



3. Choosing to believe the truth Part 2

The philosopher Soren Kierkegaard once described a familiar boyhood experience. He was being taught to swim by his father. Splashing wildly with both arms and kicking with one leg, he called to his father, "Look at me, look at me. I'm swimming!" But, says Kierkegaard, all the time he was holding onto the bottom of the swimming pool with his big toe. Many of us are like that in our faith. "I have faith!" we declare, but it is an untested faith. It is a tentative faith. One toe remains on the bottom! It is an enormous step for some of us to abandon our fears and trust God. Such faith may get harder for us the older we get.

This morning we explored the nature of faith and found that faith is something we tend to do all day every day. We have that expectation in almost everything we do that what we expect to happen will happen. For "normal" things that's exactly the case. I took the dogs for a walk this morning. The car started. I had every faith that if I turned the ignition it would start. It was an act of faith. Past experience and my knowledge of my own car was the expectation that it would start.

The same logic applies to God and the things of God. God has made Himself known to us in Christ. Therefore we have a body of experience by which we can confidently come before God, knowing that as He has dealt with us in the past, so He will act in the future.

But so often our faith and our prayers are speculative – we don't know what to pray and our prayers are filled with worry. For may we would say with Woody Allen: *Faith would be easier if God would show Himself by depositing a million dollars in a Swiss bank account in our name!*

But that's not the way it works – it goes the other way around. God speaks truth in His word and by His Spirit – and we have to trust Him. And that's the difficult bit because sometimes that answer to prayer and that expectation is not granted immediately as we want it, but in God's time. That's where the frustration comes in – we fret and get discouraged because we can't see the answer or a way through. I can give sermons on a God who makes our minuses pluses, who makes a way where there seems to be no way, who can do the impossible – but it's really not too helpful when we seem to be in the middle of a mess.

How come some people have faith to trust God and others don't. Why can't we be like Paul who was content with every situation. It comes down to our relationship with God doesn't it. How much do we know His word. How long do we spend in His presence? Why do we not reach out our hand to God?

The answer? How long have you got! God readily rewarded and points out the people in scripture noted for their faith. We've got Able and Enoch here. Look carefully, no great acts are recorded, no massive spiritual feats.

Abel: *It was faith that made Abel offer to God a better sacrifice than Cain's. Through his faith he won God's approval as a righteous man, because God himself approved of his gifts.*

Enoch: *.. he was taken up to God, and nobody could find him, because God had taken him up. The scripture says that before Enoch was taken up, he had pleased God. 6 No one can please God without faith, for whoever comes to God must have faith that God exists and rewards those who seek him.*

They didn't exactly do much did they?

Why did Abel find God's approval and Cain's didn't – Cain produced the fruit of His labour but it was from the ground that had been cursed. Abel presented himself to God with the sacrifice of one of the firstborn of his herd, and found the the acceptance before God was due the “**perfectness of another who had given himself for him.**” (W Kelly)

Enoch - We are told that *'He walked with God'*. What does this mean? The word 'walked' has a variety of meanings and applications, but those most obviously suited to this context are; *'to walk along side of and follow continually, to travel with'*. A clearer understanding might be obtained by reading the wording in the following translations; Septuagint: *'was well pleasing to God'*. Moffatt: *'lived close to God'*. (F W Dowsett)

Two different but important things. Abel recognised that his relationship with God came at the price of another. Enoch walked with God – he lived close to Him. We are a people who have been redeemed by another – Jesus Christ – and that allows us that close access to God that builds our faith. God desires us be close to Him because that is what exercises our muscle of faith . As we know God, our faith grows and the less we get blown around by all the hassles that satan, the world and life can throw at us.

We looked this morning at the importance of faith. Faith is something that grows as we live our Christian life. it's like a muscle which grows as we exercise it. If we don't seek to live by faith it doesn't grow. The problem is for many believers is that even though God wants us to grow, that many Christians never get that far. Something happens and they are discouraged but it.



I remember many years ago having a discussion with a nominal Anglican who was planning to have her baby christened. She said how she thought that it would protect her baby from evil. I asked her why she believed that – what evidence was there. Shy looked puzzled that I should ask. I asked her where in the Bible it talked about this. “Look, don't question what I believe. It's what I believe – I feel that this protects my child”.

Doh! It doesn't matter how much you feel or don't feel about something. For believers, the basis of our faith is in here – the Bible. We read truth, we believe it, we act on it and as we see God working through it, we get all the feelings we need!

So how does faith grow. We said this morning that it grows as we get to know the one who is truth. Therefore we seek to cultivate our relationship with God as we pray and study His word. The second way is by the way we experience life. It's one thing to know what's in God's word – read the 20 cans – but it's another to actually put our money where our mouth is.

What we also learn from Hebrews 11 is that faith leads to action. It wasn't head knowledge it was heart knowledge. The heroes of the OT believed and they did something. It may have not seemed much, but to God and them, it was life-changing action. How does that work out personally?

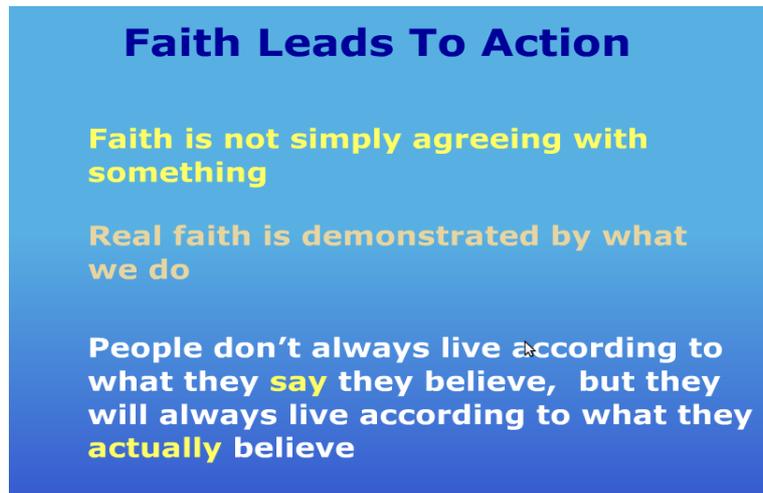
FAITH LEADS TO ACTION - faith is not simply agreeing with something

And that's where we're going. Faith isn't just an ideal we get to believe – it's something that should be life-changing

FAITH LEADS TO ACTION - it's demonstrated by what we do. If Jesus is really as powerful as we says He is, then it will show in our lives. And it does – we've all heard some great testimonies over

the years. But how different are we to the world? How much are we Jesus to men and women?

FAITH LEADS TO ACTION – this I find the most challenging point of the day – people don't always live according to what they say they believe, but they will always live according to what they actually believe.



We can have all the right words – but our actions always express what we believe. It's simple, if we live lives that make us no different from anyone else, people will say "why bother with Jesus?" Our actions always show what we actually believe.

Next week is Pentecost when we remember again the giving of the Holy Spirit. We read amazing things in the NT about the work of the Holy Spirit. Lives changed, bodies healed, people raised, massive conversions. How great is our God! And we are called to greater. But when people see us, do they see the confidence of the Acts, the confidence that comes from understanding the 20 cans – or do people see a timid faith, a faith that's unsure, a Christian whose words and deed are less than honouring – our actions always show what we actually believe.

The good news is that there's no-one here who could not become a mature and fruitful Christian. There is no-one here who cannot resist temptation, get out of hopelessness, leave behind negative behaviour and past influences and move on. You don't need some special anointing from God or others. You just need to know what is already true, chose to believe it and ACT upon it.

What next? Your homework now and every day is to become closer to God by spending more time with Him and more time with His word. The three sheets I've given you over the last 3 weeks are all snippets of scripture you can read. Allow the Holy Spirit to bury them into your heart. Claim the promises. Testify to those truths for yourself. Ask God to make them part of your thinking.

Romans 10:17 So then faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God.

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MRBC Felixstowe 24/5/09
Based on The Freedom in Christ Discipleship Course
by Neil Anderson and Steve Goss.*