

Monday, January 25, 2016 - The Faith that Saves

"What if I'm not ready to die..."

This is a question that no Christian should ever need to ask. The man who mentored me in preaching, when lying on his deathbed, was asked if he was ready for his "journey into eternity." His answer was simply, "this is what a Christian lives for." How could he be so sure of his eternal destination? It is called faith. Faith is an absolute essential of the Christian life. "Without faith, it is impossible to please God." As a Christian, we can affirm with Paul, "I believed, and therefore did I speak . . ." (2 Corinthians 4:13). The faith which we need comes only from immersing ourselves in the word of God to understand His will for us (So then faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God - Rom. 10:17)

Ours is an age of doubt, skepticism and outright antagonism toward God and Christianity. Christians are daily confronted with vigorous unbelief. Some of them are struggling with a faith weakened by doubt. To survive, each disciple must daily work to deepen their faith so that it will be strong enough to face the challenge.

There is a difference between faith that can be subject to examination and a "blind leap of faith" that defies any reasonable analysis. Jesus taught us to believe in God (John 14:1). There are solid reasons for our faith in God. "The heavens declare the glory of God; and the firmament showeth his handiwork" (Psalms 19:1).

Saving faith is built upon the evidence of God's word (Romans 10:17). Sufficient evidence for a strong and vibrant faith is available. The problem is our utilization of it.

John wrote in his gospel that we "may believe that Jesus is the Christ. the Son of God; and that believing (we) may have life in his name" (John 20:31). Christianity is founded upon the fact of Jesus' divine nature. The truth which Peter confessed at Caesarea Philippi must be affirmed by every disciple (Matthew 16:16). We are not without evidence for our faith in the Lord.

Christianity is to stake everything upon the claim that Jesus of Nazareth is the Son of God, incarnate in history, crucified in Jerusalem and resurrected from the dead and through contact with His blood which was shed on the cross, we might be reconciled to God.

Witnesses and their writings are the chief sources of attempting to determine the validity of something that is reported to have occurred. The witnesses for the miracles of Jesus are the writers of the New Testament.

What are the characteristics of a reliable witness?

- (1) A person of sober disposition.
- (2) A person who was in a position to report concerning the event in question
- (3) A person of general honesty.

(4) A person who demonstrates a concern for truth regardless of personal consequences.

It is true that these men could be considered unreliable because of their loyalty to Jesus? What motive could these men have for fabricating these accounts, especially when you consider the number of them who were murdered for their faith. They lived their lives as honest men devoted to presenting a message that stressed brotherhood, personal purity, good citizenship and humility before God and man. They were human beings who made no effort to "cover up" their human flaws. Peter, for example, was slow to accept the word that Jesus had arisen from the dead. In the crucial hour of the crucifixion, the apostles deserted Jesus from the standpoint of being personal companions of their Teacher. Because of their intimate association with Jesus for a period of several years, they were in a most advantageous position to speak reliably of Him.

The credibility of the resurrection is demonstrated by the change effected in the lives of the apostles. They risked their all, suffering persecution, prison and death for their belief in the resurrection of Jesus. They were not fanatics or wild men. They had seen him "To whom he also showed himself alive after his passion by many proofs, appearing unto them by the space of forty days, and speaking the things concerning the kingdom of God . . ." (Acts 1:3). They had touched his resurrected body (John 20:26-29). Witnesses numbering more than five hundred could verify their report (I Corinthians 15:4-8). Truly Christ "was declared to be the Son of God with power . . . by the resurrection from the dead . . ." (Romans 1:4).

1 Cor. 15:6 - For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received, that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, and that He was buried, and that He was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures, and that He appeared to Cephas, then to the twelve. After that He appeared to more than five hundred brethren at one time, most of whom remain until now, but some have fallen asleep; then He appeared to James, then to all the apostles; and last of all, as to one untimely born, He appeared to me also.

Our Risen Saviour tells us, "Let not your heart be troubled: believe in God, believe also in me. In my Father's house are many mansions; if it were not so, I would have told you; for I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I come again, and will receive you unto myself; that where I am, there ye may be also."

Our place is prepared. Are we prepared? God's word opens our eyes to sin and reveals its consequences. God's word teaches us of God and his grace. God's word teaches us his plan for our salvation. Resist the ruler of this world, knowing he will flee from you. Draw nigh to God, knowing he will free you from the bondage and guilt of sin.

Lord, open our eyes to see our need of you.