

Faith

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[0:00] Many years ago, as I began a lesson, much as Pastor John began this one this morning, praying for the healing, the grace of God in the life of God.

I was reprimanded by a young lady for my lack of faith. And she insisted that the boy would never be healed if we didn't believe it was going to happen hard enough.

Please turn to Mark 11.23. Where does such a belief come from? Mark 11.23.

Our word this morning is faith. And we want to answer the question, first of all, of what faith is according to the Bible. What's amiss with the well-meaning idea that if only I believe hard enough, I will have that for which I am praying?

Mark 11.23 and 24. I tell you the truth. If anyone says to this mountain, go throw yourselves into the sea, and does not doubt in his heart, but believes that it will happen, that what he says will happen, it will be done for him.

[1:31] Therefore, I tell you, whatever you ask for in prayer, believe that you have received it, and it will be yours. So was the young lady right?

I'd like your input. Do we need to simply believe hard enough? And if we believe it hard enough, we will have what it is that we ask.

Is that not what God's word says? Anyone? God answers our prayer according to his will and our good. Okay.

God answers our prayer according to his will and our good. But doesn't Jesus say here that if we just pray believing it enough, it will happen?

Look back at verse 22. We believe in God and his character, not what he's going to do for us.

[2:31] Very good. And very subtly, verse 22, I believe, brings that out. What's the context of verses 23 and 24?

Have faith in God, Jesus answered. Well, right from the start, whatever this passage means, it doesn't mean that I need to believe something hard enough.

The idea that believing something hard enough is a formula to get what I want makes faith itself the object of my faith, not God. And we see in verse 22 that God is to be the object of our faith.

I'm putting faith in my faith. If I have enough of it, I'll get what I'm asking for. God isn't even in the picture in such a focus as some of you have pointed out. My will is the goal, and my faith becomes the ticket that will get me whatever it is that I want.

Look on your sheet, please. I'm going to give you the five heads under which we're going to be talking about faith this morning. The first head is the object of faith.

[3:44] The object of faith. The second is the trustworthiness of God. The third is the nature of faith.

The fourth is the source of faith. The fourth is the means of faith. See, I'm just copying Jason, who decided if we give you the whole lesson ahead of time, then I'm not under pressure to complete the whole thing.

So the object of faith, the trustworthiness of God, the nature of faith, the source of faith, and the means of faith. So first of all, the object of our faith.

Someone made the comment that we need to do God's will. And we need to pray, I'm sorry, for God's will. That that's to be the focus of our faith. And we see it in a verse we've been memorized in our pack, Matthew 6, 9, and 10.

Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name. Your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. The concern of our prayer should be God's will, not our own.

[4:55] I fear that the subject of faith has become so complicated, so entangled, when it's really so very simple, because we are so self-centered.

The starting point, then, for a correct understanding of faith is recognizing that our faith must have an object beyond faith itself, and that is God. We're not going to take time to read these passages, because we have much to cover this morning, but you see under the points of the object of faith that Scripture identifies or describes those objects in several ways, as God himself, as Christ, as God's promise, Jesus' Messiahship and Saviorhood, the reality of the resurrection, the gospel, and the apostolic witness.

What do all these things have in common? Well, they're all grounded on the same reality. The object of our faith is the person and the works of God.

It's not faith itself. It's God, his person, and his works. So, having established God as the one on whom our faith rests, how trustworthy is such a faith for the Christian?

Which is the second point, the trustworthiness of God. If someone whom you know, and you've known to be, a deceiver, a manipulator, comes to you and tells you that there's a half-acre plot across the other side of town.

[6:42] And even though it used to be the site of a chemical dump, he's done research and he's discovered that there is a deep oil well underneath this half-acre. But nevertheless, because he's not a greedy type of person, he's willing to sell you that property for only \$100,000.

Would you be running to the nearest bank to remortgage your house to get into this fantastic opportunity? Probably not. Why? Well, because the man who's telling you the information is not trustworthy.

But let's say a good friend of the family for over 50 years were to come to you and tell you the same information. Someone you've known to never utter a single falsehood or exaggeration, unless everything he's told you, he's known to be absolutely true.

Someone who's frequently come and helped out in the family whenever you've had a need. And oh, by the way, once whose occupation it is to do seismic research on the location of deep oil wells.

Would the source from the information coming from this second man cause any different of a response in you compared to the first? And the answer is, of course it would. You see, the object of our faith, of that information within which we will give our trust, is ultimately the determiner of whether or not the information we have is trustworthy.

[8:18] So how can we know that our God is a trustworthy source of information? Well, by opening our eyes and just looking around us. Romans 1.20, For since the creation of the world, God's invisible qualities, his eternal power, and divine nature have been clearly seen being understood from what has been made so that men are without excuse.

I think it would be a worthwhile exercise for us to just stop and think for a few minutes about what we can observe from nature about God's character. You can take and look at a man's work and learn an awful lot about that man by seeing what his handiwork is like.

So as we look at God's handiwork, what do we see about God as we look upon that? Anyone?

Okay, there's great regularity in the seasons.

What specific character quality would that link up to? Perfection. Okay, perfection. What else?

Order. He's an orderly person.

What else? Has the sun ever not risen on a given day? Mike? I was going to say his power is demonstrated. Okay, his power is demonstrated.

[9:42] Faithfulness. Faithfulness. Consistency. Consistency. Wisdom. How much wisdom does our God have?

And this is just, I'm starting to get my head into evolution, creation, as I'm preparing for the high school class. And you just start looking at this creation.

creation. And I think the most mind-boggling thing is to look upon it and to see the blindness of man to even be able to suppose that it could have just happened.

The complexity, the wisdom of all the interrelated parts that all must fit together and all must work together. How glorious, how wise of a God we have.

What else? His mercy. We give the things we don't deserve. It makes the sunshine. It makes the rain. His mercy. It sends the sun.

[10:49] We've had a lot of rain lately, but I still remember when we were under such great drought in some of those summers when I was watching the crops withering and it was happening across our country and I thought, is this a judgment of God?

We certainly deserve it and then the rains came and he just keeps having mercy. That says something about our God. Well, we could go on and on, but it all is a reflection on who God is. So think about the kind of a person who designed, created, and is sustaining this universe. This is a God that can be trusted and believed.

so much so that if we don't, God's written revelation says that we are without excuse. So gloriously does his divine nature shine through all that he's made.

Well, having established God as the object of our faith and considered his deservedness of our trust, the next head I would like to consider is the nature of faith itself, the nature of faith.

[12:04] G.I. Packer writes, true faith springs from real self-despair and involves a complete abandoning of trust in one's own morality or religion or character to commend one to God.

Put more concisely, faith is resting in God to the exclusion of trusting in ourselves or anyone else. just as election follows from a correct understanding of man's depravity, so true faith can only follow a God-inspired embracing of my bankrupt condition.

When one eliminates the proper teaching about man, about sin, from Christianity, whatever kind of faith we come up with isn't going to be saving faith.

As J.C. Ryle observed, a right knowledge of sin lies at the root of all saving Christianity. Why?

Because I must see first myself as bankrupt before I can come to God empty-handed as faith so demands or as the hymn writer so poetically and powerfully captured in song.

Nothing in my hands I bring, simply to the cross I cling. Naked come to thee for dress, helpless look to thee for grace. Well, if I think there is anything within me that's commendable, I'm not going to come with empty hands, naked for dress, clinging to the cross, helpless before this God.

[13:39] Or as the acrostic reminds us, F-A-I-T-H, forsaking all, I take him. So from whence does such faith come?

The source of faith is the fourth head, the source of faith. The right knowledge of sin to which Ryle alluded will quickly lead us to conclude that whatever it is that faith comes from, it isn't coming from ourselves.

Faith does not originate from man. Why? Because man's depraved, a rebel, who will not and cannot come to God on God's terms. It's a matter of ability.

We cannot come to God any more than we could broad jump across the Grand Canyon. No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him, John 6, 44.

It's a matter of blindness. We're unable to see the glories of the kingdom of God. 2 Corinthians 4, 4. The God of this age has blinded the minds of unbelievers so that they cannot see the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ who is the image of God.

[14:49] It's a matter of values. Our values are completely opposite of God's values. 1 Corinthians 2, 14. The man without the spirit does not accept the things that come from the spirit of God for they are foolishness to him and he cannot understand them because they are spiritually discerned.

Well, if these things are true, then how is anyone going to come to Christ to believe, to have faith, and be saved?

And the answer is because faith is a gift from God. Second point under number four on your sheet. Faith is a gift from God. Just listen as I read six passages.

2 Peter 1, 1. Simon Peter, a servant and apostle of Jesus Christ to those who through the righteousness of our God and Savior Jesus Christ have received a faith as precious as ours.

It's something that we receive according to the scriptures. Hebrews 12, 2. Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith. Who is the author of the faith?

[15:59] Is it myself? Is it something I self-generate? No. Scripture says that Jesus is the author of my faith. 1 Timothy 1, 14. The grace of our Lord was poured out on me abundantly along with the faith and love that are in Jesus.

Yes, God poured out his grace on me but part of that grace is the faith to be able to believe in him. Ephesians 6, 23. Peace to the brothers and love with faith from whom?

From God, our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. again, it comes from God to me. Philippians 1, 29. For it has been granted to you on behalf of Christ not only to believe on him but also to suffer for him.

The same one who sends us our sufferings and our daily trials is the one who grants to us the ability to believe and have faith in the first place. And then lastly, 2 Corinthians 4, 6.

For God, who said, let light shine out of darkness, made his light shine in our hearts to give us the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ.

[17:12] When someone finally understands something, we use the analogy that a light bulb went on in his head. Well, God tells us that it is he who turns on the light bulb and that not we ourselves in order to fill our hearts with faith that we might believe on him.

I'm sorry, I missed one. One more. Ephesians 2, 8. For it is by grace you have been saved through faith and this not from yourselves. It is the gift of God.

I spent the time reading through that because in our day we have somehow abandoned this belief that it is God who supplies all things including our faith and have somehow seen faith as something originating from ourselves that then God responds to.

But the scripture as you've seen says otherwise. God's the object of our faith. He's the supplier of our faith and the reason we can have hope, confident expectation and future good.

But he has chosen to grow faith through secondary causes or means and that is our final head for this morning the means of faith. The means of faith.

[18:25] And again I'm going to no I won't. We'll do them one at a time. We might make it through. If you're anything like me you often bemoan your lack of faith and wish you had more.

But how diligently are we pursuing the means that God has ordained for the development of our faith? Each of God's means is both a gift and a command.

It's like two sides of the same coin. On one side God must produce within us a measure of faith before we can even begin making use of the means of grace profitably. But on the other side of the coin God requires me to exercise that means he has chosen and as I do he will strengthen the faith that he's already given to me.

So first by the word of God by the word of God we see it even from our memory verse this morning don't we in Joshua 1.8 Listen to Proverbs 22.17 through 19 Pay attention and listen to the sayings of the wise apply your heart to what I teach for it is pleasing when you keep them in your heart and have all of them ready on your lips so that your trust may be in the Lord.

I will learn to trust in the Lord as I not only hear his word but meditate on it according to Proverbs 22. My faith is a gift from God and is strengthened through the means he has chosen and one of those means is the word of God.

[20:10] When my faith is waning do I stop and ask myself whether I become slack in my hearing of reading memorizing and meditating on the word of God I can't say oh I wish I had more faith and then put off that means as if it doesn't matter I must come to God by his means and as I apply those means he then produces the faith within me.

The intake of the word of God isn't going to do us a whole lot of good if we don't believe what it says. And the second means for strengthening our faith is by believing what God says.

By believing what God says. During our recent times of flooding you would have been down to the shores of the raging yellow river and someone told you how it had flooded the entire field near the hospital.

how would you feel if the conversation went something like this? Your friend. I don't believe it. But I was just down there and I saw it with my own eyes.

There's no way. They just dredged it last year. It can't get that high anymore. Are you saying I'm a liar? I'm just saying I don't believe it. Is it possible to not believe it that somebody has said without slandering the one whose statement you are rejecting?

[21:41] Well, no. Why not? Because as soon as we say we don't believe what someone says, we're implying that the person is either a liar, delusional, or self-deceived.

I wouldn't want to be accused of any of those three. So it's an insult. And neither would God. When we reject what God has said, we are calling him a liar. And we often reject him in many more ways than just saying, well, I don't believe that when we read something in his word.

Of course, the most brazen insult is to reject his very existence, which we read in Hebrews 11, 6. And without faith it is impossible to please God because anyone who comes to him must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who earnestly seek him.

but we also insult him by rejecting his statements regarding history, such as what he's told us about creation. By faith we understand that the universe was formed at God's command so that what is seen is not made out of what is visible.

We insult him by rejecting his promises. Now we're starting to get closer to home. By faith Abraham, even though he was past age and Sarah herself was enabled to become a father because he considered him faithful who had made the promise.

[23:13] Notice where the attention of Abraham's faith is focused in this verse. It's on God. It's he who is faithful. Do we appreciate the fact that every time we fret or worry or take matters into our own hands, we're effectively saying that he is unfaithful?

That his promises are not trustworthy? Aren't I overstating things a bit? When my faith is running low, is it really fair to conclude that I'm calling God a liar?

John 3, 32 and 33, he, Jesus, testifies to what he has seen and heard, but no one accepts his testimony. The man who has accepted it has certified that God is truthful.

And then in 1 John 5, 10, same author, anyone who believes in the Son of God has this testimony in his heart. Anyone who does not believe God has made him out to be a liar because he has not believed the testimony God has given about his Son.

When I don't believe what God says, whether through mental assent or through actions that betray what I say I believe, I'm calling God a liar.

[24:28] my faith is a gift from God and is strengthened through the means he has chosen and one of those means is believing the word of God. When my faith is waning, do I stop and ask myself whether I've been practically rejecting what he has said through my attitudes and through my lifestyle?

Well, the third means for strengthening our faith is by looking on Jesus. by looking on Jesus. Again, Hebrews 12 2, let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy set before him endured the cross, scorning its shame and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.

This is such a well-known verse, I wonder if we often miss the obvious. my faith is perfected by God and is strengthened through the means he provides.

And one of those means is to look on Jesus, to gaze into his glorious face. He's the object of my faith.

I'm only going to come to trust in him more as I look on his beauty and his trustworthiness and looking on it means meditating on it, focusing on it, thinking upon him as not some object out there, but as the person that he is that is intimately involved in my life.

[26:08] He's the source of all power. Without him, I can do nothing, and so I need to keep looking to Jesus. When my faith is waning, do I stop and ask myself whether my eyes have wandered off of Jesus, the author and the perfecter of my faith?

The fourth means of strengthening our faith is by praising God, by praising God. Sacrifice thank offerings to God.

Fulfill your vows to the Most High, and call upon me in the day of trouble. I will deliver you, and you will honor me. Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God.

Again, my faith is a gift from God and is strengthened through the means he's chosen. One of those means is returning praise and thanksgiving to him for every detail of my life.

When my faith is waning, do I stop and ask how much praise has been on my lips lately, or do I live by my feelings?

[27:27] Do I obey God with praise and thanksgiving even when it's the last thing on earth that I feel like doing, trusting him to accept and bless those words that I'm offering up in thanksgiving because I'm offering him in submissive obedience to his command to thank him in all things.

He is praiseworthy and it must be done whether my heart is ablaze with thanksgiving or as cold and hard as a winter lake because giving him thanks his first of all do his name because he's deserving of all thanks and praise and number two he's commanded us to do it and he's told us as we do it he will then strengthen our faith so you see so often we have it backwards we don't thank him because we're waiting for the faith to be able to see that he's in control but he's already told us what to do and then that goes back to I disobey his word and I don't accept his commands no I submit myself in thanksgiving to him praising him for all that he is and all that he has done and as I do so he supplies faith he back fills the thanksgiving!

So the fifth means for strengthening one's faith is by petition by petition Psalm 118 5 In my anguish I cried to the Lord and he answered by setting me free Listen to the psalmists and the way that they

come before their God and let's compare that a little bit to maybe how we come to God in our prayers so often Psalm 34 15 The eyes of the righteous and his ears are attentive to their cry Psalm 55 22 Cast your cares on the Lord and he will sustain you he will never let the righteous fall it is through petition that we acknowledge our dependency on God and appropriate from his supply lines all that we need for life and faith God opens the flood gates of his provisions!

as we come to him and ask for him to supply those needs and he's ordained that his hands will be moved in action when we come to him and ask him for those things that he already wants to give us and faith is one of those things the ability to see him the ability to appreciate him!

When my faith is waning do I stop and ask myself how frequently I'm going to the throne of grace with desperate cries for help? James 4.2 You do not have because you do not ask God.

[30 : 33] But we often ask with the wrong motives, don't we? That we may spend what we get on our own pleasures. The purity of my motives are often revealed by my willingness to wait.

So the sixth means of strengthening our faith is by waiting on God. By waiting on God. Psalm 135 and 6 I wait for the Lord my soul waits and in his word I put my hope my soul waits for the Lord more than watchmen wait for the morning more than watchmen wait for the morning.

Psalm 27 14 wait for the Lord be strong and take heart and wait for the Lord. a message there from the scriptures wait for the Lord.

My faith is a gift from God and is strengthened through the means he's chosen. One of those means is to stop conniving calm my spirit and determine to wait for God to accomplish his purposes in his timing.

So when my faith is waning do I stop and ask myself whether I've been quietly resting and trusting or whether I've been fretting and worrying. Well, the seventh means for strengthening our faith is by obeying his commands.

[31 : 52] By obeying his commands. For the eyes of the Lord range throughout the earth to strengthen those whose hearts are fully committed to him. 2nd Chronicles 16 9.

One of the means that God uses to strengthen my faith is by being fully committed to him. Do I really believe that sin breaks the supply lines of God's grace?

That it puts a wedge there through my disobedience? Ephesians 4.30 And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God with whom you were sealed for the day of redemption. I can grieve away his grace and if I do then I need to be fleeing to him in repentance to repair that supply line of grace without which I cannot live.

Which brings us to the eighth means for strengthening our faith which is by repenting of sin. By repenting of sin. And repentance and rest is your salvation and quietness and trust is your strength. 1 John 1 9 If we confess our sins he's faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness. Repentance involves acknowledgement and confession of my sins.

[33 : 19] A desire to be cleansed from sin's penalty and power. By definition repentance is turning away from myself and my sin toward God. So my faith is a gift from God and I'm only going to get it through the means that he supplies and one of those means is keeping current accounts with him.

When my faith is waning, when I can't see him, when heavens seem hard and cold, do I stop and ask myself when the last time was that I've repented of specific sins and sought God for cleansing? Half hearted obedience and unconfessed sin are really just symptoms of a much bigger problem however. And that problem is no fear of God. The ninth means for strengthening our faith is by fearing God.

In Romans 3 Paul summarizes the wickedness of man 10 to 18 picking it up in verse 13 he says their throats are open graves their tongues practice deceit the poison of vipers is on their lips their mouths are full of cursing and bitterness their feet are swift to shed blood ruin and misery mark their ways in the way of peace they do not know and he concludes with really the fundamental underlying reason for their lifestyle!

verse 18 there is no fear of God before their eyes in our pack that we're memorizing now we have Matthew 10 28 which says do not be afraid of those who can kill the body but cannot kill the soul rather be afraid of the one who can destroy both soul and body in hell or Proverbs 29 25 fear of man will prove to be a snare but whoever trusts in the Lord is kept safe here the poet contrasts the fear of man with faith the more I fear man the less I will trust God the more I trust God the less I will fear man my faith is a gift from God and is strengthened through the means he has chosen one of those means is learning to fear him rather than man when my faith is waning do I myself whether it is man or

[35:54] God that I am trying to please well tenthly Psalm 112 7 speaks of the one who will have no fear of bad news his heart is steadfast trusting in the Lord how does this man acquire such a steadfast trust in God well by giving generously by giving generously in verse 5 of Psalms 112 we read good will come to him who is generous and lends freely and conducts his affairs with justice surely he will never be shaken a righteous man will be remembered forever he will have no fear of bad news his heart is steadfast trusting in the Lord you see there is a direct connection between giving generously and trusting in the Lord why because my generous giving if done with the faith

God supplies is demonstrating I see him as the supplier of all things in my life and so since he is the giver of all things me as his steward is simply going to give those things back to him in the ways that he has directed and so he will fill me with a heart that wants to meet needs around me that will be consistent in tithing so when my faith is waning do I stop and ask myself if I've been consistent in my tithing or when the last time I've been generous towards others even to the point of self sacrifice we could go on and on obviously there are so many areas in which scripture ties faith into our actions and as we obey those areas he provides means of more faith but I'd like to close with the fact that our faith is strengthened through humility through humility this is what the sovereign Lord Isaiah 30 15 this is what the sovereign Lord the holy one of Israel says in repentance and rest is your strength salvation in quietness and trust is your strength 1 Peter 5 6 and 7 humble yourselves therefore under God's mighty hand that he may lift you up in due time cast all your anxiety on him because he cares for you my faith is a gift from God and is strengthened through the means he provides!

Jesus I can go days at a time without even gazing into his face I can ignore some of his commands I can live with unconfessed sin I don't need to humble myself before others and ultimately under God's mighty hand I don't need to give the first fruits of all he supplied as an acknowledgement of my great dependency on him I don't need to pray for myself and others I don't have time and after all God's sovereign anyway when my faith is waning do I stop and evaluate the view I've had of myself lately do I really think I can grow in faith in my way and on my terms in summary faith is an abandonment of ourselves and a complete casting of ourself on Christ as the object of that faith to even have a desire to approach him is due to the working of his mighty strength in our hearts so he's the source of my faith and he's the object on which it rests without him

I can do nothing I can see nothing or believe nothing as it relates to the truth of himself and his gospel therefore to grow in faith I must do so by daily humbly to his means of grace and not letting any of his commands fall to the ground thank you may!

[40:33]