

The Importance of Faith



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Why Was It So Important?

Jesus demonstrated that although faith was not tangible, but an invisible spiritual material, it was the foundation upon which He lived and performed everything that He did.

"Faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen.... By faith we understand that the worlds were framed by the word of God, so that the things which are seen were not made by things which are visible." (Hebrews 11:1, 3)

Without faith it is impossible to please God, for he who comes to God must believe that He IS (Exodus 3:14; John 8:58, 1:1-3) and that He is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him." (Hebrews 11:6)

"Two blind men followed Him crying out and saying, 'Son of David, have mercy on us!' and when He had come into the house the blind men came with him and Jesus said to them, 'Do you believe that I am able to do these things?

They said to Him, 'Yes, Lord.'

Then He touched their eyes, saying, 'According to your faith let it be done to you.'" (Matthew 9:27-29)

Faith made good things happen and if people wished to find and come to know God they had to believe two things: (a) His absolute supremacy over everything and (b) that He responded favorably to and rewarded any and everyone who truly desired to live within His Kingdom and allowed Him access into their lives to be their Lord, as Jesus always did.

How Could People Get It?

"God has dealt to each one a measure of faith." (Romans 12:3b)

"Faith comes by hearing and hearing by the Word of God." (Romans 10:17)

"Take heed what you hear, for with the measure you use it will be measured back to you...." (Mark 4:24)

"Salt is good, but if the salt has lost its flavor how shall it be seasoned? It is neither fit for the land nor for the rubbish heap, but men throw it out. He who has ears to hear, let him hear." (Luke 14:34-35)

All human beings had been given the same invisible seed of faith in their souls. No one was exempt from having it, nor did one person have a greater seed than any other did. The key to using it though was a deliberate and individual choice to energize it. Once activated, it would grow and develop within the limits of whatever people heard and received into their hearts. If they wanted to draw closer to God, they had to hear and accept His Word. Whatever they listened to would grow in their hearts and affect their lives, whether towards God's ways or against them. Everyone had the freewill to choose which path to follow every single time he or she made a decision, no matter how seemingly trivial. What they accepted and followed about God was precisely equal to their resources to be able to persevere through life on earth.

How did Jesus teach how to develop faith? Follow His example. He constantly went to the (Written) Word, the images that enabled Him to focus His attention on His Father in Heaven instead of His own body. Jesus began by envisioning whatever He desired to happen and took sufficient time to pray to His Father to get out of any "storm" that arose in conflict with His desires and words. Those impressions intensified the more He concentrated on reaching God and learned to disregard any present conditions.

"lest Satan should take advantage of us, for we are not ignorant of his devices. (II Corinthians 2:11)"

"For, though we walk in the flesh, we do not war according to the flesh. For, the weapons of our warfare are not carnal (Ephesians 6:17 and Hebrews 4:12), but mighty in God for pulling down strongholds, casting down arguments and every high thing that exalts itself against the knowledge of God (Isaiah 14:12-15), bringing (even) every thought (Matthew 12:34-36 and James 3:6-8) into captivity to the obedience of Christ." (II Corinthians 10:4-5)

Jesus was aware how time consuming this would be, owing to the fact that Satan increasingly would be around to interrupt, delay, hinder and even cancel His goals altogether. Nevertheless, He remained constant and unwavering, confident that the Word of God was far, far stronger than Satan ever was. It was more than sufficient to

nullify even his most cunning attacks, including eventually torturing and killing Him in an attempt to terminate God's influence on the earth.

"Your adversary—the devil—walks around like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour. Resist him steadfast in the faith...." (I Peter 5:8b-9a) (Job 1:7 and II Corinthians 11:3-4, 14-15)

The Disciples Asked Jesus to Boost Their Faith

"The apostles said to the Lord, 'Increase our faith!' So the Lord said, 'If you have faith as a mustard seed you can say to this mulberry tree, 'Be pulled up by the roots and be planted in the sea,' and it would obey you. And, which of you having a servant plowing or tending sheep will say to him when he is come in from the field, 'Come at once in from the field and sit down to eat'? But, will he not rather say to him, 'Prepare something for my supper and gird yourself and serve me till I have eaten and drunk and afterward you will eat and drink'? Does he thank that servant because he did the things that were commanded him? I think not. So, likewise, when you have done all those things which are commanded, say, 'We are unprofitable servants. We have done what was our duty to do.'" (Luke 17:5)

Jesus said that faith acted just like a servant and that everyone had to utilize it as such in order to obtain whatever he or she desired. Faith had one duty to perform and it was to fulfill the will of God, never dispute or rebel against it. Jesus often activated His individual faith with His speech. Every single word that came from His mouth lined up with His Father's heart as stated in the Scriptures and the Law. Like any seed faith increased the more it was planted, tended, and replanted. No matter how little the kernel may have been to start with (like when Jesus was only a child), when it was treated properly it inevitably grew to immeasurable dimensions.

Jesus told His disciples that *He* could not increase their faith. Rather, it was their duty to do so, by imitating Him. He merely was their tutor, their example of how to please God the Father perfectly. Jesus taught that He could not force anyone to follow His lead because of his or her freewill to opt not to comply. He merely could merely guide them if they wished to imitate the pattern of His life. Being born anew spiritually and then continuing to follow God's lead was their decision, not His. If it had been, mankind never would have rebelled initially in the Garden of Eden by heeding a voice that denied the truth of God's.

"Do not neglect the gift that is in you." (I Timothy 4:14a)

"I remind you to stir up the gift of God which is in you ... for God has not given us a Spirit of fear, but of power, and of love, and of a sound mind." (II Timothy 1:6)

The Parables of the Mustard Seed and the Leaven

"(Jesus) said, 'The Kingdom Of God is as if a man should scatter seed on the ground and should sleep by night and rise by day and the seed would sprout and grow. He himself does not know how for the earth yields crops by itself--first the blade, then the ear, after that the full grain in the head, but when the grain ripens immediately he puts in the sickle because the harvest has come.'

Then He said, 'To what shall we liken the Kingdom of God or with what parable shall we picture it? It is like a mustard seed which a man took and sowed in his field, which indeed is the least of, and smaller than, all the seeds of the earth. But, when it is grown it grows up and becomes greater than the herbs and shoots out large branches and becomes a tree, so that the birds of the air come and nest in its branches/shade.'

Another parable He spoke to them, 'The Kingdom of Heaven is like leaven which a woman took and hid in three measures of meal till it all was leavened.' And with many such parables He spoke the Word to them as they were able to hear it, but without a parable He did not speak to them, and when they were alone He explained things to His disciples." (Matthew 13:31-35 & Mark 4:26-34)

Human beings have planted the seeds of whatever they wished to grow since the beginning of recorded history. Then they cultivated them to insure that they would reap the desired crop. However, they were not responsible for its actual growth because that started from within the seed itself and developed until it was ripe for harvest. When that time came whoever planted the seed had to cultivate it in order to enjoy its yield. The more carefully the crop was tended the larger its yield and influence would be. These facts were true no matter how large or small the seed was, or no matter what its output--whether physical or spiritual. Jesus taught numerous parables about seed, time, and harvest along with cause and effect relationships concerning both God's Kingdom in Heaven as well as Satan's domain over the earth.

"God said, 'Let the earth bring forth grass, the herb that yields seed, and the fruit tree that yields fruit according to its own kind whose seed is in itself on the earth. And, it was so and the earth brought forth grass, the herb that yields seed according to its kind, and the tree that yields fruit whose seed is in itself according to its kind. And, God saw that it was good.'" (Genesis 1:11-12)

"While the earth remains, seed, time and harvest, cold and heat, winter and summer, and day and night shall not cease." (Genesis 8:22)

In addition to instructing people how to sow seeds to get a harvest, Jesus warned them not to allow a planted seed become tainted by outside negative influences that would try to harm it. Why? Growth meant that something was living. As such, it would always stimulate more growth of itself--whatever substance it was (whether visible or invisible, good or bad). Therefore, if a seed became tainted in some way, that flaw also increased as well. It was like a weed among good grass, which would flourish and if left unchecked, someday would overpower the desired crop and destroy it completely.

"Do you not know that a little leaven leavens the whole lump?" (I Corinthians 5:6b--See Genesis 3:6-13, where a single act of rebellion spread immediately and eventually caused everything bad that has taken place even up until today.)

"Do not be deceived; God is not mocked, for whatever a (person) sows that he (or she) will also reap, for he who sows to his flesh will of the flesh reap corruption, but he who sows to the Spirit will of the Spirit reap eternal Life." (Galatians 6:7-8)

"How is it that you do not understand that I did not speak to you concerning bread, but to beware of the leaven (teachings and traditions of the Pharisees and the Sadducees?" (Matthew 16:21)

Even the Wind and the Sea Obeyed Faith

"On a certain day when evening had come (Jesus) said to (His disciples), 'Let us cross over to the other side of the lake.'

Now when they had left the multitude He got into a boat with (them) and other little boats were also with Him, and they launched out. And, as they sailed suddenly a violent wind storm arose on the lake and the waves beat into the boat so that the boat was covered with waves--so that it was already filling with water--and (they) were in jeopardy, but He was in the stern asleep on a pillow.

Then His disciples came to Him and awoke Him and said to Him, 'Master! Master, we are perishing! Lord, save us! Teacher, do You not care that we are perishing?'

But, He said to them, 'Why are you fearful, O you of little faith? Where is your faith? 'Why are you so fearful? O you of little faith, how is it that you have no faith?'

Then He arose and rebuked the winds and the raging water and said to the sea. 'Peace! Be still!', and they ceased and there was great calm.

And, they were astonished, feared exceedingly, and wondered and said to one another, 'Who can this be, for He commands that even the winds and the water and they obey Him?'" (Matthew 8:23-2, Mark 4:35-41 & Luke 8:22-25)

This is a very short account but reveals much, not only about Jesus but His disciples, too, who we can infer were all regular human beings. Jesus evidently believed that his disciples could handle the boat by themselves while He took a nap, for at least several of them were experienced fishermen. If or whenever they required that He aid in maneuvering the craft it was in His nature to help even if they were so tired that He had to sail it without their assistance. However, Jesus was so tired that He, as a normal man, needed to rest. He even went to sleep. Being that He knew that He was their model of Godly behavior, if any one of them had desired to sleep also, they could have followed His example, unless He specifically had asked them not to do so for

some reason.

Whether or not anyone else did choose to take a nap, when the squall began it woke everyone up but Jesus. Until the disciples came to Him and spoke to Him He remained unconscious and untroubled by the surrounding predicament; no matter how hard the storm was raging and threatening their physical safety. Jesus was so peaceful and had such fully developed faith that His Father would watch out for and take care of Him that He was totally unaffected by the threatening weather. Unlike His companions, He was absolutely unaffected by it.

Jesus did not get upset when He saw the emergency that they were in, Him included. Rather, instead of doing what amounted to "bowing to Satan", Jesus used His Own faith to rectify the predicament, in the fastest way: He told the wind and sea to calm down and they did. Just as He had in the past, and would continue to do, Jesus spoke to a situation calling into being what He wanted to substitute what He did not. Jesus initial reaction when his men came to Him for help was to ask why they were so scared. Evidently, what they perceived as life threatening, He did not. He had taught them not to become anxious, worrisome, or even slightly afraid of anything because if they had faith, His Father would take care of all their needs--which at the moment was to keep everyone in the boat safe and it from sinking.

Jesus actually seemed to be annoyed because they came to get Him while He was resting because He recently had taught them the above. He wasn't displeased that they woke Him up or that they wanted His help. It was the *reason* that they did so--fear. Jesus also recognized that the disciples had not taken the time to reflect that they not only were distrustful of God the Father saving themselves, they were unbelieving that He would let His Son perish with them. To question that was to suspect that He, Jesus, really even was the Christ, whether they realized it or not.

Even after seeing not only this but all of Jesus' other deeds His disciples still continued to question His authority over everything that did not have freewill on the earth, like the weather. Human beings could not control it but God certainly could, for He created it in the first place. Getting what He wanted the elements to do paled in comparison to overcoming mankind's stubborn desires to thwart His decisions and replace them with their own self-centered thoughts and actions.

The disciples asked Jesus whether He even cared what happening around and to them, which was especially ludicrous given the fact that He was asleep because He just had spent several days delivering other people that He didn't even know from severe predicaments. How could they even imagine that He wouldn't help His friends, too? And, supposing that the other small boats were still in the vicinity and therefore were experiencing the same storm as in Jesus' boat, how could they ever believe that He would not keep these individuals in mind, along with His friends and Himself. Jesus' words and actions not only saved the people in His Own boat; they rescued anyone else who was sailing on that lake at the same time. Jesus took care of a far greater problem than these men expected. They only were concerned about themselves while He looked at a far more expanded situation and fixed it for everyone affected.

Jesus Marveled at the Faith of a Non-Jew

"When Jesus had concluded all His sayings in the hearing of his people, He

entered Capernum and a certain centurion's servant who was dear to him was sick, paralyzed, dreadfully tormented, and ready to die. So, when (the centurion) heard about Jesus he sent elders of the Jews to Him pleading with Him to come and heal his servant. When they came to Jesus they begged Him earnestly, saying that the one for whom He should do this was deserving, saying, 'He loves our nation and has built us a synagogue.'

And, Jesus said to him, 'I will come and heal him.'

Then Jesus went with them and when He was not far from the house, the centurion sent friends/came to Him saying to Him, 'Lord, do not trouble Yourself for I am not worthy that You should come under my roof. Therefore, but only speak a word and my servant will be healed. For, I also am a man under authority having soldiers under me and I say to this one, 'Go!' and he goes, and to another, 'Come' and he comes; and to my servant, 'Do this', and he does it.'

When Jesus heard these things He marveled at him and turned around and said to the crowd that followed, 'Assuredly, I say to you, I have not found such great faith not even in Israel. And, I say to you that many will come from the East and West and sit down with Abraham, Isaac, Jacob in the Kingdom of Heaven, but the sons of the Kingdom shall be cast into outer darkness. There will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.'

Then Jesus said to the centurion/those who were sent, 'Go your way and as you have believed so let it be done for you,' and the servant was healed that same hour, and those who were sent returning to the house found the servant well who had been sick." (Matthew 8:5-13 & Luke 7:2-10)

The centurion very likely never saw Jesus or what He ever had done in person before he decided to seek His help. Hearing about Jesus' exploits evidently had been enough to stir up this man's faith to the point that he acted on it. After His resurrection, Jesus told his disciple Thomas that people who never saw Him with their eyes and still had faith in Him were more blessed than those who had. (*John 20:29*) Why? It takes stronger faith to believe in what you cannot see, versus what you can. That faith is the evidence of the spiritual versus the corporal world. That faith also, is what will change circumstances.

Although Matthew reads as if the soldier went himself, that is less likely than the account in Luke's gospel where the centurion respected the Jewish traditions and sent emissaries to Jesus from His Own people. Matthew, indeed, traveled with Jesus and Luke did not, thus making him an actual witness to the event as it unfolded. Therefore, his version normally would be the more accurate. However, Matthew did not claim to have included the same precise details about his writing as Luke does by interviewing multiple witness to Jesus ministry and sharing them in an orderly, chronological fashion like an unbiased reporter. Additionally, by joining the two renditions, it becomes clearer that, given the rest of the story, Luke's seemed to be the more accurate version.

The Roman soldier was used to living and working in an earthly kingdom with a stratified and specific chain of command. He, being considered to be relatively high in respect and power in that organization viewed the rest of the world in military terms and presumed that Jesus would act likewise. This man recognized Him as being the leader

of many followers and the Roman viewed them akin to being Jesus' servants. So, this man never would have anticipated Jesus Himself actually performing what He easily could have dispatched someone else under His authority to do. In this man's eyes, Jesus coming Himself was like a general doing the work of a private.

Jesus reacted to people's faith and requests, not only their needs unless asked. He already knew what everyone required because His Father did. They were in constant communication with each Other and were One. There were numerous instances that testified about Jesus reacting by getting close to, yet not helping someone, even to His Own closest friends and in His home town. When He walked on water to be close enough to save his disciples from a great storm and their boat was sinking, Jesus did not react until they called to him. In fact, He *"would have passed them by"* (Mark 6:48) had they not done so and they very well might have drowned with Him right there. Additionally, when Jesus was in Nazareth, He did not just step in and cure every sick person who lived there, only the ones who had the faith to receive His gift of healing. Jesus never forced Himself into anyone's life unless they asked Him to, which that Roman centurion did.

The centurion did not seek help for himself, but another person, a servant whom he considered to be beneath him in that society. In effect, he treated his servant as he would like to have been treated himself, something not mentioned in either rendition that must have pleased Jesus immensely. Although the Roman probably was unaware of this, Jesus had taught this concept already to His intimate followers. (Matthew 7:12) Not only that, He Himself was living in this manner daily. He did this even to the point of dying for people who at the time mostly hated Him.

Jesus made a prophesy concerning the fact that many people would receive Him, just as Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob did to God the Father. Although no one seemed to understand or react to this message it signified the advent of the gospel being spread to other nations besides the Hebrews, this Roman soldier being among the first to be affected. Additionally, Jesus added a veiled warning that some of His Own people, in constantly rejecting Him as their Messiah would remain in Satan's kingdom, the outer darkness, where they would suffer greatly because of it.