

The Importance of Faith - Part 2

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Preacher: Daniel Ralph

[0 : 0 0] then we're going to go to Luke 11 and Luke 18. Here are a few verses to hone in on as this is part two of the message on faith. So Matthew chapter 6, and we're going to read from verse 25 onwards. We now hear God's word. It says, Therefore I tell you, do not be anxious about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink, nor about your body, what you will put on. It's not life more than food or the body more than clothing. Look at the birds of the air. They neither sow nor reap, nor gather into barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not of more value than they?

Turn with me to Luke chapter 11. So in Luke chapter 11, Jesus is in a certain place, and the disciples said to Jesus, Lord, teach us how to pray. And he begins with, you know, what is known as the Lord's Prayer. It's really the disciples' prayer, because it's the prayer that the Lord taught the disciples to pray.

Then he tells this parable of a man who doesn't have any bread, and so he goes to his friend at night. But then this is how it concludes. Verse 10. For everyone who asks receives, and the one who seeks finds, and to the one who knocks it will be opened. What father among you, if his son asks for a fish, will instead of a fish give him a serpent? Or if he asks for an egg, will give him a scorpion? If you then, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will the heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him? And then finally, to Luke chapter 18.

So in Luke chapter 18, we begin with the parable of the persistent widow. And it's about, as you know, the widow keeps going to an unjust judge, and he just will not listen to her. But because of her persistence, she sort of wears him down. And the unjust judge gives in and gives the lady what she wants. But then it says this as a conclusion. The Lord said to her, hear what the unrighteous judge says. And will not God give justice to his elect, who cried to him day and night? Will he delay long over them? I tell you, he will give justice to them speedily. In other words, he's not like the unjust judge. But then here's the important bit. Nevertheless, when the Son of Man comes, will he find faith on earth? Ask the question. When the Son of Man comes, will he find faith on earth?

I'd like us to pray, and then we'll begin. Father, help us to see how important faith is, and it is what you look for, and it is what the Son of Man will look for when he returns, Christ our Lord.

[3 : 5 4] Will he find faith? We pray, Father God, this evening that we are not only a faithful people, but a people who live by faith. Help us to be so, in Jesus' name. Amen.

Amen. I want to begin with a short reminder, if that's okay. The short reminders of part one, which was on faith. And part one, we understood a couple of things. The first is, is that some people can have great faith, and some people can have very small faith. So the centurion who comes to Jesus on behalf of his servant, says to Jesus, just say the word from where you are, and I know that my servant will be healed. And sure enough, Jesus does that, and he is amazed because of the man's great faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, that his faith in Jesus was not even for himself, but actually for his servant, and in doing so, his servant is blessed by Jesus speaking.

Then we saw, ironically or strangely, you might want to say, that it was the disciples who had very little faith. So here you've got a Gentile centurion who has amazing faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, but then you've got disciples who knew a little bit about Jesus, who has very little faith in Jesus.

They wake him up in the middle of the storm, you know, Lord, we're perishing, and he rebukes the wind of the waves, but he also has some strong words to say to them, where's your faith?

And then we ask the question, well, why is it the case, even in this church, that some people have great faith, and some people have very little faith? And we draw the conclusion, and this was the conclusion, that the measurement of your faith in God is also the precise measurement of what you think about God. I want you to think that through. And the reason we came to that conclusion was because the disciples in the boat said, who is this man that can calm the wind and the waves? What did they actually think about Jesus? Well, not very much. That's why they had little faith. And so the measurement of your faith tells God exactly what you think about him, exactly whether or not he can actually do the things that he says he can do. The reason for reading Matthew 6 is because we need it drilled into our hearts quite plainly and clearly that God really does care for us more than the birds of the air. And why does he? Simply put, he cares for you more than the birds of the air because you're of much more value to him than animals. You know, God looks at a bird, and he looks at you both are beautiful, but you are worth far, far more to God than birds. What's the point that

[7 : 08] Jesus is trying to drive at here? Well, we should treat God differently in the same way God treats us differently than animals. And we should treat God differently than we treat anything else because God is of more value than anything else in this world. That's the point. God treats us differently because he values us differently, greater. And we ought to treat God differently than anything else because we ought to value God differently than anything else. He is of a greater value than anything else.

So we're back to faith being a measurement of what we think about God. God. Really important. So the way to treat God properly, the way to treat God appropriately, is with strong and deep and lasting faith in him. It's the only way to treat God properly. That's why Hebrews 11 verse 6 says that without faith it is impossible to please God. You're not pleasing God if you're not exercising faith in him. Now that doesn't come from me. It comes from me. But it's coming from Hebrews 6 11. Hebrews 11 verse 6. That without faith it's impossible to please God. So Jesus' question at the end of the parable of the persistent widow, when the son of man comes, will he find faith on the earth?

It's an important question. Really important to understand just how important this is to God. God is looking for a people who please him. Faith pleases God. That's the point. Faith pleases God.

There's a few things that I want us to take into consideration then. Four things in particular. And it all comes from Paul's verse in Galatians which says this. That as Christians, we aim to live by faith in the son of God who loves us and who died for us. That's our aim. That's our focus. That's our intention. Every day we wake up, we've got an aim. And the aim is to get through the day by living by faith in the son of God who died for us. Who loves us and who died for us. That's our aim to be able to do that. So here are the four headings. Number one, believing in God is different than believing God. Believing in God. Believing in God is different than believing God. Here's number two.

Following Jesus means following Jesus' example of what it means to live by faith. Following Jesus means following his example of living by faith. Number three, we need to seek the right thing first. And believe it or not, that's not just the kingdom, but it's actually having that faith in the right place. And then fourthly, which we saw in our readings, the very character of God.

[10 : 08] That he's not like other people. He is wholly set apart. And that's the person whom we have faith in. So let's begin with the first one. Belief in God is different than believing God. Let me explain to you why.

So belief in God is simply a statement about its existence. And so you can go out into the world, as we saw in the missionary week last week, there are lots of people around the world who have belief in a God. But you can more or less guarantee that their belief in a God does not correspond to them living by faith necessarily. You know, they believe that a certain God exists. A bit like Paul, you know, who brings to their attention, well, you have a statue to the unknown God. You're hedging your bets here.

You're acknowledging that a God must exist, but you don't know anything about him. That's belief in God. Believing God is something quite different. There are many people, even in this country, that have a belief in God without ever getting close to the God of the Bible.

So belief in God may be an act of faith in one sense, but it's not living by faith. It's not believing God. So remember what James says. He says that even the demons believe in that kind of way. You know, that's not the kind of company you want to share.

You know, that your faith in the existence of a God only measures up to the faith of demons. You know, the demons believe in the existence of God. They don't live by faith, but they believe in the existence of God. You know, many people, as I said, in this country believe in the existence of God or a God. They may even get close to the God of the Bible.

[12 : 10] But that doesn't mean that from that belief that they are then living by faith. Living by faith is something different. So belief in God is not believing God. Believing God is what it means to live by faith.

It means that when God says something, I believe it to be true and I follow it. It means that when God says something, I trust what he has said to be true. The best example of this is, of course, the Lord Jesus Christ, who obviously believes in the existence of God. He's part of the triune Godhead. He also believes that the Father sent him and he also believes that he exists eternally. But even the Lord Jesus Christ says that I do only what I see the Father telling me to do. He's believing God constantly.

In other words, for Jesus to live by faith, not to jump ahead, is simply for Jesus to know that the will of God is exactly what God wants him to do. Believing God means that God's will for you is the thing that you are to follow, whatever it leads you into, whatever direction it takes you in.

That's what it means to live by faith. You are believing God above everything else. You're believing that God's will is actually the right thing to follow all the time.

And so we aim to live by faith in Jesus, the Son of God. He loves us. He died for us. And that's how we do it. By believing that what he has spoken is what we are to follow. Very important. So Jesus sort of sets the pattern, as it were, or sets the example of what it is to live by faith. Here's Hebrews 10.

[14 : 05] In Hebrews 10, it says this, that the righteous one shall live by faith, speaking about Jesus. Jesus will live by faith. But then it has this to say, if he shrinks back, my soul has no pleasure in him. And what that means is, is that Jesus is not the exception.

That Jesus, in order to please God in his earthly ministry, also had to live by faith and not shrink back. And the same thing is true for us. He wasn't just to believe in the existence of God, he was to believe God all the time. Believing in his will all the time. Even in his death, he believed in the Father. Into your hands, I commit my spirit. And how strong your faith should be at the point of death. You know, I pray that none of you are close to it.

But let's just say that you were. You know, I pray that you can say the same as Jesus says in par. Obviously, you can't commit your life in the same way Jesus does, because the Lord is in control of the amount of days that you have to live. But nevertheless, you're absolutely convinced that when that moment comes, you know where you're going. Jesus did. He committed himself into the hands of God.

He lived by faith. So Jesus is setting the example here that there's a big difference between believing in God, which even the demons do, and believing God. That's faith. Believing that what God says is the right thing to follow all the time. So secondly, Jesus as the example.

I struggled with this for a long time, and here's why. My argument was this. Well, yeah, Jesus lived by faith, but of course he could. He's Jesus.

[16:06] It's easy for Jesus to do it, because he's Jesus. And what we end up doing is we end up reducing the fact that Jesus actually lived by faith, and we put it down to the argument, well, he could do it anyway, because he's Jesus. We just, as though, as if to say, well, Jesus didn't really live by faith, because he's Jesus. He could, he can do whatever he wants. No, Jesus really did live by faith.

And then we end up taking it a little bit farther, and then we go to the disciples, and we say, well, yeah, the disciples lived by faith, but it was easier for them, because they had Jesus. They saw Jesus.

They followed Jesus. They had Jesus with them all the time, wherever they went, or wherever Jesus, there they were together. So it was much easier for them to live by faith than it was for us.

And so all that we're doing is we seem to be coming up with a number of excuses to say it is easier for Jesus to live by faith than it is me, that it is easier for the disciples to live by faith than it is for me now. And what Jesus is saying by the example that he sets is, okay, Jesus' faith is going to be stronger in God than the disciples, obviously. The disciples' faith may be stronger than ours, okay, but not necessarily. Jesus sets the example, but he is also the author and perfecter of our faith. Yes, it's easier for him because he gives us our faith, and he perfects our faith.

But here's the question. Is Jesus an example of living by faith? If he is, then we can no longer come up with the excuse that the only way he can live the life that he did is because he's Jesus. But rather, just like him, we are to listen to the word of God and to follow it. Jesus expected the same from the disciples.

[18:04] Spend time in prayer. Stay awake. Have faith. Oh, you of little faith. All the time, he's trying to introduce them to the things of God so that their faith might grow and so that they might walk in it.

So, if it ever crops over your mind, well, it was easier for Jesus because he's Jesus. Think of the garden. Think of the cross. Think of the daily activity of Jesus, that he too only did what he saw the Father doing, that he only did the Father's will, nothing else.

He lived by faith, believing God and following God. May have been easier because he had greater faith, but Jesus is the model of endurance. That's what Hebrews 12 is saying. He is the author and perfecter of our faith, okay, but he's also the example of what it is to endure in faith, to not shrink back, but to keep moving forward. Difficult? Yeah. Not impossible for the Christian.

Not impossible for the Christian. So, thirdly, seeking the right thing first. The reason for reading the Sermon on the Mount, especially the bit about God valuing us more than the birds of the air, is because anxiety turns up in everyday life. Where are we going to live?

What are we going to wear? What are we going to eat? Have I got enough money for the future? Now, if we've got these kind of anxieties, how much more were those anxieties amplified when, back in the day with Jesus, people lived from hand to mouth, from day to day? You know, even us in here probably have enough reserves in our kitchen cupboard to get us through a few days.

[19 : 56] But not here when Jesus was preaching this sermon. These are people who live day to day. not quite sure, but they trusted in God. Think of the woman who gave away her last pennies into the offering. Why is that so amazing? Is it because she gave all that she had? Well, it's not just because she gave all that she had, but because she gave to the point where she had nothing left other than her faith in God providing. That's the point. She gave to the point where she relied on her faith or she relied on God rather than what she had. So these are people here who have to live day to day. We've got reserves and yet we can be anxious. Think of their anxiety. And Jesus is saying to them, don't be anxious. God loves you more than he does the birds of the air. You know, I don't know if it's Aristotle or Augustine's got this wonderful illustration of a bent stick.

You find this bent stick and someone says, well, can you straighten it? And you take this bent stick and you bend it back in the opposite way. You bend it further than it needs to go, hoping that it would just straighten out. How many of you have done that with books and stuff like that? It's bent. And so you bend it back in the other way, hoping that it would straighten itself out. Do you know what? In many kind of ways, Jesus is doing that with the Sermon of the Mount. You think, well, you're bending this a little bit too far, Jesus, in the other way. But he really isn't. He's trying to get us to think about God in a totally different way than we're used to thinking about him. Rather think about God as he actually is. Not how you think about him, but think about a God who really can and who really does care more for you than the birds of the air and who really can provide for your daily needs.

That's the God you belong to. And so we're back to value. God cares for us more than he does the birds of the air. And Jesus is saying here, you should care for God or the things of God more than you do your earthly treasures. In other words, your cares for God should be greater than what you're going to wear tomorrow or eat tomorrow or even sleep tomorrow. Seek first God. Seek first his righteousness and his kingdom. Now, get the order right. Have faith in God to do it. And all of these things God will take care of. He knows what you need and when you need them. Understand that God values you more than anything else. And understand that you ought to value God more than all of these earthly material things that are needed every day. Food's needed every day. Water's needed every day.

Someone asleep is needed. All these things are great needs. And Jesus is saying, don't worry about them. Get everything in order. Faith in God. Seek him first. And God will take care of it.

Difficult. Difficult. Yeah. It's really difficult. And it's going to be a lot more difficult than some than others. Not because they have less, but because they have less faith. See, the difficulty here in anxiety is not that some people have less than others. They probably all have the same least amount.

[23 : 19] The issue here is that some would have had less faith than others. That's the issue. Just like the disciples. Yeah. That's why we find that if we have more reserves, we feel just that little bit safer than when we have less reserves. You know, saving for a rainy day, we just feel that little bit safer for when the rainy day comes. I'll never forget who said it. I think it might have been Vance Havner. You know, the rainy day is going to come because you're saving for it.

I never thought about looking at it that way. He's got a point. Trust God. Understand that God values you more. You know, there was one man in particular who wanted to follow Jesus, and Jesus puts him off. In fact, he puts three of them off. And the first one is so eager to follow Jesus, he says, yeah, I'm ready. Just take me as your disciple now. And Jesus says, look, birds of the air have their nests. Sorry, foxes have holes, birds of the air have their nests, but the son of man has nowhere to lay his head. Are you sure you want to follow me? In other words, he had to make clear to this man exactly what that type of life of following Jesus is going to be like. It's going to be a life of faith. It's going to be a life of trust. You don't know where you're going to sleep next or what you're going to eat next. God will take care of it. But foxes, you know, they have their holes and birds have their nests. But the son of man, if you follow me, nowhere to lay his head.

And I think many people who are Christians come unstuck in their Christian walk because sometimes their enthusiasm overtakes their faith. I want you to think about that. You think, well, I'm not really an enthusiastic type of person. Okay. But how often we seek great things for God and we go out and think, I'm going to do this and I'm going to do that. And suddenly the first hurdle was not difficulty in the world, but whether or not you've got enough faith to pursue Jesus and to follow him. And that's exactly why Jesus says, not only to that man, but to two others, hold your horses, slow down and really think about what you're stepping into. It requires a life of faith. So fourthly, and this is where we finish, God's character. This is something really to think through because if we understand the character of God, we understand the value of God, God is of greater value than anything else. And our faith in God is a demonstration of just how much we think about him, how much we really value him over everything else.

And I think this is spelled out brilliantly in Luke 11 and of course in Luke 18. In Luke 11, you can find yourself there if you want to. A man goes to another man at midnight because somebody's come to him wanting some bread. And the man's got nothing to set before him. So he goes out and he starts knocking on another man's door. Now often this parable has been taught is about being persistent in prayer.

It's actually got nothing to do about being persistent. Luke 18 is about persistence with a persistent widow going to the unjust judge. And she keeps, you know, going back and she's getting nowhere to the point where actually she goes back once and suddenly the unjust judge has a moment where he says, just give the woman what she wants. And because of her persistence with an unjust judge, she gets it. But then the parable ends by saying, well, God will answer speedily to those who ask. What's in question? Well, the character of God. The character of God is different than the character of an unjust judge. He won't take his time, but he'll answer you straight away. Here in Luke 11, it's not about persistence. It is really about the character of God. And we know that by the way the parable ends. And it ends in this, what father among you, if his son asks for a fish, will instead of a fish give him a serpent? Or if he asks for an egg, will instead give him a scorpion? If you then who are evil, well, there's Jesus, his take on humanity. If you then who are evil know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your heavenly father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him? There's the character again. Notice the character difference. If evil fathers can give to their children good gifts, then how much more is God, who is not evil but completely holy, going to give to you the things if you ask and seek and knock. You know, we come to a God who has a perfect character.

[28 : 16] God values us more than the birds of the air. We should value God more than anything else. Because in the same way God can tell the difference between his creation, we ought to really be able to tell the difference between earthly things and the eternal God. Notice the character of God.

Jesus is saying, look, if the character of God is to give to those who ask, and evil fathers give to their sons what they ask for, God is holy. And notice how much God gives. God's character character is to give to those who ask. Why do you think Luke 18 finishes with Jesus asking the question, will the Son of Man find faith on the earth? What is Jesus looking for in that context?

Well, the faith is, are people going to be praying? Just like the persistent widow. Are people going to be keep going and going and going to God? Not because you're not getting anywhere.

You know, don't think that being persistent in prayer with God is because you're not getting anywhere. But rather, the fact that you keep persistent in prayer. That's the point. The fact that you keep going back to God. And that's the faith that Jesus is looking for. Will the Son of Man, when he comes, find faith on the earth? Will people, like the widow, keep going to God?

Now, let's conclude then. Here's the exhortation. We aim, Paul says, to live by faith in the Son of God. Not by believing in him alone, but by believing him. Believing him. Trusting him. Believing that God loves us more than he loves animals. Believing that his character is a character that gives to those who ask him in prayer. Believing God. Believing God. Living by faith. Following him. Most importantly, it means this. That whatever the will of God is, it is always the right thing for you to follow.

[30 : 27] Wherever it takes you, whatever it leads you into, it is always the right thing to follow as revealed in the word of God. Always the right thing. So, finish with Hebrews. Look to Jesus.

Not anywhere else. Look to Jesus, the author and finisher of your faith. God's going to get you to the end. Jesus gets you to the end. He gives you the faith to start with. He will bring you through.

But in the meantime, follow Jesus, the author and perfecter of your faith. Amen.