



**BETHEL**  
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## **MINISTRY OF THE WORD**

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### **Practical Faith**

Faith is a major theme of the Christian life. It would be an understatement to say that “faith” is a major part of the Christian life.

Hebrew 11:6a, “And without faith it is impossible to please [God]...”

1 Timothy 1:5, “But the goal of our instruction is love from a pure heart and a good conscience and a sincere faith.”

Do you know why John wrote the gospel of John? It was so that all who read it "...may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing [they] may have life in His name." (John 20:31b)

1 John 5:4b, "...this is the victory that has overcome the world- our faith."

And yet it isn't just the New Testament that emphasizes the importance of faith in the Christian life, the Old Testament also lays stress on this as well.

Habakkuk 2:4, "Behold, as for the proud one, his soul is not right within him; but the righteous will live by his faith."

Accordingly, Solomon exhorted us:

Proverbs 3:5, "Trust [rely/believe] in the Lord with all your heart, and do not lean on your own understanding."

There is no question that "faith" is that by which the child of God must live day by day!

And that no doubt is why the second topic which Peter turned (in this very pastoral epistle written to a persecuted people) was the question of faith. For all too often "faith" is the first to go when life gets difficult! Recall the exhortation given to a people of God facing severe persecution:

Hebrew 10:35-36a, "Therefore, do not throw away your confidence [that is, *the openness of your faith*], which has a great reward. For you have need of endurance..."

It is so contradictory! As it relates to man, the only thing that will enable the child of God to get through a trial unscathed is by relying upon God- FAITH! Yet it is this faith/reliance that is all too quickly abandoned when the going gets tough. That clearly is what happened amongst the people to whom Hebrews was written- which is occasion for the exhortation to continue to trust/rely upon God!

We see this in King Ahaz. Do you remember that time when the Northern Kingdom of Israel and Syria banded together with the plan to attack Judah, kill Ahaz, and place a puppet king on the throne? Ahaz at this moment had a choice: Would he trust God? Or would he resort to self-effort? Quite predictably, he abandoned the "faith" and leaned on his own devices.

Isaiah 7:3-4a, "Then the Lord said to Isaiah, 'Go out now to meet Ahaz, you and your son Shear-jashub, at the end of the conduit of the upper pool, on the highway to the fuller's field [Rather than turn to God for direction at this time, Ahaz "leaned on his own understanding" and so diligently worked on securing a water supply for an impending siege! And herein we read Isaiah's charge...], and say to him, 'Take care, and be calm, have no fear and do not be fainthearted...'" - In other words, "don't throw away your

confidence”!

Isaiah’s message to Ahaz is a fitting summary of the passage before us this morning. 1 Peter was written to uphold the faith of a weakened people — weakened on account of the trial they faced having become outlaws of Rome because of Christ!

“Faith” is referenced three times in this text. Notice:

1 Peter 1:7a, “That the proof of your faith...”

1 Peter 1:8b, “...and though you do not see Him now, but believe in Him...”

1 Peter 1:9a, “Obtaining as the outcome of your faith...”

Clearly the focus of this section is the faith of the believer. Yet what aspect of their faith is Peter addressing? That is where we are going to begin.

When it comes to faith and the believer (not the non-believer, which is a different story), “faith” is used three different ways in the Bible. First, there is what is known as Saving Faith. Speaking of the Philippian Jailer’s release of Paul and Silas in the cover of darkness,

Acts 16:30-31, “And after he [the Philippian Jailer] brought them out, he said, ‘Sirs, what must I do to be saved?’ And they said [Paul and Silas], ‘Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you shall be saved, you and your household.’”

Salvation comes as we rest/rely upon Jesus alone! In summarizing his teaching over the past four chapters, Paul wrote this:

Romans 5:1, “Therefore having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.”

Essentially there are two and only two approaches to God. You can approach God on the basis of your merit or you can approach God on the basis of Christ’s merit. As it relates to approaching God on the basis of our own merit, what do we read?

Romans 6:23a, “For the wages of sin is death...”

Every one of us struggles with sin — all most certainly have and do sin (Romans 3:23). In light of this, cosmic justice demands that we receive the wages of our sin — which is death!

You say, “What if I am a really good person and do good things?” In light of our sinfulness, even our good deeds are tainted.

Isaiah 64:6a, "For all of us have become like one who is unclean, and all our righteous deeds are like a filthy garment..."

To approach God on the basis of our own merit is to reap destruction! But herein is the good news! God has provided a way in which the sinner can approach God on the basis of Christ's merit! God became man, perfectly obeyed the law of God (He never sinned), and then He died on a Roman cross! And why did Christ die? He gave up His own life as a substitute!

1 Peter 3:18a, "For Christ also died for sins once for all, *the* just for *the* unjust, in order that He might bring us to God..."

And thus, if you and I will rely upon Christ's sacrifice as the basis for approaching God, we will be saved! That is the point of Romans 5.

Romans 5:1, "Therefore having been justified by faith [having been declared not guilty on account of Christ's righteousness], we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ."

This is what Saving Faith is all about. It is trusting Christ alone as the basis of your forgiveness and so your salvation! That brings us to a second type of faith referenced in Scripture as it relates to the child of God.

Secondly, there is what is known as Doctrinal Faith.

Jude 3, "Beloved, while I was making every effort to write you about our common salvation, I felt the necessity to write to you appealing that you contend earnestly for the faith which was once for all delivered to the saints."

Faith in this context is used NOT as the path that leads to life, BUT as the sum total of the teaching of God's word! We read in this in Acts:

Acts 6:7, "And the word of God kept on spreading; and the number of the disciples continued to increase greatly in Jerusalem, and a great many of the priests were becoming obedient to the faith."

It is to this end God gave the church leadership.

Ephesians 4:11-13, "And He gave some *as* apostles, and some *as* prophets, and some *as* evangelists, and some *as* pastors and teachers, for the equipping of the saints for the work of service, to the building up of the body of Christ [what is the goal?]; until we all attain to the unity of the faith..."

What is that? It is a people growing in their understanding of truth and so able to profess the same thing! "The faith" referenced here is a doctrinal understanding!<sup>1</sup> This is what we mean

by Doctrinal Faith. It is growing more and more in our ability to confess together the truth of God's word!

Now honestly, most of us do not struggle with the first two types of faith. We praise God that Jesus is our righteousness and so the basis upon which we are able to stand before God! I praise Him that in Christ my sins are forgiven and that I stand perfect before Him, clothed in a beauty not my own — the righteousness of Christ!

I praise God for godly men in church history who have and continue to teach God's word accurately such that today we are able to confess together the truth of God's word! Oh, there might be minor differences when it comes to what we believe, but these are ancillary! Together we confess Christ and we know that it is by His grace alone that we are saved!

It is the third type of faith with which we struggle the most. There is what is known as Practical Faith. Practical Faith is faith that trusts God over time for something that is outside of our control. It is the faith that Habakkuk demonstrates when being told by God that his entire way of life was going to end; his entire world would be turned upside down. And yet notice his response:

Habakkuk 3:16-18, "I heard and my inward parts trembled, at the sound my lips quivered. Decay enters my bones, and in my place I tremble. Because I must wait quietly for the day of distress [that is practical faith], for the people to arise *who* will invade us. [In the face of this mountain of worry, listen to what practical faith does...] Though the fig tree should not blossom, and there be no fruit on the vines, *though* the yield of the olive should fail, and the fields produce no food, though the flock should be cut off from the fold, and there be no cattle in the stalls, yet I will exult in the Lord, I will rejoice in the God of my salvation."

This is the most difficult kind of faith! It is trusting God in the moment when everything around us seems to be failing! That is the focus of that most glorious chapter we know as "The Hall of Faith." Notice how the Hebrew writer defines "Practical Faith."

Hebrew 11:1, "Now faith is the assurance of *things* hoped for [practical faith always has a future bent to it... it is living today in light of a promise relating to tomorrow], the conviction of things not seen [secondly practical faith is standing boldly in the Lord for something that is NOT tangibly obvious]."

This is the hardest type of faith for the Christian. It is trusting God in the moment for something that is out of our control and whose end is not readily seen!

And that is the faith that concerns Peter, Practical Faith!

God's people here had become outlaws on account of the burning of Rome and Nero's need for a scapegoat. By blaming the Christians, Nero made Christianity an outlawed religion in Rome

and so enemy number one such that now throughout the empire, faithfulness to Rome meant hostility toward Christians! Recall the words of the Roman historian Tacitus:

To stifle the report, Nero provided others to bear the accusation, in the shape of people who were commonly called 'Christians,' in detestation of their abominable character. These [Nero] visited with every refinement of punishment. First they were arrested who confessed [that they were Christians], and then, on receiving information, an immense number were convicted, not so much on the charge of arson but on the charge of ill-will toward mankind in general. Their deaths were turned into a form of amusement. They were wrapped in the skins of wild beasts to be torn to pieces by dogs, or were fastened to crosses to be set on fire, and, when the daylight came to an end, were burned for an illumination at night. Nero threw open his own gardens for the spectacle, and made it the occasion of a circus exhibition. (Tacitus, 2008, p. 44)

And so began the first, formal and organized persecution of Christianity — which involved an empire-wide attack which would claim the lives of Paul and Peter as well as Erastus, Aristarchus, Trophimus, Barsabas, and Ananias. The suffering was horrible and intense. Speaking of the Neronian persecution and what individuals suffered in the name of Christ, Foxe's Book of Martyrs recorded this:

Some...were slain with the sword, some burnt with fire, some scourged with whips, some stabbed with forks of iron, some fastened to the cross or gibbet [gallows], some drowned in the sea, some had their skins plucked off, some their tongues cut out, some were stoned to death, some frozen with cold, some starved with hunger, some with their hands cut off, or otherwise dismembered, were left naked to the open shame of the world. (Foxes, 2001, p. Chapter 1)

This is what thousands upon tens of thousands of Christians were suffering throughout the empire when Peter wrote this epistle. Knowing that in this context the first thing to go would be reliance upon Christ, Peter transitioned in his teaching here to give what essentially is A Seminar on Practical Faith! Consider with me Peter's first point, the fuel of practical faith.

1 Peter 1:6, "in this you greatly rejoice."

What is the "this" referencing here? It draws us back to what we looked at last time, specifically, the New Birth and its glorious future when the fulness of our salvation shall be realized! Look back at verse 5.

1 Peter 1:5b, "[We] are protected by the power of God through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time."

The "salvation" here is in reference to our glorification and so that time when the fulness of God's redemptive program is consummated.

1 Corinthians 15:35-37, “But someone will say, ‘How are the dead raised? And with what kind of body do they come?’ You fool! That which you sow does not come to life unless it dies; and that which you sow, you do not sow the body which is to be, but a bare grain, perhaps of wheat or of something else.”

Using an analogy from farming, Paul references the fact that when a seed is sown, that which comes up is completely different from the original form of the seed. Right? A living plant doesn’t look like its seed! And so, it will be with our resurrected bodies.

1 Corinthians 15:42-44, “42 So also is the resurrection of the dead. It is sown a perishable *body* [subject to deterioration and eventual death], it is raised an imperishable *body* [which means the glorified body will never deteriorate, decay, or die]; 43 it is sown in dishonor [we are born in sin and so under the wrath of God], it is raised in glory [this speaks of the undefiled state of eternity and the fact that at that glorious time we will NOT be *simultaneously just and sinful*. RATHER, we will ever, only, and always be spotless and clean and so the object of God’s good pleasure for eternity]; it is sown in weakness [this is speaking of the lack of our physical strength and endurance as well as our lack of resistance to disease, injury, and illness], it is raised in power [in the New Heavens and Earth, there no longer is disease, sickness, injury, illness, or death!]; 44 it is sown a natural body [which we’ll define in a moment], it is raised a spiritual body [a πνευματικός (*pneumatikos*) body]. If there is a natural body, there is also a spiritual *body*.”

Anticipating that this last statement could possibly mislead some to think that in the final state we will be disembodied spirits (and so ‘spiritual’/non-corporal), Paul gave the following explanation.

1 Corinthians 15:47-49, “The first man is from the earth, earthy; the second man is from heaven. As is the earthy, so also are those who are earthy [the idea behind this is that we fit the environment in which we were live (and so as there is air, we have lungs, etc.)]; and as is the heavenly, so also are those who are heavenly. And just as we have borne the image of the earthy, we shall also bear the image of the heavenly.”

What Paul is getting at here is that the body and so the life we receive in glory will be specially created to fit the world of the New Heavens and Earth — that is what is meant by a πνευματικός (*pneumatikos*) body! Anything and everything required of us in glory will be attainable as we will have a body specially designed for that world! And so if Christ deigns to fly away up into the heavens like He did in Acts 1:9-10, we will be given the ability to fly that we might be with Him! In fact, as the New Heavens and Earth will radiate with the glory of Christ, so also will we,

1 John 3:2, “Beloved, now we are children of God, and it has not appeared as yet what we shall be. We know that, when He appears, we shall be like Him, because we shall see Him just as He is.”

It is “in this we greatly rejoice!” Let’s talk about this “rejoicing”, for it is a special world. There are many terms in Scripture used for “rejoicing” in the Bible.

1. One of the most frequent ones is *χαίρετε (chairete)* which comes from the Greek word for joy (*χαρά (chara)*). Accordingly, *χαίρετε (chairete)* is expressed “joy” and so relates verbally to praising, rejoicing, exalting, and so glorifying God. That is NOT the word used here.
2. The word used here is another common term in the Bible, *ἀγαλλιάω (agalliaō)*. This word is distinct in that it is NOT used in secular Greek- which means it was a word most likely made up to express an activity confined exclusively to the Christian! And what is that activity? Consider its use.

In the Magnificat, Mary sang these words:

Luke 1:46-47, “My soul exalts [magnifies] the Lord, and my spirit has rejoiced in God my Savior.”

The word for “rejoice” is parallel with and so synonymous to “magnifying the Lord”. That is the essence of *ἀγαλλιάω (agalliaō)*! It speaks of exulting in the Person and Work of Christ! In the words of Theological Dictionary of the New Testament: “God’s help is always the theme of the *ἀγαλλιάω* which is a jubilant and thankful exultation.”<sup>2</sup>

And so later in this epistle, after the Philippian jailer was saved:

Acts 16:34, “...he brought them [Paul and Silas] into his house and set food before them, and rejoiced greatly [our word again... he magnified and so gloried in the Person and work of Christ!!!], having believed in God with his whole household.”

In other words, around their table that night the jailer, his family, Paul and Silas engaged in a conversation where God’s character and His work were discussed with appreciation, reverence, and joy! In this regard, after struggling in sin for quite some time, David came to God and confessed it. Part of his confession included this request:

Psalm 51:12a, “Restore to me the joy [in the LXX the word is *ἀγαλλιάω (agalliaō)*] of Thy salvation...”

When we are engaged in sinning, the last thing we are thinking about is God’s character, His glory, and all that He has done for us in redemption. Rather we either are consumed with our sin or consumed with guilt! We are NOT celebrating God, BUT avoiding Him! Yet David could remember the former days when he sat together with God’s people and spoke of the glory and excellence of the Lord. He wanted this back! It is in light of this that one commentator said that *ἀγαλλιάω (agalliaō)* is in reference to “Salvation Joy”!



That is the nuance of this word. It is more than just praising; it is delighting in WHO God is and WHAT He has and is going to do! This that which fuels our faith in the midst of the trial!

Accordingly, and quite practically, notice what Peter does here; he begins by referencing the call of God for the believer to “rejoice in the Lord” to meditate on His character, His redemptive grace and mercy, His goodness, sovereignty, purpose, plan and so the eternal glory that awaits all in Christ! With God’s people doing this, it was then that God’s people were to consider their current struggle.

1 Peter 1:6, “In this you greatly rejoice, even though now for a little while, if necessary, you have been distressed by various trials.”

1 Peter 4:13, “...to the degree that you share the sufferings of Christ, keep on rejoicing [magnifying/glorying the Person and Work of Christ], so that also at the revelation of His glory, you may rejoice [here we have *χαίρετε* (*chairete*) which, as we just saw, speaks of verbally praising God- singing, rejoicing, declaring His praise] with exultation.”

The call in the midst of the fiery flame of persecution is to focus on the who your Savior is and what He has and is doing!

Do you see what Peter is doing? In essence he is following the pattern of the prophetic tool of telescoping where the present is viewed in light of the future. Now practically speaking, do you know what this is called, when you view the present in light of the future? It is called Faith!

Practical Faith views this world against the backdrop of God, His plan, and so eternity -- such that current struggles become “...now, for a little while, if necessary...”!

This is how Paul could endure so much with so little complaint! How is it that Paul did NOT lose heart though he faced so many of the cruelties of life? NOT ONLY did Paul go from one hostile city to the next in the course of his ministry BUT when he was placed in the Mamertine Prison in Rome, where overcrowding was addressed by diverting the sewage of Rome through the prison,<sup>3</sup> he did NOT lose heart, BUT responded with the most glorious words of 2 Timothy!

Other than citing the grace of God, what practically enabled Paul to be so strong in his faith and ministry? He engaged in the telescoping of practical faith.

2 Corinthians 4:18, “While we look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen; for the things which are seen are temporal [in v. 17, he calls them ‘momentary and light’], but the things which are not seen are eternal.”

Christian this is the fuel of Practical Faith. It is NOT simply *reciting* what awaits us in glory or *coldly* gazing upon the character of God. Tell someone struggling that “God causes all things to work together for good...” and you’ll most likely get a rebuke! RATHER, it is genuinely and so purposely viewing this world in light of the character of God and so His plans for us in glory!

When/if we do this, we will be impervious to the harshness of this age and so able to “...run and not grow weary and to walk and not faint”!

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## End Note(s)

<sup>1</sup> In fact, notice the word modified by faith here... it is “unity.” Show me a congregation growing in their understanding of truth, and I’ll show you a congregation growing in unity. In this regard, consider the words Paul gave to the divided Corinthians: “Now I exhort you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, **that you all agree** [he is talking here about what they professed to be true- what they believed], **and there be no divisions among you**, but you be made complete in the same mind and in the same judgment.” (1 Corinthians 1:10)

<sup>2</sup> Rudolf Bultmann, “Ἀγαλλιάομαι, Ἀγαλλίασις,” (Kittel, 1977, p. 20).

<sup>3</sup> Cf. John F. MacArthur Jr., *Romans* (vol. 1) MNTC, p. 35.