

Sermon 8/2/09--Lockport Alliance Church--Franklyn Pfeil

Our Father, we thank you for your Holy Spirit in this place, lifting Jesus up high and higher, drawing all men to himself.

By your own word in my tongue, beginning in Moses and the prophets, teach us the things in all the scriptures concerning yourself.

Today, We're going to look at what faith is not.

Then we're going to look at what faith is.

Then we're going to look at where faith is going--where faith is taking us.

First, What faith is not..

When we talk about saving faith, the faith that saves--the first instance of it is in the life of Abraham: (Genesis 15:6).

He believed the LORD, and the LORD counted it to him for righteousness

God promised that Abraham and his wife Sarah would have a child in their old age--and that through this child all the earth would be blessed. The child would be Isaac. Through that child came Jacob, Judah, David, Jesus Christ--through whom all the world has been blessed.

God promised that Abraham and Sarah--though he was 100 and Sarah was 90--would have a child.

Romans 4--the entire chapter-- is an explanation of the faith that saves--the faith of Abraham:

And the verse which forever changed my concept of faith was Romans 4:19:
Abraham faced the fact that his body was as good as dead and that Sarah's womb was also dead.

Another translation says *he contemplated his own body, now as good as dead since he was about a hundred years old, and the deadness of Sarah's womb.*

He faced the fact, he contemplated--he considered long and hard--every relevant factor. He contemplated the facts. He did not deny the obstacles.

Biblical faith in God is not devoid of reason. It is a faith that does not deny the existence of obstacles, but evaluates them in the light of God's word and power.

Abraham considered his own body, now dead. He weighed the human impossibility of becoming a father at his age against the divine impossibility of God being able to break His word. He decided that it was more impossible for God to break his word, and so he believed God. And God counted it to him for righteousness.

So Romans 4:19 marked a deepening of my understanding of faith.

Faith turned from screwing my head on differently to an honest analysis of the situation. It was no longer, "This isn't a problem."

Instead it became, "This is a big problem, but it's not as big as Jesus."

Do any of you have a big problem? Don't deny it. It is what it is. But it is not as big as Jesus.

Faith is not a leap in the dark. It is a well-contemplated decision in the cold gray light of dawn.

Faith isn't screwing your head on differently in order to deny reality.

I've seen a lot. So have you. We don't need to deny our eyes.

I turned a bright light on everything I've seen, everything I know--and I decided to follow Jesus. That's biblical faith.

Turning now, to **What faith is...**

Faith is an instrument --an applicator--be it a hyssop branch paint brush, a crayon, with which you paint Jesus into the picture of your life.

The classic picture of faith in the Bible is a hyssop branch. The people used it to daub the blood of a lamb on the doorposts.

(Exodus 12)

Take a bunch of hyssop, dip it into the blood in the basin and put some of the blood on the top and on both sides of the doorframe. Not one of you shall go out the door of his house until morning. When I see the blood, I will pass over.

Listen carefully to Charles Spurgeon--a Brit from the 1800's, still known as the prince of preachers: "It is not thy hold on Christ that saves thee; it is Christ. It is not thy joy in Christ that saves thee; it is Christ. It is not even thy faith in Christ, though that be the instrument; it is Christ's blood and merit."

Faith is the hyssop branch--the instrument, as Spurgeon calls it, which applies the blood. But it's the blood that saves...

"It is not thy hold on Christ that saves thee; it is Christ. It is not thy joy in Christ that saves thee; it is Christ. It is not even thy faith in Christ, though that be the instrument; it is Christ's blood and merit."

When I see the blood, I will pass over.

When the death angel came through, he did not enter the threshold where the blood was applied.

Ow we're going to look at **When faith applies something other than Jesus...**

Let's suppose you took your hyssop branch and daubed whitewash over your door post. That's what the Pharisees did. Over sinful hearts they painted a whitewash of their works. Jesus called them *whitewashed tombs, full of dead men's bones*.

Faith is the motivating principle of lives. Inside and outside of the church, we all live out our faith. In effect the apostle James said, "you **show** me your life and I'll tell you what you believe in." In Matthew 9:2, "Jesus **saw** their faith." The Lord God said, "When I **see** the blood, I will pass over. Every life is a display of its faith.

A few examples of when faith applies something other than Jesus...

Faith in self is pride. If you are the biggest deal in the picture of your life, that's a faith called pride.

Faith in progress-- progress itself as an abiding principle of the universe--is a faith called evolution.

Faith in money is a faith called materialism. For a materialist, it is not "In God we trust" but "In this God we trust."

Faith in nothing even has a name. It's a faith called nihilism.

Faith in faith itself is a faith called optimism.

None of those faiths keep the death angel from our doors, because none of them pay the wages of sin that Jesus paid for us.

The Egyptians had great faith in false gods. But God is looking for evidence of the lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world. God is looking for Jesus. Without Jesus, He cannot pass over.

And it's not whether you have a big faith or a little faith.

Here's a big faith (huge crayon) and here's a little faith (small crayon.).

Which is better? Neither. You can take a big faith and draw a little Jesus. Or take a little faith and draw a big Jesus. Jesus talks about that concept when he teaches about the faith of a mustard seed.

All faith is not equal. There's the famous example of faith in thick ice and faith in thin ice. One will carry you across the river. The other will not. You can sincerely and fervently believe that the ice will support your weight. But the ice itself either will or won't. Your faith is only as valid as its object.

There is saving faith and there is faith that will not save.

Saving faith in the Bible is first seen in the story of Abraham. We will refer to it as we go on.

All faith in Jesus is not equal. Some people have a big Jesus and some have a little Jesus. The big Jesus, the real Jesus, is in the Bible. In fact, He is the Bible; he's the Word of God--made flesh to dwell amongst us. His triumph over evil was promised in the Garden of Eden, pictured in the sacrificial system of the law of Moses, and clearly portrayed by the prophets.

Because the wages of sin had to be paid in kind--*an eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth, a life for life*--

He divested Himself of heaven's glory, to become like one of us--born of woman, born under the law--so that he could take my place on a cross I'd earned. Virgin born, the sinless son of God, He was baptized in identification with us as we are baptized in identification with Him. Coming up out of the water, driven by the Spirit, he withstood temptation by wielding the sword of the Spirit, the word of god, against the devil in the wilderness. He performed miracles, personified the grace and truth of God, died at the hands of secular government and organized religion for the sins of the world, then rose from the dead in accordance-with and fulfillment-of scripture. He will come again in glory to judge the living and the dead and of His kingdom there will be no end.

He 'answered' questions with questions until the questions stopped.

He forgave one criminal. He did not forgive the other. "*Father forgive them*" was not all-inclusive.

He was murdered because he was a threat to established religion.

He cried.
He got tired.
He got angry.
He got hungry.

At the age of 12, He told His father-- a carpenter who had long endured the whispered jokes about Jesus' illegitimacy-- that He'd been at the temple, because He had to be *about His Father's business*.

Once, when told that his mother and brothers were outside waiting, he looked around at those who followed Him and said-- "*These are my Mother, brothers, and sisters...*"

When a would-be follower hesitated, saying he first had to go and bury his father, He replied, "*Follow Me; and let the dead bury their dead.*"

At 30 years of age, in His hometown synagogue, he read a well-known passage from Isaiah about the long-awaited Deliverer, the Messiah. Then he handed the scroll to the attendant and sat down. From His seat, almost as an afterthought, He told the people--who had known and observed Him every day of His life—that the Scripture He'd just read was about Him.

He fasted.

He sweat blood in prayer.

The very first thing He did after delivering the sermon--whose words have reverberated more than the rest of recorded literature combined—was to descend from the mountaintop to heal an "untouchable," the lowest of the low, with a touch. It made him ceremonially unclean. The Pharisees were agast.

He pronounced contempt for the phony 'Lord, Lord' crowd and promised them that before His Father in heaven He would deny that He ever knew them.

He had a fondness for slapstick humor: "*If the blind lead the blind, both shall fall into the ditch.*"

He had a fondness for ironic humor: "*First remove the board from your own eye;*" "*Strain a flea and swallow a camel.*"

Children gravitated to him and he was genuinely happy in their company.

He grew up in the obscure town of Nazareth--and chose Capernaum in out-of-the-way Galilee as His headquarters.

There were days when multitudes of the blind, lame, and diseased came to Him--and *He healed them all*.

There were days when He was not able to heal anyone--because his power was not met by faith in that town.

He told His followers not to judge-- and in the same breath he told them not to cast *their pearls before swine*.

Called to testify before Pilate and Herod, the swine who were ostensibly His judges, he cast no pearls. Beaten, broken, half dead, He still spoke with the edge and the disdainful authority of a King, letting the emptiness of their own words re-echo against the pavement stones and off into the night.

He never asked for advice. Not once.

But He wouldn't say or do a thing--not one thing--unless His Father had done or said it first.

He made a whip and ran the money-changers out of the temple--twice.

He was *meek and lowly in heart*. in obedient submission to the Father. But never did he submit to any man. And when he scorches the earth in judgment, He will do so in meek submission to His Father's will.

He took the strictest moral code known to man and ratcheted it up to the nth degree.

When he described hell, he turned the heat up hotter than any other description of hell in all of scripture.

He used indelicate language: "*Hypocrites!*" "*Vomit.*" "*Latrine.*" "*Brood of vipers.*" "*Child of Hell.*" "*Your father the devil.*" "*Whitewashed tombs.*"

He wrote nothing that remains. His only recorded act of writing was on the ground—standing in defense of a woman, facing a mob--but what He wrote is unknown. Whatever he wrote caused the mob, one by one, to walk away--until there remained only the woman caught in adultery, and Jesus.

He often wandered away, alone, to pray.

One night, He actually had Peter walking on water. As if that weren't enough, when He got in the boat they reached the other shore--at the speed of thought.

As if He were starting some perverse race to perdition, He said but one word: "*Go,*" and a herd of demon-possessed swine ran violently to their deaths in the depths of the sea.

He thought it was a good idea to use the equivalent of a workingman's yearly pay to buy perfumed ointment so it could be poured over His head.

He called Peter "*Satan,*" just after He had founded His church upon the profession of faith in Him which Peter had spoken.

He walked through a crowd that wanted to kill Him, but no one dared lay a hand on Him. On at least one occasion, He seems to have disappeared, melting into a crowd.

He obeyed His parents.

He went to 'church' regularly.

But His greatest disdain was for the 'church' leaders.

He liked all kinds—the thoughtful, loyal apostle John; wisecracking Nathan; John the Baptist, who seemed to step out of the whirlwind that had taken Elijah away; the big-hearted, spontaneous Peter; Nicodemus, the polished Pharisee; the despised tax-collector Matthew; the even more despised publican Zaccheus; the doubting Thomas; a woman with multiple husbands; a woman with multiple partners; scurrying Martha; contemplative Mary; a rich young man who would not deny himself and take up his cross....

He watched the crowds grow as they flocked to see His miracles.

He then watched them thin out in reaction to His message.

He died on his own terms, in Jerusalem, where the prophet goes to die, at Golgotha, on Mt. Moriah, where Isaac had been offered, where the Temple of David stood, where the temple sacrifices had been slain.

In the power of the Spirit he'd fulfilled every jot and tittle of the law. Thus, the grave had no claim on him, death could not deter him.

And so he rose from the grave.

Returning to His father's house after 33 years in the far country, His Father ran to greet him.

That's the Biblical Jesus. Saving faith is faith in him.

He is the light of the world, who spoke light into existence before time was.

John 1:1-4:

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was with God in the beginning. Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made. In him was life, and that life was the light of men.

Colossians 1:16:

For by him all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things were created by him and for him.

The creator, who made something out of nothing, brought form out of chaos, light from darkness--

The Savior, who at the cross made good out of bad--your life out of his death--and brings order out of the dark chaos of our lives,

The sustainer--who maintains the expanding universe while orchestrating life in the irreducible complexity of the cells of your body, who fills all in all and in whom all things hold together.

Colossians 1:17:

He is before all things, and in him all things hold together.

That's the biblical Jesus. Saving faith is faith in him.

The sacrificial lamb lived in the household for four days. It was observed over that time, inspected. There could be no flaw, no spot or blemish. The kids, no doubt considered it their pet, little Fluffy or Tuffy or Snowball. They were about to find out the cost of sin. After four days their Father took the lamb, slit its throat, and the blood poured out into a basin on the floor at the door. Then a hyssop branch was taken and the blood was daubed on the posts and on the lintel--above the doorway.

The points of blood if connected form perpendicular lines--a cross.

At the intersection of that cross, God met man in Jesus Christ: fully human, fully divine.

Spreading outward from the intersection was the offer of God's grace to all people, to every point of the compass, to the four winds.

Outward from the intersection, an infinite vertical proclaims his love:

*For as high as the heavens are above the earth,
so great is his love for those who fear him;*

Outward from the intersection, an infinite horizontal proclaims his mercy:
as far as the east is from the west,

so far has he removed our transgressions from us.

Maybe you've never connected the dots, followed the blood, as the lamb slain from the foundation of the world entered Eden, Egypt, the tabernacle, the Temple, Babylon, Bethlehem, back to Egypt; then to Nazareth, Capernaum, Jerusalem, Gethsemane, Golgotha, Mt. Of Olives, glory.

I'd heard about Jesus, but I didn't get it. I even respected Him, his moral authority, his poeticism, his exquisite expression. But I was beyond my fortieth yea before I went alone, with my sins to His cross. He met me there. My faith conjoined with His grace is the conception of rebirth. I was born again. This transaction has nothing to do with your country, your parents, your friends, your church. This transaction, this covenant, is between you and Him, just the two of you, standing alone. Just like the woman caught in sin, and Jesus. Just the two of you.

Maybe you've never brought your sins to His cross, a meeting there between just the two of you.

Maybe you've got a problem bigger than you--maybe a broken heart, broken health, broken relationship, broken marriage, broken family, broken promises, or maybe regrets about the promises that you've broken.

It takes just a little faith to draw a bigger Jesus into your life.

You can draw Jesus too small; but it's impossible to draw Jesus too big.
