



THREE LEVELS OF FAITH



And as Jesus passed on from there, two blind men followed him, crying aloud, "Have mercy on us, Son of David." When he entered the house, the blind men came to him; and Jesus said to them, "Do you believe that I am able to do this?" They said to him, "Yes, Lord." Then he touched their eyes, saying, "According to your faith be it done to you." And their eyes were opened.

Matthew 9

"Do you believe that I am able to do this?"

"Yes, Lord."

"According to your faith, be it done to you."

Faith. The one thing Jesus was looking for as he traveled the roads of Galilee. Faith is what he's looking for right now.

We may feel that there could be more love in our churches. No doubt that's true.

We may feel that our churches could use a lot more hope, as they look to the future.

Also true.

But the greatest need of all, is our need of faith.

More faith. Real faith.

No wonder the harvest is so meager.

No wonder our witness is so weak.

No wonder Jesus said, “When the Son of Man comes will he find faith on earth?”

We need faith.

But it has to be the right kind of faith. Much of what we call faith is not faith at all. It looks like faith from the outside, but inside there’s nothing there.

One way to describe it is to say there are levels of faith.

Think of a house with a first floor, an upstairs and a basement.

On the first floor we have what we could call **Churchy Faith**

“Churchy faith” is the kind of faith that satisfies church folks. I’m a Lutheran. I’m a Anglican. I’m a Pentecostal. I’m a Catholic. I claim to believe in the doctrines of my church. I do what’s expected of a member in good standing.

Maybe I even say my prayers before I go to bed. Or I throw up a quickie prayer in the morning as I drink my orange juice and take my vitamin pills. Maybe I even read the Bible from time to time.

So I’m what they call a normal Christian, leading what they call the normal Christian life. But I know, and God knows that my faith is not very deep. Sometimes I even pride myself on the fact that I’m not a fanatic, like some people. Churchy faith is good enough for me.

Now upstairs in the second floor we have **Superior Faith**

Superior faith is the kind of faith I get after I’ve had a “spiritual experience.” It seemed I was no longer satisfied with “churchy faith.” Life was empty. Maybe I came to a crisis in my life and found out my connection with God was weak. So I

went searching for God, for spiritual healing, maybe I came looking for the gift of the Holy Spirit.

“Lord, you’ve got to help me! There’s got to be more than this! If I can’t find something more than this paper-thin faith I have now, I’m going to walk away and forget the whole thing.”

Then one day it happens. There’s a crack in universe and lightning comes down and sets my heart on fire. Maybe I have a vision. Or I start speaking in tongues. Or maybe I just know the truth like you never knew it before.

Now I really have faith. Now I know how to pray. How sad that these church folks don’t know what they’re missing. My heart bleeds for those spiritual infants out there who are still floundering around in their little “church faith.”

But when I try to help them find life in the Spirit like I have, they close their hearts. They’re not interested. What a pity!

It’s called “superior faith.” Faith that looks down on the folks who haven’t come up to speed spiritually.

But now we have a problem. Any faith that looks down on other people’s faith in God is no longer faith; *it’s an illusion*. The minute I start demeaning anybody’s faith in God I lose my own connection with God. I may still get lots of support from all the other super-saints, but my own connection with God dries up. For all my spiritual gifts and spiritual wisdom, I have become a Pharisee.

**“God, I thank thee that I am not like other men,
extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even like this tax collector.”**

Luke 18

Of course, “superior faith” is easy to spot in others, not so easy to spot in ourselves. It often takes a stroke of judgment from heaven to bring us down to size.

Sometimes the Lord allows us to march on in our superior faith for quite a while, before it happens. He sends people across our path to call us to repentance. But we ignore them because they’re not as spiritually advanced as we are. Finally comes the blow. And as we fall from the second floor our eyes open and we discover what Pharisees we have become. If we’re lucky, we fall down two flights of steps and end up in the basement.

For in the basement is **Rock Bottom Faith**

Rock Bottom Faith is the only faith that satisfies God. The only faith that resonates with our Lord. It's Rock Bottom Faith because it stays in the rock bottom world of repentance. It repents daily before God and never never looks down on anyone's faith.

The Pharisee stood and prayed thus with himself, "God, I thank thee that I am not like other men, extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even like this tax collector.

I fast twice a week, I give tithes of all that I get."

But the tax collector, standing far off, would not even lift up his eyes to heaven, but beat his breast, saying, 'God, be merciful to me a sinner!'

I tell you, this man went down to his house justified rather than the other; for everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, but he who humbles himself will be exalted."

Luke 18

Lord, give us no peace until we find the basement, that rock-bottom faith of the tax collector!

So what is rock-bottom faith?

First: Rock bottom faith always *approaches God like those blind men, like the tax collector*

"Have mercy on us, Son of David," they cried.

"God, be merciful to me, a sinner!"

Those blind men saw what nobody else could see, that Jesus was the Son of David, the Messiah. They threw themselves on his mercy, and wouldn't let go. When he went into a house, they went right in after him. Nobody could push them away. *They were relentless in their pursuit of his mercy.*

They didn't say, "You got to do this for us, we're good Christians!"

No. "Son of David, have mercy on us!"

And the tax collector---"God be merciful to me a sinner."

"Well," you say, "those guys needed mercy. They were hurting. They were in trouble. And all those bad guys out there, they NEED mercy. But me, I'm okay. I'm saved. I'm a decent chap. Why should I be crying to God for mercy all the time?"

Listen. You and I need that mercy just as badly as the Tax Collector---every day, every hour. We need God's mercy, not just for the bad stuff back there in our past. We need it for the hypocrisy, and vanity, and the secret resentments that plague our lives even now. "Lord, have mercy!"

Rock bottom faith never stops crying out to God for mercy!

Secondly, rock bottom faith goes for "*the one thing needful*," like Martha's sister Mary did even though it got her in trouble.

*Now as they went on their way, he entered a village;
and a woman named Martha received him into her house. And she had a sister called
Mary, who sat at the Lord's feet and listened to his teaching.
But Martha was distracted with much serving; and she went to him and said,
"Lord, do you not care that my sister has left me to serve alone?
Tell her then to help me."
But the Lord answered her, "Martha, Martha,
you are anxious and troubled about many things; one thing is needful.
Mary has chosen the good portion, which shall not be taken away from her."*

Luke 10

Before we get too emotional feeling sorry for Martha, who has to do all the work, pay attention to what Jesus is saying.

One thing is needful:

Living Bread.

Forget the cheese and baloney.

Get the living bread of his words.

Rock-bottom faith is sustained by nothing else.

His words.

It's not your spiritual experiences.

It's not your spiritual gifts.

It's not your spiritual accomplishments.

It's his words.

Those words of Jesus are preserved to us in Matthew, Mark, Luke and John in the Bible. You want rock-bottom faith? Go to those four gospels and soak up Jesus' words until they start singing in your soul. You will find the one thing needful.

And no one will ever take it away from you.

Finally, rock-bottom faith obeys Jesus like Peter did, even when he had his doubts.

***While the people pressed upon him to hear the word of God,
he was standing by the lake of Gennesaret. And he saw two boats by the lake;
but the fishermen had gone out of them and were washing their nets.
Getting into one of the boats, which was Simon's, he asked him to put out a little
from the land. And he sat down and taught the people from the boat.
And when he had ceased speaking, he said to Simon,
"Put out into the deep and let down your nets for a catch."
And Simon answered, "Master, we toiled all night and took nothing!
But at your word I will let down the nets."***

Luke 5

Now we're looking at rock-bottom faith. Peter is in no mood to go out there and fish. He was discouraged, tired, hungry and had his doubts. What good will it do?

But he obeys. And when he does this they enclose a great shoal of fish, so that their nets begin to break.

And what do you know? Peter never does get his breakfast and that nice nap he was looking forward to. He hauls up his boat, leaves everything behind, and follows Jesus!

Peter obeys, even though he has his doubts. Even though he's tired and hungry. That's rock-bottom faith.

You do what Jesus calls you to do, even if you have your doubts. He says, "Love your enemies." What good will that do? Why should I?

But you obey.

He says, "Pray for those who persecute you." I have no desire to pray for these people who keep giving me a hard time.

But you obey.

“Seek first the Kingdom of God.” Look, I’ve got a thousand problems pressing on my life.

But you obey.

You know the right thing to do, and you’re scared.

But you obey.

That’s the kind of faith that counts with God.

That’s the kind of faith that moves mountains.

Churchy faith will keep the church folks happy.

Superior faith will keep the super-saints happy.

But only rock-bottom faith satisfies God.

Faith that approaches God like those two blind men, throwing themselves on Jesus’ mercy. Like the tax collector, “God be merciful to me a sinner!”

Faith that goes after the “one thing needful,” like Martha’s sister Mary, even if it gets her in trouble with her sister.

Faith that obeys Jesus, like Peter did, even when he had his doubts.

Lord, help us to find the basement, and stay there, and live by rock-bottom faith till the hour you return.

Lord Jesus, may we seek you with a rock bottom faith. Knock us down from our sense of superiority, our reliance on our spiritual accomplishments; Convict us whenever our hearts demean and diminish the faith of others. Lord, help us to relentlessly seek your mercy. May we be sustained by your Living Bread instead of famished by our meager self absorption. And Lord may our faith in you, our love for you and our hunger for your word lead us to obey you, despite any distraction, fear or doubt. Lord have mercy.

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