

Walking By Faith

Habakkuk 1:4: "Behold, as for the proud one, his soul is not right within him, but the righteous one will live by his faith."

Romans 1:17: "For in it the righteousness (being the gospel) of God is revealed from faith to faith; as it is written, but the righteous man shall live by faith."

Ephesians 2:8: "For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God."

I Thessalonians 1:1-3a: "Paul and Silvanus and Timothy, to the church of the Thessalonians in God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ: Grace to you and peace. We give thanks to God always for you all, making mention of you in our prayers; constantly bearing in mind your work of faith."

Let's look to the Lord:

Father, we thank You that you brought us to Yourself through Jesus Christ, and we stand in the place that You have given us in Him, a place of being Your children and being born into Your family. And we come to You as Your children this morning, looking to You to feed us our food, to speak to us as a father speaks to His children. Lord, we pray that our ears would be open to You, and Lord, we know it is only by Your Holy Spirit that You can communicate to us. So we ask Lord, that Your Spirit would be free among us to speak to us into our hearts the things that You want that we might be edified and built up. In Jesus' name. Amen.

I want to take Jerry's message from last week and build on it. I knew I was going to speak this week a few weeks ago, and I was wondering, "Lord what do You want to say?" Sometimes you just do not know, but I heard some things as I was listening to the Lord, and I said, "What are You trying to say?" As Jerry spoke last week, a verse that had come to me when I was in California started to take shape, and that verse was in I Thessalonians about the work of faith. So I would like to take Jerry's message and run further with it. This is one of the things that I got from the message last week that I want to build on.

Living By Faith

Faith is indispensable in the Christian's life. We never graduate from the use of it. Notice that I did not say the need of it. I said, the use of it. We never graduate from the use of faith. We never outgrow the need to use faith. We will never as long as we live on this earth, we will never outgrow that need to use faith.

Faith is not a onetime key that you throw away with the using. Once a key unlocks the door that allows you to enter in, that there is no more use for it. For a long time I thought as a Christian, and maybe many Christians, that faith opens the door to God, but the rest of the way we trudge it out ourselves. That is often because we do not understand about faith other than the faith that believes our sins are forgiven. So we look at faith as something in our mind so supernatural that we think, "How can I have faith? It is beyond me. That is for the big saints; that is for Moses or Abraham or Paul, but not little people like me. I listen to their teaching, and I try to slug it out." I do not realize that I am called to live by faith.

What does it mean to live by faith? Does that mean we do not take a step until the Lord speaks? All of us are called into such a relationship with God that if we are not using faith, we never find out what it is that He is doing or even who He is because faith unlocks the door to who He is. It takes away the veil of who He is because you see Him working. And that is probably the biggest thing that I believe Christians need to know, that God works not only in prayers such as, "Heal my sister" or other things we pray for, but in our very life itself. Faith is going to be the very thing that is going to transform us. The use of faith is a transforming power of God in our lives. And this is so important to us that we not let it go by and think that faith is just a word that Christians use, when it is actually our very life, a life of faith. The just man, the righteous man shall live by faith; those who are righteous in Christ will live by faith.

We are to live by faith, and so long as we live, faith must be exercised. It must be exercised for us to live as Christians. Otherwise, there is no knowing of God, a real knowing of God. We have the intellectual, philosophical knowledge of God, but the real experiential knowledge of God only comes by faith. As long as we live, faith must be exercised. And faith will always lead us to God.

I want to look at two things about this in Habakkuk and Romans where it says, "the life of faith." We are saved by grace through faith, the life of faith, because we are saved. Today we are saved, tomorrow we are saved, the next day, and the next day we are saved through faith. Then we want to look at the work of faith or the outworking of our faith.

So the life of faith (and I include myself when I say this,) many Christians do not live a life by faith, whether it is out of ignorance because we do not realize that it is there for us to live by or whether it is our own choosing. "I do not want to live according to this. I am happy to get in the door. I am happy with the blessings of God in atonement, the peace He gives to my soul, and even with the physical blessings, the worldly goods." We are happy with that. As long as we can live in a peaceful nation, and you know that we are to pray that we can live peacefully. As long as I can live in that peace and be assured that I am not going to hell, I am happy. That is enough for me. I include myself in that. It is so easy to be happy and live in the outer court. If you live in the outer court, you are never confronted with God. He is in the inner court, and I am in the outer court. I can do business in the outer court. I can live my life as I like in the outer court, but faith draws me into the inner court because the veil has been torn in two, and faith calls me in within the veil.

In Hebrews 11 we actually have a picture of the life of faith. I do not want to say these are little things that we all do, but God is showing us what faith brings us into. That is the life of faith. God brings us into His kingdom, into His plan and purpose.

Examples of Ones Living By Faith

In these verses in Hebrews beginning with verse 4 all the way to the end of Hebrews, we have this picture of what God is doing through faith. The life of faith begins with Abel bringing an acceptable sacrifice to God. He did not bring the work of his hands like his brother Cain did. He brought Life; he had nothing to do with that other life. That was a Life apart from him, and he offered it to God. In that he found propitiation which just means atonement. His sin was atoned

for; they were forgiven. The penalty of his sin was paid with that acceptable sacrifice. Nothing was done from his hands. He presented another Life to God on his behalf.

This sacrifice reconciles one to God and allows one to begin and to continue in a relationship with God, a relationship in which He is my Father, and I am His child. And that brings redemption, and redemption is the restoring of one back into the purpose that God originally had for us. That is redemption which is not just the forgiveness of sins, but it is full redemption restored. It is like the prodigal son who came back and said, "I am no longer worthy." And the father said, "Bring the robe, bring the ring and the sandals to put on his feet. He is my son." That is redemption, and that is the redemption we will have in fulness that we are looking forward to, that full redemption.

Life continues as we see in the life of Enoch in Genesis 5:21-24. Reconciliation has been accomplished, and he is by faith now walking with God. And his walking with God, as we are told in Hebrews, pleased God. Why was God pleased with him? It was because Enoch was walking with Him. That pleases God. When we walk with God, He is pleased because that is what He meant for us to do, always to walk with Him, to be in that relationship.

In Noah we see a maturing relationship; not a relationship as a child, but a relationship where the Father can say, "I have something for you to do." And so with Noah we see faith allowing him to do the works of God. He allowed him to do the works of God as God made His will known to him. It is not that he sets out a plaque and says, "This is my will." But out of that walking, out of that relationship, there was that speaking into his life, "Do this; this is My will. This is what I want for you."

In Abraham we see a man of faith being brought into God's purpose and plan for his own life. God's plan was that he would bless all the nations. What a wonderful plan, isn't it to be a blessing? It was not to receive the blessing but to be a blessing, to be the one who gives blessing to others. So Abraham, Isaac, Jacob and even Jacob's sons had become the heirs and sons of God because they were sharing the blessing that they had been given. They were sharing what they had inherited from God and were giving it to others.

In Moses we see a man of faith brought into the greater purpose that God has for the sons of Israel. God was redeeming a people for Himself, a greater purpose. Now God had a people for Himself that they might be a kingdom and priest to their God, a people in which man and all creation could see the glory of God and know that He alone is God and worship and serve Him alone—the greater purpose of God. All the earth is filled with His glory and worship Him—the greatest purpose. We see God for who He is.

After Moses, continuing past verse 29, we continue to see so great a cloud of witnesses, those who worked the works of faith in their generation to the glory of God and the salvation of their souls, and the souls of others. How great a thing we have been called into. How great! How humbling it is to think that someone like me or someone like you would be called into such a great thing. Only God can do something like that.

Now faith is not self-generated. I do not nor can I work up faith. As a matter of fact, it is not even my faith; it is a faith that God gives me. "Jim, here is some faith." No, that is not how He

gives faith. Let me put it this way. Faith is God initiated. Every work of faith comes after there is an encounter with God.

You think of Enoch. What made him walk with God? The commentators say, "God showed him when he named Methuselah after him that will come." He is talking about the great deluge, the flood, and that had an effect on Enoch: "God, You are going to do this; I want to know what else?" He became a preacher of righteousness, as it says in Jude. Amazing!

There was Noah; God came and initiated Noah, and said, "I want you to build Me an ark." He appeared to Abraham, He appeared to Isaac, He appeared to Jacob, He appeared to Joseph in a dream, He appeared to Moses. Everywhere faith is shown, it is always initiated by God. It never just comes right out of ourselves.

Faith Comes By Hearing

I do not have faith. If you cut me open right now and you are looking for faith, you would find nothing. But it says, "Faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the Word of God" (Romans 10:17). Jerry used that very Scripture last time. It does not mean that I am just reading the Word and then I obey it. God speaks a word to us. Jerry mentioned rhema, which Chuck Smith would say, "Word for today." It is the word for right now. The first Christian radio station was in New Zealand. I was in New Zealand at the time, and they had a big campaign to have Christian radio, and they finally got it. The name of the station was Radio Rhema, for the Word of God to be spoken. But it was not just for the Word to be spoken but for the Word to have its effect. "I do not speak my word without having it come back to Me full. It does not come back to Me void." So His Word initiates faith.

So we have a divine encounter with God, speaking into our lives to us, to me just as I am. Abraham was an idolator, and Moses was running away from God. He speaks to me just as I am in the condition I am. He does not change anything because He is God, and He can speak to me who I am. Even in His holiness, even in His righteousness, He can come to me and speak to me even in my sin, like He did to David, "You are the man." It is because He is trying to move you to Him. So we have this divine encounter, which births faith in us. It births a faith in God through Jesus Christ that leads us to the open door which is a life of faith in God. It is not just a life of faith, it is a life of faith in the living God. We can have faith in a lot of things. I have faith that the Dodgers will beat the Yankees today. We have faith in ourselves to do certain things, don't we? I have faith in another person, and you have to have faith that the guy will do this.

But that is not the faith we are talking about. It is faith in the living God who says, "I will dwell among you." Not only that, I will dwell in you. And the reason why He brings us to the open door with the life of God is so we can experience everything those men and women in Hebrews chapter 11 did—new of God in reality and their experience. That is what He wants. He wants us to experience Him as God.

That encounter with God gives us faith that leads us to the sacrifice that brings forgiveness of my sin and reconciles me to God and redeems me back into His purpose. Faith leads me to all those things. It is not given all at once. It shows you this, and as a result this, and as a result this.

And it is not to say, “Okay, I have to check off my list.” It happens. Yes, that is the way that comes out of faith in God. It happens.

Faith opens the door to Him and allows me to walk in a relationship with Him who redeemed me. It enables me to work the works of God which is to do His will. It brings me into God’s plan and purpose for my life which is to be His son, and it brings me into the larger purpose He has for the whole universe that He may have all the glory. That is what the life of faith does. That is the end of the life of faith which is included in the life of faith.

God would not just have us know this, but He would have us experience Him through this. This is what He wants for us. It is a life of faith. Now this is what I want to talk about.

Your Work of Faith

Thessalonians says, “Your work of faith.” And I want to emphasize that word ‘your.’ Because “your” is very personal. He is speaking to those people themselves, and God is speaking to us not just corporately but also individually, because for all of us there is a work of faith. And we are going to see that it is not just one work. “Okay, my work of faith is done; I can go now.” No! Our life has a work of faith, and another work of faith, and another work of faith until we see Him as He is.

Who were the Thessalonians? Well, you could say that they were a bunch of Greeks. In Acts 17 it talks about where the church of Thessalonica was started by Paul, and then he got chased out, and they went to Berea. This is a great description of the Thessalonians—the Bereans were more noble minded than the Thessalonians. What does that say about the Thessalonians? They were no one special. And brothers and sisters, that is a word to us. Who does God want to have a life of faith? No one special. So that includes me; that includes you, and even includes some of you that are special. Because in I Corinthians chapter 1 it says, “Not many noble.” That means that there were some noble who were taken; so the people in Berea were more noble minded. However, there was something that set the Thessalonians apart from all the other people in the region of Achaia which is in Greece, and that was they responded to the Word of God and the Gospel. And in chapters 1-2 of I Thessalonians it talks about this.

I Thessalonians 2:13b: “They accepted it not as the word of men, but for what it really is, the word of God.”

In other words, God was speaking to them, and it moved them because it also says, “For what it really is, the word of God, and also performs its work in you who believe.”

In other words, faith is initiated into a work of faith. So what is your work of faith? Your work of faith in all your life is going to be this—it is what God would have you do. That is simple; it is what God would have you do. When He speaks to you and says, “This is what I want you to do.” “I believe You are speaking to me, God, and therefore I am going to respond.” It is the will of God for you at that specific moment. The rhema that we talked about as the word for the day is actually the word for the moment.

It is like this. You all have cars, but have you ever had the red little engine light come on? So what did you do? You acted immediately! If you do not act immediately, you will find out that

there are consequences; you lose something, maybe your whole engine. But the thing is when that red engine light comes on, it means you need to do something.

Now the Word of God to us is the rhema, like that red engine light coming on, and the Lord is saying to you, "I want you to do something now." That now might be tomorrow, but He is preparing you and saying, "I am preparing you for this." It is like Peter when he was on the roof asleep, and he had a dream. The Lord said, "Okay, I am sending you somewhere; I want you to go." Only a few hours later, all of a sudden, some people came and got him, but it was not until another day before whatever it was God wanted him to accomplish was accomplished. It is the will of God for you personally to do at that specific moment what God is speaking to you. That is your work of faith.

Now when Paul was preaching the Gospel to the Thessalonians, at that very moment they responded to the Gospel. How? It says in chapter 1:9: "They turned away from idols to serve the living God." New American Standard says, "a living God." Other versions say, "the living God." Turning away from idols was their work of faith. It was not that Paul gave them a commandment: "Okay, now the Bible says that you should have no other false gods before you." But when they realized that this was the living God and His Gospel, all of a sudden God revealed to them that idols are not living; they are nothing. "I am the living God!" And from their recognizing what God was showing them, they could turn away from idols to serve a living God. When God inspires us to faith, initiates faith, He also brings us to the place that if we begin to step out in obedience, all of a sudden you find that you are able to do what God is telling you to do, but there has to be a stepping out.

They did not argue about it: "Let's talk about these idols." No, they turned; they just turned. It does not even say that Paul spoke to them about idols; he spoke the Gospel. He told them about the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ and God showed them the rest.

Now I just want to talk about works, and I am not going to say that there are a lot of things that we could say about our works of faith. But in doing these things, I just want to say first of all that these are common things, even great works, but we shy away, "I can't do works." If God is speaking to you to do something, it is not like He is not going enable you to do it. He is going to give you the grace and the life to do what He is asking you to do.

Sometimes this work of faith that we have is actually God working in us. It is not just us working, but it is God working in us; it is a transforming work that He is working in us. And for the Thessalonians in their work of faith, there was more to come. Don't think that after they turned from idols there was nothing to do. "Oh, we turned from idols, that was just ???." No, after this there was more to come. But it is veiled to us, but it was not veiled to them. They had it, and they walked in it. Later on, we see some brothers and sisters from Thessalonica coming to get Paul to take him back to Jerusalem after his first visit. So there was a work that was being done in them.

And it is the same thing with us. There is an initial work, but there are continuing works of faith. I was reading something by T. Austin Sparks, and he talked about our first work of faith was to turn to the Lord Jesus. That is our first work of faith, to turn to His saving sacrifice. And the other works that come have to do with us walking with Him, working with Him, being brought

into His plan for our life, just as I mentioned in Hebrews, all those things are within our walk. Now sometimes the work of faith that God has given us for the moment is a work in which God is actually using to seal us as His. For example, the Thessalonians turned from idols.

You see the same thing in Amy Carmichael's story in Mimosa when the Lord said she could not allow herself to let the ashes of Sheva be smeared on her forehead to mark her as his devoted. It was not because there was some commandment given to her, but in her heart she had met the living God, and He spoke into her heart and said to her, "This is not the God you met." That is an amazing thing that He was able to speak to this child. How wonderful is our God!

Then there was Nicky Cruz, and you will remember the book about him, "Run, Baby, Run. He was a member of one of the most feared gangs in New York City in the 1960's, the Mau Maus. And through the ministry of David Wilkerson, who wrote "The Cross and the Switchblade," which is the story of his ministry to gangs in New York, Nicky Cruz got saved. And his work of faith brought him out of that gang, and he became a servant of God. He had a wonderful testimony, and a wonderful life that went with it.

John Newton turned away from a life of open flagrant sin and blasphemy against God: "There is no God!" That kind of thing, even to the cursing of Him. It is even on his tombstone, "Here lies John Newton, Once a sinner that did all these things, but saved by the grace of God." His work was turning away. God turned him away. It was not him turning; God turned him away. God turned his testimony away; God turned Mimosa away. God turned you and me away.

Works of faith have happened throughout our lives. I am talking about works that seal us as God's, and we belong to God. It is not that we are gods, that it is God plus you. He sealed us as His. For example, in Hebrews chapter 11, Moses came to a point in his life where it says, "When he came of age." When he could decide for himself, he refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter. He turned his back on all that the world could give him. That place he had in the world, he turned his back on. He could have had it. He could have just gone with it. But no, he turned his back on it. God sealed him; "he is Mine."

We think of Hananiah, Mishaël, and Azariah (Shadrach, Meshack, and Abednego, the real names) refusing to bow to the idol of the religion of the kingdom of this world. They refused to bow down to the powers of the world, to the things that we worship in the world, not just the riches but the ideas about who should be worshipped, what it is to be a man who worships. And they took this in even with the sentence of death upon them. To me this is a really important thing. "Our God can deliver us." Notice they did not say, "Our God will deliver us." A lot of time we as Christians say, "Well, we are Christians; God will deliver us." But they said, "Our God can deliver us, but if he does not, we are still not going to bow." So we find that sometimes our work of faith puts us in the fire. That does not mean God is always going to bring you through the fire necessarily. He did these brothers, but look at the millions and millions of martyrs who He did not bring through. What about them? What was God's word to them at the time of their ordeal? It was the same words that He gave to the thief on the cross: "Stand in this, and truly, truly I tell you today you will be with Me in Paradise." That was the word that made him endure to the end, that marked him in such a public testimony that he was His.

All of these are examples of the life of these people. It is really an example of faith that leads us to the cross, but it does not leave us at the cross. It brings us through the cross, whether it is being brought through the glory, like the martyrs or brought through to a higher ground like Shadrach, Meshack, and Abednego. They got a higher place in that kingdom because of what they did, because of their stand.

Sometimes the work of faith is just being called to do something God has asked us to do. I have already mentioned Peter going to Cornelius' house. I know we might not understand why we are being called to do something. Peter did not understand it; he was going like, "Wait a minute; I have never been unkosher. I have never eaten anything that is common or unclean. And the Lord just said, "Hey, but what I have cleansed." That is a prophetic word, "What I have cleansed." God had probably already cleansed those Gentiles; that is wonderful.

Somebody might ask you, "Why don't you come over for dinner, and you think to yourself, "I really do not know those folks." And the Lord says, "Go, with those people." Like He said to Peter when he said, "You know these people are coming, go with them." And Peter said, "Okay, I do not know why I am going, but I will go." Then when Cornelius is talking and Peter said, "Why did you send for me?" And he goes, "Well, we want to hear everything that God commanded you to say." There is something that might happen where you might say something or you might hear something that changes your life or changes their lives for good that God is doing.

Or we think of Gideon who was called to deliver Israel. And he is going, "I think you have the wrong guy. I am the least of my family, of the least tribe; I am totally inadequate. Yet how gracious God was in that situation with Gideon. We have been reading chapters 6-7 in Judges and how his faith was faltering all the time, and yet you see God coming alongside and bolstering what he was doing so that Gideon would just trust, "I have got it; I am it; I am in this with You."

Then there was the widow at Zarephath in I Kings chapter 17. God commanded her to feed Elijah. We do not hear God, but God said to Elijah, "I have commanded this widow to feed you." Now this was a time of famine when he went to the widow and said to her, "Do you have something to eat?" She said, "All I have is this little bit of flour and some oil, and my son and I are going to eat it before we die, but I will give it to you." And she never wanted for food again throughout the famine. It was a work of faith. He asks us to do something, and what He asks us to do usually costs us something.

Sometimes a work of faith is just to believe in something he has told us without showing us. A light is made on this point in Watchman Nee's "Normal Christian Life," standing on God's facts. There are a few times in my life that the Lord has spoken something to me in a time of great need because of a feeling that I was beyond help. We can say words like He will never leave you or forsake you, and all these things that are great things to stand on, but when they are spoken to you, it is like heaven opens. I remember one time when I was so down, and I thought there was no way I could get back to God as a Christian. I remember waiting in a traffic jam because it was Christmas time, and I was around a mall that was just backed up. I was sitting there feeling sorry for myself and my condition, and I looked at a license plate that said, "RUD 308." And the Lord quickened that to me to look it up, which I did, Revelation 3:8.

It says, “Behold, I have set before you an open door, and no man can shut it.” That was life to me. That brought me right back into the presence of God as if I had never left.

It was just like that prodigal, “Bring the robe, give the ring, give the sandals.” Sometimes we just have to stand on those things. We come in and we feel like we have blown it. Or we feel like we do not have to fear whether God is here; we just have to stand on the thing that He has told us. “I have redeemed you. You are mine. You are my son. You are not just a person; you are my son. I know your name; I know who you are. There are things that we just have to stand on, and when we stand on them God is pleased because He says, “This is the place I have given you. Take it. Stand in it because I have given it to you and I want you to be here.” We are initiated by a word that God has given us—restorative.

The two verses we read at the beginning from Habakkuk and Romans, Old and New Testament, are almost the same thing. It shows us that God does not change. The Old Testament is the same, “the just man shall live by faith.” The New Testament has not changed at all. Our sins are forgiven, that is great, but “the just man shall live by faith.” That is the whole thing. Faith is pleasing to God. It pleases Him when we walk by faith because in faith we take Him for who He is. He is God; He is the Almighty; He is righteous and holy, yet He is our Father. He is our heavenly Father who loves us and provides for us and protects us and trains us up and walks with us. Faith’s roots are made to run deep in God, made to run deep in Him. They find that He is not rocky soil; He is that soft soil that bears fruit even to a hundred fold. Our response is not an unfearingly obedience to a system created law, but it is an obedience to a living God who speaks to us, who speaks His will, His way, His provision into our lives in real time, so that our obedience is an obedience of faith stepping into all that He has spoken to us in and for that moment.

What I learned in preparing for the Friday night Bible study in Judges chapter 7 about Gideon’s victory is that to live by faith is to be stripped down to one thing, and that is reliance on God, just total reliance on God. That is what God is after, that is what God wanted in the garden. He wanted Adam to be totally reliant on Him forever, and that is what He wants for us. For us to live by faith brings glory to God. By our work of faith we are transformed into sons of God, by our life of faith we will come to the point where we can say in truth and in spirit, “I know whom I have believed and am persuaded that to follow Him I will come into the sharing of His glory.” This is what God has for us in a life of faith—Glory. That is the end. It is not like, “Oh, I have a position.” Yes, I do have a position in the kingdom of God and of His Christ, and I share in His glory. How wonderful it is that God calls us to this, and that He initiates every step of the way, a life of faith that we can never be without Him.

Let us pray:

Heavenly Father, we thank You that You have willed so much for us to have, and Lord, we can truly say that we are lacking. But Lord, I thank You that the one thing that You are aiming at is that You will not let us lack the faith to go into the kingdom of God because You initiate it. Oh Lord, may we be sensitive to what You are speaking to our hearts. May we be moved by Your promises to us who go this way, and you will find My will, you will find My glory, and you will find My satisfaction. Oh Lord, thank You that this is our lot; this is the lot that You have chosen for us, and we would take it, and we would live in it. Help us, Lord, we pray. In Jesus’ name. Amen.

