

Sunday, October 30, 2016

Habakkuk 1:1-4, 2:1-4

2 Thessalonians 1:1-4, 11-12

Luke 19:1-10

Faith in Abundance

What kind of faith do you have? Let me ask this question again. What kind of faith do you have?

Notice I did not ask whether you have faith, or whether you place your faith in God, in Jesus Christ or in the Spirit of God. But I simply asked, “What kind of faith do you have?” In asking this question I am making a big assumption—that you have faith in someone or something usually beyond oneself. But just what is faith?

According to the prophet Habakkuk God had not been answering the cries and prayers of his people for a long time. It was as if God had turned deaf to His people. But in response God said, “I am going to do something in your days that you would not believe, even if you were told.” But you must have faith and trust me. Habakkuk asks God why he tolerates these wicked and treacherous acts of some people without bringing them to harm. God responds by simply stating, that it is ‘the righteous who will live by his faith.’ The righteous are those who profess God and live according to God’s teachings. And it is then that Habakkuk prays to God and asks for God’s people to renew their faith for Habakkuk no longer is complaining but has faith that is even stronger. And we know this because he states, “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 saviour.” The Sovereign Lord is my strength..

Habakkuk’s faith in God was uncertain yet because God heard his prayer and answered he will rejoice in the Lord and place his trust in him even though there may not be food. Habakkuk’s faith is focused on God and he trusts God as his Saviour who will see him through all the challenges of life.

What is faith? It is trust, assurance and confidence in God and Jesus Christ. One who lives out their faith is not just believing that God exists but demonstrates their faithfulness

through service and obedience to God. Faith according to Hebrews 11:1 as “the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen or yet received. It is also evidence of that which is not seen- the invisible spiritual things.

How would you describe your faith? Is it growing, on a plateau or level playing field, or the increase or decline? Would you say- you are not sure or just answer—it’s ok. There is a story about a famous composer who had a rebellious son who would come home late at night after his parents had gone to bed. Before going to his own room, this rebellious son would go to the piano and slowly, spitefully, and loudly play a simple scale—“do, re, mi, fa, sol, la, ti” but would not hit that final ‘do’. He left the scale unfinished and then go to bed.

Meanwhile the father who was a great musician heard the scale minus the final note and having realized his son was home and safe had heard the unfinished scale. He would try and sleep but instead he twisted and turned. He could not relax because the scale was not finished. Finally not able to stand it any longer, the father would crawl out of bed, stumble to the piano and then as loud as he could, strike the final note of the scale. Only then did he return to his bed and fall asleep

This story reminds us of how sometimes or even often how we might treat God. We play around with the elements or components or parts of faith but we do not necessarily play the full scale.

We forgive, but not completely; certainly not everyone all the time. We love, but not completely especially if they are strangers or different from us. We serve, but not completely- usually when it fits our schedule or interests. We accept Christ as Saviour and Lord, but on our terms, maybe. We live the Christian life- style at least in our eyes, but not completely. We commit our lives to God but not completely. Yet God still reaches out to us, continues to love us and has infinite patience and of course amazing grace even when we treat God terribly or even hurt those whom we love.

Jesus’ story about Zacchaeus the chief tax collector is a favourite of many people because many can see themselves in this person whose life is changed forever through a simple act of faith. Zacchaeus is a chief tax collector, known by many of the community as a person

who is wealthy at their expense of and even the other tax collectors in which he supervises. He not only deals with his own group of people and charges them too much, he receives extra payments from other tax collectors when he draws up the accounts for the Roman government. He is wealthy. But something happens to him.

Within Zacchaeus something stirs him up and he leaves his shop where the tax collectors meet regularly. He has heard the word on the street about a man who changes people's lives. We don't know why Zacchaeus wanted to see Jesus but he not only wanted to see him, he wanted to see Jesus separated from the crowd. He knows that if he waits by the side of the road, Jesus won't see him because he is vertically challenged. He knows that it would be to his advantage to see Jesus from a different level and so he runs ahead of the crowd, climbs the tree and waits. He knows where Jesus is going to walk as he passes through Jericho. It is a small community and Jesus would most likely take the express route through town as this was his intention—to pass through this community. Yet something occurs which changes the lives of people because of Jesus' walkabout. Jesus sees this man, calls him by name, gets him to climb down to the street, talks to him and then Jesus announces to the crowd that he is going to his house. The soft whispering in the crowd grows louder as people realize that Zacchaeus is a sinner, a bad man and yet it is to his house that Jesus is going to go. Zacchaeus immediately has a change in heart of who he is. He calls Jesus Lord God; and is ready to give his wealth to the poor. Salvation has come to this house and Zacchaeus now has faith that is growing exponentially in this moment!

Did Zacchaeus have faith? We do not know if or when Zacchaeus' life really change. Was it as he climbed the tree, shut the office down, or when he saw Jesus and Jesus spoke directly to him. Maybe just maybe, Zacchaeus' faith had reawakened when he heard about Jesus coming into Jericho. He had been raised as a Jewish boy in the Hebrew faith of Father Abraham. And God's spirit passed over him when he heard about Jesus, he just had to see him. All we do know is that his life, and that of his household changed forever.

What about your faith? Have you experienced God's Spirit in your life lately? Friday I had a meeting out in the county with a couple of colleagues in ministry. I did not want to go

because I thought it was not going to be very productive. It was a beautiful ride and after the meeting which was ok, I was driving back home satisfied with the work that was completed. Yet there was something amazing—I beautiful heron just took off from a huge marshy ditch near where I was driving and put everything into perspective again. We are only a part of God's creation and in that moment, I was reminded of trusting God again, putting my faith in God and in the work that we shared together. Had I not been driving at that moment- I would not have witnessed this majestic bird taking flight and realizing again the wonders of God's love and creation. You just have to go on faith and trust God.

Paul in writing to the church at Thessalonica, commends them for their faith which continues to grow, and for their love for each other which is increasing. Paul is so thrilled for this church as the Spirit moves amongst them that he boasts about them to others for they had experienced persecution and trials and yet they are staying focused on their faith. They believed in Paul's story of Christ Jesus and their faith is strong. Paul tells them that God can count on them because they are fulfilling their purpose of acting from faith in Christ to those whom they meet. The question we need to ask ourselves is this; Can God count on me/ you and your faith because it is strong and growing?

How do you know your faith is growing? We read in James 2:19-20 "You believe that there is one God. .. But faith without works is dead." Dead faith is when one believes in God but does not obey His commandments. Just think about this for a moment. Zacchaeus believed in Jesus, and changed his life right away. He had faith and he intended to pay restitution to those whom he cheated. Real faith includes acting on that faith in one's life by serving God and obeying His commandments. What have you done lately to do the works of God? Listened to others? Pray for others? Care and share with others the message of the empty cross and tomb?

We can grow in our faith like the Thessalonians. Paul commended them for their increase in faith and they increased their faith because they prayed and were studying His Word and teachings. Through grace they were saved but with faith they continued to grow. We too are called to increase our faith by praying and studying God's word. But we must be willing to do so on a regular basis. We are to 'be anxious for nothing but in praying offer supplication as you give

thanks. Tell God and God's peace will be upon you and will guard your hearts and minds. (Phil.4:6-7)

What is faith? It is believing that Jesus is able to do what he says he can do. Two blind men came to Jesus and asked Him to heal them. Jesus first asked them, "Do you believe that I am able to do this?" Their reply was, "Yes, Lord." Then He touched their eyes saying, "according to your faith, let it be to you." And their eyes were opened and they could see (Matthew 9:27-30). Their faith and the assurance that Jesus could give them sight was the substance or reality they hoped for. It also gave them the evidence or trust that they would receive what they asked for. They believed, that had faith in advance that it would be done."

What does your faith mean to you? Are you reading and praying every day; are you finding out more about God and His Son Jesus? We are the disciples of Jesus and as people who believe in the resurrection we are the ones responsible for telling the story to another person so that they may grow in grace and in faith. We are Christ's disciples, it is up to us to tell the story and you can do this—for you have faith in abundance. You just need to realize it and share with others even a bit about your faith. God will help you. God will enable you just share your faith.. For even if you share a little—you 'll still have a lot!.

PRAYER:

God of love and mercy, we praise you because we are your faithful people called to serve you. Our faith is alive and so are we. Help us to share this faith filled with hope with others. Enable us to do so without fear and enable us to grow to you for we know we have faith in abundance. We ask this in Jesus name. Amen.