**Faith, A Blur not a Still Life**

Oh what I would do to have the kind of faith it takes to stand before a giant, with just a sling and a stone.

         …to stand before a rock and call water to gush forth like a waterfall

         …to march around a fortified city and watch the walls fall down

         …to defeat an army of thousands with only 300 soldiers

         …to cause an ax head to float

         …to face a pride of hungry lions

         …to cure leprosy with a hug

         …to heal deformed arms and legs with a touch

         …to give sight to a blind man

         …to start a bonfire of soaking wet wood with only a word

         …to feed thousands with a little boy’s lunch

         …to stop the sun for several hours

         …to exorcize demons from violent victims

         …to provide an unending supply of food for a poor woman

         …to cause a fire that does not consume

         …to save an entire nation through a trophy queen

         …to return life to dead bodies

Oh what I would do to have that kind of faith. Oh what I would do to have faith like Moses and Elijah and Peter and Paul.

Most religions teach that to get god to notice you, you have to do certain things: pray the right way at the right time; speak special incantations; honor a statue or figurine representing god.

The Bible teaches something different. God doesn’t require that we do anything to get Him to notice and love us. He loves us first. Love like that is a bit reckless because He knows that many of us will not return His love. None-the-less God requires only one thing of us – faith.

We’re going to talk about faith this morning. If in His reckless love the only thing God requires from me is faith, I guess I ought to know what that looks like. Does that make sense to you?

The idea that all you need is faith began with the father of the Hebrew nation, *Abram believed God, and He credited it to him as righteousness.* Genesis 15:6

         The word translated “believed”, “*ve he emin*” carries the idea of being faithful in belief; proving to be firm and reliable.

         Abram was considered right with God based solely on the fact that his faith was real and sure.

The New Testament writers, especially Paul, picked up on this as they preached that we are righteous by faith alone.

         *Abraham believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness.* Romans 4:3

         *Consider Abraham: “He believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness.* Galatians 3:6

         *It is by grace you have been saved, through faith, and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God.* Ephesians 2:8

We say, “*Faith only*” or “*Faith alone*” or “*We’re saved by faith not by works*.” If that’s true, and it is, there’s nothing I can do to be right with God. The only way I can be right with God is to believe (or have faith).

Now get this, I do have to have faith. That I go to church or I used to go to church when I was a kid, that my uncle is a preacher, or that I come from a religious family does not make me right with God. I must have my own personal faith.

The Bible says, *Without faith it is impossible to please God, because anyone who comes to Him must believe that He exists and that He rewards those who earnestly seek Him,* Hebrews 11:6 It can’t be much more plain than that. *Without faith it is impossible to please God.*

So then a fair question would be, *What is faith?* The same writer of Hebrews gave us this definition: *Faith is being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see.* Hebrews 11:1 Two important words are used here:

         *Being sure of* or *the assurance of* translates υποστασις. Υποστασις means to be certain of something; to know for sure.

         The other word is ελεγχος, being certain. Ελεγχος has the idea of evidence that proves something.

         Together these are legal terms with the idea of being convinced of something beyond a shadow or a doubt.

         Faith is being absolutely convinced of God and His promises.

We get a clearer picture of faith as the author goes on to list people who had had the kind of faith it takes to build an ark, or have a baby at about 90 years old, or walk through the Red Sea on dry ground, or face torture and beatings yet never giving up on God. They lived in faith and their faith sustained them.

You might be thinking, *I believe in God, but I don’t think I can claim the kind of thing written of those people*. Maybe, maybe not. Have you been asked to build an ark?

Has God called you to face life or death persecution?

Have you ever been in a situation wherein your faith was necessary to cast out a demon?

The Bible says, *Do not think of yourself more highly than you ought, but rather think of yourself with sober judgment, in accordance with the measure of faith God has given you.* Romans 12:3

Probably you don’t have the kind of faith those people had because you don’t need that kind of faith, and God didn’t give you that kind of faith. Don’t think so highly of yourself that you should be doing what they did.

Jesus said, *If you have faith as small as a mustard seed, you can say to this mountain, ‘Move from here to there’ and it will move. Nothing will be impossible for you.* Matthew 17:20

He wasn’t telling us to go around moving mountains.

He wasn’t saying that we all have to have big faith.

He was saying that if we have faith, when necessary, we can cause a mountain to move.

God has given you the faith you need to be righteous and to follow His will. Go back to Romans 12, *think of yourself in accordance with the measure of faith God has given you.* Now look how the writer applied this:

*We have different gifts, according to the grace given us. If a man’s gift is preaching, let him use it in proportion to his faith. If it is serving, let him serve; if it is teaching, let him teach; if it is encouraging, let him encourage; if it is contributing to the needs of others, let him give generously;*

*if it is leadership, let him govern diligently; if it is showing mercy, let him do it cheerfully.* Romans 12:6-8

If you have faith, even faith as small as a mustard seed, you have enough faith to pursue the calling for which God created you. God trusts you to use your faith to carry out your call.

You may choose not to. That’s the reckless aspect of God’s love and grace. You don’t have to obey Him. You’re free to reject His call. You’re even free to deny faith. God takes that chance.

Don’t try to measure how big your faith is. Rather ask if you’re putting feet to your faith. Ask if you’re doing what God called you to do. Rick Warren was right when he wrote that *the purpose of your life is far greater than your own personal fulfillment…You were born by His (God’s) purpose and for His purpose*. The Purpose Driven Life, p17

You probably don’t need the kind of faith it takes to stand before a giant with just a sling and a stone. You need the kind of faith it takes to share the Good News with someone in your life. You need the kind of faith it takes to serve or teach or encourage or give generously or lead or show mercy.

If I might modify a line from a sermon given by Steve Poe at the 2018 North American Christian Convention, “God will never ask you to do anything that He won’t first give you the *faith* to carry out.” If God needs you to move a mountain He’ll give you the faith to move a mountain.

Faith is not believing something and doing nothing. If you took a picture of faith it would be a blur. Faith is trusting that God is active and in response I’m doing what He says.

Faith and fear have something in common. Both believe that something you cannot see will come to pass. Fear allows the circumstances you cannot see to come between us and God. Faith allows trust to come between us and God.

Do you remember the story in the Old Testament when Israel sent 12 spies to scout out the Promised Land – 10 were bad and 2 were good? Ten saw giants in the land. Two saw that God was giving them a beautiful land with rich resources. The ten said, *We’re afraid this isn’t going to turn out well. Let’s go back to Egypt*. Two said, *God is on our side. Let’s claim this land!*

Peter saw Jesus walking on the water and, acting in faith and trust, he walked on the water with Jesus. Then thinking of the physical laws of gravity and buoyancy he let fear come between himself and Jesus, and he began to sink.

Faith is trusting God in all circumstances, including the terrible circumstances when we cry out to God, *Why? Why this? Why me? Why now?*

Faith is trusting God that even in the deepest pit God is working to make something good of it; trusting that your trials produce perseverance and perseverance helps you grow mature faith; trusting that God will carry you through your trials so that you glory in Him.

Dallas Willard said *God’s address is at the end of your rope, when all hope is gone*. That’s when you absolutely need God.

Faith is focusing on God amid the distractions of life.

         When you’re concerned about being downsized at work. God says *continue to do your work as if unto the Lord Himself*.

         When your marriage is troubled. God says, *husbands love your wives as Jesus loved the church and gave His life for her even though she is unfaithful to Him*.

         When your health or that of someone you love is unstable. God says, *I am with you. I will never leave you*.

It’s easier to just give up. Get out while you can. Quit that job. Get a divorce. You can drink or drug yourself until you’re numb and no longer feel the pain of ill health.

Faith continues to focus on God until you can say with the Apostle Paul, *I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith.* 2 Timothy 4:7

I have two separate conclusions to this sermon. The first is for whoever might not have yet accepted Jesus as your Lord and Savior: Don’t wait until you have perfect faith. Believe this, God exists and that He rewards those who earnestly seek Him.

When we offer the invitation, come forward and accept Christ. Surrender your life to be His follower. Accept Christian baptism today and you will become a child of God.

If you’re fighting with yourself about this, give it up. Take that first step to come down this aisle and we’ll help you from here. But you have to choose for yourself. We can’t do it for you. Don’t wait for a better day.

There may never be a better day, and you may never come to this point again. You could be lost for eternity because you failed to act on what faith you have. Accept Jesus today.

I’m not going to ask you to decide at this moment. I want you to think about it for a while before you choose. We’ll offer you a chance at the end of the service.

Now a conclusion for people who have already chosen faith in Jesus I have this two part challenge:

First, since faith is doing what God has gifted and called you to do, remember, faith doesn’t do nothing. Faith does the ministry God called us to. He has already given you the ability to do what He called you to do.

The only question is, do you have the kind of faith it takes to do what He says? Would a picture of you acting in faith be a blur, or would it be a still life?

Second, do something audacious.

I’m a preparer. I manuscript my sermons and teaching. I dot every “I” and cross every “T”. I try to anticipate every detail. I want to be prepared so that I can handle any snag that may arise.

So when I plan something audacious I wrestle with myself. I tend to plan things that I know I can do. I realize that I actually trust myself more than I trust God.

A few years ago I decided to ask God to do something great among us that I couldn’t do. I decided to push the limits. I asked Him for something that wouldn’t be because of the sermons I preach or the classes I teach. I very specifically asked God to move among our younger people to rise up to take the leadership of this church. He’s doing it in a big way.

In Steve Poe’s sermon I referenced earlier he talked about a guy named Jim Collins who challenges his church and staff to approach each year with a BHAG. BHAG stands for Big Hairy Audacious Goal.

He challenges them to set a goal that is unattainable; something that only God could accomplish. Then he challenges them to work in faith and let God determine the outcome.

Our culture tells us to play it safe. Avoid risk at all costs. I say, *Take a risk!* *Set a BHAG for yourself.* It’s risky because it may not happen. Listen, if everything you do is risk-free, you’re not trusting God. You’re trusting yourself. The Christian life is meant to be experienced not endured.

People who do audacious things in the name of God don’t have different faith than us. Theirs is not greater faith than ours.

People who do audacious things in the name of God are tuned into God, doing what He tells them to do, and God gives them the faith necessary to move mountains when needed.

Conclusion: Oh what I would do to have the kind of faith it takes to step out of this boat I’m in and onto the crashing waves; to step out of my comfort zone into the realm of the unknown.

         …love my wife more than I love myself

         …obey everything Jesus taught

         …love unlovable people

         …leave the comfort of the church to seek the lost

         …serve rather than be served

         …forgive people who hurt me

Oh what I would do to have the kind of faith it takes to want the Healer more than the healing; to want the Savior more than the saving; to want the Giver more than the giving.

Oh what I would do to have the kind of faith it takes to want Jesus more than anything.