

11. FAITH

DEAN FARRAR tells of visiting two great ships preparing to sail on a dangerous expedition to the Arctic, the land of snow and darkness. He found the brave captains full of confidence. On the wall of the cabin, as almost the only ornament, he saw the text, "Have faith in God." Pointing to it, he said, "Now there's the true compass, the true needle, pointing to the pole."

"Have faith in God." Jesus spoke those words to the Apostle Peter. A fig tree had just withered away at the word of Christ, and when the apostle called the attention of Jesus to it, He said, "Have faith in God. For verily I say unto you, That whosoever shall say unto this mountain, Be thou removed, and be thou cast into the sea; and shall not doubt in his heart, but shall believe that those things which he said shall come to pass; he shall have whatsoever he said. Therefore I say unto you, What things so ever you desire, when you pray, believe that you receive them, and you shall have them." Mark 11:22-24.

The disciples had fixed their attention on the miracle of the withered tree itself rather than on the lesson Jesus intended it to teach. The Savior sought to turn their attention from the miracle and point out the supreme heights to which true faith may attain, especially in regard to answered prayer. Of course Jesus Himself never removed any literal mountains, and He did not expect His disciples to do so. He referred here to figurative mountains-the troubles, the difficulties that might and do arise.

Real faith in God is trust in Him, belief in His Word. 'Faith is the substance [ground, or confidence) of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen.'" Hebrews 11: 1. Without it no one can please God. "Without faith it is impossible to please him: for he that comes to God must believe that he is, and that he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him." Verse 6.

Faith in Jesus as the Son of God, faith in the redemption that God has wrought through Jesus, faith in our Savior's atoning sacrifice upon the cross, faith in His Word as the Word of God-these we must have too. "As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of man be lifted up: that whosoever believes in him should not perish, but have eternal life." John 3:14, 15. Belief on Him, faith in Him, brings eternal life. This is the genuine saving faith which Christians must have.

Do we trust Jesus to do the things He promises to do? Are we like the man in the Bible who "believed the word that Jesus had spoken unto him"? John 4:50. During the Civil War a father came to Abraham Lincoln, begging him to pardon his son, who had been found guilty of some serious offense in army service and sentenced to be shot. Day after day he stood weeping at the door of the president's office. Day after day he knocked and pleaded and begged and wept again. Finally the president could endure it no longer. Although he had received messages from the military authorities that he must not pardon that particular soldier, the greathearted president said, "General or no general, discipline or no discipline, I am going to pardon that man's son."

When the father was brought in to hear the news, he couldn't believe it. It was too good to be true! And when the president smiled in kindness, he was filled with terror. "I know what you are going to do," he said. "You are saying this just to get me to go away, and then you will shoot my boy as soon as I am gone."

Lincoln said, "Go away, old man. If your son lives until I have him shot, he will be as old as Methuselah."

So it is that many of the promises of God in Christ seem too good to be true, and we are slow to believe them. But what a blessing comes when we accept our Savior at His word! We need to know the simplicity of faith, to believe the words of Christ and find blessing.

To the Roman officer who requested healing for his servant, Christ said, "Go thy way; and as thou has believed, so be it done unto thee. And his servant was healed in the selfsame hour." Matthew 8:13. And, speaking to those about Him, Jesus said, "Verily I say unto you, I have not found so great faith, no, not in Israel." Verse 10. To the man afflicted with a withered hand, Jesus said, "Stretch forth your hand. And he stretched it forth; and it was restored whole, like as the other." Matthew 12:13. To the two blind men who followed Him into the house where He was staying, pleading that they might have their sight, Jesus said, "Believe you that I am able to do this? They said.... Yea, Lord. Then touched he their eyes, saying, According to your faith be it unto you." Matthew 9:28, 29.

To the Samaritan leper who, together with nine others, had been instantly cleansed by the power of Christ, and who had returned to express his thanks, Jesus said, "Arise, go thy way: thy faith hath made thee whole." Luke 17:19. To a woman who had suffered twelve years from an affliction that had been found to be medically incurable, Jesus said, "Daughter, be of good comfort: thy faith hath made thee whole; go in peace." Luke 8:48. To blind Bartimaeus, sitting by the wayside and calling out to Jesus for help, our Savior

said, "Receive thy sight: thy faith hath saved thee." Luke 18:42. To a woman who had greatly sinned, but now was forgiven with a great forgiveness, Jesus said, "Thy faith hath saved thee; go in peace." Luke 7:50.

Let us turn now to another instance of wonderful faith. One day a man helplessly sick with palsy was carried to Jesus by four of his friends. The crowd was so great that they ascended to the flat roof of the house in which Jesus was teaching, made a hole through it, and let the man down with ropes into the presence of Jesus. And, "when Jesus saw their faith, he said unto the sick of the palsy, Son, thy sins be forgiven thee." Mark 2:5. What wonderful words those were to the afflicted man! Evidently his sins were harder for him to bear than his disease. Jesus could read his heart.

Immediately some of the theologians sitting nearby accused Jesus of blasphemy. Not recognizing Him as the Son of God, they said, "Who can forgive sins but God only?" Verse 7. But Jesus, perceiving in His spirit that they so reasoned within themselves, said unto them: "Why reason you these things in your hearts? Whether is it easier to say to the sick of the palsy, Thy sins be forgiven thee; or to say, Arise, and take up thy bed, and walk? But that you may know that the Son of man hath power on earth to forgive sins, (he said to the sick of the palsy,) I say unto thee, Arise, and take up thy bed, and go thy way into your house. And immediately he arose, took up the bed, and went forth before them all; insomuch that they were all amazed, and glorified God, saying, We never saw it on this fashion." Mark 2:8-12.

What a wonderful work of faith this was, resulting in the forgiveness of the man's sins and the healing of his body. Notice, it was not only the faith of the man himself, but the faith of his friends that brought him healing. The verse says, "When Jesus saw their faith." How important it is for all believers to have faith-faith in the power of God to help themselves and to help others. Here were five men who had united in faith to seek help from Christ, and they received that help.

Long ago, in the days of the Russian Empire, a number of criminals were standing chained together in the courtyard of a prison waiting to start their long, sad journey into the Siberian wilderness. One of them was a Christian, whose only crime was speaking to a fellow workman about the faith that had made his life new. The other prisoners were jeering at him. "You are no better off than we are," they taunted him. If your God is alive, why isn't He of some use to you now? Why doesn't He knock off those chains and set you free?"

Quietly, but earnestly, the man replied, If it is the Lord's will, He can set me free even now; but I am willing that His will be done." At that moment a voice was heard calling this man's name and telling him that a paper had just arrived granting him full pardon. He was told to stand aside. Then his chains were taken off. No wonder the awe-struck prisoners were solemnized by what they had witnessed. It was discovered later that a Christian woman of high station had taken an interest in this man and had interceded for him with the authorities. Truly it is the believer's privilege to exercise faith in time of danger.

But even when our faith is small and we do not exercise that which we have, our Savior's mercy is still extended to us. We think of the experience of Peter as he was sinking in the water, looking at the stormy waves instead of at Jesus, where lay his help. Turning his eyes again to the Savior, he cried out in one of the shortest prayers in the Bible, "Lord, save me. And immediately Jesus stretched forth his hand, and caught him, and said unto him, O thou of little faith, wherefore did thou doubt?" Matthew 14:30, 31.

God understands all our needs. Jesus was here on this earth; He took our nature; He understands the feelings of our infirmities. So in all things, even in our daily needs, we are to exercise faith in God. Jesus said, "If God so clothe the grass of the field, which to day is, and to morrow is cast into the oven, shall he not much more clothe you, O you of little faith?" Matthew 6:30. It is a principle of His kingdom that "he that is faithful in that which is least is faithful also in much." Luke 16: 10.

The teaching of Jesus on the subject of faith is especially needed today, as we draw near the end of the age; for Jesus intimated that when He returns, faith will be scarce. "Nevertheless when the Son of man comes, shall he find faith on the earth?" Luke 18:8. He will find it, but it will be only among those who are looking for Him and are preparing for His coming. We must remember that true faith is believing God's promises when we cannot see their fulfillment. "We walk by faith, not by sight," said the apostle in 2 Corinthians 5:7. John Wesley wrote in his diary: "My brother Charles, among the difficulties of our early ministry, used to say, 'If the Lord would give me wings, I would fly.' I used to answer, 'If the Lord bids me fly, I would trust Him for the wings.'---In other words, God's commands are enablings. What He tells us to do, He gives us the ability to do, the resources to do.

Our salvation depends upon faith. Jesus said so: "Whosoever believes in him ... shall not perish, but have everlasting life." John 3:16. On God's side, our justification, our being made righteous, is by His grace. "Being justified by his grace, we should be made heirs according to the hope of eternal life." Titus 3:7. But on our side, we are justified by faith in Christ's blood. "Much more then, being now justified by his

[Christ's] blood, we shall be saved from wrath through him." Romans 5:9. But we lay hold upon this justification through faith. "Therefore we conclude that a man is justified by faith without the deeds of the law." Romans 3:28.

It is for us to believe that "Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures" (1 Corinthians 15:3); that He took our place before God's broken law; that He paid the debt which we could never pay; that He who is wholly righteous, wholly obedient, takes our transgressions upon Himself, and that God counts us as though we had never sinned because of what Jesus did and does for us.

It is written of Abraham, God's servant of old, that "he believed in the Lord; and: he [the Lord] counted it to him for righteousness." Genesis 15:4 That is the way it is with us., We who believe are, said to be in Christ or, as it is written in Philippians 3:9, to "be found in him, not having ... [our] own righteousness, which is of the law, but that which is through the faith of Christ, the righteousness which is of God by faith."

Do we have faith in Jesus' atoning sacrifice for us upon the cross? If we do, we have peace with God, as we find in Romans 5: 1: "Being justified by faith." We do not personally see Jesus die upon the cross for us, but by faith we accept the record found in the Inspired Word of God, so that we, with all believers, may say:

"Strong Son of God, immortal Love, Whom we, that have not seen thy face, By faith, and faith alone, embrace."

-Alfred Lord Tennyson.

Although it is true that "God hath dealt to every man [that is, every believing man] the measure of faith" (Romans 12:3), it is also true that we may increase our faith. The secret of a growing, increasing faith is worth having. Here it is: "Faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God." Romans 10: 17. The bearing of God's Word, the real hearing by the heart, increases faith. The more we feed upon it, meditate upon it, practice it in our lives, the more faith grows. The reason is that the Holy Word of God reveals Christ. In fact Jesus Himself is called the "Word of God." He was the Word made manifest. He was "the Word . . . made flesh." (John 1:14.) Accepting that Word, believing that Word, we receive the faith of Christ.

Many years ago a man was sentenced to be hanged. While on the scaffold he asked for a drink of water. His request was granted, but his hand shook so violently that he was not able to get the water to his mouth. "Take your time," said the king of the country, who was sitting nearby to see justice executed. "Take your time; you will not be executed until you drink it." Instantly the doomed man dashed the cup from his hand, saying, "Well, then, I'll never drink it, so I'll never be hanged." The king was as good as his word, and the convicted man's life was spared.

Even so we must instantly believe the Word of God and accept it-all of it, including the record which God has given us of His Son unto salvation. This is the faith that brings victory, the faith that is based on the Word of God. This is the faith that the people of God must have in the latter days, for of them it is written, "Here are they that keep the commandments of God, and the faith of Jesus." Revelation 14:12. Notice, it is not merely faith in Jesus, but the faith of Jesus, the faith He had, the faith which He gives to those who surrender their lives to Him. This brings victory in every area of life daily living, witnessing for Christ, finding victory over evil habits, bearing witness to the Lord Jesus Christ. "For whatsoever is born of God overcomes the world: and this is the victory that overcomes the world, even our faith." 1 John 5:4. This is the faith that wins the victory in the hard fight, in the long-drawn-out test of the soul.

During World War I a party of journalists visited the great fortress city of Verdun, on the French frontier then being besieged by the mighty German Army. They were met outside the city by a French officer who gave them an eloquent speech of welcome, saying, "Gentlemen, the French Republic considers that the highest honor it can pay to its guests is to take them into Verdun. But, gentlemen, I should add that the French Republic cannot guarantee to take them out again." But we can depend upon our Guide. He takes us through our Verduns, our trials and dark valleys. Our faith rests upon His faithfulness, for it is written that He will never leave us nor forsake us. (Hebrews 13:5.) In Him we may face the future with confidence, knowing that whatever His wisdom has planned for us is for our good.

It is a good thing once in a while to read the eleventh chapter of Hebrews, called by some the great Westminster Abbey of the Bible. Here the heroes of faith are brought to view one after another. As we read of their victories, we are strengthened for the battle of life. Of them it is said, "These all ... obtained a good

report through faith." Verse 39. And so may we. Why should we not continue this great list of victors?-as Archdeacon Hare has done in one of his well-known sermons:

"By faith the Waldensians retired among the mountain fastnesses and dwelt in the caves of the Alps that they might keep their religion in undefiled purity. By faith Wycliff, the morning star of the Reformation, rose out of the darkness, and heralded the coming of daylight. By faith Luther proclaimed his Theses, . . . burnt the Pope's Bull, . . . went to the Diet of Worms; . . . translated the Bible. By faith Rogers, the proto-martyr of the Reformation, when his wife and eleven children met him on his way to the stake and an offer of life and pardon was brought to him in their sight, walked on with a stout heart and washed his hands in the flames. By faith Oberlin went forth among the Vosges Mountains and spread the blessings of religion among the wild inhabitants. By faith Clarkson and Wilberforce overcame the slave trade. By faith Simeon preached the Word of God in this town (Cambridge) through a long life of persevering activity. And what shall I say more? For time would fail me to tell of Ignatius, and Justin, and Cyprian, and Perpetua, and Basil, and Patrick, and Columba, and Bede, and Anselm, and Huss, and Melancthon, and Zwingle, and Calvin, and Knox.... and Penn.... and Zinzendorf, and Howard, and Henry Martyn."

In God's great record above, the names of all His true children will be added to the roll of heroes of faith.

There is one thing about faith that must never be forgotten: True faith is a working faith, or as the Apostle Paul puts it, a "faith which works by love." (Galatians 5:6.) Faith does not exclude works; faith is revealed by works. In fact a faith which does not reveal itself in works is a dead faith. "But wilt thou know, O vain man, that faith without works is dead?" James 2:20. No dead faith is a saying faith. No workless faith is a real faith. "Show me thy faith without thy works," says the apostle, "and I will show thee my faith by my works." Verse 18. The actual, genuine, visible proofs of justification by faith are holy works, obedience to the commands of God. "Ye see then how that by works a man is justified, and not by faith only." Verse 24.

As Martin Luther put it: 'Faith is a living, busy, active, powerful thing; it is impossible for it not to do us good continually. It never asks whether good works are to be done, but has done them before there is time to ask the question, and it is always doing them.'

A certain Irish bishop was taking a walk into the country with a friend. On their return journey, the friend urged the bishop to hurry, as he feared that they might miss the train which was to take them to an important engagement. The bishop looked at his watch and announced that there was plenty of time. "But is your watch reliable? Is it on time?" asked the friend. The bishop said, "I have perfect faith in it." When they arrived at the station, they found that the train had left a few minutes before. The friend turned to the bishop and said: 'Faith and good works are both necessary in this world of ours. If you had faith, complete faith, in your watch, it seems to me that in this 'case,'" tapping the bishop's watch, "good works were absent." Could not that be so with us? Is there not a danger that we profess a full and complete faith in the Lord Jesus Christ but fail to obey Him?

Our Savior Himself was the greatest example of faith that this world has ever seen. He implicitly believed every word of His Father. At the same time.. He was the greatest example of obedience that the world has ever seen--obedience to God. Jesus Himself said, 'My meat is to do the will of him that sent me, and to finish his work.' John 4:34. And these are His words recorded in another place: "If you keep my commandments, you shall abide in my love; even as I have kept my Father's commandments, and abide in his love." John 15:10. Let us hear and now begin to obey the word of Christ and "have faith in God!"

Have Faith in God-believe His holy Word;
Have faith in God-and in His Son, our Lord;
Have faith in God-forevermore adored.
Have faith, dear friend, in God.

BIBLE SUMMARY

What did Jesus say about those who have not seen Him and yet believe in Him?

"Blessed are they that have not seen, and yet have believed.," John 20:29.

What great truth was the foundation of apostolic preaching , and later of the Reformation?

The just shall live by faith." Romans 1: 17.

What part of the Christian armor is faith?

"Putting on the breastplate of faith and love." 1 Thessalonians 5:8. In another place the Apostle Paul speaks of it as "the shield of faith," the "great shield," as it is in the original, a shield to cover the whole body and protect it from the darts of the enemy. (Ephesians 6:16.)

Is faith something static, or may it grow?

"We are bound to thank God always for you, brethren, as it is meet, because that your faith groweth exceedingly." 2 Thessalonians 1: 3.

How does faith grow?

"Faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God." Romans 10: 17.

Is faith always passive, or will there at times be conflict in a life of faith?

"Fight the good fight of faith, lay hold on eternal life." 1 Timothy 6:12.

Why does the Word of God not benefit some people?

"The word preached did not profit them, not being mixed with faith in them that heard it." Hebrews 4:2.

What does faith have to do with our drawing near to God?

"Let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith." Hebrews 10:22.

Is it possible to be poor and rich at the same time?

"Hath not God chosen the poor of this world rich in faith?" James 2: 5.

What sort of prayer is needed in the healing of the sick?

"The prayer of faith shall save the sick." James 5:15.

What does justification by faith bring us?

"Being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ." Romans 5: 1.

How are we saved?

"By grace are you saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God." Ephesians 2:8.

When God brought His ancient people out of Egypt, who among them were finally destroyed?

I will therefore put you in remembrance, though you once knew this, how that the Lord, having saved the people out of the land of Egypt, afterward destroyed them that believed not." Jude 5. See Hebrews 3:14.

In whom must we believe in order to be saved?

"For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believes in him should not perish, but have everlasting life." John 3:16.

When we believe on Jesus, where is the witness that our sins are forgiven?

"He that believes on the Son of God bath the witness in himself: he that believes not God hath made him a liar; because he believes not the record that God gave of his Son." 1 John 5: 10.

What does this witness do for us?

"Being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ." Romans 5: 1. That this witness is the witness of the Holy Spirit testifying to the Word of God is made evident by Romans 8:16. Our acceptance with God does not precede, but rather follows our faith in the promises of God's Word. No matter what our feelings may be, our duty is to accept His Word and trust in it, to believe it, to have faith in it, to believe that God has forgiven our past sins because He promises to do so. Though we may not have a happy feeling at first, we should still trust the Lord and know that He has done exactly what He has promised to do; for, "if we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and, to, cleanse us from all unrighteousness." 1 John 1: 9.

Should we expect our faith to meet -with trials and tests?

"My brethren, count it all joy when you fall into divers temptations; knowing this, that the trying of your faith worketh patience." James 1:2, 3.

What may we expect every day if we go forward in faith?

"Now the God of heaven fill you with all joy and of peace in believing, that you may abound in hope, through the power of the Holy Ghost." Romans 15:13. "AS thy days, so shall thy strength be." Deuteronomy 33:25 .