

Title: “Faith”

Chris Ryan

Hebrews 11:4-11

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Service Readings: Gen. 15:1-6, Heb. 11:1-16, Luke 12:22-34

Abraham, Enoch, and Sarah had their own dark hours. And in those times they relied on their own strength but in God's strength to give them the faith that they needed. This is another lie from Satan. He tells us that we need strength like them and he leads us to believe that we are responsible for building it, but he fails to tell us that our faith is more like theirs than Jesus'. He fails to tell us that this is what God expects from us. He wants us to compare our faith to Christ and not to Abraham! And if we succumb to that lie, we start to question our own worth, our own faith, and our own standing before God.

Message:

Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ.

On the cross Jesus was nailed. He suffered and he died. And the pain he experienced was excruciating. But it was similar to the physical pain of others in that day. Crucifixions were common at the time. They were used by Rome to control the population. So why do we remember the crucifixion of Jesus but not the crucifixion of so many others? What was it about his death that was so different? There simply must be more to the murder than the blood stained wood because if there is not, than what makes his death different than all the rest? We know the answer to this and we accept it as fact. Jesus didn't simply die a death more painful than we can imagine. The blood that he shed and the death that he experienced might be unimaginable, but there was more to it than that. As he hung on the cross, all sin was placed upon his shoulders and then the full wrath of God was released upon him. And there, in that moment, he experienced an agony worse than any nail or whip as the father turned his head and separated himself from Jesus.

And all this, we accept and even proclaim and it is easy for us to do so when the sun is shining brightly in our lives and there are no storm clouds to be seen. It is easy for us to look at him and announce that “by his blood we are healed and our sins are forgiven.” It is easy to stand in the spotlight of our own lives confirm this as what we hold to be true. It is easy to claim this as our own and be even be proud of our faith. In these times we may even wear it like a badge of honor, like something we earned and then we show it off as part of our accomplishments. And, if the day is bright enough, and our lives are going well enough, we sometimes even tell ourselves that because of this faith we can handle anything that might come our way. But hear this: the days may be long, but a night always follows. And then what? The opening lyrics to a Natalie Grant song start like this:

My feet are tired from the runnin'
My strength is gone for overcomin'
My lips are silent, I don't know what to pray

You see, in our *good* times we look to the cross and we remind ourselves that it has meaning, that the death of Jesus has meaning. And we look past his suffering and see the empty tomb and we remind ourselves that it, too has meaning. And we stand proud in our faith because we are certain that *this* work, *Christ's* work has meaning in our lives, now and for all eternity.

But what do we see when our feet are tired and our strength is gone and when we don't know what to pray? What does the cross tell us during these times, when we are sitting next to our loved one who will be taking his last breath at any moment? How proud are we of our faith when the person we have been married to for all those years begins to forget who we even are? And where is our faith when we are in the midst of marital trouble and facing a divorce? In these times we might be tempted to look upon the cross and see someone who had more faith that we do. We may remember that even in the darkest moment, when the Father turned his head, Jesus never, for even the briefest of seconds, stopped trusting in him. But here we stand, in the midst of our own lives, our own troubles, and our own anguish. And we know in our minds that even though the father would not turn from us, even though we know that we would never forsake us, we can only, for the very briefest of moments, place our trust in him. What does that say about our faith?

In these hours of darkness, when your faith is at its most vulnerable, Satan attempts to steal it away. He points you to the cross and confirms for you what Jesus has done *for you*, and then questions if you *really* believe it. "How can you have saving faith," he asks, "if you question God during these times? Maybe, just maybe, you don't have enough faith and Jesus didn't die for you. Maybe your faith isn't really as strong as you think it is."

And in these times, passages like our epistle reading tempt us to succumb to Satan's prodding if we are not careful. We read verses like this:

⁴ By faith Abel offered to God a more acceptable sacrifice than Cain, through which he was commended as righteous, God commending him by accepting his gifts. And through his faith, though he died, he still speaks. ⁵ By faith Enoch was taken up so that he should not see death, and he was not found, because God had taken him. Now before he was taken he was commended as having pleased God.

And then we read verses like this:

⁸ By faith Abraham obeyed when he was called to go out to a place that he was to receive as an inheritance. And he went out, not knowing where he was going. ⁹ By faith he went to live in the land of promise, as in a foreign land, living in tents with Isaac and Jacob, heirs with him of the same promise. ¹⁰ For he was looking forward to the city that has foundations, whose designer and builder is God. ¹¹ By faith Sarah herself received power to conceive, even when she was past the age, since she considered him faithful who had promised.

These are the verses from today. They talk of a faith that is clearly strong and unwavering. They talk of a faith that is rewarded by God for its strength. What does that say about how God views our own struggling faith?

You see, if we are not careful Satan will use these passages to prove his point. Abraham, Enoch, Sarah had strong faith; they were all righteous in the eyes of God. "Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God, for he has prepared for them a city." "But what of you," he asks? "What has God prepared for you? Maybe it is just more pain, more agony, and more sorrow. Maybe that's all he has for you. Or maybe, just maybe you don't even have enough faith for him to even *bother* with you. Maybe you are forgotten by God."

Blessed, blessed are the poor in spirit...

It is here where Satan is wrong. These passages don't proclaim *Abraham's* faith! Abraham didn't *have* his own faith, he had *God's* faith. And Enoch didn't have his own faith, but God's. And so it was with Sarah as well. The faith that *they* had was a faith that had been *given* to them, a faith that had been built and fortified *within* them through the *Holy Spirit*. The strength of their faith was not from their own doing! The strength of their faith was born from their acknowledgement that on their own they *had no faith*! They knew that their strength was non-existent if not for the Holy Spirit!

You see, Abraham, Enoch, and Sarah had their own dark hours. And in those times they relied on their own strength but in God's strength to give them the faith that they needed. This is another lie from Satan. He tells us that we need strength like them and he leads us to believe that we are responsible for building it, but he fails to tell us that our faith is more like theirs than Jesus'. He fails to tell us that this is what God expects from us. He wants us to compare our faith to Christ and not to Abraham! And if we succumb to that lie, we start to question our own worth, our own faith, and our own standing before God.

Blessed, blessed are the poor in spirit...

God doesn't ask us for perfect faith, or even great faith. He doesn't even ask for good faith for he knows that we cannot accomplish even that. What he asks from us is to acknowledge that Jesus has perfect faith, but we do not. He wants us to recognize our own poverty of faith because when we do, we remove the badge of honor that we placed upon our chest. When we do, we abandon all the pride that we have placed in ourselves. He wants us to recognize the poverty of faith that we have because when we do, we look upon the cross and realize that if we had perfect faith, Jesus' death would have been a waste. And in that moment we begin to understand that faith is not the goal to be achieved or the stick by which we are measured by the father. In that moment we realize that faith is not a badge. We realize, finally, that faith is knowing that we cannot achieve it, cannot acquire it, but Jesus could, and did, and that he did it *for us*. You see, faith is the poverty of spirit and the surrender of ever believing that we can achieve it on our own.

We all have these dark times, and some of you might be experiencing it today. You can't make sense of the situation and you can't seem to keep your complete trust in Jesus. Thoughts enter into your mind that you are ashamed of. You begin to question the strength of your faith for you believe that it should be stronger than it is. You look to the cross and all you see is someone who was stronger than you, much stronger than you. You read scripture and you find people who seem to be much stronger than you, have much more faith than you. You hear them talk to God and they always know exactly what to say. But right now, today, you don't know what to say. You don't know

what to pray. In your mind, and even in your heart you know that Jesus suffered terribly, for you. And you know that because of this he can relate to what you are going through. And you know that he not just *understands* your suffering, but he is actively participating in it with you. You know all this but you also hear the whispers of Satan telling you that maybe you *don't* have enough faith to make the death of Jesus mean anything to you. That you don't have enough faith to solicit the ear of God for your pleas. And maybe, just maybe, Jesus has stopped listening.

And if this is you, then I have a message for you today. Faith is not knowing what to pray. Faith is not thinking that you have enough, or not enough. Faith is the recognition that you don't have enough and *that this is exactly the point!* Faith is coming empty handed to the cross and begging God to give you the faith that you need because you can't do it yourself.

Faith is knowing that if you had faith that you need to trust God to get us through these times you wouldn't need Jesus. And faith is knowing that you need Jesus every moment of your lives. And faith is knowing that God knows this and that he responds by pouring out the Holy Spirit into your situation. Faith is knowing that even if you don't feel him in the moment, even if you don't seem to have the strength to cling to him in the moment, he is clinging on to you with all his strength and with all his might.

Blessed, blessed are the poor in spirit for they will inherit the kingdom of God.

Please pray with me.

My feet are tired from the runnin'
My strength is gone for overcomin'
My lips are silent, I don't know what to pray
So I'll wait, I'll wait for you

My eyes have seen your hand deliver
My heart remembers you, my help and my defender
My well runs dry, but I've known the taste of rain
So I'll wait, I'll wait for you

Here I am, I'm reachin' out
I need you always, oh, I need you now
I'm comin' close so we can stay
Hand in hand until we stand face to face

May the Lord be with you always, even when you can't see him.

Amen.