

The Challenge of Faith
Presented by Mary Lowman
Air Dates: March 11 - 15, 2024

Day One

You don't have to read much in the New Testament to realize faith is a vital part of our relationship with Jesus Christ. How do we have more faith? That certainly is a key question for all of us who desire to please God, since it's impossible to do so without faith.

We read in Matthew 13:58 that Jesus *did not do many miracles in his hometown because of their lack of faith*. As I was reading that chapter, I thought, why didn't Jesus perform miracles so they would have faith in him? The miracles would have produced faith. But then I remembered the many times he refused to do miracles so that people might have faith in him.

Faith is not produced by miracles; miracles are a result of faith. Jesus never jumps through hoops to try to convince us to have faith in him. After all, Jesus doesn't need our validation of who he is, and it is sinful arrogance to think God must prove himself to us. We must come to God by faith if we come at all, and faith is the evidence of things hoped for, it is being certain of what we do not see. Therefore, miracles don't produce faith. They strengthen our faith, but the faith must come before the miracles.

As a matter of fact, I think if Jesus had tried to produce faith through miracles, he never could have done enough. He would have to come up with bigger and better miracles all the time, because we would want more.

Have you been asking for a miracle? No question God loves to respond to our need, but before you ask for that miracle, ask God to increase your faith. God is looking for faith; in fact, without faith it's impossible to please God. And the Bible tells us *faith comes from hearing, and hearing through the word of Christ* (Romans 10:17). Your faith grows from spending time in God's Word. That's where faith finds its birth. Then, as your faith is strengthened, you can pray in faith for the miracle you need.

Day Two

Do you ever go to God for help in a faithless panic? I certainly can remember doing that at times when I've been at the end of my own rope, and in panic rather than in faith, I've run to God for help.

Recently I was comparing two stories in Matthew 8. The first is the story of the Centurion who asked Jesus to heal his servant. You remember the Centurion insisted Jesus could heal his servant simply by speaking a word; he didn't even need to come to his house. The Centurion had faith to believe Jesus had the power to simply speak healing to his servant who was miles away. When Jesus heard this, he said, "I have not found anyone in Israel with such great faith."

You see, this Centurion was not an Israelite, yet he believed in Jesus. And Jesus commends him for his faith, and heals his servant as requested.

A short time later, the disciples come to Jesus in a panic. Jesus was asleep in the boat, and a squall comes up quickly, which threatens to overturn the boat and drown them all. They come in great fear,

begging Jesus to do something if he can. And Jesus says to them “You of little faith. Why are you so afraid?”

Interestingly, the Centurion was commended for his faith, and the disciples were confronted for their lack of faith. Both needed help. Both sought help from Jesus. Jesus responded to both requests. But one was a request of faith and one was a faithless cry of panic.

The Centurion expected Jesus to heal his servant—long distance. The disciples were amazed Jesus could calm the storm. The Centurion only knew Jesus from afar by reputation. The disciples had spent much time with him. Yet, the Centurion showed great faith. He came with his need, but he brought expectation along with the need. The disciples came with their need, but they thought this storm was too much for Jesus. They really didn't expect him to do what he did.

How about you and me? Jesus invites us to come with our needs, but he loves to see faith along with it. The next time you're in a panic situation and you need Jesus' deliverance, come with faith believing he will hear and answer. He loves to see us come to him by faith. It pleases him to see we have faith in him. In fact, without faith, it's impossible to please him.

Day Three

I want to examine fair-weather faith. I see an awful lot all around me and I see far too much in my own life at times. Fair-weather faith is the kind that is strong when things are going well, but when bad times hit, it falls apart.

Let me share some verses with you, which illustrate the kind of faith we should have. First, a few verses from the Psalms:

The Lord has done great things for us, and we are filled with joy (Psalm 126:3).

What shall I return to the Lord for all his goodness to me (Psalm 116:12)?

Praise be to the Lord, for he has heard my cry for mercy. The Lord is my strength and my shield; my heart trusts in him, and he helps me. My heart leaps for joy and with my song I praise him (Psalm 28:6-7).

And in contrast:

Though the fig tree does not bud and there are no grapes on the vines, though the olive crop fails and the fields produce no food, though there are no sheep in the pen and no cattle in the stalls, yet I will rejoice in the Lord, I will be joyful in God my Savior (Habakkuk 3:17-18).

Here we see two types of praise: one when things are good and wonderful, and one when nothing good is happening. You know, it's easy to have fair-weather faith, to praise God when everything's going our way, when we're feeling good about our circumstances, when we've had a wonderful answer to prayer. But what about those off-days, those down times, those dry spells?

A mature Christian is one who praises even when nothing good is happening and there's no silver lining, no light at the end of the tunnel. Habakkuk said even though things are just awful, yet I will rejoice in the Lord, I will be joyful in God my Savior. It's that set of our will that makes the difference. We make a choice to praise God and rejoice in him, regardless.

Where are you today? Good times in your life? Nice circumstances? If so, praise God and promise him that when the hard times hit, you'll praise him then, too.

Maybe it's not so good for you right now. Tough days, heartaches, failures, disappointments? Praise him anyway. Say "Lord, everything's going wrong right now. But I will rejoice in you anyway." When God sees that kind of faith and that set of your will, he is pleased for he knows that your commitment and love for him are steadfast. Your faith is not the fair-weather type. May that be true of each of us.

Day Four

There were two occasions in Scripture where we're told Jesus was amazed. Do you know what they are? It may amaze you to see what amazed Jesus.

The first occasion is recorded in Luke 7, which is the story of the Roman Centurion who asked Jesus to heal his sick servant. Roman soldiers were characteristically hard, tough men, with little compassion or concern for others, certainly not for servants. We would expect this man to be ruthless and uncaring. So, we cannot help but be impressed that he would care about a servant, and that he would be willing to come to Jesus on his behalf.

In addition to this, we see in verse 5 that he had been very generous with the Jewish people who were under his command and had built them a synagogue, though he was not himself a Jew. This was indeed an unusual man.

What is really amazing is his profound comprehension of who Jesus is. We're told as Jesus was going to his home to heal his servant, the soldier sent friends to say to him, "Lord, don't trouble yourself, for I do not deserve to have you come under my roof. That is why I did not even consider myself worthy to come to you. But say the word, and my servant will be healed.

Here was a Roman soldier who somehow knew the power and authority Jesus had. In addition, he was a truly humble man, feeling unworthy for Jesus to even enter his home. He showed great faith in Jesus, believing he could heal his servant by just speaking a word, without even seeing the servant.

And when Jesus heard this, we're told he was amazed at him. In fact, Jesus said, "I tell you, I have not found such great faith, even in Israel." Jesus was amazed at his faith.

He was amazed at the depth of his faith, and at his persistence in seeking Jesus. I'm sure Jesus was also amazed this Roman Centurion would believe in him in spite of the social or political consequences it might cause. Surely it was not considered smart for a man in his position to believe in this itinerant, controversial Jewish preacher. Yet he unashamedly goes to Jesus for help.

He had amazing faith. I would like to have that kind of faith—the kind that amazes Jesus, wouldn't you? Next we'll see the other occasion where we're told Jesus was amazed.

Day Five

What would amaze Jesus Christ? Well, there are two occasions where we're told Jesus was amazed. Earlier we saw how Jesus was amazed at the faith of the Roman Centurion who asked him to heal his servant. He had great faith in Jesus even though he had little teaching or knowledge of our Lord.

In Mark 6 we see where Jesus was again amazed, but for different reasons.

Jesus left there and went to his hometown, accompanied by his disciples. When the Sabbath came, he began to teach in the synagogue, and many who heard him were amazed. 'Where did this man get these things?' they asked. 'What's this wisdom that has been given him? What are these remarkable miracles he is performing? Isn't this the carpenter? Isn't this Mary's son and the brother of James, Joseph, Judas and Simon? Aren't his sisters here with us?' And they took offense at him.

Jesus said to them, 'A prophet is not without honor except in his own town, among his relatives and in his own home.' He could not do any miracles there, except lay his hands on a few sick people and heal them. He was amazed at their lack of faith (Mark 6:1-6).

Just think of what they missed because they didn't believe in Jesus. He wanted to do good things for them, but he couldn't because of their lack of faith. Mark writes he could not do any miracles there. Their lack of faith made it impossible for Jesus to do miracles in their town.

I wonder today if Jesus is amazed at my faith and at yours? Is he amazed I have faith in him, regardless of the circumstances, regardless of the prospects, even without complete understanding? Do I amaze him with my consistent faith in him and what he can do? Or rather, is he amazed to see that in spite of all I know and all the experience I've had, my faith is still weak and anemic?

How about you? Is Jesus amazed at your strong faith or at your lack of faith?

A.W. Tozer said, "True faith rests upon the character of God and asks no further proof than the moral perfections of the One who cannot lie. Faith is not meritorious; it is simply confidence in the goodness of God, and the lack of it is a reflection upon God's holy character."

Having faith in God is not a great virtue for us. It simply says we've got enough good sense to trust the God of the universe.