

# Dartmouth Bible Notes

Notes from the Pulpit Ministry of Dartmouth Bible Church

Series: Faith (Lesson 1)

Scripture: Matthew 16:13-20

Speaker: Rev. Neil C. Damgaard, Th.M., D.Min.

Date: May 24<sup>th</sup>, 2009



## ***The Thing That Makes Christians Different***

Matthew 16:13-20 (NASB)

Now when Jesus came into the district of Caesarea Philippi, He *began* asking His disciples, saying, "Who do people say that the Son of Man is?" <sup>14</sup> And they said, "Some *say* John the Baptist; and others, Elijah; but still others, Jeremiah, or one of the prophets." <sup>15</sup> He *said* to them, "But who do you say that I am?" <sup>16</sup> And Simon Peter answered and said, "Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God." <sup>17</sup> And Jesus answered and said to him, "Blessed are you, Simon Barjona, because flesh and blood did not reveal *this* to you, but My Father who is in heaven. <sup>18</sup> "And I also say to you that you are Peter, and upon this rock I will build My church; and the gates of Hades shall not overpower it. <sup>19</sup> "I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven; and whatever you shall bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatever you shall loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven." <sup>20</sup> Then He warned the disciples that they should tell no one that He was the Christ.

### **New Pulpit Mini-Series**

#### **On "Faith"**

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- Faith without Works
- Works As Evidence of Faith
- Junk Faith
- Day to Day Faith
- Tiny Faith
- Stupid Faith
- Mountain Faith
- Hard Faith
- Saving Faith Part 2

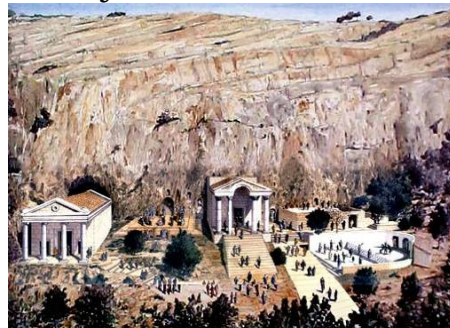
**Introduction** I was sitting in a coffee shop this week, and outside on the patio were six twenty-something young men. I was just the other side of the glass from them and although I couldn't hear their conversation I could see that they were cheerful, brassy and full of Friday afternoon. One wore a Motley Crue shirt that had four women in the shape of a cross. Another wore a shirt with the hammer and sickle symbol. Another had a Harley-Davidson shirt. They were all white guys, each clutched cell phones in one hand and three held cigarettes in the other. I wondered, what makes me different than them, other than age?

When I was in Grand Goave, Haiti three years ago, I was surrounded by Haitian people of all ages. None possessed even a tenth of what I possess and I was so marked by my visit there that I felt almost guilty just to be there. They live with an unspeakable being deprived of so much that I take for granted. I can imagine none of them ever leaving the island. Their government is in chaos. Their churches are simple assemblies of migratory people. Few are able to find employment. Half of the population resorts to voodoo for just a whiff of some

kind of a world view and meaning. And yet my theology tells me that I am going to heaven, and many of them probably will not. But spiritually, am I any different than them? Isn't it just a twist of accident that I was born into privilege and they were not? I never for a second imagined myself better than any of them. Maybe worse...

And then, in this introspective moment, how am I different, ESPECIALLY when sometimes Christians really blow it? We seem capable of breaking every one of the Ten Commandments and sometimes with little to no twinge of conscience. Christians often do feel bad when they sin, but with some regularity I see Christians break God's law with an almost cavalier casualness. More than a thousand times, probably, *I've* recited to myself Paul's words to the Romans, Romans 7:19,24 (NIV) ***19 For what I do is not the good I want to do; no, the evil I do not want to do—this I keep on doing...24 What a wretched man I am! Who will rescue me from this body of death?***

Well, with these incongruities lurking in my mind, we turn to Caesarea Philippi, in northern Israel. Matthew and Mark tell us that Jesus was around here somewhere, perhaps at this spot. (Which may have looked a little like this):



(Not long before Matthew himself was probably a corrupt, political hack.) And with perhaps the backdrop of these niches in the stone wall, and little statues of Greek and Roman gods standing in them, Jesus asks His disciples, ***Who do people say that the Son of Man is?*** (Matt.16:13b).

The same question goes today, of course... WHAT ARE SOME OF THE POPULAR THINGS OUT THERE, which are being toyed with as to who Jesus Christ is?

In *The DaVinci Code* author Dan Brown suggested that Jesus was the lover of Mary Magdalene and that they had a secret child.

The Mormons say (although you must listen very carefully in their doctrine) that Jesus is essentially the brother of Satan.

Muslims say that Jesus was a great prophet but eclipsed by Mohammed.

The Catholic church has traditionally taught that that Jesus is so severe and holy, that people need a mediator with Him and that the best one to *be* that mediator, or go-between, is His mother, Mary. So they pray to Mary.

I wonder how those of us in this room would describe Jesus Christ? Jesus asked this very question of His disciples at Caesarea Philippi.

I want to begin today a relatively short mini-series on the question of “faith.” I want to explore saving faith to begin with and then some of the other aspects of faith in the heart and mind of the Christian, i.e. **young** faith, faith in the **old** person, **works as an evidence** of real Christian faith, **Abraham** as an example of faith, **mustard-seed** faith, etc.

- You see, *we say* that a true Christian is the person who possesses a personal belief and trust in Jesus Christ, which gains him or her complete forgiveness of sins and **eternal life**.
- We say that “eternal life” means that when this body dies, I go to heaven where I will live eternally.
- We say that eternal life will be without sin, and without guilt.
- We imagine that we will see loved ones there who were Christians, and that somehow we will be wonderfully reunited with them.
- Moreover, we say that people who did NOT have a saving faith, will go to hell forever and pay for their own sins there.

But I have been wondering if the Christians that I know are principally different than the non-Christians? Are we really any different, much “other” than the people we know whom we would call unbelievers? We certainly *say* we are; and when some of those unbelievers hear us say that, sometimes they are offended. Several things prompt me to ask the question, “Are we principally different?”

- I.** First, I know some pretty nice non-Christians. There are some people out there who have not become born-again Christians yet who do nice things, speak kindly, and might even be *nicer* than some of the Christians which I know (or even than me on a day here or there.)
- II.** Second, I find that inside of me, I still wrestle with the “old man,” the flesh, the sinful nature and some days that combat is fierce still. On those kind of days, I often feel “accused” in my spirit, too... Am I really any better than the non-Christians that I know?
- III.** Third, the collective of non-Christians out there is engaged in a 24-hour a day propaganda campaign to TELL me that I am no different, and that my belief that I am different is an illusion. The campaign can be wearying sometimes.

So what IS it that makes us different, even though sometimes we don’t look much different? I would suggest that the one element in our lives which completely and totally and irreversibly distinguishes us from all non-Christians is our faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. That is it. It is the one thing which we cannot be a Christian without, and the one thing that no person can substitute anything else for—not good works, not intellectual agreement, not enthusiasm or zeal, not personal sacrifice (though *all* of those things may well flow out of faith.)

We are going to do a whole message, Lordwilling next Sunday, on “saving faith” itself. What it is, that a person finds, is given, creates, steals or something that God recognizes as the right “legal tender” with which to enter heaven? But for today, we need to consider what the Bible says that faith is...

The quickest place to turn is to that wonderful anonymous Letter to the Hebrews, where at the beginning of the 11<sup>th</sup> chapter we read ***Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen.*** Hebrews 11:1 (NASB). And then a great number of illustrations of this definition are laid out...

Essentially faith is CONFIDENCE that things yet future and unseen will happen as God has revealed they will.<sup>1</sup>

It is the *SUBSTRUCTURE* IN OUR MINDS AND HEARTS of all that we hope for in the future, and it *AFFECTS US IN THE PRESENT* with a kind of *celebration*.

Someone else observed that faith is *THE SPIRITUAL ORGAN* that enables a person to perceive the invisible realities of life.<sup>2</sup>

This state of mind, and affect on the heart and emotions and decision-making, is what drove the apostles to go out and risk themselves to tell others about it. You say, “Well, that’s fine. They SAW Jesus, even Paul.” But in the face of the dangers they faced, I suggest they might have lost the value of having seen Jesus. The mind can talk itself out of things if pressed hard enough. But they kept at it. Almost all of them to the point of the end of their lives...

What about you? Or the people you know?

Do they have a state of mind of certainty and confidence about what the Bible says (and once again, that’s the apostles and Jesus Himself and before them, the Old Testament prophets...)

Is there some sense of excitement about the future? Do the trials and disappointments of THIS life feel a little muted by what you just know in your heart is coming eventually? Do you find the promises of the Bible—and you feel like you’ve interpreted them responsibly—will be yours?

Even though you have never yet seen Jesus, have been given no dream or vision or prophecy, you can somehow “see” the Lord, you can somehow “hear” His voice, you can somehow “sense” His presence and His providence and His provision and His leading in your life?

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<sup>1</sup>Tom Constable. (2003). *Tom Constable's Expository Notes on the Bible* (Heb 11:1). Galaxie Software.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

These, I think, are the evidences that you are a person of Hebrews 11 faith.

This is important today because there are some preachers of big churches and famous reputation, who are mutating biblical faith into some credit card kind of claim on prosperity, health and prominence NOW. Do you know what I'm talking about? Consider some more of the words from Hebrews 11:

And what more shall I say? For time will fail me if I tell of Gideon, Barak, Samson, Jephthah, of David and Samuel and the prophets, <sup>33</sup> who by faith conquered kingdoms, performed acts of righteousness, obtained promises, shut the mouths of lions, <sup>34</sup> quenched the power of fire, escaped the edge of the sword, from weakness were made strong, became mighty in war, put foreign armies to flight. <sup>35</sup> Women received back their dead by resurrection; and others were tortured, not accepting their release, in order that they might obtain a better resurrection; <sup>36</sup> and others experienced mockings and scourgings, yes, also chains and imprisonment. <sup>37</sup> They were stoned, they were sawn in two, they were tempted, they were put to death with the sword; they went about in sheepskins, in goatskins, being destitute, afflicted, ill-treated <sup>38</sup> (men of whom the world was not worthy), wandering in deserts and mountains and caves and holes in the ground. <sup>39</sup> And all these, having gained approval through their faith, did not receive what was promised, <sup>40</sup> because God had provided something better for us, so that apart from us they should not be made perfect. Hebrews 11:32-40

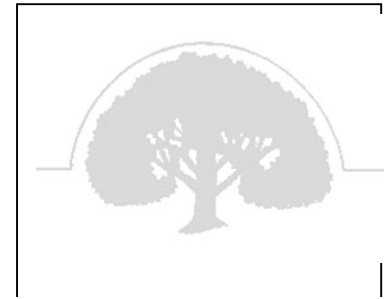
Now this is someone writing in the first century, about people of faith that lived centuries before that. This isn't EVEN talking about Peter and Mary and Paul and John and Polycarp and Clement and Ignatius and Justin Martyr and Luther and Calvin and all the heroes that WE have to look back at as examples. And I see no mention of prosperity or supernatural health or popularity in this passage in Hebrews. So let's think correctly about the state of mind of confidence in the word of God, and what it gives. The NOW that we get, is confidence about WHAT'S COMING. We can claim the things that the New Testament SAYS we can claim, by faith, now. But the state of faith chiefly focuses on Jesus and being with Him.

One more observation, back in Matthew 16:17: ***And Jesus answered and said to him, "Blessed are you, Simon Barjona, because flesh and blood did not reveal this to you, but My Father who is in heaven."*** Peter, son of Jonah, did not figure out by his own doing who the Son of Man really was. God the Father revealed it to Him. Such is where faith comes from, ultimately. We see, we hear, we think, and we decide. But underneath it all is the grace of God, calling us, wooing us to embrace the Lord Jesus Christ by faith.

I am no better than anyone else. Indeed, I'm not even as good as some. But what makes me different, is that I have this confidence in Jesus Christ, and in Him alone. He's not just MY PARTICULAR worship of choice. He's the ONLY worship of choice. I

know that and that is what makes me different. We of Christian faith focus our identity on HIM, and what HE has done for us. I am sure of it. I can't explain completely why, and I can't yet answer all questions that people may have. But I have certainly, my friends, and I have enjoyed that certainty for 37 years so far! I hope you will explore this matter with me further and deeper in the weeks to follow this summer...

Notes from the Pulpit Ministry of Dartmouth Bible Church  
Series: Faith (lesson 2)  
Scripture: Romans 3:21-26, etc.  
Speaker: Rev. Neil C. Damgaard, Th.M., D.Min.  
Date: May 31<sup>st</sup>, 2009



## ***Saving Faith***

### **Romans 3:21-26** (NASB)

<sup>21</sup> But now apart from the Law *the* righteousness of God has been manifested, being witnessed by the Law and the Prophets, <sup>22</sup> even *the* righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all those who believe; for there is no distinction; <sup>23</sup> for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, <sup>24</sup> being justified as a gift by His grace through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus; <sup>25</sup> whom God displayed publicly as a propitiation in His blood through faith. *This was* to demonstrate His righteousness, because in the forbearance of God He passed over the sins previously committed; <sup>26</sup> for the demonstration, *I say*, of His righteousness at the present time, that He might be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus.

**Introduction** There is nothing more important in life than to understand what saving faith is.

HEALTH is not more important, nor is helping other people with their health although I think healthcare is one of the most noble things a person can do with his life.

MAKING MONEY isn't as important as saving faith, although everyone needs to be able to do this adequately.

HAVING FUN and staying in a "fun" environment isn't as important although I personally think life should BE fun—and if your life isn't fun on some level especially living in this free culture, something is wrong!

BEING SAFE isn't as important as understanding the nature of saving faith, Although consider how much money we spend on safety!

If there was one thing that might compete in importance, it *might* be HAVING ENOUGH TO EAT. But even there, knowing that saving faith lasts beyond the grave—in fact, IS about beyond the grave so I would even say that having enough to eat isn't as important (though I do not glibly dismiss this one.)

**Know what saving faith is, being clear in your minds about this, and more importantly, HAVING saving faith is the most important thing in life.**

- We want kids to hear about it and understand it and find it as early as possible. Sometimes we are not content to just inform them of the choice they need to make—we try to badger them into making that decision...
- We go to great ends to talk about it to people whose last day might be TODAY, in nursing homes and hospitals and on battlefields.

- Our whole church is founded because a few people 46 years ago had a burning sense of urgency about saving faith and the need to create a new “Saving Faith Center” in this town.

Here are some verses in the New Testament which talk about it:

Romans 10:9

*...if you confess with your mouth Jesus as Lord, and **believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you shall be saved;***

John 3:16

*For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever **believes in Him** should not perish, but have eternal life.*

John 3:36 (John the Baptist)

*He who **believes in the Son** has eternal life; but he who does not obey the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God abides on him.*

John 5:24

*Truly, truly, I say to you, he who hears My word, and **believes Him who sent Me**, has eternal life, and does not come into judgment, but has passed out of death into life.*

John 6:40

*For this is the will of My Father, that everyone who beholds the Son and **believes in Him**, may have eternal life; and I Myself will raise him up on the last day.*

1<sup>st</sup> John 5:13

*These things I have written to you who **believe in the name of the Son of God**, in order that you may know that you have eternal life.*

I hope you can see from these few examples that the thing is talked about plainly in the Bible. And there is nothing more important for a person to “GET” than what IS saving faith.

I have read a great deal on the subject of the Second World War. One of the scariest things I have read was an account of living as a German citizen in the mid 1930s. German pride was growing and as national socialism (the “Nazis”) grew and became dominant across the German nation and by 1936 began to display some very evil aspects, there were more than a few who yawned, turned away and said, “It won’t hurt us.” Nine years later as their country lay in smoking ruins, those same formerly eye-rolling people—those who still lived—sat in silence and despair.

This is a sad and scary illustration. But I cannot emphasize too much the importance that we think clearly and soberly about the definition and meaning of the term “saving faith.” We must not be sleepy, casual or presumptive. We need to reset our assumptions about this, I think. We have championed “grace” to the point that salvation has become too light-hearted and frankly, easy.

So what IS “saving faith?” We see an important difference between the KINDS of faith that people say they have.

- There’s “temporal” faith, which is a thing a person fires up in a crisis.
- There’s “intellectual” faith, which is a kind of mental agreement with certain theological ideas, and accepting them to be intellectually true.
- There’s “tradition” faith, which is the comfort a person feels when they’re leaning on certain traditions—“it makes me feel better because I’m doing this religious thing because it is a time-honored tradition to do it.” Often we hear people engage this one when they say, “Well, I was raised as a \_\_\_\_\_ and I’m all set with that.”

So where do we come off with something called “saving faith?” Here are some definitions:

**John Wesley**, the founder of Methodism, said:

*Justifying faith implies not only the conviction, like the Bible says, ‘God was in Christ reconciling the world unto Himself,’ but a SURE TRUST and CONFIDENCE that Christ died for MY sins, that He loved ME and gave Himself for ME.*

**John Calvin**, said:

*Saving faith is "... a firm and sure knowledge of the divine favor toward us, founded on the truth of a free promise in Christ, and revealed to our minds and sealed on our hearts by the Holy Spirit."<sup>3</sup> Saving faith is like an empty, open hand, stretched out towards God, with nothing to offer, and everything to receive.*

**A.W. Pink** says:

*Saving faith receives salvation with an empty hand, but NOT a hand which is still tightly grasping the world—a heart that is steeled in rebellion against God cannot savingly believe—it must first be broken.*

**John Piper** says:

*Saving faith is banking all our hope on Christ for the satisfaction of our hearts and forgiveness of our sins. It is the heartfelt conviction that Christ is both solidly reliable and supremely desirable.*

**Leighton Ford** said:

*Saving faith is not faith without evidence, but it is commitment without reservation.*

**John Paton** (1824-1907) was a missionary in the New Hebrides. When translating one of the Gospels into the local language he had a problem finding a word or phrase in their

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<sup>3</sup> *The Institutes of the Christian Religion* 3:II:7 end

language that was the equivalent to the New Testament's concept of trusting Christ. The islanders trusted nobody and there was no word for "trust" in their language. His assistant, who was from the New Hebrides, entered the room and Paton had an idea. He said to the fellow, "What am I doing?" as he sat back in his chair and raised his feet off the floor. The fellow said you're *somethinging*, and used a verb which meant to "lean your whole weight upon. This is what Paton used to convey "to believe in Christ."

I hope this was not confusing, but it is good to see and think about what several people have said saving faith involves.

Here is what **MAKES UP A FAITH WHICH TRULY RESCUES US FROM SIN** and judgment by a holy God, and gives us the hope of glory for the future:

1. It is a **CONFIDENCE** that the facts about Jesus of which we read in the New Testament are true and accurate. Saving faith is just sure of those things which are recorded there—His coming, His death on the cross, His atoning for sins, His rising from the dead, and His promise to come again.
2. It is an **EMOTIONAL STIRRING**, on some level, of the soul which breaks a person's sense of self-independency. The person *feels* something of responsibility before a holy God. They see Jesus on the cross and somewhere inside of their emotions, they cry out, "No! He shouldn't have died—I should have died."
  - a. I think this is a tricky aspect, and I think we as Christian parents can mess our kids up with this. Whereas under less cluttered circumstances, a kid is confronted with the idea of sin and the need for a savior, so often the message gets filtered through the maze of family life and confused by the emotions of the parents. The kid **KNOWS** that Dad or Mom really really really want them to be right with God and they naturally want to please Dad and Mom so they go along with the program. They don't **REALLY** hear the call to repent and trust Christ but their hearing the Gospel is clouded by the family environment. More, sometimes Dad or Mom badger the heck out of the kid and they're like, "OK OK I'll accept Christ. Geez Mom." And they may or may NOT have really understood their own, independent, unmitigated, plain and simple need for Christ.
3. Then there is something which happens inside their hearts and minds, the word which we use to describe it is "**REPENTANCE**." Now this is an easily MISunderstood word. It conjures up scenes of revival meetings and people stumbling down front and slobbering and balling. Now while I appreciate a good slobber as well as the next guy I don't think that has much at all to do with repentance. Here is the description of repentance from a Bible dictionary:

**REPENTANCE** — There are three Greek words used in the New Testament to denote repentance. (1.) The verb *metamelomai* is used of a change of mind, such as to produce regret or even remorse on account of sin, but not necessarily a change of heart. This word is used with reference to the repentance of Judas (Matt. 27:3). (2.) *Metanoeo*, meaning to change one's mind and purpose, as the result of after knowledge. This verb, with (3.) the cognate noun *metanoia*, is used of true repentance, a change of mind and purpose and life, to which remission of sin is promised.

Evangelical repentance consists of (1) a true sense of one's own guilt and sinfulness; (2) an apprehension of God's mercy in Christ; (3) an actual hatred of sin (Ps. 119:128; Job 42:5, 6; 2 Cor. 7:10) and turning from it to God; and (4) a persistent endeavour after a holy life in a walking with God in the way of his commandments.

The true penitent is conscious of guilt (Ps. 51:4, 9), of pollution (51:5, 7, 10), and of helplessness (51:11; 109:21, 22). Thus he apprehends himself to be just what God has always seen him to be and declares him to be. But repentance comprehends not only such a sense of sin, but also an apprehension of mercy, without which there can be no true repentance (Ps. 51:1; 130:4).<sup>4</sup>

4. There is some kind of **DECISION-MAKING** that occurs. This might look differently from person to person. But whereas Jesus always called people to DO something, to ACT upon their statement that they wanted to follow Him, so it is true that when saving faith really happens there is the NEED to make some kind of decision about a person's life. It might involve just stepping out and making it KNOWN that, "Hey, I think Jesus is real and I asked Him to enter into my life and be my Savior!" It might involve some kind of decisions about relationships that have been ongoing. It might mean a new effort to defeat an addiction of some kind that has been shackling the person. It might involve making amends with someone. It might involve *a lot* of possible decisions.

A saved person believes in a promise making God. He thinks clearly about who Jesus Christ is and knows that He is the way, the truth and the life. He is moved at the realization that "I am a sinner, and desperately ruined by sin. Unless someone DOES something, I am lost! Oh! There's Jesus Christ." And he wants to live a life pleasing to his savior after he comes to believe in Him. He is not cavalier about sin. He DECIDES to follow Him and to seek Him. That is saving faith.

If someone, anyone, were to interview on these things, what would they find?

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<sup>4</sup>Easton, M. (1996, c1897). *Easton's Bible Dictionary*. Oak Harbor, WA: Logos Research Systems, Inc.

Notes from the Pulpit Ministry of Dartmouth Bible Church

Series: Faith (lesson 3)

Scripture: Various

Speaker: Rev. Neil C. Damgaard, Th.M., D.Min.

Date: June 14<sup>th</sup>, 2009

## ***Abrahamic Faith***

**Introduction** Imagine it is about the year 2,091... You're a man living in Iraq. You're an old man. You have a wife who's pretty good looking. You're in a city there called Ur—you've lived in Greater Ur all your long life. In Ur the main religion centers on a god named Nanna the Illuminator, the god of the moon (also known as Sin or Suen.) And suddenly, out of nowhere, a god, a real God, who is very obviously God, speaks to you and the first thing He says to you is, "I want you to move." "Get up. Get gone. Say goodbye to everyone, and get gone. I'll show you where I want you to go." Strangely, your reaction isn't, "I haven't got insurance, I don't have enough money, what if my wife doesn't want to leave, I'll be lonely, there's bandits on the highway," or "Let me check with Nanna the Illuminator?" You just grab your pack, a few things, and you get gone. *On the road again...*

Oh—I forgot to mention that it is 2,091 B.C. The country isn't called "Iraq" ...yet. It is four thousand years ago. The Temple to Nanna still stands today among the ruins of Ur. This was the land of the Chaldeans. Four thousand years ago there were countless gods, or at least people imagined so. And Abraham becomes the first of a new race of people—a new nation chosen by God. God made an unconditional covenant with this man, and even though he was pretty old at the time, God promised that he would father a son. Abraham the father of faith *ITSELF* in the true God. We read about Abraham and his family from the end of Genesis 11 to the beginning of Genesis 25. He receives a great deal of prominence throughout the whole Old Testament:

In a conversation God had with Joshua maybe 500 years later, God says in Joshua 24:3 ***'Then I took your father Abraham from beyond the River, and led him through all the land of Canaan, and multiplied his descendants and gave him Isaac.***

Maybe 500 years after that the psalmist wrote: Psalms 105:42-43 ***For He remembered His holy word With Abraham His servant; <sup>43</sup> And He brought forth His people with joy, His chosen ones with a joyful shout.***

Another 300 years and the prophet Micah wrote, Micah 7:20 (NIV) ***You will be true to Jacob, and show mercy to Abraham, as you pledged on oath to our fathers in days long ago.***

In the New Testament Abraham is talked about by Jesus, Paul and the anonymous writer to the Hebrews:

In Matthew 8:11 Jesus says an amazing thing: ***“And I say to you, that many shall come from east and west, and recline at the table with Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob, in the kingdom of heaven...”***

In what I think is one of Jesus’ most wonderful parables (the parable of Lazarus and the rich man), Jesus actually quotes Abraham in the awesome glimpse of the after-life and the fate of the rich man’s family of five brothers: Luke 16:29 ***“But Abraham said, ‘They have Moses and the Prophets; let them hear them.’***

In Romans 4 and in Galatians 3 Paul speaks of Abraham... He even calls Christians “sons of Abraham.” ***Therefore, be sure that it is those who are of faith who are sons of Abraham. <sup>8</sup> And the Scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, preached the gospel beforehand to Abraham, saying, “ALL THE NATIONS SHALL BE BLESSED IN YOU.” <sup>9</sup> So then those who are of faith are blessed with Abraham, the believer. Galatians 3:7-9***

Hebrews 11 we have two detailed explanations of why Abraham was important. It was the faith that he possessed that wins him a place in the Christian hall of fame. Hebrews 11:8 ***By faith Abraham, when he was called, obeyed by going out to a place which he was to receive for an inheritance; and he went out, not knowing where he was going.***

Abraham’s faith is seen in his willingness to OBEY God. I love the line, *not knowing where he was going...* Do you ever feel like that? Do you ever feel like you are driven by the need to just do what God says, even if you don’t know where you’re going?

Now, how is the faith in that man like our faith at all? How can we relate to someone who lived maybe 4,000 years ago?

I. Abraham’s faith in God was based upon A GOD WHO REVEALS HIMSELF. God does not need to be discovered, found, figured out, extrapolated or calculated. He reveals Himself. He says, “Here I am.” Jesus said to Thomas, ***He who has seen Me has seen the Father...***(John 14:8.) The world tells us God is not clear. The devil tells us God isn’t worth all that much. Our flesh tells us God

has taken a hike, isn't even interested in us. But our faith tells us that God reveals Himself and delights to do so.

II. As we have said, Abraham's faith was an OBEDIENT FAITH.

- a. He left Ur, and *headed out on the highway* (as the song goes.) Got on the road and figured God would be his "**GPS.**"
- b. and as the Book of Hebrews calls it, ***he lived as an alien in the land of promise, as in a foreign land, dwelling in tents with Isaac and Jacob, fellow heirs of the same promise; <sup>10</sup> for he was looking for the city which has foundations, whose architect and builder is God.*** Hebrews 11:9-10
- c. Amazingly, we have the account of how Abraham was willing even to sacrifice his only son—the very son that God had promised to him, out of a deep sense of obedience to God.

What in your life, do you do, because of your faith in God? What do you do, simply because you know God has told you to do it?

I hope you read your Bible, personally, and frequently, because you believe that God will reveal Himself to you there. I also hope you read your Bible because you sense that He WANTS you to.

I hope you seek personal holiness and to be cleaner and cleaner inside not out of guilt but because God commands us to work on our inner person, on being more and more set apart for Him. This will also involve making some personal decisions NOT to do some things, that God has said to avoid. This is because of a fundamental conviction that God knew what He was talking about when He made certain prohibitions.

If you are married, I hope you have it as your life-purpose to honor marriage and to obey God in all the aspects of that. And as a parent, I hope you view your relationship with your children as an exercise in obeying God, for He has revealed how we are to DO parenting.

III. Abraham's faith *TRUSTED* in God. God had made a COVENANT with Abraham. That is no small thing. He Entrusted himself to God, to the same God that we are dealing with today, 4,000 years later. God does not change, but that doesn't mean He is stagnant. It means He is utterly stable and dependable. Somehow, amazingly in Ur, Abraham sensed that and leaned on it. We read back in Genesis 15:6 ***Then he believed in the LORD; and He reckoned it to him as righteousness*** and in Romans 4:5-8 ***But to the one who does not work, but believes in Him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is reckoned as righteousness, <sup>6</sup> just as David also speaks of the blessing upon the man to whom God reckons righteousness apart from works: <sup>7</sup> "BLESSED ARE THOSE WHOSE LAWLESS DEEDS HAVE BEEN FORGIVEN, AND WHOSE SINS HAVE BEEN COVERED. <sup>8</sup> "BLESSED IS THE MAN WHOSE SIN THE LORD WILL NOT TAKE INTO ACCOUNT."***

I believe this is a point of great crisis in our society today. We do not TRUST much any more, that God is who the Bible says He is. We are not willing to ENtrust ourselves to Him, or to surrender control of our lives to Him. For a while in this country, it was almost assumed that everyone would have a baseline dependence on the God of the Bible. No more. Some (many?) now think we are smarter than that. Some think the Bible must somehow be defective or inadequate as a channel for accurately revealing God—the TRUE God.

IV. Abraham is like us in that as his faith in the Lord GREW, so does our faith GROW. We aren't giants of faith the moment we begin to believe. The way it works is, the more you turn over to God, the more you see Him show up. When we are young, we're praying things like, "Lord give me this and that." As we grow in our faith a little more, we start praying, "Lord, would you lead me and show me more about you?" As we get stronger still in our faith, the Lord allows some trials to come—things we wouldn't sign up for maybe but that we see He is using to stretch us and grow us. Our faith is growing. Eventually, IF you grow in faith, you will be praying for big things, and far more than just your own comfort and freedom from pain, and convenience. You might even be like Dawson Trotman, the man who founded the Navigators, praying for whole nations! He prayed over a world map and asked God to send the Good News of Jesus Christ across borders and into hard places. You might be praying for people you know to be released from all kinds of bondages, and praying on FAITH, because it looks hopeless. You might be praying for God to bring YOU people to share Christ with, and for you to disciple. Now THAT is a prayer of faith!<sup>5</sup>

We are little different from Abraham really, except we are 4,000 years later and we have the whole Bible and we know much more of how God's plan for the world looks. But we are set with the same day-to-day challenges. We're on the road. We don't really know where we're going. We're strangers in a strange land. Like Abraham, we're **looking for a city which has foundations, whose architect and builder is God.**

Do you have faith in God? Are you interested in the subject of faith? Do you think about what it means to use a phrase like, the assurance of *things* hoped for, the conviction of things not seen? (Hebrews 11:1) Do you pursue the things that feed your faith, and are THOSE things the most important things in your schedule and in your week? Can you SEE if your faith is growing, and can you tell? I'm looking forward to meeting Abraham, and Sarah, and Isaac and Jacob. A big fellowship-supper is evidently coming, and if you have trusted the Lord Jesus Christ, you'll be there with those people. Bring Him in! Bring the Lord Jesus into your belief. Entrust yourself to Him, and SEE Him on the cross. You will never be disappointed.

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<sup>5</sup> The outline is taken from [http://executableoutlines.com/text/gen15\\_6.htm](http://executableoutlines.com/text/gen15_6.htm)

Notes from the Pulpit Ministry of Dartmouth Bible Church

Series: Faith (lesson 4) [Father's Day]

Scripture: 2<sup>nd</sup> Timothy 1:3-7

Speaker: Rev. Neil C. Damgaard, Th.M., D.Min.

Date: June 21<sup>st</sup>, 2009

## **Early Faith (part 1)**

### **2<sup>nd</sup> Timothy 1:3-7 (NASB)**

I thank God, whom I serve with a clear conscience the way my forefathers did, as I constantly remember you in my prayers night and day, <sup>4</sup> longing to see you, even as I recall your tears, so that I may be filled with joy. <sup>5</sup> For I am mindful of the sincere faith within you, which first dwelt in your grandmother Lois, and your mother Eunice, and I am sure that *it is* in you as well. <sup>6</sup> And for this reason I remind you to kindle afresh the gift of God which is in you through the laying on of my hands. <sup>7</sup> For God has not given us a spirit of timidity, but of power and love and discipline.

**Introduction** Paul's words to Timothy in 2<sup>nd</sup> Timothy 1 reveal NOT that Timothy was led to faith in Christ by his mother or grandmother. Bible preachers typically sentimentalize the text to say that. It isn't what Paul said. What he said was that a ***sincere faith*** (which we would take to mean a genuine and real belief in Jesus of Nazareth) DID dwell first in Grandma Lois (wouldn't you love to hear *her* testimony?) and then ALSO Eunice—Timothy's Mom—found real faith in Christ, too. Wonderfully, somehow—we are not told how—Timothy comes to trust Christ too. It is the first three-generation faith that we know of in the New Testament era. Paul somehow figured significantly in Timothy's getting started in the Christian life; somehow there was a connection between the gifts that Timothy had, and Paul's discipling and ordaining him. As to Timothy, we have one other verse about his background—from Luke-- Acts 16:1 ***...and he came also to Derbe and to Lystra. And behold, a certain disciple was there, named Timothy, the son of a Jewish woman who was a believer, but his father was a Greek...*** I wish we could say that Tim's Dad was a Christian because that would make this a perfect Father's Day passage! But we only have the connection with Mom and Grandma.

If you are a Christian, and you, yourself possess a saving knowledge and a real faith in Christ—in other words you're personally secure with God--then it seems to me we are interested in two things this morning as we bring up something I am calling "early faith"... (Some believers will say, "I don't care about children, I'm only interested in my own faith—they can worry about themselves." That is a crass and terribly short-sighted view of the free gift of eternal life, available to any and all at any time by the grace and mercy of God...) But if we DO have an interest in seeing faith occur early in people then I think we ponder two matters:

**a)** we are interested in *our* children, assuming you have children (and other children) finding a true and genuine faith in the Lord Jesus at as early an age as possible. That is a subject worthy of much thought, just for itself. What constitutes faith that occurs early? Are there influences or does it just randomly and magically happen?

**b)** What affect do parents and grandparents and siblings have ON that faith? Most people do not exist in a social vacuum. We are connected in families and neighborhoods and communities to lots of other people. The faith aspect of a child is not exempt from the effects of other people, especially parents and siblings.

There is a LINE between early faith, in and of itself, and the question of how adults come to bear on that faith... Faith itself, and who is influential (or not) in someone *coming* to faith, are two different things.

My first memory of anything religious was in attending our local Methodist church for Vacation Bible School. I don't remember much except being taken there and hearing about someone named Jesus. I was maybe six years old. From there, I grew up in a Lutheran church. Jesus was also mentioned there too with some regularity. Somehow in those years I think I came to figure, Jesus is real. And there were some real times of fear as a kid, that I remember praying in the night to Jesus. I do not mean to dishonor my parents in any way, but they were violent people. I was an only child. There were countless nights of conflict that I listened to, and I prayed deeply. Intensely. Desperately.

I remember one single Bible verse from my early years—I don't think it was from the Methodist VBS, I think it was from a Lutheran VBS... and feeling a sense of intrigue at that one verse. It was John 20:29 **Jesus said to him, "Because you have seen Me, have you believed? Blessed are they who did not see, and yet believed."** I remember thinking to myself at a young age, "that's pretty neat. I haven't seen Jesus yet but I believe." I don't remember any other Bible verses at all until nineteen years old when I memorized my first Topical Memory System verse, 2<sup>nd</sup> Corinthians 5:17 **Therefore if any man is in Christ, he is a new creature; the old things passed away; behold, new things have come.**

Do you remember when you started to believe in the Lord Jesus Christ? Perhaps you might ask, "Before I answer that question, tell me what you mean by "believe in the Lord Jesus Christ?" And that would be a fair pre-cursor. Personally I do not remember a time when I did NOT believe in the Lord Jesus, if by believe we mean know that He exists, and that He is something like how He is typically described and instructed about in typical 1960s Protestant Sunday

Schools. One 20something male responded to my Facebook inquiry about early faith this week:

“What I remember is one night when I as very little, my parents got me ready for bed and I got in bed and they came over to talk to me about being saved and not just believing but inviting Jesus into my heart. I understood what they were saying and never thought to question it. Sometimes I think ‘Well its better now that I’ve thought about it and confirmed it by putting my faith and belief to the test’, but now that I have, I sometimes wonder if it was better when I just believed it and never even thought for one millisecond ‘What if I’m wrong?’ or ‘What if my faith isn’t as strong as I think it is?’ Sometimes I miss the certainty--that absolute certainty you have as a child that you’re doing everything right, as far as faith in Jesus [is concerned.] I don’t question my faith anymore but I do every once in a while wonder if I’m doing it right or if I’m trying hard enough to be what Christ wants me to be.”

FAITH IS AN AWESOME THING. Ultimately, as I understand things, to believe, to have faith in God—a saving faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, is itself a gift from God. Ephesians 2:8,9 tells us that ***by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; <sup>9</sup> not as a result of works, that no one should boast.*** The whole process of salvation is “not of ourselves, it is the gift of God.” Which includes, the faith with which to believe. This is a great comfort to us. It can be exasperating when we want to *will* saving faith somehow INTO our children, or grandchildren. Paul uses an interesting phrase once, in 1<sup>st</sup> Tim.3:9: he refers to the ***mystery of the faith.*** Believing in Christ is in itself, not a simple or easily outlinable thing. In some sense, it is *mysterious*, not in any kind of dark way, but in the sense that it isn’t predictable or simplistic. It is always A GREAT WONDER when someone finds himself actually believing, in a transforming way, in Jesus Christ. It is joy and intrigue and excitement and hope and change of mind and change of perspective.

But that is not to say that we cannot contribute to it, or set a child up for it. In our reading in Deuteronomy 6 clearly it is God’s intention for us to do just that. We are to speak of the things of God and the law of God in our homes. We are to do it often, in a relaxed and routine way, and with the conviction that we AS PARENTS ourselves believe in God’s revelation.

## So what does early faith look like?

I. It is belief in the claims of Christ, in the facts of the Gospel records of Matthew, Mark, Luke and John.

It is the wonderment of a child. I think of Matthew 18:1-4

***At that time the disciples came to Jesus, saying, “Who then is greatest in the kingdom of heaven?”<sup>2</sup> And He called a child to Himself and set him before them,<sup>3</sup> and said, “Truly I say to you, unless you are converted and become like children, you shall not enter the kingdom of heaven.<sup>4</sup> “Whoever then humbles himself as this child, he is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven.***

And Mark 10:13-16

***Jesus said, Except you become as a little child you cannot enter into the kingdom of heaven. It is that wonderment and complete, almost assumed confidence in the written record of God’s Word that a child can feel. It is then imagination about those things.***

It seems to me that it is a time in the world and in life that is unravelling a good faith that many children will naturally find, left to themselves. It seems to me to be a time when the devil is blinding people and young people—a hard family environment or social conditions are conspiring to unravel a child’s love for God as has not been seen in centuries. It always seems like left alone, many more kids will come to faith in Christ.

II. Early faith then is instruction – taking it in, being teachable about, being interested in, at least to some extent, in

1. the facts of who God is,
2. what people are really and truly like and
3. why there is brokenness and sin in the world.
4. It is about how God sent His Son to be the redeemer and that redemption is available at any time.

III. Early faith is a simple sense and world-view and doctrine that the future is laid out already. That Jesus IS coming again and how this permeates and controls the Christian’s sense of purpose and drive in life. A belief in a good future should drown out all the cynicism and despair of the world’s messages and any other world view, really!

IV. Early faith is a personal trust in God, a clinging to Him by faith, that either does or doesn’t take root in a child’s heart. REAL early faith takes root, is there and survives even if the parents confuse it with legalism or wrong doctrine or even a toxic kind of view about the Christian life. Real faith CANNOT be legislated by although well-meaning Christian parents or grandparents who are a little bit crazy with desire—almost MANIC about it, for their children and grandchildren. All too often the parents or grandparents don’t REALLY have faith that God will rescue their kids. So they set out to do it themselves. They belittle any resistance in the child. They minimize the other “systems” of belief in the world in an intellectually dishonest way even, as though God cannot REALLY be trusted to bring the child to a natural faith in Jesus Christ.

## ***Early Faith (part 2)***

Proverbs 3:1-12 (NASB)

My son, do not forget my teaching, But let your heart keep my commandments; <sup>2</sup> For length of days and years of life, And peace they will add to you. <sup>3</sup> Do not let kindness and truth leave you; Bind them around your neck, Write them on the tablet of your heart. <sup>4</sup> So you will find favor and good repute In the sight of God and man. <sup>5</sup> Trust in the LORD with all your heart, And do not lean on your own understanding. <sup>6</sup> In all your ways acknowledge Him, And He will make your paths straight. <sup>7</sup> Do not be wise in your own eyes; Fear the LORD and turn away from evil. <sup>8</sup> It will be healing to your body, And refreshment to your bones. <sup>9</sup> Honor the LORD from your wealth, And from the first of all your produce; <sup>10</sup> So your barns will be filled with plenty, And your vats will overflow with new wine. <sup>11</sup> My son, do not reject the discipline of the LORD, Or loathe His reproof, <sup>12</sup> For whom the LORD loves He reproveth, Even as a father, the son in whom he delights.

**Introduction** If you could control the route your child's life is going to take, would it look like this? (If you don't have a kid, imagine this exercise...)

- Your kid does well in school, but not too well—they stay out of trouble for the most part,
- They maintain purity—they never find themselves in a situation where they are even eligible for an STD.
- They learn a trade, find a good job.
- They meet a good partner who is a strong Christian, who loves Jesus Christ. They move OUT of your house, but not *too* far away.
- They have a strong Christian walk, but they're not weird. They can laugh, they can appreciate the good things in the culture, they know how to have fun, and they're not culturally ignorant.
- They can relax—they're not too driven and not too money-oriented, but they're not in poverty either.
- They're healthy and fit and active and at the same time they can enjoy a good meal too--they're not looking down their nose because they're friends eat non-organic tomatoes.
- They have a church, which they attend each Sunday, and they do so because they want to, but they don't think THEIR church is the only orthodox church there IS, nor do they get a twitch in their eyelid if someone mentions another church across town.

If you could write your child's story, wouldn't it look kind of like that? I think that's kind of like what the Dad in Proverbs 3 is thinking... A life committed to the principles of Proverbs 3:1-12 will be A BALANCED AND HAPPY LIFE. A life like this--a *good life*—the best life possible—***must*** have faith securely grounded in it. It must have its own faith. It must have faith as the most

basic thing which energizes it and sustains it and makes the days worth living.

Last week we started talking about what I am calling “early faith.” By “early faith” we mean faith which might take root early in a boy or girl’s life. *We should not take it for granted that it automatically does, and we should not confuse the faith itself, with the process of parenting, for those are two very separate things.* We suggested that “early faith” would involve some basic elements

- an intellectual conviction that the claims of Christ are true;
- a wonderment AT HIM, (as a child can have so easily);
- it will be receptive to basic instruction about God, who man is, the existence of sin and what is to be done about it;
- a simple sense that the future is already laid out and that Jesus will eventually is going to come again; a personal trust in God and in the Gospel.

Today I want to suggest some of the

**Benefits of Early Faith** It is a wonderful thing when a young person makes a personal decision to be a Christian. They will probably not even realize the benefits that come to them...

1. GREATER STRENGTH WITH WHICH TO NEGOTIATE PUBERTY – Do you suppose and can you imagine that a young person could use the filling of the Holy Spirit to help them make their way through puberty? I don’t mean to say that puberty is a tribulation. But it can be hard, and if a young person has truly found the Lord, this can be a great strength to them when temptation arrives or if the forces that would work to unravel faith and conviction set in, in this area.
2. MORE TIME TO WALK IN A WAY PLEASING TO GOD – Hey, call me silly, but the sooner a person finds Christ and discovers their own true faith in Christ, the longer he has to lead a life which is pleasing to the Lord! This may seem thin unless the person comes to faith later in life! Those are the people who testify, “Oh, if I had only come to know this Savior earlier! What trouble and confusion it might have saved me, let alone the sin and disappointment I explored and might not have.”
3. SECURITY IF DEATH COMES EARLY – Believe me, it is far easier to “do” the funeral for a young person who has died IF that person was a true believer in Christ. We do not grieve in despair, and certainly not for the young person in glory.

4. IT IS EASIER TO ARRIVE AT – I actually think it is simpler to come to Christ when the mind is young, unencumbered with all the sophisticated doubts and conspiracies that the devil can weave. Before the mind gets too cynical or worried or distracted with the cares of life.

It seems to me that we are living in a time in the world that is unravelling a good faith that many children would naturally find, left to themselves. It seems to me to be a time when the devil is blinding people and young people—a hard family environment or social conditions are conspiring to unravel a child's love for God as has not been seen in centuries. It always seems to me that left alone, many more kids would come to faith in Christ—on the pure sense and logic of the need!

5. MORE TIME TO BE USED FOR THE KINGDOM – What IS the really wonderful life? Is it travel, and making lots of money and acquiring power and influence? Some young girls seem to think that the Wonderful Life, is making babies! Is that the Great Life? I would suggest that the best possible life any person, in any land, can live, is to be used FULLY by the Lord Jesus Christ, laying up treasures in heaven.
6. BETTER CHANCE OF AVOIDING THE DESTRUCTIVENESS OF SIN – Coming to Christ at a younger age doesn't immunize a person from sin and its power for destruction. But it sure evens up the chances for a good life, a BETTER life. I ask you, how many television shows do we watch which focus on the destructiveness of sin? There are many. If you could somehow buy something which would shield your child, or ANY child that you know, from the cancer, the radiation burn, the disease of sin, could any price be too high?

We also ponder

### **How a Dad and Mom Contribute to Early Faith**

1. BY THE **CONTENT –THE ACTUAL THEOLOGY--**OF WHAT HE OR SHE SAYS ABOUT GOD – This may seem obvious, but Dad and Mom's TALK about God, which reveals their beliefs, attitudes, assumptions and affections—are extremely influential in a kid's heart. Well, I grew up hearing God's name a lot! But never in direct conversation about the nature of God. I would have benefited if my Dad or Mom could have sat me down, or just been out somewhere naturally and talked about who God is? If you are a Christian Dad or Mom you can contribute perhaps more than anyone else in your child's life, by what you say about God. If you say nothing, or little, your child is short-changed. Young people--if you marry someone who will not

be equipped to talk well about God, you are short-changing your child or future child from what could be a great asset for early faith!

2. By demonstrating GRACE and PEACE and JOY in the Lord (what one 20Something called simply, “chill.”) This may be the most important thing, outside of the Gospel itself, that a kid NEEDS to pick up from his Dad and Mom. Unfortunately, I think these things are all too often LACKING in today’s evangelical-fundamental-Bible-believing homes. There’s LAW and RULES and GUILT. But little grace, peace and joy. Those are the things that are infectious and the things that a kid would really miss if they go out from the home into the world...
3. By his/her daily/routine conversation about God—this is different from #1 above. In this item I am thinking of the routine things about God’s faithfulness, whether He answers prayer and how, whether He is even interested in our prayers... The day-to-day things about God and our relationship, over years, is what really makes early faith a reasonable thing to a kid.
4. By his/her priorities—If Dad or Mom choose to work Sundays, choose to give little to the Lord’s work, make sports a higher priority than anything else, why does it surprise us if the kid decides, “Hmmm. Faith must not be that big of a deal. I’ll think about it later. It’s not too relevant to Dad and Mom after all, except at Christmas and Easter...”

Nothing affects a family like a short-term missions trip. I often wonder about the real effect on the target people when we go some place for a week or two, even on a cool team. But the effect it has within a family for PRIORITIES—everyone is drawn into a missions trip. Everyone is praying. Everyone is contributing in some way. If Dad or Mom say, “You know, I think the Lord wants me to go on one of these, it speaks volumes to the kids about the reality of faith and the urgency of the Gospel.

5. By his/her decision-making—the process of how Dads and Moms make decisions contributes to early faith, either positively or negatively. I don’t how a kid can be expected to trust God in their own decisions if Dad or Mom do not do so. On the other hand, if the kid sees Dad and Mom trusting God to honor His Word and His promises to them, it goes a long way to paving the way for the kid to think, “Hey, maybe I want that God too!”

6. By being observed as a man and woman of prayer. Kids know. They know if Dad and Mom believe their own talk. They know if we pray or not. If we do, and the child knows it, it is hard to ignore the power of prayer.
7. By modeling godly risk-taking for God—Faith is about trust and ultimately taking risks for the Lord. From one standpoint, our whole lives are a “risk.” We commit ourselves to Christ by faith, and we take the “risk” that we are fools! Our kids know the Christian life by how much they see us demonstrating faith—taking godly risks. It has an effect. If they don’t see us taking risks, sticking our necks out for Christ—they’re likely to decide its about religion, tradition, security and safe-guarding ourselves. How much risk-taking for God does your kid see you exercising?
8. By his or her behavior in crisis and under stress—When our children really see our faith, is when we are under stress or in crisis. How do we look then? Do we fall apart? That speaks loudly to children pondering whether to have faith in God or not. Do we hold up well, go quickly to prayer, rely on God’s promises, have the joy of the Lord? They see that too.

All of this goes with the hope that each of our children and those we minister to from around town, will COME to early faith. But what if they do not? Have we failed? Ultimately remember that salvation is of the Lord. We are partners with the Lord Jesus in the commission that He gave us. Do you remember exactly what that is? It is to make disciples, to baptize them and to teach them. It isn’t to save them, or even to keep them. The Great commission is largely about discipleship. We can’t control the heart, our own and much less our children’s hearts. That is the work of the Holy Spirit. But we CAN contribute a great deal to them, and we bow in worship when a child DOES come to faith in Christ!

As for the question, “When does my spiritual ministry to my children end?” “At 18?” “At 20?” That answer is that it never ends! I think I pray more for our children now than I ever have. Your role changes but your ministry for your kids and grandchildren never ends. You can pray for your children (and their future spouses!) as soon as they are conceived (and you know about it!)

May the Lord give our kids grace to come to Christ at an early age! May we help in the process and we will receive a great jolt of joy when we see Him using us in the process!

# Dartmouth Bible Notes

Notes from the Pulpit Ministry of Dartmouth Bible Church

Series: Faith (lesson 5)

Scripture: 1<sup>st</sup> Samuel 16:1-13

Speaker: Rev. Neil C. Damgaard, Th.M., D.Min.

Date: July 5<sup>th</sup>, 2009



## **Teenage Faith**

### 1 Samuel 16:1-13 (NASB)

NOW the LORD said to Samuel, "How long will you grieve over Saul, since I have rejected him from being king over Israel? Fill your horn with oil, and go; I will send you to Jesse the Bethlehemite, for I have selected a king for Myself among his sons." <sup>2</sup> But Samuel said, "How can I go? When Saul hears of it, he will kill me." And the LORD said, "Take a heifer with you, and say, 'I have come to sacrifice to the LORD.'" <sup>3</sup> "And you shall invite Jesse to the sacrifice, and I will show you what you shall do; and you shall anoint for Me the one whom I designate to you." <sup>4</sup> So Samuel did what the LORD said, and came to Bethlehem. And the elders of the city came trembling to meet him and said, "Do you come in peace?" <sup>5</sup> And he said, "In peace; I have come to sacrifice to the LORD. Consecrate yourselves and come with me to the sacrifice." He also consecrated Jesse and his sons, and invited them to the sacrifice. <sup>6</sup> Then it came about when they entered, that he looked at Eliab and thought, "Surely the LORD'S anointed is before Him." <sup>7</sup> But the LORD said to Samuel, "Do not look at his appearance or at the height of his stature, because I have rejected him; for God sees not as man sees, for man looks at the outward appearance, but the LORD looks at the heart." <sup>8</sup> Then Jesse called Abinadab, and made him pass before Samuel. And he said, "Neither has the LORD chosen this one." <sup>9</sup> Next Jesse made Shammah pass by. And he said, "Neither has the LORD chosen this one." <sup>10</sup> Thus Jesse made seven of his sons pass before Samuel. But Samuel said to Jesse, "The LORD has not chosen these." <sup>11</sup> And Samuel said to Jesse, "Are these all the children?" And he said, "There remains yet the youngest, and behold, he is tending the sheep." Then Samuel said to Jesse, "Send and bring him; for we will not sit down until he comes here." <sup>12</sup> So he sent and brought him in. Now he was ruddy, with beautiful eyes and a handsome appearance. And the LORD said, "Arise, anoint him; for this is he." <sup>13</sup> Then Samuel took the horn of oil and anointed him in the midst of his brothers; and the Spirit of the LORD came mightily upon David from that day forward. And Samuel arose and went to Ramah.

**Introduction** Sometimes I wish I could be a teenager again, to relive certain aspects that were so, well, alive. I loved the times—I remember in July of 1966 attending freshman orientation and on the way into the high school auditorium seeing a sign which read, "Welcome Class of 1970" and thinking, "Man, that's a long ways off!" The sports—in my high school it was football and wrestling... The music of the late 1960s, my friends (several of which I am still in touch with), the non-stop mystification about the opposite sex. I loved the freedom, having few cares in the summertime other than how to stay out of the folks' way and just get the lawn mowed on time --being just old enough to know the world is big, but not being quite old enough to worry too much about it. Sometimes I miss those days which even then, I knew would come to an end in 1970. Now, one wife, two children, three degrees and four jobs later I still think about being a teen...

In thinking about teenagers, it might seem preposterous to go to a person who was a teenager three thousand years ago and to try to seek something, to *understand* SOMETHING ABOUT FAITH IN TEENS... imagining someone so long ago in a culture completely different from ours! And we don't read much about about David, the Bethlehemite, in the Bible as to his teen years but we read a

great deal about him later. There are very interesting stories about this man after his teen years.

In 1<sup>st</sup> Chronicles 2:13-15a we read *and Jesse became the father of **Eliab** his first-born, then **Abinadab** the second, **Shimea** the third, <sup>14</sup> **Nethanel** the fourth, **Raddai** the fifth, <sup>15</sup> **Ozem** the sixth, **David** the seventh; <sup>16</sup> and their sisters were **Zeruiah** and **Abigail**... nine in all and David is the youngest son.*

My Dad's family would be *and Christian became the father of Helen, his first-born, then Emil the second, Ethel the third child, Harry Christian the fourth, Freda the fifth, Edith the sixth, Marvel the seventh and Martin the eighth, and youngest son.* By the time my Dad, Martin, came along, old Chris was 45 years old and the lore of my family tells that Chris didn't have a lot of interest or energy for the eighth child.

We read in 1<sup>st</sup> Samuel 16:6-13 <sup>6</sup> Then it came about when they entered, that he looked at Eliab and thought, "Surely the LORD'S anointed is before Him." <sup>7</sup> But the LORD said to Samuel, "Do not look at his appearance or at the height of his stature, because I have rejected him; for God sees not as man sees, for man looks at the outward appearance, but the LORD looks at the heart." <sup>8</sup> Then Jesse called Abinadab, and made him pass before Samuel. And he said, "Neither has the LORD chosen this one." <sup>9</sup> Next Jesse made Shammah pass by. And he said, "Neither has the LORD chosen this one." <sup>10</sup> Thus Jesse made seven of his sons pass before Samuel. But Samuel said to Jesse, "The LORD has not chosen these." <sup>11</sup> And Samuel said to Jesse, "Are these all the children?" And he said, "There remains yet the youngest, and behold, he is tending the sheep." Then Samuel said to Jesse, "Send and bring him; for we will not sit down until he comes here."

God had chosen David, Jesse's youngest, least of all.

<sup>12</sup> So he sent and brought him in. Now he was ruddy, with beautiful eyes and a handsome appearance. And the LORD said, "Arise, anoint him; for this is he." <sup>13</sup> Then Samuel took the horn of oil and anointed him in the midst of his brothers; and the Spirit of the LORD came mightily upon David from that day forward. And Samuel arose and went to Ramah.

David was the eighth and youngest son of Jesse from the kingly tribe of Judah. He was also a direct descendent of Ruth the Moabite. David began his life as a shepherd in Bethlehem. One day, the prophet Samuel called him out of the field and anointed him without the knowledge of the current king, Saul. David simply returned to his sheep. His first interaction with Saul came when the king was looking for someone to play music for him, and the king's attendant summoned the skilled David to play for him. Saul was pleased with David and kept him in his service as a musician.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> <http://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/jsource/biography/David.html>

I would like you to imagine being David, as a teenager. You're the youngest of eight children—low man on the “totem pole.” The sheep and the lambs are your job. All day, all night, baaahhhh, baaahhhh. You make a few tunes, and even make a little “guitar” for yourself... (Its interesting that the Psalms mention various kinds of lyres, stringed instruments, cymbals and trumpets and timbrel and pipe—sounds like “Chicago” to me!) No football. No intrigue among the doings of Bethlehem... Just *baaahhh, baaahhhh*... You would write some Hebrew, so you liked to pass the time some days by writing some poetry...

***Answer me when I call, O God of my righteousness...***

***Tremble and do not sin. Meditate in your heart on your bed and be still. Offer the sacrifices of righteousness and trust in the Lord.***

***You have put gladness in my heart, more than when grain and new wine abound...*** (from Psalm 3).

There was no way for David the teenager to know that a thousand years from now angels would flash into this very field and call in mighty unison, “Glory to God in the Highest!” Little did he know as a teenager, how God would consecrate his line to generate the very Messiah Himself! Line. Ha. He didn't even have a chick yet. Just the lambs and sheep... *baaahhhh*...

He knew who God was, and he wondered about those nasty Philistines, and how they *didn't* know Jehovah! Idiots... I know God. I wonder if He will ever do anything for me???

But in just a few years God Himself would send Samuel the prophet over to Bethlehem to find Jesse the kingly tribe of Judah. God had decided that a descendent of Ruth the Moabite would be the chosen king. Saul, Israel's king and her first king, was rejected by God for his disobedience. A new king would be anointed, who would have far-reaching effect. He would find it in his heart to craft a temple to God. He knew that God could not be contained in a temple—that's the non-sense of the Philistine superstition. And God knew that David knew that. But he loved his God. And he wanted to centralize worship. God would allow it. But not through him—there would be too much violence and blood in this man, still only a teenager...

IF TEENS COULD SEE HOW GOD CAN USE THEM. If they could have some foresight and see beyond just the Now and the I Want To Have Fun Today passion. If they could imagine how, given time, God can make them wonderful and deep thinkers and path-finders, maybe even mighty for him. And if they could see that, for those who DO have a small shepherd-like, song-writing faith in God, if they will just be faithful to Him—Oh sure, the peer pressure will come and like David, tempt him to go with the crown. But IF they can manage to be faithful to Him when they're young, how powerfully He can use them!

Paul wrote to Timothy, ***I remind you to kindle afresh the gift of God which is in you through the laying on of my hands*** (2<sup>nd</sup> Timothy 1:6). Timothy had been a young man when Paul began to work with him. And he needed to keep the fire lit, and to ***be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus*** (2:1). At some point, teens take over their own faith.

Do you know that the leaders of the Church of the Lord Jesus Christ in this country for the 2020s and 2030s are teenagers now, someplace?

- In 2009 they are 15 and 16 and 17 and in 2029 (you and I will be old geezers if we're even here), they will be 35 and 36 and 37.
- In 2039 you and I will *definitely* be elsewhere. But they will be 45 and 46 and 47. Some of them will be leaders of churches, and missionaries, and worship leaders and writers and scholars and yes, even tithers—oh they will have to become tithers because *our* giving days will be long over. Some will be mercy-givers, devoting their life to demonstrating the love of Jesus Christ to those who need His kindness.
- Some will become pastors and elders. (In 2039 Tom Brown will be 57 years old. He will be then what I am now...)

When David slew Goliath he was probably about 27 years old. He had all the rest of his remarkable events ahead of him, some sad, some good. He would **write lots more songs**. He would **unify the nation** of God's people. He would **lead military victories**. He would **annex Jerusalem** and would **envision building a permanent Temple** to Jehovah. He would die around 67 years old and pass the kingdom to his son, Solomon, who would build the first Temple in Jerusalem.

I'm sure songs came back to him in later years, from his teen years maybe, that later became big-time praise songs under his administration...

Give thanks to the Lord our God and King  
His love endures forever  
For He is good, He is above all things  
His love endures forever  
Sing praise, sing praise

***Ascribe to the LORD, O [mighty ones] families of the peoples,  
Ascribe to the LORD glory and strength.***

***Ascribe to the LORD the glory due His name  
Worship His name in the beauty of His holiness!***

From 1<sup>st</sup> Chronicles 16:28,29

I am in wonder WHEN A TEENAGER DISCOVERS HIS OWN FAITH. Tom tells me you can really see it when a teen goes away from home—when they discover their own belief and passion for the Lord in another place, outside the familiar and predictable context. I think that’s a good observation. Teens are at a critical place. They are susceptible to the temptations of the world, and sometimes give in, but they are eligible to make a SIGNIFICANT decision in their lives when they’re in the mid to late teen years. I didn’t make that decision, but I have watched a good number of teens here over the years make it—for Jesus Christ. Somehow, David made it. He went on to great things, though not without trouble in his life. His faith wasn’t Easy Street. It wasn’t about just having fun and feeling good all the time. He got chased around the country side, learned the hard way some things about women, probably took a few hits. Was scared, tired, humiliated, sorrowful, lonely. But his faith sustained him. And it started when he was a teenager.

To our teens today, what do you think about God? Do you think He is just a myth? Do you think He is real? Do you think He will enable you to do cool things if you place your life in His hands? Do you think He has a specific plan for your life? Do you think He will bless you and give you good things, maybe some of the things you most deeply long for? Do you think He can use you to make an impact among your friends without looking like a strange person? Do you think He can give you your own identity that is distinct from your parents? Do you think He loves you? Do you think He is worth seeking?

Since 1976 I have been interested in how the Christian faith takes up residence inside of a teenager. I was only 23 myself, but a life-long interest in teens began with our working with a Word of Life club in McLean, Virginia.

Much can be said about young people today, in particular, teenagers. We wish to focus today on the single matter of their faith, as it may or may not exist. Faith competes with several other intense pursuits in teens: acceptance and coolness, a rapidly developing sexuality and desire for companionship, peer pressure, identity, academic profile, place in the family and/or the desire to detach from the family, and fun. These are the things that are vying with each other for the teen’s attention. Sufficient to say, it isn’t easy being a teenager and dealing with all these things demanding our attention, sifting them, balancing them, talking about them.

The Bible doesn’t give nearly the attention to teenagers as we do. I know of no place explicitly written about teenagers, unless you consider the Proverbs and their teaching on wisdom and discretion, to be aimed at teens. The Bible seems to assume that there are teens around, but it treats them the same as everyone else: they are responsible for their own choices, and that is that. And yet we are faced today with a great need to minister to our teens. And it is important that

we give some thought to what faith looks like in a teenager—being as it competes with such powerful other concerns. Here’s something from James Dobson’s May, 2009 *Family News* letter:

If you’ve been paying attention to today’s youth culture, and especially if you’re currently raising kids, you are aware that they are growing up in an environment awash with materialism, illicit sexuality, violence, drugs, cutting, piercing, eating disorders, teen suicide and other symptoms of depression and despair. Millions of teens are confused and overwhelmed by the pressures they face. To cite just one example, a phenomenon that the media has dubbed “sexting” has emerged in the last few years, in which children as young as middle-school age are taking nude photos or videos of themselves or while engaging in sexual activity. Then they send them to their peers via cell phone. According to a nationwide survey by the National Campaign to Prevent Teen and Unplanned Pregnancy, 19 percent of teen guys and girls have engaged in this dangerous activity without knowing they may be creating and distributing child pornography! I tremble for our society when I consider what we have permitted to happen to our children.<sup>7</sup>

What I’m about to say, probably doesn’t apply to all teenagers. But it probably applies to 99.7%. Teens are pretty *about themselves*. It is the time where the self-focus part of the old nature, blends with a heavy dose of hormones, cooking at 425° for two hours. And that is how it is designed to be, because during the teen years a person finds out who they are, what they believe and eventually that the world does not revolve around them.

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<sup>7</sup> *Family News* From Dr. James Dobson, May 2009, quoting [http://www.thenationalcampaign.org/sextech/PDF/SexTech\\_Summary.pdf](http://www.thenationalcampaign.org/sextech/PDF/SexTech_Summary.pdf)

# Dartmouth Bible Notes

Notes from the Pulpit Ministry of Dartmouth Bible Church

Series: Faith (lesson 6)

Scripture: Luke 1:39-56

Speaker: Rev. Neil C. Damgaard, Th.M., D.Min.

Date: July 12<sup>th</sup>, 2009



## ***Teenage Faith (part 2)***

Luke 1:39-56 (NASB)

<sup>39</sup> Now at this time Mary arose and went with haste to the hill country, to a city of Judah, <sup>40</sup> and entered the house of Zacharias and greeted Elizabeth. <sup>41</sup> And it came about that when Elizabeth heard Mary's greeting, the baby leaped in her womb; and Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit. <sup>42</sup> And she cried out with a loud voice, and said, "Blessed among women *are* you, and blessed *is* the fruit of your womb! <sup>43</sup> "And how has it *happened* to me, that the mother of my Lord should come to me? <sup>44</sup> "For behold, when the sound of your greeting reached my ears, the baby leaped in my womb for joy. <sup>45</sup> "And blessed *is* she who believed that there would be a fulfillment of what had been spoken to her by the Lord." <sup>46</sup> And Mary said: "My soul exalts the Lord, <sup>47</sup> And my spirit has rejoiced in God my Savior. <sup>48</sup> "For He has had regard for the humble state of His bonds slave; For behold, from this time on all generations will count me blessed. <sup>49</sup> "For the Mighty One has done great things for me; And holy is His name. <sup>50</sup> "AND HIS MERCY IS UPON GENERATION AFTER GENERATION TOWARD THOSE WHO FEAR HIM. <sup>51</sup> "He has done mighty deeds with His arm; He has scattered *those who were* proud in the thoughts of their heart. <sup>52</sup> "He has brought down rulers from *their* thrones, And has exalted those who were humble. <sup>53</sup> "HE HAS FILLED THE HUNGRY WITH GOOD THINGS; AND SENT AWAY THE RICH EMPTY-HANDED. <sup>54</sup> "He has given help to Israel His servant, In remembrance of His mercy, <sup>55</sup> As He spoke to our fathers, To Abraham and his offspring forever." <sup>56</sup> And Mary stayed with her about three months, and *then* returned to her home.

**Introduction** She was just a young teenager in an unimportant town called Nazareth, in the hills of Galilee. She came from a poor but honorable family--descendants of Israel's greatest king, David. She'd been carefully trained in the Scriptures and knew great portions of them by heart. She knew that God had promised to send the Messiah, One who would rescue her people Israel and be their king. For four hundred years, God had been silent. No new Scripture was written; no prophets had spoken.

Every Jewish girl prayed to be the mother of this Messiah. Mary loved God and wanted to serve him with all of her heart. But she was just a poor girl in an insignificant town, from a humble family, with no great expectations that her life was going to be any different from her mother's or from that of the other women in her town. In her day a girl was betrothed when she reached puberty and it usually was a year before she was married. Mary was betrothed to Joseph. They would be married within a year and she was spending this last year in her home learning how to be a good Jewish wife and mother. Joseph was a carpenter,

hard-working and responsible. He was a kind man, and the more Mary knew him the more she appreciated his sensitivity and his gentleness toward her. Life would be good with Joseph. She was so glad that her parents had made such a good match for her.<sup>8</sup>

Then came the CHALLENGES—first, a visitation by the angel Gabriel who foretells that Jesus would be born to HER, a virgin, conceived by the very Spirit of God. What would this do to the mind of a young teenage girl? And then there is the challenge of Joseph not understanding. And then after Jesus is born, they must flee to Egypt for a time. All of these amazing things happening to a young teen girl from Nazareth... From all we know, her reaction to all of this is to absorb it in faith.

If I could have my way,

- every teenager that I meet would hear the Gospel clearly, understand it, embrace it in awesome joy, and commit their lives to a lifetime of seeking and serving Jesus...
- none would confuse it with something else;
- none would refuse it as a way to grab control of their own lives and keep control from their parents;
- none would decide that the pleasures of this world are better;
- none would look at the miracles of Jesus (stilling the storm, making dead people alive, feeding 5,000 people out of next to nothing, talking to guys that have been dead for 600 or like, 1,400 years, coming back from the dead Himself) and yawn.
- every teenager that I know would come to trust in Jesus Christ for their eternity, would love Him for doing what He did for us, and would make a commitment to live for Him, whatever that might mean...SO in love with Him they would be...

Since 1976 I have been interested in how the Christian faith takes up residence inside of a teenager. In 1976 I was only 23 myself, but a life-long interest in teens began with our working with a Word of Life club in McLean, Virginia.

Much can be said about young people today, in particular, teenagers.

- Sometimes they truly do possess a saving faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, they have really been saved, they have found God. That is a wondrous thing!
- Sometimes they just think they have, but they really haven't yet.
- Sometimes they have not yet found faith in God though they go to church.
- Other times, they *not only* have no personal belief or trust in God, they hate Him—because of some calamity in their lives, or some misconception or misinformation of who He is, or demon-possession even.

But even if a teenager has faith in the Lord, that faith competes with several other intense pursuits in the lives of teenagers:

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<sup>8</sup> Kraft, Vickie, *Mary, Most Blessed of Women* <http://bible.org/seriespage/mary-most-blessed-women>

- the urgency to have fun **OR** to compete—the drive and industry for FUN and COMPETITION are huge in our society; foreign to first century Nazareth, I think...
- acceptance and coolness. This is also huge. It is why gangs happen. It is why teens start smoking and doing drugs. It is why all kinds of boundaries are abandoned. “I must be cool. I must be perceived as cool. And I MUST gain acceptance by whom I perceive to be my friends...”
- a rapidly developing sexuality and the world’s propaganda about this,
- plus the desire for companionship,
- peer pressure,
- identity,
- academic profile,
- place in the family and/or the desire to detach from the family.

Sufficient to say, it isn’t easy being a teenager and dealing with all these things demanding our attention, sifting them, balancing them, talking about them.

The Bible doesn’t give nearly the attention to teenagers as we do. I know of no place explicitly written about teenagers, unless you consider the Proverbs and their teaching on wisdom and discretion, to be aimed at teens. The Bible seems to assume that there are teens around, but it treats them the same as everyone else: they are responsible for their own choices, and that is that. And yet we are faced today with a great need to minister to our teens. I think they are our greatest challenge as a church, to know how to speak to them, engage them with the call to discipleship and build them up in the faith. NO AGE GROUP TODAY IS SO PRONE TO ABANDONING FAITH IN JESUS CHRIST, AS DO TEENAGERS... As an illustration what we’re up against, here’s something from James Dobson’s May, 2009 *Family News* letter:

If you’ve been paying attention to today’s youth culture, and especially if you’re currently raising kids, you are aware that they are growing up in an environment awash with materialism, illicit sexuality, violence, drugs, cutting, piercing, eating disorders, teen suicide and other symptoms of depression and despair. Millions of teens are confused and overwhelmed by the pressures they face. To cite just one example, a phenomenon that the media has dubbed “sexting” has emerged in the last few years, in which children as young as middle-school age are taking nude photos or videos of themselves or while engaging in sexual activity. Then they send them to their peers via cell phone. According to a nationwide survey by the National Campaign to Prevent Teen and Unplanned Pregnancy, 19 percent of teen guys and girls have engaged in this dangerous activity without knowing they may be creating and distributing child pornography! I tremble for our society when I consider what we have permitted to happen to our children.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> *Family News From Dr. James Dobson*, May 2009, quoting [http://www.thenationalcampaign.org/sextech/PDF/SexTech\\_Summary.pdf](http://www.thenationalcampaign.org/sextech/PDF/SexTech_Summary.pdf)

Getting back to Mary of Nazareth... Were her challenges any less than today's teens? No, she didn't have any technology at all. She had lived her whole short life in a completely agrarian town—and probably knew little of the big world out there. And while blessed with the great privilege of being Messiah's mother, (consider [Luke 1:46-55](#))

it also involved great heartache. She would have to watch Him be rejected, as Simeon implied in [2:35](#)... She would bear a child as a teenager, watch her son grow up into a marvelous man. But only three years into His teaching career she would watch Him die on a Roman cross.

This young woman would have her whole life defined by her Son. Joseph vanishes from history, but evidently Mary lived a long life and tradition tells us that she died in Ephesus, under the care of the apostle John. If you learned at 15 years old that the meaning of your life is already mapped out by God, and that your job will be to serve that plan, how would you feel about that? Some would say, "Yes Lord, yes Lord, Yes Yes, Lord." But others would struggle with that. They would respond, "It's MY life."

What challenges to faith do our teens face? How can we help them? What can they deserve from us? They need to hear the Gospel from us, uncluttered with our additions. It needs to be clear. We need to provide them with frequent opportunities to make a decision. We need to be relaxed and un-uptight. If there is one hindrance that I hear over and over it is the kids' very parents who are so uptight and nervous and rigid that the simple process of becoming a Christian gets side-tracked by the very people who most want it to happen! Finally, we need to pray and wait on the Lord—and ALL of us are evangelists when it comes to our teens. Any of us should be ready, if an open door presents itself, to help a teen come to Christ. That means there is a free atmosphere to talk, and that we LISTEN!

We wish we knew more about Mary. But at least we can say she stands as an excellent example of a godly teenager.

It is possible for a teenager to have a vital faith, and a vital walk of faith with the Lord. There is so much to live for when you know the Lord Jesus Christ! There is no one better to look to for purpose, example and for salvation. There is no other name under heaven by which men must be saved ([Acts 4:12](#)).

## Luke 1:46-55 (NASB)

<sup>46</sup> And Mary said: "My soul exalts the Lord, <sup>47</sup> And my spirit has rejoiced in God my Savior. <sup>48</sup> "For He has had regard for the humble state of His bondservant; For behold, from this time on all generations will count me blessed. <sup>49</sup> "For the Mighty One has done great things for me; And holy is His name. <sup>50</sup> "AND HIS MERCY IS UPON GENERATION AFTER GENERATION TOWARD THOSE WHO FEAR HIM. <sup>51</sup> "He has done mighty deeds with His arm; He has scattered *those who were* proud in the thoughts of their heart. <sup>52</sup> "He has brought down rulers from *their* thrones, And has exalted those who were humble. <sup>53</sup> "HE HAS FILLED THE HUNGRY WITH GOOD THINGS; AND SENT AWAY THE RICH EMPTY-HANDED. <sup>54</sup> "He has given help to Israel His servant, In remembrance of His mercy, <sup>55</sup> As He spoke to our fathers, To Abraham and his offspring forever."

# Dartmouth Bible Notes

Notes from the Pulpit Ministry of Dartmouth Bible Church

Series: Faith (lesson 7)

Scripture: 2<sup>nd</sup> Timothy 4

Speaker: Rev. Neil C. Damgaard, Th.M., D.Min.

Date: August 2<sup>nd</sup>, 2009



## **Old Faith**

2 Timothy 4 (NASB)

I SOLEMNLY charge *you* in the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who is to judge the living and the dead, and by His appearing and His kingdom: <sup>2</sup> preach the word; be ready in season *and* out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort, with great patience and instruction. <sup>3</sup> For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but *wanting* to have their ears tickled, they will accumulate for themselves teachers in accordance to their own desires; <sup>4</sup> and will turn away their ears from the truth, and will turn aside to myths. <sup>5</sup> But you, be sober in all things, endure hardship, do the work of an evangelist, fulfill your ministry. <sup>6</sup> For I am already being poured out as a drink offering, and the time of my departure has come. <sup>7</sup> I have fought the good fight, I have finished the course, I have kept the faith; <sup>8</sup> in the future there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will award to me on that day; and not only to me, but also to all who have loved His appearing. <sup>9</sup> Make every effort to come to me soon; <sup>10</sup> for Demas, having loved this present world, has deserted me and gone to Thessalonica; Crescens *has gone* to Galatia, Titus to Dalmatia. <sup>11</sup> Only Luke is with me. Pick up Mark and bring him with you, for he is useful to me for service. <sup>12</sup> But Tychicus I have sent to Ephesus. <sup>13</sup> When you come bring the cloak which I left at Troas with Carpus, and the books, especially the parchments. <sup>14</sup> Alexander the coppersmith did me much harm; the Lord will repay him according to his deeds. <sup>15</sup> Be on guard against him yourself, for he vigorously opposed our teaching. <sup>16</sup> At my first defense no one supported me, but all deserted me; may it not be counted against them. <sup>17</sup> But the Lord stood with me, and strengthened me, in order that through me the proclamation might be fully accomplished, and that all the Gentiles might hear; and I was delivered out of the lion's mouth. <sup>18</sup> The Lord will deliver me from every evil deed, and will bring me safely to His heavenly kingdom; to Him *be* the glory forever and ever. Amen. <sup>19</sup> Greet Prisca and Aquila, and the household of Onesiphorus. <sup>20</sup> Erastus remained at Corinth, but Trophimus I left sick at Miletus. <sup>21</sup> Make every effort to come before winter. Eubulus greets you, also Pudens and Linus and Claudia and all the brethren. <sup>22</sup> The Lord be with your spirit. Grace be with you.

**Introduction** Most things when they get old, get worse. Cars wear out. The human body starts betraying itself. Relationships become boring after a long time. Trends become clichés. Aging is a strange thing.

- When you're young you pretty much assume you're indestructible. You live for today, maybe for next week. When a person becomes old, weird things happen. The body develops a will of its own, usually bent on annoying the mind!
- Old people have a lot to teach and pass on, but few younger people have the patience to listen.
- For the young, life can be so complicated—rushing around, trying the juggle so many responsibilities. Old people often revert to a very simple view of life. “Ahhh—life. Yes, its nice.”
- For the young money and sex are of great interest. To the old, they are both things of memory or little more than stories of the past.
- For the young, the priorities are fun, achievement, accumulation, exciting relationships, trying on new routines and ideas all the time. For the old, the priorities are getting through the day without a mishap, maintaining a routine that is comfortable, and “is there enough orange juice left in the carton for my evening glass?”

I'm interested in the progress of faith; real faith. I'm interested in what it looks like in a young person, and I'm interested in what it looks like in an old person. I've *been* a young person. I remember believing that Jesus was there as a child, and needing a sense of His care from time to time. And I remember coming to a powerful conviction of my own sin, and my need for a God who was REALLY there when I was 19 when faith really happened for me. I remember being a 20Something and working to develop my faith. I remember being a 30Something and allowing my faith to bring me to a city that I'd never heard of. As a 40 Something I was a Daddy and my faith grew as I began to pray for our children. Faith grows over the years, and God stretches us and opens new doors of opportunity to trust Him. Sitting in Marisol's this week one afternoon, I was surrounded by 26 20Somethings...it was noisy, full of life, foxy, rushing in and rushing out. I realized again, that I'm not a 20Something anymore. Few of those that I watched have much faith in God, I suspect.

But I'm still a little out of my territory when speaking about old people. I am intrigued about how faith works in young people with all the doubts and uncertainties, when most of life still lies in front of them. But I am also intrigued by what faith *becomes* in an old person, who looks back on most his life; who has accumulated a wealth of memories and experiences.

Which brings us to the last known writing of Paul—2<sup>nd</sup> Timothy 4. In that passage we have a glimpse of “old faith,” at least in one man. Little is known about the early life of the apostle Paul, except that he was from Tarsus, which is now in southern Turkey. He was raised as a Jew and studied under the great teacher Gamaliel. He was born around the year A.D. 2 and at about 33 years old becomes a follower of Jesus Christ as we read about in the Book of Acts. At

around 65 years old he is nearing the end of his life, in Rome, as a prisoner. It was reported that he was beheaded, outside the Mamertine Prison in Rome where apparently both he and Peter were imprisoned at different times.

In 1997 American males had a life expectancy of 74 years old but only as far back as 1900 American males could be expected to live to be 48 years old, on average. In the first century if a man lived to be 40 years old he was considered old, and many said that 30 was about all a man could expect to live. Paul was around 65 when we wrote his second letter to Timothy. What were his concerns as he wrote the end of that letter?

- Clear thinking about what is important and how believers need to be aggressive speakers into the culture
- Watchfulness for Timothy
- Urgency to exhort and warn
  
- Still teaching a Christian world-view
  
- Still has human needs
- Strong feelings about significant people in his life
- Affection for friends
- God to be the bringer of justice and mercy
- God was his defender
- Full expectation to arrive at home

If you are older, what is your faith about? Are you still thinking clearly about what is important? Are you watching your “Timothys” and exhorting them to be sober in all things, to endure hardship and to fulfill their ministries?

Are you interested in passing on what you have learned to younger people? There are opportunities to pass along lessons you learned to younger people. That means somehow finding a way to be around them, to be near them. They need to realize that God will defend them when they suffer for doing right. They need to know that in the future there is laid up for all those who love His appearing, a crown of righteousness. I am not sure what that IS exactly but whatever it is, it is of immense value and importance.

At least from this passage of Scripture, old faith isn't about just waiting to die. It is about passing ON the faith into whatever people you have access. I once heard Professor Hendricks talk about how EVERY Christian needs in their life a Paul—a mentor; a Barnabas—a peer/friend; and a Timothy—someone who YOU are building the faith into. It is a good thing to start praying about—who can

YOU give the benefit of what you've learned over the years? If you're an older saint with your faith still intact and growing, you have a great deal to offer which the younger generation GREATLY NEEDS!!

If you're a young person, which one of the older saints might God use to minister to you? You need help. You need wisdom. You need perspective and ideas about how to solve problems in your life. You need what some of these older saints have in great abundance.

**OLD FAITH IS A FAITH WHICH SEEKS TO PASS ITSELF ON.** It doesn't just sit and stagnate. It gets up, prays for open doors for whom to minister to, and it goes and blesses a younger generation of believers.

Think about it. Pray about it. Ask God to speak to you, those of you with a mature and well-seasoned faith in the Lord Jesus Christ.

# Dartmouth Bible Notes

Notes from the Pulpit Ministry of Dartmouth Bible Church

Series: Faith (lesson 9)

Scripture: James 2:18

Speaker: Rev. Neil C. Damgaard, Th.M., D.Min.

Date: August 16<sup>th</sup>, 2009



## ***Works As Evidence of Faith***

### **James 2:14-26 (NASB)**

What use is it, my brethren, if a man says he has faith, but he has no works? Can that faith save him? <sup>15</sup> If a brother or sister is without clothing and in need of daily food, <sup>16</sup> 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? <sup>17</sup> Even so faith, if it has no works, is dead, *being* by itself. <sup>18</sup> 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.” <sup>19</sup> You believe that God is one. You do well; the demons also believe, and shudder. <sup>20</sup> But are you willing to recognize, you foolish fellow, that faith without works is useless? <sup>21</sup> Was not Abraham our father justified by works, when he offered up Isaac his son on the altar? <sup>22</sup> You see that faith was working with his works, and as a result of the works, faith was perfected; <sup>23</sup> and the Scripture was fulfilled which says, “AND ABRAHAM BELIEVED GOD, AND IT WAS RECKONED TO HIM AS RIGHTEOUSNESS,” and he was called the friend of God. <sup>24</sup> You see that a man is justified by works, and not by faith alone. <sup>25</sup> And in the same way was not Rahab the harlot also justified by works, when she received the messengers and sent them out by another way? <sup>26</sup> For just as the body without *the* spirit is dead, so also faith without works is dead.

**Introduction** Eugene Petersen paraphrased it this way in *The Message*:

Dear friends, do you think you’ll get anywhere in this if you learn all the right words but never do anything? Does merely talking about faith indicate that a person really has it? <sup>15</sup> For instance, you come upon an old friend dressed in rags and half-starved <sup>16</sup> and say, “Good morning, friend! Be clothed in Christ! Be filled with the Holy Spirit!” and walk off without providing so much as a coat or a cup of soup—where does that get you? <sup>17</sup> Isn’t it obvious that God-talk without God-acts is outrageous nonsense? <sup>18</sup> I can already hear one of you agreeing by saying, “Sounds good. You take care of the faith department, I’ll handle the works department.” Not so fast. You can no more show me your works apart from your faith than I can show you my faith apart from my works. Faith and works, works and faith, fit together hand in glove. <sup>19</sup> Do I hear you professing to believe in the one and only God, but then observe you complacently sitting back as if you had done something wonderful? That’s just great. Demons do that, but what good does it do them? <sup>20</sup> Use your heads! Do you suppose for a minute that you can cut faith and works in two and not end up with a corpse on your hands? <sup>21</sup> Wasn’t our ancestor Abraham “made right with God by works” when he placed his son Isaac on the sacrificial altar? <sup>22</sup> Isn’t it obvious that faith and works are yoked partners, that faith expresses itself in works? That the works are “works of faith”? <sup>23</sup> The full meaning of “believe” in the Scripture sentence, “Abraham believed God and was set right with God,” includes his action. It’s that mesh of believing and acting that got Abraham named “God’s friend.” <sup>24</sup> Is it not evident that a person is made right with God not by a barren faith but by faith fruitful in works? <sup>25</sup> The same with Rahab, the Jericho harlot. Wasn’t her action in hiding God’s spies and helping them escape—that seamless unity of *believing* and *doing*—what counted with God? <sup>26</sup> The very moment you separate body and spirit, you end up with a corpse. Separate faith and works and you get the same thing: a corpse.

The Bible verse for today is simply what James wrote in 2:18 which says, ***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.”*** Showing faith BY works—not TO impress people, but just a natural outgrowth or outflow of genuine, heart-felt trust and dependence on Christ...

When a person becomes truly and genuinely born again, saved, regenerated; when they personally come to believe in Jesus Christ as Savior AND Lord, and they surrender their lives to Him, and really want Him to be noticeable and felt in their hearts and minds and daily lives, **WHAT KINDS OF NEW ACTIVITIES** accompany that experience of new life? Anything? Does that person start to do *new* things, or does he start to do old things in a new way? Is there any visible addition of activity to the person’s lifestyle?

Often, and regardless of what country he is in, a new convert to Christ finds himself beginning to go to church or at least to *some* fellowship or gathering of other Christians. Why does he go? That’s a good question. When I first came to Christ I was very reluctant to attend church. I declined the invitation from several friends to attend their church with them for a number of weeks, week-after-week, “Thank you, No. I don’t care to start going to church.” I still imagined it would be boring or repressive or artificial in some way (we used to use the word, “plastic.”) I knew I had come to believe in Jesus Christ in a new way, but I didn’t all of a sudden want the church scene. But to get the guys off my back, I finally consented to attend Sunday School one week. But I found that I loved it. And I’ve been attending both Sunday School and worship ever since.

A number of other new things started happening. In addition to this “going to church thing” which I soon discovered I had a strange taste for, my friends around the dorm invited me to Bible studies and evangelism outreaches. We had rallies with song-singing, and retreats and “discipleship groups” where we talked about actually memorizing individual verses of the Bible. And there were prayer groups, which (and I thought this was strange at first) did nothing other than sort of “round robin” praying out loud and for all kinds of things which they called “prayer requests.” New activities...

Now let me ask you, are these the kinds of works which James is talking about in chapter 2 of his letter? The works that James means, without which faith is just words, he says, are **WORKS OF SERVICE**. Works of service are tasks done to help other people, motivated by your own love for Christ, a sense of obedience inside you to various things He said, and by the compassion of God within us, having been loved by Him ourselves! Works of service are things that are needed by other people—they are not just a waste of time. They do not

primarily benefit US, but as we do things for other Christians it is a ministry and for non-Christians it is a testimony. People teach Sunday School, they serve on teams, they host people in their homes and show hospitality, they give rides and provide food and clothing, they run Vacation Bible Schools and set up short-term missions trips, they mow the church grass and keep up the building, and serve in Christian camps or on regional teams. They go prepare food and then serve it at the Salvation Army and they visit families at Christmas time whose Dads or Moms are in prison. They go to Cuba and other scary places to help the Christians there. They do good works of service because Jesus Himself lived as a servant, washed the disciples' feet in the upper room, and CALLS us to serve and because we love Him that much.

But I believe there are other kinds of good works, too.

- **WORKS OF DEVOTION.** These are the things I mentioned earlier, like attending church and the practice of Christian disciplines of Bible reading and memorization, going to Bible studies and prayer groups, taking time to go to a retreat or a conference. The motivation for works of devotion is just a love of the things of God, and a hunger for them.
- **WORKS OF RESCUE.** If I reach out to assist someone who is in danger, this is a work of rescue—it can take dramatic form as in hiding someone in persecution or becoming a foster parent even if there isn't much remuneration. Or it might be a work of rescue that simply preserves something good—helping with a wildlife preserve or an animal rescue organization. It might be helping with the pro-life movement and rescuing babies from abortion. The motivation for works of rescue is compassion and a sense of real urgency.
- **WORKS OF ENDURANCE UNDER PERSECUTION.** Enduring persecution is one of the hardest things a Christian might ever have to do, and it is interesting that in 2<sup>nd</sup> Timothy 3:12 the apostle Paul wrote that ***all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will be persecuted.*** That verse has always kind of haunted me... If I am ever called to endure persecution or if you are, your motivation to do so will be courage and determination to never bring shame to the name of the Lord Jesus. Be assured, if we endure, it is a good work.
- Finally, there are **WORKS OF KINGDOM-BUILDING.** Our conference is bent on planting new churches. I know, I know... Who cares about that? We care about our church, right? But when we engage in projects and ministries beyond our own church we are motivated by vision for the kingdom of the Lord Jesus Christ. And there is an excitement about contributing something to that kingdom. We tend to think of the kingdom in terms of inner qualities and inner sanctification, and indeed it is. Jesus must reign from the inside out. But the apostles were not satisfied to just sit and become sanctified. Most of them got up, got out of “Dodge” and spread the Gospel as far as their legs would carry them.

Kingdom-building efforts may involve serving on a building committee, or working in Christian education at a Christian college or seminary. It may involve missions of all kinds and using our spiritual gifts to support dreams and plans far bigger than our own church. There are plenty of Christians who have been motivated to give their BEST energies to projects that are much more far-reaching than my own little fellowship.

When a person genuinely meets the Lord Jesus Christ, they cannot help but be changed and affected. C.S. Lewis said, "Christianity, if false, is of no importance, and if true, of infinite importance. The only thing it cannot be is moderately important." Once a person meets Him truly, he or she is affected for life. We WANT to serve Him. We want to use our best energies to work for a God who would give up His only Son for us on the cross. And we want to use our best energies for a man who would sacrifice Himself for us out of love.

Good works that really evidence saving faith in the Lord Jesus Christ are **PLANNED BECAUSE OF A VISION OF HIM**. Paul heard His voice, and heard Him say he would be sent to the Gentiles. With all Paul suffered and endured he never lost sight of Jesus Christ. He had a vision that drove him to want to use his very last calorie of energy to take the Good News of Jesus Christ to one more person who had not yet heard about the free gift of eternal life. We also plan good things because we see Jesus. This church was planned in the minds and hearts of a very few people in 1962 and early '63 because of a vision of Jesus Christ.

Good works that really evidence saving faith in the Lord Jesus Christ are **DONE**, BECAUSE OF A LOVE FOR JESUS AND A DETERMINATION TO GET THEM DONE. It is not ten years since we built this building, but I am still amazed that we completed it. There were many hindrances along the way. We had to have a little courage to plan when we had not money yet. We had to wait for town sewage to be put in. Then when we finally broke ground we hit a roadblock with the kind of dirt that was under the surface and we had to spend an additional \$42,000 for good dirt before one single form could be laid in the ground. When we took occupancy (December 12<sup>th</sup>, 1999) we still had to find ways to finish the nurseries and offices and to put in air conditioning. We were out of money and tired but the troops here persevered to finish it off. I am still proud of our committee and the many people that worked so hard for so long. It was a good work **done** that will benefit many people for years to come.

Good works that really evidence saving faith in the Lord Jesus Christ **ARE CONTINUED**, and we keep doing them sometimes for years, BECAUSE OF ANTICIPATION OF PLEASING GOD AND HIS REWARD. Do not lightly regard the promised rewards of the King! Sometimes I have heard people smugly say, "Well, I will get to heaven by the grace of God, but I don't want any rewards." What a stupid thing to say... As if any rewards the Lamb of God awards are given carelessly or are of small value. Paul said ***I press on toward the goal for the prize for the upward call of God in Christ Jesus***

(Philippians 3:14.) The Greek word for **press on** means to “stretch forward” like a runner does in a track race, to break the tape at the finish line...



Genuine faith is demonstrated by works. It cannot be avoided. Do you love the Lord Jesus Christ who loved you and gave Himself for you? Is there anything you would not do for Him, if you knew He was calling you to do it? Do not content yourself with simply going to church once in a while. The Christian life is intended to be far more than just that. It is meant to be a life of activity, serving Him, seeking new ministries all the time, seeing how He is leading and opening doors.

Good works are not just some things which become part of life for a Christian. They ARE life, for the true Christian. That is what James was saying in the second chapter of his letter. This final word today, about how to tell who are Jesus' disciples: John 13:35 ***By this all men will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another.***

James 2:14-26 (The Message)

Dear friends, do you think you'll get anywhere in this if you learn all the right words but never do anything? Does merely talking about faith indicate that a person really has it? <sup>15</sup> For instance, you come upon an old friend dressed in rags and half-starved <sup>16</sup> and say, "Good morning, friend! Be clothed in Christ! Be filled with the Holy Spirit!" and walk off without providing so much as a coat or a cup of soup—where does that get you? <sup>17</sup> Isn't it obvious that God-talk without God-acts is outrageous nonsense? <sup>18</sup> I can already hear one of you agreeing by saying, "Sounds good. You take care of the faith department, I'll handle the works department." Not so fast. You can no more show me your works apart from your faith than I can show you my faith apart from my works. Faith and works, works and faith, fit together hand in glove. <sup>19</sup> Do I hear you professing to believe in the one and only God, but then observe you complacently sitting back as if you had done something wonderful? That's just great. Demons do that, but what good does it do them? <sup>20</sup> Use your heads! Do you suppose for a minute that you can cut faith and works in two and not end up with a corpse on your hands? <sup>21</sup> Wasn't our ancestor Abraham "made right with God by works" when he placed his son Isaac on the sacrificial altar? <sup>22</sup> Isn't it obvious that faith and works are yoked partners, that faith expresses itself in works? That the works are "works of faith"? <sup>23</sup> The full meaning of "believe" in the Scripture sentence, "Abraham believed God and was set right with God," includes his action. It's that mesh of believing and acting that got Abraham named "God's friend." <sup>24</sup> Is it not evident that a person is made right with God not by a barren faith but by faith fruitful in works? <sup>25</sup> The same with Rahab, the Jericho harlot. Wasn't her action in hiding God's spies and helping them escape—that seamless unity of *believing* and *doing*—what counted with God? <sup>26</sup> The very moment you separate body and spirit, you end up with a corpse. Separate faith and works and you get the same thing: a corpse.

# Dartmouth Bible Notes

Notes from the Pulpit Ministry of Dartmouth Bible Church

Series: Faith (lesson 10)

Scripture: Revelation 2:18-29

Speaker: Rev. Neil C. Damgaard, Th.M., D.Min.

Date: August 23<sup>rd</sup>, 2009



## ***Junk Faith***

### **Revelation 2:18-29** (NASB)

“And to the angel of the church in Thyatira write: The Son of God, who has eyes like a flame of fire, and His feet are like burnished bronze, says this: <sup>19</sup> I know your deeds, and your love and faith and service and perseverance, and that your deeds of late are greater than at first. <sup>20</sup> ‘But I have *this* against you, that you tolerate the woman Jezebel, who calls herself a prophetess, and she teaches and leads My bond-servants astray, so that they commit *acts of immorality* and eat things sacrificed to idols. <sup>21</sup> ‘And I gave her time to repent; and she does not want to repent of her immorality. <sup>22</sup> ‘Behold, I will cast her upon a bed *of sickness*, and those who commit adultery with her into great tribulation, unless they repent of her deeds. <sup>23</sup> ‘And I will kill her children with pestilence; and all the churches will know that I am He who searches the minds and hearts; and I will give to each one of you according to your deeds. <sup>24</sup> ‘But I say to you, the rest who are in Thyatira, who do not hold this teaching, who have not known the deep things of Satan, as they call them—I place no other burden on you. <sup>25</sup> ‘Nevertheless what you have, hold fast until I come. <sup>26</sup> ‘And he who overcomes, and he who keeps My deeds until the end, TO HIM I WILL GIVE AUTHORITY OVER THE NATIONS; <sup>27</sup> AND HE SHALL RULE THEM WITH A ROD OF IRON, AS THE VESSELS OF THE POTTER ARE BROKEN TO PIECES, as I also have received *authority* from My Father; <sup>28</sup> and I will give him the morning star. <sup>29</sup> ‘He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.’

**Introduction** I wonder how many phrases we can think of which include the word, “junk?”

I think there is a faith equivalent and today I’m going to call it “junk faith.” Before I define it, let me illustrate some of its properties:

- I. Junk faith maybe USED TO BE valuable.
- II. Junk faith may taste good at first.
- III. Junk faith might promise a big payoff!

I read a Wikipedia article this week about “junk bonds.” Here is a sample:

In finance, a **high yield bond (non-investment grade bond, speculative grade bond or “junk bond”)** is a bond that is rated below investment grade at the time of purchase. “Junk” bonds have a higher risk of default (rated “BB” or lower) or other adverse credit events, but typically pay higher yields than better quality bonds which is what makes them attractive to investors...The

holder of any debt is subject to interest rate risk and credit risk, inflationary risk, currency risk, duration risk, convexity risk, repayment of principal risk, streaming income risk, liquidity risk, default risk, maturity risk, reinvestment risk, market risk, political risk, and taxation adjustment risk. Interest rate risk refers to the risk of the market value of a bond changing in value due to changes in the structure or level of interest rates or credit spreads or risk premiums. The credit risk of a high yield bond refers to the probability and probable loss upon a credit event (i.e., the obligor defaults on scheduled payments or files for bankruptcy, or the bond is restructured), or a credit quality change is issued by a rating agency including Fitch, Moody's, or Standard & Poors.<sup>10</sup> Basically, “junk” bonds are invested in by either wealthy people or people wishing to live with high risk, at the prospect of high yield.

#### IV. Junk faith might fill up the spaces in your life.

You and I and many people of faith have a good, basic desire to grow in our walk with God.

- We start the process, somehow, wonderfully, by COMING to a personal faith in Jesus Christ. We may not have all the answers to questions people ask, and maybe cannot defend ourselves too well, in a hostile world, but we find within our hearts a belief, a trust and a dependence on the Son of God.
- Then we start to exercise faith by moving through each day with an awareness of God, and a growing hunger for Him, this strange desire—that somehow we know isn't of our own making—to please Him and live as He wants us to. We find that just going through some kind of routine isn't enough; maybe it was before but when we come to realize that He really IS THERE, just going through motions isn't enough. We want more of Him. We even long for the kinds of experiences with Jesus that we read about Peter and John and Mary going through in the Bible...
- Then we notice that first the desire, and then the actual doing of some good works starts to happen in our lives. We are kind of surprised at ourselves, but we delight in a desire to help other people—maybe we had never been that way much before, but now some good works are flowing out of our lives.

We want to grow, and we fear spiritual stagnation, don't we? We believe that God values strong faith in Him and in His plan—the Bible says so frequently.

But something can happen that can DISTRACT US from real spiritual growth, from real and genuinely growing our trust and faith in the Lord. Our faith can become SIDE-TRACKED. It can become “JUNK FAITH.”

I think the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> chapters in the Book of Revelation are one of the most daunting, sobering and humbling sections in the whole Bible. Here we have direct communiqués from the glorified, resurrected Jesus Christ, the Son of God, the Lamb upon His throne, to seven of the earliest Christian churches, all in

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<sup>10</sup> [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/High-yield\\_debt](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/High-yield_debt)

what we now call Turkey. I've asked this before, but how would we do with such a letter of evaluation from the Lord Himself?

Located halfway between Pergamos and Sardis, **Thyatira** had been under Roman rule for nearly 3 centuries (ca. 190 B.C.). Since the city was situated in a long valley that swept 40 miles to Pergamos, it had no natural defenses and had a long history of being destroyed and rebuilt. Originally populated by soldiers of Alexander the Great, it was little more than a military outpost to guard Pergamos. Lydia came from this city on business and was converted under Paul's ministry (Acts 16:14,15).<sup>11</sup> Thyatira was an industrial center controlled by guilds, somewhat like, modern trade unions. These guilds paid homage to the pagan gods Apollo and Artemis (also known as Tyrimnos), and they worshiped at the shrine of Sabbath. Members of the guild were obligated to attend festivals in honor of these gods, to eat meals in their temples, and to indulge in sexual promiscuity. Noncompliance with these rules meant expulsion from the trade union, lack of employment, and poverty. Christians who refused to honor pagan gods, eat meat sacrificed to an idol, and engage in sexual immorality jeopardized their material necessities. They were regarded as outcasts of society.<sup>12</sup>

Jesus commends the Thyatirian Christians to some extent, as we read in Revelation 2:19 ***'I know your deeds, and your love and faith and service and perseverance, and that your deeds of late are greater than at first.*** Good works HAD flowed from their lives. They had a love for each other and they also had faith. They served each other and they hung in there. They had even GROWN so that over time there were more good works and better ones among them. All of this is quite a good résumé to have! I wonder if we could receive such affirmation from the Lord Jesus?

But despite the good things, some in the church had fallen prey to what I'm calling today, a "junk faith." The Lord said to them, ***'But I have this against you, that you tolerate the woman Jezebel, who calls herself a prophetess, and she teaches and leads My bond-servants astray, so that they commit acts of immorality and eat things sacrificed to idols.*** (Revelation 2:20)

The switch from praise to rebuke is sudden and abrupt. Even though the believers had put forth a considerable effort to help needy people materially and trust God spiritually, THEY HAD TOLERATED A PERNICIOUS INFLUENCE IN THE CHURCH. This influence was spreading like cancer so that in time the spiritual health of the congregation would be seriously jeopardized.

- The church at Ephesus hated the works of the Nicolaitans (2:6);

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<sup>11</sup>MacArthur, J. J. (c. 1997). *The MacArthur Study Bible* (electronic ed.) Nashville: Word Pub.

<sup>12</sup>Kistemaker, S. J., & Hendriksen, W. (1953-2001). *Vol. 20: New Testament commentary : Exposition of the Book of Revelation*. Accompanying biblical text is author's translation. *New Testament Commentary* (136). Grand Rapids: Baker Book House.

- but the church at Pergamum allowed the Nicolaitans to live among them (2:15);
- the church at Thyatira was tolerating deceptive teaching within the congregation.

The name Jezebel refers to the Old Testament wife of King Ahab, who had married a princess from Sidon. Jezebel urged Ahab to worship the pagan god Baal and the goddess Asherah, and to construct a temple and a sacred pole (1<sup>st</sup> Kings 16:31–33; 21:25; see also 2<sup>nd</sup> Kings 9:30–37). The woman in Thyatira is referred to by the name of the wife of King Ahab and called herself a prophetess. The New Testament reveals that women prophesied (Luke 2:36; Acts 21:9; 1 Cor. 11:5). This woman held an influential post in the church because she was a teacher, but her instruction was deceptive. She persuaded the church to engage in illicit sexual relations at the pagan temples and there to eat the food that had been offered to an idol. No wonder that this woman is given the name Jezebel, because her namesake in the Old Testament persuaded Israel to worship Baal, the god of fertility, and Asherah, the goddess of fertility. Under the guise of religion, the people fell into the sin of sexual immorality with all its dire consequences and into the sin of apostasy by eating food in pagan temples. Notice that the order of committing fornication and eating food offered to an idol is the reverse of the sequence in the letter to Pergamum (2:14).<sup>13</sup> This dull-witted compromise is what I am calling “junk faith.”

But before we go on, please do not miss verse 21 which tells us something about how God is, and how people sometimes are: ***‘And I gave her time to repent; and she does not want to repent of her immorality.*** God gives people time to change their minds and make decisions to change direction from sin towards living rightly. The problem isn’t that He runs out of patience—it is that people don’t want to change! This “Jezebel” just didn’t want to change. She would rather hold on to her influence, her profit, her self-deluded “prophet” status. But the judgment that Jesus promises will be total and terrifying, as you can read in verses 22 and 23. There is more in the letter that is interesting, but I simply want to suggest to you today, that

**JUNK FAITH IS A GULLIBLE FAITH.** We are told as Christians to be sharp-minded, well-grounded and discerning. Because someone might come into the midst of a church and speak well, or seem to teach skillfully, and because that man OR woman creates a following, doesn’t mean it is good. People will gullibly follow many things today—as the great rise in cults testifies. We do well to teach doctrine, to teach a balanced and grounded view of the Christian life. There are no short-cuts to spiritual growth and maturity. It takes years. It takes the gradual re-training of the heart and the development of a TASTE for holiness and

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<sup>13</sup> *Ibid*, Kistemaker, S. J., & Hendriksen, W.

righteous living. We must learn and teach each other not to be easily taken in by every *wind of doctrine* that comes along, and my friends, there is no shortage of new winds of doctrine, blowing through each year, it seems.

**SECOND, JUNK FAITH IS A COMPROMISING FAITH.** It allows the mind to say to itself, “Well, these little changes are just being flexible; they may make me a little vulnerable, but I can take it. I don’t need to be so rigid and anyway, the media says we are closed-minded and bigoted and fear-driven, maybe they’re right...” Junk faith allows the slow and gradual decay of conviction, and lets evil into day to day experience. It rationalizes and justifies and diminishes the importance of careful, holy living. Its interesting that apparently this “Jezebel” was even open about dabbling in the occult, as the Lord’s words in verse 24 indicate. It is sad when once good faith, strong, energized by good works and spiritual progress gets polluted and mutates into something that Jesus Himself directly addressed to this ancient Christian church.

**THIRD (AND LAST) JUNK FAITH IS A BETRAYING OR A BACK-FIRING FAITH.** Compromise never results in happiness, ultimately. How many times have we seen this among our friends. People abandon the basic principles of Christian living, and they think they will have a better life. Maybe for a short while they appear happy. But in the long run, they will see that truth is truth. There is a back-fire and betrayal to those who buy into a “junk faith” by being gullible and by compromising what is right.

Real faith is an incredible thing. The Lord Jesus is worth following, until we breathe our last breaths. He will never disappoint. Even when things are hard and perplexing, we can look to the cross and the empty tomb. If you do not know Him yet, surrender to Him. Invite Him to take control. He is magnificent. His excellencies know no end.

# Dartmouth Bible Notes

Notes from the Pulpit Ministry of Dartmouth Bible Church

Series: Faith (lesson 11)

Scripture: Romans 8 and 12

Speaker: Rev. Neil C. Damgaard, Th.M., D.Min.

Date: August 30<sup>th</sup>, 2009



## ***Day to Day Faith***

**Introduction** In *Star Trek* I always liked it when Mr. Spock would say, “We are being scanned,” when some alien and obviously superior life-form would scan the Enterprise... I feel that way with our faith--Christianity gets looked at and compared to other religions in many ways.

- How **HAPPY** are its members?
- How much **GOOD** does it do in the world?
- Does it insist on **RULES** for living which are fear-driven and unreasonable or, how **TOLERANT** is it?
- Does it create **HATE-MONGERING THUGS** (compared to other religions?)
- Is it ORGANIZED OR IS IT SPONTANEOUS?
- Is it a BUSINESS OR A FAMILY?

The MAIN distinguishing feature which OUGHT to be noticed however, is the FAITH OF ITS PEOPLE. Christian people are people whose lives are infused with a strange quality—believing in things which they cannot see yet. And more, being committed TO those things, which they cannot see yet... We have been considering faith, from a number of different angles this summer:

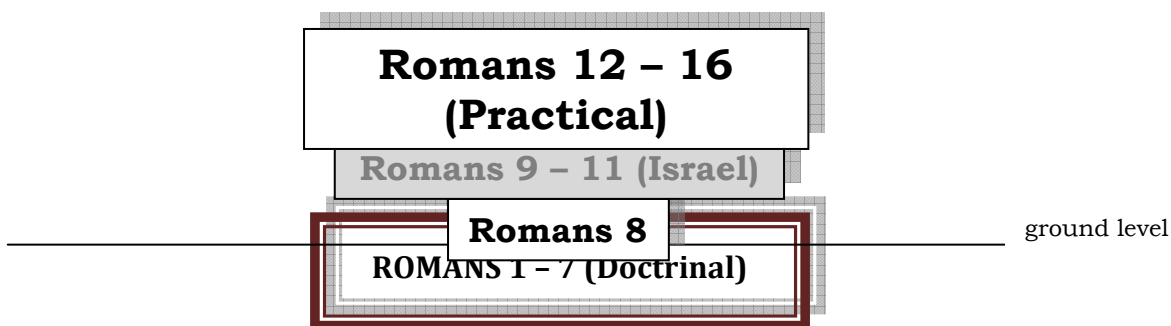
1. A faith that was sort of “demo’d” by a fellow named **Abraham**, long ago.
2. A faith that can begin at a young age, “**early**” faith.
3. A faith which sometimes, and marvelously when it does, happen in **teens**.
4. A faith which can last, or even *begin* in an **old** person.
5. A faith which isn’t static or merely intellectual—it **generates works** which benefit other people, which are a goodness to the building up or helping of other folks.
6. A faith which can mutate into something which is little more than gullibility and which allows great compromise and change in its basic tenets (“**junk.**”)

Today we want to look at the “**A-B-Cs**” OF “DAY TO DAY” FAITH. For most people life includes a number of **BIG, CHALLENGING EVENTS**. These big events are where we tend to think our faith had better show up! At whatever point a person really finds Christ—that’s a pretty big event. **Big job change; finding the person that you want to partner with for life; getting cancer; getting fired; divorce; facing persecution; having a child; having another child; illness of a loved**

**one; death of a loved one; moving to a different part of the country; war; getting your driver's license**—these are all big things, and as Christians we crank up our faith in a significant way when we come up upon one of these big events. We pray, we try our best to remember where Scripture speaks to big events, and we trust God to be there with us and to provide whatever asset we need to do OK during the big event.

But most of life is DAY-TO-DAY. It isn't often too dramatic. We live it in faith on a daily and weekly basis. Faith needs to be real not only at big and challenging events, and then we put it away in the cupboard until we need it again—real faith needs to be there and useful *each day!* That's what we want to consider today, and in looking for a Bible passage that illustrates that or teaches something about it, one might easily go to the things Jesus told His disciples in the upper room about **abiding in Him** and **bearing fruit** as we read in John 15. Today though I want to consider **ROMANS 8** as a "hotbed" for light on how to live by faith, day-to-day. As I see it, the "A-B-C"s are illustrated here as the activities, the beliefs and the companions of a daily faith in Jesus Christ. It spills over into chapter 12 too. (Chapters 9 – 11 are a "parenthesis" where Paul steps aside for a bit to talk about Israel.)

Romans 8 is built on the foundation of Romans 1 – 7, which is mainly a doctrinal framework of what God is doing in the world. The more I look at the book of Romans, the more I think our current world would not like it if it knew what Paul wrote! It looks like this:



### The **Activities** of Day to Day Faith (Romans 8)

A faith that doesn't DO something is just a philosophy. Day to day Christian faith has a limitless list of things we DO that help us walk by faith, and which flow OUT of our invisible walk with Jesus Christ. We could speak of devotions, and worship and evangelism and fellowship and missions endlessly, with all the things that go along with the Christian life. But today, let's confine ourselves to what Paul said to the Roman believers...

1. Mind set on the Spirit (vs. 6)
2. Putting to death the deeds of the Body (vs. 13)
3. Being led by the Spirit of God (vs. 14)
4. Sufferings of this present time (vs. 18)
5. Waiting eagerly for our adoption as sons (vss. 23,25)
6. Loving God (vs. 28)
7. Conquering (whatever) through Him (vs. 37)

### The Beliefs of Day to Day Faith (Romans 8)

Of course, the activities of Christian faith rest upon a set of deeply embedded beliefs inside our hearts and heads. Just from Romans 8 there are 11 ideas that Paul mentions here—some of them may feel familiar to you, and others may seem new—but they are the theological ASSUMPTIONS which we make as we walk and live daily in faith in Christ.

1. No condemnation (vs. 1)
2. Have been set free from *the law of sin* (vs. 2)
3. My “real life” is in the Spirit, not in the flesh (vs. 8)
4. My spirit is alive! (vs. 10)
5. Not obligated to live by the flesh (vs. 12)
6. An awesome “glory” is coming (vs. 18)
7. The Spirit Himself “intercedes” for us (vs. 26)
8. God causes all things to work together for good for us (vs. 28)
9. We have been foreknown, predestined, called, justified, glorified, and therefore (vss. 29,30)
10. He withholds nothing good from us (vs. 32)
11. Cannot be separated by *anything* from God’s love in Christ (vs. 38)

### The Companions of Day to Day Faith (Romans 8 and 12)

And we are not expected to live daily by faith alone. Nothing is more tragic to me than when a Christian becomes disillusioned with the church or so disappointed, that he cuts himself off and severs himself or herself from the warmth of Christian fellowship. Now, fellowship should be meaningful. It needs to be far more than just going to church each week and sitting in a chair next to another Christian. It should be *KINSHIP*, brotherhood, partnership, leaning on each other’s strengths, trust, enjoyment, fun, encouragement, being challenged and corrected even. God does not intend for us to walk by faith alone, but **TOGETHER**. This is a reason why I find Facebook so useful these days. In that “social networking” technology, I “talk” to people all the time. I am never without some Christian at my fingertips to share a little with. I’ve even had “prayer”

together with people Facebook! Paul talks in both Romans 8 and 12 about the companions of day to day faith...

1. We are the children of God, the sons of God, saints, God's elect
  2. Those in Christ, according to the Spirit, we, us
- Romans 12
3. We are many members, of 1 body, each given a measure of faith (vss. 3,4)
  4. We need each other's devotion (vs. 10)
  5. We need preference to be granted to each other, BY each other (vs. 10)
  6. We need our needs met BY each other (vs. 13)
  7. We need hospitality from each other (vs. 13)
  8. We need mutuality in sorrows and in victories (vs. 14)
  10. We need even-treatment from each other (vs. 16)
  11. The lowly among us, need fellowship and compassion (vs. 16)

Living faith from day to day is richly dependent on "truth," based upon the word of God. It is true that not all Christians in the world KNOW this much truth—but this is all right here in Romans 8.

Do not expect the world to agree with that or even to understand at all how you are trying to live. I don't think we need to get paranoid about how non-Christians don't really understand what it is to walk with Christ daily by faith—and friends or family may vaguely "get" that you're trying to live rightly or righteously, but as a Christian you are grounded upon a whole different world-view. Just from Romans 8, you can see that there's a lot of unique activities and beliefs that we do and depend upon to be true. We fellowship with companions who also are committed to the activities and the life-strategy and the foundational truths that we are.

I feel this is particularly hard for young people, who are so dependent on the approval and acceptance of their peers. It is important that somehow, some place, young people are provided with peers who also get it, in the faith. This world is not likely to grow more sympathetic to Christianity and day to day faith. It is likely to grow *less* sympathetic in the years to come. So with this the case, I think that Christian fellowship that feeds and sustains young people is going to become MORE THAN EVER the priority of the church. If we do not find that somehow, we will lose them in even bigger numbers. The family is one place, the church is another, and random outside, "wayside" or parachurch fellowships are another.

I sincerely hope this has not made day to day seem too complicated. There are "A-B-Cs" of walking daily by faith, and I hope you can think of your faith by way of the activities that define it, by the beliefs that you PERSONALLY undergird your faith with, and by the friends you have in Christ, who are important to your daily faith!

Romans 8:1-39 (NASB)

<sup>1</sup> THERE is therefore now **no condemnation** for **those** who are in Christ Jesus. <sup>2</sup> For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has **set you free from the law of sin and of death**. <sup>3</sup> For what the Law could not do, weak as it was through the flesh, God *did*: sending His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh and *as an offering* for sin, He condemned sin in the flesh, <sup>4</sup> in order that the requirement of the Law might be fulfilled in us, who do not walk according to the flesh, but according to the Spirit. <sup>5</sup> For those who are according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh, but **those** who are according to the Spirit, the things of the Spirit. <sup>6</sup> For the mind set on the flesh is death, but **the mind set on the Spirit** is life and peace, <sup>7</sup> because the mind set on the flesh is hostile toward God; for it does not subject itself to the law of God, for it is not even able *to do so*; <sup>8</sup> and those who are in the flesh cannot please God. <sup>9</sup> However, **you are not in the flesh but in the Spirit, if indeed the Spirit of God dwells in you**. But if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he does not belong to Him. <sup>10</sup> And if Christ is in you, though the body is dead because of sin, yet **the spirit is alive** because of righteousness. <sup>11</sup> But if the Spirit of Him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, He who raised Christ Jesus from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through His Spirit who indwells you. <sup>12</sup> So then, brethren, **we are under obligation, not to the flesh, to live according to the flesh**— <sup>13</sup> for if you are living according to the flesh, you must die; but if by the Spirit you are **putting to death the deeds of the body**, you will live. <sup>14</sup> For all who are **being led by the Spirit of God**, these are sons of God. <sup>15</sup> For you have not received a spirit of slavery leading to fear again, but you have received a spirit of adoption as sons by which we cry out, “Abba! Father!” <sup>16</sup> The Spirit Himself bears witness with our spirit that **we are children of God**, <sup>17</sup> and if children, heirs also, heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ, if indeed we suffer with *Him* in order that we may also be glorified with *Him*. <sup>18</sup> For I consider that **the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory that is to be revealed to us**. <sup>19</sup> For the anxious longing of the creation waits eagerly for the revealing of **the sons of God**. <sup>20</sup> For the creation was subjected to futility, not of its own will, but because of Him who subjected it, in hope <sup>21</sup> that the creation itself also will be set free from its slavery to corruption into the freedom of the glory of the children of God. <sup>22</sup> For we know that the whole creation groans and suffers the pains of childbirth together until now. <sup>23</sup> And not only this, but also **we ourselves**, having the first fruits of the Spirit, even we ourselves groan within ourselves, **waiting eagerly for our adoption as sons**, the redemption of our body. <sup>24</sup> For in hope we have been saved, but hope that is seen is not hope; for why does one also hope for what he sees? <sup>25</sup> But if we hope for what we do not see, with perseverance **we wait eagerly for it**. <sup>26</sup> And in the same way the Spirit also helps **our** weakness; for we do not know how to pray as we should, but **the Spirit Himself intercedes for us** with groanings too deep for words; <sup>27</sup> and He who searches the hearts knows what the mind of the Spirit is, because He intercedes for **the saints** according to *the will of God*. <sup>28</sup> And **we know that God causes all things to work together for good** to

those **who love God**, to **those** who are called according to *His* purpose. <sup>29</sup> For whom He **foreknew**, He also **predestined** to become conformed to the image of His Son, that He might be the first-born among many brethren; <sup>30</sup> and whom He predestined, these He also **called**; and whom He called, these He also **justified**; and whom He justified, these He also **glorified**. <sup>31</sup> What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who is against us? <sup>32</sup> He who did not spare His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all, **how will He not also with Him freely give us all things?** <sup>33</sup> Who will bring a charge against **God's elect**? God is the one who justifies; <sup>34</sup> who is the one who condemns? Christ Jesus is He who died, yes, rather who was raised, who is at the right hand of God, who also intercedes for us. <sup>35</sup> Who shall separate **us** from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? <sup>36</sup> Just as it is written, "FOR THY SAKE WE ARE BEING PUT TO DEATH ALL DAY LONG; WE WERE CONSIDERED AS SHEEP TO BE SLAUGHTERED." <sup>37</sup> But in all these things **we overwhelmingly conquer through Him** who loved **us**. <sup>38</sup> For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, <sup>39</sup> nor height, nor depth, **nor any other created thing, shall be able to separate us from the love of God**, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

#### Romans 12:1-21 (NASB)

<sup>1</sup> I URGE you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies a living and holy sacrifice, acceptable to God, *which is your spiritual service of worship*. <sup>2</sup> And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what the will of God is, that which is good and acceptable and perfect. <sup>3</sup> For through the grace given to me I say to **every man among you** not to think more highly of himself than he ought to think; but to think so as to have sound judgment, as God has **allotted to each** measure of faith. <sup>4</sup> For just as **we have many members** in one body and all the members do not have the same function, <sup>5</sup> so we, who are many, are one body in Christ, and **individually members one of another**. <sup>6</sup> And since we have gifts that differ according to the grace given to us, *let each exercise them accordingly*: if prophecy, according to the proportion of his faith; <sup>7</sup> if service, in his serving; or he who teaches, in his teaching; <sup>8</sup> or he who exhorts, in his exhortation; he who gives, with liberality; he who leads, with diligence; he who shows mercy, with cheerfulness. <sup>9</sup> Let love be without hypocrisy. Abhor what is evil; cling to what is good. <sup>10</sup> **Be devoted to one another** in brotherly love; give preference to **one another** in honor; <sup>11</sup> not lagging behind in diligence, fervent in spirit, serving the Lord; <sup>12</sup> rejoicing in hope, persevering in tribulation, devoted to prayer, <sup>13</sup> contributing to the **needs of the saints, practicing hospitality**. <sup>14</sup> Bless those who persecute you; bless and curse not. <sup>15</sup> **Rejoice with those who rejoice, weep with those who weep**. <sup>16</sup> Be of the **same mind toward one another; do not be haughty in mind, but associate with the lowly**. Do not be wise in your own estimation. <sup>17</sup> Never pay back evil for evil to anyone. Respect what is right in

the sight of all men. <sup>18</sup> If possible, so far as it depends on you, be at peace with all men. <sup>19</sup> Never take your own revenge, beloved, but leave room for the wrath of *God*, for it is written, “VENGEANCE IS MINE, I WILL REPAY,” says the Lord. <sup>20</sup> “BUT IF YOUR ENEMY IS HUNGRY, FEED HIM, AND IF HE IS THIRSTY, GIVE HIM A DRINK; FOR IN SO DOING YOU WILL HEAP BURNING COALS UPON HIS HEAD.” <sup>21</sup> **Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.**

# Dartmouth Bible Notes

Notes from the Pulpit Ministry of Dartmouth Bible Church

Series: Faith (lesson 12)

Scripture: various, from the end of each Pauline epistle

Speaker: Rev. Neil C. Damgaard, Th.M., D.Min.

Date: September 6<sup>th</sup>, 2009

## ***The Humanity of Day to Day Faith***

**Introduction** Despite the propaganda of the media and some in the scientific and educational communities, we are not **animals**. We're not slaves to instinct, habit or the environment. We don't howl at the moon, migrate south in the Winter or swim upstream to our original spawning place to begin the new generation!

On the other hand, despite the science fiction community and some cults, we are not **angels**. We do not innately possess the ability to see heaven or reach by our own efforts into the glory of God. We do not glow, we do not do battle with forces in high places and we cannot deliver awesome messages sent straight from the throne of God.

We come from Adam and Eve, **but** we are not *exactly like* Adam and Eve as they were before the Fall at least, because we have still sin.

We are our own, unique beings—we are *human* beings. We are all at the same time intelligent,

sinful, with a limited life-span, ethnically diverse,  
amusing, creative, both deep and shallow,  
spirit-invested, made in the image of God,  
but gullible, discerning, sensitive but  
capable of the most grievous atrocities,  
looking heaven-ward and yet  
inexplicably willing to go to hell.

We are God's creation and handiwork—not a random advancement of evolution. And some of us have experienced the new birth, but even as a NEW creation, as a born-again, regenerate, saved person, I AM STILL HUMAN.

I still have **interests**. I still get **hungry**. I get **depressed sometimes**. I get **excited about stupid stuff**. I get **ticked off**. I get **tired** and I wonder how *come it takes so long to see prayers answered*. I still like having **fun!** I love the Lord now more than ever but I can't seem to escape being human, although as a pastor I'm

supposed to be a really advanced Christian and almost inhuman... Sometimes I feel like I'm supposed to be one of "the Inhumans!"<sup>14</sup>

And wondrously, some of us will go to heaven—not all of us. I know this because I am convinced that God spoke into this world through the prophets and then through Jesus and then through His apostles, God revealed some truths which include the destiny of heaven for some people. He has not predestined that all will go to heaven. And He has won the certainty of that redemption by sending His Son to die for us, for as many of us as possible, for a great company of us, a company of made up of souls from many nations, from all centuries, of all kinds of people—all rescued by His love for humanity, and all by the one sacrifice of His Son on the cross.

Last week I sought to bring a message on the **A-B-Cs** of day-to-day faith--the **activities**, the **beliefs** and the **companions** of Christian faith. We're thinking this summer about **faith**. We started the series with a message on "saving faith," and Lordwilling, we will finish it with a message on "saving faith" (because I am convinced you can't really say all there is to say about it in one message!)

But I wanted to do another message and I felt led to do another one. I was thinking more about the day to day situation. We don't usually have mountain top experiences and fortunately we don't have to deal with deep valleys too often. Most of the time we're walking with the Lord routinely, day-to-day.

- I am not an "Inhuman" superhero, even though I'm saved.
- I'm not exempt from sin yet—though no longer a slave to it—it still raises its ugly head in my life. But beyond sin,
- I am still fully human. I live my faith, daily, as a normal human.
- I feel normal emotions,
- I have normal likes and dislikes, and
- I think normal thoughts.
- I am *seeking* to develop the mind of Christ but I do not believe that makes me inhuman in some way.

Here's what day-to-day faith means: it means I want to bring *everything* into subjection to Jesus Christ, my Lord. I am still a regular guy—it's going to TAKE the rest of my life to bring everything into subjection to Jesus Christ my Lord, but it doesn't mean I'm going to become some colorless, boring, holy drone that just spouts off Bible verses all the time. I don't think that's holy—I think that's obnoxious!

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<sup>14</sup> Black Bolt, and his royal family, consisting of Medusa, Karnak, Gorgon, Triton, Crystal, Maximus the Mad, and the canine Lockjaw. <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Inhumans>

And I thought where do we see that in the New Testament? It occurred to me that the END OF EACH OF PAUL'S LETTERS HAS DAY TO DAY STUFF—the last thoughts about some practical things as he finishes each letter. We're not going to look at all 13 of them, but a couple...

In reading 1<sup>st</sup> Corinthians 16:14-24 and looking for day-to-day things,

Let all that you do be done in love. <sup>15</sup> Now I urge you, brethren (you know the household of Stephanas, that they were the first fruits of Achaia, and that they have devoted themselves for ministry to the saints), <sup>16</sup> that you also be in subjection to such men and to everyone who helps in the work and labors. <sup>17</sup> And I rejoice over the coming of Stephanas and Fortunatus and Achaicus; because they have supplied what was lacking on your part. <sup>18</sup> For they have refreshed my spirit and yours. Therefore acknowledge such men. <sup>19</sup> The churches of Asia greet you. Aquila and Prisca greet you heartily in the Lord, with the church that is in their house. <sup>20</sup> All the brethren greet you. Greet one another with a holy kiss. <sup>21</sup> The greeting is in my own hand—Paul. <sup>22</sup> If anyone does not love the Lord, let him be accursed. Maranatha. <sup>23</sup> The grace of the Lord Jesus be with you. <sup>24</sup> My love be with you all in Christ Jesus. Amen.

- Yes I know I'm supposed to be full of love and everything I do motivated ultimately by love. That's hard. I'm not that loving. I guess that's why I need to be close to Jesus, to get those love tanks refueled regularly.
- Stephanus's family was really committed to helping other Christians. I need to spend time with people like that. The problem is I would rather spend time watching football all season. But I always feel enriched when I spend time with certain families whose greatest kick seems to be helping other Christians out. And I know I need to go out of my way to point out some of the people who really work hard to build up the church (**Stephanas, Fortunatus, Achaicus**).
- I like communicating with Christians in other places! I love hearing for instance (as I did this weekend) from Ron Gallegos in Alaska! FACEBOOK is great for that.
- I've never really understood that ***greet one another with a holy kiss***. In Jesus' time it was a special acknowledgement between believers, men kissing men on the cheek and women kissing women on the cheek.<sup>15</sup> It was a cultural thing, then. I think I would rather "greet one another with a holy high five or a holy handshake maybe." But I think it is good for Christians to greet one another and not ignore each other. It feels good to have someone notice me. I like that. I don't like being ignored.
- I go through life always seeming to interpret people by whether they know the Lord and love Him, or whether there's any chance of that. I can't seem to think of people, "that doesn't matter." Paul finishes 1<sup>st</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> Tom Constable. (2003). *Tom Constable's Expository Notes on the Bible* (1 Co 16:20). Galaxie Software.

Corinthians by saying, ***If anyone does not love the Lord let him be accursed. Maranatha*** is an Aramaic expression meaning “Our Lord, come.” Probably Paul did not translate it into Greek because believers commonly spoke it in Aramaic in the services of the early church (cf. Rev. 22:20). Since it was Aramaic it probably originated in Palestine where people spoke that language. They exported it to the Greek-speaking congregations that retained its form.<sup>16</sup>

If you meditate through the endings to Paul’s letters you can imagine a lot of little practical things for day-to-day Christian living (and thinking.)

Let’s look at one other one: 2<sup>nd</sup> Thessalonians 3:13-18

<sup>13</sup> But as for you, brethren, do not grow weary of doing good. <sup>14</sup> And if anyone does not obey our instruction in this letter, take special note of that man and do not associate with him, so that he may be put to shame. <sup>15</sup> And *yet* do not regard him as an enemy, but admonish him as a brother. <sup>16</sup> Now may the Lord of peace Himself continually grant you peace in every circumstance. The Lord be with you all! <sup>17</sup> I, Paul, write this greeting with my own hand, and this is a distinguishing mark in every letter; this is the way I write. <sup>18</sup> The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you all.

- Yea, I need to be told not to “grow weary of doing good.” Well, I’m not sure how much good I actually do... but if I DID any good, I would need to be told not to get tired of doing it. Because my old sin nature sometimes thinks I deserve a break today. It thinks if I do ***a*** good thing, I should be given a month-long furlough to rest. But actually, there is always good that people need doing for them, and if you get right down to it, that is what really satisfies in life. Tinkering with my sports car, tweaking my computer, growing flowers all have a certain self-satisfying pleasure, but those aren’t the things that really matter in life. A lifetime of trying to be a blessing, now that means something.
- In vs. 14 it sounds pretty severe! But then as now even more, people resent authority. They don’t want anyone telling them what to do, even biblical stuff. And if someone is disobedient as a general rule Paul said to detach from that person—and SHAME was the tool! We don’t like that word today. We go out of our way to eliminate shame from everything. “Go ahead, smoke dope. It doesn’t matter. Go ahead, have sex with anything and anyone, it doesn’t matter. Go ahead, steal money and hurt animals and harbor criminals, it doesn’t matter—we surely wouldn’t want anyone to feel shame.” But shame, as Paul used it was intended to ***admonish*** (read “jerk”) the person back to reality. A brother in Christ needs to be admonished once in a while. A community with no admonishment becomes a dangerous place after a while.

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<sup>16</sup> *Ibid*, Constable.

- I see in verse 16 the value of “peace.” Hmmm. What’s the opposite of that? Conflict. Paul says day-to-day faith within the Christian community should feel peaceful. It should be a refuge from a broken world. We should always be about bringing peace to marriages that are in conflict; to friendships or partnerships between Christians that are in dispute. That isn’t easy, but that is what day-to-day faith in Jesus Christ breeds.
- Then in verse 17 I see Paul wanted his own mark to be identifiable. I like that. He wasn’t so “inhuman” that it didn’t matter to him. He wanted the Thessalonian believers to be able to identify HIM. He wanted to be known. I can relate to that. I am not so completely ego-less yet that I don’t care at all about recognition. I knew another pastor once that was the most completely ego-less person I ever met. I loved that brother, but I was so intimidated by that. At least Paul wanted people to recognize his mark!  
We are real people as Christians. We live by faith in Jesus Christ every day. It isn’t dramatic or earth-shattering very often. Most of the time it is a routine of seeking the Lord, trying to hear His voice in the decisions you are making—and making them for Him—and always looking for ways to talk to people about Him. Life isn’t just about ME; it is about Him. What has He called me to do? How does He want me to use the time that I have here? How can He use me to bless people in His name, and so honor Him?

There is no better life than a life full of Jesus Christ! You may think there is, out there somewhere, a life of success or recognition for your accomplishments, or a life of non-stop FUN. But the best life is the life that feels His touch every day; that hears His quiet voice and listens to His word every day; a life where daily, I have been used of Him somehow to build the kingdom! His kingdom is forever. His kingdom is coming, maybe soon. His kingdom will be full of goodness and power and His glory.

In reading 1<sup>st</sup> Corinthians 16:14-24 and looking for day-to-day things,

Let all that you do be done in love. <sup>15</sup> Now I urge you, brethren (you know the household of Stephanas, that they were the first fruits of Achaia, and that they have devoted themselves for ministry to the saints), <sup>16</sup> that you also be in subjection to such men and to everyone who helps in the work and labors. <sup>17</sup> And I rejoice over the coming of Stephanas and Fortunatus and Achaicus; because they have supplied what was lacking on your part. <sup>18</sup> For they have refreshed my spirit and yours. Therefore acknowledge such men. <sup>19</sup> The churches of Asia greet you. Aquila and Prisca greet you heartily in the Lord, with the church that is in their house. <sup>20</sup> All the brethren greet you. Greet one another with a holy kiss. <sup>21</sup> The greeting is in my own hand—Paul. <sup>22</sup> If anyone does not love the Lord, let him be accursed. Maranatha. <sup>23</sup> The grace of the Lord Jesus be with you. <sup>24</sup> My love be with you all in Christ Jesus. Amen.

Let's look at one other one: 2<sup>nd</sup> Thessalonians 3:13-18

# Dartmouth Bible Notes

Notes from the Pulpit Ministry of Dartmouth Bible Church

Series: Faith (lesson 13)

Scripture: Matthew 17:20

Speaker: Rev. Neil C. Damgaard, Th.M., D.Min.

Date: September 13<sup>th</sup>, 2009



## ***Tiny Faith***

### **Matthew 17:14-23** (NASB)

<sup>14</sup> And when they came to the multitude, a man came up to Him, falling on his knees before Him, and saying, <sup>15</sup> “Lord, have mercy on my son, for he is a lunatic, and is very ill; for he often falls into the fire, and often into the water. <sup>16</sup> “And I brought him to Your disciples, and they could not cure him.” <sup>17</sup> And Jesus answered and said, “**O unbelieving and perverted generation, how long shall I be with you? How long shall I put up with you? Bring him here to Me.**” <sup>18</sup> And Jesus rebuked him, and the demon came out of him, and the boy was cured at once. <sup>19</sup> Then the disciples came to Jesus privately and said, “Why could we not cast it out?” <sup>20</sup> And He \*said to them, “Because of the littleness of your faith; for truly I say to you, if you have faith as a mustard seed, you shall say to this mountain, ‘Move from here to there,’ and it shall move; and nothing shall be impossible to you.” <sup>21</sup> [“But this kind does not go out except by prayer and fasting.”] <sup>22</sup> And while they were gathering together in Galilee, Jesus said to them, “**The Son of Man is going to be delivered into the hands of men; <sup>23</sup> and they will kill Him, and He will be raised on the third day.**” And they were deeply grieved.

### **Mark 9:22-24**

<sup>22</sup> “And it has often thrown him both into the fire and into the water to destroy him. But if You can do anything, take pity on us and help us!” <sup>23</sup> And Jesus said to him, “**If You can! All things are possible to him who believes.**” <sup>24</sup> Immediately the boy’s father cried out and *began* saying, “I do believe; help my unbelief.”

**Introduction** How much faith do you have? At any given time in our church family there is probably every answer to that question. Some have big, huge faith, some moderate faith, some a little, tiny bit of faith and some, none yet.

Saving faith is a trust in Jesus Christ as the only one who can and has saved, rescued, redeemed me from my own sin. Then we walk by means of that trust. It translates into a daily reliance of Him, and belief that somehow my every decision is of interest to Him. Eventually that trust translates into a hunger for Him, and finally—at the end of life--a kind of love that will only be satisfied by being WITH Him...

Today we want to think about what I’m calling “tiny” faith. But let me say right up front that I am not going to endorse just having a little faith.

- A parent expects his child to have FULL faith in his dictates.

- Our dog has COMPLETE faith that we will provide his food, shelter and what Renée and I affectionately call, “walkies”
- A good boss hopes his employees have an UNWAVERING faith that he will manage the company well and take care of his employees.
- A patient exercises TOTAL faith in the surgeon to do it right.
- A soldier depends REPEATEDLY on his commander to utilize him carefully and wisely. Once is not enough!
- A account holder assumes that his funds manager will invest his money wisely, EVERY TIME.

The New Testament tells us that

- ***the apostles said to the Lord, “Increase our faith!”*** Luke 17:5
- faith is the very device which authorizes our very entrance into heaven!  
***THEREFORE having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ*** Romans 5:1
- faith is a useful piece of “equipment” ***...in addition to all, taking up the shield of faith with which you will be able to extinguish all the flaming missiles of the evil one.*** Ephesians 6:16
- faith is a thing to be *filled up* with: ***let us draw near with a sincere heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water.*** Hebrews 10:22
- having faith is *utterly logical* since ***without faith it is impossible to please Him, for he who comes to God must believe that He is, and that He is a rewarder of those who seek Him.*** Hebrews 11:6
- he greatest people that ever lived were people ***who by faith conquered kingdoms, performed acts of righteousness, obtained promises, shut the mouths of lions,*** Hebrews 11:33

So what do we mean by “tiny” faith? By this I mean that Jesus recognized the smallness or sometimes the weakness of the faith in many of us. More than once He said, “O you of little faith.” When you’re Jesus, and people around you aren’t sure if You’re going to come through with something they need, it grieves You...

But there is a big difference between having a weak or undeveloped faith, and having none. It always amazes me that some of those scribes and Pharisees could have seen some of those miracles and yet still have no faith. No faith is the thing that means a person will be judged themselves for their sins. Jesus came to pay for sins FOR us but a person needs to believe that for himself or herself. No faith is the most dangerous condition a person can be in, in this life! Its worse than stage IV cancer. Its worse than utter poverty. Its worse than being completely alone with no friends and family and its worse than the terrors of being in a war zone.

The incident we look at today is recorded by Matthew and Mark and Luke. Matthew was probably there. Mark got his information probably from Peter, who definitely was there. Luke was not there but heard from the others about this story and decided to include it in his Gospel to be read about. It is a dramatic event because it involves the supernatural world—a demon possession, AND it occurs right after the Transfiguration on the mountain, which is in my mind at least, one of the most incredible moments in all Jesus’ ministry.

A number of things are interesting about the story...

- It’s a parent-child situation, and where do we have more emotion and passion than there, in life?
- It demonstrates the capability of what demons can do—torture and misery. That is what they are about. We learn something about them here; they are not cool. There is nothing good or fun about them.
- Demons completely submit to Jesus. No argument and no contest. What He says, they do.
- Jesus works with the littleness of the father’s faith. He wishes the father had more faith, but He works with what is there. I think that is what is on my heart today.

Do you have a little faith? If you are not a Christian yet, you need saving faith. And if you are a Christian, you need to call out to the Lord with what faith you have, on whatever situations you are facing.

Jesus said ***if you have faith as a mustard seed, you shall say to this mountain, ‘Move from here to there,’ and it shall move;*** (assuming that the move is in God’s will) ***and nothing shall be impossible to you.***

The apostle John wrote, <sup>14</sup> ***And this is the confidence which we have before Him, that, if we ask anything according to His will, He hears us.*** <sup>15</sup> ***And if we know that He hears us in whatever we ask, we know that we have the requests which we have asked from Him.*** 1st John 5:14-15 “Tiny” faith still has some confidence that when we ask according to His will, this pleases Him and He gives us good things. We can EXPECT God to answer our prayers, even if the answers aren’t always what we think we need.

We exercise what faith we have. It may seem “tiny” but even “tiny” faith (like maybe 1/1000<sup>th</sup> of an ounce (a mustard seed) can do a lot. It can move a mountain if God wills.

- Do you think God cares about you? **CALL OUT TO HIM.**
- Do you think He is interested in specific situations you are in, or decisions you are considering? **PRAY AND BRING HIM IN** on your thinking.
- Do you think He might be willing to bring His power and grace to bear on the situation or on the decision? **WATCH FOR HIM WORKING.**

- Do you trust that His will is always for the best and that any leading He gives you can ONLY BENEFIT you? **ASK HIM TO WORK. ASK HIM AGAIN.**

Luke 9:37-43a (NASB)

<sup>37</sup> And it came about on the next day, that when they had come down from the mountain, a great multitude met Him. <sup>38</sup> And behold, a man from the multitude shouted out, saying, "Teacher, I beg You to look at my son, for he is my only *boy*, <sup>39</sup> and behold, a spirit seizes him, and he suddenly screams, and it throws him into a convulsion with foaming *at the mouth*, and as it mauls him, it scarcely leaves him. <sup>40</sup> "And I begged Your disciples to cast it out, and they could not." <sup>41</sup> And Jesus answered and said, "**O unbelieving and perverted generation, how long shall I be with you, and put up with you? Bring your son here.**" <sup>42</sup> And while he was still approaching, the demon dashed him *to the ground*, and threw him into a convulsion. But Jesus rebuked the unclean spirit, and healed the boy, and gave him back to his father. <sup>43</sup> And they were all amazed at the greatness of God.

1 Thessalonians 3:10 (NASB)

<sup>10</sup> as we night and day keep praying most earnestly that we may see your face, and may complete what is lacking in your faith?

NOTE TO SELF:

Pet Stories in the Bible

Balaam's donkey (Judges

The poor man's ewe (2<sup>nd</sup> Sam.12)

Elijah's ravens (1<sup>st</sup> Kings 17)

The white horse owned by Faithful and True (Rev. 19:11)

# Dartmouth Bible Notes

Notes from the Pulpit Ministry of Dartmouth Bible Church

Series: Faith (lesson 14)

Scripture: Judges 11:29-40

Speaker: Rev. Neil C. Damgaard, Th.M., D.Min.

Date: September 20<sup>th</sup>, 2009



## ***Stupid Faith***

### **Judges 11:29-40 (NASB)**

ow the Spirit of the LORD came upon Jephthah, so that he passed through Gilead and Manasseh; then he passed through Mizpah of Gilead, and from Mizpah of Gilead he went on to the sons of Ammon. <sup>30</sup> And Jephthah made a vow to the LORD and said, “If Thou wilt indeed give the sons of Ammon into my hand, <sup>31</sup> then it shall be that whatever comes out of the doors of my house to meet me when I return in peace from the sons of Ammon, it shall be the LORD’S, and I will offer it up as a burnt offering.” <sup>32</sup> So Jephthah crossed over to the sons of Ammon to fight against them; and the LORD gave them into his hand. <sup>33</sup> And he struck them with a very great slaughter from Aroer to the entrance of Minnith, twenty cities, and as far as Abel-keramim. So the sons of Ammon were subdued before the sons of Israel. <sup>34</sup> When Jephthah came to his house at Mizpah, behold, his daughter was coming out to meet him with tambourines and with dancing. Now she was his one *and* only child; besides her he had neither son nor daughter. <sup>35</sup> And it came about when he saw her, that he tore his clothes and said, “Alas, my daughter! You have brought me very low, and you are among those who trouble me; for I have given my word to the LORD, and I cannot take *it* back.” <sup>36</sup> So she said to him, “My father, you have given your word to the LORD; do to me as you have said, since the LORD has avenged you of your enemies, the sons of Ammon.” <sup>37</sup> And she said to her father, “Let this thing be done for me; let me alone two months, that I may go to the mountains and weep because of my virginity, I and my companions.” <sup>38</sup> Then he said, “Go.” So he sent her away for two months; and she left with her companions, and wept on the mountains because of her virginity. <sup>39</sup> And it came about at the end of two months that she returned to her father, who did to her according to the vow which he had made; and she had no relations with a man. Thus it became a custom in Israel, <sup>40</sup> that the daughters of Israel went yearly to commemorate the daughter of Jephthah the Gileadite four days in the year.

**Introduction** All of us have certain words that if we hear them, we become annoyed or uncomfortable. Have you noticed that? My own vocabulary has become controlled in various ways around different people—there are some words I have no problem saying (none of them vulgarities though) but which I know trouble some other people if I say them, so I try *not* to say them if I’m around other people. Do you do that too? It’s a gesture of kindness to restrain our vocabulary if we know it distracts other people. One of those words is the word “stupid.” The dictionary says the word comes from the Middle French, *stupide* which derives from the Latin *stupidus*, to be numb or astonished. Our word means to be slow of mind, given to unintelligent decisions or acts, to lack intelligence. Its synonyms are “dull,” “dense,” “crass,” “dumb.” My Dad never

called me “stupid” but he would frequently point out when I might be “dumb.” Now, I know some of you don’t like the word “stupid,” and I think that I wouldn’t want to be called “stupid.” But when we come to talking about *faith*, there is an application of the word that is appropriate—and that’s what I want to talk about today.

Faith in God—reliance on the Lord Jesus and personal trust in Him--itself, is an amazing thing! I’m amazed some days, that I have faith in the Lord. *Faith is an inner assurance of some things we are hoping for, in the future—you just know* they’re going to happen. And faith is *a conviction, an inner awareness, of things people cannot see*. This is how Hebrews 11:1 defines “faith:” **Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen.**

Faith anticipates the future—there are better things ahead!<sup>17</sup> and evaluates the present in light of an invisible God Who I can tell is really here!

- Faith is the thing that enables me to hold my head high when people talk about Jesus. I know Him. I believe the stories about Him—every one of them—in Matthew, Mark, Luke and John, and I always come away from those stories proud of Him.
- Faith is the thing that enables me to pray, and I am sure I get too casual in prayer sometimes, and I talk to God with too much daydreaminess, and I tell Him pretty much everything, and its because I have faith that He cares, He listens and He understands me. Faith is what makes prayer NOT a fear. I trust in God’s love for me.
- Faith is the thing that keeps me in ministry. When I first entered ministry I some pretty loud voices saying, “Don’t be an idiot!”
- Faith is the thing that gives me confidence that though life may get adverse here, I have a future with the Lord, and I will see some of the things that John saw and wrote about in his writings.
- Faith is the thing that gives me a basic joy in life, and that makes it possible for me to awaken each day looking forward to what the day may bring. I can allow myself to be pretty positive, because of faith.
- Faith is the thing that gives me a completely rational view of my whole life!

**FAITH IS AN AMAZING THING**, and I want others to find it too, and I would do a lot to *help* others find faith in the Lord Jesus Christ! It is the most important thing in life, and let us be careful to never get confused and think that something else is more important to God.

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<sup>17</sup> Raymond Brown, *The Message of Hebrews : Christ Above All*, Originally Published Under Title: *Christ Above All*, The Bible Speaks Today (Leicester, England; Downers Grove, Ill., U.S.A.: Inter-Varsity Press, 1988, c1982), 197.

But faith can mutate and become genuinely stupid if we are not discerning. I want to consider that, today.

Our passage comes from the Book of Judges, where we read about a time in Israel's history before they crowned their first king—Othniel, Ehud, Shamgar, Deborah, Barak, Gideon, Tola, Jair, Jephthah, Ibzan, Elon, Abdon and Samson. (Love those names!) The period of the Judges is a cloudy time for most modern Christians. We might rather read in John or Romans or Philippians than go back and read about a murky time in Israel's early history in the Old Testament. In Judges 11 we read about the ninth judge, Jephthah. Our passage tells the story well. It is tragic. It ends with the implied death of Jephthah's only child, a daughter, and at his own hands—since he had rashly made a vow that if the military victory was given into his hands, he would offer the first thing that came out of his house to the Lord as a burnt offering upon his victorious return home.

No one likes to be called “stupid” but if ever there was ever a genuine example of “stupid” faith, this is it. Understand that making a vow to the Lord was not unusual in the years after Moses and in that dispensation. Making the vow shows Jephthah's zeal was real and his and enthusiasm and sincerity before the Lord were genuine. And there's the paradox. He wanted a military victory over the Ammonites and He got it—20 cities were defeated! The thing to notice though *within* Jephthah's faith, is his stupidity. This is what I'm calling “stupid” faith. Jephthah was sincere, alright. His “orthodoxy”, if you will, was intact. (And his name is amazingly mentioned in the Book of Hebrews, 11:32.) Some scholars try to soften the blow by interpreting the text as she was sent off into perpetual virginity and could never have a family. I think that is just that—trying to soften the text. I think the implication is strong. She died.

Dr. Haddon Robinson, in his message on the same passage, calls it “strong faith with weak theology.” It was a stupid sincerity. The point is that God *never told him* to offer a vow of sacrifice. And the tragedy of losing his beloved daughter is beyond estimation.

Even today believers do things that are stupid, even as we think they are honoring to the Lord.

### **Principles of Having Faith Stupidly (or Dumbly)**

1. STUPID FAITH ATTACHES TO A CHARISMATIC LEADER. I mean an outgoing or really friendly or crowd-pleasing leader. I mean a person who makes you feel good to be around. When the person begins to identify why they are in the faith being because of a leader, it has become very, very stupid. This is born out with the great rise in cults, and sometimes it is amazing who has actually joined the cult of a charismatic leader.

2. STUPID FAITH SAYS, “DOCTRINE BORES ME. JUST GIVE ME JESUS.” If someone ever said that to me, I would say, “Well, who is Jesus?” Now we’re into doctrine very quickly. The Bible tells us that ***Ezra had set his heart to study the law of the LORD, and to practice it, and to teach His statutes and ordinances in Israel.*** (Ezra 7:10.) Paul wrote to Timothy to ***be diligent to present yourself approved to God as a workman who does not need to be ashamed, handling accurately the word of truth*** (2<sup>nd</sup> Tim.2:15)
3. Stupid faith invents new doctrine and then advances it more important than the established doctrine. I think you can see lots of examples of this on late night television preaching.
4. Stupid faith minimizes or diminishes the clear teaching of the will of God. Anything short of the whole truth about God, is not true. It is falsehood. You can’t have it half right about God.
5. Stupid faith goes beyond what Scripture teaches and speculates further. As much as I love the doctrine of the second coming of Christ and the blessed hope of the rapture of the church, I think here I have in mind preachers who insist on seeing fulfilled prophecy with every newspaper headline.

### **Principles of Smart Faith**

1. Smart faith makes knowing God my number one priority.
2. Smart faith becomes well-acquainted with the Bible and then listens carefully and cautiously to ideas to see if they match up with the Word of God.
3. Smart faith KNOWS WELL what exactly God HAS commanded us to do, and what He hasn’t commanded.
4. Smart faith is not impulsive in making decisions.
5. Smart faith prays and then prays some more about decision-making and choices.

Our job as Christians living in an increasingly secular and faithless society, is to have an intelligent faith. Our trust in God and what we RELY upon Him for, needs to be informed by a careful and responsible understanding of the Bible. We need to approach the Scripture well and insist on a normal and good method for how we interpret it.

Faith is an amazing thing—I hope you have it. I hope you have mined deep in the many wonderful promises that Scripture offers to people who will simply believe in them. He never disappoints. We may have to wait a bit to see the promises come true, but they will. He is a faithful God. He is worth trusting in. And the Lord Jesus is called in the Book of Revelation, *Faithful and True*.

# Dartmouth Bible Notes

Notes from the Pulpit Ministry of Dartmouth Bible Church

Series: Faith (lesson 15)

Scripture: 2<sup>nd</sup> Corinthians 12:7-15

Speaker: Rev. Neil C. Damgaard, Th.M., D.Min.

Date: October 11<sup>th</sup>, 2009



## ***Mountain Faith in a Nobody***

### **2 Corinthians 12:7-15 (NASB)**

And because of the surpassing greatness of the revelations, for this reason, to keep me from exalting myself, there was given me a thorn in the flesh, a messenger of Satan to buffet me—to keep me from exalting myself! <sup>8</sup> Concerning this I entreated the Lord three times that it might depart from me. <sup>9</sup> And He has said to me, “My grace is sufficient for you, for power is perfected in weakness.” Most gladly, therefore, I will rather boast about my weaknesses, that the power of Christ may dwell in me. <sup>10</sup> Therefore I am well content with weaknesses, with insults, with distresses, with persecutions, with difficulties, for Christ’s sake; for when I am weak, then I am strong. <sup>11</sup> I have become foolish; you yourselves compelled me. Actually I should have been commended by you, for in no respect was I inferior to the most eminent apostles, even though I am a nobody. <sup>12</sup> The signs of a true apostle were performed among you with all perseverance, by signs and wonders and miracles. <sup>13</sup> For in what respect were you treated as inferior to the rest of the churches, except that I myself did not become a burden to you? Forgive me this wrong! <sup>14</sup> Here for this third time I am ready to come to you, and I will not be a burden to you; for I do not seek what is yours, but you; for children are not responsible to save up for *their* parents, but parents for *their* children. <sup>15</sup> And I will most gladly spend and be expended for your souls. If I love you the more, am I to be loved the less?

**Introduction** I wonder if any of you are like me, in that when you get around people of “big” faith you feel intimidated? I always kind of feel small if I get around people whose faith has accomplished a lot or whose faith is well known. People with “big” faith seem bigger than life. And when I meet a famous Christian preacher or celebrity, I kind of feel small, maybe even guilty. What have I done for the Lord? When has my faith moved a mountain? When did I accomplish something great, driven by a BIG jolt of trusting God.

Sometimes people think of the most famous Christians as the heroic missionaries, the big-name media preachers, the Christians who write the most books or the well-known Christian singers. Many people know the names of Hudson Taylor, Billy Graham, Beth Moore, Adoniram Judson, James Dobson and Michael W. Smith. Billy Graham has preached the gospel to about 2.2 billion people, including his radio and television audiences. And we thank God

for these names and for the great things they have accomplished for the kingdom of God. But I do not think that the biggest, most powerful faith—the mountain faith—is necessarily found in the big names. Again, I am thankful FOR the big-name Christians. It feels good these days to have some well-known Christians that we can be proud of. But the most significant faith might be found in some people, whom no one or almost no one knows about. I direct your attention in the Scripture reading today to 2<sup>nd</sup> Cor. 12:11 ***I have become foolish; you yourselves compelled me. Actually I should have been commended by you, for in no respect was I inferior to the most eminent apostles, even though I am a nobody.*** We are jumping right into the middle of a wonderful chapter that is famous for Paul’s “thorn in the flesh” experience, which he said he asked the Lord three times to take it away from him! I wish you to see the little phrase ***hei kai ouden eimi*** εἰ καὶ οὐδέν εἰμι at the end of verse 11, which comes across in English to us variously,

as ***though I be nothing*** (KJV);

***even though I am nothing*** (ESV, NET, HCSB, NIV);

***even though I am nothing at all*** (NLT);

***You know from personal experience that even if I’m a nobody, a nothing, I wasn’t second-rate compared to those big-shot apostles you’re so taken with*** (The Message); or simply

as ***I am a nobody*** (NASB.)

I think Paul struggled when he was alive to establish his apostolic esteem with some of the churches of the first century. That is hard for us to imagine, because we think of him as the great apostle Paul, and we have two thousand years of heritage from him. But at the time, he was a guy, perhaps not impressive in appearance or in speech. A normal guy—with a reputation of being a little crazy. We tend to elevate the apostles to lofty positions, and with good reasons, as we read in about the New Jerusalem, Revelation 21:14 ***And the wall of the city had twelve foundation stones, and on them were the twelve names of the twelve apostles of the Lamb.*** BUT AT THE TIME, they were normal men with normal lives. In His providence, the Lord chose no Roman senator, no great military general, no famous entertainer to be among His original disciples. He chose fishermen, a tax collector, and various other normal guys. In fact, even though called himself a “nobody” Paul had more education than any of the early disciples.

Paul’s faith, as the nobody that he called himself (which meant that any good thing was God’s doing 1<sup>st</sup> Cor. 15:10)<sup>18</sup>, was pretty mountain-moving.

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<sup>18</sup> 1<sup>st</sup> Corinthians 15:10 (NASB)

<sup>10</sup> But by the grace of God I am what I am, and His grace toward me did not prove vain; but I labored even more than all of them, yet not I, but the grace of God with me.

- His faith in the beginning in Damascus, compelled him to wait on the Lord while he was blinded. He fled Damascus in danger, armed only with his conviction that Jesus was with him.
- He spent fourteen years thinking, praying, studying with no known ministry (Galatians 2:1.)
- By faith he took insisted in front of the leaders of the church in Jerusalem that his friend Titus, a Greek convert to Christ did not have to be circumcised since that would be a violation of the gospel of grace.
- By faith then Paul and Barnabas, and later Paul and others and sometimes Paul by himself, went out, always heading northwest, or west, always straining towards Rome itself.
- By faith he endured beatings, stonings, shipwreck, unfair trials, imprisonments, misunderstandings among his own friends, distortions of his teachings and the hardship of not being able to respond quickly, plotting by business people who resented his demystification of Greek divination, demonic oppression and eventually beheading in Rome. This all from a man who called himself a “nobody.”

How does faith like a mountain happen in someone like Paul? How can big faith happen for us? Faith is a good thing! It pleases God, and nothing in life is more important than pleasing God.

I do not believe Paul was given a massive dose of faith in Damascus and then told to use it as he needed it over the next 35 years. I believe Paul’s faith *HAPPENED DAILY*. It was lived out daily. As he obeyed the plan that God laid out for him, God gave him faith to live it out, and Paul *exercised* trust in the Lord daily. Paul said it to the Galatians: ***I have been crucified with Christ; and it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me, and delivered Himself up for me.*** (Galatians 2:20)

“Mountain faith” is lived out daily and Paul’s faith *WAS NOT EASY*. Do not let anyone tell you that trusting God in the midst of trials or pain is easy. I think that is either a lie or a delusion. Christian faith—on a big scale—is not easy. But it is something that God will vindicate and reward. Paul said that he was marked by the scars he wore, which he called ***the brand marks of Christ*** (Gal. 6:17.) He wore his faith in the marks on his body.

“Mountain faith” *ENDURES GREAT HARDSHIPS FOR CHRIST*, My cousin Wayne provides this summary:

In Lystra the apostle was stoned. Afterward he was dragged from the city, and left for dead (Acts 14:19). Doubtless scars were left in the wake of that abuse.

At Philippi Paul (and Silas) were beaten with “many stripes” with rods (Acts 16:22). One must reflect upon the fact that while Jewish law limited beatings to forty stripes (Deuteronomy 25:3), the Romans observed no such restrictions!

Elsewhere (cf. 2 Corinthians 11:23ff) Paul writes of receiving “stripes above measure” (suggesting both many in number and great in intensity).

In addition to the generic reference, he received five beatings by the Jews (none of which is recorded in Acts). Each of these produced thirty-nine wounds—thus no less than 195 stripes from these five beatings alone.

Further, three times he was whipped with “rods” (two of these occasions are not elsewhere recorded in the New Testament). This was Roman punishment, and was a violation of Paul’s rights as a born citizen of the empire (Acts 22:25ff).

Not even a skillful surgeon like Luke (Colossians 4:14) could have remedied the terribly disfigured body of God’s noble apostle.

While others might well have recoiled at the thought of such hideous scars, Paul gloried in them as badges of honor for his Master. They were credentials of dedication, and he let them shut the mouths of his whining critics.<sup>19</sup>

Probably some of the Christians who really HAVE had “mountain faith” are “nobodies” like the apostle Paul. We struggle for lack of recognition or because others are looked at as “super-Christians” and yet our approval must come from God, not other people.

How often is your faith something you need? Are you looking for ways for God to stretch your dependence on Him? I have to ask myself this. I like my routine, but how much am I having to trust God each week? How about you?

- Maintaining your testimony for Christ requires faith.
- Persevering in a hard family situation because you know God wants you to requires faith.
- Enduring pain and illness, especially when they are severe, require faith.
- Watching other people prosper financially or professionally when it is all you can do to put some bread on the table, requires faith that God is the vindicator.
- Turning the other cheek, and NOT striking back, requires a belief that God is here.
- Forgiving, when the person doesn’t deserve it and maybe hasn’t even asked for it, requires faith. Mountain faith happens all the time in “nobodies.” And the Lord sees it. And it will be remembered.

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<sup>19</sup> Wayne Jackson, Oct. 2007, *The Marks of Jesus*, <http://www.christiancourier.com/articles/1387-the-marks-of-jesus>

The more faith we can find, to trust ourselves to the Lord and to the promises He has made, the better. Living by faith starts with saving faith. Have you really found that? If so, then we live day by day and learn to turn more and more over to Him. I'm doing that right now! Some days the little things I am trying to give over to Him FEEL like I need a mountain of faith. But I hope to get to the point where every day I sense His providence and His love and that I am watching Him work. It isn't my imagination. It isn't wishful thinking. It is walking by faith. I'm going to work on trusting Him. Not just when I am sure things are going to work out like I want them. But all the time. Especially when I am fearful. He is faithful. He will remember His promises. And He will use what faith I have for the glory of the Lord Jesus Christ!

# Dartmouth Bible Notes

Notes from the Pulpit Ministry of Dartmouth Bible Church

Series: Faith (lesson 16)

Scripture: Jonah 1

Speaker: Rev. Neil C. Damgaard, Th.M., D.Min.

Date: October 25<sup>th</sup>, 2009



## ***Hard Faith***

### **Jonah 1 (NASB)**

THE word of the LORD came to Jonah the son of Amittai saying, <sup>2</sup>“Arise, go to Nineveh the great city, and cry against it, for their wickedness has come up before Me.” <sup>3</sup>But Jonah rose up to flee to Tarshish from the presence of the LORD. So he went down to Joppa, found a ship which was going to Tarshish, paid the fare, and went down into it to go with them to Tarshish from the presence of the LORD. <sup>4</sup>And the LORD hurled a great wind on the sea and there was a great storm on the sea so that the ship was about to break up. <sup>5</sup>Then the sailors became afraid, and every man cried to his god, and they threw the cargo which was in the ship into the sea to lighten *it* for them. But Jonah had gone below into the hold of the ship, lain down, and fallen sound asleep. <sup>6</sup>So the captain approached him and said, “How is it that you are sleeping? Get up, call on your god. Perhaps *your* god will be concerned about us so that we will not perish.” <sup>7</sup>And each man said to his mate, “Come, let us cast lots so we may learn on whose account this calamity *has struck* us.” So they cast lots and the lot fell on Jonah. <sup>8</sup>Then they said to him, “Tell us, now! On whose account *has* this calamity *struck* us? What is your occupation? And where do you come from? What is your country? From what people are you?” <sup>9</sup>And he said to them, “I am a Hebrew, and I fear the LORD God of heaven who made the sea and the dry land.” <sup>10</sup>Then the men became extremely frightened and they said to him, “How could you do this?” For the men knew that he was fleeing from the presence of the LORD, because he had told them. <sup>11</sup>So they said to him, “What should we do to you that the sea may become calm for us?”—for the sea was becoming increasingly stormy. <sup>12</sup>And he said to them, “Pick me up and throw me into the sea. Then the sea will become calm for you, for I know that on account of me this great storm *has come* upon you.” <sup>13</sup>However, the men rowed *desperately* to return to land but they could not, for the sea was becoming *even* stormier against them. <sup>14</sup>Then they called on the LORD and said, “We earnestly pray, O LORD, do not let us perish on account of this man’s life and do not put innocent blood on us; for Thou, O LORD, hast done as Thou hast pleased.” <sup>15</sup>So they picked up Jonah, threw him into the sea, and the sea stopped its raging. <sup>16</sup>Then the men feared the LORD greatly, and they offered a sacrifice to the LORD and made vows. <sup>17</sup>And the LORD appointed a great fish to swallow Jonah, and Jonah was in the stomach of the fish three days and three nights.

**Introduction** Sometimes being a person of faith is hard. Sometimes just keeping the faith, is hard. Have you ever just wished God would show you the overall situation?

- If **you or a loved one became terminally ill**, wouldn’t you wish God would show you the overall map of how it fits into His plan, and how He is going to provide?
- If you **lose your job** through no fault of your own (or even FOR your fault) don’t you just wish God would send you an e-mail which says, “Look, I factored this crisis into My overall situation for you, and you’re going to be okay. So relax.”

- If **war came to our land**, and people were dying all around us, surely then we would cry out to God, “Please show us how we can survive!” (We haven’t had war in our land in 144 years (since 1865), but in the 190 years before that we had four major wars on American soil...)

War Deaths on American Soil (1675 - 1865)

King Philip's War	English	800
	Indian	3000
American Revolution		4435
War of 1812		2260
Indian Wars		1000
Mexican War		1733
Civil War	Union	365000
	Confed.	134000

**512,228**

Out of a total population  
Of 31,443,321 or 1.6%

War Deaths on American Soil (1865 - 2009)

Pearl Harbor (1941)		2350
Sept. 11, 2001		3222

**5,572**

But if God responded in those ways, it wouldn’t require faith to carry on would it? It would be “by sight.”

As we have laid out in recent months (the previous 15 messages), faith takes shape in different ways at different times.

1. It all starts WITH “**SAVING FAITH**” and we will conclude this series with a second message on that topic soon.
2. Then faith grows, takes challenges, sometimes becomes very small (**TINY**), sometimes swells into **MOUNTAIN-MOVING TRUST** (even in “nobodies,”) as it goes from the **EARLY** stages of trusting God, into more mature forms.
3. It discovers that **WORKS** will inevitably happen, if the faith in God is real, and that
4. a **JUNKY** or **STUPID** manifestation of faith should be avoided.
5. We find that a growing faith still involves **BEING HUMAN** (we don’t turn into some kind of alien creature,)
6. and ultimately our faith is of the same brand as old **ABRAHAM**’s was, so long ago, when he hammered out the prototype faith—seeking a God who wanted to be found, obedient, trusting what God said to be true and growing, not stagnating.

We also see that sometimes faith is **hard** for most of the whole Christian life. It is difficult, either because

- circumstances have become difficult, or

- inside of us something psychological or even spiritual has been happening that has made it hard to trust God, or
- perhaps because there has been Satanic oppression and we have been in a time of spiritual warfare.

In any event, we recognize that this is probably the lot of most Christians at some time or other. At the very least we know that Paul said to Timothy (2<sup>nd</sup> Tim.3:12) **And indeed, all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will be persecuted.**

Of all the big challenge-to-faith stories in the Bible, like **Abraham** offering his son Isaac in sacrifice, *Moses and the Red Sea*, Daniel & the lions, *Peter watching Jesus die* and Paul getting stoned, I think the granddaddy of all faith stories in the Bible just *has to be* the story of **Jonah** and the “great fish” which we find of course in the Book of Jonah.

This famous Sunday School story is actually one of the most terrifying stories in the Bible, to me. Ancient Nineveh would be about the size and population of New Bedford to Fall River. It is near what is now Mosul, Iraq. Notice how Jesus spoke of this event (which took place 750-800 years before Him):

But He answered and said to them, **“An evil and adulterous generation craves for a sign; and yet no sign shall be given to it but the sign of Jonah the prophet; <sup>40</sup> for just as JONAH WAS THREE DAYS AND THREE NIGHTS IN THE BELLY OF THE SEA MONSTER, so shall the Son of Man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth. <sup>41</sup> “The men of Nineveh shall stand up with this generation at the judgment, and shall condemn it because they repented at the preaching of Jonah; and behold, something greater than Jonah is here.**

(Matthew 12:39-41)

I have thought of this story as an example of “hard” faith simply because I cannot imagine a harder thing to endure than being eaten and digested—or in this case NOT being digested—by a big animal. Actually, you look in vain to find one mention of the words “faith,” “trust,” “depend” and but ONE use of the phrase “believed in God” (3:5) in this book. *But we see plenty of faith here.* And I believe every instance of faith we see in Jonah is *hard faith*. Faith in this book is hard because:

1. God told Jonah to do something he didn’t want to do.
2. The sailors had faith in God, and asked God to spare their lives.

3. After being inside the fish for 72 hours, Jonah prayed (or maybe during). *From within suffering, when the air stinks, it is dark (what light could there be inside there?), when the seaweed is wrapped around your head, that is the hardest place to pray!*
4. From inside the fish, he thinks he will live, and see the temple again. Faith gives him a hope, even there, and a sense of the Temple again.
5. He called out in the streets of a large city with no assurance anyone would listen, or even for his own safety. God tells us to do something which seems pointless or with little hope of success.
6. The people repented, and their city is spared for another 150 years! Repentance is always hard, but driven by a new faith it is possible. It is hard to say, "I'm wrong, I need to change my direction and go with God's way."

Faith won't be hard when He comes again. We will be with Him through all the things that will happen in the final days. It won't be by faith. We will have the Spirit in and among us too, but the Lamb will be seen to our eyes, and we will hear the sounds of His presence with our ears. We will look at each other, and see each other, and many others, but faith will not be hard in those days, dear ones.

You may find it hard to trust God today. Or, a day may come when it is so. Remember this man, Jonah, and how God delivered him from the most terrible event imaginable. Remember how God used Him. Remember Jonah's own words, that God is ***gracious and compassionate God, slow to anger and abundant in lovingkindness, and one who relents concerning calamity.***

(Jonah 4:2)

If faith is hard today, and if it is hard to live the faith of Abraham, trusting, obeying Him, look to our Savior Himself, ***fixing our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of faith, who for the joy set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.*** (Hebrews 12:2).

Engage your faith,  
 wait on Him,  
 entrust to Him your pain, fear, frustration, any despair you  
 have, any depression, all the temptations.  
 You will not be disappointed.

If faith has seemed so hard to you, that you can't find any in your heart yet, ask Him for it. Ask the Lord who gives liberally and generously to give you the one thing in your heart that He requires. Call out to Him—here isn't

important—wherever you are comfortable, and MAYBE here, sure! But I beg of you, do it. He will respond. Think on the cross of Jesus Christ and His payment for sin—for *your* sin. Ask Him to make Himself plain to you. Invite Him to show Himself to you. You will not be embarrassed. You will not be disappointed. You will not be disillusioned. You will find the finest friend imaginable. You will find a lover. You will find a Defender. You will find a God who wants to bless you.

From Constable's *Notes on the Bible*:

1:17 The identity of the great fish remains a mystery since the only record of what it was is in this story, and that description is general. The text does not say that God created this fish out of nothing (*ex nihilo*) nor does what the fish did require such an explanation. We know of many types of fish capable of swallowing a human being whole. (Two examples are the sperm whale and the whale shark.) Occasionally today we hear of someone who has lived for several days in a fish or in some other large animal and has emerged alive. Notwithstanding Jonah's experience has been one of the favorite targets of unbelievers in the miraculous who claim that this story is preposterous (cf. Matt. 12:39–40). Significantly God saved Jonah's life by using a fish rather than in a more conventional method such as providing a piece of wood that he could cling to. Thus this method of deliverance must have some special significance. The Jews were familiar with the mythical sea monster (Ugaritic *lotan*, Heb. *leviathan*) that symbolized both the uncontrollable chaos of the sea and the chaotic forces that only Yahweh could manage (cf. Ps. 74:13–14; 104:26). The Hebrews did not believe that leviathan really existed any more than we believe in Santa Claus. Yet the figure was familiar to them, and they knew what it represented. For Jonah to relate his experience of deliverance in his cultural ancient Near Eastern context would have impressed his hearers that a great God had sent him to them. It is probably for this reason that God chose to save Jonah by using a great fish. Here God controlled the traditionally uncontrollable to spare Jonah's life. The God who is great enough to control it could control anything, and He used His power for a loving purpose. This is more remarkable since Jonah as God's servant had rebelled against his Master. God's method of deliverance therefore reveals both His great power and His gracious heart. "Men have been looking so hard at the great fish that they have failed to see the great God." "It is the greatness of Israel's God that is the burden of the book." Jonah was able to calculate how long he was in the fish after he came out of it. Obviously he lost all track of time inside the fish. The time was significant because Jonah's deliverance became a precursor of an even greater salvation that took three days and nights to accomplish (Matt. 12:40). God restored Jonah to life so he would be God's instrument in providing salvation to a large Gentile (and indirectly Jewish) population under God's judgment for their sins. He raised Jesus to life so He would be God's instrument in providing salvation for an even larger population of Gentiles and Jew under God's judgment for their sins.

2:1 This is the first mention of Jonah praying. Until now he had been fleeing from God and hiding from Him. Now in his great distress he finally sought the Lord. Being willing to die by drowning was one thing (v. 1:12), but death by gradual digestion was something Jonah had not anticipated. We do not know how long Jonah struggled in the sea before the fish swallowed him. Perhaps that terror contributed to his repentance. God often has to discipline His rebellious children severely before we turn back to Him.

## Other Scriptures

Matthew 16:4 (NASB)

<sup>4</sup> “An evil and adulterous generation seeks after a sign; and a sign will not be given it, except the sign of Jonah.” And He left them, and went away.

Luke 11:32 (NASB)

<sup>32</sup> “The men of Nineveh shall stand up with this generation at the judgment and condemn it, because they repented at the preaching of Jonah; and behold, something greater than Jonah is here.

# Dartmouth Bible Notes

Notes from the Pulpit Ministry of Dartmouth Bible Church

Series: Faith (lesson 17)

Scripture: Galatians 2:

Speaker: Rev. Neil C. Damgaard, Th.M., D.Min.

Date: November 1<sup>st</sup>, 2009



## ***Justified Through Faith in Christ***

Galatians 2:15-21 (NASB)

Faith

<sup>15</sup> “We *are* Jews by nature, and not sinners from among the Gentiles;<sup>16</sup> nevertheless knowing that a man is not justified by the works of the Law but through faith in Christ Jesus, even we have believed in Christ Jesus, that we may be justified by faith in Christ, and not by the works of the Law; since by the works of the Law shall no flesh be justified. <sup>17</sup> “But if, while seeking to be justified in Christ, we ourselves have also been found sinners, is Christ then a minister of sin? May it never be! <sup>18</sup> “For if I rebuild what I have *once* destroyed, I prove myself to be a transgressor. <sup>19</sup> “For through the Law I died to the Law, that I might live to God. <sup>20</sup> “I have been crucified with Christ; and it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the *life* which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me, and delivered Himself up for me. <sup>21</sup> “I do not nullify the grace of God; for if righteousness *comes* through the Law, then Christ died needlessly.”

**Introduction** Maybe we’re wrong. Maybe God is distant. Maybe God is not too interested in us, at least in the details of our lives. Maybe He isn’t even a perfect God, or even more maybe-we’re-wrong, maybe there is NO God at all.

We have now come five months into this series on “faith” and we’re at the end of what I can think to say, and maybe we are of all people the ones most to be pitied because somehow we have believed a lie. Some people say we Christians are really nothing more than a big social club, a society of mutually deceived people who have bought into a myth—a cool myth--but finally – alas!—a myth after all. Some people think we keep each other IN the church by fear and manipulation and that we have authored a great saga about God’s Son coming to earth, and a future reign of Him upon this planet, when in REALITY, all that really is, is the planet itself, and the creatures who crawl around on it.

And maybe, as some suggest, within this great saga about Jesus, we the keepers of the story, imagine a certain code of living by which we police each

other and attract new members: live a certain way, worship our God and Him alone (and yes, He's a Him,) live with a certain morality—no stealing, no revenge, no sex except after marriage, tithing, church-going, Bible carrying, song singing. We have created a Law, and we insist that people live according to it, otherwise they can't be in our club. God may be out there somewhere, but He didn't create your ethics, your code of living, your Law, people might say. And maybe they're right.

If they ARE right, then all the martyrs of the church over the centuries died in vain. All the schools and hospitals which were prompted by Christian thinkers (including Harvard, Yale and Princeton, all of which were begun as training schools for pastors) and all the great cathedrals that were built—some of which took a hundred years to build—all of these were built utterly in vain.

If you have ever wondered like that, you are in good company for I believe the earliest Christians might have felt disenfranchised from Israel. The Christians were the new and strange religion. They hung out on the fringes of Judaism for a while, but as soon as Paul and Peter and James got their playbook worked out, the Christians started seeming more and more strange to the Jews. The Jews were clinging to their identity with the Law. They were very proud of their heritage as God's chosen people. They weren't so much about individual identity with God as they were the nation, the people, the community, the joint-identity we all have as Jews. But we see that SAVING FAITH is the individual starting place, in the process of developing faith in God. It isn't about your family's faith, or your church's tradition of faith, or the collective faith of some group you're in. Its about YOU, and whether YOU are trusting in Jesus Christ for salvation from sin.

The Book of Galatians is one of the tougher books to grasp in the New Testament collection of writings by the apostles. Galatians is written into a problem area that believers in Galatia were wrestling with: the grace of God. They were being confused by a guild of teachers who were coming along *after* the apostles, and countermanding their teachings regarding what it means to be truly saved. They weren't denying that Jesus had come, or that He was even the Son of God. They were adjusting the Galatian Christians' concept of how to be saved and to live life. They were saying you need to be a follower of the Law, the code, the principles of living, before you can really become a Jesus-follower. "Simple trust in Jesus of Nazareth is not sufficient. You please God by LIVING for God and by demonstrating that by living according to the Code."

Which brings us to Galatians 2. Paul was a Jew, and he too was glad to be one. He even says ***we are Jews by nature...*** or, by nation—by race. They were not pagans—any of the other nations. In vs. 16 he states it and REstates it:

nevertheless knowing that a man is not justified by the works of the Law but through faith in Christ Jesus, even we have believed in Christ Jesus, that we may be justified by faith in Christ, and not by the works of the Law; since by the works of the Law shall no flesh be justified.

(ESV is a little clearer)

yet we know that a person is not justified by works of the law but through faith in Jesus Christ, so we also have believed in Christ Jesus, in order to be justified by faith in Christ and not by works of the law, because by works of the law no one will be justified.

(NLT)

Yet we know that a person is made right with God by faith in Jesus Christ, not by obeying the law. And we have believed in Christ Jesus, so that we might be made right with God because of our faith in Christ, not because we have obeyed the law. For no one will ever be made right with God by obeying the law.

(The Message)

We know very well that we are not set right with God by rule-keeping but only through personal faith in Jesus Christ. How do we know? We tried it—and we had the best system of rules the world has ever seen! Convinced that no human being can please God by self-improvement, we believed in Jesus as the Messiah so that we might be set right before God by trusting in the Messiah, not by trying to be good.

This is really an incredible concept—we are made completely alright with God by focusing all our hope of BEING made right with God on Christ, and not on ourselves trying to clean it up, start it over, re-write the past, make amends, help the needy, forgive other sinners, etc. ***By the works of the Law no one will be justified.*** Now don't just move over to some imagined list of good works and call that "the works of the Law." The Law of Moses was very specific about what kind of works were needed among God's people... The "works of the Law" included nothing less than loving the Lord our God with all our heart and all our soul and all our might (Deut.6:4). It included things like keeping the laws of worship and sacrifice with great specificity, including all the cleanness and uncleanness things. It included laws for how to spend the Sabbath Day, and to do so every week. It included a great many rules for how to treat people. And on and on. The ***works of the Law*** by which NO ONE shall be justified were many specific acts.

Now, justification should not be confused with forgiveness, which is the fruit of justification, nor with atonement, which is the basis of justification. Rather it is the favorable verdict of God, the righteous Judge, that one who

formerly stood condemned has now been granted a new status at the bar of divine justice.<sup>20</sup>

But saving faith is never a license to sin. In verses 17 & 18 he refuted the charge of the Judaizers that justification by faith led to lawless behavior. He said this made Christ, in effect, a promoter of sin. This could never be. If a Christian puts himself or herself back under the Law, the Law will show him or her to be a sinner since no one can keep the Law perfectly. These verses are a strong testimony that Christians are free from the requirements of the Mosaic Law.<sup>21</sup> And people might say that today: “Your free gospel is too good to be true! If one accepts Jesus, since that is a free transaction, that person can go on and live however he wants!” And here, as in Romans 6:1,2, Paul says, “No way!” In that passage he wrote, ***WHAT shall we say then? Are we to continue in sin that grace might increase? <sup>2</sup> May it never be! How shall we who died to sin still live in it?***

So salvation comes by faith alone in what Jesus did on the cross. But saving faith ISN'T FIRE INSURANCE. It isn't a “policy” that you never think about until the day of the fire! Paul says that we LIVE by faith too, a life of being, in effect, crucified over and over again to the flesh. It isn't a one-time thing. You don't go to some big meeting or have the one big crisis in your life, and then you're exempt from temptation. Paul said, ***I have been crucified with Christ; and it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me, and delivered Himself up for me.*** (Galatians 2:20)

We live by faith. That's the Christian life. It is a constant process of giving things over to the Lord, waking up, really, to how OFTEN I need to do that and that I CAN do that. There isn't anything I cannot give over to the Lord Jesus Christ. As we grow in faith, I believe the Lord asks for admittance to more and more areas of our lives.

Long ago I had a fellow in the Navigators draw an illustration on a table napkin that shows how the process of growing in Christ and giving things over to the Lord works. He begins with a little issue and then deals with more and more, sometimes repeatedly until He gets control of that issue. In the beginning He doesn't show us the whole picture or we would get discouraged. But as time goes on, He takes control of more and more of the “issues” in our lives, and becomes more and more our Lord as well as our Savior. This is because He has only good in mind for me. And gradually, I want Him to be in complete control.

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<sup>20</sup>Tom Constable. (2003). *Tom Constable's Expository Notes on the Bible* (Ga 2:15). Galaxie Software.

<sup>21</sup>Constable, *Ibid*

I must admit—it isn't easy becoming a person whose *first* impulse is to say, when a challenge comes up: "Let's bring God in on this." "Let's pray and ask the Lord to move on this." My nature is more to rant and fuss and expect doom or defeat. But I need to become a ***THE LIFE I NOW LIVE I LIVE BY FAITH IN THE SON OF GOD WHO LOVED ME AND DELIVERED HIMSELF UP FOR ME*** kind of person. If He was willing to deliver Himself up for me, why would He not work in the day to day challenges that I need Him for?

In this pulpit series I have sought to look at faith from a number of different perspectives, many of which you have experienced. I cannot imagine living without faith in the God of the Bible. If you do not yet have faith in Him, for salvation from sin or on a day to day basis, ask Him to give it to you. I believe He will respond to a request like that. Faith in the Lord Jesus Christ is the one thing that a person needs to become justified before God, to have all your sins forgiven, and to live the most exciting and joyful life possible. You don't dredge up that faith by yourself. You receive it as a gift from God. Invite Him into your life. Call Him on His Word. See what happens!