

I wish I had your faith

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Date: 08 September 2013

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[0 : 00] And this evening I thought we would look at this response, I wish I had your faith.! And I once conducted a funeral in this very room and somebody came up to me afterwards and said, you've obviously got great faith, I wish I had your faith.

So people do say that, at least twice. Let's pray. Lord, help us to be credible, sincere and fruitful witnesses for you.

We find it rather amazing that you should use us for anything at all. But that you should use us to bring other people to you seems to us to be the most amazing privilege.

So help us to be obedient and to be ready in this particular matter. For Jesus' sake. Amen.

Amen. So has anybody else ever had that sort of comment? Yeah. So the way I'd like to tackle it this evening is to look at the fear behind it, to look at what we would call the theology.

[1 : 41] And I've got three points to make. And then we'll see after that whether we can come up with a one-liner. Because I confess I couldn't.

Maybe together we can think of something. So three points. And the first one is this, that spiritual jealousy can be a valid biblical motivation.

So if somebody says, I wish I had your something, your peace. I wish I had your composure. I wish I had your sense of certainty.

I wish I had your faith. I'm saying that's a step in the right direction. And it is something that the Bible recognizes.

Please can we turn to Paul's letter to the Romans, chapter 9. And because Christians believe that the Bible is God speaking, and that's where we get our ideas from and our faith from, I'm going to refer again and again to the Bible.

[2 : 52] Romans chapter 9. If you're not familiar with this book, it's very long, quite remarkably complicated. But part of it is to do with the fact that at the time he wrote it, Jews were becoming Christians and some Jews weren't becoming Christians.

And there's this question, should Jews become Christians? Or after all, God invented being a Jew, so has he changed his mind or what?

So I'm reading in Romans 9, verse 1, where Paul says, the apostle Paul says, I speak the truth in Christ, I am not lying, my conscience confirms it in the Holy Spirit, I have great sorrow and unceasing anguish in my heart.

I could wish that I myself were cursed and cut off from Christ for the sake of my brothers, in other words, his Jewish nation, those of my own race, the people of Israel.

Theirs is the adoption of sons, theirs is the divine glory, the covenants, the receiving of the law, the temple worship and the promises.

[4 : 00] Theirs are the patriarchs and from them is traced the human ancestry of Christ, who is God over all, forever praised. Amen.

Amen. So I'm just going to stop there and say, do you see that he's building up a picture? He's saying, really these people ought to have or have a claim on, and he gives that list.

And actually the list is not a million miles from the things he's just been saying that Christians have. So Christians have the adoption of sons. He was just talking about that.

Christians have the hope of glory. Christians have the covenants and so on and so on.

So he's saying that I, in some sense, the Jewish people have a claim on this, but the Christians have got the solid thing themselves. Now if you turn over with that in mind to chapter 11, and you'll appreciate I'm missing out a lot, but this is what he says a little bit further on.

[5 : 09] Romans 11, verse 11. Again I ask, did the Jews stumble so as to fall beyond recovery? Not at all. Rather, because of their transgression, salvation has come to the Gentiles to make Israel

envious.

But if their transgression means riches for the world and their loss means riches for the Gentiles, how much greater riches will their fullness bring? I'm talking to you Gentiles.

Inasmuch as I'm the apostle to the Gentiles, I make much of my ministry in the hope that I may somehow arouse my own people to envy and save some of them.

Don't you see what he's saying? He's saying these are the people who really ought to be believing and having the real thing, but it's Christians who have this, and I want Christians to have these privileges, and I want them to enjoy them, so that the Jews who ought to have them will look over and say, I wish I had some of that.

That's what he's saying, isn't it? I'm very pleased to build up the Gentiles, that's to say the non-Jews, and for them, when they're Christians, to really enjoy and appreciate all the things of the whole Bible, if I may arouse my own people to envy and save some of them.

[6 : 39] So I'm arguing by extension and saying, if that's the case regarding Jews vis-a-vis Christian believers who are Gentiles, that same pattern might be repeated in other ways.

So Roman Catholic people might say, I do envy you Protestants. We sort of have seriousness, and we sort of have priests, but you seem to have an access to God that we don't have.

You seem to have a reality that we don't have, and I'm envious, and I'd like some of that. Do you see what I mean? So my point number one is simple, that that sort of spiritual jealousy, that sort of envy, can be a valid biblical motivation.

And I suppose when we're witnessing, and perhaps when we're preaching, there's a temptation to always be scolding people who are not Christians.

It's a temptation we have to be very careful about. But in this case, it's congratulating them. It's saying, you've got the right idea. Wanting some of that is right.

[7 : 54] Now, want it more. Do you see what I mean? Right. So that was point one. Fairly straightforward, I think. Point number two.

Faith is both a gift and a duty. So if somebody says, I wish I had your faith, we have to bear in mind, faith is both a gift and a duty.

And you might be trying to get your head around that a little bit. What do I mean by that? Faith. And I mean saving faith. That's the sort of faith that God looks at and says, that's the response I'm looking for to make, to bring somebody into a new life, into what Christians would call salvation. So one point is that it is not humanly generated. There is an inability in humankind to come up with faith, no matter how hard you try.

If you try hard to have faith, there is a description of that.

[9 : 10] There is a word for it. It's called make-believe. And Christianity isn't make-believe. It's not making yourself believe something you know isn't true.

Richard Dawkins seems to think that that's what Christianity is. Christians have never said that. Don't know where he gets the idea from. It is not humanly generated. There is an inability within humans to make themselves believe.

And when faith exists, it only ever exists as a gift. Ephesians 2, verses 6 to 10. Ephesians 2, verses 6 to 10.

Now notice I'm saying it only ever exists as a gift. So notice the way that Paul says it here. And I wonder if Mark could read that to us in a loud voice.

Ephesians 2, verses 6 to 10. And what grace does art in Christ and seated us with it in the plain and the realms of Christ Jesus, in order that in the coming ages we might show the eternal power of richness of grace and expressed in his kindness to us in Christ Jesus, which is why grace you have been saved through faith.

[10 : 33] And this, not for yourselves, it is the gift of God, not by works, so that no one can boast. For we are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus, to do good works, which God prepared in the past for us to do.

Thank you very much. Now please notice what he's saying there. He isn't saying, some of you had faith as a gift, others of you did your own faith.

He says, you have faith, I can guarantee it was a gift. For it is by grace you have been saved through faith, and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God.

And there's a policy matter here that God will not allow people to get to heaven and say, look how well I did.

That would be called boasting. And God has set it up so it completely and totally excludes boasting. Not by works so that no one can boast.

[11 : 41] So faith is a gift. It's a free gift. It's not a 50-50 gift. It's not a buy one, get one free thing. It is a gift. Pure gift.

And, it is commanded as a duty. If we fail to believe, we are sinning.

So we're trying to get our heads around that. That's what the Bible says. Let's see the Bible say it.

So for example, in Acts 2 verse 38, Acts 38, this is Peter on the day of Pentecost, saying, what shall, people say to him, what shall we do?

And in Acts 2 verse 38, Peter says, I'll read it, repent and believe, sorry, repent and be baptized, I've put repent and believe, haven't I?

Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ, for the forgiveness of your sins. So I've completely misquoted that, and that's an invalid reference, so we forget that one.

[12 : 56] That wasn't very good, was it? John 3, 16. John 3, 16.

This makes the other point, which I failed to make the first time there. John 3, 16. For God so loved the world, that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him, shall not perish, but have eternal life.

For God did not send his Son into the world, to condemn the world, but to save the world through him. Whoever believes in him is not condemned, whoever does not believe, stands condemned already, because he has not believed, in the name of God's one and only Son.

So I read that as saying, that failure to believe, is a fault, is a sin. We are condemned, because we have not believed.

That's how I read that. Now, can anybody help me out on the first one, because the verse I gave, was invalid. Anybody think of a verse, where we are commanded to believe? Yes, all in evidence.

[14 : 25] We are commanded to believe. Yeah, I think you've come to the same, hurdle as I've come to, because it commands everyone to, repent.

Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. Yes. Yeah. Repenting is always believing, repenting.

It isn't a separate thing. The word, it's the word that God requires, requires, to believe in the one who is sent. Yeah, that was John 6, was it not?

Yeah, I think I read that earlier. John 6, 28, what must we do, to do the works, that God requires, the work of God is this, to believe in the one who is sent.

Yep, anybody take us any further? Yes, yes, yep, without faith it is impossible, to please God.

[15 : 40] Hebrews 11, 6. Hebrews 11, 6.

Without faith it is impossible, to please God, because anyone who comes to him, must believe, that he exists, and that he rewards, those who earnestly seek him. I think we're making the point, although perhaps not, in as conclusive a way, as I thought I had made it, but I'm going to stick with it.

Faith is a gift, and it is a duty. We are, commanded to believe, although I haven't given you a verse, but I think we're getting, the implication, of other bits of the Bible, and to fail to believe, is, not just a misfortune, but it's a sin.

So, if you're going to follow, if you're willing to follow me on that, here's some thoughts about it.

Such is the pickle, and the black hole, and the slavery, of sin.

Because you might think, actually it's very unfair of God, to expect us to do something, which we are incapable of doing. Because that's what I just said, isn't it?

[17 : 03] God commands us to do something, but we can't do it. It only ever happens, if God gives faith as a gift. And you might be thinking, now I come to think of it, that sounds very unfair.

To which I'm going to say, it is unfair, but that doesn't mean, that it's, not entirely reasonable. I mean, when I say it's unfair, it doesn't compute.

This is, the pickle of sin. That it gets us, into a situation, that we cannot get out of. It's like, a black hole.

You know, a black hole, in astronomy. You get sucked into it, you can't get sucked out of it. You might say, that's unfair. Well, that's just the way black holes work.

Sin, you can get into, but there isn't a way out. That's the pickle. It's like slavery. You can get into slavery, but you can't get out of it. And sin is like that.

[18 : 03] It, constrains us, it grabs us in, so there is no way out. Even in this matter of faith, we are commanded, to do something, that we cannot do.

Let me put it another way. Our sinfulness, is not an excuse for our sin. Because our inability, is a sinful inability. It's part of our sin.

And, we can't make our sinfulness, an excuse for our sin. If you see what I mean. We can't say to God, well, I can't believe you.

It's unfair of you, to ask me to do that, because I can't. To which the answer is, well, you can't, because you're a sinner. And my third comment is, that rather than, complain about, what sin, has done to us, and where it's left us, and what an impossible situation, we're in, and try and argue it, and, debate it.

The only thing to do, with sin, is to confess it. I've got a great big thick book, by, Burkauer, who is a theologian.

[19 : 20] It's really about as thick as that, called Sin. And, he says, the most helpful thing, I read in it, it actually says it near the front, so most of the rest of the pages, are fairly pointless.

Not true. He says, you can't, come to an understanding of sin, so that you can explain it, and show the reasons for it. All you ever do, is get to a point, where you say, God have mercy on me, a sinner.

Try to make excuses, well I can't get out of this, I'm stuck, it's your fault God, and God says, no it's your fault, you're the sinner. Lord I can't even believe.

No you can't, can you? Lord have mercy on me, a sinner. So, that was point number two, that saving faith, is both a gift, and a duty.

Would you like, I've got a third point here, were we, are you happy with that, in terms of clarification? Yeah. So, number three, the Bible doesn't leave us, saying, oh it's a huge pickle, people can't believe.

[20 : 38] The Bible goes further than that, it says, you are to have faith, you need to have faith, believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, and you will be saved, I'm sure it says that somewhere.

Faith, saving faith, comes by, well what does it come by? So, does it come by doing nothing, by inaction?

No. No. Matthew 7, verse 7, but a minute ago you said, it's not within human capacity, to believe. That might, yep, that's a truth, but there's also a truth, that you need, to get faith, you need, to be active, it's no use just sitting there, lamenting, saying, oh I can't believe, I can't believe.

So Jesus in Matthew 7, 7 says, ask and it will be given to you, seek and you will find, knock and the door will be opened, for everyone who asks, receives, and he who seeks, finds, and to him who knocks, the door will be opened.

[21 : 47] And I think that's a very general piece of advice, and he's saying, okay you don't have faith, you want faith, well ask God for it. You don't see what this is all about, you feel as though you're, locked out of something, well knock, and keep on knocking, and the door will be opened.

And you're looking for something, that you can't find at the moment, well seek, and keep on seeking. Go to it, don't just sit there on your bottom, waiting for something to happen, get going, with God, start putting in some effort, ask, knock, seek, inactivity gets you nowhere, and is not what you're supposed to do.

In verse 13, Jesus says, enter through the narrow gate. In Luke 13, Luke, that was chapter 7 verse 13, Luke 13 24, Matthew, Mark, Luke 13 24, he says, Luke 13 24, somebody says to him, Lord are only a few people going to be saved, and he said, make every effort, to enter through the narrow door.

Make every effort, or strive to enter through the narrow door. So this is good spiritual advice. So in a sense saying, oh I wish I had your faith, as if it just drops out of the ceiling, and you just sit there, and wait for it to happen, if it doesn't happen, then it doesn't happen.

That's not the way Jesus presents it. He says, okay you want faith, well, make an effort, strive, to enter through the narrow door, knock, seek, ask.

[23 : 45] There's another verse that says, you have not, because you ask not. So if you're spiritually seeking, if you're conscious that Christian people have something that you don't have, don't just sit there, waiting for it to drop down magically.

Put in the effort, and I'll explain where the effort comes from. There is a proper spiritual striving and struggling. I know that in one of the Stuart Townend songs, he says, all strivings cease, which is a line that he's copied, from somewhere else actually.

But I don't think that's a, that is not necessarily a biblical idea. There is such a thing as rest, but it does say strive to enter into the rest.

So that, just, inertia is no solution spiritually. And I want to urge you, if you are interested in spiritual things, you know that Christians have got something you haven't got, then put in some effort.

Now, how would we put in that effort? So, Romans 10. Now, you see, I would find it difficult to say to my dad, put in some effort.

[25 : 02] I couldn't say that to my dad. But it would, it would be that, there are means to employ. There are things to do. Romans 10, 14.

14 to 17. How then can they call on the one they have not believed in? Okay, these people can't call on God because they haven't believed.

And how can they believe in the one of whom they have not heard? And how can they hear without someone, preaching to them? And how can they preach unless they're sent?

As it is written, how beautiful are the feet of those who bring good news. And he talks about the Israelites. They've not accepted the good news. For Isaiah says, Lord, who has believed our message?

Consequently, faith comes from hearing the message. And the message is heard through the word of Christ. So faith comes by hearing.

[26 : 01] And hearing the message of Jesus Christ. So here's one of the things you can put an effort into, which is getting to hear the message about Jesus Christ.

So if you wanted this evening to hear the message of Jesus Christ, you're hearing it now. If you wanted to hear some more, ask Ben.

You'd be willing to do that. Lots of people would. Hear the message. Get it coming into you.

And it actually has the power to do something inside you. And as you hear, and as you pray, and as you say, Lord, I'm seeming to get a bit of the hang of this, but I want more.

I haven't arrived yet. If you strive and ask, then hearing produces faith. Faith comes from hearing the message.

[27 : 10] So that was one thing that you can very seriously do. Here's another thing you can very seriously do. John chapter 20. John chapter 20, verse 30.

So I'll read this. This is at the end of John's gospel. John has written down the story of Jesus at length. Although he's cut out a lot, he's only given you the bits that he thinks are really important. John 20, verse 30. Jesus did many other miraculous signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not recorded in this book. But these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing, you may have life in his name.

What's John saying? He's saying, I wrote this down. And my very point in writing it down is so that you could read it. And as you read it, you too can have Christian faith.

You can believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and by believing, have life in his name. That's a very important principle.

[28 : 30] He's saying, well, how can I get faith? I envy your faith. Well, you can have faith and read the book by reading, considering, receiving, testimony in the book, in scripture.

So if you have trouble reading, get somebody to read it to you. Get it on an audio thing so you can listen to it. If you have trouble understanding it, ask somebody to explain it to you.

You could do worse than saying, let's meet up each week, we'll read a chapter, you tell me, you explain it to me. More than happy to do that. And what this is really doing is saying that we're looking at Jesus.

Here's somebody looking at a chair. Now, I doubt very much whether you looked at the chair before you sat on it this evening. But more fool you because the chair is holding your weight and you entrusted yourself to the chair in an act of faith, even as you're doing now.

You're not clutching at your neighbor in case the chair gives way or poisoning yourself so that if the chair gave way and crumbled, you wouldn't fall. I can see you're all leaning your full weight on the chair.

[29 : 56] That's an act of faith. If the chair had been dodgy or woodwormy, you would have been well advised to take a good look at the chair before sitting on it.

Because even in this thing, even in this situation, faith comes by looking. You didn't make yourself believe the chair could hold your weight.

You looked at it and you looked at its quality. Let's imagine you did this. You could have done this. You probably didn't. You probably took it for granted. But you could have looked at it.

Metal. Metal's good for holding weight. Joints seem to be welded. Welded joints are good for holding weight. It's not covered in tissue paper. It's got a wooden seat, probably.

So I think other people are sitting on it. They haven't fallen down. So the chair will hold my weight. I look at the chair and that produces faith within me.

[30 : 55] I'll go for it. I'll sit on it. In a similar sort of way, as we look at Jesus, the more we look at him, the better we look at him, the more we find out about him, the more we find I can trust him.

He's true. He's right. He's all the things he says he is. I will go for it and lean my whole weight for eternity on Jesus. I wish I had your faith.

You can have faith. By looking at Jesus. And lastly, faith must come to life by obedience.

Now, you can't make yourself believe. It is not done by an effort of will. But, James 2, 25 and 26 says this about faith.

talks about a prostitute who was a woman of faith. And we know she was a woman of faith because she risked her life to hide some spies.

[32 : 12] And James looks back on that and he says, in the same way, was not even Rahab the prostitute considered righteous for what she did when she gave lodging to the spies and sent them off in a different direction?

She risked her life. She put her faith into action. And that's faith. And James says a bold thing. He says, as the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without deeds is dead.

And faith comes to life and lives by action. So you can't make yourself believe.

But you might well come to the point where believing is not the problem. The problem is whether you're actually going to act on it. And the Bible says, if you don't act on it, then it doesn't really count as faith.

It's just talk. So acting might be, I'm actually going to come to church every week. I'm actually going to go and buy a Bible.

[33 : 20] I'm going to read it. I'm actually going to give up some things that I know God isn't pleased with. I'm actually going to start doing some things I know God is pleased with. There's a point of action.

And faith must come to life by obedience. It's no use saying, I wish I had your faith. I wish I had your faith. And it might well be your problem is you're just not willing to put faith into action.

That's your problem. It isn't as though faith hasn't, you know, somebody else's fault because faith hasn't dropped into your head from the sky. You know what you should believe, but you're not willing to do what you should do.

Faith comes to life by obedience. So those are my three points. The last one is how faith comes.

Okay. A little bit longer than I thought.

Now then, I wish I had your faith. I'm looking for a one-liner. Yes? Oh, lovely. Thank you very much, Steve. Acts 16.31.

[34 : 27] What does it say? Yeah. Thank you.

You saved my skin there. So, Acts 16.31, was it? Thank you. Appreciate that.

So, can we round off? Does anybody, so I think this is the right territory to be thinking in. Can anybody give us a one-liner? I wish I had your faith.

Is there a one-liner? You can, yes. Yeah. You can, is a very simple answer.

Okay, ask God. Yeah, yeah, you could say ask God. Couldn't you? Yes.

[35 : 28] Yes. Yeah, they always, they always lead on to something else, don't they? Yep. Yep. Anybody else? Oh, you could do.

Yeah. what have you done or what are you doing about it? That's a good answer.

So, what are you doing about it? Hmm. Yeah. Yeah.

So you just come back with that. Which is a promise and a command wrapped into one, isn't it?

You will be saved. Yep. Yep.

[36 : 51] Yes. Yes. Thank you. Do you know, I would be inclined to say in front of this, the Bible says, believe on the Lord Jesus and you'll be saved.

I think there's a wholesomeness in saying the Bible says. Billy Graham used to say that. And it's a very good way of speaking.

So he'd be on the telly and the equivalent of Jeremy Paxman would be taunting him with something or other. And he would reply, well, you know, Jeremy, the Bible says whatever.

That's a very good answer. Yes. Yes. Yes. I wish I had your faith.

What is my faith? Because sometimes people say, they say, oh, that's so cute. I think getting them to articulate what they see, what they like, and possibly, at the very least, possibly.

[38 : 05] Yeah. So you could tell me, what do you see as my faith, or something like that? Yes. Thank you.

Yes.

Yes. Yes.

Yes. Yes. Yes.

Yes. No, you've got to, it's an answer that, it's got to suit where it's coming from, isn't it? Yes.

[39 : 06] Yes. Yes. Yes. Yes. Yes. Yes. Yes. Yes. Yes. Yes. Yes.

Yes. Yes. Yes. Yes. Yes. Yes. Yes. Yes. Yes. Yes. Yes.

Yes. Yes. Yes. Yes. Yes. Yes. That's a very helpful comment as well. So, it's worth emphasizing that. So, the Bible isn't saying you go through a crisis and then forget about it or everything's changed on automatic.

It's entering a new state, isn't it? it. I am going from unbelief to living a life of faith and obedience.

Yeah. Hmm.

Hmm. Hmm. Hmm. Okay.