

NOT NEGOTIABLE: Faith

We're talking about the not negotiable - the actions, attitudes, beliefs, values, etc, that are part of living as a follower of Jesus: no discussion, no debate, case closed. Which means if you don't have these integrated into your faith life, something significant is missing.

Among the not negotiables we've listed so far is having a purpose, a mission in life - followers of Jesus live to tell the world, serve the world, and change the world. That's what we're called to do as a church called FCCEM.

Followers of Jesus also worship. We take time, we make time, to praise, to glorify, to honor, to worship God.

Followers of Jesus receive and give grace. Grace is good you don't deserve. A perfect, holy God's love for us in the sacrifice of his son on the cross - a perfect, holy God allowing imperfect, unholy us to stand before the throne, promising us everlasting life - that's good we don't deserve. Our forgiving others, our giving others some of the grace we have received - that's what we do as followers of Jesus, and there is no debate about it.

We may not do it! We may not do any of the things we're talking about in this series: We may not make time to worship; we may not give grace to others; we may not live with the purpose Jesus gave to us; but that doesn't make any of them negotiable.

The same is true about our focus this morning, faith. We know what faith is, kind of. Many Christians think faith is what you believe. That they have faith in God means they believe in God - they believe God exists; they believe God is at work in the world.

But biblical faith is more than belief. Biblical faith is a force, it is a power, it is a tool by which worried minds are calmed and spectacular things are accomplished. Faith is a confidence, a certainty that produces hope and action as it reduces fear.

I took a brief tour through the Gospels' many references to faith and found five areas of life affected by faith. One is provision. MT 6.30-34.... If you're worried about what you're going to eat, or wear - if you're worried about the basic provisions of life, you need more faith. You can have confidence about the basics because God knows what you need. God will provide what you need.

Seems I'm always concerned, anxious, worried, fretting about finances in our ministries. Whether it's our general ministry budget - paying bills, supporting our ministries - or our Helmets ministry, where we're really low on funds right now - or the Rise Up, Church! campaign whose goal we recently had to raise. Lions and tigers and bears, O my! I can hear Jesus shout out from Matthew 6: O you of little faith! God knows what your budget needs. God knows what Helmets needs. God knows what Rise Up Church! needs. Show some faith!

Faith is confidence in God's ability and willingness to provide, confidence that battles anxiety, confidence that frees us to direct our hope in more godly directions.

We've all worried about tomorrow. Jesus says we can have faith because God knows and God will provide. If you're worried about your tomorrows right now, faith is your answer.

Faith is a not negotiable, in so many ways. Matthew 8.23-27.... Why were you afraid? You have so little faith. Translation: If you had more faith, if you had more confidence, if you had more trust in God's care for you, you wouldn't be afraid of the storm, you wouldn't be afraid of what might happen, what could happen. If you had more faith, if you had more confidence.

If faith is a not negotiable for you, then you will walk into this week with hope, because the God who knows your daily needs, also knows what scares you. That God knows what keeps you awake at night. That God knows what leaves your spirit trembling. That God knows why you're afraid. That God is your God, and if you can find more

faith in your God, your fear will diminish, your life will change and the energy you have wasted in fear you will be able redirect into a life of purpose, confidence and hope. Don't let the wave of a stormy sea scare you, Jesus says. I'm on board. Don't let fear dominate your life. I am with you. Treat faith like the not negotiable it is.

Third category in which faith matters: healing. Again and again in the Gospels, people get healed because they have faith, and they don't get healed because of a lack of faith. Let's look at one of each. At the end of Matthew 13, is this pointed observation (58)... The townspeople didn't believe, they didn't have confidence, they didn't trust Jesus to heal them, and because they didn't have faith, they didn't find their healing.

Let's look at it from the other direction. Matthew 9.20-22.... Your faith has made you well. Your faith produced your healing. How did that happen? Her faith was a confidence that if she touched his garment, she'd get healed. Her faith fueled her move from where she was to where Jesus was and where he wanted her.

It doesn't matter what your sickness is. It doesn't matter what you need for healing is. Faith is not negotiable.

A fourth dimension of faith's power has to do with our power to get things done. Jesus and some of his disciples are on a mountain, where they meet Moses and Elijah. They come down the mountain to find other disciples in a dispute with a father whose son the disciples had not been able to heal. Feel the power of these verses. MT 17.18-20.... You couldn't do what you wanted to do because you didn't have enough faith. If you had faith, if you had a little faith, a bit of faith, a mustard seed-sized portion of faith, you could do anything. You could heal this man's son. You could move mountains. You could change the world.

That's what faith does. It doesn't just give people something to believe. It gives them something to do, and the confidence to get it done.

Hear Jesus say that to you today. I don't know what it is that you want to do, feel called to do but haven't been able to do, but he has a word for you: If God is behind whatever it is you want to do, what you need to get it done is more faith. You can help your friend, you can find fulfillment, you can do anything God has in mind for you. That's the power of faith. That's the confidence of faith.

We call ourselves a small church that does big things. Helmets of Hope is a big thing. The fundraiser on Tuesday night is a big thing. A \$13,000 capital campaign is a big thing. They wouldn't be big things for larger churches. They wouldn't be big things for most churches. But they are big things for us. We do big things, even though we have no size. We have no numbers. We have no reason to be doing the things that we do. It must be faith. We do big things because we believe in a big God. We do big things because we believe God has called us to accomplish more than our size suggests we're capable of. We do big things because what we say about our monthly breakfasts we believe is true about our ministry to veterans - God ALWAYS provides.

We've got a lot to do with this week. We need lots of people here, and we need those people to be generous. We did a lot yesterday in our cleanup. There's more to do now. We will do great things. We will find healing and move mountains. We will raise money, serve veterans, and make improvements on our east side, not by our power or authority or design, but by our faith in God. Jesus makes clear that God will honor our faith, fix our fear, and restore us to wholeness.

And you will make a difference this week. You will combat your fears. You will overcome your doubt. You will find hope and confidence. You will overcome the demons that haunt you. Not by your smarts. Not by your income. Not by your creativity. Not by your connections. But by your faith. If it's not negotiable.