

Chapter Three ***WALKING BY FAITH***

If you were to choose some Biblical characters to demonstrate what it is to walk by faith, whom would you select ?

Caleb, who, though more than eighty years old, wanted to fight giants?

Elisha, who stood against all the prophets of Baal ?

Daniel, who publicly prayed knowing that it might cost him his life ?

It is interesting to see those whom the Bible notes as examples of faith. None of the above!

The apostle **Paul** writes about faith in his letter to the Romans, chapter 3: 28. “... *we conclude that a man is justified by faith without the deeds of the law.*” He then takes all of chapter 4 to give his example of the patriarch Abraham, to whom ‘faith was reckoned for righteousness’.

The apostle **James** also takes Abraham as his supreme example of the life of faith, declaring that faith without works is dead. He asks, “*Was not Abraham our father justified by works, when he had offered Isaac his son upon the altar? Seest thou how faith wrought with his works, and by works was faith made perfect ?*” (James 2: 21,22)

However, he adds a second example, one which must seem strange to all of us. He presents to us Rahab the harlot, who welcomed the spies sent into Jericho. By all human standards she was a hardly a commendable person - besides following a despicable trade, she was a traitor and a liar who cared only for her own safety. Yet she is named as an example of faith.

What is even more surprising is that James is not the only one who so considers her! The author to the book of Hebrews also names her in his extensive list. In my former understanding of faith, I would certainly not have considered her! - nor many others mentioned in Hebrews 11. Then, maybe it's my understanding of faith that has to change.

Some would even title chapter 11 of Hebrews as “*Heroes of Faith*”. I see no heroes there, just ordinary people like you and me, who experienced all kinds of circumstances in the walk of faith. Some conquered kingdoms, by faith; others were put to death, by faith! A better title for the chapter would be “*Examples of Faith*” as its purpose is to show us that, in His sovereignty, God leads men and women along many different paths in order to fulfill His will in and through them. To us, torture and death do not seem compatible to God's will for the believer, but history is replete with stories of how the church grew rapidly upon the blood of martyrs. It was God's will that they died, so that they might be ‘to the praise of His glory’. This is not to say

that He does not have compassion for the feelings of people. Of course He does, but, among His saints He is developing those who, by their suffering and death, will bring greater glory to Him than by their life. To them He has guaranteed a ‘better resurrection’.

*Sometimes on the mount where the sun shines so bright,
God leads His dear children along.*

*Sometimes in the valley, in darkest of night,
God leads His dear children along.*

Some through the water, some through the flood,

Some through the fire, but all through the blood.

Some through great sorrow, but God gives a song,

In the night season and all the day long.

(G.A.Young)

In the Gospels we read of **only six people** whom Jesus commended for their faith. If the choices of Paul, James and the author of Hebrews raise your eyebrows, wait till you see those whom Jesus chooses!

At least three of them were not even Jews, one was a leper, another had been sick for many years, one was blind, three declared themselves 'unworthy' and all were sinners.

The Roman Centurion of Matthew 8: 5 - 13.

His servant was lying paralysed at home so he asked the Lord if he would heal him.

"I'll come with you," said the Master, but the centurion answered him. "Lord I am not worthy for you to come under my roof, but just speak the word and my servant will be healed!"

Let us understand this; he probably had the finest house in the city, for the rank of a centurion in the Roman army was one of great honour. His unworthiness was not because of his status but because he realised he was in the presence of someone far greater than himself. He continued, "Lord, I am like you, a man under authority."

Under what authority did he consider Jesus to be? He had no delegated authority from the Jewish authorities, nor did he have the status of one schooled at the feet of a great rabbi. He was a lowly carpenter - but He did have the authority of the anointing of God, and the centurion recognised this. How? By faith!

Jesus marvelled and said, "*I have never found such faith in all of Israel!*"

Where was the faith? The centurion had an *inner witness* that this man, Jesus, was a man with divine authority. He obeyed that witness (of the Holy Spirit) and submitted himself to that authority. "I am not worthy; just speak the word and it shall be done."

The woman with a hemorrhage of Mark 5: 25 - 34.

This unfortunate woman had endured much at the hands of many physicians with no healing from her embarrassing and distressing condition. Indeed, she was getting much worse. The law declared her 'unclean' so she was not allowed to enjoy many of the privileges of the common folk. She could not attend the celebrations of Feast Days, nor enter the synagogue to worship, and most of all, she must not come near the 'righteous' Pharisees and 'holy men'.

She had heard of Jesus, but an *inner witness* told her to reach out to touch the hem of His garment. This was contrary to everything that she had been taught, but she obeyed and was healed. There was no precedent for this. She did not believe because she had heard of others being healed the same way. She simply obeyed an inner impulse.

Jesus said, "*Take heart, daughter. Your faith has made you well.*"

The Canaanite woman of Matthew 15: 22 - 28.

This woman's heart was breaking as she sought help for her demon-possessed daughter. She came to the Lord but even He seemed to shun her and His disciples tried to drive her away. She was not a Jew but she saw what almost no one else had seen, even the disciples up to this time. She recognised Jesus as "The Lord, the Son of David". These were terms well known to apply to the coming Messiah. Others had not yet recognised Him, but this Canaanite woman had. Such revelation only comes by the *inner witness* of the Holy Spirit. This same revelation came to Peter on Mount Hermon, nearly two years later! Jesus tested her understanding, her revelation, by challenging her that it was not good to throw

the children's bread (ie; healing for the Jews) to the dogs (ie; Gentiles). Her reply shows that she fully understood, by revelation, that He truly was the Messiah.

Jesus said, "*O woman, your faith is great; be it done for you as you wish!*"

Blind Bartimaeus of Mark 10: 46 - 52.

Though blind, Bartimaeus could see more than all the great multitude of sighted people surrounding Jesus. He lived in the cursed city of Jericho and had lost his sight, becoming a beggar, despised by all around him. When he cried out, the people sternly told him to be quiet but he would not cease in his crying, for like the Canaanite woman, he had received a revelation, an *inner witness* of Jesus as Messiah. "Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me."

Jesus called the beggar to Him and asked a strange question. "What do you want me to do?"

Bartimaeus replied, "Master, I want to regain my sight!"

Jesus said, "*Go your way, your faith has made you well.*" And immediately he regained his sight.

Revelation had preceded confession with healing as a result.

The woman in Simon's house of Luke 7: 37 - 50.

In John 11:2 and Matthew 26:6 it is said that this woman was Mary, sister of Lazarus. Simon, a Pharisee, watched her actions and began to judge Jesus as lacking discernment, for she was recognised as a sinner. Jesus, however, was fully aware of who she was but recognised her actions as anointing him for burial. She probably had little understanding of this but, acting in obedience to an *inner witness*, the prompting of the Holy Spirit, and motivated by love, she had ministered to the Lord prophetically.

Jesus said, "*Your faith has saved you; go in peace.*"

The tenth leper of Luke 17: 11 - 19.

Ten lepers had come to Jesus seeking to be healed. All obeyed His instructions to go to the priests, to be declared 'clean'. This was a requirement of the Old testament and, though one of them was a Samaritan, he also obeyed. On the way to the priests, all of them were healed but only the Samaritan acknowledged that his healing was not some magic trick but was due to God so, falling at the feet of Jesus, he began to glorify God. He had obeyed the audible voice of the Son of God and had been healed.

Jesus said, "*Rise and go your way; your faith has made you well.*"

In **all six examples**, faith was evidenced and fulfilled, in **obedience**. If there had been no obedience to the recognition of authority, to the revelation of deity, to the inner witness of the prompting of the Spirit, to the spoken word of the Lord, there would have been no miracles recorded.

Definition of FAITH

How then shall we define faith so that it meets all the questions of controversy and explains the choices of Jesus, Paul, James and the writer to the Hebrews?

When I ask people to define faith the usual answer is to quote Hebrews 11: 1

"Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen."

Yet, when asked to explain their definition, I find few who have a convincing explanation. To me the author is simply saying what the apostle Paul has said elsewhere, as quoted in the last chapter.

a) What is it that we hope for? Barclay, the author of the popular devotional series, Our Daily Bread, defines hope as '*eager expectation*' for that which is promised. The apostles Paul and Peter both gave testimony before their accusers of our great hope of resurrection. To them, our hope is sure. To the author of Hebrews, it is as an anchor fixed within the veil of the presence of God. We hope for what we shall surely receive. What shall we receive but that which flows from the grace of God; that which He has promised? His gift of salvation, His gift of the Holy Spirit dwelling within us; His gifts given by the Holy Spirit. His GIFT.

I picture the little child at Christmastime or a birthday. He knows he will receive something special from his parents - a gift from their love. He eagerly waits for the big day. He has hope for that which is surely

going to come. Finally he receives what is promised - his gift. This is the substance of that which he hoped for. His expectation has become reality.

Faith is the substance of things hoped for. It is a **GIFT**.

b) When I first arrived in Canada, I viewed the trees in our garden with great anticipation of enjoying their fruit the following spring. However, I had no knowledge of whether they were apple trees, plum trees or peach trees. I am not a scholar in horticulture and could not recognise the trees by their leaves or shape. When the fruit began to arrive, however, I had no doubt what each one was. I knew them by their *fruit*. The fruit was the evidence I needed. The nature of the trees had not changed, the character of the trees had not changed, but these had been hidden from my understanding, until the fruit came. The evidence of things unseen was the fruit upon the branches.

So it is that the evidence of the Spirit-filled life is in its fruit. Jesus said, "For the tree is known by his fruit." (Matt 12:33)

Faith is the evidence of things not seen. It is a **FRUIT**.

The author of Hebrews 11 is saying no more than Paul said in 1 Corinthians 12:9 and Galatians 5:22.

I define faith in this way:

"God's finger in the hearts of men and women, moving them to do His will."

It is evidenced in **obedience** as an attitude of the heart. It is not an attitude of the mind. It is BELIEF AND RESPONSE. The moving finger is God's, the response of obedience is ours. The first and greatest work of faith a man can do is to believe on the Lord Jesus Christ - unto salvation. Revelation precedes confession - see Peter on Mt. Hermon, "Thou art the Christ." It is evidenced in repentance, baptism, confession and good deeds (works of righteousness). Where these are not evident, one can rightly doubt (like James) the reality of faith; it is effectively 'dead'.

The **walk of faith** is a daily submission to His will (revealed and unrevealed). Holding onto Daddy's hand! As Peter said, "To whom else can we go?" As we hold on, our Father is able to move mountains! - because of His character, not because of our strength of mind or belief! Note that even the devils believe in all that our Father can do, but that is NOT faith.