

FAITH

HOPE

LOVE

A THREE PART SERIES

**BOOK ONE
- FAITH -**

**So, faith, hope, love abide, these three,
BUT THE GREATEST OF THESE IS LOVE**

INTRODUCTION

YOU WERE BORN WITH IT

You can pretend it's not there.
You can ignore it when it speaks to you.
You can build a wall to hide it from yourself.

But it's still there.

You were born with the knowledge that you are living your life under the eye of One who knows you...

and to whom you will account for
what you did with the light you had.

Everything depends on what you do with this knowledge.

And this is the judgment, that the light has come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil. For every one who does evil hates the light, and does not come to the light, lest his deeds should be exposed. But he who does what is true comes to the light, that it may be clearly seen that his deeds have been wrought in God.

John 3:19-21

As the light of God begins to search us, our innate knowledge of God develops into one of two things:

faith.
unbelief.

Unbelief is not lack of faith, it is rebellion. It is rejecting spiritual light and embracing spiritual darkness with an act of will.

To have faith is to embrace the light which is most clearly seen in the person of the crucified and risen Lamb of God.

Look to him, and open your heart, and faith becomes possible.

*"Behold the Lamb of God who takes away
the sin of the world!"*

*"I am the light of the world;
he who follows me will not walk in darkness
but will have the light of life." John 8:12*

FAITH . . . A LIVING RELATIONSHIP

And they heard the voice of the Lord God walking in the garden in the cool of the day, and Adam and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the Lord God among the trees of the garden. But the Lord God called to Adam and said to him, "Where are you?" And he said "I heard your voice in the garden, and I was afraid, because I was naked; and I hid myself."

One of the most important words in the Christian vocabulary is the word,

FAITH

Everything hinges on whether or not you have faith.

But the problem is that many good Christian people have a very confused idea about what faith is. The faith they think they have, or the faith they try so hard to acquire is not faith at all.

For instance, there was a time when a Sunday School teacher or a pastor thought he was doing some troubled soul a big favor when he said, "Don't ask questions, Believe! That's the way it is. Believe."as if telling someone to shut up and believe would bring him to faith in God!

Many people think they have faith because they have never allowed themselves to question what their grandmother told them about God, or what the preacher or the priest said. Some think they have faith because they claim to believe everything that's in the Bible. (Of course, they never read the Bible.) What these people call faith has taken the place of the fairy tales that used to delight them as a child. They take a dose of faith once-in-a-while as a diversion, a little break from reality.

Then on Sunday afternoon, or Monday morning, they lay their faith aside and get down to business making a living and getting ahead according to the jungle law.

To other people, faith means guessing your way through life. There are certain things about life which we cannot know for sure, at least not in the same way that we know things we can see and touch. What happens when you die? Is there a spirit world? Is there a God watching us all the time or is there nothing out there beyond the stars but an infinity of black space? So you pick out a set of guesses and call them your beliefs. These guesses don't influence your living very much, but they make interesting conversation.

To still others, faith is a system of positive thinking. It is thought that if

you believe a thing is going to happen --- and believe hard enough --- somehow it will happen. You want a promotion. So you start "putting your faith to work."

You think promotion. "I'm going to get that promotion! I know I'm going to get that promotion." One day the boss calls you into his office and, with a big smile, tells you the good news.

But when Jesus Christ talks about faith, he is not talking about going by what your grandmother said, or taking a Sunday morning excursion into fantasy, or guessing your way through life or thinking positive thoughts. When Jesus Christ talks about faith,

he is talking about a **living relationship with the living God.**

When Jesus says, "Have faith in God," He is telling you to know God for yourself. Not what somebody told you about God. Not having a few opinions about God. Not throwing some prayers up into the sky and hoping that someone "up there" might catch them. Not sitting in a room talking to yourself and calling it prayer. But to know God better than you know yourself or your husband or wife or mother or father or child.

"And this is life eternal, that they might know thee, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom thou hast sent."

.... that's what faith is.

You don't have to feel guilty if you don't believe everything your grandmother told you to believe. You don't even have to feel guilty if you find it hard to believe that the earth was made in six twenty-four-hour days....or because you have some negative thoughts interfering with your positive thinking. So you have questions....any honest person is going to have questions. Concentrate on one thing: get to know God. Then you will have faith, the only faith there is, and your questions will work themselves out.

But how do I get to know God? How can I, a flesh-and-blood person come to know the invisible Spirit of Glory behind all things? I cannot see him or touch him or hear him, so how can I know him?

Who says you can't hear him? Who says you have to be some kind of special prophet in order to hear God? **YOU CAN HEAR GOD.**

"And they heard the voice of the Lord God walking in the garden in the cool of the day, and Adam and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the Lord God among the trees of the garden. But

the Lord God called to Adam and said to him, "Where are you?" And he said, "I heard your voice in the garden, and I was afraid, because I was naked; and I hid myself..."

...that's why we don't hear God. Not because God isn't calling, but because we're hiding. Every time the sound of his voice reaches our ears, we cover them and run farther into the bushes. We're afraid because we're naked, we're in no shape to stand in his presence.

If I just finished murdering the child of my best friend---the blood is still dripping from my hands----and suddenly I hear my friend's voice calling to me from off in the distance, which way am I going to run? If I just finished burning down your house and you come along and ask me for a match, you won't see me for dust.

So when the living God calls to us by name, we don't say "Oh, isn't that nice! Here comes God! I've been looking forward to meeting him." We look down at our hands and they are shaking. Our knees begin to buckle under us. And if there is a manhole we can jump into, or a closet, we're gone.

Why do you think the people of Israel killed the prophets? It was simply their way of stopping their ears and hiding in the bushes. They did not want to hear what God had to say.

But just because we run and hide----that doesn't stop God. Just because we busy ourselves with everything under the sun but the things that count, or keep looking the other way, or continually change the subject... just because we pretend to be concerned about human justice and human rights and world peace, when in fact the only thing we're concerned about is our own image and our own survival----God is not hindered. He keeps coming on, coming on, calling to us just as he called to Adam! "Where are you, my child? Where are you?"

Then to have faith is a very simple matter. All you have to do is have enough courage to come crawling out of the bushes and stand there to meet the One who is calling to you and is at that moment approaching you. "Here I am, Lord. Here I am. I'm naked. I'm stained with evil. I'm chained to a demon, but here I am."

When you do this, you find yourself looking right into the face of Jesus Christ.

And instead of condemning you for what you've been, he gives you a robe

to cover your nakedness----a robe just like his----and says, "Come, follow me."

But when the fullness of time was come, God sent forth his Son, made of a woman, made under the law, to redeem them that were under the law, (under the curse of their own guilt), that we might receive the adoption of sons.

He comes out into this wilderness with his blood already shed for us, and calls us like a shepherd calling his lost sheep. Calls us by name. Calls each of us as if each were the only one out here. All we have to do is answer,

"Here I am, Lord. Over here. Help me!" That's what it is to have faith.

And the minute we have faith----the minute we step out of the bushes and answer God's call, that moment God comes to us and does something for us. Something happens that we can see. You don't have to stand around guessing whether there is a God. You don't have to spend your whole life scratching your head and wondering whether your grandmother told you the truth.... you can know!

When the shepherd found the lost sheep, he immediately picked it up and carried it home and had a celebration. The sheep knew that it was found.

When the prodigal son was still a great way off his father ran to him, fell on his neck, kissed him, put a robe on him, a ring on his finger, shoes on his feet, killed the fatted calf and called for music and dancing. The father made his penitent son to know that he was a son. He was welcome. This was his home where he belonged. Do you think God will do any less for you?

God will make you to know that you are really his child and that he is really your father.

And because you are sons, God hath sent forth the Spirit of his Son into your hearts crying, "Abba, Father!"

You are no longer a slave to the elemental spirits of the universe. You are a son, a daughter, and heir of God through Christ. And the Spirit of Christ in you, makes you to know this.

It is not a matter of guessing. The Spirit of Christ has come into you, and you are changed by him. You are driven by a power that you never knew before.

You have a liberty that you never had before. You can conquer things within yourself which before you just could not master.

But notice carefully: this does not happen until you come out of the bushes. Too many people are trying to be saints over there in the bushes --- trying to have faith and live a sham at the same time. It cannot be done.

Of course it is embarrassing to come out naked before God. But what are those bushes, those fig leaves of pretense to cover your nakedness, compared with the robe of righteousness, washed in his own blood, that Christ offers you? Better to come out of the bushes and confess to God what you are and what you have been ----now----and get it over with, and get that robe, than to wait until the Judgment and have God lift the bushes and expose you, with nothing to cover your nakedness in all eternity.

So many people are trying to have faith the hard way----

the impossible way.

They are trying to make themselves believe other men's guesses. Or they are trying to believe by crawling back into history seeking to verify events that took place twenty centuries ago. And the harder they try to believe, the more they are plagued with doubts.

You can't go back 2000 years and check it out. You don't have to. For the Christ who died outside Jerusalem for the sins of the race is alive and calling you by name..... right now.

All you have to do is answer him.

Answer that voice that you know has been calling to your heart. You've been running away. Stop. Turn around, and say, "Lord, here I am. Come and get me."

And he will. Before this day ends, God will confirm your faith. He will put a robe on you to cover your nakedness. He will put a ring on your finger, shoes on your feet. He will kill the fatted calf. There will be rejoicing in heaven. And in your heart there will be a new Spirit that cries, "Father! Father!" bearing witness to your spirit that now you are indeed a child of God.

THE REALITY OF FAITH

And without faith it is impossible to please him. For whoever would draw near to God must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who seek him. By faith Noah, being warned by God concerning events as yet unseen, took heed and constructed an ark for the saving of his household; by this he condemned the world and became an heir of the righteousness which comes by faith.

By faith Abraham obeyed when he was called to go out to a place which he was to receive as an inheritance; and he went out, not knowing where he was to go. By faith he sojourned in the land of promise, as in a foreign land, living in tents with Isaac and Jacob, heirs with him of the same promise. For he looked forward to the city which has foundations, whose builder and maker is God.
Hebrews 11:6-10

If we're serious about drawing near to God we have to be careful not to confuse having faith with being religious. To be religious all you have to do is add a few religious trappings to your life -

- go to church — once-in-a-while,
- read the Bible — once-in-a-while,
- repeat some prayers,
- say that you believe in God,

- and you're religious.

To have faith is a very different thing. To have faith you literally let go of your old life and take hold of a new one.

Abraham let go of his homeland, launched out into the unknown, and with his heart took hold of a new land he couldn't even see.

Peter let go of his fishing boat and every familiar thing and took hold of Jesus, to sail with Him into unknown waters and become a fisher of men.

"Do not be afraid; henceforth you will be catching men," said Jesus. And when they had brought their boats to land, they left everything and followed him. Luke 5:10-11

Every man and woman who has ever walked with God has taken this step. They joyfully abandoned the treasure of this world to obtain the treasure of God.

"The kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden in a field, which a man found and covered up; then in his joy he goes and sells all that he has and buys that field." Matthew 13:44

Why does the man have to sell all he has and buy the field? Why doesn't he just pick up the treasure and walk off with it?

- Because the treasure isn't sitting there in a neat little box to be picked up and carried off in five minutes.

The treasure is in the form of ore --- it's going to take time and trouble to dig it out. If the man wants the treasure he's going to buy the field. And to buy the field it's going to cost everything he's got. Does this throw him into a quandary? Does he go home to his wife a nervous wreck?

"What's wrong, honey. Why can't you eat your supper?"

"Well, I found this treasure today hidden in a field worth more than you can imagine. But to get it we have to buy the field and it will cost us everything we've got. I'm sick over it! I can't make up my mind!"

There is no conflict in the man's heart.

*"...in his joy he goes and sells all that he has
and buys the field."*

In his joy he digs at that treasure day after day, year after year, until he has it in the shape it needs to be, until he really has it.

If we haven't come to the place where we're ready to joyfully abandon everything else to walk with God, then we simply haven't seen God's treasure yet.

- We may be religious,
- but we haven't tasted the life of faith.

May God give us, today, a vision of the treasure He has for us -
so bright,
so clear, that we'll gladly sell everything we have to buy the field.

The treasure is the life of knowing God,
walking with Him,
talking with Him,
living in His will,
loving Him with all our hearts.

Jesus died on the cross to make that kind of life possible to us.

"I am the Way — to God.
I am the Truth — of God.
I am the Life — of God.
Come to me and I will bring you to God."

What do you think it was that caused Peter and the others to forsake everything and follow Jesus? They knew in their bones that this man would bring them into the presence of the living God! They knew it! And when we get a

good glimpse of Jesus we know it too. This man, Jesus, is the treasure for whom it's worth forsaking everything.

Moreover, Jesus not only opened the way to the Father with His death so we could enter heaven some day, He pours out the Holy Spirit upon us to quicken us, enlighten us, so we can walk the way of God on this earth. He pours out the Holy Spirit on us afresh this hour!

Jesus opens the way.

Jesus gives the Spirit, but there are some things we have to do: we have to have faith. Not just be religious, but have faith...

1. To have faith is to dare to believe that God is there.

***And without faith it is impossible to please him.
For whoever would draw near to God must believe
that he exists and that he rewards those who seek him.
Hebrews 11:6***

Believe that He exists. Not that He exists theoretically, but that He exists concretely. That He is here to help us, save us, and love us.

"Oh, how I wish I could believe that," people say.
"I want to believe in God.
I envy people who do, but I can't!
What can I do about this?"

Start looking at Jesus. That much you can do. Just look at Him!

"Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world."

"Look unto him and be saved all the ends of the earth!"

You want to know that God is there?

- Look at Jesus healing the sick,
- and see God.
- Look at Jesus forgiving the sinner,
- and see God.
- Look at Jesus feeding the hungry,
- and see God.
- Look at Jesus opening the eyes of the blind,
- and see God,

and draw near to this incarnation of God who is nothing but good!

Before you know it you will begin to know that God is there. *You will know it.* He's there waiting for you to draw near.

2. To have faith is to expect God to manifest Himself to you as you search for Him.

...For whoever would draw near to God must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who seek him.

Jesus teaches this over and over -

- *ask and you shall receive,*
- *seek and you shall find,*
- *knock and it shall be opened to you,*

*for everyone who asks receives,
he who seeks finds,
to him who knocks it shall be opened.*

There is no such thing as pursuing God and finding nothing.

Even if you're way off the track, if you have totally wrong ideas about God, if you begin to seek Him you will find. He will reveal Himself to you. He will speak to your heart. He will touch your mind and open your eyes.

But there has to be pursuit. We have to do some seeking.

Are you hungry enough for God —

- *to get up early and pray?*
- *to follow any glimmer of light that comes?*
- *to seek out anyone who you think might possibly be able to help you?*

This goes not only for those outside the Kingdom, but for those within. The pursuit of God never stops.

*0 God, thou art my God; early will I seek thee:
my soul thirsteth for thee, my flesh longeth for thee
in a dry and thirsty land, where no water is... Psalm 63:1*

Do you think Paul ever stopped pursuing God? Or Peter?

*"When thou saidst, 'Seek ye my face;'
my heart said unto thee, 'Thy face, Lord, will I seek.'"*

The more you do this the more you will discover that this is the only pursuit on earth worth the effort.

3. To have faith is to get rid of the distractions.

"Fear not, little flock, for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom. Sell your possessions, and give alms; provide yourselves with purses that do not grow old,

with a treasure in the heavens that does not fail, where no thief approaches and no moth destroys. For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also." Luke 12:32-34

As we begin to find God we also start to understand what it is that has been keeping us blind all these years.

- Our treasure has been in the wrong place.
- We've been attached to things in our lives which have become idols.

So we begin to simplify and unclutter our lives. Joyfully we sell all that we have to buy the field. We give alms, providing ourselves with purses that do not grow old - a treasure in the heavens that does not fail.

(No man can tell us what to get rid of next. The Spirit of God shows us — a-step-at-a-time.)

This uncluttering of your life is one of the least painful things God will ever call us to do. It won't make you a nervous wreck. Every new distraction you throw overboard will bring new relief, new joy.

". . . then in his joy he went and sold all that he had and bought that field."

4. Having faith is something you have to do for yourself, no one can do it for you.

But at midnight there was a cry, "Behold, the bridegroom! Come out to meet him." Then all those maidens rose and trimmed their lamps. And the foolish said to the wise,

"Give us some of your oil, for our lamps are going out." But the wise replied, "Perhaps there will not be enough for us and for you; go rather, to the dealers and buy for yourselves." And while they went to buy, the bridegroom came, and those who were ready went in with him to the marriage feast; and the door was shut.
Matthew 25:6-10

Don't depend on some preacher or evangelist to pump you full of faith every two weeks. Don't wait around for your husband or wife or child to get in the mood to seek God too. The call of God is on your life now!

The door of the Kingdom is open to you now!

You have seen the treasure hidden in the field. Now is your chance to sell all you have and buy it.

The issue is:

"Will you let go of your old life,

*your mediocre life,
your self-centered,
vain,
empty life,*

and take hold of HIS life? Will you keep doing this?"

Never mind what anybody else on earth is doing,

- what about you?

"Fear not, little flock, for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom. Sell your possessions, and give alms; provide yourselves with purses that do not grow old, with a treasure in the heavens that does not fail, where no thief approaches and no moth destroys. For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also."

LIVING BY FAITH

For all believers the key word is faith.

Evangelicals were taught from childhood that we are "justified, not by the works of the law, but by faith"; that we are saved, not by our own righteousness, but by faith.

Rediscovery of "justification by faith" inspired the Protestant Reformation, which set off a spiritual awakening that swept over Europe around 500 years ago.

This spiritual awakening began when Luther and others like him stressed that people were brought into a living relationship with God, not by their own efforts, but by faith in Jesus Christ.

One day I had a conversation through a half-opened door with a lady who was lamenting that she was not enjoying a sense of the presence of God as she once experienced it.

"But to have the presence of God", I said to her, "there are some things we have to do".

"Wait a minute!" she protested, "We're saved by grace not by works!"

Most of us are like that woman.

We have the doctrine down cold.

We know that everything hinges on faith.

But adhering to the *doctrine* of faith is one thing – living the *life* of faith is quite another.

When Moses was a young man, he was aware that he was different from the people around him.

He was the adopted son of Pharaoh's daughter and enjoyed all the privileges of nobility. He had his own apartment, his own chariot, a fine horse, and bags of money to spend. But Moses knew that, by birth, he was a Hebrew.

And Hebrews were people of faith. They believed in the Unseen God. Moses began to think of himself as a Hebrew believer – a man of faith.

The only trouble was, he lived like all the Egyptians around him – not like a man of faith.

When Moses was forty, he saw an Egyptian beating on a Hebrew. Here was his chance to prove to himself that he was a man of faith. He killed the Egyptian, saved the Hebrew.

But killing the Egyptian was not an act of faith.

It was not inspired by the God of the Hebrews.

It was inspired by Moses' ego.

Word got out that Moses had killed an Egyptian. His life was in danger. So he fled into the wilderness of Midian where he lived as a shepherd for another forty years.

Sometimes when Moses would lie on the hillside watching his sheep, he would say to himself, "Nobody knows this but me, and I'm not going to advertise it, but I'm a Hebrew---I'm a man of faith."

But Moses was not yet living the life of faith. He was merely clinging to an idea in his head.

Let's be honest with ourselves. Much of the time you and I are like Moses was before he stumbled into the burning bush – we think we're "Hebrews", we think we're people of faith, we adhere to the doctrine of faith like all good "Hebrews," but we live like the Egyptians around us.

Sometimes we take a swing at an Egyptian, at least with our mouths, to convince ourselves that we are really different.

But we are driven most of the time, as Moses was in those days, by our egos --- not by the Spirit of God.

Many times we claim the inspiration of the Spirit of God --- for what our ego decides to do.

"The Lord, showed me," we say with great piety. But did he? Were we even seeking his light?

The thing you did, the thing you said, the way you imposed yourself on the group – that wasn't the Spirit of God! It was your ego.

One day Moses is leading his sheep around Mount Horeb, and he stumbles on this awesome mystery. He sees a bush burning merrily all by itself---but the leaves remain green. He draws near to have a look.

"Moses! Take off your shoes! You are standing on holy ground."

Moses falls on his face, tears off his sandals trembling like a leaf in the wind.

"I am the God of your father, the God Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob. Stand up Moses. I have work for you. Come. I will send you to Egypt, to Pharaoh that you may bring forth my children, the sons of Israel, out of Egypt."

"Who me? They won't listen to me. They won't believe me. They'll say, 'The Lord did not send you. The Lord did not appear to you.' "

"What's that in your hand, Moses?"

"A rod."

"Throw it on the ground."

Moses throws it, and it becomes a serpent.

"Pick it up."

He picks it up and, it's his faithful rod.
A few more samples, and Moses still protests, "Wait a minute... Lord, I can't speak. I'm very slow of speech."

"Who made man's tongue?"

The Lord has his way, and soon Moses is traveling toward Egypt. He's going to do all the things God told him to do.

And as Moses *does* the things God tells him to do, he becomes a man of faith.

So when do you and I begin living lives of faith?

When we start doing the things God calls us to do.
When we start doing the things Jesus commands us to do.

Faith is not a doctrine. Faith is not a feeling. Faith is not cold chills running up and down your spine.

Faith is action!

You believe Jesus saved you, when you walk in the salvation He gave you.

You have faith in Jesus Christ, when you begin living the life he calls you to live.

"Not everyone who says, 'Lord, Lord' shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of my Father who is in heaven." Matthew 7:21

Saying, "Lord, Lord," is assenting to the doctrine of faith.
Doing the will of the Father is living the life of faith.

"Therefore everyone who hears these words of mine and does them will be like the wise man who built his house upon the rock. The rain came down, the streams rose, and the winds blew and beat against that house; yet it did not fall, because it had its foundation on the rock. But everyone who hears these words of mine and does not do them is like a foolish man who built his house upon the sand. The rain came down, the streams rose, and the winds blew and beat against that house and it fell with a great crash."

Matthew 7: 24-27

Every time we gather in the name of the Lord, the Heavenly Father calls to us from out of the burning bush. **Our burning bush is Jesus.**

We gather in His name. We draw near to be strengthened by Him---to be refined and purified as we watch the fire of His Spirit going up through the bush toward heaven.

Out of the bush, comes the voice of God:

"You're standing on holy ground. Take off your shoes ...I call you this day to move beyond the *doctrine* of faith to enter with me into the life of faith."

What a change we will find in our lives when we leave the doctrine of faith—all our hard, preconceived ideas, all of our opinions, all those "experiences" we take pride in—leave them like Moses' shoes at the burning bush--and follow the Lord Jesus into the life of faith!

The life of faith can be distinguished from all of its counterfeits by four clear marks, and if any one of those four essentials is missing we need to turn to the Lord and seek help.

First of all, the life of faith is a life of risk.

In this world where everybody plays it safe, you can buy insurance to cover any possibility. But to start living by faith, to truly follow Jesus, involves risk.

"Then Jesus told his disciples, 'If any man would come after me, let him deny himself, take up his cross and follow me. For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will find it'"
Matthew 16: 24,25

To take up my cross means that I allow Him to lead me on a road, which involves all the things that happened to Him—rejection, danger, possibly death.

Day by day I lose my life in His life. I give up my program for His program. I walk out there with Him not knowing where He's going to take me.

If His Spirit instructs me to stop and listen to what that stranger is trying to tell me, I stop and listen.

If His Spirit moves me to reach down inside my pocket and share some of the money I have with someone in need, I do it.

If His Spirit urges me to open my mouth and say something that will make me unpopular with my best friend, what choice do I have?

If His Spirit comes to me through the voices of two or three brothers or sisters and says, "We feel that you're out of line", I need to submit.

It is a life of risk that goes on as long as we are alive in this body of flesh and blood, and it's a lot more satisfying than the "Christian pussyfooting" most of us have substituted for the life of faith.

Secondly, the life of faith is a life of discipline.

Discipline as opposed to Christianity of convenience, which is so popular these days:

"If I feel like it, I'll pray. What good would it do for me to pray, if I don't feel like it?"

"If I don't get to bed too late and there's nothing better to do, I'll gather with the saints tomorrow."

"If I have a few dollars left over, I'll share it with somebody in need."

To live the life of faith, we follow the example of our Lord---and of every man or woman of faith that has ever walked this earth.

We discipline ourselves to pray whether we feel like it or not.

We discipline ourselves to gather with the saints even if we're up half the night with a headache.

We discipline ourselves to take the first and best portion of whatever provision comes into our hands and offer it back to God in thanksgiving.

If we don't discipline ourselves to do it, it won't get done.

If we don't discipline ourselves to form a prayer life, our prayer life will evaporate into a thing of convenience.

"If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself, take up his cross daily and follow me."

Daily. Day in and day out we discipline ourselves in this life of faith.

Thirdly, the life of faith is a life of joy.

Joy! After Moses met the Lord at the burning bush, he had an ingredient in his life that had never been there before, and it was there continuously, even on the roughest days. Moses had joy in his heart!

Happiness depends on what happens to you...when nice things happen, you're happy...when bad things happen, you're sad.

But the joy of the Lord is there all the time, no matter what.

"Sorrowful yet always rejoicing"

"Rejoice in the Lord always, again I say rejoice."

The life of faith is a life of continuous, deep-down-inside, steady, unbroken joy. It's a joy that no human being, and no circumstance, and no demon can take from you.

Finally, the life of faith is a life of power.

Moses came away from the burning bush carrying the rod, which he had used as a shepherd for years and years.

But now this rod is a sign of the power of God.

When Moses lifts the rod up over Egypt, the plagues begin to fall.

When Moses takes the rod and strikes the rock in the wilderness, water gushes out.

When Moses raises the rod over the battlefield, the Israelites are strengthened in their death-struggle with the Amalekites.

Moses was the meekest of men, but as he lived a life of faith, the power of God flowed through that rod in his hand, and delivered the people again, and again.

As we live the life of faith, the power of the Holy Spirit within us is our rod.

"You shall receive power when the Holy Spirit comes upon you; and you shall be my witnesses."

As we move in His will, follow His leading, walk in His light, the words that we speak in faith, the things that we do in faith, the way that we learn to submit to each other in faith---all this releases the power of the Holy Spirit through our lives for the healing and blessing of others. Our witness to Jesus is confirmed with signs following.

The issue is simple:

Am I adhering to a doctrine of faith, while living like the Egyptians around me? Or am I living a life of faith?

The God of the burning bush is urging us to renew our commitment to the call, which is upon each of our lives.

"Trust me, not just in theory, but with your life."

"Turn from your own way, pick up your cross,
and follow me into a life of risk,
a life of discipline,
a life of joy,
a life of power

and I will bless you beyond anything you could ask or think."

FAITH THAT WORKS

"I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me; and the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me. I do not nullify the grace of God; for if justification were through the law, then Christ died to no purpose.

O foolish Galatians! Who has bewitched you, before whose eyes Jesus Christ was publicly portrayed as crucified? Let me ask you only this: Did you receive the Spirit by works of the law, or by hearing with faith? Are you so foolish? Having begun with the Spirit, are you now ending with the flesh? Did you experience so many things in vain?---If it really is in vain. Does he who supplies the Spirit to you and works miracles among you do so by works of the law, or by hearing with faith?"

Galatians 2:20-3:5

Faith.....

"When I'm with brothers and sisters waiting on God I have faith. Then I go out into the arena of daily life and my faith evaporates."

- Who of us hasn't experienced that?

"When the conditions are right, when the atmosphere has something of heaven in it, I have faith. But when I'm immersed in the world of real problems my faith crumbles." You're reading a book on healing. It all sounds so inspiring and logical. You know God heals!

You believe for healing.

Then you go to the hospital to visit your friend who's wasting away with cancer and you see his sunken cheeks, the pain in his eyes, the sallow skin, and you know that logical as that book on healing seemed it doesn't fit with what you're beholding in the eyes of your dying friend.

- There is a faith that will verily bring the life of God to your dying friend.
- There is a faith which will bring the power of the Lord to heal down into our midst to a degree we never dreamed possible.
- There is a faith that will move mountains and break through gates of brass and bars of iron.

There are two kinds of faith -

- there is passive untested faith that works beautifully in the church parlor, or in some remote Christian retreat-center, or on the printed page of some thrilling book.
- there is active tested faith that works in the real world of real people and real problems and real evil, real sickness, death, and pain.

How would you feel if you went to the shopping center and bought a suit at the bargain price of \$29.00. You're really pleased with your buy. It's a fine looking suit. You wear it to a wedding in late August where they have a reception on the lawn. A sudden storm comes up and as you're helping to carry some things into the garage you get caught in the rain. In ten minutes your beautiful suit shrivels and sags and turns into a substance resembling wet newspaper.

The next day you take what's left of the suit back to the store and complain.

"Why my dear friend," exclaims the salesman, "that material was never meant to be worn in the rain. I didn't sell you a raincoat!"

The average believer is a believer with just such a faith --beautiful -- until he gets caught in the rain.

You have a roof put on your house. A discount special. A beautiful earth color in the latest shade. All the neighbors are asking where you bought it. A heat wave comes along, the temperature rises to 105°. You happen to look out the window and see tar dripping from the eaves trough. Rushing outside you discover that your lovely new roof has melted away. Only the roofing nails are left tacked into boards which just that morning were covered with shingles.

You call the discount store.

"My friend," replies the salesman, "that type of shingle was not made for extreme heat."

So it is with this untested-faith which satisfies us so well until the heat of trial is applied to our lives.

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! By his great mercy we have been born anew to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, and to an inheritance which is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven

for you, who by God's power are guarded through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time. In this you rejoice, though now for a little while you may have to suffer various trials, so that the genuineness of your faith, more precious than gold which though perishable is tested by fire, may redound to praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ.

I Peter 1:3 -7

The same Lord who awakens faith in our hearts leads us by a path where that faith is developed and strengthened. Jesus is bringing us, as He brought the disciples, to the place where we have a faith in Him that survives the bad weather and accomplishes the purposes of God.

"Truly, truly, I say to you, he who believes in me will also do the works that I do; and greater works than these will he do, because I go to the Father."

John 14:12

"And these signs will accompany those who believe: in my name they will cast out demons; they will speak in new tongues; they will pick up serpents, and if they drink any deadly thing, it will not hurt them; they will lay their hands on the sick, and they will recover."

Mark 16:17-18

We're not interested in a faith that looks good, but in a faith that does what our Lord says it will do. A faith that does more than sit and exude piety. A faith that brings the life of God down into this world,

into our bodies,
our minds,
our hearts,
our tongues, and our daily living,

A faith that works!

1. Faith that works is active, not passive.

"The life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God who loved me and gave himself for me."

How does Paul live his life by faith in the Son of God?

By sitting and dreaming? No, he acts,
he moves,
he does things.

When our Lord calls for faith He calls for some kind of action ---

"Stretch forth your hand."

"Rise and walk. "

"Go, wash in the pool."

"Go your way your son will live."

"Fear not, little flock, it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom. Sell what you have and give alms. Provide yourselves with purses that do not grow old, a treasure in the heavens that does not fail."

Our Lord awakens faith in us by calling us to do something.

We hear so much these days about "letting go and letting God", "relax and let God carry you", "be still", "rest!" This is part of faith but only after we've stepped forth and done something in response to Jesus' call.

Only when the Israelites had eaten the Passover lamb and had begun their march and saw the Egyptians pressing from behind and the sea blocking them before were they told to,

"Fear not. Stand still and see the salvation of our Lord."

And the much quoted ***"Be still and know that I am God"*** from Psalm 46 comes at the end of a long catalogue of upheaval and disruption.

"God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble. Therefore will not we fear, though the earth be removed, and though the mountains be carried into the midst of the sea; though the waters thereof roar and be troubled, though the mountains shake with the swelling thereof. There is a river, the streams whereof shall make glad the city of God, the holy place of the tabernacles of the most high. God is in the midst of her; she shall not be moved: God shall help her, and that right early. The heathen raged, the kingdoms were moved....."

Then after beholding the works of the Lord and what desolation He hath made in the earth...

"Be still and know that I am God." Psalm 46

Who is He saying this to? People who are out in the thick of it.

Before we can learn to rest in God and be still before the Lord, we first have to move off dead center.

- If Jesus tells us to launch out into the deep — faith launches out

into the deep even if we've been fishing all night.

- If Jesus tells us to let down the nets – faith lets down the nets even if we didn't catch a thing all night.

2. Faith that works moves in the reality of God....

....not in ideas about God,
not in theological concepts,
but in the living burning presence
of God Himself.

***"I am the way, and the truth, and the life;
no one comes to the Father, but by me." John 14:6***

This is true -- not just after death, but now Jesus brings us into God's very heart.

***"Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden,
and I will give you rest...." Matthew 11:28***

Jesus is calling us to actually pursue Him,
draw near,
**settle for nothing less than
His living presence.**

This is to be a continuous action,
like breathing,
like thinking,
like the beating of our hearts.

Moving in God's power is living in prayer---prayer becomes the fountainhead, the source of your life with God.

When Paul says,

***"The life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of
God who loved me and gave himself for me!"***

he is describing how his life is constantly moving toward Jesus, aggressively pursuing Jesus,

actively knowing Jesus,

listening to Jesus,

obeying Jesus. By faith in the Son of God.

Paul moves in the reality of God.

- He walks and talks with God.
- He draws his life from God.
- He finds his fulfillment in God.

Faith is not hanging on to certain religious principles. Faith is hanging on to God Himself. Knowing God through knowing His Son. No one can do this for you or carry you into it.

But this life is yours for the receiving,
the taking,
the believing.

For the Son is closer to each of us now than our own bodies,
if we will open our hearts and draw near to Him.

3. Faith that works moves in the reality of this world as it is.

Instead of withdrawing into a little sheltered Christian fortress, and instead of insulating itself in the soft materialistic lie of ease and plenty of pagan America, as if that's what life really is, faith,

- draws near the sick,
the sinner,
the hurting ones,
the rejected,
the forgotten, and believes that the Father of Jesus is really here and really cares and really saves.

To live by faith in the Son of God who loved us and gave Himself for us is to go where He sends us. And where does He send us? Always into the real world!

"Go to the lost sheep of the house of Israel."

***"Those who are well have no need of a physician,
but those who are sick."***

"I come not to call the righteous but sinners."

"Make disciples of all nations." starting with the poor and the maimed and the halt and the blind in the streets of your own city."

Only when we move in the reality of this world as it is, its anguish, its pain, its need -- only when we stay in genuine contact with the people who are being left behind and forgotten, will we preserve our vision of God.

When we withdraw from the world's pain into our Christian enclave or into a life of pagan self-indulgence, our faith shrivels.

For whatever is born of God overcomes the world; and this is the victory that overcomes the world, our faith. Who is it that overcomes the world but he who believes that Jesus is the Son of God?

I John 5:4-5

We need to understand what kind of faith it is that overcomes the world. Certainly not the untested, passive, sheltered, coddled faith that hides from the world and its problems.

The faith that overcomes the world is fire-brewed faith,
active faith,
faith that moves in the reality of God,
faith that moves in the real world and overcomes evil with good.

God help us to settle, for nothing less.

FAITH NOT FEELINGS

*Why art thou cast down, O my soul?
and why art thou disquieted in me?
Hope thou in God: for I shall yet praise him,
for the help of his countenance. Psalm 42:5 (KJV)*

It wasn't the worst prison in the world...but it was a prison.

- You ate well enough.
- There were books to read.
- They had a swimming pool and a steam bath.

But the doors were locked, and there were no windows.
The prison consisted of a giant cave in the heart of a mountain.

....all light was artificial,
....the air was dank and stale.

There was a rumor among the prisoners that there was a way out. It was said that a certain prisoner was not a prisoner at all and at certain times would pick out one man or woman and lead them through a hidden door and a labyrinth of tunnels to blue sky and fresh air.

And true enough, prisoners were disappearing. But there was also a rumor that the way to freedom was not easy. Accounts came back of prisoners who panicked on the escape route and ended in a dungeon infinitely worse than the prison.

One day just before dinner as a certain prisoner was standing in line waiting to get into the mess hall he was nudged on his arm.

"Quick! Follow me," said the voice beside him.

What could he lose? So he followed this man who looked like any other prisoner, and whom he had seen a thousand times, down a corridor, through the boiler room, and out through a narrow crack between two walls of rock.

Everything went smoothly until, as they climbed along a ledge, the heat became unbearable. There was a distant roar and the smell of smoke. The ledge brought them to a clearing from which two paths emerged.

- One was cool and covered with soft green moss and beautifully lighted.
- The other led to what appeared to be a tunnel of fire one hundred yards off.

"Come!" said the guide and headed quickly toward the fire.

"Wait a minute! You're making a mistake!" cried the prisoner. "No one will ever survive those flames. Let's take this path. See, it's cool and easy on the feet. And you can see where you're going."

The guide ran back and grabbed the prisoner by the arm. "We don't have time to fool around! Come on! We're going through those flames! Beyond them is blue sky. That mossy path where you think you can see where you're going leads to a prison far worse than you've ever been in. Once you're in you'll never get out."

But the prisoner wrenched himself loose from his guide's grip and started running toward the other path.

"I don't like the feel of flames," he cried as he turned the corner and disappeared from sight. "Better he should never have come out of his prison," said the guide, "than that he should turn down that path."

One of the most dangerous things we can do is start following Jesus out of our old life and then switch to letting our feelings become our guide.

And how often we allow ourselves to be guided by our feelings.

"I don't feel the presence of God.... I must be lost."

"I feel great ...I must be on the right track."

"I don't feel good about myself these days... something must be wrong."

We measure where we are... what we are by how we feel.

Once we attach major importance to how we feel, our feelings rule our lives. Perhaps we don't take Tylenol or Sominex to alter how we feel. Perhaps we resist the compulsion to eat three sandwiches before we go to bed to counteract the empty feeling inside our souls. Maybe we don't fish for compliments to retain our feeling of security. But, if we measure our relationship with God by how we feel we're still in bondage to feelings.

- We will chase after experiences that make us "feel" the Spirit.
- We will be drawn to places that give us the feeling of peace or divine power.
- We will take the path that makes us feel comfort and avoid the path that causes us to feel pain.

Even if we do "feel" the presence of God, that "feeling" will never by itself hold us in God's presence. When the feeling has passed, as the feeling always does, does that mean God is gone? It's one thing to "feel" God... quite another to know God.

- I can feel God now ...and feel nothing of God tomorrow.

- But if I know God now ...
then I have what I need to still know God tomorrow
regardless of how I feel.

***.... For his sake I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them as refuse, in order that I may gain Christ and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own, based on law, but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness from God that depends on faith; that I may know him and the power of his resurrection, and may share his sufferings, becoming like him in his death.....
Philippians 3:8a-10***

....that I may know him....

Knowing Jesus in the power of his resurrection may be attended by wonderful feelings. But knowing Jesus in the fellowship of his sufferings, for all its joy, involves feelings of pain. And becoming like Jesus in his death takes us through a tunnel of fire.

On Palm Sunday everybody felt God.

***And the crowds that went before him and that followed him shouted, "Hosanna to the Son of David! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord! Hosanna in the highest!" And when he entered Jerusalem, all the city was stirred, saying, "Who is this?" And the crowds said, "This is the prophet Jesus from Nazareth of Galilee." And Jesus entered the temple of God and drove out all who sold and bought in the temple, and he overturned the tables of the money-changers and the seats of those who sold pigeons. He said to them, "It is written, 'My house shall be called a house of prayer'; but you make it a den of robbers." And the blind and the lame came to him in the temple, and he healed them.
Matthew 21:9-14***

They felt God as they shouted,

"Hosanna to the Son of David! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord!"

Yes, and they felt God as they watched Jesus enter the temple that day and turn over the tables of the money changers and knock down the seats of those who sold pigeons. They felt the holiness of God burn through their hearts as Jesus said to them,

"It is written, 'My house shall be called a house of prayer'; but you make it a den of robbers."

Again they felt God as they watched the blind and the lame coming to him in the temple and walking away healed.

But how long did the feeling last? In a few days these very people who felt God in such a wonderful way as they followed Jesus around that day were screaming for Jesus' blood.

And who were the ones who kept going when everything turned sour? Those whose roots of knowing Jesus penetrated below the level of feeling. Who..

...even when their minds were confused,
...even when their hearts were broken,
...even when their nerve left them,
...still held on to the words that he spoke and
kept going, though they felt devastated.

For example, Mary Magdalene. If Mary had gone by feelings she would have been destroyed by the absurdity of it all Friday afternoon. But Mary kept going.

- She stuck by Jesus' cross, attended to his burial,
kept the Sabbath, was first at the tomb the next morning
to finish what needed to be done.

No wonder she was also the first to see him alive from the dead.

But what do we do if we find that,

- we are preoccupied with our feelings,
- we are measuring our spiritual condition,
- gauging our relationship with the living God
by whether or not we feel his presence?

With an act of will, a thousand times a day if necessary, we have to defy feelings and start living by faith.

1. To live by faith is to believe with our will even when our hearts feel as weak as water.

*"Let not your hearts be troubled;
believe in God, believe also in me." John 14:1*

*"Let not your hearts be troubled,
neither let them be afraid," John 14:27b*

In your mind you feel troubled.

In your body you feel nervous ... but you refuse to let your heart be troubled. With your heart you will to believe Jesus ... to trust that he will do exactly what he has promised.

- When my best friend says to me,
"Don't be upset,"...I'm still upset.
- When my doctor or my spiritual advisor says,
"Don't be upset".... I'm still upset.

But when in my heart I hear Jesus saying to me,

***"Let not your heart be troubled. Believe in God,
believe also in me,"***

this I can do because when I take hold of his words with my will, those words come to life.

Again and again he says to us,

"Do not be anxious about your life." Matthew 6:25

***"Do not be anxious saying, 'What shall we eat,
or what shall we drink, or how shall we be clothed?'"
Matthew 6:31***

"Do not be anxious about tomorrow." Matthew 6:34

***"Have no anxiety about anything but in everything
by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving,
let your requests be made known to God." Philippians 4:6***

And when we respond to those commands with our will, the peace of God which passes all understanding keeps our hearts and our minds in Christ Jesus no matter how we feel.

***Why art thou cast down, O my soul?
and why art thou disquieted in me?
Hope thou in God: for I shall yet praise him,
for the help of his countenance. Psalm 42:5***

...for the help of his face ... the help of being able to look into this face instead of measuring my feelings. And the face of God in this world is the Spirit of Jesus and that face is always near.

2. To live by faith is to act even if our feelings have to go through a tunnel of fire.

And as Jesus was going up to Jerusalem, he took the twelve disciples aside, and on the way he said to them, "Behold, we are going up to Jerusalem; and the Son of man will be delivered to the chief priests and scribes, and they will condemn him to death, and deliver him to the Gentiles to be mocked and scourged and crucified, and he will be raised on the third day."

Matthew 20:17-19

Jesus was going to his baptism of fire ... and he calls us to follow him through those same flames.

***"If any one would come to me, let him deny himself,
take up his cross daily, and follow me."***

There will be things we are called upon to do which won't feel good.

- Words we are called upon to speak which won't make us comfortable,
- Changes in our way of life, perhaps, which may be costly or painful.
- Circumstances that will sear our very flesh.

But as we walk through the flames we have fellowship with Jesus himself. With our feelings we experience the flames, but with our hearts we know Jesus in the power of his resurrection, the fellowship of his sufferings, even becoming like him in his death.

*Why art thou cast down, O my soul?
and why art thou disquieted in me?*

*Hope thou in God: for I shall yet praise him,
for the help of his countenance.*

God help us to build our lives not on the sinking sand of feelings, but on the solid rock ---

- on Jesus ... God's Mercy who exists outside our feelings,
- on Jesus ... God's Word that will still be true when heaven and earth have passed away,
- on Jesus ... who in this world is the very face of God, breathing upon us with never failing help.

*I shall yet praise him,
for the help of his countenance.*

FAITH IN YOUR FAITH OR FAITH IN GOD?

We're all aware that Jesus didn't have a halo around His head. His face did not shine like Moses' when Moses came down from Sinai. There was nothing about Jesus' appearance or the sound of His voice that gave any indication that this was God the Son. And yet, certain people recognized God in Him right away.

"Rabbi, we know that you are a teacher come from God."

"Lord, if you want to, you can make me clean."

"Lord, I am not worthy to have you come under my roof; but speak the word only and my servant will be healed."

While others absolutely couldn't stand Jesus. They hated Him. The very mention of His name made them angry.

"Who does he think he is?"

"Why he's a blasphemer!"

"He casts out demons by Beelzebul, the prince of demons!"

"He's a madman!"

And the people who hated Jesus were not crooked politicians and men who ran the race track, but the religious people,

- church members in good standing,
- "Christian" businessmen,
- people who prayed and gave alms,
 who went to the synagogue,
 performed all the requirements of their religion,
- people who had a testimony about how good God
 had been to them.

Why was it that these religious people found Jesus so offensive?
Why is it that a man who insists that he has faith and who does all kinds of decent things which would seem to indicate that he has faith can't recognize God when God comes walking toward him in human flesh?

Why is it that people who say they love Jesus Christ,
 who read their bibles,
 who practically live at prayer meetings,
 who can give the most beautiful testimonies can't

recognize the voice of Jesus when Jesus calls them to deny themselves, pick up their cross, and follow?

The Eternal Word is speaking to these people, telling them exactly which road to travel. And what do they do? They turn their backs on Jesus, get down on their knees, and pray for guidance more to their liking.

They turn their backs on the Lamb of God who died for their sins, and go headlong down a road that leads away from the Cross all the while shouting, "Hallelujah. Praise the Lord!"

How can these children of the Kingdom, these enlightened ones be so blind? Don't they have any faith? You bet they have faith! They have so much faith it has turned in upon itself. So that now, instead of having faith in God, they have faith in their faith. Their real confidence is no longer in God's grace, but in their faith.

"Of course I'll make it, I have faith."

"Of course God is with me, I'm a man of faith."

"Naturally I'm qualified to tell you what your problem is, I have faith."

"And if I should boss you around a little, consider yourself fortunate, I'm a spiritual man."

When we start thinking this way, beneath our humble masks, whatever faith in God we may once have had is gone. What's left is faith in faith.

It's like a man who had once been befriended by the King. The King had come walking through jail one day, talked to this man, and set him free.

At first the man kept telling all his friends how good the King was.

"Oh, we have a wonderful King!"

But as years passed, the man changed his testimony. It was no longer, "We have a wonderful King", but rather, "I have a connection with the King. Me and the King, man, we're tight! Why if I wanted to I could ask the King for ten grand and he'd give it to me."

One day the King sends his son, The Prince, to the man's house with a message.

"The King wants you to join his army and report for duty right away."

"What are you talking about fool? Get off my porch

before I kill you! Me and the King are tight."

When the Son of God came to Israel, He ran up against this again and again. "Who do you think you are, you fool? We're insiders! We're God's chosen ones!"

And now as the church on earth enters into its hour of judgment, and the glorious Lamb of God walks amid the seven golden lampstands calling the saints to wake up and repent and get on with the work they've been given, His message is meeting with offense and rejection at every turn.

"What do you mean? Wake up and repent. Why we're people of faith! We're children of the Kingdom!"

I tell you many shall come from east and west and sit at table with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob in the Kingdom of Heaven, while the sons of the Kingdom will be thrown into the outer darkness; there men will weep and gnash their teeth.

Whether you sit at table with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob in the Kingdom, or get thrown into the outer darkness depends not on whether you think you have faith, but on what your faith is really attached to. Is it attached to itself or to God? Is your faith in your faith, or in God?

A few things about faith in God:

1. Faith in God recognizes Jesus immediately.

- It doesn't have to analyze Him.
- It doesn't put Him through a battery of tests.
- It doesn't run to the theologians to find out what they think.

It discerns as directly as a sheep knows its shepherd's voice that this lowly one speaking to me is my Lord.

"Lord, if you want to, you can make me clean." How did this leper know?

Not because he read it in the newspaper,
or heard it on WBFG.

The leper had been sitting on a rock listening to the sermon on the mount and he knew that this voice was the voice of his shepherd.

It doesn't take heavy meditation.

"Everyone who is of the truth hears my voice."

"He that is of God hears God's word."

The hour is coming and now is when the dead shall hear the voice of the Son of God and those who hear shall live.

Jesus Christ is speaking to the professing church as never before.

- There are those who listen.

- And there are those who go right on playing their spiritual games.

Those who listen and who change their lives accordingly have faith in God.

2. Faith in God sees Jesus as holy.

There is a popular faith which believes that you can put Jesus in your pocket and then everything you touch will turn to success. Wrap Jesus around your stocks and bonds and see them grow.

The people who peddle this nonsense, and the people who swallow it are going to be in for a surprise when they stand before the King. For faith in God always holds Jesus Christ in awe.

"Lord; I am not worthy to have you come under my roof; speak the word only and my servant will be healed."

"Put your finger here and see my hands; and put out your hand and place it in my side; do not be faithless but believing."

And how did Thomas answer? "Just like I thought all along. Praise God! Hallelujah!" No.

"My Lord and my God!", said Thomas, and fell to his knees trembling, shaking.

May God bring us to that kind of faith.

3. Faith in God is continuously overwhelmed by God's mercy in Jesus Christ.

"Lord, if you want to, you can make me clean."

"Of course I want you to be clean!"

"Speak the word only and my servant will be healed"...

"Go, be it done for you as you have believed."

Even when we go on with Jesus and find out what it means to have a thorn in the flesh like Paul, or a wounded thigh like Jacob -

Even when God's Spirit leads us into the wilderness and baffling things start happening to us - we still see Jesus turning our darkness into light.

*"Lo, I am with you always.
I will never leave you or forsake you.
I will not leave you desolate."*

4. Faith in God dies to itself and goes all the way with Jesus –

any faith in Jesus which right now is unwilling to go all the way with Him will sooner or later turn from Him.

For this reason, Jesus never wastes time trying to disciple people who are holding something back. If you prefer not to go all the way with Jesus, that's your privilege, but don't get upset by the fact that Jesus doesn't coddle you and answer all your questions.

"He who loves father or mother more than me is not worthy of me; and he who loves son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me; and he who does not take his cross and follow me is not worthy of me. He who finds his life will lose it, and he who loses his life for my sake will find it."

5. Faith in God is a gift God has already given us.

All that's needed to complete it is an act of will on our part moment-by-moment.

Some of us are forever moping around feeling cheated.

"Oh, if only I had faith! Some people find it so easy to believe while I find it so hard!"

No man ever walked this earth with more understanding than Jesus.

- He cares about us.
- He knows what we're going through.
- He helps us.

But Jesus never sympathizes with our unbelief. He never says, "That's all right. I understand. You do have a little weakness here. Just bungle along in your unbelief as best you can" - Never.

On the contrary, Jesus says, "Where is your faith?
Why did you doubt?
Why are you so hard of heart?"

Because God, by His Spirit right now, is giving every person reading this the power to believe in His Son afresh,

- to discern who Jesus is,
- to see Jesus as holy and wonderfully good,
- to follow Jesus all the way.

Will you come down off your pedestal and move in that power?

Faith is not an issue we settle "once and done". It's an issue we settle every hour of every day. We commit ourselves again and again.

If you've followed Jesus for fifty years praise God for that. But are you following Him right now? Are you utterly sold out to Him?

Is Jesus your first love,
your supreme joy,
your life?

The Spirit of God is calling many of us to wake up and see what's been happening to us. We've been getting religious - which means we've got more confidence in our faith, or in the doctrine of eternal security, or in our Bible knowledge than we have in our Lord.

May God, this day, blast our religious sophistication to a million pieces until we get our eyes and our hearts on Jesus

and on nothing else.

REFINED FAITH

The symbol of fire appears again and again in God's dealings with the human race. Fire has to do with

judgment,

refining,

separating the gold from the dross.

"Behold, I send my messenger to prepare the way before me, and the Lord whom you seek will suddenly come to his temple; the messenger of the covenant in whom you delight, behold, he is coming, says the Lord of hosts. But who can endure the day of his coming, and who can stand when he appears?" Malachi 3:1-3

"For behold, the day comes, burning like an oven, when all the arrogant and all evildoers will be stubble; the day that comes shall burn them up, says the Lord of hosts, so that it will leave them neither root nor branch. But for you who fear my name the sun of righteousness shall rise with healing in its wings. You shall go forth leaping like calves from the stall. And you shall tread down the wicked, for they will be ashes under the soles of your feet, on the day when I act, says the Lord of hosts." Malachi 4:1-3

Scripture talks about three visitations of fire which will bring about the close of this age. The very last of these three will be the fire of divine judgment.

But the day of the Lord will come like a thief, and then the heavens will pass away with a loud noise, and the elements will be dissolved with fire, and the earth and the works that are upon it will be burned up. Since all these things are thus to be dissolved, what sort of persons ought you to be in lives of holiness and godliness, waiting for and hastening the coming of the day of God, because of which the heavens will be kindled and dissolved, and the elements will melt with fire!
II Peter 3:10-12

Before this fire will come the fire of blazing prophecy carried across the earth by people like you and me calling the whole human race to repentance, when the gospel of the kingdom will be preached throughout the whole world as a testimony to all nations ... then the end will come. And before the fire of a worldwide preaching of the gospel there will be a fire of trial aimed specifically at us who are to proclaim this gospel. How are we ever going to preach and live the fire of God unless we have been refined by that fire ourselves?

Beloved, do not be surprised at the fiery ordeal which comes upon you to prove you, as though something strange were happening to

you. But rejoice in so far as you share Christ's sufferings, that you may also rejoice and be glad when his glory is revealed. If you are reproached for the name of Christ, you are blessed, because the spirit of glory and of God rests upon you. But let none of you suffer as a murderer, or a thief, or a wrongdoer, or a mischief-maker; yet if one suffers as a Christian, let him not be ashamed, but under that name let him glorify God. For the time has come for judgment to begin with the household of God; and if it begins with us, what will be the end of those who do not obey the gospel of God? And "If the righteous man is scarcely saved, where will the impious and sinner appear?" Therefore, let those who suffer according to God's will do right and entrust their souls to a faithful Creator.

I Peter-4.12-19

Fiery trial has been part of the lot of believers in every age. Just as surely as we can know that if we seek God's kingdom first he will provide for us and sustain us, we also know that if we follow Jesus seriously we will pass through seasons of fiery trial. That's always been true. But for the hour in which we live it's even more to be expected.

If the end is as near as is universally felt by believers all over this earth.... and if this end is to be preceded by an aggressive worldwide proclamation of the gospel of Jesus by the Body of Christ on earth...then the Body of Christ on earth at this time can be sure that it will be prepared for its task, refined, toughened by fire.

For the time has come for judgment to begin with the household of God.... I Peter 4:17a

In his mercy God has already begun preparing us for days of severe trial by giving each of us some exercise in handling trial on a smaller scale. Perhaps we've been going on our way satisfied that we have faith in God.

We say quite honestly,

"If I didn't have faith in God, I don't know who I'd be."

"If I didn't have Jesus I don't know how I could survive."

And our faith really is part of our daily life.

- We do seek God's face in prayer.
- We are finding sustenance in the scriptures.
- We are trying to apply our faith to our jobs,

our family life,

our leisure time,

turning from temptations,
altering the way we relate to people,
the way we handle money,
the way we deal with problems, to conform to the will of our Lord.

Then one day a bomb drops on our life ... trouble comes, some disappointment, humiliation, tragedy, perhaps something that brings pain to our body and our mind, or perhaps some vicious persecution.

Suddenly, everything, including our faith, is shaken. Sometimes this trial is over quickly --- like a summer storm. Sometimes it goes on and on. In either case, our faith is now put under a strain ... nothing is simple any more. Questions start boiling up inside our hearts.

- How could the God I have trusted in allow this to happen?
- Is there a God at all?
- Why has the path of faith led me to a place where circumstances have beaten and robbed me of everything but pain?

Did Jesus ever promise us that such things would not happen to us?

"If the world hates you, know that it has hated me before it hated you. If you were of the world, the world would love its own; but because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, therefore the world hates you. Remember the word that I said to you, 'A servant is not greater than his master.' If they persecuted me, they will persecute you; if they kept my word, they will keep yours also."
John 15:18-20

"I have said this to you, that in me you may have peace. In the world you have tribulation; but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world."
John 16:33

- In the world....tribulation.
 - In me....peace.
- In the world: rejection, persecution and a cross.
 - In me....joy.

The lesson we're going to have to learn, if the fire of God is to accomplish its purpose in our lives, is to let this fire come in and refine our faith to the point where we can rejoice even in our trials. If we forever run from God's

fire and play it soft and safe, we'll never be of any use to the purpose of God.

1. *Beloved, do not be surprised at the fiery ordeal which comes upon you to prove you, as though something strange were happening to you.*
I Peter 4:12

This is nothing strange...this is necessary. This fiery ordeal has come to separate the silver from the dross in our lives. Until the trial came many of my hopes were false. I was hoping in things that were vain. Now these vain hopes are being burned up. Before the trial came to me most of my confidence was not in God's mercy but really in my superiority over others,

my spiritual maturity,
my superior knowledge,
my superior righteousness,
my superior commitment.

I was quick to judge from my exalted platform ... but now that's all being burned away and all I have, **really all I have, is Jesus ... who is God's mercy.**

2. *Beloved, do not be surprised at the fiery ordeal which comes upon you to prove you, as though something strange were happening to you. But rejoice in so far as you share Christ's sufferings that you may also rejoice and be glad when his glory is revealed*
I Peter 4:12-13

Not only am I to understand the meaning of this fire that comes at me, I am to rejoice in it. Because this very trial brings me into a fellowship with the Son of God which I could never have before. Now I am sharing, partaking in Christ's sufferings. I am getting to know Jesus under the yoke of His cross.

Visions of Jesus may come to us on mountaintops, but real communion with Jesus comes to us down in the valley.

Peter caught a glimpse of who Jesus was up there at the transfiguration, but Peter never really knew this Jesus until Peter began to suffer for his Lord. Look back over your own life and see if it wasn't the times of trial that brought your visions of Jesus into the wonderful reality of communion with him. So with the trial we may be going through now ... or the trial we may enter tomorrow....don't just grit your teeth and suffer through this thing... rejoice,
worship,
praise the Lord who is with you in it.

Paul and Silas turned their imprisonment in Philippi into songs of praise --- they didn't use it as a gimmick to bring on an earthquake, they had no idea there would be an earthquake, they just praised God.

The rougher things get in our lives the more joyful and glad and loud and free these times of worship should be.

3. *If you are reproached for the name of Christ, you are blessed, because the spirit of glory and of God rests upon you. Peter 4:14*

Not only are we to understand the purpose of this trial ... not only are we to rejoice in this trial ... we are to receive its blessing.

We don't have to wait until the trial is over and we're standing on that sea of glass.... the blessing begins now. As soon as we experience any kind of reproach for the name of Christ, any kind of cross, the Spirit of glory and of God comes to rest upon us.

"I will not leave you desolate, I will come to you."

Never is this promise of Jesus more dramatically fulfilled than when the fire of trial begins to burn in our lives. The same Son of Man who walked with Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego in Nebuchadnezzar's fiery furnace walks with us in our fire, rests on us when our heads are covered with this world's shame.

If God is raising up a people now who will proclaim His gospel with authority unmatched since apostolic days, and if we hope to be among them (why shouldn't we?), then we need to understand that God is raising up this people not only by baptizing them with the Holy Spirit but also by baptizing them with fire.

The baptism of the Holy Spirit can happen in minutes. But the baptism of fire, for most of us at least, takes time. The Lord puts us into the fire then takes us out, then puts us in until the gold is pure and the steel is hard.

May God give us the grace to welcome the baptism of fire as much as we welcome the baptism of the Spirit....

....to rejoice in our trials,

....to sing praises,

....to give God glory in them, until the fire of God has put us in shape for the work that lies ahead.

To put it simply;

To have the fire, we need to feel the fire.

To feel the fire all we have to do is;

1. Ask God to send it.

2. Receive it when it comes.

3. Get used to it.

But we have this treasure in earthen vessels, to show that the transcendent power belongs to God and not to us. We are afflicted in every way, but not crushed; perplexed, but not driven to despair; persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed; always carrying in the body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be manifested in our bodies. For while we live we are always being given up to death for Jesus' sake, so that the life of Jesus may be manifested in our mortal flesh. So death is at work in us, but life in you.

II Corinthians 4:7-12

Working together with him, then, we entreat you not to accept the grace of God in vain. For he says, "At the acceptable time I have listened to you, and helped you on the day of salvation." Behold, now is the acceptable time; behold, now is the day of salvation.

We put no obstacle in any one's way, so that no fault may be found with our ministry, but as servants of God we commend ourselves in every way: through great endurance, in afflictions, hardships, calamities, beatings, imprisonments, tumults, labors, watching, hunger; by purity, knowledge, forbearance, kindness, the Holy Spirit, genuine love, truthful speech, and the power of God; with the weapons of righteousness for the right hand and for the left; in honor and dishonor, in ill repute and good repute. We are treated as impostors, and yet are true; as unknown, and yet well known; as dying, and behold we live; as punished, and yet not killed; as sorrowful, yet always rejoicing; as poor, yet making many rich; as having nothing, and yet possessing everything.

II Corinthians 6:1-10

When we withdraw from this fire our effectiveness dries up.

When we get accustomed to this flame;

live with it,

rejoice in it,

glory in it,

God's power in us increases.

Beloved, do not be surprised at the fiery ordeal which comes upon you to prove you, as though something strange were happening to you. But

rejoice in so far as you share Christ's sufferings, that you may also rejoice and be glad when his glory is revealed. If you are reproached for the name of Christ, you are blessed, because the spirit of glory and of God rests upon you.

I Peter 4:12-14

CERTAIN OF THINGS NOT SEEN

Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen. Hebrews 11:1

Our Lord himself pioneered the way of faith for us. Son of God though he was, he divested himself of his divine rights, became a man and lived his life on this earth all the way to the cross, by faith. He was, "*sure of things hoped for, certain of things not seen,*"...and certain of nothing else.

Jesus was sure that the Kingdom of God had now come to this earth through him, but he had no assurance that it would be well received. He was certain that the Spirit of his Father was with him, but he was not certain about what he would have for breakfast, or where he would sleep, or how many disciples would stick with him to the end.

And Jesus teaches us that to be sure of the Kingdom of God
... to be certain of the presence of the Spirit of God
... to have the kind of faith that delivers God's glory,
God's grace to the world
around us, we have to accustom ourselves to being sure of God and unsure of everything else. This is exactly what Jesus means when he tells us we cannot serve God and mammon.

- If we're going to be sure about God,
 - we're not going to be sure about money.
- If we're going to be sure about money,
 - we're not going to be sure about God.

And he called the twelve together and gave them power and authority over all demons and to cure diseases, and he sent them out to preach the kingdom of God and to heal. And he said to them, "Take nothing for your journey, no staff, no bag, nor bread, nor money; and do not have two tunics. And whatever house you enter, stay there, and from there depart. And wherever they do not receive you, when you leave that town shake off the dust from your feet as a testimony against them." And they departed and went through the villages, preaching the gospel and healing everywhere. Luke 9:1-6

The disciples had been with Jesus for some time soaking up his teaching, watching the healings. Now it was time to take some of the weight of this ministry. Jesus starts with the twelve whom he called apostles... sent ones. He calls them together, gives them power and authority over

demons and diseases and sends them out to preach the Kingdom of God and to heal, just as he does.

To make sure that they're sure about God only, certain that God is with them, Jesus strips them of every other certainty they've been accustomed to depending on. And he said to them, "Take nothing for your journey,

- ... no staff to lean on,
- ... no bag to keep your treasure in,
- ... no bread to munch on,
- ... no money to depend on,
- ... not even a second set of clothes."

"What if I spill soup on my tunic?"

But now, instead of a staff, or a bag, and bread,
and money,
and two suits of clothes, they
are certain of things not seen certain of three specific things:

1. that they have been called by God,
2. that the power of God is with them,
3. that they will bear fruit for the Kingdom of God...

and it was so. They opened their mouths and words came out with an authority that utterly amazed them. They stretched forth their hands and life flowed through them like an unseen river and
the sick were healed,
the demon possessed were healed,
the blind and the lepers and the lame were healed,
and Israel was perplexed.

"What is this? What does it mean?"

...all this because they were uncertain about things visible, but certain of things not seen faith!

Not long after this Jesus called seventy more disciples together and gave them the same power,
the same instructions.

After this the Lord appointed seventy others, and sent them on ahead of him, two by two, into every town and place where he himself was about to come. And he said to them, "The

harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few; pray therefore the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into his harvest. Go your way; behold, I send you out as lambs in the midst of wolves. Carry no purse, no bag, no sandals; and salute no one on the road. Whatever house you enter, first say, 'Peace be to this house!' And if a son of peace is there, your peace shall rest upon him; but if not, it shall return to you. And remain in the same house, eating and drinking what they provide, for the laborer deserves his wages; do not go from house to house. Whenever you enter a town and they receive you, eat what is set before you; heal the sick in it and say to them, 'The kingdom of God has come near to you.' But whenever you enter a town and they do not receive you, go into its streets and say, 'Even the dust of your town that clings to our feet, we wipe off against you; nevertheless know this, that the kingdom of God has come near.' I tell you, it shall be more tolerable on that day for Sodom than for that town.'

Luke 10:1-12

Here again we see that Jesus is giving them tremendous authority. But they are to carry this authority in the midst of complete uncertainty about everything but God ... nothing else to lean on ...

no purse,
no bag,
no extra sandals,
salute no one on the road,

...that is, depend on no one but God. Uncertain about the visible, certain of things not seen.

- Certain that they had been called by the living God.
- Certain that the power of God was resting upon them.
- Certain that they would absolutely bear fruit for his kingdom.

And this faith was confirmed by signs following, everywhere they went.

What does this have to do with us? Does this mean we're supposed to hitch-hike instead of driving a car? Never travel with a suitcase or a wallet or a purse or a Master Card? No. We know for a fact that when Jesus and the disciples traveled they had a money bag. (It wasn't very certain, since Judas was in charge of it.) And when Peter or Paul traveled from church to church in later years, they were able to pay their fare on the boat, buy their food, pick up a new pair of sandals when the old ones wore out. But the lesson had been learned and never forgotten:

"When you go out into the world to proclaim the kingdom of God and manifest the kingdom through healing, the trust of your heart can rest in only one place ... in God ... not in your purse,
or in your bag,
or in your car,
or in your bank account,
or in your water bed....

only in God."

And the time when our Lord begins to teach us this lesson about radical faith is at that moment when he chooses to send us out.
When he says,

"Arise, shine, for your light has come."

At the very moment when Jesus says, ***"Go preach the kingdom ...heal the sick,"*** he pulls out from under us all the phony props in which we were secretly trusting. ***"Carry no purse, no bag, no sandals, salute no one on the road,"*** translates in our lives into,

"I'm going to teach you that there is only one thing you can be sure of, and that's me. When your confidence in everything else is shattered and you are looking to me alone as Lord and friend, then you will be certain of things not seen. You will be certain that I have called you. You will be certain that I am with you. You will be certain that my Spirit in you is bearing fruit."

Because the time has come for us to "arise and shine,"

- to preach the kingdom,

- to heal the sick,

God is teaching us this lesson of faith, both through his word and through our circumstances; that nothing in our lives is certain ... nothing in our lives is sure...nothing is dependable but Jesus alone.

If we learn this the easy way, by listening and withdrawing our hearts from every crutch---fine! But most of us have been and will be getting a little help from the hand of God working in our circumstances to teach us to let go. So, don't be alarmed,
don't get depressed,
don't get angry, as he shakes you and sifts you.

God is teaching us that as his prophets we have only one certainty

... and he is all we need ... Jesus!

*- Faith is being sure of things hoped for,
certain of things not seen.*

All the visible, tangible things in our lives offer us less and less security. The Spirit of the Lord is leading us into a three-fold certainty....

First: We can be certain that he, Jesus, has called us.

That call is an unseen thing. We can't prove to the world that we have it ... but we know. The Spirit of the One who died on that cross and rose again has broken into our darkness and he has spoken to us. He has said to us, "Follow me." And nothing in all the world makes any sense any more but to answer that call.

- Anything that interferes with that call,
- Anything that dulls the meaning of that call,

has to go ... get rid of it! Doubt everything around you that you can see and touch, but be certain of this: that Jesus the Messiah has put a call on your life and the only reason you're still here is to answer that call.

Certainty number two: We can be certain that Jesus is with us.

"Lo, I am with you always to the end of the age."

Can we see him? No.
Can we touch him? No.

Yet his unseen presence, the presence of his Spirit, is the one solid unshakeable reality of our life. His presence is the only treasure that will travel with us to the other side of death. We won't take our money,
our houses
our cars,
or even our bodies...but he is with us, and he stays with us in every trial, through every valley even the valley of the shadow of death.

Doubt everything else, for everything else will change, decay, sink away.... Everything. But be certain that Jesus is absolutely with us

today in our body,
tomorrow in our daily walk.

Certainty number three: Be certain that by the power of the Lord Jesus we are absolutely bearing fruit for his kingdom.

When the farmer plants the seed he sees nothing, but he is certain it is beginning to grow. Soon he sees the shoot,
then the stalk,
then the ears of corn.

With his eye he never sees this growth, but he knows it's taking place.

And we need to be certain that as we abide in the Master,
as we move in his will,
as we speak what he gives
us to speak, there will be fruit,
changed lives,
new believers, sons and daughters of God, brought
to birth through us ... be certain of this.

And *anything* that weakens this certainty,
that blurs the vision,
that dulls the hope, needs to be pushed aside.

Doubt the things you see and touch, but be certain that through your obedience God is bringing forth fruit for his kingdom be certain.

When Moses left Egypt at the age of forty fleeing for his life, he left as a man who had always been accustomed to having a fat purse, a fat suitcase, plenty of sandals, lots of friends.

When Moses came back to Egypt forty years later, he was destitute, he had nothing but a strange rod he carried in his hand. That rod was the symbol of the power of God which remained with him the rest of his life.

Moses was made ready to carry the power of God by learning to trust in nothing else. Moses was certain of three things:

1. God had called him.
2. God was with him.
3. God was bearing fruit through him.

Like Moses we have been in the wilderness and we have been to the burning bush. We have no confidence in our flesh or our brains or our money or our earthly connections anymore. But we are certain of three things

1. Jesus has called us.

2. Jesus is with us.

3. Jesus is bearing fruit through us.

With these three certainties we will go out and shake the earth.

CALVARY FAITH

Then after this he said to the disciples, "Let us go into Judea again." The disciples said to him, "Rabbi, the Jews were but now seeking to stone you, and you are going there again?"

*Jesus answered, "Are there not twelve hours in the day? If any one walks in the day, he does not stumble, because he sees the light of this world. But if any one walks in the night, he stumbles, because the light is not in him." Thomas, called the Twin, said to his fellow disciples, "Let us also go, that we may die with him."
John 11:7-10, 16*

And that journey to Judea to raise Lazarus from the dead was his last journey in flesh and blood ... the beginning of Jesus' journey to the cross.

"Are there not twelve hours in the day? If any one walks in the day, he does not stumble."

To walk in the day is to walk by the light you have from God even if that light is leading you to your own Calvary. To walk in the night is to walk in fear ... to shrink back from doing what you know is God's will because it might be dangerous or costly.

You say you're walking by faith. What kind of faith? Faith that believes that God will heal your warts and cure your sinuses, but is afraid to follow Jesus to a cross? Or, is it a faith that believes God will be with you even if you die doing his will?

Childlike Faith or Infantile Faith?

Many of us have confused childlike faith with infantile faith. Surely the more we walk the road of faith the more childlike our faith in God becomes. We get up in the morning and trust God. And even when God takes us by the hand and leads us through a dark valley we still trust him ... that's childlike faith.

But there is an infantile faith which never gets beyond the stage of trusting God for the goodies. A faith which delights to know Jesus in the power of his resurrection but dreads the thought of knowing Jesus in the fellowship of his suffering or the likeness of his death.

Infantile faith is where we all begin. Jesus started imparting faith to his disciples by teaching them to trust God to supply their needs.

But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things shall be yours as well.

Matthew 6:33

....you'll have bread,
....the boat won't sink,
....where is your faith?

Then Jesus led his disciples on beyond infantile faith, teaching them to trust God for the power they needed to set people free and heal their bodies.

"Why couldn't we cast out that demon?"
"Because of your unbelief ... come on! ... faith!"

But these exercises in faith were to bring the disciples far beyond the point where they trusted God for daily bread, or protection, or power. Jesus was bringing them to the place where they would trust God when they looked into the face of death itself.

***"Let not your hearts be troubled.
Believe in God ... believe also in me..."***

...Calvary faith!

Jesus wanted them to be able to trust God when they saw him hanging on the cross. In fact, one day as his followers, they would be reaching their own crosses.

***"..indeed, the hour is coming when whoever
kills you will think he is offering service to God."
John 16:2***

***"Then they will deliver you up to tribulation,
and put you to death..." Matthew 24:9***

Then the issue of faith will not be,

- will the boat sink?
- will we have bread for tomorrow?

Then the issue will be:

Do I know God is with me even though every support fails and every light goes out?

Calvary Faith

There is a tendency in American Christendom to freeze our concept of faith at the infantile level.

"I'm trusting God for a thousand dollars!"

Nothing wrong with that ... if you need a thousand dollars and if you don't send out this bold statement of faith in a prayer letter to a thousand people calculating it will average out to a dollar a head.

Of course we are to trust God for our daily needs, for protection, for power to accomplish the work he gives us. But the faith that Jesus brings us through his death on the cross takes us beyond that to a faith in which we trust God enough to lose our lives in him.

"Truly, truly I say to you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, it bears much fruit. He who loves his life loses it, and he who hates his life in this world will keep it for eternal life"
John 12:24-25

Calvary faith is trusting God and doing his will even if it costs me everything I've got ... including my life.

Mordecai also gave him a copy of the written decree issued in Susa, for their destruction, that he might show it to Esther and explain it to her and charge her to go to the king to make supplication to him and entreat him for her people. And Hathach went and told Esther what Mordecai had said. Then Esther spoke to Hathach and gave him a message for Mordecai, saying, "All the king's servants and the people of the king's provinces know that if any man or woman goes to the king inside the inner court without being called, there is but one law; all alike are to be put to death, except the one to whom the king holds out the golden scepter that he may live. And I have not been called to come in to the king these thirty days."

And they told Mordecai what Esther had said. Then Mordecai told them to return this answer to Esther, "Think not that in the king's palace you will escape any more than all the other Jews. For if you keep silence at such a time as this, relief and deliverance will rise for the Jews from another quarter, but you and your father's house will perish. And who knows whether you have not come to the kingdom for such a time as this?" Then Esther told them to reply to Mordecai, "Go, gather all the Jews to be found in Susa, and hold a fast on my behalf, and neither eat nor drink for three days, night or day. I and my maids will go to the king, though it is against the law; and if I perish, I perish." Esther 4:8-16

(It would be helpful to read the entire third and fourth chapters of Esther)

Esther does not say, "I will go to the king though it is against the law and I know he will hold out his scepter to me!" Rather she says, ***"I will go to the king though it is against the law and if I perish, I perish"***

"To go to the king on behalf of my people is the will of God so I will do it regardless of the consequences."

- This is Calvary faith...it offers no guarantee of tranquil circumstances.

The road may well be hard, lonely, dangerous, even fatal. Calvary faith has only one guarantee:

If I trust God and do his will he will be with me, he will never forsake me, I will have his light within me.

Most of us come to the place of Calvary faith the way Esther came. We're sailing along our merry way, thanking God for all the good things that have happened to us and trying to avoid as much as possible paying much attention to people to whom bad things are happening.

"After all, what can I do? What can I do for all the poor, the sick, the prisoners, children with no mother, mothers with no husband."

Then one day suddenly God opens our eyes and we see an opportunity to be of help.

"But if I do this thing, if I make this change in my routine there is a chance that my life will be disrupted forever!"

Now it's not just a matter of trusting God for tomorrow's bread or for better health; now it's a matter of trusting God even if to obey his will of mercy destroys my life as I now know it.

That's how it was with Esther. Esther didn't even consider the possibility that she could do anything for her fellow Jews.

"It's Just one of those things. I'm in the palace and the rest of my Jewish brethren are out in the cities exposed to the danger."

"Tragic ...but what can I do? My hands are tied!"

"Talk to the king, Esther."

"Impossible! I can't talk to the king unless he calls for me."

"Talk to the king, Esther."

"If I go in to the king without being invited; it means my head, unless he holds out his scepter. How can you ask me to do that?"

"God asks you to do that. Surely he raised you up for this moment. Act Esther! Plunge in and do what needs to be done."

"Fast and pray for me and I will go to the king, and if I perish I perish."

When Moses leaves the burning bush to go to Pharaoh his days of tranquility are over. His life will never be his own again. He's plunging into forty years

of pain, weariness, and thankless work. But Moses also knows that if he refuses to plunge in and obey, his soul will shrivel to nothing.

- When Peter forsakes all,
- When Saul gives up his career,
- When Mary offers herself in obedience,

they all realize that in a way they will perish in doing this, but not to do it would mean that their souls will wither within.

And for us Calvary faith begins the moment we decide that it's better to perish doing God's will than to let our souls shrivel by playing it safe.

So, I make that change,

I take that step,

I let go of that false security,

- and if I perish, I perish.

Then after this he said to the disciples, "Let us go into Judea again." The disciples said to him, "Rabbi, the Jews were but now seeking to stone you, and you are going there again?"

Jesus answered, "Are there not twelve hours in the day? If any one walks in the day, he does not stumble, because he sees the light of this world. But if any one walks in the night he stumbles, because the light is not in him." ***John 11:7-10***

When God has caused the light to dawn in our hearts and we see the way we have to go, we know there will be dangers, work, persecutions, and at the end a cross.

Calvary faith is to walk in that light regardless of the consequences.

"If I perish, I perish."

Esther walked in that light, laid down her life in front of the king and received it back along with the lives of her people Israel. Jesus the Lamb walked in that light, laid down his life and received it back again on the third day along with the lives of all of us.

God help us to walk in that light, to lay down our lives in whatever way God chooses and receive them back along with that great multitude, which no man can number, who have come through great tribulation and have washed their robes, and made them white in the blood of the Lamb.

**THE LAMB
WHO WAS SLAIN
HAS BEGUN
HIS REIGN**



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