

Finding God

Call to Worship: Isaiah 55

1st Scripture: Genesis 32:22-32

2nd Scripture: Hebrews 11:1-6

Introduction

Beyond the shadow of any doubt, one of the most critical elements of our salvation, is the whole concept of "faith." From the standpoint of man, aside from love, and alongside of hope, there is no greater need for mankind to have met, than the need to have faith. And even love, the greatest of all virtues, and hope, the sister of faith, ultimately exist, out of a faith foundation.

In our text, here in Hebrews, the author, in seeking to deal with a people, who were tempted to turn back to the visible and tangible elements of the Old Covenant sacrificial system, challenges his audience over the importance of learning to walk by faith and not sight. To be sure, we serve a Savior, whom we cannot see with the naked eye, nor touch with our physical hands, and yet, He is the very substance, to which, every Old Covenant ritual shadow pointed, proving that what we cling to, with our faith, is far (infinitely) more precious than every visible element contained in the Old Covenant sacrificial system.

In fact, one of the main purposes of this particular chapter in the Book of Hebrews, is to avow that even the Old Covenant people of God (Abel and Abraham and Sarah and Moses and David and Elijah...etc) were all justified in the sight of God (they were all considered righteous in God's sight) not on the basis of Law keeping (ever), but always, only, on the basis of their faith in God and His promises, and most particularly, their faith and hope in the coming promise of the Messiah, Jesus Christ.

This afternoon, I want to hone our focus on that which is stated in verse 6, because the author makes a particular statement about faith here, that is both profound and revealing. And I hope that, as we briefly consider this text, that we will be encouraged to see how a living faith is exercised, unto the finding of our living God, who sadly, is not found by most in this world, until it is too late.

I. What is faith?

"But without faith it is impossible to please Him, for he who comes to God must believe that He is, and that He is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him" (vs. 6).

Here, we have a startling statement of fact, concerning man's ability to please God, in any sense. The author states that it is "impossible" to please God (there is no other avenue or means of pleasing God) without faith. If pleasing God were an island, the only bridge that could ever reach that island, is a bridge that contains the substance of faith. It is no wonder then, that faith is such a critical element in the obtaining and working out of man's salvation. There is no means of pleasing God without it. What then is this critical element of faith, which is so important to God, and absolutely necessary for man to have, if he is to please God in any sense?

[Read verse 1]. Here, we find that faith is the substance of things hoped for (it is the legitimate, tangible grasp of that which cannot be immediately grasped by our physical members), and the evidence of things unseen (the certain conviction of that which certainly exists, but is not able to be presently seen). When you walk into your local bank, you might see signs near the teller windows (or somewhere in the bank), which aim to give you confidence, as you invest in that bank, by affirming that your monies are protected and backed by the full faith of the United States federal government, for up to \$500,000. And that is supposed to assure you that your money is safe. And we hand over our checks and our money, confident that, while it will not be in our possession for a time, it will always be readily available, when we desire to withdraw it. It is safe there.

Well, our faith in Christ and His promises, leads us, likewise, to take risks of obedience (even unto potential temporal losses), with the confidence that Who He says He is, He is, and what He says He has accomplished, is certain. The belief/faith is real and within us. And while it cannot be seen, it is inextricably woven to acts of risk taking and obedience that come out of it. Imagine going to the bank and saying, "Yes, I believe you will take care of my money. I believe that you will pay me interest on it, and I believe that the money will be there for me, whenever I need it." And the teller responds, "Great, how much will you be depositing then, so that we can get you started in opening an account." And you respond, "You mean I have to actually make a deposit. Forget about it. I'm not taking that chance!" And you storm out of the bank.

Obviously, your confession of faith in that bank was nothing more than lip service. Well, the same goes for our faith in Christ. True faith, faith that is more than lip service or cerebral Acknowledgement, will always act out of that faith, in obedience to Christ.

And so, in our text, this is the type of faith that the author has in mind, when he speaks of it being impossible to please God without it. And, in fact, the entire chapter of Hebrews 11, which provides us with a list of Old Covenant men and women of faith, reveals the faith of these individuals *by their actions*. If you read through the whole chapter, you'll notice that it never simply says, "So and so had faith, because he said he believed." No, rather, it presents us with the visible expression of the faith of these individuals (since we can't see faith itself, which is intangible) by the actions that issued out of that faith. Abraham offered Isaac, Moses chose to endure suffering with the Israelites, rather than cling to the riches of Egypt...etc. And so, true faith, always acts! The acts, in themselves, don't please God, but the acts, which issue out of a heart faith (a living faith) do please God.

The author then clarifies why it is impossible to please God without faith, when he adds, "for he who comes to God must believe that He is, and that He is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him." It is important to realize that both of these points of affirmation, while connected, have active implications.

1) Believing that God is, does not simply mean, "confessing that He exists." To be sure, there are many practical atheists who do that. There are many who go into the bank, express faith in the bank, but take no risk by leaving an actual deposit. What the author means here, then, is that the one who has faith, must live a life that exhibits a true dependence on the invisible, and yet, living God, by actively relying upon Him. His actions, though imperfect, must affirm that he is resting in a true and living God.

2) Believing that God is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him, means that a man/woman of faith, actively seeks God, via the means that He has determined, will allow Him to be found. Without the true, day to day, dependence, observed by commitment and obedience, and without a true, diligent seeking of God, one might have a profession of faith, without having a living faith. And a profession of faith alone, does not, and cannot please God...because ultimately, it is a lie.

Now, let me work this toward a conclusion, by bringing this all together under one critical roof. I want to spend the remainder of our time thinking about the words, "diligently seek" from our text, which actually translates from the single Greek word, "ekzeteo." If you are using a translation other than the NKJV, KJV, AMP or NIV, you might notice that the word "diligently" is left out here, because the word "zeteo" itself, means "seek," and is used numerous times throughout the New Testament. However, the translations that I've just mentioned, have the "ek" prefix added to the word, which seems to be ignored in the other translations. This is, in fact, the only time the word "zeteo" is given this prefix in all of the Greek New Testament. And so, there is a reason why the author here, adds this prefix. The prefix itself, simply means "out of" and is used by itself and as a prefix to other words, in many other places. But the literal translation here, would be, "seek out." And I think, therefore, that the "diligence" concept is certainly what is applied here. It properly reads then, "He is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him."

Now, why do I emphasize this, brethren? Because a "diligent seeking" of God is that which comes out of a true faith. And this has critical application for both the unbeliever and the believer, here this afternoon.

1) For the unbeliever, the idea here is akin to God's call to Israel of old, when God had given them great hope in Babylon, in light of their former treacherous rebellion, to return to God by seeking Him with their whole hearts (Jeremiah 29:10-14). And what He meant by this, was that, if Israel turned away from her gross idolatry; if she truly repented of her sins and sought the Lord, they would find Him. You see, in the captivity, where they had been wrenched out of the Promised Land and exiled to a foreign nation, and where the temple and the city of Jerusalem had been destroyed, God was hidden, as it were, and unwilling to protect them, because they were, in fact, under His judgment. But here, was the hope of His favor once again, if they would but seek Him again, not hypocritically, but with their whole hearts.

And so, the charge for you this morning, non-Christian, is to *diligently* seek God; to lay aside every encumbrance; to turn your back on your sin, and to set your heart on seeking Him diligently....and you can be certain that you will find Him. For, that is true faith. You are in the captivity of your sin, but God has provided a deliver in His Son, Jesus Christ. Seek Him with all

of your being; get into His Word, pray continually, call upon the Name of Jesus, and you will find Him! You say, "Well, that seems like hard work!" If you were in a burning house, how hard would you strive to get out? If you were drowning in the undertow of a violent ocean current, how much diligence would you exercise, seeking to get the attention of a lifeguard (or anyone for that matter)!

2) And finally, brethren, for you, there is also great encouragement here. You have unsaved loved ones. You have struggling marriages. You have rebellious children. Particular sins haunt and plague you. Your heart is prone to wander away from Christ. Whatever it may be, and whatever the combination of any or all of these things and much more, there is a diligence of faith, which you can exercise toward seeking God continually, with the hope that He will answer...in due time.

Let me exhort you (and myself for that matter) to enter the heavenly ring with Jacob, and to wrestle with God. In our case, to lay hold of Him in prayer, and to tell Him we are not letting go, until He blesses us! This is not to foster an arrogant or demanding spirit, but rather, a fervent and pleading spirit, that diligently pursues God, until we find Him there, with an answer. You may have your hip thrown out of joint, but keep pleading, day in and day out, and don't let go until you've found Him! [Prayer meetings: "Lord, we're not letting go, until you give us our loved ones, our marriages, our children, victory over sin...etc]

Amen!

Benediction: Jude 1:24-25