We even have faith that those cars coming towards us on the highway will stay on their side of the

road. Simply put, we live most all the moments of our life by one form of “faith” or another . . . and we think very little about it.

And while the “faith” spoken about here in these scriptures, and I will call this kind of faith “biblical faith”, is very different from our “natural faith”, the practice of those two kinds of faith can actually be very similar.

The greatest difference that I am able to discern between “natural faith” and “biblical faith” is that while “natural faith” rests is an assumption about natural occurring circumstances, “biblical faith” rests in a trusting relationship with a “Person”, in God Himself.

May I say that again! “Biblical faith” does not rest in natural circumstances, but rests in a trusting relationship with the very “Person of God” Himself.

And “biblical faith” did not and does not come to us though any “natural” means. It was not born naturally within our souls as part of our DNA, and perhaps emerges later on through some effort of our own “free will”.

“Biblical faith” is “supernatural”, and it comes to us through “supernatural” means. “Biblical faith” comes directly from God as a “free gift” from Him, powerfully enabling us to believe and to trust far beyond the natural means of this world. It is one of the three “abiding gifts” given to us by the Holy Spirit, “faith, hope and love”.

May I read for us the simple definition that God has given to this word “faith”. It’s found in Hebrews 1 verse 1. And you’ll note as we read it, that although the definition is but a few words, and relatively simple, its depth of meaning still remains ever so mysteriously complex. Those words,

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

May we please allow our minds to linger on those words for just a moment.

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

Folks, learned Academics and Theologians have studied and explained these few words for centuries now. But I would suggest that even after all of

their devoted work towards understanding and explaining the meaning of these precious words, they are still not much closer to truly understanding them than you and me.

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

As I have studied about “faith”, in our scriptures, I’ve found that in both the Old and the New Testaments, God used essentially the same words that are translated into English as “faith”, and each of those words convey the simple meaning and concept of “belief”. “Belief”!

But also, as we know from studying these scriptures, the actual and exact meaning of words and concepts is not determined simply by their definition, but also by their “context”, and by the “application” of their usage.

Those words again,

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

Examining each word and phrase, we find that God is here telling us that this special “belief” is the “substance of things hoped for”. The word “substance” means that it is “real”. It has a “concrete essence” and is not just some “wispy” idea or concept or thought. It is so real that it conveys “assurance” of its reality and effectiveness. And so, I conclude from these words that my “believing”, my “faith”, is the means by which God brings that which I “hope for” into being, into real existence, into reality, into substance.

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I confess that as I say these words, I almost sound like “Jiminy Cricket” talking to Pinocchio. And you can almost hear the words of the song, “When you wish upon a star”.

But folks, we know that “wishing upon a star” is fantasy. But thanks be to God, “faith” is not fantasy. It is “real”! “Faith” is so real that it is able to bring that which is only “hoped for” into real “being”.

May I take this thought one step further. Our “faith in God” is able to bring that which is “Not in existence” into that which “Is in existence”, much like God did when He first created the worlds. He took that which was “nothing” and made it into something that “was and is real and tangible”, “something out of nothing”! And so, likewise, through the means of our “faith”, God brings those things that are only “hoped for” into “vivid reality”.

And as we see those things “hoped for” come into vivid reality, they become the “evidence” of “things not seen”, real evidence, “visible evidence”, evidence such as that of spiritual changes, both in our own lives and in the lives of others, and also temporal evidence, evidence such as all the provisions that we have to sustain us and bless us in our daily livelihood, and then also evidence of emotional blessings, blessings such as, love and joy, and peace, and patience and kindness.

Folks, all we have to do is open our eyes and we will see God's gracious provision of so many of the things that we once only hoped for, but now have. It is amazingly clear. Those words again,

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

Dear friends, may I say again, we know that “wishing upon a star” won't work, but “faith” in our Loving and Almighty God and in His plan, does work. And as we abide in Him and in His Will, He will do things in our lives that we used to only imagine and hope for.

But again, may I say, that even after all these years as a Christian, I still do struggle to apprehend faith and its amazing provision as my own. And I find that to be a strange and mysterious dilemma to be in. What I mean is, I know that I have God's generous “gift of faith” abiding within my soul. The Holy Spirit, who lives within me, brought that faith with Him when, at salvation, He came into and now abides continually within me. But yet, when daily circumstances arise that demand that I “trust” in the Loving God who gave me this faith, I “falter”.

And that seems to be the real “dividing line” drawn within our souls, that “break point”, where “believing” needs to move on from just “believing”, on to taking the next step of faith, that of “trusting”. “Trusting”. In other words, it is one thing to “believe” in some person or in some idea or some concept,

but it is another matter altogether to place your “trust” and “dependence” in that person or that idea or that concept.

As it relates to God and to the things of God, simply put, it is one thing for you or me to believe that Jesus Christ was a real person in history, and even to go so far as to believe that He is the Savior sent from God the Father to save us from our sins. But it is another thing altogether for you or me to actually place our “trust” in Jesus as “our personal Savior”, to trust that He can actually “justify” and “wipe away” all my sins and give me eternal life in heaven with Him.

The place where this “dividing line” between “believing” and “trusting” is well defined for us, is in the simple words of verse 19 of our text. Listen!

19 You believe that there is one God. You do well. Even the demons believe--and tremble! (James 2:19)

I must tell you that for me, there is no clearer dividing line in all the scriptures on this matter of belief! “Even the demons believe”, and they know exactly who God is, who Jesus Christ is, and all that Jesus has done to save our souls from hell. But their “believing” has never taken that next vital step of “trusting” Jesus and obeying Him. And because they don’t let their “belief” mature into “trust”, they are eternally doomed in hell.

So then, let me say it again. “faith” is not just the simple effort of “belief”. “Faith” is a step far beyond simply “believing”. “Faith” is “believing” so strongly and to the extent that we will actually place our confidence and our “trust” in the Person and Work of Jesus Christ as our Savior and as our Lord.

. . . May I take the remaining moments of our time today and ponder this matter and concept of “trust”. Because, as we’ve said, “trust” seems to be that ultimate “step of faith” that God truly desires us to have in our relationship with Him. And I’d like for us to use a verse that most of us, especially me, quote often. It’s in Proverbs 3, verses 5 and 6. Those words are,

5 Trust in the LORD with all thine heart; and lean not unto thine own understanding. 6 In all thy ways acknowledge him, and he shall direct thy paths. (Proverbs 3:5-6)

In my struggles to understand and to apprehend the faith that God desires me to have, I must confess that it is the nature of my thought processes to try to find formulas or methodology to help me to gain that faith. But no methodology that I have tried thus far has been very successful. And maybe, my problem is that I am trying to make something that is very simple into something harder than it really is.

In Matthew 18, Jesus said,

3 . . . "Assuredly, I say to you, unless you are converted and become as little children, you will by no means enter the kingdom of heaven. 4 Therefore whoever humbles himself as this little child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven. (Matthew 18:3-4)

There are many thoughts given as to what Jesus intended by these words. And perhaps He intended several principles to be understood. But in its basic literal words, we are being instructed to always come to our Lord with the innocence and humility of a child, our hearts and our minds devoid of our own plans and purposes, devoid of our own strength and knowledge, and simply "joining" with the Lord Jesus in whatever He is doing.

A favorite example that is helpful to me is one that I have shared with you on other occasions. It is when, as my children were very young, I could say to them simply, "come go with me", and they would immediately go running for my truck. They didn't need to ask where we were going, or if I had enough gas, or any number of other questions. They, without questioning me, trusted that I knew all the things that needed to be known for the trip.

And perhaps that is part of the understanding of this passage.

5 Trust in the LORD with all thine heart; and lean not unto thine own understanding. 6 In all thy ways acknowledge him, and he shall direct thy paths. (Proverbs 3:5-6)

The second part of this passage probably has the most important element of our "trust", the loving command for us to "acknowledge Him", to "acknowledge God". Folks, this word "acknowledge" does not imply that we are to simply be aware that God is "involved". No, the word "acknowledge" has a much, much deeper meaning. It means to "know" God, to "know the Person of God", to know His character, and to intimately

know His loving and faithful and trustworthy nature, and to know Him so well that we don't need to ask all those questions about "why" and "how", but to simply "trust" that He knows all those other many details, and that He is faithful to do them . . . not a lot different than the little child who doesn't need to question or know all the details, but just runs and jumps into the truck. Daddy is trustworthy.

Folks, I would dearly love to become as that little child, in all my ways "knowing" my loving Father, and "trusting" Him in every circumstance of life, with never a question or concern.

Listen as we close . . .

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