

Matters of Faith Pt. 3

Pastor James Foley – Shared Sunday, January 17, 2021

INTRODUCTION

Thank you for joining us today! Whether you are here in person or watching via the livestream, you are most welcome. Please have a Bible at the ready and be prepared to take some notes. We have much to cover in a relatively short amount of time.

SETTING THE STAGE

FYI – Last Sunday we began to review the varying types and/or degrees of biblical faith...

1) “Little” Faith

Little faith refers to a weak and wavering belief that is susceptible to the influence of external circumstance and liable to retreat into doubt. Though this is not the “ideal” form of faith that we are to aspire to, God is gracious to meet us in our humanity (i.e., calling us to deeper degrees of trust).

2) “Persistent” Faith

Scripture calls us to a persistent faith—i.e., a faith that compels us to seek the Lord despite adversity, affliction and opposition. It is His divine desire that our belief be marked by an unwavering and indomitable character that fuels an ongoing pursuit of His Person, Promises and Principles.

3) “Persevering” Faith

Scripture also calls us to a persevering faith. It is one thing to have a persistent faith that causes you to seek the Lord in prayer. It is another to have a confidence that endures despite trial and tribulation. Let us reject any inclination to “throw away” our confidence as it shall be rewarded (Heb. 10:35–36).

4) “Tested” Faith

A tested faith is one that has been refined like gold in a furnace. God uses trying times to identify and eradicate all impurity, so that what remains is precious and pure in His sight. Remember that He works all things together “for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose” (Rom. 8:28).

NOTE – If you would like to go deeper on these topics and beyond, please check out recent sermons, etc., online.

KEY – This morning I would like to identify and address other manifestations of faith. Let’s delve in...

“SHIELDING” FAITH

Firstly, Scripture speaks to a “shielding” faith. Consider the following selection...

1 Peter 1:3–6 (NIV, Emphasis Mine)

3 Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! In his great mercy he has given us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, 4 and into an inheritance that can never perish, spoil or fade. This inheritance is kept in heaven for you, 5 who through faith are **shielded** by God’s power until the coming of the salvation that is ready to be revealed in the last time. 6 In all this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while you may have had to suffer grief in all kinds of trials.

NOTE 1 – It is quite apparent that faith has a shielding (i.e., protecting) capacity through His divine power. The Lord has great and mighty things in store for those who are His, and faith serves as the mechanism by which we are “preserved” through this life and find entry into the next (v. 4b–5)!

NOTE 2 – This connection between faith and a shielding effect is also revealed in the works of the apostle Paul...

Ephesians 6:10–17 (Emphasis Mine)

10 Finally, be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power. 11 Put on the full armor of God, so that you can take your stand against the devil’s schemes. 12 For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms. 13 Therefore put on the full armor of God, so that when the day of evil comes, you may be able to stand your ground, and after you have done everything, to stand. 14 Stand firm then, with the belt of truth buckled around your waist, with the breastplate of righteousness in place, 15 and with your feet fitted with the readiness that comes from the gospel of peace. 16 In addition to all this, take up the **shield of faith**, with which you can extinguish all the flaming arrows of the evil one. 17 Take the helmet of salvation and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God.

NOTE 1 – [Fiery] Arrows were a common and particularly dangerous implement of warfare in ancient times. Opposing armies would often volley arrows (i.e., wave after wave) at their targets—hoping to inflict maximum damage and loss of life. Shields provided the most effective defense against such a weapon, as they could deflect their damage and/or prevent penetration.

KEY 1 – Woe to the soldier who went into battle and faced the fiery darts of the enemy without a shield!

NOTE 2 – The apostle Paul played upon this imagery. The enemy of our soul volleys “flaming arrows” against us ongoingly (i.e., manifesting in the form of lies and deceptions meant to discourage or dissuade – v. 16). Our best defense against this offensive tactic of the enemy is to utilize the “shield of faith” (v. 16b). Allow me to illustrate...

1A) – Satan (Arrow of Deception) – “God does not love you.”

1B) – Faith-Filled Shielding Response – “I am convinced that ‘God is love’ (1 John 4:8) and that He has loved me with an ‘everlasting love’ (Jer. 31:3). If God loved me enough to send His Son while I was an enemy (Rom. 5:8), how much more will I know His love as His child (John 1:12)”

2A) – Satan (Arrow of Deception) – “God does not hear you.”

2B) – Faith-Filled Shielding Response – “I believe God meant it when He extended the invitation (Matt. 7:7–8): ‘Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives; the one who seeks finds; and to the one who knocks, the door will be opened.’”

3A) – Satan (Arrow of Deception) – “You are hopeless—God will fail you.”

3B) – Faith-Filled Shielding Response – “I believe that God has a plan, a future and a hope for me (Jer. 29:11). He is not a man that he should lie or change His mind—does He speak and not act or promise and not fulfill (Num. 23:19)!”

4A) – Satan (Arrow of Deception) – “You are inadequate—you will fail.”

4B) – Faith-Filled Shielding Response – “I may be inadequate on my own (John 15:5), but I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me (Phil. 4:13). Through Christ I am spiritually gifted and shall use that gift—whatever it might be—to glorify Him and advance His kingdom (Rom. 12:3–8)!”

KEY 2 – Woe to the Christian who contends with Satan and his fiery arrows and does not have the shield of faith!

“GREAT” FAITH

Secondly, Scripture speaks to “great” faith...

FYI 1 – In fact, Scripture speaks to “great” faith on two separate occasions in the Gospels (cf. Matt. 8, 15). Interestingly, such faith was demonstrated by Gentiles (i.e., the Centurion and the Canaanite Woman who sought Christ re: her demon-possessed daughter)...

Q. Why does this comment on “ethnicity” matter?

A. Because this is a type of faith anyone can aspire to...

FYI 2 – Such faith was not reserved for the Jewish elite alone, but was accessible to the Gentile and the outsider...

FYI 3 – Let us consider—albeit briefly—the account of Jesus and the Roman Centurion...

Matthew 8:5–13 (Emphasis Mine)

5 When Jesus had entered Capernaum, a centurion came to him, asking for help. 6 “Lord,” he said, “my servant lies at home paralyzed, suffering terribly.”

7 Jesus said to him, “Shall I come and heal him?”

8 The centurion replied, “Lord, I do not deserve to have you come under my roof. But just say the word, and my servant will be healed. 9 For I myself am a man under authority, with soldiers under me. I tell this one, ‘Go,’ and he goes; and that one, ‘Come,’ and he comes. I say to my servant, ‘Do this,’ and he does it.”

10 When Jesus heard this, he was amazed and said to those following him, “Truly I tell you, I have not found anyone in Israel with such **great faith**. 11 I say to you that many will come from the east and the west, and will take their places at the feast with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven. 12 But the subjects of the kingdom will be thrown outside, into the darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.”

13 Then Jesus said to the centurion, “Go! Let it be done just as you believed it would.” And his servant was healed at that moment.

NOTE 1 – Consider that Christ had this interaction with a Roman Centurion. A Centurion was a military commander of a Roman “century” (i.e., one-hundred soldiers). Centurions were men of some power and capacity in the Roman forces, appearing from time to time in the NT record.

NOTE 2 – Typically, the Jews hated the Romans, and the Romans were apathetic toward them and their religious traditions. However, this Roman interestingly sought Jesus (i.e., a Jewish rabbi and messianic figure)! Why did he seek the aid of Jesus? What compelled him to seek the Lord on the behalf of his suffering servant?

NOTE 3 – Christ did offer to come and heal his sickly servant, but in a state of faith-filled humility the Centurion declined His offer. Perceiving the authority of Christ—and being a man familiar with authority himself—he asked that Christ only issue the command for healing (v. 9). That alone would be sufficient!

NOTE 4 – Christ marveled at the “great” faith of this man. In fact, he noted that he had not seen such faith demonstrated amongst His own people—natural and spiritual Israel! The Lord used this incident to expose His Jewish audience (i.e., those who trusted in their ethnicity to save) to a challenging reality...

Matthew 8:11–12

11 I say to you that many will come from the east and the west, and will take their places at the feast with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven. 12 But the subjects of the kingdom will be thrown outside, into the darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.”

Based upon this account...

Q. What is great faith?

Q. What can we glean re: great faith?

A. Great faith is a sure and certain confidence and/or trust in the Lord and in the authority of His Word. Whereas “little” faith is subject to vacillation and retreat in the midst of difficulty, “great” faith possesses an unwavering and abiding nature. It is that type of faith that takes the Lord at His Word—believing in its total sufficiency. Even without the “immediate” presence of the Lord and any associated “feeling”—His Word is enough!

KEY 1 – I admire and aspire to such a faith. In many ways I confess I am not there yet! When I am faced by a severe challenge or difficulty, I often want some dramatic evidence that the Lord has heard me and purposes to intervene (e.g., a blowing wind or an audible voice, etc.). But to be at a point where the Word of God is enough and ends all debate—that is truly exceptional!

KEY 2 – The Lord indicated that He had not found such faith in all Israel at the time of this happening—and He was looking! Throughout the whole of His earthly ministry, He only identified one other person’s faith as “great” (cf. Matt. 15). Thus, there seems to be something tragically rare about “great” faith...

KEY 3 – It is a level of faith everyone can access (as has been noted) but few seem to attain...

Q. Why settle for “little” faith when we can possess it in “greater-and-greater” degrees?

Q. If “little” faith can move mountains (cf. Matt. 17:20), imagine what “great” faith can do?

QUOTE – “The world has yet to see what God can do with a man fully consecrated to him. By God’s help, I aim to be that man.” –British revivalist Henry Varley to D. L. Moody

“LIVING” FAITH

Lastly, Scripture speaks to what I shall call a “living” faith.

Q. What is a “living” faith?

A. A sincere, transformative faith that evidences itself in righteous works.

James 2:14–26 (Emphasis Mine)

14 What good is it, my brothers and sisters, if someone claims to have faith but has no deeds? Can such faith save them? 15 Suppose a brother or a sister is without clothes and daily food. 16 If one of you says to them, “Go in peace; keep warm and well fed,” but does nothing about their physical needs, what good is it? 17 In the same way, faith by itself, if it is not accompanied by action, is **dead**.

18 But someone will say, “You have faith; I have deeds.” Show me your faith without deeds, and I will show you my faith by my deeds. 19 You believe that there is one God. Good! Even the demons believe that—and shudder.

20 You foolish person, do you want evidence that faith without deeds is **useless** [i.e., dead]? 21 Was not our father Abraham considered righteous for what he did when he offered his son Isaac on the altar? 22 You see that his faith and his actions were working together, and his faith was made complete by what he did. 23 And the scripture was fulfilled that says, “Abraham believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness,” [Gen. 15:6] and he was called God’s friend. 24 You see that a person is considered righteous by what they do and not by faith alone.

25 In the same way, was not even Rahab the prostitute considered righteous for what she did when she gave lodging to the spies and sent them off in a different direction [Josh. 2]? 26 As the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without deeds is **dead**.

NOTE 1 – As was noted in recent weeks, there is a version of faith that is “dead, useless and futile”—a version that “assents” to the existence of God but allows for that reality to bring about no demonstrable change. This is the type of belief that James rails against throughout the whole of this text, citing that even demons believe to such a degree (v. 19)!

NOTE 2 – Yet there is a version of faith that is living, vital and transformative—a version that impacts and influences how we actually live day-to-day! This was the type of faith that OT figures like Abraham and Rahab demonstrated and this is the type of faith we are called to emulate in the NT era! To be extremely clear...

KEY 1 – We are saved by grace through faith and not through righteous works...

Ephesians 2:8–9 (Emphasis Mine)

8 For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God— 9 **not by works**, so that no one can boast.

KEY 2 – However, a genuine faith will inherently produce/evidence itself in works of righteousness...

Ephesians 2:8–10 (Emphasis Mine)

8 For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God— 9 not by works, so that no one can boast. 10 For we are God’s handiwork, **created in Christ Jesus to do good works**, which God prepared in advance for us to do.

KEY 3 – We do well to remember the established scriptural connection between faith and works...

James 2:17

17 . . . faith by itself, if it is not accompanied by action, is dead.

Matthew 7:17–20

17. . . every good tree bears good fruit, but a bad tree bears bad fruit. 18 A good tree cannot bear bad fruit, and a bad tree cannot bear good fruit. 19 Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. 20 Thus, by their fruit you will recognize them.

KEY 4 – Seek a vital faith that is living, genuine and transformative. Allow it to thrive and flourish, bearing fruit...

John 15:5, 8

5 “I am the vine; you are the branches. If you remain in me and I in you, you will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing . . . 8 This is to my Father’s glory, that you bear much fruit, showing yourselves to be my disciples.

Galatians 5:22–23

22 . . . the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, 23 gentleness and self-control. Against such things there is no law.

CONCLUSION

Thank you for taking the time to join us today. Should those of you who have joined us online wish to give, please do so through the giving portal of our church website (www.NewLifeBarre.org). For those who are present, please place your donation in one of our offering boxes.

NOTE – The 2020 Annual Business Meeting will take place on Sunday, January 24, 2021 following the Sunday Service (January 31 in case of inclement weather). The Annual Report will be distributed today to the voting membership (see Taran Long). Please review it and bring it with you to the Annual Meeting.

Numbers 6:24–26

24 The Lord bless you
and keep you;

25 the Lord make his face shine on you
and be gracious to you;

26 the Lord turn his face toward you
and give you peace.