

October 16 2016

Scripture Lesson

Romans 1:16-17 The Power of the Gospel

For I am not ashamed of the gospel; it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who has faith, to the Jew first and also to the Greek. For in it the righteousness of God is revealed through faith for faith; as it is written, 'The one who is righteous will live by faith.'

Romans 3:21-26 Righteousness through Faith

But now, irrespective of law, the righteousness of God has been disclosed, and is attested by the law and the prophets, the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all who believe. For there is no distinction, since all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God; they are now justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, whom God put forward as a sacrifice of atonement by his blood, effective through faith. He did this to show his righteousness, because in his divine forbearance he had passed over the sins previously committed; it was to prove at the present time that he himself is righteous and that he justifies the one who has faith in Jesus.

Romans 5:6-8 Christ Died for Sinners

For while we were still weak, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly. Indeed, rarely will anyone die for a righteous person—though perhaps for a good person someone might actually dare to die. But God proves his love for us in that while we still were sinners Christ died for us.

Hebrews 11:1-3 The Meaning of Faith

Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen. Indeed, by faith our ancestors received approval. By faith we understand that the worlds were prepared by the word of God, so that what is seen was made from things that are not visible.

Sermon *Is Seeing Believing or is Believing Seeing?*

Is Seeing Believing or Is Believing Seeing?

Before I begin I have a disclaimer. This sermon is inspired by an internet sermon by Darian Catron edited with many of my own thoughts.

We've been hearing about those fires in Southern California and floods in Louisiana this summer and I want to relate this story that really spoke to me...

One night a house caught fire and a young boy was forced to flee to the roof. The father stood on the ground below with outstretched arms, calling to this son, "Jump! I will catch you." But the boy protested, "Daddy, I can't see you." The father replied, "But I can see you and that's all that matters."

Do you believe in a God who is there with us through the fire and the flood? Faith. The Bible teaches us to live...by faith and not by sight.

I want you to think about something. What do you think it would take to amaze Jesus? While on earth, was there anything that impressed him to the point of exclaiming, "That's really something! Wow!"---Never in any chapter of the four Gospels was Jesus astounded by anybody's righteousness. Never was he impressed with anyone's wisdom or education. But he was amazed by one thing: people's faith.

Almost every time that Jesus healed someone he said, "Your faith has healed you" or that they would be healed because of their faith. And he forgave people of their sins because of their great faith. When those who brought the paralytic to Jesus tore through the roof just so their friend could be healed, Jesus saw their faith. Is seeing believing or is believing seeing.

When the disciples cried out in the midst of the storm, "Lord, save us! We're going to drown! Jesus said, "You of little faith, why are you so afraid?" just before he calmed the storm. When Jesus walked on the water and Peter also tried to do so but took his eyes off of the Master and sank, Jesus caught him and said, "Oh you of little faith, why did you doubt?" Is seeing believing or is believing seeing.

Once while traveling through Capernaum Jesus was met by a Roman Centurion. The soldier wanted Jesus to heal his servant who was at home paralyzed and suffering terribly. Jesus agreed to go with him, but the man said, "No, I'm not worthy to have you enter my home. Just say the word and I know my servant will be healed. And Jesus said, "Truly I tell you, I have not found anyone in Israel with such great faith. Go, and let it be done just as you have believed it would be done." And in that very moment his servant was healed.

So, what is faith? From Hebrews 11: it says...Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen. Faith means that we can trust in it, believe in it, and depend on it... Why? Because you believe that God is good and trustworthy, just, and cares about you. Ah, yes, God cares about you.

Remember the story we started out with. The little boy is protesting on the roof that he is desperate but can't see the father who wants to catch him. Without compassion, the fact that the father cares about his son, this story would have no meaning. I think you have to have compassion for those you love first, before you can believe in the unseen. It is all tied together. Compassion for others leads you into the faith that you believe. Jesus told doubting Thomas, "Blessed are those who believe and do not see."

So, we say we have faith. We read the Bible and do what it says. We pray faithfully asking for God's blessing, provision, mercy, and redemption. We go to church to hear God's Word spoken, and to worship Him. Why? Because of our FAITH.

By contrast, there are many of us going to church today, whose faith has gone dormant. We see people daily who think that the object of Christianity is to read the Bible, try to live a good life as best they can, and thus EARN God's approval. What this reveals is a Christianity focused on OUR ability rather than God's.

To illustrate: One day a woman was rushing home from a doctor's appointment. The doctor had been somewhat delayed at the hospital, and the lab work took a little longer than usual so by the time she left the clinic, she was running quite a bit behind schedule. She still had to pick up her prescription, pick up the children from the baby-sitter, and get home and make supper, all in time to make it to the prayer meeting at her church that evening.

As she began to circle the busy Wal-Mart parking lot, looking for a space, a heavy downpour of rain showered her car. While she wasn't usually the type to bother God with small problems, she began to pray as she turned down the row closest to the front door. "Lord, you know what kind of a day I've had, and there's still an awful lot to do. Could you please grant me a parking space right away, oh, and close to the building so I don't get soaked."

The words weren't even completely out of her mouth when she saw the backup lights of a car come on at the end of the row. It was the best space in the whole parking lot, right next to the handicap spots and straight out from the front door. She made straight for it and as she pulled in, she said, "never mind God, something just opened up."

So, how should we live our lives as Christians? Romans, chapter 1, reveals to us an insight into what we should be doing. Verse 16: For I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God that brings salvation to everyone who believes: first to the Jew, then to the Gentile. For in the gospel the righteousness of God is revealed—a righteousness that is by faith from first to last, just as it is written: "The righteous will live by faith."

Faith. There's that word again. Is faith believing in the unseen or is seeing believing? We find that faith can be experienced in many ways.

A vocational school teacher taught a class of mentally impaired teenagers. Looking at his students' capabilities rather than their limitations, he got them to play chess, restore furniture and repair electrical appliances. Most important, he taught them to have faith in themselves. One of the students named Bobby soon proved how well he had learned that last lesson.

One day he brought in a broken toaster to repair. He carried the toaster tucked under one arm, and a half-loaf of bread under the other. Now that's faith- built on experience.

The righteous will live by faith. Righteousness means having "integrity, virtue, and purity of life." It is the "condition of being acceptable to God." Being righteous before God.

Now don't most of us feel that we are living, for the most part, a righteous life. But in Romans chapter three, as we heard earlier in the scripture lesson, it says: "There is no one righteous, not even one; there is no one who understands, no one who seeks God. All have turned away, they have together become worthless; there is no one who does good, not even one." Kind of depressing isn't it?

Even later in Romans 3:23 it says: "For all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God..."

So we're all in the same boat. None of us has bragging rights to say, "I'm better. I'm worthy. Or I'm good enough." Because none of us are. We're all hopeless messes in desperate need of salvation. But if we are going to achieve salvation, if we are going to walk on water someday, we need to get out of the boat. We need to take that plunge into the unseen and unknown if we trust in the Almighty and believe in Him.

Paul Harvey tells the story of Ray Blankenship preparing his breakfast and gazing out the window, when he saw a small girl being swept along in the rain-flooded drainage ditch beside his Andover, Ohio, home. Blankenship knew that farther downstream, the ditch disappeared with a roar underneath a road and then emptied into the main culvert.

Ray dashed out the door and raced along the ditch, trying to get ahead of the floundering child. Then he hurled himself into the deep, churning water. Blankenship surfaced and was able to grab the child's arm. They tumbled end over end. Within about three feet of the yawning culvert, Ray's free hand felt something protruding from one bank. He clung desperately, but the tremendous force of the water tried to tear him and the child away. "If I can just hang on until help comes," he thought.

He did better than that. By the time fire-department rescuers arrived, Blankenship had pulled the girl to safety. Both were treated for shock. On April 12, 1989, Ray Blankenship was awarded the Coast Guard's Silver Lifesaving Medal. The award is fitting, for this selfless person was at even greater risk to himself than most people knew. Ray Blankenship can't swim.

In many respects, we are like Ray Blankenship. We wind up jumping out into the deep waters without the knowledge of how to swim. For some, that's reason enough to go back to the shore.

But Jesus didn't care when he told Peter to climb out of the boat during the storm. "Focus on me," He said. And when Peter stopped doing that, he sank. What did Jesus do? With outstretched arms, He pulled him out of the water and scolded him for not having enough faith.

We don't all have to be super heroes like Ray Blankenship. We just need to focus on the little experiences that make us who we are, as well as the big ones.

The following story spoke to me personally as a father and perhaps it will speak to all you parents out there who may have had one or many opportunities to relate to this incident.

Erwin McManus in his book, “Seizing Your Divine Moment,” relates the following story:

“It was a combination family vacation and a speaking engagement. The location was the beautiful beaches of Florida’s northern peninsula. My wife, Kim and our kids, Aaron and Mariah, were looking forward to enjoying the warm waters of the Gulf of Mexico. My assignment was to call several thousand singles to a life of sacrifice as we basked in soothing tranquility. A tropical storm had just hit the area and left the waters basically unswimmable, but my little boy, Aaron, insisted on going down to the beach. So we walked from our beachside hotel down four or five steps right onto the beach. To my right there were perhaps a hundred or so singles enjoying the Florida sun.

And then I saw him. He had somehow managed to find his way to the water, and now he had begun to find his way back. I had not seen him before, and he did not appear to be a part of the retreat. In fact, it seemed as if no one was even aware of him. He appeared alone in the middle of the crowd. He was a double amputee who had worked his way, with the use of specialized crutches, through the sandy beach. Just as I had noticed him, one crutch slipped, and he fell hard to the sand. Undaunted, he pulled himself back up and began again, only to fall a second time. It all happened in what seemed an instant, long enough for me to see him to my right and choose to turn to my left.

I wish I could say I simply wasn’t thinking, but the problem was that I was. I knew if I turned to my right, I would have to do something. So I turned to my left. I gently placed my arm on my son’s shoulder, turned him away, and began talking to him to distract him from the scene below. We went a few feet, and I felt sure we were free from any responsibility—until my son stopped me. To my surprise, he said, “I have to go help that man.”

No explanation was needed. I knew exactly what he meant. His words pierced through me, and I stood there paralyzed in my hypocrisy. I could only look at him and say, “Then go help him.” Several thoughts were racing through my mind, I had been caught, was one of them. Yet at that point, it wasn’t that I was unwilling to go; it was just clear that this was Aaron’s moment...I had missed mine...His compassion had moved him to heroism. While Aaron seized his divine moment, I was stuck in a moment I couldn’t get out of.

I watched my ten-year-old son run across the beach and, without explanation, begin to pick the man up. I had to wonder what the man was thinking when this little boy grabbed him and his crutch and tried to pull him up. I watched as the

crowd turned and saw Aaron's futile effort to help the man back to the hotel deck. Almost immediately I watched the crowd move toward Aaron and the man. Someone picked up the crutches, while others reached down and picked up the man. The group moved as if they were one unit, committed to helping the man complete his journey.

After the group helped him return to the hotel deck, Aaron came running back to me, and there were tears in his eyes. He looked up at me with his innocent conclusion: "I couldn't help him...I wasn't strong enough." He couldn't see that no one would have helped the man if he had not taken the initiative. My sense of shame was overwhelmed by my deep sense of pride in who my son was becoming. I explained to Aaron that it was his strength and compassion that carried the man. It was because of him that others came to his aid."

Listen, it's not about your power or strength or who you are or who you were. It's about His power, His strength, His sacrifice. In Romans chapter 5, Paul says, "You see, at just the right time, when we were still powerless, Christ died for the ungodly."

You say, "Well I can't see it. I can't see what He's doing. All I can see is me and my past and my weaknesses and temptations. How can I trust in what I cannot see?"

Is seeing believing or is believing seeing?

St. Augustine said, "Faith is to believe what we do not see, and the reward of faith is to see what we believe."

Now maybe some of us like me, have walked in here today, trusting in our own ability to save our souls, meet our Maker, and walk with Jesus in the great hereafter. We're putting in our time here at the church hoping it will be enough to tip the scales in our favor.

But I want to tell you, I don't believe we can achieve salvation on our own. Just because we believe that there is a loving God and a human Savior who died on the cross for all mankind, it is not enough. We have to be willing to jump into the unseen just like the young and old in the two stories we just heard. Just like the little boy on the roof, we hear a good God and his Son, Jesus, calling our name and saying, "Just jump! I'll catch you. I'm here and I won't let you fall...if you just trust me."

And together we say, "Amen".