

FAITH OR WISHFUL THINKING?

SCRIPTURE: Romans 4:16-25

TEXT: Romans 4:18 "Against all hope, Abraham in hope believed and so became the father of many nations."

PURPOSE: To see people trust God for salvation.

INTRODUCTION:

Wendell was a dreamer and a positive thinker. One day in a board meeting he asked the question, "What is foolishness and what is faith? At what point does faith become merely wishful thinking?"

1. Have you wondered at what point is hope hopeless and faith foolishness?
2. Can you imagine the impossible as reality?
 - a. If so, when is the inner thought simply fantasizing?
 - b. When is the inward impression an expression of faith?
3. Can you think of yourself as a new person?
4. Faith is not believing something that cannot be true.

- I. Faith is centered in God (17).
 - A. Faith that focuses elsewhere is not faith.
 1. Faith has become fuzzy to us.
 - a. Having a lot of faith is applauded.
 - b. The need for more faith is widely accepted.
 - c. People with strong faith are admired.
 - d. Persons with another faith are mistrusted.
 2. The object of our faith is most important.

Some people have had faith in thin ice and never lived to tell the story. They died by faith. Others had weak faith in thick ice and were as safe as though they walked on concrete.

Years ago I read of a man in the northern woods who came to a frozen lake he needed to cross. Fearing the ice might be too weak to bear his weight, he carefully laid down in order to distribute his weight. He then painstakingly inched his body over the ice. He had almost reached the other side when he heard a noise behind him. He turned to see a man on a wagon load of wood being pulled by a team of horses! Faith based on feeling is like that. (The Faces of God, by James Hamilton, pg 65.)

3. Faith may not be based on present facts, though faith is not unintelligent.

4. Abraham's faith was firmly founded in God.

B. God changes circumstances (17).

1. Abraham knew God gives life to the dead.
2. Abraham also had inside information, namely, God calls those things that are not as though they were (17).
3. God determines some things will happen, but have not happened yet.
4. Occasionally He lets us in on the secret.

#Noah built an ark on dry land.

#Abraham believed he would be a father of many nations.

5. When faith is in God, the future is as sure as though it had already happened.
6. We are not dealing with possibility thinking but God's will.

II. Faith faces the facts, but does not falter (18).

A. Abraham's faith was against hope (19).

1. Some faith is in empty superstition and in non-existence factors.

#As I have talked with unemployed people I have asked, "What are your hopes for a job?" One will say, "I really don't know. I hope something comes my way." "What do you hope to do?" "Just anything." "Where are you looking? Where have you applied." "I'm going to start looking in the newspaper this weekend."

On the other hand, another person will say, "I have applied here. Another company is hiring in a month. I am qualified to work in another area. The economy is bad, but I'm not giving up."

2. Abraham's faith was of the latter kind.

- a. He knew Sarah and he were both beyond child bearing years.
- b. Circumstances seemed to be against them, but they refused to quit.

3. "Against all hope..." and "in hope" point in opposite directions.

- a. In view of human resources, no possibility of a son existed.
- b. The object of his hope was not himself.
 1. God's omnipotence, His purpose, His promise were the basis of Abraham's hope and faith.
 2. The certainty of the divine promise outweighed every natural probability.

B. He did not weaken in faith (19).

1. Abraham faced the facts, but did not dwell upon them.
2. He was not absorbed by his impotency as he was by God's omnipotency.
3. As time passed, Abraham still trusted God.

#How can the principle of faith operate, much more how can it acquire strength, unless God shall at times withdraw himself from the direct vision, and leave the soul to its own obscurity? If a man, wishing to test the spirit of obedience in his son, commands the son to follow him in a certain direction, does he not render his own test unavailable, by taking him by the hand and dragging him along? And so our heavenly Father, if he wishes to test and to strengthen our faith, must he not sometimes take us out of the region of openness and clearness of sight, and place us in the midst of entanglements, uncertainties, and shadows? What we need, what we must have, what is absolutely indispensable to our interior salvation, is faith. (Interior Life, Thomas Upham, pg 236)

- C. He did not waver regarding God's promise (20).
 - 1. Abraham was consumed by the promise of God.
 - 2. He did not entertain doubts concerning God's Word.
 - 3. Faith in God is not a shaky effort to believe your desires will be fulfilled.
 - a. It is not: "I wonder if" or "I hope I will" mentality.
 - b. Faith is like an anchor or fortress.

#As Charles Haddon Spurgeon said, "Faith is taking God at His Word. Faith is not belief without evidence." Nor is faith equated with feeling. (The Faces of God, James Hamilton, pg. 65)

- 4. To doubt means to have two minds or opinions.

#People who are nervous on airplanes tend to relax on long trips after they have flown for two hours. The longer the plane stays up, the more they learn they can trust it. The delays in God's timing can serve to strengthen our faith in Him.

- D. He was fully persuaded God had power (21).

#Stuart Briscoe confesses to neglecting his family as he traveled as an evangelist. His wife, Jill, suggested they take a vacation. Stuart would agree, but promptly forget.

One day at her suggestion he facetiously said, "Okay, I'll take you to the Mediterranean for two weeks."

She responded, "Stuart, that's not funny."

Shortly after this conversation, a friend called Stuart to tell him he had made reservations for the entire Briscoe family to vacation for two weeks on the Mediterranean. When Stuart told Jill, her response was, "Fantastic, wonderful, how exciting!"

Why the difference?

Briscoe commented, "She knew I did not mean it. Even if I did, I could not afford it, and if I could have afforded it, I probably would not have spent the money. When I said Norman had promised, the situation was different because he meant it, could afford it, and had demonstrated his generosity previously."

- III. Faith in God results in righteousness (22).
 - A. Our faith is credited as righteousness.
 - 1. All who believe after Abraham's pattern will be pardoned by faith.
 - 2. The words "it was credited to him" were also for us.
 - B. We are to place our faith in God.
 - 1. The God who raised Jesus from the dead.
 - 2. The God, who gives life in the barren womb, gives life in the darkened tomb.
 - 3. Jesus died for our sins and was raised to life for our pardon.

CONCLUSION:

- 1. Faith in Christ brings right living.
- 2. This is for us—a renewed life and changed character through faith in God.
- 3. You may be convinced you cannot live a Christian life—any change would be short-lived.
- 4. Perhaps you have tried to serve God, but came up against the times when God's promise seemed far away.
- 5. Faith does not see everything at once, much less an entire life time.

#Faith is like walking down a dark road with a flashlight. You have a mile to go, but your flashlight only shows thirty feet. Do you refuse to start out because you can see only thirty feet? Of course not. We are asking people to commit themselves to Jesus Christ for a lifetime. But they begin where they are, at that specific point, to commit the next "thirty feet" to him, trusting him for the future.

(Good News Is For Sharing by Leighton Ford, pg 164.)