

FAITH NOT FEELINGS



Wisdom
Jonathan Allan Farrell

***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

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 that 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 insecurity. 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, be-coming 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.



Refiner's Fire
Jonathan Allan Farrell

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

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 moneychangers 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 pene-trated 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 ab-surdity 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."

"Let not your hearts be troubled, neither let them be afraid,"

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,"



Ears to Hear
Jonathan Allan Farrell

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.***

...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 anyone 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 who 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.**



Believe
Jonathan Allan Farrell

Prayer- Yes Lord, help us to build our faith on you. Despite our circumstances, despite our feelings ...may looking upon your face be enough. Your face dear Lord, to know your face ... Jesus...where there is mercy, ultimate truth and where we find your very life. Help us take hold of you with our wills...help us defy our feelings and to turn our hearts to you. And in the midst of all things, when our hearts turn to your face, may we be lifted from despair to an awe of you...turning our feelings into a melody of love to you. MM

REB...Unknown Date ... found in the booklet "Faith"... which is available upon request.
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