

The faith that makes life worth living

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[0 : 0 0] If you would turn, please, in your Bibles to 2 Timothy chapter 3. In fact, some of you might know this so well enough, you don't need to turn. I'll just put it in its context.

2 Timothy chapter 3 verse 15 is a reading.

And Timothy is being instructed or reminded or at least observed as one who's learned the scriptures from when he was a very young child.

And so this is what he's being told or this is what's being remembered. And how from childhood, this is 2 Timothy 3 verse 15. And how from childhood you have been acquainted with the sacred writings which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus.

It's just the one verse this evening, but given its, not complexity, but given its depth, we're going to stick with the one verse.

[1 : 1 6] So the phrase that we're focusing in on is how we become wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus. Let me pray for us before we sing and before we come back to that word.

Father God, we ask that you enlighten our minds with a view of changing our heart. That, Father God, that we would have ears to hear your word, having heard it spoken.

We pray that we would have it expounded to us now. Father God, trust your means of doing this. And we just pray, Father, that our hearts would be receptive to receiving your word and that we would indeed become obedient to it.

Father, we know that your word is good for us. And so, Father, we recognize that you have not withheld any good thing from us this evening in giving us your word. So be with us now as we submit humbly to you, your word, and to the power of your spirit doing a mighty work within us.

In Jesus' name. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Well, if you have your Bibles there with you, please turn again to 2 Timothy 3, to Timothy chapter 3, verse 15.

[2 : 4 3] Amen. I'm taking my sort of instruction, as it were, from the Lord Jesus Christ this evening in how he instructed the disciples in the boat for fear that they were drowning by rebuking them for their little faith.

and I spent a great deal of time over what actually made their faith little rather than great. So as we sit here this evening as a Christian congregation, there's a couple of things that can be spotted immediately.

The first thing that can be spotted is that Christian people, people of the gospel, people saved by Christ Jesus, have faith. There's no difficulty there.

There's no problem with even understanding that, that you have faith in the Lord Jesus Christ if indeed you belong to Christ. The difficulty comes, however, when the measurement of our faith is different for different people.

And this, in some situations, means that if we were the disciples in the boat, then we may look for encouragement to our faith only to have Jesus turn to us and rebuke us for our little faith.

[4 : 10] Well, why is that happening? Why not encouragement? It's because the thing that was there to build their faith was there but not paid attention to, not adhered to.

And I say this bearing in mind that, you know, this church has had quite a lot to deal with over the past several weeks. You know, our faith can be challenged in all kinds of directions, even though we know ultimately the truth.

And then, of course, in reading about some high-profile ministers that have basically rejected Jesus. I want to point out that they're high-profile because people have made them high-profile with websites and news and what have you.

You know, some of these ministers, you know, one who wrote a very famous book called I Kiss Dating Goodbye has not only rejected his book that he wrote, but he's left his wife, he's left his children, he's left his church, pastor of one of the biggest churches in America, and rejected Christianity and accepting of all things that are not of the faith.

Well, how does something like that happen? How does something like that happen? And so what I would like us to do this evening is take these few verses and simply ask the question, what does it mean to become wise for salvation?

[5 : 44] What's actually happening when that's happening? So sometimes when we grow up through life, we get certain things come our way that we're not too sure about how to deal with, and we're told to be strong in a moment of absolute weakness.

We're told to keep our chin up. We're told to, you know, my head's just above water. We're told to be strong in moments of weakness.

We're even told to be strong when we feel at our weakness. Now, one of the issues going on here is that we're in the world, but we're not of it. And that's a careful distinction to make.

We're told not to love the world or the things in the world. We're told that we're not of the world. But all of those things happen to us. All of those challenges happen to us right here.

We can't escape them because we're in the world affected by them. What Timothy is understanding here and what we're understanding in the book of Timothy is that God's involvement is always a supernatural involvement.

[6 : 55] And therefore, you're not going to stumble across it in the world. It must come from God to you. His nature is not like our nature, and therefore, his power is not like our power.

It's different altogether. And therefore, the kind of strength that we need to live in this world, though we're not of this world, we're not going to find it in the world. It has to come from God.

And one of the areas of strength is, of course, strong faith. It's not just having the grace which is sufficient, and it is sufficient, not questioning it for a moment, but it is to have strong faith.

And faith is given to us to grow, just like understanding of God is to grow. And, of course, when they don't, then they feel the weakness of the lack of growth.

And that's the same in the natural world as it is in the spiritual world in that sense. Now, when it comes to comfort, we live in a world where the world is full of counselors.

[8 : 05] But as Christians, we know that it's the word of God that changes minds. We know that we don't have to go down the road of mind management. We don't have to go down the road of faith as a means of optimism.

Okay? We don't have to listen to counselors when we're counseled by the counselor with the word of God that actually changes life. It not only changes our life spiritually, taking us from death to life, but it changes us psychologically.

It changes us emotionally. In other words, God's word doesn't have the limitations of humans' words. And, therefore, as we come to the word of God, which is the only thing that can produce faith, okay?

Faith comes by hearing and hearing by the word of God. As we come to this word, this is the only place where our faith is going to get the necessary strength that it needs to live in this world.

And so, at the moment of weakness, our strength does not come from the world. It comes from the word. Now, there's more to it than that, but this is something that we'll have to get on to.

[9 : 18] But just to give you a little bit of a story is by way of introducing, let's say, a world's way of dealing with something. Back in the day, when I had one of my first bikes, or I'd just learned how to ride a bike, we lived on a fairly quiet avenue, or which I thought was fairly quiet growing up.

And I'm riding my bike, and I jump off the curb, ready for my wheels to land down onto the road, only to be hit by a yellow Ford Escort first.

And the Ford Escort hit my bike before my bike hit the road, and I went over the top of the Ford Escort, yellow. I remember the color.

And I even remember it was a lady driving. It was, I'm blaming her. It was my fault. And I hit the back window, rolled off the boot, got up, and walked away. Now, at the time, I never thought, wow, look at the grace of God, look at the providence.

And, no, I was a kid. I was just ready to get back on my bike and do something else if it would work. But my nan had the solution of all solutions. Go make him a strong cup of tea with lots of sugar in it, for he's out of shock.

[10 : 31] Now, that was it, okay? Now, the trouble is, is when you get older, sometimes you get hit by things that you don't get back up from. And you get hit by things that you've never been hit by before, and because you've never encountered them before, you're not too sure about what to do next.

Because it's never happened to me before. How do I get back up from this? And the wrong answer is a sugary cup of tea. The world's ways just will not cut it.

The right answer is, of course, God's word. God's word is powerful and effective, it goes on to say. Able to equip us, able to build us up, able to keep us strong, to make us complete in every good way.

And so there are times when you're completely out of your depth, and the only thing that will keep your head above water is, of course, the buoyancy of God's word, or rather your faith in God's word.

The word of God produces faith in you, and that faith is to grow by you going back to the very thing that gave you that faith in the first place.

[11 : 45] Your faith is to be strengthened, but the only way it can be strengthened is not just by believing the word of God. And this is what we're moving on to.

Belief is a bit like decisions. And we remember the famous illustration, or not so famous, but it's been said often by many. You know, three birds sat on a telephone wire deciding to fly south for the summer or for the winter.

How many flew south? And the answer is, well, none, because they only decided to do it. And that deciding to believe, that deciding to say, yeah, okay, is very, very different than actually the action that is to be followed.

And so we live in a world where there's plenty of answers. The world's got plenty of answers about how to help us. But none of them will make us wise to salvation.

And salvation is not that point at which you arrive only to then stop and think, well, there's nothing more for me now. All I have to do is wait either to pass away or for the Lord Jesus Christ to come.

[12 : 58] And many Christian lives are stuck just in that time zone. That all I'm here doing is doing my bit, okay, whatever my bit is between either my death or the Lord's return.

And, of course, being wise unto salvation helps us to understand that there's much more to it than that. So what does it mean to become wise unto salvation?

Well, here's the first thing. God, in his grace in giving us the scriptures, gets us to the Lord Jesus Christ by means of revelation. We would not know about Jesus, okay, if it was not for the word of God, if it was not for the word of God teaching us about the Lord Jesus Christ.

Now, the way that we get to see this, okay, is by hearing. Now, I'm fond of listening to people who say Christians have a blind faith, but it's not true even for a moment.

God never asks you to believe something you don't see. Not once. Not once does he ask you to believe something that you don't see. Rather, what he teaches you is that you see by hearing.

[14 : 19] And, therefore, you see by faith in what you've heard. It's true that we don't see it with our eyes, but it's not true that we don't see it at all.

Okay? How can we see the things of the future? Okay? How can we know they're there if we don't see them? We do see them. We just don't see them with our eyes. We see them via our ears.

God has given us ears to hear, and that's how we see. Okay? The reason we know about the future, the reason we know about glory, the reason we know about Christ's return, the reason we know about the future and just how good it will be is not because we don't see.

It's not because we don't walk by sight. We do. But the way that we see is different. We see by hearing. Okay? That's the Christian faith.

We see by hearing. It's true that we don't walk by sight, physical sight, with our eyes, but it's not true that we don't walk knowing where we're going, that we don't walk unable to see what's in front of us.

[15 : 26] That's not true. So being wise unto salvation is firstly to recognize that we do walk by sight, but our sight comes via what we hear, not through our eyes.

And that's an important distinction for your faith, being strong and remaining strong. Remembering that to be able to conceive these things in your mind and heart, to be able to be convinced of them, to be able to see them, must come through hearing.

There's no other way that it can come. If you try to see them with your eyes, you won't see it because we don't walk by sight in that sense.

So when a person believes, they believe both with their mind and they believe with their heart. Their heart feels, their mind reasons. And people reason according to their mind.

That's why they say things like, I can't see it. What they really mean is, I don't understand. You're trying to tell them something and they're not understanding what you're saying.

[16 : 29] And instead of them saying back to you, I don't understand, which would be fine, they may use a phrase like, I don't see what you're saying. I don't see what you're saying.

That's a strange way of putting it, but not really. Because we all understand what's going on. We can only see things that our mind can understand. Okay?

We can only see things that our mind can understand. Hence why Paul says in Romans 12 that we are to be transformed in our mind.

That the gospel transforms our mind. It renews our mind. Why? Why is that so important? Well, it's important because we see by hearing. It's important because we see by our mind being able to understand.

If we can understand it, we say, I can't see it. So the idea of having a faith that first impacts the mind and heart is a really important one.

[17 : 33] This distinction of saying, well, his faith is only a head one, while mine's a heart one. Those distinctions are not Christian ones. They're not biblical ones. They don't work.

They don't have any place within scripture. It is true that some believers can be all head in that they're able to explain different parts of the Bible.

And some can be all experiential and sort of being taken away with perhaps the grace of God or not necessarily the grace of God, but by other senses is James points out and Paul points out elsewhere.

Rather, the Christian in his complete state or in her complete state has a mind that perceives, has a mind that understands, and a heart that feels.

Okay? And both of those are cooperative. They work. They don't clash, but they feed one another, as it were. There's no tension between them whatsoever because the mind sees and the heart feels.

[18 : 40] And that is how your faith is strengthened. So I'll just run through it again quickly before we move on. Your faith is beginning to be strengthened by understanding that you don't walk blindly, that your faith is not a blind faith.

It's actually a faith that sees. But you see by hearing, and you see by understanding what you hear. Because if you don't understand, you say, I can't see it.

Now, these are the very basics of your faith growing. This is the very basics of you growing up in your faith. And we all feel the moments of perhaps when we don't, we don't, we're not quite there yet.

Now, Paul had to deal with this over in Philippians where he says, look, for those of you who are mature, you'll see it as I'm saying it. But those who are immature, then wait for God to reveal it to you.

In other words, he doesn't argue his point. He doesn't sit in church and go, well, if you can't see it, you're just silly. If you can't see it, you're just not bright enough.

[19 : 48] If you can't see it, you're just not as clever as me. No, he doesn't do that. What he does is he says, those who are mature, Philippians 3, verse 15, can see it and understand.

Those who are immature can't. So wait for God to reveal it to you. God will reveal it to you. In other words, God is the one who brings our mind and heart to see the things that he is telling us.

It's a process of growing up. But we see more by becoming mature. It's not by knowing more. Okay, it's not by knowing more.

It's by being able to perceive and understand through maturity. And Paul's had to deal with this tension in the church. And, you know, people fall out in churches.

There's nothing new there. It's in the New Testament. I mean, we wouldn't have half the New Testament letters to the churches that we do if it wasn't for some of the disagreements that are being addressed in those letters.

[20 : 48] But the way Paul addresses it is by saying, look, you need to keep going until one of you proves the other one wrong. No, he says, those who are mature see it this way.

And those who aren't don't. And the solution is to wait for God to reveal it to you. Go read it yourself. Philippians chapter 3. So the strength of our faith then rests entirely on the word of God.

But there's another side to that. And that is our response to the word of God. Okay, and this is where it becomes not complicated.

But this is where we understand, well, what is my involvement in listening to this word? What is my involvement in listening to what's being said this evening? How do I participate?

Well, it all depends on where you sit and stand before God this evening. And so by way of illustration, I want to take us back to Abraham.

[21 : 52] And this is a well-known story that you'll be aware of. But I want to be able to pan it out in such a way where you get to see the details. In Genesis 22, God tells Abraham to take his son, his only son.

And that is, of course, his only son according to the promise. Okay, he had another son, Ishmael, which is not according to the promise.

But Isaac was according to the promise. And God tells him to take his son, as you know, so that he can offer up his son to God as a burnt offering.

Now, before you go any further, before you move on, well, I know what happens next. It's okay. The whole story is about Abraham's faith. Nothing to worry about. Let's move on. No, just stop right there.

Just stop right there. What does that do to your faith in God? Here you have God telling you to offer your son to him in a burnt offering.

[22 : 57] And you're supposed to have faith? Are you not going to begin to question God's character? Are you not going to begin to question God's love for you?

Are you not going to begin to question what is God actually doing here? What's actually happening here? This seems a little bit strange, Lord, that you would require such a thing.

Now, Abraham doesn't express any of this. Nevertheless, it is many of the things that do get expressed by many Christians today. We're surprised at what the Lord might bring our way.

Elizabeth Elliot, in her book, No Graven Image, which is actually a novel rather than a... It's a book, but it's a fictional story. But I actually asked her daughter if one of the lines in her novel was actually more of a real life line against real people in America.

Because that book, No Graven Image, no Christian bookstore would stock it. Because she has a line in the book which says, If you have a God where you can say no Lord to, that God wouldn't do that, then you don't have God.

[24 : 19] You have an idol. You're forming God according to what you think he ought to be. It's a very powerful line. And, of course, though it's a fictional story, I asked her daughter, Was she really having a go at the people who wouldn't stock the book and those who questioned whether or not Jim Elliot should have really gone off and did what he did, you know, being a missionary to those Ecuadorian Indians?

And she said, Yeah, absolutely. Absolutely. It was a jab at them. Because what was actually happening there is that they were saying God wouldn't do that.

God wouldn't do that. Well, the moment you say God wouldn't do that, either you know, either you're absolutely certain what God would and would not do, or you're forming God according to your understanding.

So Abraham is being told by God to take his son as an early offering. God wouldn't do that. Only God did do that. God has done that.

Now, the interesting thing is, as the story goes on, Abraham and his son is walking up to the place, up to the mountain that God would show, where he would be offered as a burnt offering.

[25 : 38] And his son looks at Abraham, assuming his son looked at his father when he was speaking to him, and says, Where's the lamb for the burnt offering? You know, we're both making our way up this high mountain, and it's very unlikely we're going to find one up there.

So where is it? Shouldn't we take one with us? And Abraham looks at his son and says, God will provide a lamb for himself. God will provide a lamb for himself.

And his son, well, we don't know what happens, but nothing goes on to set. They make their way up the top. At this point, his son is bound on the altar in which the burnt offering is going to take place.

Abraham lifts the knife above his son. Okay? Why? Because God asked him to. In Genesis 22, verses, I think, 18 and 19, it says that he's just about to bring the knife down and slaughter his son.

You know, the language is graphic, and it's sort of meant to be graphic for a very good reason. And the angel stops him. And, of course, there's a ram caught in the thicket, and God provides.

[26 : 47] Now, some people want to go, we know what's happened. We're able to figure this out. Abraham always knew that God was never going to let him go through with it. Abraham had enough faith to know that he was never going to let this happen to his son.

Abraham had enough faith to know that though he was taking his own son up there, God would provide a way of escape, though his son could be free and live, and that he would provide something else in its place.

But when you actually look at God's answer to Abraham, it has nothing to do with being able to figure out God's plan. God doesn't look down upon Abraham and say, well done, Abraham, you figured out by faith what I was doing.

No, he simply says, you obeyed. You obeyed. What does that mean? What does it mean for you sat here?

Well, what it means is this, that in a difficult situation, and none of us have been tested to that kind of degree, none of us have been tested to the degree that Abraham was, but in a highly stressful situation like that, someone might say, well, you've just got to have faith.

[28 : 03] You've just got to have faith in God. And yet that's not what the account is teaching us. What the account is actually teaching us is you've got to have the obedience to faith.

It's not enough simply to say, I believe, because at the moment of testing, the question of whether or not you obey that belief is going to be brought into question.

So leading up to it, yeah, I believe, I have faith, I'll always believe, and then you get tested, and suddenly you realize that your obedience to faith isn't there.

But Abraham's was. And what we learn is that in a stressful situation like that, in a difficult situation like that, the point, or one of the points at least being made, apart from all the points that are covenantal according to the promise, is the fact that it is impossible to live before God in the situations that God puts you in, or you find yourself in, without the obedience of faith.

It's impossible. You cannot get through without the obedience of faith. And if you read Romans, what does it say?

[29 : 19] That the gospel came into the world through the Lord Jesus Christ to bring what? To bring us to the obedience of faith. What the gospel actually produces in the Christian believer is not faith alone, but actually the obedience to faith.

In stressful situations, when life is really difficult, when life takes a turn in a way that we perhaps were expecting, but we didn't expect it to affect us as much as what it has, then what is needed is not more faith, but actually the obedience to the faith that we have.

So remember the disciples in the boat with Jesus. They're afraid that they're going to drown. They wake up Jesus, and Jesus rebukes them. He rebukes them.

In other words, what he's saying is this. This shouldn't be the kind of problem that causes you to bother me. This shouldn't be the kind of problem that causes you to wake me up, panicking that you're going to die.

And he rebukes their little faith. In other words, their faith wasn't strong enough to deal with the simplest, the minutest of problems.

[30 : 42] And the way we tend to picture it is actually the other way around. That my faith is challenged by problems that are bigger. No, Jesus says, that's not what's happening.

What's actually happening is that the problem is small, it's just that your faith is smaller. And the reason why many Christians struggle is not because the problems are big, but actually because their faith is little, or rather their obedience to the faith is little.

And that's where the challenge comes in, isn't it? And that's why it's very difficult, even for me, even for you, even for the most experienced minister, elder, Christian, man, woman in the church today.

None of us like to be challenged on our ignorance. When Jesus rebukes them for their little faith, he's rebuking them for their ignorance.

You know, this is not the kind of problem which you should be waving over. He rebukes their little faith, though he does calm the wind in the ways it's true.

[31 : 57] And so one of the issues that we have to wrestle with, I feel, is quite a simple one, but it's one that we don't always spot. We always think the problems are big. And Jesus is saying, that's not always the case.

It's the fact that your faith is smaller, or rather your obedience of faith is smaller. And one of the ways that we find ourselves being ignorant of God's word that actually builds our faith, that actually strengthens our faith, is when we read it and don't understand it.

I can't see. It's ignorance. We're ignorant of God's word. Our mind is unable to see the things that we're being told.

We can't see because we don't understand. We're ignorant of the truth. And so one of the reasons that our faith is small is due to lack of understanding.

It's due to ignorance. It's due to the fact that we're not growing in the word of God, in our understanding of that word. And so that very basic problem there leads to a whole host of problems that then follow.

[33 : 09] And those problems would disappear, or at least be minimized, if only we grew, if only we saw. So in the same way someone explains something to us, and we go, I don't see.

I can understand. What happens is we get faced with a problem in the world, a circumstance in the world, and it comes to our mind and it comes to our heart and we go, this doesn't make any sense.

I can't see. I don't understand. Right? The problem's big and our faith is small. And so what we learn from Abraham, what we learn from the Lord Jesus Christ, what we learn from the book of Hebrews and Romans, is that we are to be obedient to the faith.

And the way that we've come obedient to the faith is by learning what the word is actually saying. And the way that we learn what the word says is by hearing. The way that we see is by hearing.

So here's the exhortation. Faith is something which God gives us. It's not something that simply changes your mindset, gives you a positive outlook, an optimistic one, on the world.

[34 : 20] It's though everything's rosy. Okay? It doesn't matter what's happening there. Everything will be okay in the morning. That's not biblical faith. Biblical faith sees the world for what it is, a place which no person should really want to live in.

And understands that we're not going to live here forever. That we have a hope beyond this place that is certain and sure. And the reason we see that is because we hear it.

Okay? The reason we see it and we understand it is because we hear it. God is not expecting you to have blind faith. God is not expecting you to walk through this world blindly.

He wants you to walk through this world with your eyes wide open. It's just that the way you see spiritually is by hearing. And the reason why there's a downgrade in faith is normally because there's a downgrade in hearing, in listening to the word.

And when God builds your faith in this way, it'll keep you safe in the storm. It'll keep you safe, secure, confident in the challenges that even God brings your way through testing.

[35 : 37] So as you sit here this evening, know that God has you where he wants you. And God is giving you grace daily, mercy daily, and also the opportunity to come to his word for your faith to be built daily.

As it says here, all the scripture is God-breathed. All the scripture is powerful. All the scripture is enabling for this life.

All the scripture is what all the believer needs because it's Christ. So strength to believe comes from hearing, not from seeing with your eyes, but rather seeing with your mind.

What your mind can perceive through hearing the word of God is how you live by faith. It's not blind. It's actually seeing by seeing, but not in the way the world sees.

So encourage yourself by reading his word. Encourage yourself by asking him to help you understand his word.

[36 : 51] Strengthen your faith by paying attention to the Lord your God. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.