

Lesson 44

A Matter of Faith

Introduction:

Two days before His crucifixion Jesus left the home of Lazarus, Mary and Martha in order to enter Jerusalem where He would spend the day teaching. On the way, the disciples noticed that the fig tree that Jesus cursed the previous day had withered from the roots up. They were amazed and asked Jesus why it had withered so quickly. He replied by saying, “*Have faith in God*” or more accurately translated, “*Have the faith of God.*”

Reading the Scripture:

The Withered Fig Tree

Matthew 21:20-22 and Mark 11:20-26

(Gospels forged together into one seamless story, in collaboration with New American Standard Bible, authored by Michael Gibson, Founder of Spirit & Truth, dba Key 2 Changes: “Follow Me: A Message from God”, a journey with Jesus)

31 AD, April 21, Monday Morning, (Nisan 12)

And as they were passing by in the morning, they saw the fig tree withered from the roots up. And being reminded, Peter said to Him, "Rabbi, behold, the fig tree which You cursed has withered." And Jesus answered saying to them, "Have faith in God. Truly I say to you, whoever says to this mountain, 'Be taken up and cast into the sea,' and does not doubt in his heart, but believes that what he says is going to happen, it shall be granted him. Therefore I say to you, all things for which you pray and ask, believe that you have received them, and they shall be granted you. And whenever you stand praying, forgive, if you have anything against anyone; so that your Father also who is in heaven may forgive you your transgressions. But if you do not forgive, neither will your Father who is in heaven forgive your transgressions."

Group Discussion:

1. Where does faith come from? It is a gift from God.
2. How do you get faith? By hearing the word of God.

The Commands:

1. Have faith in God.
2. Believe that you have received them.
3. Forgive, if you have anything against anyone.

The Lesson:

In this short teaching session Jesus told His disciples who they should have faith in and three conditions for having their faith rewarded. It is interesting that Jesus began this lesson with the statement, “*Have faith in God*”. As His disciples most of us would say, “Well of course, whom or what else would we have faith in?” However, within our churches and in the world at large God has a lot of competition.

True **Biblical** faith *is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen. (Hebrews 11:1) It is a response to God and His word, because faith comes from hearing and hearing by the word of God. (Romans 10:17) It arises in the heart, for with the heart a person believes. (Romans 10:10) Once God’s word is heard and believed it needs to be spoken, for with the mouth he confesses. (Romans 10:10) And finally God’s word must be acted upon because faith without works is dead. (James 2:26) Therefore it might be stated that an individual has true*

Biblical faith when **he hears God's word, has assurance in his heart that it is God's word, confesses it and acts upon it.**

Biblical faith always has as its **source**, God and His word. It follows the pattern of:

1. **Believing** the word of God.
2. **Confession** of the word of God.
3. **Acting** upon the word of God.

Faith is not complete until all three parts occur!

This pattern is demonstrated throughout the Scripture and one example of it can be seen in the life of Abraham.

1. Abraham heard the Word of God and believed it. (*Move to the land, which I will show you.*)
2. Abraham spoke the word of God. (He told his family because they moved with him.)
3. Abraham did what he was told to do by God. (Abraham physically moved.)

Today, we see true Biblical faith being challenged in three primary areas within the Church. The first deals with the idea that faith is **mental assent** or agreement. In this case there is a belief in place but it produces no works. Listen to what, James the brother of our Lord Jesus Christ had to say. *What use is it, my brethren, if someone says he has faith but he has no works? Can that faith save him? If a brother or sister is without clothing and in need of daily food, and one of you says to them, "Go in peace, be warmed and be filled," and yet you do not give them what is necessary for their body, what use is that? Even so faith, if it has no works, is dead, being by itself. But someone may well say, "You have faith and I have works; show me your faith without the works, and I will show you my faith by my works." You believe that God is one. You do well; the demons also believe, and shudder. But are you willing to recognize, you foolish fellow, that **faith without works is useless?** (James 2:14-20) Jesus also addressed this issue when He said, "Not everyone who says to Me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who **does** the will of My Father who is in heaven will enter." (Matthew 7:21)*

The second challenge deals with the idea that faith is **reason**. In this case the belief is that since God has given us a mind to reason with we should trust that. However there are many ways to reason and they are all based on the individual's perspective. For example reason can be based on observable data, historical references, or popular opinion just to name a few. When reason is employed its source comes from the individual's mind not the heart, therefore it is not Biblical faith.

The third challenge deals with the idea of **confession** or in other words "you can have whatever you say." This concept¹ is mainly being propagated by the Word of Faith movement, which had its beginnings in the United States of America. The fallacy here lies in the fact that the source of the "word" is the individual himself and may arise from the desires of his spirit, soul, mind, will, emotions or flesh. At its root is the thought that the individual himself is God, therefore like God he can create whatever he speaks by faith. In this scheme the individual's **faith** is not in God or His word but in the individual's own ability to create by faith whatever he speaks.

¹ A popular **secular** movement of the "you can have whatever you say" concept was promoted in 2006 by a book and movie of the same title, **The Secret**.

The four primary tenants of the word of faith movement are:

1. Step number one is "**Say it.**" "Positive or negative, it is up to the individual. According to what the individual says, that shall he receive."
2. Step number two is "**Do it.**" "Your action defeats you or puts you over. According to your action, you receive or you are kept from receiving."
3. Step number three is "**Receive it.**" We are to plug into the "powerhouse of heaven." "*Faith is the plug, praise God! Just plug in.*"
4. Step number four is "**Tell it so others may believe.**" This final step might be considered the Word of Faith movement's outreach program.

While these four tenants use other Biblical faith principles, the source of the individual's belief is not necessarily the word of God. And true faith cannot come **except** by hearing and hearing by the word of God. Therefore, what these people are using to obtain whatever they want cannot be called faith. Jesus, the only begotten Son of God said, "*Truly, truly, I say to you, the Son **can do nothing of Himself**, unless it is something He sees the Father doing; for whatever the Father does, these things the Son also does in like manner.*" (John 5:19)

In the second part of His teaching Jesus said, "*Truly I say to you, whoever says to this mountain, 'Be taken up and cast into the sea,' and does not doubt in his heart, but believes that what he says is going to happen, it will be granted him. Therefore I say to you, all things for which you pray and ask, believe that you have received them, and they will be granted you.*" For many Christians this statement presents a problem and it arises because they don't have a proper understanding of it.

Jesus used the phrase, *does not doubt in his heart* as one of the conditions for the disciple's faith to be rewarded. Believing what you say will come to pass will always be subject to doubt if you don't have assurance. If you are trusting in yourself to bring about what you say you can never have assurance. That assurance can only come from God and His word. If God and His word are the source of your belief then you can be assured that it will come to pass because you have "the faith of God". "*So will My word be which goes forth from My mouth; it will not return to Me empty, without accomplished what I desire, and without succeeding in the matter for which I sent it.*" (Isaiah 55:11) God never doubts His word and it always comes to pass. Since faith comes from hearing and hearing by the word of God, then if God doesn't tell you to move the mountain, you will doubt in your heart and the mountain won't be moved.

The next condition for receiving the reward of your faith is "*to believe that you have received them, and they will be granted you.*" It stands to reason that if you have **God's reply** on something that you are praying or asking Him about, that you can believe that you have received your request.

Since faith comes from hearing and hearing by the word of God, it is incumbent upon believers to hear the word of God if they are to have faith that produces results. The word of God is heard by believers in three different ways:

1. The written word of God – The **Scriptures**.
2. **Utterances** – Testimony, preaching, teaching, tongues and prophesy.
3. A still small voice – **Hearing** in your spirit.

When a believer cannot find a word of God that applies to his unique situation then he should ask God for wisdom before he prays. James says, *“But if any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God, who gives to all generously and without reproach, and it will be given to him. But he must ask in faith without any doubting, for the one who doubts is like the surf of the sea, driven and tossed by the wind. For that man ought not to expect that he will receive anything from the Lord, being a double-minded man, unstable in all his ways.”* (James 1:5-8)

The final condition was forgiveness of others. If any disciple expected to have his faith rewarded then he had to forgive others. Forgiveness of sins would stand at the center of the gospel, which was to come: Christ died for sinners and He through His disciples is reconciling man to God. Jesus wanted the disciples to have a firm understanding of the importance of forgiveness so He declared, *“Whenever you stand praying, forgive, if you have anything against anyone, so that your Father who is in heaven will also forgive you your transgressions. But if you do not forgive, neither will your Father who is in heaven forgive your transgressions.”* Since this is the word of God to us as Christians we should believe it, confess it and act upon it. The consequence of not forgiving others is dire.

The Point Of The Lesson:

Living by faith has requirements

Application:

Try using the outline below to improve your prayer life.

Receiving by Faith

Consider God who promised faithful. *By faith even Sarah herself received ability to conceive, even beyond the proper time of life, since she considered Him faithful who had promised.* (Hebrews 11:11)

Get clean ... wash yourself. *If we confess our sins, He is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.* (1 John 1:9)

For if you forgive men for their transgressions, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive men, then your Father will not forgive your transgressions. (Matthew 6:14-15)

Prepare to serve God. *I urge you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies a living sacrifice, acceptable to God, which is your spiritual service of worship.* (Romans 12:1)

What is it you want or need from God? Clarify it:

- **Examine your motives.** *Search me, O God, and know my heart; try me and know my anxious thoughts; and see if there is any hurtful way in me, and lead me in the everlasting way.* (Psalm 139:23-24)

*If I regard wickedness in my heart, the Lord **will not hear.*** (Psalm 66:18)

And this is the confidence (faith) which we have before Him, that if we ask anything according to His will, He hears us . And if we know that He hears us in whatever we ask, we know that we the requests which we have asked of Him. (1 John 5:14-15)

- **Remove any doubts.** When the priest entered the Holy place he had to walk between the seven-branched lampstand (menorah), which is a symbol of the Holy Spirit, and the Table of the Bread of His Presence, which is a symbol of the word of God ... before he could approach the altar of incense where his prayer was offered.

Allow both the Scriptures and the Holy Spirit to speak to you in what you should ask for.

Keep this in mind:

- | | | |
|---------------------------|---|----------------|
| • God leads | - | Satan drives |
| • God convicts | - | Satan condemns |
| • God is never in a hurry | - | Satan harasses |
| • God accepts | - | Satan accuses |

Settle on what you are going to ask God for at this point. In other words ... you know that what you are going to ask for He will grant. Have the faith of God. (Mark 11:22)

Make your request known to God. *Therefore I say to you, all things for which you pray and ask, believe that you have received them, and they shall be granted you. (Mark 11:24)*

Thank God for hearing and granting your request.

Summarize in writing your request of God and record anything God has revealed to you or asked you to do.

Make a public confession of what you believe God has given you. *But having the same spirit of faith according to what is written, "I believed, therefore I spoke ", we also believe, therefore also we speak. (2 Corinthians 4:13)*

Do not fear. *The fear of man brings a snare, but he who trusts in the Lord will be exalted (Proverbs 29:25)* Remember, the Lord tells his people to "fear not" three hundred sixty-five time in the Bible. If you begin to become fearful cry out to God to deliver you and ask for more of His love to be expressed to you. *There is no fear in love; but perfect love casts out fear, because fear involves punishment, and the one who fears is not perfected in love. (1 John 4:18)*

Recognize that testing will come. Testing usually comes in two forms:

- You by faith are to understand that God has granted your request. When does the answer actually manifest? That's the first test! You usually won't know the answer to this question but if you do not doubt it will fall within the time frame of meeting the need for the request. For example, when Daniel prayed he got an answer to his prayer immediately. (Chapter 9) Another time when he prayed it took three weeks for the answer to come because a spirit hindered the reply. (Chapter 10)
- *Be imitators of those who through faith and patience inherit the promises. (Hebrews 6:12)*
- The second test is: how the answer comes? This is where your expectations might get in the way if you are counting God to do it the way you think.
- *Trust in the Lord with all your heart, and do not lean on your own understanding (expectations). (Proverbs 3:5)*
- *In this you greatly rejoice, even though now for a little while, if necessary, you have been distressed by various trials, that the proof of your faith, being more precious than gold which is perishable, even though tested by fire, may be found to result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ. (1 Peter 1:6-7)*

- **If thoughts** concerning your request come your way ... **you are being tested.** Immediately thank God for having heard your prayer and granting your request.”