

Bible Lessons



“When the Son of man cometh, shall he find
faith on the earth?” Luke 18:8b

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Quarterly Bible Lessons for Adults and Young People

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Volume 50 April • May • June Number 2

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Edited by Sis. Angela Gellenbeck
In This Issue: *Reflections* contributed by
Sis. LaDawna Adams, Bro. Harlan Sorrell, Bro. Darrell Johnson,
Bro. Bob Wilson and Bro. James Bell

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Website editor: Angela Gellenbeck

If you would like printed copies mailed to you, please contact
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Phone (318) 402-9592

THEME FOR BIBLE LESSONS FOR SECOND QUARTER, 2018

The Just Shall Live By Faith

For this quarter we will focus on the principles of faith and trust in God. We want to explore the beginnings of faith, the necessity of faith, the walk of faith, and the fight of faith. Which vital doctrines are covered by these principles? What practical standards for personal living will these teachings require of our lives? What is the projected end—the GOAL—of a life of faith?

We hope to discover the answers to these questions as we study into the Word of God. Join us, and invite a friend, to share the joys and challenges of living by faith.

—Sis. Angela Gellenbeck

APRIL 1, 2018

FAITH'S BEGINNINGS

Romans 10:6 But the righteousness which is of faith speaketh on this wise, Say not in thine heart, Who shall ascend into heaven? (that is, to bring Christ down from above:)

7 Or, Who shall descend into the deep? (that is, to bring up Christ again from the dead.)

8 But what saith it? The word is nigh thee, even in thy mouth, and in thy heart: that is, the word of faith, which we preach;

9 That if thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved.

10 For with the heart man believeth unto righteousness; and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation.

11 For the scripture saith, Whosoever believeth on him shall not be ashamed.

12 For there is no difference between the Jew and the Greek: for the same Lord over all is rich unto all that call upon him.

13 For whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved.

14 How then shall they call on him in whom they have not

believed? and how shall they believe in him of whom they have not heard? and how shall they hear without a preacher?

15 And how shall they preach, except they be sent? as it is written, How beautiful are the feet of them that preach the gospel of peace, and bring glad tidings of good things!

16 But they have not all obeyed the gospel. For Esaias saith, Lord, who hath believed our report?

17 So then faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God.

18 But I say, Have they not heard? Yes verily, their sound went into all the earth, and their words unto the ends of the world.

Ephesians 2:8 For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God:

9 Not of works, lest any man should boast.

MEMORY VERSE: For whatsoever is born of God overcometh the world: and this is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith. —I John 5:4

CENTRAL THOUGHT: Faith is born or implanted by God in the heart of a person when he or she, hearing and receiving God’s Word, is persuaded and convicted to believe, confess, and obey it.

WORD DEFINITIONS

Romans 10:6 “Who shall ascend...”: Phrases from Deuteronomy 30:11-14 are quoted by Paul. “Heaven”: “The region above the sidereal heavens, the seat of an order of things eternal and consummately perfect, where God dwells and the other heavenly beings.” Deuteronomy reads “Who shall go up for us to heaven...”

Romans 10:7 “The deep”: bottomless; boundless; fathomless. The abyss. Deuteronomy reads “Beyond the sea...who shall go over the sea...”

Romans 10:8 “The word of faith”: the means of begetting and implanting faith in the heart.

Romans 10:9 “Confess”: to be in full agreement; align with; endorse; assent. “Confession of the Lord Jesus with the mouth must be taken to express generally, not only fearless avowal of the

Christian faith, but also consistent life” (*Pulpit Commentary*).

“Believe in thine heart”: “Faith must have an object and a reason for its exercise; the object is Jesus Christ—the reason is the infinite merit of his passion and death” (*Clarke’s Commentary*).

Romans 10:11 “For the scripture saith...”: A quote from Isaiah 28:16.

Romans 10:12 “Rich”: having many resources; abounding in riches.

Romans 10:13 “For whosoever shall call...”: A quote from Joel 2:32. This was also quoted by Peter in Acts 2:16.

Romans 10:15 “How beautiful are the feet...”: A quote from Isaiah 52:7.

Romans 10:16 “For Esaias saith...”: A quote from Isaiah 53:1.

Romans 10:17 “So then faith cometh by hearing”: “The beginning, progress, and strength of faith is by hearing” (*Matthew Henry*). “Faith”: “Persuasion, i.e. credence; moral conviction (of religious truth, or the truthfulness of God or a religious teacher), especially reliance upon Christ for salvation; abstractly, constancy in such profession; by extension, the system of religious (Gospel) truth itself—assurance, belief, believe, faith, fidelity” (*Strong’s Exhaustive Concordance*).

Romans 10:18 “Their sound went into all the earth”: A quote from Psalm 19:4.

LESSON BACKGROUND

In the epistle to the Romans, the apostle Paul deals with the issues of Israel’s unbelief and rejection of Christ and the turning of the Gentiles to faith in Christ. In the beginning chapters he establishes several key facts: First, that all have sinned, Jew and Gentile alike. Secondly, no one is justified by the law or by his own good works. Third, salvation is by the free gift of Jesus Christ. Fourth, salvation by grace does not mean continuation in sin. And fifth, the righteousness of faith can be attained by Jew and Gentile alike, only by faith.

Paul sets forth in this chapter the process by which man comes to faith in Christ. He quotes extensively from the Old Testament. He compares the description in Leviticus of justification by doing the

works of the law to that of justification or righteousness which comes by faith. He then expounds upon the message in Deuteronomy that the commandment was not “far off” or “too hard,” but that it is very near, even in one’s mouth and in one’s heart. He calls it “the word of faith.” That “word” must be believed by the heart, and vocal confession, or agreement, or consent, must be given.

How, he reasons, is this “word” brought to one’s heart and mouth? Again quoting from the Old Testament, he tells that one must be “sent” in order to bring the good tidings of peace—to preach the gospel message of salvation. He goes further and answers the question, “Has everyone heard the message?” by quoting from Psalm 19 that God has “sent” the sound of His Word to the whole earth by the messengers of creation—the heavens, sun, moon and stars declare it.

The verses from Ephesians reiterate that salvation is by grace and through faith; the gift of God. John calls overcoming faith that which is “born” of God.

God initiates; it is up to man to give response.

—Sis. Angela Gellenbeck

DISCUSSION:

1. *Complicate:* As ridiculous as it may sound, we as humans have many times reacted to the gospel message in the same manner as “Who shall go up to heaven and bring Jesus down?” Describe how we do that.
2. *Universal:* Which verses clearly teach that the gospel message is for all?
3. *Born:* Describe the process of hearing, believing and confessing unto salvation.
4. *Experience:* Tell how God has drawn, persuaded or convinced you to believe in Him.

COMMENTS AND APPLICATION

The Bible clearly states that the “word” of salvation, or the reality of the invisible God, is set forth plainly in the things He has

created, so that everyone in the entire world can read or hear the message. God is faithful to do His part. He “lighteth every man” (John 1:9) and it is not His will that “any” should perish (II Peter 3:9). He will have “all men” to be saved and come to a knowledge of the truth (I Timothy 2:4). Through creation, through the witness of every man’s conscience, through the printed or preached word, through His Spirit’s personal visitation, and through the personal example—the “word” written in the lives of His people lived out before the world, the Father draws men to Him.

In Acts 17:31 Paul told the Athenians on Mars’ Hill that God has “given assurance,” or offered faith, or presented hard evidence or proof to *all men* when He raised Jesus from the dead. The empty tomb is still the solid basis for our faith!

Jesus told John in the book of Revelation, “Behold, I stand at the door and knock” (Revelation 3:20). He goes on to say that the hearing of His voice and the opening of the door is completely up to the will of the individual. Hearing comes by the word of God. Faith comes by hearing. So God calls. He draws. He convinces and convicts. He persuades. But only when the “Word” heard is united by the willful assent of the heart is faith “born” and the process is complete.

—Sis. Angela Gellenbeck

REFLECTIONS

In Matthew the fourteenth chapter, we read of the incident where Jesus had sent the disciples away on a ship. He then went up into the mountain to be alone and pray. As the evening was approaching, the disciples found themselves in the midst of a rough and windy sea. About the fourth watch, between 3:00 a.m. and 6:00 a.m., Jesus went out to them walking on the sea. Remember, this was not a smooth sea of glass. (Isn't it interesting that Jesus loved to walk on the stormy waters?) The disciples perceived Him to be an apparition which only added to their distress and fears. Jesus calmly replied to their cries by saying, "Be of good cheer; it is I; be not afraid." Upon hearing the Master's voice, they felt assurance and hope.

Then Peter did the unthinkable: He asked to join Jesus on the water! Jesus, in turn, invited Peter to “come.” Peter walked ON the

water. But sadly, his human reasoning caused him to look at his surroundings and he began to sink. Jesus stretched forth his hand and admonished him by saying, "O thou of little faith, wherefore didst thou doubt." The loss of Peter's faith did not change the circumstances, as the sea was still tumultuous and rough; it did not cause Jesus to sink, as He is still the Lord of all. The lack of Peter's faith hindered only Peter.

"Faith sees the invisible, believes the impossible, receives the
incredible,
No matter what was—
Faith moves the unmovable, proves the unprovable, for anyone
willing to trust
Believe and you'll see what faith does."
— by Donna Brooks, Marty Funderburk and Scott Wilemon

May our prayer be that the Lord will increase our faith so that
we may move mountains and walk on water.

—Sis. LaDawna Adams

APRIL 8, 2018

HOW FAITH WORKS

Galatians 5:6 For in Jesus Christ neither circumcision availeth
any thing, nor uncircumcision; but faith which worketh by love.

Romans 5:5b The love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the
Holy Ghost which is given unto us.

6 For when we were yet without strength, in due time Christ
died for the ungodly.

7 For scarcely for a righteous man will one die: yet peradventure
for a good man some would even dare to die.

8 But God commendeth his love toward us, in that, while we
were yet sinners, Christ died for us.

I John 4:9 In this was manifested the love of God toward us,
because that God sent his only begotten Son into the world, that we
might live through him.

10 Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us,

and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins.

16 And we have known and believed the love that God hath to us. God is love; and he that dwelleth in love dwelleth in God, and God in him.

19 We love him, because he first loved us.

MEMORY VERSE: But God, who is rich in mercy, for his great love wherewith he loved us, even when we were dead in sins, hath quickened us together with Christ, (by grace ye are saved).

—Ephesians 2:4-5

CENTRAL THOUGHT: One way God creates faith in us is by revealing His love to us. He proved that love by giving His Son Jesus to be the sacrifice for our sins, and when we comprehend that truth, we are persuaded to believe the love that He has for us.

WORD DEFINITIONS

Galatians 5:6 “Faith which worketh by love”: Faith is made active, or energetic, by love (*Clarke’s Commentary*). “When this marvellous exhibition of Divine compassion and love is through faith in very deed caught sight of and realized, it naturally becomes a truth-power, exercising over the man an influence imperative and supreme...Thus the apostle evinces how in his own case faith through love became operative and influential. Christ's love to himself, on being realized by him, awakened in his soul a sentiment of grateful affection to his Redeemer, which was so strong and influential as thenceforward to sway and regulate the whole of his life” (*Pulpit Commentary*).

Romans 5:5 “Shed abroad”: pour out; bestow liberally.

Romans 5:8 “Commendeth”: establish; prove; exhibit.

I John 4:10 “Propitiation”: the atoning sacrifice that appeases God’s wrath.

LESSON BACKGROUND

In our first lesson we learned that faith is birthed in us by God persuading us and drawing us; by knocking on our heart’s door and

speaking His Word to us. Today's lesson describes the manner in which He draws and persuades us: by His grace and love freely manifested toward us.

The epistle to the Galatians was written by Paul to settle the ongoing disputes between the new Gentile Christians and the Jewish Christians who were determined to hold on to the form of the Law and all the outward commandments, joining them with their new faith in Jesus. They not only insisted in doing this themselves but were also determined to coerce the new Gentile Christians to adhere to Moses' law, especially the rite of circumcision. This effort was just as futile as Jesus had described: putting new wine into old wineskins, and sewing a new fabric patch onto old, rotten clothing. Three times—once in I Corinthians 7:19 and twice in Galatians—Paul states what truly availed instead of circumcision: the keeping of the commandments of God, a new creature, and faith which works by love. Indeed, it is believing in the revealed love of Christ which generates the new birth in us and gives us the desire and motivation to obey Him and do His will.

To the Roman Christians Paul was also establishing the doctrine of salvation through faith rather than justification through keeping of the law. Here he states that it was Christ who loved us first. While we were yet sinners, Jesus proved His love to us by dying for our sins. We do not have salvation "awarded" to us because of our own righteous acts.

John wrote the first epistle apparently to refute the false teachers of his day, namely, the Cerinthians, who denied that Jesus was the Messiah, and that he was by birth a mere man, and that the Aeon, or Christ, descended upon him at his baptism and left him before his death; the Docetes, who believed that the Son of God did not truly and really become a man, but that there was only an appearance assumed, or that he seemed to be a man; and the Gnostics, who taught that the apostles did not deliver the doctrine of Jesus as they had received it, but made additions to it, especially in the commandments which were termed legal (*Clarke's Commentary* and *Barnes' Notes on the Bible*). In maintaining the doctrine of holiness, John reminds us again that it was not our love nor our works which accomplished our salvation, but Jesus loved us first; and believing in that love (our faith) and receiving that life that was given

to us by the sacrifice of Jesus Christ is what overcomes the world.

—Sis. Angela Gellenbeck

DISCUSSION:

1. *That Which Avails:* Paul taught that three things were more important to God than circumcision. What were they?
2. *That Which Generates:* When we comprehend the love of Christ, what happens in our hearts?
3. *That Which Was Manifested:* What did Jesus do that proved His love for us?
4. *That Which Came First:* Is our salvation based upon our love for God or His love for us? Which was first?

COMMENTS AND APPLICATION

If you will permit a personal testimony, I would like to share what happened in my own heart the day I was truly born again. I had a tender heart and fear toward God since I was a tiny girl and had been to the altar to be “saved” every time I felt I was not ready to meet God. But I was eleven years old when my faith truly took hold of Christ for salvation. This time I truly “heard” the word, comprehended the sacrificial love of Christ for me, knew in my heart that I was a sinner and that I deserved to have died, but that He had taken my place on the cross. At that moment I believed—not only *on* Him but *into* Him. A great thankfulness and love for Him eclipsed anything else in my heart. I LOVED HIM. I knew I was forgiven. I knew HE WAS MY SAVIOR. The power of that faith brought peace and rest from a great struggle. It brought floods of joy. It brought overcoming victory which has endured unto this day.

Comprehension of the love of God truly generates faith. Not only faith for forgiveness and salvation, but a faith that obeys, performs, and acts. Love provides the energy for our faith. But it is never our love first. It is He who loved us first. As we believe in that love, we are moved to love Him and trust Him. Paul said, “I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me: and the life that I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me” (Galatians 2:20).

—Sis. Angela Gellenbeck

REFLECTIONS

Since we know that faith works “by love” (Galatians 5:6), it is vitally important that we maintain a fervent love for God. Jesus said, “The first of all the commandments is, Hear, O Israel; The Lord our God is one Lord: And thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind, and with all thy strength: this is the first commandment” (Mark 12:29-30). As the bond of love between us and God grows stronger, our faith will grow stronger. Recently, in my meditations, the words of this precious old song by Fanny Crosby came to me with great inspiration and, as I sang it, it blessed my soul until the tears were flowing. Think about this:

“Savior, more than life to me, I am clinging, clinging close to Thee;
Let Thy precious blood applied, Keep me ever, ever near Thy side.

“Through this changing world below, Lead me gently, gently as I go;
Trusting Thee, I cannot stray, I can never, never lose my way.

“Let me love Thee more and more,
Till this fleeting, fleeting life is o’er;
Till my soul is lost in love, In a brighter, brighter world above.

(Chorus): “Every day, every hour, Let me feel Thy cleansing power;
May Thy tender love to me Bind me closer, closer, Lord, to Thee”
—*Evening Light Songs* #460

“But ye, beloved, building up yourselves on your most holy faith, praying in the Holy Ghost, Keep yourselves in the love of God, looking for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ unto eternal life” (Jude 1:20-21).

—Bro. Harlan Sorrell

APRIL 15, 2018

JUSTIFICATION BY FAITH

John 3:16 For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life.

John 5:24 Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that heareth my word, and believeth on him that sent me, hath everlasting life, and shall not come into condemnation; but is passed from death unto life.

Acts 13:39 And by him all that believe are justified from all things, from which ye could not be justified by the law of Moses. (See also Galatians 2:16.)

Romans 4:3 For what saith the scripture? Abraham believed God, and it was counted unto him for righteousness.

20 He staggered not at the promise of God through unbelief; but was strong in faith, giving glory to God;

21 And being fully persuaded that, what he had promised, he was able also to perform.

22 And therefore it was imputed to him for righteousness.

23 Now it was not written for his sake alone, that it was imputed to him;

24 But for us also, to whom it shall be imputed, if we believe on him that raised up Jesus our Lord from the dead.

Romans 5:1 Therefore being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ. (See also Romans 3:21-25.)

Romans 10:9 That if thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved.

10 For with the heart man believeth unto righteousness; and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation.

11 For the scripture saith, Whosoever believeth on him shall not be ashamed.

Hebrews 11:6 But without faith it is impossible to please him: for he that cometh to God must believe that he is, and that he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him.

MEMORY VERSE: Behold, his soul which is lifted up is not upright in him: but the just shall live by his faith. —Habakkuk 2:4

CENTRAL THOUGHT: As in the example of Abraham, righteousness and justification and everlasting life are given by God to us when we hear His word, believe in the risen Savior and give our will, or assent, or confession to our belief.

WORD DEFINITIONS

John 3:16 “Believeth in him”: believeth *into* Him; indicating the point reached or entered.

Romans 4:22-24 “Imputed”: reckoned; passed to one’s account; credited.

Romans 5:1 “Justified”: cleared of all charges; declared righteous.

Romans 10:11 “Ashamed”: dishonored; disgraced; put to confusion; frustrated; disappointed.

LESSON BACKGROUND

John 3:16, declaring the simple message of salvation—“Whosoever believeth”—and probably the most memorized and quoted verse of the Bible, has interestingly been explained as describing the love of Christ, which Paul in Ephesians 3:13 prays may be comprehended by all holy saints. Its breadth—the world. Its length—He gave His only begotten Son. Its depth—whosoever believeth. Its height—everlasting life! Here we have God’s part described: loving and giving; and our part—believing and having. As we noticed in Word Definitions, this believing is not only a mental belief; it is a *heart faith* that gives us entrance *into* Christ and His salvation.

When God brought Abraham out to view the night sky and declared to him again His promise of a seed, a posterity that could not be numbered, Abraham believed God’s promise. Without sight, without visible proof, he simply counted it as done. Paul, relating the story in the epistle to the Romans, detailed Abraham’s faith: he didn’t consider his nor Sarah’s inability to conceive a child; he didn’t stagger through unbelief; he was not weak, but strong in faith; he

gave glory to God; he was fully persuaded that there would be not just promise but performance.

Paul reiterates in chapter five that justification, or the declaring of our now-righteous standing before God, is by faith. Out of that simple faith, we have peace. Our conflict with God is over. The strife has ceased.

We consider again the verses from the first lesson, this time with the emphasis on our response to the Word which God has sent. Coupled with our faith, the Word generates life and salvation into us!

Without this heart belief, we can never please God, but when we believe, as Abraham did, that what He has said in His word regarding our deliverance, forgiveness, and cleansing, He will *do*; and show that belief by diligently seeking Him—seeking Him until He rains righteousness upon us—He will perform the wonderful miracle of salvation.

Our memory verse became the watchword of the Protestant Reformation. Martin Luther wrote in 1545: “At last, by the mercy of God, meditating day and night, I gave heed to the context of the words, namely, ‘In it the righteousness of God is revealed, as it is written, ‘He who through faith is righteous shall live.’” There I began to understand that the righteousness of God is that by which the righteous [person] lives by a gift of God, namely by faith. And this is the meaning: the righteousness of God is revealed by the gospel, namely, the passive righteousness with which a merciful God justifies us by faith, as it is written, ‘He who through faith is righteous shall live.’ Here I felt that I was altogether born again and had entered paradise itself through open gates.”

—Sis. Angela Gellenbeck

DISCUSSION:

1. *God’s Part/Our Part:* Explain the importance of each.
2. *Father of Faith:* Abraham has been given this title. Explain why.
3. *Proof of Faith:* What proves to God *that we believe* He is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him?

COMMENTS AND APPLICATION

The material in our lesson today may seem elementary to some. True, this teaching is the very foundation, the essential basic understanding for coming to Christ. Yet we need to frequently remind ourselves of this truth because it is very easy for any of us to slip into the idea that salvation comes because of things that we do. We may say things like, “You can’t partake of that and be saved.” “That woman isn’t saved because she dresses immodestly.” “In order to be saved you must give up ____.” In reality, not partaking of worldly things, dressing modestly, and giving up this or that thing are *results* of salvation, and *not the cause of it*.

Repentance, or turning away from sin, *is* a vital part of hearing and receiving God’s revealed Word, believing from the heart that Jesus is the only Savior, and giving assent to that faith by confessing openly that you are trusting Him for salvation. Truly a person should in his or her repentance bring forth the fruits of repentance.

It is possible, however, to do many “righteous” things or “give up” many things, while still not having in the heart a *true dependence on Christ alone* for salvation. We may begin to look down on people who are still in their sins, as if we are “better.” Why did Jesus need to come in the flesh and bear our sins in His body on the cross as sacrifice for our sins, if we could just “do right” to be saved?

Many people are deceived into thinking they are right with God—justified—if they belong to a church. Others may say, “Yeah, I need to get back into church,” as if that is all the salvation they need. Still others maintain very admirable deeds of compassion, such as caring for the homeless, sheltering animals, giving aid to foreign countries, or guiding troubled teens. They may say things like, “I know I sin like everybody else, but God will let me into heaven because my good traits outweigh my bad ones.”

All of these flawed ideas fail in presenting a person justified in God’s sight. Only the righteousness which is by faith in Christ alone and in His shed blood will avail.

—Sis. Angela Gellenbeck

REFLECTIONS

Faith is not stagnant. It is not a one-time act of believing in God and thereby reaching the summit of spiritual attainment. It is not merely that one confesses, prays, believes and that's the sum total of their experience. It is just the beginning. Our initial faith in God carries us over the threshold that connects our natural life to the spiritual life of God and sets us up for a greater exploration and understanding of that which is divine.

Several scriptures enlighten us to this principle. We must be careful not to overemphasize the initial act of faith nor underemphasize the continued process of faith that is so vital to sustaining our relationship with God.

We live by faith. It is the essential ingredient of a godly life. Without it we die. Our natural life begins at birth and progresses from that point. We grow from one stage to the next. But not without careful attention to that which sustains life—so it is with us spiritually. We must be born again, not of the flesh but of the Spirit. This spiritual birth is initiated by faith and its progress is sustained by faith.

We walk by faith. This requires forward movement—progression from one point to the next. Once we have believed we must continue steadfastly in our belief—against all odds and against all opposition or the entire process becomes futile.

Our faith is the power cord of our spiritual life. It connects us to God, Himself. The greater the faith, the greater the connection. If we lose the connection we lose the power and the privilege of knowing and pleasing God, for without faith it is impossible to please him.

—Bro. Darrell Johnson

APRIL 22, 2018

SANCTIFICATION BY FAITH

Acts 15:8 And God, which knoweth the hearts, bare them witness, giving them the Holy Ghost, even as he did unto us;

9 And put no difference between us and them, purifying their

hearts by faith.

Galatians 3:6 Even as Abraham believed God, and it was accounted to him for righteousness.

7 Know ye therefore that they which are of faith, the same are the children of Abraham.

8 And the scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the heathen through faith, preached before the gospel unto Abraham, saying, In thee shall all nations be blessed.

9 So then they which be of faith are blessed with faithful Abraham.

14 That the blessing of Abraham might come on the Gentiles through Jesus Christ; that we might receive the promise of the Spirit through faith.

Hebrews 4:1 Let us therefore fear, lest, a promise being left us of entering into his rest, any of you should seem to come short of it.

2 For unto us was the gospel preached, as well as unto them: but the word preached did not profit them, not being mixed with faith in them that heard it.

3a For we which have believed do enter into rest.

10 For he that is entered into his rest, he also hath ceased from his own works, as God did from his.

11 Let us labour therefore to enter into that rest, lest any man fall after the same example of unbelief.

MEMORY VERSE: Having therefore, brethren, boldness to enter into the holiest by the blood of Jesus...Let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience, and our bodies washed with pure water.

—Hebrews 10:19, 22

CENTRAL THOUGHT: The blessing of Abraham and the promise of the Father—the Holy Spirit—was given to the disciples and to the believing Gentiles to whom the apostles preached. He is given to us when we, having been cleansed from sin, take hold of the promise of the Spirit by faith, enter into the holiest place and the promised land of rest, cease from our own works of righteousness, rely fully on the righteousness which is given us through faith and receive the purification which comes by the refining power of the Holy Spirit.

WORD DEFINITIONS

Hebrews 4:11 “Labour”: to make haste; give diligence; make every effort.

Hebrews 10:19 “Boldness”: assurance; confidence.

Hebrews 10:22 “Full assurance”: conviction; most certain confidence.

Hebrews 10:22 “Washed”: a complete bathing to cleanse the entire person.

LESSON BACKGROUND

The fifteenth chapter of Acts records Peter’s discussion with certain believing Pharisees who felt it was needful to circumcise all the believing Gentiles. Peter settled the dispute by alluding to the account of the conversion of the Roman centurion, Cornelius, and his other relatives and friends, all of whom, it is evident, were believers in the true God, and who, upon hearing the gospel, believed in Jesus, were baptized, and filled with the Holy Spirit. Peter pointed out the similarities between their baptism of the Holy Spirit and that of the other apostles on the day of Pentecost, including this detail, that the Holy Spirit purified their *hearts* by faith—a spiritual circumcision.

In our last lesson we read from Paul’s epistle to the Romans about the blessing given to Abraham that is now ours through faith; today’s discussion includes his message to the Galatians about Abraham’s faith and the inheritance promised to him, which the apostle clearly indicates is the same as Jesus’ promise in Luke 24:49 and Acts 1:4-5. Jesus promised the believers the Holy Spirit, Who He said would guide them, teach them, endue them with power from on high, and make them witnesses unto the whole world.

The writer to the Hebrews, who is generally agreed to be Paul, also spoke about the Holy Spirit when he spoke of the promise of entering into Jesus’ rest, drawing a parallel between the true soul rest that Christ has promised believers and that literal land of promise, Canaan. As the Israelites, hindered by their unbelief, refused to confidently enter Canaan, and were condemned to forty years in the wilderness, he warns that we also, through unbelief, can forfeit our rest in the promised land of the Holy Spirit. This rest, he

explains, involves ceasing from our own works. Paul mentions these works in Romans 10, when he describes the Jews' "own" righteousness of the law, contrasting it with the righteousness which is "by faith." He also speaks of his "own" righteousness in Philippians 3:9, desiring to count it as worthless to obtain the righteousness of God by faith.

Our memory verse is a most encouraging exhortation; we as believers can boldly and confidently come to God in full assurance of faith, seeking to enter into the holiest place, which the scriptures clearly show, by type and shadow, is that place of sanctification (holiness) given through the Holy Spirit.

—Sis. Angela Gellenbeck

DISCUSSION:

1. *What Can He Do For You?* Share the promises given in Scripture of what the Holy Spirit will do in our lives.
2. *With Faith For My Cleansing:* Our lesson speaks of people whose hearts were "purified by faith." Of whom was this speaking?
3. *Come Over Into the Canaan Land:* Of what is Canaan a type? Can you name some of the parallels?
4. *Only Believe:* What hindered the Israelites from entering Canaan? What hinders us today from receiving the promise of the Father?

COMMENTS AND APPLICATION

The same "persuasion" with which God wooed and drew your soul to Him, convicting you of sin and revealing Christ as your substitute and sacrifice is the same convicting persuasion that will reveal and open up to your heart the wonderful promise offered you by the coming of the Holy Spirit into your heart in His fullness. In the literal type, the Canaan land, the Israelites were called to scout out the land, to investigate its cities, people, kingdoms, agriculture, and land features. Today God invites you to investigate the glorious possibilities of life in the Spirit. The battles, the kingdoms, the fruit, the conquest.

The question is, will you draw back in unbelief when you view the lay of the land? Will you believe the negative reports? “You can’t overcome.” “You’ll always be plagued by that weakness.”

We are challenged in our lesson to draw near, not draw back. To come in full assurance of faith. To have faith for our cleansing, as did the believing Gentiles in Cornelius’ house. We can see what the Spirit did for Peter, Paul, Stephen, Philip, John, and countless others. The kingdoms of fear, doubt, timidity, self-promotion and self-righteousness were toppled in the lives of these disciples just as Israel toppled Canaan’s kingdoms by faith.

Many religious teachers and belief systems dismiss this possibility. Canaan is portrayed as being Heaven; holiness is scorned; the Holy Spirit, Who is clearly promised to fill believers after they are saved, is believed to have already come into their hearts at conversion.

In coming to the Father, asking for the gift of His Holy Spirit, a crucial part of our faith is that we lay ourselves on the altar as a sacrifice to God; completely and totally surrender to His will, and give Him permission to do the cleansing and purifying of our souls.

Not until we know that we have abandoned everything to God can we have faith to believe that He accepts our sacrifice and places His seal on that which is now completely His. The scriptures let us know that the seal is His Holy Spirit. When we reach that point in surrender, God sends His holy fire. By faith we can conquer in the promised land.

—Sis. Angela Gellenbeck

REFLECTIONS

“Why is it that the scriptures teach a sinless life as the test of the new birth, and yet the world is full of men and women who know they have been born again, and yet cannot measure up to that standard? They cannot deny that they have met with a change, and others see its manifestation in their lives. And yet they are conscious of committing sin, more or less daily. Here is a point where experience seems to conflict with revelation. We see the same thing ascribed to some of the New Testament congregations. Some of them have sins alleged to them, others not, while all are urged on to

the 'fullness of the blessing of the Gospel.' Those who had sinned, of course, had incurred the necessity of repentance and pardon, before they could inherit the blessing of perfect love."

"A consideration of these facts, together with the scripture teaching, lead us to the conclusion that while repentance and regeneration begin a life of freedom from the commission of sin, entire sanctification is the summit condition of perpetuating that sinless life. The fact that 'whosoever is born of God doth not commit sin' is based upon the holy 'seed' that abides in him, which cries out for the destruction of the unholy Adamic nature, that wars against it; and upon the fact that grace provides for, and all the promises of God point to the present, entire destruction of the inward foe. In other words, the absence of sinning in the new-born life, is secured by the provisions that God has made for that life, the most important of which is the second work, of removing all tendency of evil out of our nature. This 'unites the heart,' the will, and the whole realm of our moral nature, with all the appetites and propensities of the body, into sweet accord with God, and into natural, and easy resistance of all outward evil. This is the plane of victory upon which the 'born again' soul is expected to move forward without committing sin throughout life. Hence, justification is a mere transition state. Here men quit sinning, while they press on to perfection, but relapse into sin as soon as they undertake to stand there. 'Therefore being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ: by whom also we have access by faith into this grace wherein we stand' (Romans 5:1-2). Peace with God, through justification, is a glorious experience; but to find a place to 'stand,' we must pass on, by a second grasp of faith, to a higher plane. Hence also Paul urges the Hebrew Christians 'on to perfection,' clearly intimating that a failure to do so will surely 'lay a foundation for repentance from dead works' (Hebrews 6:1). Behold also the Apostle Paul's great anxiety to bring the 'fullness of the blessing of the Gospel' to the various congregations of young converts, 'to the end they may be established' (Romans. 1:11). 'To the end He may establish your hearts unblameable in holiness before God' (1 Thessalonians 3:13). All these, and other scriptures, clearly point to perfect holiness of heart, an experience to be gained after justification, as the sure footing of complete inward salvation, and

outward victory.”

—D. S. Warner in “Problem Solved,” *The Gospel Trumpet*, Sept. 15, 1883)

“Have you ever felt the power of the Pentecostal fire
Burning up all carnal nature, cleansing out all base desire,
Going through and through your spirit, cleansing all its stain away?
Oh, I’m glad, so glad to tell you it is for us all today.

“You may now receive the Spirit as a sanctifying flame,
If with all your heart you seek Him, having faith in Jesus name;
On the cross He bought this blessing, He will never say us Nay;
He is waiting now to give it, why not claim it, friend, today?”

—L. L. Picket, 1897

—Bro. Harlan Sorrell

APRIL 29, 2018

THE PROOFS OF FAITH

James 2:14 What doth it profit, my brethren, though a man say he hath faith, and have not works? can faith save him?

15 If a brother or sister be naked, and destitute of daily food,

16 And one of you say unto them, Depart in peace, be ye warmed and filled; notwithstanding ye give them not those things which are needful to the body; what doth it profit?

17 Even so faith, if it hath not works, is dead, being alone.

18 Yea, a man may say, Thou hast faith, and I have works: shew me thy faith without thy works, and I will shew thee my faith by my works.

19 Thou believest that there is one God; thou doest well: the devils also believe, and tremble.

20 But wilt thou know, O vain man, that faith without works is dead?

21 Was not Abraham our father justified by works, when he had offered Isaac his son upon the altar?

22 Seest thou how faith wrought with his works, and by works was faith made perfect?

23 And the scripture was fulfilled which saith, Abraham believed God, and it was imputed unto him for righteousness: and he was called the Friend of God.

24 Ye see then how that by works a man is justified, and not by faith only.

MEMORY VERSE: For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them. —Ephesians 2:10

CENTRAL THOUGHT: Salvation by faith, which is begun by a divine work wrought by God in the heart, convicting and persuading and creating faith in us, is not accomplished by works of righteousness that we have done, nor are we justified by the works of the law; however, Christ, dwelling in our hearts by faith, works in us the true works of righteousness, and these good works are proof of our faith, making it perfect or complete.

WORD DEFINITIONS

James 2:17 “Dead, being alone”: is dead in itself. “The faith that does not produce works of charity and mercy is without the living principle which animates all true faith, that is, love to God and love to man” (*Clarke’s Commentary*).

LESSON BACKGROUND

It would appear that James was refuting the apostle Paul’s teachings that a man is not justified by the law (the Mosaic law) but only by faith. I believe it can be proven that the two teachings were not at odds with each other, but were rather balancing each other and were written to counter the extremes of those who would take either “faith” or “works” too far.

There were heresies on both sides of the issue. The Gnostics (later termed Antinomians, or *anti-law*) did not accept the Old Testament moral law. The Pharisees attempted to bind the ceremonial confines of Moses’ law upon the Christians. Paul, in Romans 2:13, actually taught similarly to James. “For not the hearers

of the law are just before God, but the doers of the law shall be justified." James admonished, "But be ye doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving your own selves" (James 1:22).

Paul's definition of "faith" was *trust in the grace of God as revealed in the atoning death of Christ*; a living trust in a living person. By "works" he meant *dependence upon outward legal observances*. James' definition of "faith" in this chapter was *that intellectual belief of religious truth*; barren orthodoxy. He said the intellectual belief held by devils in the one, true God even caused them to tremble. We recall the magician, Simon, who was recorded as being a "believer" who was also baptized. Later he was rebuked as having a heart "not right with God." By "works" James meant *the acts which spring from true, living faith or its fruits*, an identical teaching which Paul put forward in Galatians 5.

Both Paul and James refer to Abraham. Again, we can find agreement when we consider the entire body of teaching, especially when we consider Hebrews the eleventh chapter where faith resulted in Enoch, Noah, Abraham, and others acting upon their faith in obedience. James emphasizes obedience as he refers to Abraham offering up Isaac, which caused God to exclaim, "Now I know..."

"Seest thou how faith wrought...' Here is a proof that faith cannot exist without being active in works of righteousness. His [Abraham's] faith in God would have been of no avail to him, had it not been manifested by works; for by works—by his obedience to the commands of God, his faith was made perfect—it dictated obedience, he obeyed; and thus faith had its consummation. Even true faith will soon die, if its possessor does not live in the spirit of obedience" (*Clarke's Commentary*).

Paul's joining of the two—faith and works—in Ephesians 2:10 shows the true balance and frees man from falling into self-righteousness. "It is God." We were never saved by our works, and we will never, by ourselves, keep saved by our own works. We cease from our works, surrender to Christ Who lives through us, and by that living faith and trust which works through the motivation of love, prove our faith by obedience and deeds of charity and kindness.

—Sis. Angela Gellenbeck

DISCUSSION:

1. *“Can Faith Save Him?”* What is your answer to James’ question?
2. *Give:* How does the example in verses 15 and 16 show what kind of works James is talking about?
3. *Abraham’s Offering of Isaac:* Where does Paul also mention this proof of Abraham’s faith?
4. *Works and Fruit:* Paul speaks of the fruit of the Spirit; James talks about works. Do they mean the same thing?

COMMENTS AND APPLICATION

We are faced with the same debate over these scriptures in today’s religious circles. Many times it is hard to discern the balance between “law” or “works” and “grace” or “faith.” Efforts to obey God are being scorned as “legalism,” while proponents of “messy grace” are being applauded and their best-selling works followed by the masses.

It is true—we could fall into the category of those mentioned by Jesus who stand before Him at the end, saying, “Lord, Lord” and holding up their religious standards and charitable works as their proof of being His, when in reality, He has to say, “I never knew you” (Matthew 7:21-23). We can rigidly hold to outward forms of righteousness while neglecting acts of love and charity to others, running a great risk of having Him say to us at the judgment, “Depart from me” (Matthew 23:28 and 25:31-46).

“True faith alone, whereby men have part in Christ’s righteousness, atonement, and grace, saves their souls; but it produces holy fruits, and is shown to be real by its effect on their works...We see then how that by works a man is justified, not by a bare opinion or profession, or believing without obeying; but by having such faith as produces good works” (*Matthew Henry*).

Let us “make every effort” to enter into the rest from our own works; where once we depended upon our own righteousness to “be right” but have now submitted ourselves unto the righteousness which is of God by faith. Let us allow Him to both will and do in us after His good pleasure (Philippians 2:13). As we learned in an earlier

lesson that our faith was generated by believing in the revelation of God's love, may we now allow that faith to continue to work by love.

Let us seek to glorify Him—not ourselves—before the world, that they may behold our good works and pure, honest conduct; fruit that comes from abiding in Him.

—Sis. Angela Gellenbeck

REFLECTIONS

I trust I shall never forget the account of Bro. Ostis Wilson sitting with his dad on his deathbed. His dad was also an effective gospel minister who had made many sacrifices and labored faithfully in the Lord's vineyard for many years.

Bro. Ostis asked his dad how it looked for him. His dad simply replied, "I believe that by the merits of Jesus' shed blood I will be saved." I believe this to be the true spirit of humility and love we need.

Paul asked the question, "What do you have that you did not receive, and why do you glory, as if you had not received it?" It is God Who gives us the mind to work; it is He Who gives us the willingness to do; it is He Who has given us skill and gifts. It is He Who gives us life and breath, and it is He Who has created us.

Jesus said in Luke 17:10, "So likewise ye, when ye shall have done all those things which are commanded you, say, We are unprofitable servants: we have done that which was our duty to do."

An amazing verse of song put it this way:

"Could my tears forever flow, could my zeal no languor know,
These for sin could not atone; Thou must save, and Thou alone:
In my hand no price I bring, Simply to thy cross I cling."

My dear brother and sister in Christ, you are so precious! Let us work on—toil on—being constrained and motivated by the love of Christ.

—Bro. Bob Wilson

MAY 6, 2018

LIVING BY FAITH

2 Chronicles 20:20b Believe in the Lord your God, so shall ye be established; believe his prophets, so shall ye prosper.

Psalms 27:13 I had fainted, unless I had believed to see the goodness of the Lord in the land of the living.

Habakkuk 2:4 Behold, his soul which is lifted up is not upright in him: but the just shall live by his faith.

Mark 11:22 And Jesus answering saith unto them, Have faith in God.

Luke 1:45 And blessed is she that believed: for there shall be a performance of those things which were told her from the Lord.

John 20:27b And be not faithless, but believing.

29b Blessed are they that have not seen, and yet have believed.

31 But these are written, that ye might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing ye might have life through his name.

Romans 15:13 Now the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, that ye may abound in hope, through the power of the Holy Ghost.

2 Corinthians 5:7 (For we walk by faith, not by sight.)

MEMORY VERSE: I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me. —Galatians 2:20

CENTRAL THOUGHT: By having faith in God and believing His Word, we have a victorious spiritual life, we maintain life, and we carry on day-to-day Christian life. We are established, we have strength, vitality, blessings, joy, peace and hope—all through faith in God.

WORD DEFINITIONS

2 Chronicles 20:20b “Established”: confirmed; supported;

nourished.

Psalm 27:13 “I had fainted”: These words have been added by the English translators. In the original, the sentence breaks off: “Unless I had believed to see the goodness of the Lord in the land of the living—! Its eloquent pause gives the reader the privilege of imagining what might have happened if he had not believed!

John 20:27 “Be not faithless”: become not faithless; Jesus was not accusing Thomas of being an unbeliever, but warning that he was about to become one.

LESSON BACKGROUND

Today’s lesson is a collection of verses that inspire us and show us the victory and blessing there is in a daily walk by faith. We are admonished; we are warned. Of course, behind every verse is a story. Let’s find out!

II Chronicles 20 is the story of King Jehoshaphat’s battle with the Moabites. Afraid of the huge army approaching from all sides, he proclaimed a fast and prayed before the Lord, reminding Him of the promise to His friend Abraham. “We don’t know what to do,” he cried, “But our eyes are on You.” The Spirit of the Lord inspired a singer to proclaim, “Be not afraid nor dismayed...the battle is not yours but God’s! Stand still and see the salvation of the Lord!” The next day as his army went out to face the enemy, Jehoshaphat stood and said, “Believe in the Lord your God!” and appointed singers to praise the Lord as they went forth. When they began to sing and praise, the Lord sent ambushments against the evil coalition and gave Jehoshaphat a great victory that day.

In Psalm 27 David speaks of enemies and foes and false witnesses. He talks of trouble and being forsaken by father and mother. But he rejoices in God’s light, salvation, deliverance and secret hiding place. He proclaims his desire to dwell in God’s house and behold His beauty; to seek His face and be taught His way. At the end he seems to catch his breath as he contemplates what condition he would be in if he had not believed in the Lord. Then he exhorts, “Wait on the Lord: be of good courage, and he shall strengthen thine heart: wait, I say, on the Lord.”

The *Cambridge Bible for Schools and Colleges* says this about the

words of Habakkuk: "...Like a watchman looking forth from his watch-tower he will look out to see what answer he shall receive to [his plea] from Heaven (Habakkuk 2:1). He is commanded to write the answer when it is given on tablets, that all may read it easily (Habakkuk 2:2-3). It comes in the shape of a moral distinction; "His [the unrighteous man's] soul is puffed up in him; but the righteous shall live by his faithfulness." My thought in including it in today's lesson is that as we have seen by the Word that it is faith in God that generates spiritual LIFE and RESURRECTION within the soul; it is faith in God that lays hold upon the promise of the Holy Spirit Who comes to dwell in the heart, purifying and refining with fire; and it is faith working by love that causes us to ABIDE in Him; to obey, to walk, to work the works of God, to have victory that overcomes, to be blessed, have peace, joy and eternal hope!

The verse in Mark 11 is Jesus' answer to His disciples when, leaving Jerusalem after Jesus had cast the merchants and animals out of the temple, they found a fig tree dried up from the roots. They remembered that the day before Jesus had pronounced a curse upon it because it was barren of fruit. Seeing Jesus' power over nature made them marvel. Jesus not only pointed them upward to His Father—"Have faith in God!"—but let them know that God would also honor *their* prayers of faith.

Who was the "blessed" one mentioned by Luke? It was Mary, the mother of Jesus, and Luke records the anointed words of her cousin, Elizabeth, whose body and spirit, along with the babe in her womb, witnessed of the holy child Mary carried. Here we have a precious example to follow. Mary, chaste and pure, yielded herself completely to God to bear His Son, and with Him, His reproach and suffering. Such obedience and submission declared her belief and faith in the sure Word and Promise of God.

The admonishment in John comes from the scene where Jesus appeared personally to Thomas after his resurrection. His gentle rebuke to Thomas' skepticism is a challenge to us all. It is through believing that we have LIFE through His name.

Paul's benediction to the Romans comes near the end of this epistle where he teaches about salvation through faith and not through works. He reminds them that joy, peace and hope come by believing in God. To the Corinthians, as he writes about the

temporary dwelling place we have here and the eternal hope we have in Christ, he includes this truth: We walk by faith and not by sight. Our memory verse is Paul's personal statement of triumphant living. His life in Christ began by faith, but it didn't stop there. Everything he did from that point until his departure to be with Christ was by faith. When Jesus said "Go," he went. When Jesus said "Stay," he stayed. When Jesus said, "You'll not be harmed," he believed. When he was bitten by a venomous snake, he shook it off in faith. He shrugged off his own righteousness as well, declaring it "rubbish," and gave himself to the sufferings of Christ that he might own HIS righteousness.

—Sis. Angela Gellenbeck

DISCUSSION:

1. Who said, "Believe...so shall ye prosper"?
2. Who was speechless when he considered what might have befallen him if he had not believed?
3. What prophet declared, "The just shall live by faith"?
4. Jesus said "Have faith in God" after what miracle?
5. Who did Jesus encourage to believe without seeing?
6. Who said, "We walk by faith"?

COMMENTS AND APPLICATION

There are many more verses we could have included; for example, the Hebrews 11 list of Old Testament faith heroes. But now is OUR time to live and walk by faith. Peter said that we love Jesus and rejoice and believe in Him, even though we haven't seen Him. Jesus reproved those who had to have a physical sign. He constantly pointed us to faith in God. He taught us to pray in faith. To not be anxious about our daily provisions.

Really, everything we do requires faith. When we take our marriage vows, faith is involved as each vows to be faithful until death. It takes faith for the husband to give himself for his wife; faith that she will respond with respect and obedience. It takes faith for the wife to submit to her husband, giving her expectations to God and trusting Him to teach her husband how to truly love and cherish

her. Raising children requires much faith as we obey God's Word when it tells us to unconditionally love, chasten, reprove and train them; to believe that as we do our part, God will do His part. Moving out into fields of service for God is an act of obedience by faith. Preaching the Word God gives us is done in faith. Giving of our time, service and finances—sacrificing until it “hurts”—necessitates faith. Denying worldliness and popularity takes faith to know that it will all be worthwhile in the end.

Lord, give us more faith!

—Sis. Angela Gellenbeck

REFLECTIONS

In the prophetic vision found in Ezekiel the forty-seventh chapter, the man measures a thousand cubits, which is water to the ankles. He again measures a thousand cubits, bringing water to the knees. The next thousand cubits result in water to the loins. The final thousand cubits provide waters to swim in: a river that cannot be passed over. A skilled swimmer would not practice the breast stroke in ankle deep water, nor would a diver dare to plunge into knee deep or thigh deep water. A river to swim in provides freedom to do all of these things without hindrance or danger.

A lack of faith restrains the will of God being fulfilled. We have a great desire to wade out into it but are too afraid to leave the shoreline. Our comfort zone keeps us stuck in the shallow end. To remedy this we need to dive into deeper waters. "And now I have plunged myself recklessly out, like a chip on the stream of his infinite will. I pass the rough rocks with a smile and a shout and I just let my God his dear purpose fulfill." What liberation, what freedom and what a wonderful life! The Lord desires that our faith embraces His plan for us, knowing that He can take care of us and bring us to His "expected end."

—Sis. LaDawna Adams

MAY 13, 2018

THE TRUST PRINCIPLE

Psalm 2:12b Blessed are all they that put their trust in him. (See also Psalm 34:8.)

Psalm 37:5 Commit thy way unto the Lord; trust also in him; and he shall bring it to pass.

Psalm 56:3 What time I am afraid, I will trust in thee.

4 In God I will praise his word, in God I have put my trust; I will not fear what flesh can do unto me.

Psalm 62:8 Trust in him at all times; ye people, pour out your heart before him: God is a refuge for us. Selah.

10 Trust not in oppression, and become not vain in robbery: if riches increase, set not your heart upon them.

Psalm 118:8 It is better to trust in the Lord than to put confidence in man.

Proverbs 3:5 Trust in the Lord with all thine heart; and lean not unto thine own understanding.

Proverbs 29:25 The fear of man bringeth a snare: but whoso putteth his trust in the Lord shall be safe.

Isaiah 26:3 Thou wilt keep him in perfect peace, whose mind is stayed on thee: because he trusteth in thee.

4 Trust ye in the Lord for ever: for in the Lord Jehovah is everlasting strength.

Jeremiah 17:5 Thus saith the Lord; Cursed be the man that trusteth in man, and maketh flesh his arm, and whose heart departeth from the Lord.

6 For he shall be like the heath in the desert, and shall not see when good cometh; but shall inhabit the parched places in the wilderness, in a salt land and not inhabited.

7 Blessed is the man that trusteth in the Lord, and whose hope the Lord is.

8 For he shall be as a tree planted by the waters, and that spreadeth out her roots by the river, and shall not see when heat cometh, but her leaf shall be green; and shall not be careful in the year of drought, neither shall cease from yielding fruit.

I Timothy 6:17 Charge them that are rich in this world, that they

be not highminded, nor trust in uncertain riches, but in the living God, who giveth us richly all things to enjoy.

MEMORY VERSE: But we had the sentence of death in ourselves, that we should not trust in ourselves, but in God which raiseth the dead: Who delivered us from so great a death, and doth deliver: in whom we trust that he will yet deliver us.

—II Corinthians 1:9-10

CENTRAL THOUGHT: The result of our belief in God’s Word that saves and sanctifies us is that we trust, rely, and depend upon Christ and not upon our own understanding, our own righteousness, our own flesh, wealth, human strength, or deliverance from any other source.

WORD DEFINITIONS

Psalm 37:5 “Commit”: roll down; roll away; probably a metaphor picturing the way a camel kneels down and gives a big shrug, rolling its burden onto the ground.

Psalm 62:10 “Oppression”: extortion, or “the act or practice of wresting anything from a person by force, duress, menaces, authority, or by any undue exercise of power” (*Webster’s*). “Become not vain”: act upon a vain hope; deal foolishly. “Robbery”: things taken away by violence.

Psalm 118:8 “Trust”: seek refuge.

Isaiah 26:3 “Whose mind is stayed”: lean; lay; rest; support; prop. “And that is the trust of the Old Testament, the faith of the New—the simple act of reliance, going out of myself to find the basis of my being, forsaking myself to touch and rest upon the ground of my security, passing from my own weakness and laying my trembling hand into the strong hand of God, like some weak-handed youth on a coach-box who turns to a stronger beside him and says: ‘Take thou the reins, for I am feeble to direct or to restrain.’ Trust is reliance, and reliance is always blessedness” (*MacLaren’s Expositions*).

Isaiah 26:4 “Everlasting strength”: literally, *the Rock of Ages*.

Jeremiah 17:5 “Maketh flesh his arm”: his confidence, to lean upon and be protected by.

Jeremiah 17:6 “Heath”: a plant which has neither fruit nor seed, and is neither sown nor planted. Bare; destitute; naked desert plant.

Jeremiah 17:7 “Blessed is the man that trusteth in the Lord”: “In the Word of the Lord,’ [Those] who have a spiritual knowledge of Him, and so trust in Him, who have seen the vanity and emptiness of all other objects of trust, there being no salvation in them, only in Him; who betake themselves to Him as their only refuge; lay hold, rest, and rely upon Him, as their Saviour; commit their all unto Him; trust Him with all their concerns, respecting life and salvation, and with their immortal souls; and expect all from Him, grace here, and glory hereafter: who trust in His person for their acceptance with God; in His righteousness for their justification; in His blood for the pardon of their sins; in His fulness for the supply of their wants; in His power for protection and preservation...” (*Gill’s Exposition of the Entire Bible*).

I Timothy 6:17 “Highminded”: arrogant; proud; a high, self-exalted outlook; acting from a sense of self-greatness.

II Corinthians 1:9 “The sentence of death”: literally, answer of death; judicial response; verdict; diagnosis. Paul felt that he must die, and all human help was vain.

LESSON BACKGROUND

Our verses today are from the writings of David, Solomon, Isaiah, Jeremiah and Paul concerning the essential element of trust in God. Not only believing in God’s Word is vital and necessary—and that not just a “head” belief, but rather a “heart” belief—but we also must take refuge or comfort in, and rely, depend, and lean on God for salvation and for all things.

Several verses have to do with trusting God instead of being afraid. Indeed, reliance upon God is the antidote to fear. Where once I was afraid to die, trusting in God for salvation and atonement of my sin brings peace and knowledge that I no longer stand in danger of the judgment of eternal death. Instead of fearing what people can do to me in this life, trusting in God, Who controls all things, shields me from what may harm me, or deems, in His ultimate wisdom, physical misfortune or harm as part of His plan for my spiritual good and His glory, causes me to have peace in all circumstances and

dangers.

David was indeed “a step away” from death many times, first while tending sheep in the wilderness and contending with predators; and later as he was a fugitive from King Saul. It is thought that Isaiah was possibly put to death by Hezekiah’s son Manasseh; certainly prophets like him were constantly at risk merely by bringing God’s words to the people. Jeremiah faced ridicule, threats, imprisonment and exile because he faithfully warned his people of God’s impending judgments upon Israel. Paul was a set mark for all the enemies of the gospel—the zealous Pharisees and Jewish leaders and the pagan devotees and Roman emperors. He speaks of “perils of waters, in perils by mine own countrymen, in perils by the heathen, in perils in the city, in perils in the wilderness, in perils in the sea, in perils among false brethren.” He learned to not rely upon his own strength, but to trust God in everything.

—Sis. Angela Gellenbeck

DISCUSSION:

1. *Your Choice:* Those who trust in God are _____. Those who trust in man are _____.
2. *Word Picture 1:* The actions of what animal describe for us the meaning of the word *commit*.
3. *Word Picture 2:* A person who does not trust in the Lord is compared to what plant?
4. *All Other Ground:* Name “other” things besides the Lord upon which people often place their trust.

COMMENTS AND APPLICATION

There are so many other scriptures describing the blessedness of trusting in God. We have listed just a few, but they are enough to convince us of this vital truth.

I could not emphasize enough how prone we are to lean upon our own strength; to depend upon other sources of help, to seek comfort and refuge in places other than God. Trusting in riches is mentioned several times in this group of scriptures. Jesus described the security of wealth as being deceptive. How is that? It is because

accumulated wealth can seem so secure when in reality it is very insubstantial and fleeting. Without realizing it, we can develop an “air” of independence almost immediately when we feel that we have finally reached financial success. A child of God should instead manifest humility; an inner sense of total dependence upon God for life, temporal blessings, and personal holiness.

It has been said that preservation of life is one of the strongest drives in a man. The scriptures today reveal a depth of trust in God that surpasses that strong human instinct. What will it take to reach that depth, where my very efforts to hold on to life itself are surrendered into the will of God?

—Sis. Angela Gellenbeck

REFLECTIONS

It’s time to do a little study and find the scripture that is in the very center of the Bible. It is the scripture in our lesson, Psalms 118:8. “It is better to trust in the Lord than to put confidence in man.” If you count the chapters before Psalms 118, there are 594 chapters and there are 594 chapters after. If you add 594 + 594 you get 1188 or Psalms 118:8. What does this scripture tell us? “It is better to trust in the Lord than to put confidence in man.”

I believe our lesson is central to the success of every Christian life today. God wants to be front and center of our everyday life. He wants us to put all of our trust in Him. It is no coincidence that the center of the Bible tells us to put our trust in Him. If God is the center of our life in everything, we will be perfectly balanced. Perfect love will cast out the imbalance of fear. Fear tips the scale causing one to slide in a puddle of doubts. Trust keeps us out of the sinking mire of doubt and into the stable, trusting zone. Let us learn to look up and keep our trust in God.

—Bro. James Bell

MAY 20, 2018

HINDRANCES TO FAITH

Wealth

Mark 10: 23 And Jesus looked round about, and saith unto his

disciples, How hardly shall they that have riches enter into the kingdom of God!

24 And the disciples were astonished at his words. But Jesus answereth again, and saith unto them, Children, how hard is it for them that trust in riches to enter into the kingdom of God!

25 It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle, than for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of God.

Pride

Habakkuk 2:4 Behold, his soul which is lifted up is not upright in him: but the just shall live by his faith.

Revelation 3:17 Because thou sayest, I am rich, and increased with goods, and have need of nothing; and knowest not that thou art wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked.

Self-righteousness

Romans 10:3 For they being ignorant of God's righteousness, and going about to establish their own righteousness, have not submitted themselves unto the righteousness of God.

Proverbs 20:6 Most men will proclaim every one his own goodness: but a faithful man who can find?

Self-abasement

Jeremiah 1:6 Then said I, Ah, Lord God! Behold I cannot speak: for I am a child.

7 But the Lord said unto me, Say not, I am a child: for thou shalt go to all that I shall send thee, and whatsoever I command thee thou shalt speak.

Fear of Man

Numbers 13:31 But the men that went up with him said, We be not able to go up against the people; for they are stronger than we.

Proverbs 29:25 The fear of man bringeth a snare: but whoso putteth his trust in the Lord shall be safe.

MEMORY VERSE: And he said unto them, Why are ye so fearful? How is it that ye have no faith? —Mark 4:40

CENTRAL THOUGHT: We are hindered from faith and trust in God when we place our dependence upon material wealth, pride or self-righteousness. Self-abasement and fear also hinder us from believing God and trusting Him fully.

WORD DEFINITIONS

Mark 10:25 “A camel to go through the eye of a needle”: a common expression among the Jews and Arabs, which signified an impossibility. The Babylonian *Talmud* used an elephant as a reference. There is a similar proverbial expression about a camel in the *Koran*. Another explanation given by some is of a foot gate which was located next to a main gate in Bible times, known as the “needle’s eye.” The idea is that while a camel and rider could go easily through the main gate, the “needle’s eye” was low and narrow, and could only accommodate foot passengers.

LESSON BACKGROUND

The young man came running. He was eager; he was seeking for more. He believed Jesus had the answer. But he was like many of us. He had preconceived notions about what Jesus would have him “do.” And when Jesus shocked this rich, self-confident seeker with the revelation of the “one thing” he lacked and what it would cost him to fill that void, he staggered. His wealth was his stability. His security. To lose it and follow this homeless teacher—and what was this about a cross? Jesus looked at him steadily, His heart reaching out in love. But He knew what bound the seeker’s trust in its grasp. And He had to tell him the truth.

I’m sure Jesus’ heart ached as He watched him walk away, shoulders sagging, head down. But He didn’t run after him with an easier deal. Instead He looked into the eyes of His disciples who were closely watching and answered their unspoken questions. The beginning verses in our lesson are Jesus’ accurate word picture of the human impossibility of escaping the prison of prosperity, and as the disciples comprehended the strength of covetousness they staggered too. “Who in the world could even be saved?” Jesus gave an answer which lets us all know that only God can unravel a man from the net which wealth has wound around him.

Closely associated with the prestige of prosperity are pride and self-righteousness. Habakkuk’s assessment of the human problem of being lifted up and the only solution, faith and reliance upon God, and Jesus’ honest judgment upon the Laodiceans (Revelation 3:17)

for their pride gives us a clear understanding of what He requires of us. Paul revealed the root of the problem of the self-righteous Pharisees: they were ignorant of their need and unwilling to submit. The verse from Proverbs describes the rarity of true, honest and humble people who trust only in God’s righteousness and are full of faith—not full of themselves.

It seems to be from the opposite end of the spectrum, but self-abasement works to hinder faith and trust in God as well, as pictured by Jeremiah’s protest to God when God called him to be a prophet. This form of doubting, coupled with a crippling fear of other people—what they might think; what they might do—as the verses from Numbers and Proverbs bring out, has hindered many aspiring Christians from spiritual conquest, ministry, and inner peace.

Numbers 13 tells the story of the Israelites who had gone in to scout out the land of Canaan. Ten of the twelve spies came back with negative reports which sucked the courage right out of the already lagging spirits of the people. Joshua and Caleb tried to rally their brethren to look at the power of God instead of their incapacities. “We are well able!” Caleb encouraged, a truth which tells us, “We are able because our God is able.” Doubt says, “I am not able. Can’t be done. It’s too much. I am just a...child...an illiterate person...a handicapped person...a woman...a man with failures—” and we draw back in unbelief.

In the memory verse, Jesus is questioning the disciples after they so totally lost their faith in Him when they were out on the lake in the storm. He was right there! How could they think they would perish! His words are a rebuke to us all. We too have doubted His love and care and power to keep us safe. It would be good for us to take His question seriously to heart: “Why am I doubting? Where is my trust? Why am I so afraid?”

—Sis. Angela Gellenbeck

DISCUSSION:

1. *Almost Impossible:* What did Jesus say would hinder people from entering the kingdom of God? How did He express this near-impossibility?
2. *Not Upright/Just:* What qualities make the difference

between the two?

3. *Don't Need a Thing*: What church expressed this?
4. *Can't Speak*: What prophet brought this up to the Lord?
5. *Can't Do It*: Who said this to God? What did it cost them?
6. *Safe*: This word describes the outcome of _____.

COMMENTS AND APPLICATION

I am so challenged by the scriptures in this lesson, especially as I see my own struggles through the years mirrored by these examples. These were real people, just like you and me. Look how God dealt with them in love and mercy. We may judge the young rich man for his covetousness, the Israelites for their stubborn unbelief, the Laodicean church for their ridiculous pride, the disciples of Jesus for their silly fear, the Pharisees for their ugly superiority. Yet we must also take a good look at ourselves. These things are all Big Things in many lives. Where are the missing pastors, Sunday School teachers, evangelists or missionaries? Bugged down somewhere in the wilderness of material wealth or prestige; captured and pining away in cells of personal failures and inhibitions; or lost on the seas of fear and despair.

Bring your earthly treasures, your ambitions for greatness, your hangups and addictions, your fears, your embarrassing handicaps, your excuses—bring them all to Jesus. Hand them over. Confess them. Let Him answer the question, “Why am I so afraid?” And take His true wealth. Experience the conquest. Walk on the water. Discover the rest of humility and the peace of believing.

—Sis. Angela Gellenbeck

REFLECTIONS

Along the path of our spiritual endeavors stand giant foes whose goal is to impede and ultimately stop our forward progress. And after escaping the clutches of one, we often encounter another equally prepared to bring our journey to a screeching halt.

Fear is one of the most successful giants of all. The fear of failure, the fear of rejection, the fear of the unknown, the fear of man, etc, etc.—all play a major role in hindering faith and inciting

spiritual terror in those who are susceptible to their tactics.

They have the ability to get into our minds and wage an emotional and psychological warfare. And even to enlist us in the fight against ourselves—low self-esteem, high self-esteem, self-doubt and every other selfish motivation that can hinder our faith.

On the screens of our imagination they project vivid pictures of the frightful scenarios that are “inevitable” should we dare continue down this path. And rather than believing God, we believe them. We believe what we “feel” and how we “feel.” Yet faith is not a feeling but feelings often hinder faith.

I once heard a preacher say “a good man feeling bad is still a good man and a bad man feeling good is still a bad man.” Our character is not dictated by our feelings neither is our faith in God. Faith is governed by the word of God and our obedience to it. Nothing more. Nothing less.

We must fight the good fight of faith in order to lay hold on eternal life. It matters not if we see the foe as giants of varying degrees or as the less intimidating reflection of ourselves. We must fight with the same resolve and tenacity. For our eternal welfare is contingent upon our success in this battle.

—Bro. Darrell Johnson

MAY 27, 2018

CHALLENGES TO FAITH

Divine Delays

Luke 18:1 And he spake a parable unto them to this end, that men ought always to pray, and not to faint;

2 Saying, There was in a city a judge, which feared not God, neither regarded man:

3 And there was a widow in that city; and she came unto him, saying, Avenge me of mine adversary.

4 And he would not for a while: but afterward he said within himself, Though I fear not God, nor regard man;

5 Yet because this widow troubleth me, I will avenge her, lest by her continual coming she weary me.

6 And the Lord said, Hear what the unjust judge saith.

7 And shall not God avenge his own elect, which cry day and night unto him, though he bear long with them?

8 I tell you that he will avenge them speedily. Nevertheless when the Son of man cometh, shall he find faith on the earth?

Deceptive Doctrines of Men

Colossians 2:8 Beware lest any man spoil you through philosophy and vain deceit, after the tradition of men, after the rudiments of the world, and not after Christ.

I Timothy 1:4 Neither give heed to fables and endless genealogies, which minister questions, rather than godly edifying which is in faith: so do.

18 This charge I commit unto thee, son Timothy, according to the prophecies which went before on thee, that thou by them mightest war a good warfare;

19 Holding faith, and a good conscience; which some having put away concerning faith have made shipwreck.

I Timothy 6:20 O Timothy, keep that which is committed to thy trust, avoiding profane and vain babblings, and oppositions of science falsely so called:

21a Which some professing have erred concerning the faith.

II Timothy 2:16 But shun profane and vain babblings: for they will increase unto more ungodliness.

17 And their word will eat as doth a canker: of whom is Hymenaeus and Philetus;

18 Who concerning the truth have erred, saying that the resurrection is past already; and overthrow the faith of some.

Human Knowledge and Ability

Isaiah 31:1 Woe to them that go down to Egypt for help; and stay on horses, and trust in chariots, because they are many; and in horsemen, because they are very strong; but they look not unto the Holy One of Israel, neither seek the Lord!

3a Now the Egyptians are men, and not God; and their horses flesh, and not spirit.

MEMORY VERSE: Some trust in chariots, and some in horses: but we will remember the name of the Lord our God. —Psalm 20:7

CENTRAL THOUGHT: Seasons of tribulation which try faith and

perseverance and the combination of the increase of ungodliness, spiritual deception and human technology near Jesus' second coming are presenting great challenges to those who would have simple faith and trust in God.

WORD DEFINITIONS

Luke 18:1 "Men ought always to pray": "...as afflictions and desolations were coming on the land...they should have need of much patience and continual fortitude, and the constant influence and protection of the Almighty, therefore they should be instant in prayer...Men should never cease praying for that necessity of which God has given them to feel, till they receive a full answer to their prayers" (*Clarke's Commentary*). "Faint": be weary; exhausted; spiritless.

Luke 18:7 "Avenge": to vindicate one from wrongs; accomplish the avenging of.

Colossians 2:8 "Spoil you": lead you away as spoil. "Philosophy": "the philosophy of the Judaic-oriental heretics at Colosse, which afterwards was developed into Gnosticism" (*Jamieson-Fausset-Brown Bible Commentary*). "A search for and knowledge of speculative truth." "Christianity is not a philosophy, but a life—not a knowledge of abstract principles, but a personal knowledge of faith and love of God in Christ" (*Ellicott's Commentary for English Readers*). "Vain deceit": that which deceives by being a show of what it is not; a hollow pretence (*Pulpit Commentary*). "There is a philosophy which rightly exercises our reasonable faculties; a study of the works of God, which leads us to the knowledge of God, and confirms our faith in him. But there is a philosophy which is vain and deceitful; and while it pleases men's fancies, hinders their faith" (*Matthew Henry Commentary*). "Traditions of men": those of the religious Greeks or those of the Pharisees, by which Jesus said they transgressed God's commands. "Rudiments of the world": the ceremonial laws of the Jews, which were as an elementary school master, to bring children to a higher law, which is Christ.

I Timothy 1:4 "Fables": myth; idle tale; fanciful story. "Endless genealogies": unfinished record of descent or lineage.

I Timothy 6:20 "Profane and vain babblings": unhallowed and

empty talk; idle chatter. “Oppositions”: objections to the truth of the gospel. The Greek word is *antithesis*—opinions advanced by one party against another. “Of science falsely so called”: a reference to the developing Gnostic heresy, the basis of which was a claim to having special, personal knowledge. The words *science* and *Gnostic* both originate from the Greek word which means “a knowing; knowledge, wisdom, or doctrine.” It was falsely called knowledge, for it was in opposition to the solid, experiential truth of the Gospel.

II Timothy 2:17 “Canker”: gangrene (which is death and decomposition of body tissue, resulting from either obstructed circulation or bacterial infection due to an underlying disease or severe trauma); pervasive decay or corruption; rot.

Psalm 20:7 “We will remember the name of the Lord our God”: “To remember him is to bear him in mind, and not forget him; to have the desires of the soul towards him, and to the remembrance of him; and to make mention of him, of his names, attributes, word, and works; which is both for his glory and for the encouragement of faith in him, both in ourselves and others; it is to call upon his name in times of trouble, and at all times, and also to trust in him and not in an arm of flesh; for it stands opposed to trusting in chariots and horses; and it is to call to mind past instances of his goodness, wisdom, and power, and be thankful for them, and make use of them to engage confidence in him” (*Gill’s Exposition of the Entire Bible*).

LESSON BACKGROUND

The parable about the widow and the unjust judge is a summons to unceasing importunity, endurance and patience when there is a delay in needs being met and prayers being answered. Jesus’ question “Will He find faith?” turns the thoughts to the delay or time of tarrying before His second coming as being a time where faith would be challenged as well.

Paul’s warnings to Timothy of the developing heresies in and around the church of God in Ephesus mirror similar warnings he gave to the Colossians. He mentions that these philosophies were not “in faith” as were teachings that edified in a godly way. He also connected faith with keeping a good conscience; the failure to do so

leads to destruction of faith, which he vividly illustrates by a word picture: a shipwreck. He warns against allowing false teachers to cause believers to err in their faith and speaks of how false doctrine steadily eats away at true faith, again using a word picture to depict the horror and destruction.

“It is the usual way with heresy to corrupt and destroy the gospel, under pretence of improving it” (Pulpit Commentary). Jesus’ teachings of the resurrection, a cornerstone belief of the Christian church, was being questioned and spiritualized by groups like the Sadducees and the Gnostics, who denied the resurrection in its literal sense. Paul had addressed this false teaching in I Corinthians 15. There were many whose faith was being subverted or overthrown by these devilish doctrines.

Isaiah, prophesying to the apostate Israelites of impending destruction and captivity, warned them not to go to Egypt for help. They disregarded his command and fled to Egypt away from Babylonian captivity, to their own destruction and hurt. Our memory verse reminds us that we have a choice between putting our trust in earthly powers or remembering to rely on God.

—Sis. Angela Gellenbeck

DISCUSSION:

1. *Delay*: How does this affect a person’s faith?
2. *Deception*: Name the different terms Paul used referring to false doctrines.
3. *Word Pictures*: How does Paul describe the effects of false doctrines?
4. *Horses and Chariots*: In reference to our faith, what does it mean spiritually for us to go down to Egypt for help or to trust in horses and chariots?

COMMENTS AND APPLICATION

The way the Gospels describe the end-time conditions—the deception and falling away of believers and the necessity of endurance in order to be saved—leads us to believe that the period of delay of Jesus’ coming is a huge test of faith for the followers of

Christ. “While the bridegroom tarried...” We are definitely living in that time, so it is important to identify the many challenges to our faith. Our lesson today describes a few important challenges; however, we are not facing these challenges singly, but it is the *coalition* of these forces on so many fronts that is a danger staggering in its enormity.

Our minds are bombarded not only by skeptics and scoffers who “scientifically” reason away the existence of God and scorn those who believe in the coming of Jesus, judgment and eternal rewards or punishment, but we also face the many deceptive “Christian” teachings about the last days. While being surrounded by this host of doubts, questions and false teachings, the faith of Christians throughout the world is also being challenged by persecutions, tortures from which there seems to be no deliverance, afflictions that try body, mind and spirit, and prayers that seem to go unanswered. In the middle of this, trusting in the help from “Egypt,” as the Israelites literally did in the times of their apostasy and captivity, is a “logical” solution presented to our minds. We can fall into that today when we trust in human reasoning, intellect and ability. Daniel prophesied that human knowledge would be increased near the time of the end. As technology abounds we definitely see that taking place. We realize the peril of love growing cold and faith, which works by love, ebbing lower as the end draws near.

—Sis. Angela Gellenbeck

REFLECTIONS

The resurrection is either the greatest miracle or the greatest delusion which history records. Without faith in the resurrection there would be no Christianity at all. Christianity stands or falls with the truth of the resurrection. If it can be disproved you can dispose of Christianity. In I Corinthians 15:17 it says, “And if Christ be not raised, your faith is vain.”

The resurrection distinguishes Jesus from all other religious founders. The bones of Abraham, Muhammad, Buddha, and Confucius are still here on earth, but Jesus’ tomb is empty. No one would ever say, “Destroy this temple and in three days I will raise it up” (John 2:19). But Christ made this statement and it came to pass

just as He said it would. Jesus coming forth from the tomb, leaving all the grave clothes folded in order and the hand carved rock vault empty is the cradle of His church. It is the beginning and ending of our faith and it depends on believing in his resurrection.

Paul said in Philippians 3:10, "That I may know him and the power of his resurrection." Having this kind of heartfelt desire to know the Lord more deeply will surely activate our faith to greater levels.

—Bro. James Bell

JUNE 3, 2018

THE FIGHT OF FAITH

Jude 1:3 Beloved, when I gave all diligence to write unto you of the common salvation, it was needful for me to write unto you, and exhort you that ye should earnestly contend for the faith which was once delivered unto the saints.

I Timothy 6:12 Fight the good fight of faith, lay hold on eternal life, whereunto thou thou art also called, and hast professed a good profession before many witnesses.

Ephesians 6:10 Finally, my brethren, be strong in the Lord, and in the power of his might.

11 Put on the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil.

12 For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places.

13 Wherefore take unto you the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand.

14 Stand therefore, having your loins girt about with truth, and having on the breastplate of righteousness;

15 And your feet shod with the preparation of the gospel of peace;

16 Above all, taking the shield of faith, wherewith ye shall be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked.

17 And take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit,

which is the word of God.

Hebrews 10:23 Let us hold fast the profession of our faith without wavering; (for he is faithful that promised.)

Revelation 12:11 And they overcame him by the blood of the Lamb, and by the word of their testimony; and they loved not their lives unto the death.

MEMORY VERSE: For whatsoever is born of God overcometh the world: and this is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith. Who is he that overcometh the world, but he that believeth that Jesus is the Son of God? —I John 5:4-5

CENTRAL THOUGHT: Our daily spiritual warfare as a Christian is a fight *of* faith and a fight *for* faith. Faith is both a defensive and offensive weapon; our belief, trust, and reliance in God, our positive profession and testimony and our submission and obedience to Him actively engage and successfully overcome our adversary.

WORD DEFINITIONS

Jude 1:3 “Earnestly contend”: from two Greek words; one of which means *focused on*, and the other, *a contest or struggle* (from which we get the English word *agonize*). “To strive; to use earnest efforts to obtain, or to defend and preserve” (*Webster’s*).

Ephesians 6:12 “Wrestle”: personal, individual, hand-to-hand combat or struggle for mastery. “Flesh and blood”: mere human power; feeble humanity; human beings like ourselves. “Principalities”: chief, first in rank or position; demons ruling the legions of evil spirits. “Powers”: authorities; the legions of evil spirits. “Rulers of the darkness of this world”: world rulers of this present spiritual darkness; evil spirits. Jesus referred to Satan as the Prince of this world in John 12:31, 14:30 and 16:11. “Spiritual wickedness in high places”: the realm of iniquity; the seat of hosts of evil spirits or the domain of Satan’s kingdom.

Ephesians 6:14 “Truth”: sincerity.

Ephesians 6:15 “And your feet shod”: heavy military sandals studded with hobnails for secure footing.

Ephesians 6:16 “Shield”: from a Greek word meaning *door*; a

full-body shield shaped like a door. “My faith is nothing except for what it puts in front of me, and it is God who is truly my shield; my faith is only called a shield, because it brings me behind the bosses of the Almighty’s buckler, against which no man can run a tilt, or into which no man can strike his lance, nor any devil either” (*MacLaren’s Expositions*).

Ephesians 6:17 “Helmet”: a combination of two Greek words meaning *all-around encircling of the head*.

LESSON BACKGROUND

It is important to remember the original definition of the word *faith* as we discuss the spiritual warfare that is going on. Faith is not something we drum up in and of ourselves. It always involves God speaking and revealing His will to us; persuading us and convicting us. Our part is to receive His revealed Word, believe it, and act upon it. The entire body of our beliefs, as being persuaded by God’s Word, is called “the faith” by Jude; also by Paul in Ephesians 4:13 and by James in James 2:1. Beginning with the conviction of sin and belief unto salvation; to the conviction of our need of the Holy Spirit and complete consecration to God as a vessel to be filled with His fullness; to the everyday walk of faith; to the great spiritual testing of these end-times, “the faith” is contested by the opposing powers of our adversary all the way.

Paul charged both Timothy and the Hebrews to fight and hold fast; he described the spiritual forces with whom we contend and the all-important spiritual armor in his letter to the Ephesians. John wrote of the warfare in Revelation 12, revealing the important weapons by which the early saints gained the mastery: faith in the power of the blood of the Lamb and the clear word of their testimony of that faith. Equally important is the depth of their consecration: they loved God more than physical life and stood by their convictions—their faith—even to the point of losing their lives because of their testimony. John also gives the answer to victory over the world in our memory verse today: faith which is born of God.

—Sis. Angela Gellenbeck

DISCUSSION:

1. *Battle Plan*: List the instructions for spiritual warfare in our lesson today.
2. *The Opposition*: Describe the forces against us.
3. *Weaponry*: Discuss the different pieces of defensive and offensive armor.
4. *Vital Elements*: What three important ways of overcoming are listed Revelation 12:11?

COMMENTS AND APPLICATION

The Interpreter in Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress* showed Christian a scene where the entrance to a palace was guarded by a group of armed men. Many who would enter were turned away by this formidable sight, until one man came, decisively signed up at the applicant's booth, put on his helmet, drew his sword, and hacked his way through, giving and receiving many wounds, until he secured entrance to the palace.

In the last two lessons, we have discussed the different hindrances and challenges to our faith. Besides those, we face the spiritual force of Satan, who seeks to sift us, tempt us and devour us. As in the palace scene, let us have courage to resist him steadfast in the faith, put on our holy weapons and fight for the mastery! Child of God, fight for your heavenly prize! Fight for your marriage, your children, and for lost souls!

I love the thought of the shield of faith being as big as a door and the helmet of God's salvation and deliverance completely encircling our minds. Truly, as long as we believe and obey the revealed heavenly vision from God's Word, are persuaded and convinced by it to the point we would rather die than deny it, firmly hold to our profession and testify boldly in the face of every foe, all "Heaven will crown" our fight of faith!

—Sis. Angela Gellenbeck

REFLECTIONS

In a recent visit, I asked a friend how he was doing, referring to his business. He remarked that a lot was coming in and a lot was

going out, and he hoped that when the dust settled they would be on top. I got to thinking of that phrase—“when the dust settles.”

Our spiritual journey is described in the scriptures as a warfare. “Every battle of the warrior is with confused noise, and garments rolled in blood.” We are not engaged in a physical warfare but a spiritual one and the same elements exist. Confusion, noise, opposition, weaponry, blood, and death are all found in the spiritual warfare.

It is very difficult to assess when the dust is flying, the enemy is advancing, and the struggle is on. However, if I will hold on to faith and continue to trust in the Lord when I don't understand what is happening, when I feel that God is not answering, or when I have been misunderstood or mistreated, I believe I will be on top when the dust settles. We may lose some battles and suffer some losses, but that doesn't mean we have lost the war.

David on one occasion suffered great losses while he was fighting the Lord's battles and his soldiers felt like stoning him; but it is written that David **“encouraged himself in the Lord.”** He sought the Lord's direction, pursued the enemy and recovered his loss.

Our songs have been a great encouragement to me:

“Forward, forward is the battle cry...”

“Onward, upward, Christian soldier, bravely push the battle on;
There's a great reward before us, Soon the conflict will be won.”

“Press on my brother, sister, and face the deadly foe;
Thro' Jesus Christ we'll conquer, while trav'ling here below.”
These songs ignite a flowing energy!

—Bro. Bob Wilson

JUNE 10, 2018

THE REST OF FAITH

Hebrews 4:1 Let us therefore fear, lest, a promise being left us of entering into his rest, any of you should seem to come short of it.

2 For unto us was the gospel preached, as well as unto them: but the word preached did not profit them, not being mixed with faith in them that heard it.

3 For we which have believed do enter into rest, as he said, As I

have sworn in my wrath, if they shall enter into my rest: although the works were finished from the foundation of the world.

4 For he spake in a certain place of the seventh day on this wise, And God did rest the seventh day from all his works.

5 And in this place again, If they shall enter into my rest.

6 Seeing therefore it remaineth that some must enter therein, and they to whom it was first preached entered not in because of unbelief:

7 Again, he limiteth a certain day, saying in David, To day, after so long a time; as it is said, To day if ye will hear his voice, harden not your hearts.

8 For if Jesus had given them rest, then would he not afterward have spoken of another day.

9 There remaineth therefore a rest to the people of God.

10 For he that is entered into his rest, he also hath ceased from his own works, as God did from his.

11 Let us labour therefore to enter into that rest, lest any man fall after the same example of unbelief.

MEMORY VERSE: Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.

—Matthew 11:28-30

CENTRAL THOUGHT: Just as the Israelites could not enter Canaan because of their unbelief, we are warned that through unbelief we too might not enter into the spiritual rest that remains to God's people.

WORD DEFINITIONS

Hebrews 4:1 "Let us therefore fear": take all possible precaution; have a solicitude against careless indifference; be watchful and on guard. "Rest": reposing down; abode. "Seem": a milder or softening term designed to express one much stronger; implying a possibility of coming short.

Hebrews 4:2 "Not mixed with faith": "The word mixed is

peculiarly expressive; it is a metaphor taken from the nutrition of the human body by mixing the aliment taken into the stomach with the saliva and gastric juice...[It] becomes the means of increasing and supporting the body, all the solids and fluids being thus generated; so that on this process, properly performed, depend (under God) strength, health, and life itself. Should the most nutritive aliment be received into the stomach, if not mixed with the above juices, it would be rather the means of death than of life; or, in the words of the apostle, it would not profit, because not thus mixed. Faith in the word preached, in reference to that God who sent it, is the grand means of its becoming the power of God to the salvation of the soul...Faith, therefore, must be mixed with all that we hear, in order to make the word of God effectual to our salvation" (*Clarke's Commentary*).

Hebrews 4:3 "As I have sworn...": a quotation from Psalm 95:11. "If they shall enter into my rest": They shall not enter. (See also verse 5.)

Hebrews 4:4 "For he spake..." a quotation probably from Genesis 2:2.

Hebrews 4:7 "Saying in David": a quotation from Psalm 95:7.

Hebrews 4:8 "Jesus": The *Septuagint* rendering of *Joshua*. This correction is usually inserted into the marginal reading of most Bibles with margins.

Hebrews 4:11 "Labour": to be prompt, earnest and diligent; make every exertion of heart and mind; same word as "study" in I Timothy 2:15.

Matthew 11:29 "Yoke": "properly, a wooden bar placed over the neck of a pair of animals so they can pull together; (figuratively) what unites (joins) two people to move (work) together as one; a burden or obligation" (*HELPS Word Studies*).

LESSON BACKGROUND

We included several of the verses from Hebrews 4 in the April 22 lesson about sanctification by faith, which proved that the rest spoken of here is the sanctifying work of grace in the heart of a believer, fulfilling the types and shadows of the Sabbath day and the Canaan land by the infilling of the Holy Spirit and its conquest and

victory in the heart.

Today we want to look more closely at the rest for our souls which was offered and promised by Jesus. Our text gives three types or shadows of this rest: God's rest on the seventh day after finishing the work of creation; the Sabbath day covenant that was given to the Jews, and the Canaan land into which Joshua led the Israelites after their wanderings in the wilderness. All were fulfilled in Christ and His promise of rest through the Holy Spirit.

Unbelief, drawing back, disobedience and rebellion were the causes of the Jews not entering into Canaan when God said it was time to go. In righteous anger for their stubbornness, God declared that generation would never go into Canaan. Every person over twenty, except for Caleb and Joshua, who were not faithless, forfeited their entry into the promised land. Their children after them, after forty years of wilderness-wandering, were allowed by God, under the leadership of Joshua, to go in and possess the land.

Jesus gave the precious invitation in our memory verse as He spoke to the multitudes. He had upbraided them for their unbelief and breathed a prayer to His Father concerning His manner of revelation of divine truth to "babes." Only recorded in Matthew's gospel, this personal, tender promise surely brought hope to those languishing under the impossible burden of the law. It brings hope to any today who labor under their own sins, efforts to be righteous, pride, addictions, fears, worries, confusion, grief—anything that brings them unrest.

—Sis. Angela Gellenbeck

DISCUSSION:

1. *A Paradox:* Explain how you can reconcile the idea of a vigilant soldier in last week's lesson with a heart at rest and repose as taught in today's lesson.
2. *A Clarification:* What word in verse eight needs added correction from the Septuagint rendering?
3. *A Requirement:* What is necessary on our part for the Word of God to accomplish its rest-giving life in our hearts?

COMMENTS AND APPLICATION

How can we describe the rest from our “own works”?

First, it is truly a rest from the works of the flesh, as listed in Galatians 5:19-21. We cease from sin. We are delivered of its bondage and servitude by coming to Christ for salvation.

Secondly, we “cease” from our own efforts for salvation—our righteousness, our good deeds, our self-imposed strict standards. Not that we quit doing right and begin to do wrong; rather, we cease *depending* upon our righteousness and put our trust in Christ, Who is “made unto us wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification [holiness], and redemption: That, according as it is written, He that glorieth, let him glory in the Lord” (I Corinthians 1:30-31, emphasis added). Trying to “be right” can be a bondage so oppressive it brings discouragement and rebellion. Many a young Christian has been turned away from Christ because of this misunderstanding. Additionally, it can also cause a person to glory in his own righteousness and do many righteous acts from the secret motive of seeking the praise of others. Being free from this bondage brings such quietness and relief! A Sabbath to the soul!

Third. We cease from our own selfish strivings. God created man in His own image, that is, a God-centered one; but, after Adam sinned the image was marred into a self-centered one. In entire consecration, we in faith surrender our will and desires for our own way completely to God, offering ourselves upon the altar of His will as a free-will offering and receiving the power of His Holy Spirit to direct and control our lives. He changes our nature from being a self-centered drive to being Christ-centered. That brings great inner calm and rest.

Finally, as we grow in understanding and experience of God’s love, care, wisdom, and power, we find ever-increasing rest and repose in the will of God. We learn to trust Him more and more; we learn to depend upon Him for every little or great thing; we come to greater assurance, confidence and security. We experience inner peace in the midst of great trials, afflictions, impending disaster or death, persecutions, conflicts and storms. We daily cast our worries, doubts, confusion, cares, personal preferences, desires, dreams, ambitions and plans upon Him. We look to Him, our Source, to

supply our needs and wants while patiently, quietly, but industriously and diligently attending to our daily work and duties.

Rest doesn't mean we don't care. It doesn't mean laziness or apathy. It doesn't mean we don't have preferences or plans. But they no longer rule our lives nor cause us to be hurtful or controlling to others. We find rest in the meekness and gentleness of Christ. In essence, we *abide in Christ*. We confide in His Word, and we find a refuge, a hiding place in His wise and tender care.

—Sis. Angela Gellenbeck

REFLECTIONS

"And Jesus called a little child unto him, and set him in the midst of them, And said, Verily I say unto you, Except ye be converted, and become as little children, ye shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven" (Matthew 18:2-3). Jesus desired that this childlike faith would be exhibited in our lives. Children do not fret over day-to-day worries because they know that their parents are taking good care of them. All of their basic needs are met by the prudence and nurturing of their mother and father.

We have a heavenly Father who is even more capable of taking care of us. Needless amounts of time and energy are expended over worries, stresses and frets of the future when the Lord is already aware of what we need. His ability to care for us extends into eternity. He knows how to love, nourish and comfort us.

"My Jesus knows just what I need,
O yes, He knows just what I need,
He satisfies and every need supplies,
Yes He knows just what I need."

—Sis. LaDawna Adams

JUNE 17, 2018

THE PRAYER OF FAITH

Matthew 17:20b If ye have faith as a grain of mustard seed, ye shall say unto this mountain, Remove hence to yonder place; and it

shall remove; and nothing shall be impossible unto you.

21 Howbeit this kind goeth not out but by prayer and fasting.

Matthew 21:22 And all things, whatsoever ye shall ask in prayer, believing, ye shall receive.

Luke 11:9 And I say unto you, Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you.

10 For every one that asketh receiveth; and he that seeketh findeth; and to him that knocketh it shall be opened.

John 15:7 If ye abide in me, and my words abide in you, ye shall ask what ye will, and it shall be done unto you.

James 1:5 If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God, that giveth to all men liberally, and upbraideth not; and it shall be given him.

6a But let him ask in faith, nothing wavering.

James 5:14 Is any sick among you? let him call for the elders of the church; and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord:

15 And the prayer of faith shall save the sick, and the Lord shall raise him up; and if he have committed sins, they shall be forgiven him.

16 Confess your faults one to another, and pray one for another, that ye may be healed. The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much.

I John 3:22 And whatsoever we ask, we receive of him, because we keep his commandments, and do those things that are pleasing in his sight.

I John 5:14 And this is the confidence that we have in him, that, if we ask any thing according to his will, he heareth us:

15 And if we know that he hear us, whatsoever we ask, we know that we have the petitions that we desired of him.

MEMORY VERSE: Again I say unto you, That if two of you shall agree on earth as touching any thing that they shall ask, it shall be done for them of my Father which is in heaven. —Matthew 18:19

CENTRAL THOUGHT: The effectual, fervent prayer of unwavering faith is promised in God's Word to be answered when it is accompanied by fasting, seeking, knocking, abiding in Christ,

knowledge and obedience of His will, confession of faults, and spiritual agreement. Complete consecration to God's will and trust in his divine wisdom is also essential to the prayer of faith.

WORD DEFINITIONS

Matthew 17:20b "Mustard seed": "the name of a plant which in oriental countries grows from a very small seed and attains to the height of 'a tree'—ten feet and more" (*Thayer's Greek Lexicon*).

21 "This kind": "There are certain evil propensities, in some persons, which pampering the flesh tends to nourish and strengthen; and that self-denial and fasting, accompanied by prayer to God, are the most likely means, not only to mortify such propensities, but also to destroy them" (*Clarke's Commentary*).

James 1:5 "Upbraideth": disgrace; insult; revile; reproach; create shame; cast blame.

6 "Wavering": to go back and forth trying to decide or distinguish; to be at variance with one's self; doubt or hesitate.

James 5:16 "Effectual, fervent": accomplish; engage in work; energize.

Matthew 18:19 "Agree": to be in harmony with. From a Greek root from which we get the English word *symphony*.

LESSON BACKGROUND

The first verses in our lesson are from the incident where Jesus' disciples were unable (because of their "littleness of faith," Jesus told them), to cast out the devil which tormented a young child. Jesus compared facing problems like this to commanding a mountain to move. Insurmountable difficulties. Impossible situations—they all must change at a command from the Deliverer. Jesus reproved some people for "little" faith and commended some for great faith.

Examples of great faith included the centurion who grasped the concept of Who Jesus was. He was convinced that Jesus was like himself, under authority and having authority to command sickness or disease to go or come. Others, like the woman who was convinced that if she could just touch the hem of Jesus' robe, she would be healed, were also commended by the Savior. Their faith for

deliverance and healing came from the same revelation and conviction essential for salvation and sanctification.

Jesus also commended people like the four friends who removed a roof to bring their crippled friend to Jesus, as well as the Gentile woman who persevered despite apparent put-offs by Jesus and his disciples. In Luke 11 he tells of a man who, being refused help from his friend in the middle of the night, kept right on asking until the friend, moved by his unwavering importunity, gave him whatever he needed. He tells a very similar story of the importuning widow in chapter 18. Jesus' purpose was to illustrate the necessary element of unceasing prayer to God when we are in need and demonstrate an important characteristic of faith: perseverance. Asking God for our needs may involve further earnest seeking of God, with the added emphasis of knocking. This is repeated by James as he describes how the prayer for wisdom must include perseverance, not the hesitation caused by going back and forth on an issue or trying to "split hairs" over what is lawful or not. He encourages the seeker that God is not standing in judgment or condemning us for having a need or lack.

John emphasizes the important element of a life that abides in Christ; also, one must have God's Word (faith comes by hearing!) permanently fixed in mind and heart. This kind of persuasion generated by God's revealed Word is what gives the assurance that the request will not only be heard, but answered. He adds in his later epistle that the assurance comes from our knowledge and obedience of God's will. Certainly a person asking for forgiveness and deliverance from sin can be assured that he is asking according to God's will; asking for the infilling of the Holy Spirit is definitely God's will as well. So you can ask in complete faith for these things. Are you sick? Ask God for a witness, or persuasion from His Word, that it is His will to make you well. When He inspires a promise, or gives you the conviction that His atoning blood that saves you is sufficient to heal you as well, you can draw near with full assurance of faith that it will be accomplished.

These verses give a clear picture of what it means to pray the prayer of faith. The early church followed these commands. Anointing with oil in the name of the Lord, prayer, fasting, and confession of faults was the method the believers followed for the healing of the sick. God witnessed to their faith by many miracles. In

later times of reformation after apostasy, God would once again send miracles of healings for those who would live their lives by the revelation and conviction of His Word and follow the example laid down by the apostles of faith and fervent prayer.

—Sis. Angela Gellenbeck

DISCUSSION:

1. *This Kind*: Having the kind of faith and spiritual power required by particular circumstances of illness or oppression will take what kind of action?
2. *Ask, Seek, Knock*: What might be the meaning of the progression of these actions?
3. *Great Faith/Little Faith*: Describe what these terms mean to you.
4. *Any Sick*: What conditions must be met for the prayer of faith to be prayed?
5. *Any Two of You*: Express what is meant by the word *agree*.

COMMENTS AND APPLICATION

We began this series of studies with an emphasis on the power of God's Word when it is heard and received by the heart, to convince and persuade the soul. This generates faith to believe and apply the promises, either for justification from sin for the sinner or for sanctification by the Holy Spirit in the heart of the justified believer. We explored the concepts of complete trust in God for all of life and described the hindrances and challenges to that trust. We discovered the importance of complete consecration of soul and body and the resulting inner peace and soul rest. We studied what it means to fight the good fight of faith.

Having thus laid a solid scriptural foundation and argument for faith and trust in God for all things, how can we separate what God has promised to do for the soul who believes and trusts Him, from the wonderful provision of divine healing for the body? Has His Word not proven His power and promises, His way and wisdom that is best, His conditions and requirements for those who come to Him?

As we have been seekers of His saving, sanctifying and keeping

grace; as we have learned to trust Him for His provision and care over all of life; let us now be convicted and inspired to seek Him as Healer of the body! Let us ask Him what it means for us to trust in horses and chariots; to go to Egypt for help, to lean upon the arm of flesh.

As we near the time of His coming, how shall we give an answer to His searching question: When the Son of man cometh, will He find FAITH on the earth?

—Sis. Angela Gellenbeck

REFLECTIONS

We are inundated with many options in nearly every aspect of our lives. At the grocery store we can choose from a multitude of brands and variations. This is also true of the cars we drive, the clothes we wear and the homes in which we live. The list of options is virtually endless.

As a society we have come to expect variety as our God-given right. We demand it! The financial market is driven by it and as a result we've come to expect it even in the spiritual realm. This, I believe, is one of the greatest challenges to faith in our generation. We have too many options.

So when we come to places in our experience where there is nothing to stand on but God, we are tempted to waver. We search for an alternative, thinking perhaps there's another way. But we must relinquish our search and set our focus on God alone.

This is the place where prayer, on the wings of faith, can soar through the clouds and above the storm. The prayer of faith is not reserved for the spiritual elite nor is it beyond the reach of the average Christian. It is for us all. We attain it when we learn to pray with a single eye, a single mind and a single purpose—trusting in God only.

Thus, prayer can be defined as us coming to and communing with God in faith—seeing God as the only option. True prayer, no matter how elementary, must be accompanied by faith. Therefore, the prayer of faith is simply praying in faith—it is believing in God and standing on His word alone.

—Bro. Darrell Johnson

JUNE 24, 2018

THE REWARD OF FAITH

II Corinthians 4:13 We having the same spirit of faith, according as it is written, I believed, and therefore have I spoken; we also believe, and therefore speak;

14 Knowing that he which raised up the Lord Jesus shall raise up us also by Jesus, and shall present us with you.

16 For which cause we faint not; but though our outward man perish, yet the inward man is renewed day by day.

17 For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory;

18 While we look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen: for the things which are seen are temporal; but the things which are not seen are eternal.

II Timothy 4:7 I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith:

8 Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, shall give me at that day: and not to me only, but unto all them also that love his appearing.

Hebrews 6:11 And we desire that every one of you do shew the same diligence to the full assurance of hope unto the end:

12 That ye be not slothful, but followers of them who through faith and patience inherit the promises.

Hebrews 10:35 Cast not away therefore your confidence, which hath great recompense of reward.

36 For ye have need of patience, that, after ye have done the will of God, ye might receive the promise.

37 For yet a little while, and he that shall come will come, and will not tarry.

38 Now the just shall live by faith: but if any man draw back, my soul shall have no pleasure in him.

39 But we are not of them who draw back unto perdition; but of them that believe to the saving of the soul.

MEMORY VERSE: Be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life. —Revelation 2:10b

CENTRAL THOUGHT: The life of faith and trust in God for salvation, holiness, daily needs and spiritual victory, through tribulations, afflictions, adversaries, and temptations, will most assuredly be rewarded at life's end by *sight* of all the unseen things for which faith was the evidence, and the glorious crown of eternal life.

WORD DEFINITIONS

II Corinthians 4:13 "As it is written, I believed...": a quotation from Psalm 116:10.

II Corinthians 4:17 "Light": little or light, as compared to great and weighty; easy to bear; easily managed; not burdensome. The same word Jesus used when He said His yoke would be easy and His burden *light*. "Affliction": pressure; tribulation; a narrow place that "hems you in" and makes you feel there is no way of escape.

Hebrews 10:36 "Patience": cheerful endurance. "Undisturbed by obstacles, delay, and failures."

Hebrews 10:37-38 "For yet a little while...": a quotation from Habakkuk 2:3-4.

Hebrews 10:39 "Perdition": destruction; loss; cut off from well-being.

LESSON BACKGROUND

In Paul's second epistle to the Corinthians, he spoke of the many tribulations, sufferings and labors of his ministry. He emphasized in the third and fourth chapters that the glorious gospel for which he suffered was an awesome and powerful LIGHT that transformed lives. The blessing of identifying with the sufferings, afflictions and death of Christ was that through these, eternal, unseen glories were being accomplished in the lives of the saints. He then quoted from Psalm 116, identifying with the Old Testament saints who looked forward in spirit to the glory of the Messiah's kingdom. Their faith caused them to speak of things they couldn't see yet. Paul's faith caused him to testify and speak of the glory that was ahead for him.

To Timothy, Paul's last written testimony was that he was already in the process of being sacrificed, or offered up as a witness,

a martyr, for Christ. He was in prison, awaiting Nero's death sentence. He had been true to the vision and revelation of Christ. Earlier in the letter he had stated, "I know whom I have believed, and am persuaded that he is able to keep that which I have committed unto him against that day" (II Timothy 1:12).

The writer to the Hebrews exhorted them to be diligent, not slothful; citing the examples of those who inherited the promises through faith and patience. He then went on to mention Abraham, who when receiving God's promise and oath, patiently endured until he received the promise. Twenty-five years he waited for Isaac, his son of promise!

The exhortation was repeated in the tenth chapter, where he quotes from Habakkuk, "The just shall live by faith," adding, "But if any man draw back, my soul shall have no pleasure in him." He encourages patience, assuring us that He Who has promised to come will surely come. I like the way one translation phrases the last verse: "We are not of them who slink away and hide through fear; we are not the cowards, but the courageous."

The memory verse is from the vision John saw while exiled on Patmos, where Jesus appeared with messages for the seven churches. To the church at Smyrna, He spoke of coming persecution and suffering, which came from both Jews and Romans. Smyrna was home to the temple of the wine deity, Dionysius. A myth about his death and resurrection may be alluded to in the Lord's greeting to this church, "These things saith the first and the last, which was dead and is alive," meaning that Christ's death and resurrection was indeed a truth and not a myth. In the heathen celebration of this myth, the priests were presented with a crown. Possibly the mention of the crown Jesus promised—an eternal one, not one of earthly festivity—was given because the Smyrnan people were so very familiar with the event.

Whether or not the famous martyr, Polycarp, first pastor at Smyrna and ordained by the Apostles, was there at the time of this writing has been debated by commentators. He was martyred in Smyrna in A. D. 168, and although the city was destroyed by an earthquake soon afterward, the stadium where he suffered may still be seen.

—Sis. Angela Gellenbeck

DISCUSSION:

1. *The Same Spirit of Faith:* Peter mentions having “like precious faith.” What kind of faith is meant by these terms?
2. *Reward:* Name several aspects of this brought out by these scriptures.
3. *Light Affliction:* Who else spoke of a “light” burden?
4. *I Have Kept the Faith:* Where was Paul when he wrote this?

COMMENTS AND APPLICATION

We have traced the life of faith from its beginnings to the final climax. The “faith chapter,” Hebrews 11, also describes this journey, chronicling the earliest stories of faithful men all the way through the Old Testament and pointing forward to future faith stories of New Testament saints as making “perfect” or fulfilling what the ancient saints began. Our stories should be in there somewhere!

The Old Testament pilgrims looked forward by faith to the Messiah. They believed in Him and His coming kingdom although they never saw it or experienced it. We look backward by faith to both their prophecies and Christ’s advent here on earth. We have heard the word of His gospel preached by eyewitnesses down through the ages, and we stand very near the END of all things. We too have not seen Him, yet we believe in Him, love Him, and rejoice in Him with joy unspeakable.

Someday, the love we have for Him because He first loved us, that hopes all things, believes all things, bears all things, and endures all things for His dear sake; and the faith by which we have lived and walked, for which we have fought, and through which we conquer; shall be brought into fruition and into sight. We will see Him as He is. Sufferings will be glory, and sorrow will be joy. We will see the “end” of the Lord. Our faith will be LOST in sight!

—Sis. Angela Gellenbeck

REFLECTIONS

In the first chapter of the first epistle of Peter, he speaks of the glorious reward and inheritance reserved in Heaven “for you, who

are kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation ready to be revealed in the last time.” Then, in verse 7 he says, “That the trial of your faith, being much more precious than of gold that perisheth, though it be tried with fire, might be found unto praise and honour and glory at the appearing of Jesus Christ.” Hebrews 11:35-38 also mentions the Old Testament saints who were tortured, mocked, scourged, imprisoned, stoned, sawn asunder, destitute, afflicted, and tormented for their faith. Oh, what a day of reward it is going to be when the Lord descends from Heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God, and all the heroes of faith come forth (from righteous Abel down to the very last of the faithful followers of Christ) and appear before the great white judgment throne! Truly, a reward is awaiting that is worth suffering for and worth dying for.

In October 2015 I was privileged to visit Rome, Italy, where I toured many ancient sites. Among them was a field of what used to be an arena in ancient Rome where, it was said, many early Christians were slain and martyred at the hands of the pagans. It was a sobering feeling as I walked across that field which, they said, in those ancient days was soaked with the blood of the martyrs.

May we, like those early Christians, and like Moses, esteem the reproach of Christ greater riches than all the treasures of this earth, having “respect unto the recompense of the reward,” patiently **enduring whatever** “light afflictions” may come our way to try our faith, keeping our eyes on “him who is invisible” (Hebrews 11:26). Paul said, “For I reckon that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us” (Romans 8:18).

“Jesus, we will follow in Thy footprints,
Share Thy suffering and shame and loss;
For the glory that is set before us,
We will triumph in the Savior’s cross.”

—Bro. Harlan Sorrell

