

Faith - The Ultimate Fact 1

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- [0 : 00] The word that we're talking about today is faith. I was greatly happy watching the journal last night and finding out what it isn't.
- And what it isn't was the basis of the oil prices going up in the world today. And it's apparently not because there's a shortage of oil or anything like that.
- It's just that there is fear, panic, and hysteria. And fear, panic, and hysteria are not what this is about.
- And it's hard for me to know because I've always thought of myself as a very... It's... I don't know what... I don't know where the limit... What happens to them, you know. ...loyal to my country now than I used to.
- [1 : 02] But I feel my country is saying, your loyalty doesn't mean that much to us. And so you know what you can do with it.
- And I'm sure that nobody's making that message explicit. It's just sort of implicit in the difficult times in which we live. And so you see that a whole country, not only a country, but a whole...
- ...western world at least is... ...is caught up in... ...fear, panic, and hysteria. And that the reflector of that is the price of oil.
- And you guys probably understand that. I don't altogether understand it. But it does seem to me a strange reality that fear can so grip a whole country.
- And we have apparently no control over it, whatever. You know. That fear and that the disease which everybody refers to called recession...
- [2 : 08] ...is a disease which we give ourselves up to with complete abandon. Perhaps making some personal choice commitments, hope will...
- ...effects of it in the same way that you take shots. But there it is. And that's what happens.
- And I guess faith in your country, loyalty to your country, is very important. But it derives from something else.
- And it's that something else that I want to talk about today. And that is in the word faith. So I just want to explain this word to you as I've been trying to think about it.
- And figuring out how you explain it in the kind of world in which we live. I think faith is illustrated in a lot of really interesting ways.
- [3 : 19] I think it's illustrated by a blind man seeing. Moving from non-faith to faith is comparable to moving from blindness to seeing.
- It's comparable to a deaf man hearing. To a hungry man being fed. To a dead man being... To a lame man being made to walk.
- To a sick man being made whole. It's... Those are illustrations of what faith is. It's like that.
- Now, Lazarus undoubtedly had a problem when he was raised from the dead and turned up for supper that night. And as they sat around the table, people would say to him, you know, what is it like to be dead?

You know, we've never been there and we'd like to know. And no doubt he could explain something to them about it. I find it hard to imagine quite how you answer that question.

[4 : 25] But I'm sure that his friends and certainly all the media would want to know what it was like. And he would have to try and explain it to them. The only reason he can do that is that he is no longer dead.

He is alive. And so he can explain to people what it was like being dead. Now, to try and explain faith to people who haven't got it is like Lazarus lying in the tomb trying to explain what it's like to be dead to people who are all dead anyway.

You know, you can't, there's nothing you can explain. There's, you've got, it's got to be some kind of contrast. It's, I had a friend whose name was Mario Galeazzi and he came out and spent some time with us.

And he is a counselor in Toronto and he is blind and has been blind most of his life. He, he went blind as a teenager, I think.

And, but he was wonderfully interested and he wonderfully sensitive to every breeze, every breeze that blew, wonderfully sensitive to the, to the sorts of things, wonderfully sensitive to what was going on in a world that he couldn't see.

[5 : 43] And, uh, wonderfully grateful if when you walked with him, you tried to explain things to him, you know, and say, well, now there's this and then there's that and put your hand on this and can you feel that and try and get, help him to understand what Stanley Park was like, for instance, as he walked through it.

And, but yeah, I came to the question of color and I said, well, uh, there's the loveliest sunset, you know, with the whole range of colors going. And I said, what, what do you do when I talk to you about colors?

He says, I remember because, uh, I once was able to see, but I don't know how you would explain colors to somebody who had been born blind. How you would explain that, I mean, there's a lot of things that I guess it would be difficult to explain, but that seems, that seems hard.

And the reason I raise that is simply because I think explaining faith to people who haven't got it is comparable to explaining color to people who can't see it.

And that it's, uh, it's a very difficult thing to do. And we spend a lot of our time trying to. Uh, the, the, the next thing I want to tell you about faith is that, uh, when, when Jesus, uh, was here on earth, he did a number of miracles in order to try and illustrate what faith was.

[7 : 05] And, you know, those miracles have to do with the blind and the lame and the deaf and the dumb and the sick and the dying that, that, uh, he did all those.

And, uh, those were the lesser that explained the greater event, which was coming to faith. Now, we put it the other way around.

We think faith is nothing, but that, uh, you know, that if you can get somebody who's blind to see. But Christ seemed to have used those miracles as, in a sense, lesser events that explain the greater event.

Because in the greater event, where there is faith, a person comes to a relationship with the eternal God who created and sustains and redeems the whole of the universe.

So that has got to be the greater event. And the, the, the, the miracle in itself is a lesser event to try and illustrate that reality.

[8 : 04] And that's what I think I told you a week ago or something about, about the man who was let down from the roof. And Christ said to him, you know, And, uh, you know, he was, I mean, the sense is that he was disappointed at that.

You know, what, uh, here I am lying paralyzed on the ground and you tell me my sins are forgiven. Uh, you know, I want to walk. And so Christ says, get up, take up your bed and walk.

But that you may know that your sins are forgiven. You'll walk a few miles and last a few days. But the reality of your sins forgiven is an eternal reality.

It has something to do with the whole of eternity, not just the rest of your life. So you see, what Christ did was to use these miracles to explain what the nature of faith is.

So faith is, uh, becomes very important for that reason. The other thing about faith, another thing about faith that I'd like to explain to you is that faith isn't very spectacular.

[9 : 12] Because it's what we're all meant to have. So that, uh, if, uh, if a blind man gets up in the morning and goes down the street saying, I can see, I can see, I can see.

Unless somebody says, he's an idiot, you know. What is he doing there, you know. And, uh, in that sense, you come.

Believe, I believe, I believe, you know. But, uh, that's only significant if people know that previously you didn't believe. Because belief, faith, is meant to belong to us all.

It's not a special thing. And when people came to Christ and said, well, you know, I don't have that kind of faith. Jesus said, if you had, you know, so small you can hardly describe it.

He said, that is not the point. The fact is that faith is something that belongs to us all. It's that by which we are meant to live.

[10 : 26] It's by faith in God. Which brings me to my next point, which I will illustrate with this. Uh, and I don't know what, this seems good to me, but I don't know whether it makes any sense to you.

That's a car, and it's traveling along a road at 200 kmh. You get the picture? The road goes along to here, and this is a rock.

Now, uh, faith has to have an object, you see. Uh, it, there's something that it has to come up against.

Some reality that it has to hit into. Now, uh, that's, uh, that's where I think our society gets into real trouble with the concept of faith.

You know, because faith is not just a great burst of self-generated energy that goes up in every direction. Faith has to hit something solid in order to have any meaning.

[11 : 29] And so faith must have an object. And we have successfully in our world made life into an almost totally subjective experience.

There isn't any other reality outside of me. And when I go into a restaurant, and I'm given the menu, and see it, and the water is poured, and the waiter or waitress says to me, enjoy.

That bothers me. I don't know if it bothers you or not. I want to say, enjoy what? You know. Enjoy the way you're looking at me, or enjoy. What am I supposed to do?

Do I turn on some kind of, uh, trigger in my life? That means I will suddenly, spontaneously burst into some kind of enjoyment? Enjoy, she said.

Tell me what to do. Just enjoy. And I want to say, enjoy what? Well, I mean, it's up to her that, uh, she might provide something which would be very enjoyable.

[12 : 40] But just to enjoy all by myself is a ridiculous thing to do. It's... And our world is kind of like that, you see, because we think that you can love.

Doesn't matter who or what, just love. And, uh, love doesn't have any object. It's just something we do. And we find fulfillment in it.

On Peter Zofsky the other morning, there was a story being told about somebody, and the, uh, the, the story ended with an old and wise man saying to a young, a young and struggling lady, if you will believe, then everything is possible.

You know, as though... The question is to believe what? It's belief without an object. And belief without an object is nonsense.

It doesn't mean anything. Faith with the... Idolatry. For a very particular reason.

[13 : 51] And that particular reason is that that is the way that we are meant to relate to the eternal God. When you're given a mathematical problem, you exercise reason in order to break it down and work it through and find out what the solution is.

And we're all used to reason. And we sometimes boast that we're going to commit ourselves to living a life that is so circumscribed by the limitations on reason.

And beyond reason I will not go. Well, we're learning that you don't go very far under those circumstances. Faith is meant to carry you way beyond where reason can carry you.

And that doesn't make faith unreasonable. All it's reason won't get you. And where it won't get you is to a knowledge of God.

And in God, a knowledge of who you are as a person. And so faith has to have an object. And that object, the appropriate object for our faith is the God who created, sustains, and redeems us.

[15 : 04] That's what faith is ultimately all about. That's why faith in your country has got to be secondary to faith in God. And that's what...

That's what... Who's that famous movie star that gets into all sorts of trouble and says she's God? Shirley MacLaine.

Yeah. Well, you see, that's not really a great discovery when she discovered that she was God. That was just the inevitable result of the way she thinks.

There is no objective reality except... There's no reality except me. And if there is no reality except me, then I must... I have to say God, because there isn't anything else.

So that, I mean, it's not... You know, it's not surprising that she's forced to that conclusion. The difficulty is that we...

[16 : 02] If we were to all think that way, we would all be forced to the same conclusion. And then our population problem wouldn't be... Just be too many gods, you know, to make it work. And all of them in competition with one another.

But what she does is to take all the objective reality out of faith.

Now, when you turn to the passage that you have in front of you now, and it says that faith is the assurance of things hoped for, it means, I mean, I think we don't know how to read that or how to deal with it.

But faith being the assurance of things hoped for, our hope needs to be informed by the Word of God. And you know that the great illustration of hope in the Old Testament, or in the New Testament, they would have a child.

And both of them were well stricken with years. It was, humanly speaking, and rationally impossible that they would have a child. Most of us can hope, really hope, the New Testament said.

[17 : 39] What you have to hope for, you can get hold of. And that's why it says in Hebrews chapter 11, verse 1, is that faith is the assurance of things hoped for.

The assurance of hope that we know by reason of who God is. The problem, you see, with the whole of this issue of faith is that we were meant to have it.

And we're, in a sense, subhuman when we don't have it. When we don't have that relationship to God, which is informed by, or which is based on, on faith in God.

And so when the writer says that hope is, faith is the assurance of things hoped for, it means that our hopes are informed by the Word of God, and faith gives us the assurance that that's what's going to happen.

And you see, that's in contrast to our hopes being based on the TSE index or the VSE index or the New York SE index or one of those things. Our hope is not on that.

[18 : 58] Our hope is... You can't sort of hope for any sort of vanity or sort of speculate about possibilities and set your hope on that.

No. Faith is the assurance of the thing hoped for, and the hoped for thing is the thing that you have been informed of by the Word of God. That gives you a reasonable hope.

And the reason most of our hopes in this life are dashed is that our hopes were ill-informed in the first place. We entertained hopes we shouldn't have had.

The second thing it says about faith is that faith is the conviction of things not seen. And you know how often you hear the story of the person who won't believe unless he can see, unless he can touch, unless he can taste, unless it can come within.

And because there is a greater reality, which is not available to us through those, the writer explains that faith is the conviction of things not seen.

[20 : 17] in the sense that I've already tried to explain to you, that reason can lead you to certain profound conclusions.

And those profound conclusions may be quite amazing in themselves, but they always leave questions unanswered, you know.

So that when you have an astrophysicist from Cambridge who does the study in time, he leaves the whole situation open because he recognizes that by reason he has come to certain conclusions, but even having come to those conclusions, he's opened a whole other realm of possibility.

And in that realm of possibility, the writer of the Hebrew says that hope is the conviction of things not seen.

That that unseen world is a world about which we can have convictions, and those convictions are informed by faith.

[21 : 27] Then the third thing it says about what faith does for us is, faith for by it, that is by faith, men of old received divine approval.

And you know that the whole 11th, you may know, and if you don't know, you can certainly find out, that the whole 11th chapter of Hebrews is about men of faith, women of faith, and how, where their faith led them.

And it says that, it says that they were, they were affirmed in that because they, the people of old, received divine approval by faith.

And I think that, that points to the, the sort of central reality of faith in, in Christian life, and that is the reality of what God has done for us in Christ.

You see, you, you know that, I don't know if you know, I, I mean, I, I have to keep making assumptions. Some of you are old and seasoned Christians who know all these things, and others of you may, it may be entirely new to you.

[22 : 33] But you know the centrality of the doctrine of justification by faith. And that the Protestant reformers came out and said it is by faith alone that a man is justified.

And they wanted it to be alone because they wanted that faith to be pure. They didn't want it to be contaminated. They didn't want anything to move in on it. They wanted it to be by faith alone that a man is justified.

And, and when they said faith alone, they were saying faith in what God has, has done. Not faith contaminated by what you do, or what you aspire to, or what you might do, or what others think of you, or what you've achieved, or what you've committed yourself to, or what you've worked for, or anything like that.

It is faith alone in what God has done for you in Christ. And I've told you that this is, in, in the sense, in our world, this is the great weakness of the gospel.

That a man is not saved or justified by faith. He's not justified by what he does. And, and, and the, the fallacy in the gospel seems to be, well, if a man doesn't behave religiously, he ever hoped to be justified.

[23 : 58] But this is what, this is, this is the heart of the discovery, which is at the center of our New Testament faith. that wealth, wisdom, ability, prowess, victory in war, devotion to family, that none of those things are the basis of your justification.

God has justified you by his commitment to you in Jesus Christ. When he says that, that, that God has done for you what, what you cannot do for yourself.

And that's how men of old received by faith divine approval. We receive divine approval by our, by anything that we do.

So that we are wonder free of the burden of being religious because God has done for us what the religious people among us, I suppose myself included, fall into, into the trap of trying to do it ourselves and losing sight of the fact that what God has done for us by his commitment to us is all that needs to be done.

It's a, it's a kind of statement when Christ, when, when, when, when at the, at the baptism of Christ there is the voice from heaven that says, this is my beloved son in whom I am well pleased.

[25 : 28] and, uh, that our justification is that in Christ God approves us. That, that, uh, that that's, that's the way it happens.

That we are approved by what God has done for us. Well, that, that you see is the third thing that, that, uh, that becomes the basis of our life which is, which has to be a life of faith.

You have to live your life continuously, uh, on the basis of what God has done for you. Every breath you draw, everything you do, every day you live, you live by faith in what God has done for you in Christ.

And the fact is that being, uh, weak and sinful as we are, and sin being the opposite of faith, uh, we are, uh, we are, uh, the, the whole direction of our life tends to veer away from the central reality of what God has done, which we, uh, which we receive by faith and on which our life is that, that, that, that relationship to God.

And, uh, that relationship to God is, is the relationship we enter into when God performs the miracle in our lives of giving us faith in who He is and what He has done.

[27 : 04] And then the verses end up by saying, by faith we understand that the world was created by the Word of God. Uh, the world does not have an existence of its own.

You know, we, we try, we try and treat it and try and understand it and try and explain it as though it was something that had its own built-in and are involved every day and which our lives are a part of.

is that, is that, uh, if you have a world without God, it was there in the beginning, there, and the creation comes into being and He sustains it.

the creation of the world was created by the Word of God.

And then it, uh, it goes on to say, uh, by, uh, it says the thing that, uh, that I think is, is terribly, is terribly important in, in a very simple way.

[28 : 41] It says, by faith we understand. Uh, and, uh, you know, the, the human dilemma is so often portrayed as one in which we simply don't understand.

You know, we don't understand what we're doing here, we don't understand the purpose of human life, we don't understand the problems in which we are immersed, we don't understand any of those things, and yet this passage says, by faith we are given understanding.

And, uh, and that's, that's the understanding that is appropriate, and that's the understanding that belongs to us. By faith we understand. And, uh, we would like to say we understand so that we don't need faith, but it's quite the other way around.

By faith we understand the world was created by the Word of God. And then it concludes with what is seen was made out of things which do not appear.

You know, we're experts in the visible world. We're experts in the tangible reality. We're experts in the process of technology.

[29 : 59] But we are made aware that it's only by faith that what is seen and what we are expert in was made out of things which do not appear.

But the reality that lies behind them is spiritual and that the meaning of our lives is spiritual. And it is by faith, the miracle of being given a faith in God as he has revealed himself in Christ, that we understand, that we are made to understand that what is seen was made out of things which do not appear.

That's the world into which you have to go now. And it's the world to which we belong. And it's the world in which faith informs and faith gives understanding and faith gives the assurance that that God has done.