

Faith Like a Centurion

By Nathan Warner

“If you have faith like a grain of mustard seed, you will say to this mountain, ‘Move from here to there,’ and it will move, and nothing will be impossible for you.” (Matthew 17:20)

Nothing will be impossible for you if you have Faith. Have you ever had a mountain in your life you wanted to move? Have you ever wanted to be like those *“who through faith conquered kingdoms, enforced justice, obtained promises, stopped the mouths of lions, quenched the power of fire, escaped the edge of the sword, were made strong out of weakness, became mighty in war, put foreign armies to flight”* (Hebrews 11:33-34)?

We see examples of these “heroes” of the Faith throughout Scripture. Take Elijah when King Ahaziah sent his captain to detain him. Elijah said, *“If I am a man of God, let fire come down from heaven and consume you and your fifty.” Then fire came down from heaven and consumed him and his fifty*” (2 Kings 1:10). Wow. Elijah could call fire down from heaven! It seems like God has given him superhuman powers to do whatever he wanted to do because he was a man of faith. Boy, can you imagine if we only had faith like that – we could banish illness, feed hunger, and vaporize car payments to say nothing about turning the country around.

How about Peter and the lame beggar? *“And Peter directed his gaze at (the lame beggar), as did John, and said, ‘Look at us.’ And he fixed his attention on them, expecting to receive something from them. But Peter said, ‘I have no silver and gold, but what I do have I give to you. In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, rise up and walk!’ And he took him by the right hand and raised him up, and immediately his feet and ankles were made strong. And leaping up he stood and began to walk, and entered the temple with them, walking and leaping and praising God”* (Acts 3:1-8).

When we hear about stories like this, we may get the impression that God gave men superpowers because of their faith. We could come away thinking that faith is a blank check to tap God’s infinite bank account for things we need, things we feel God must want, things that seem good to us, or things that we think will glorify Him. After all, God wants His children to be happy, doesn’t He? So why shouldn’t we be prosperous? Why shouldn’t we be successful? Why shouldn’t we be healed? If we could only increase our faith, we would be able to be “special” and “important” to God on earth.

Faith is often treated as the Holy Grail of Christianity. If we only have faith, then we wouldn’t have sickness and disease, our children wouldn’t go astray, the country would turn around, and we’d have revival, health, prosperity, and happiness. Faith becomes power. This view of faith has been sold by religious frauds and peddlers as a “Cure All.” They know that *“faith is the substance of things hoped for”* (Hebrews 11:1a) and so they position themselves as the toll masters on the bridge to the untold riches available through faith, charging pilgrims to cross to the other side where they’ve been told the grass is greener. Like Simon the Magician in the Book of Acts, we poor, helpless believers will do anything for power against evil: *“when Simon saw that the [Holy] Spirit was given through the laying on of the apostles’ hands, he offered them money, saying, ‘Give me this power also, so that anyone on whom I lay my hands may receive the Holy Spirit’”* (Acts 8:18-19). Simon, who claimed to be a believer, was eager to part with his money to receive the power of faith. We may think this is odd, but many people today do a similar thing when they spend money to buy books, CDs, and videos or pay to attend conferences and meetings that deal with improving our faith for healthy living, curing illness,

increasing prosperity, turning the country around, etc. They part with money in an attempt to gain power by following “how-to” faith-building exercises.

Part of the difficulty is that events in the Scriptures can often be interpreted to support this view of “power by faith.” We often see the miraculous events in the Old and New Testaments as acts of pure faith that gave the Prophets and the Apostles the power they were asking for to do what they wanted.

If we claim this view of faith, we are missing half the picture. There is another side to faith that we also read about in Hebrews – those who, in faith, *“were tortured, refusing to accept release, so that they might rise again to a better life. Others suffered mocking and flogging, and even chains and imprisonment. They were stoned, they were sawn in two, they were killed with the sword. They went about in skins of sheep and goats, destitute, afflicted, mistreated – of whom the world was not worthy – wandering about in deserts and mountains, and in dens and caves of the earth”* (Hebrews 11:35b-38). If this too is faith, then what on earth is faith?

I struggled with this when I was younger. I used to think that if we only had enough faith, anything would be possible for me. If I broke my leg, I could have faith in God and He would heal me. If I went blind, I’d just have to have faith that God would give me back my sight and He would. It wasn’t until a good Christian friend I knew went through a terrible illness that my understanding of faith matured. I read Hebrews Chapter 11 with a new understanding and also discovered the example of the Roman Centurion who Jesus said had more faith than anyone in Israel.

I think the Centurion is one of the clearest pictures we are given of true faith. When Jesus said He would come with the Centurion to heal his servant, the Centurion replied, *“Lord, I am not worthy to have you come under my roof, but only say the word, and my servant will be healed. For I too am a man under authority, with soldiers under me. And I say to one, ‘Go,’ and he goes, and to another, ‘Come,’ and he comes, and to my servant, ‘Do this,’ and he does it”* (Matthew 8:7-9). The Centurion understood that his request would have to be the will of God for it to happen. He resigned himself to God’s will in the situation and correctly presented himself as a servant of Jesus and a soldier under the command of God’s will, hopeful for the miraculous but also willing to experience the tragic.

Anyone who knows about military history (past or present) knows that without discipline, responsibility, and obedience, an army is completely worthless. The foundational objective of Basic Training is to instill in soldiers discipline, responsibility, and “instinctive obedience” so that they will carry out any order they are delivered on the battlefield without hesitation, regardless of whether they think it is right or not. Questioning orders is not acceptable because the soldier does not know his commander’s battle plans. He is where he is at on the battlefield in order to carry out and follow his commander’s order when it arrives. He is not given a tank and told, “Do whatever you want with it, son – it’s got a full tank.”

This Roman Centurion understood that those under his command were utterly bound to his will and would do whatever he told them, even if they did not know what it was they were doing. He understood that this was how he had to approach the Lord – in complete and total Faith. Such discipline! Such responsibility! Such obedience! This is the true definition of faith.

Faith is an act of complete and total obedience to God and God’s will in a situation. It is not a magical password that opens some mystical portal to heaven for blessings and power to come back upon you whenever you feel you need it. Faith is not the moving of mountains that you don’t like or the uprooting of trees at your command. Faith is going where God tells you to go and doing what He tells you to do. Faith is clinging to God and trusting Him in every situation

He leads us into.

When we understand this, we see that the great acts and miracles of Scripture were not initiated by men in their compassion for people who were suffering, for their sense of justice, nor for their righteous indignation. They were motivated and moved by their complete obedience to the will of God in the time and the place when the order came through, whether to “*escape the edge of the sword*” or be “*killed with the sword.*”