

## FAITH -- THE KEY TO SALVATION

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 Independence, Missouri

Sunday, March 1, 1953  
 8:30 a.m. KABC and KFRM  
 Kansas City, Missouri  
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## SCRIPTURE READING:

Blessed is he that believeth in the word of God, and is baptized without stubbornness of heart; yea, without being brought to know the word, or even compelled to know, before they will believe. Yea, there are many who do say, If thou wilt show unto us a sign from heaven, then we shall know of a surety; then we shall believe. Now I ask, Is this faith? Behold, I say unto you, Nay; for if a man knoweth a thing, he hath no cause to believe, for he knoweth it. And now how much more cursed is he that knoweth the will of God and doeth it not, than he that only believeth, or only hath cause to believe, and falleth into transgression? Now, of this thing, ye must judge.....

And now as I said concerning faith; Faith is not to have a perfect knowledge of things; therefore if ye have faith, ye hope for things which are not seen, which are true.....

Now as I said concerning faith -- that it was not a perfect knowledge, even so it is with my words. Ye can not know of their surety at first, unto perfection, any more than faith is a perfect knowledge. But behold, if ye will awake and arouse your faculties, even to an experiment upon my words, and exercise a particle of faith, yea, even if ye can no more than desire to believe, let this desire work in you, even until ye believe in a manner that ye can give place for a portion of my words.

-- Book of Mormon - Alma 16:138-141, 143, 149-151

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"Without faith it is impossible to please him, for he that cometh to God must believe that he is, and that he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him."

What a monstrous and intolerable world this would be if there were no faith-- if nobody trusted anybody else for anything! No one would care to consult a doctor, or to take the medicine prescribed by the doctor and compounded by the pharmacist. No one would ever extend credit, or accept a check, or ride in a train or bus or elevator. No one would dare to send his child to a teacher. All activity would cease; all production would stop; all trade and commerce and travel would cease; all social contacts would be discarded; all schools would close. But we have faith that men will pay their debts and honor their checks; that they know to diagnose disease and compound prescriptions; that they know how to build and maintain in safe repair our cars, our trains, our busses, our elevators. We trust people to be the kind of people we can safely associate with socially; we assume in faith that our teachers can be trusted to shape the minds and characters of our youth.

Faith is a principle of life. It is not passive, or negative, or quiescent; it is active, dynamic, constructive, affirmative, aggressive. It is the principle which moves men to great achievement, to noble living, to the conquest of evil. Faith is reliance; trust, confidence, hope, assurance. Faith is betting your life that there is a God, and trusting him to supplement the best effort which you can muster with his power, to complete what you have begun in his name. Faith is the principle which binds men to God for action.

Men must have faith in something. Even those who claim to have no faith in God base their lives on an assumption which cannot be proved -- on the assumption that natural law is eternally dependable and unchangeable. There is no way of

proving beyond the shadow of a doubt that it is; but we base our lives in every conceivable way on the premise that water will always be wet and fire hot; that lead will always be heavy and helium light; that the sun and moon and stars and earth will continue in their accustomed orbits. Think of the confusion and loss of life which would ensue if the seasons on which we depend for all our agriculture should suddenly be reversed; if the water on which we depend to fight fire should suddenly take on the properties of gasoline; if the rubber with which we insulate our power lines should suddenly begin to conduct electricity. If natural law were not dependable, we could not exist on this world or in this universe. Every one of us, saint or sinner, believer or unbeliever, theist or atheist, bases his life on the assumption that natural law is dependable. In a physical and scientific, as well as a spiritual way, then, we literally live by faith.

Most of the great and revolutionary discoveries and inventions in the scientific realm have been the result of faith. Men of science postulate a theory; then they set to work to experiment in an infinite number of ways to make the theory in which they have faith work out in experience. A good example is Edison's invention of the incandescent lamp. His theory was that somewhere in the universe there should be a substance which in a vacuum would glow hot under an electric current to produce light. The scientists of his day called him a fool, and pointed out that combustion was necessary to produce light, that combustion could not take place in a vacuum, if it did, combustion would destroy the filament which produced the light. Edison's faith clung to his theory and after hundreds of experiments, using hundreds and hundreds of possible substances, he found a substance that would glow red hot in a vacuum as a current passed through it -- and we had the first crude incandescent bulb. With the same faith, men of science are today still seeking a cure for polio, for cancer, for heart disease. Other men of science are delving into the mysteries of atomic energy. Sooner or later, such dynamic, aggressive faith finds its answer, produces its fruitage; and the thing hoped for becomes a reality. Paul's definition of faith is scientifically as well as spiritually accurate: "Faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen."

Faith is a saving principle. It can lift a man out of his sin and degradation and helplessness to a new life, through the power of Jesus, his redemption, and his atonement. We have characterized it in today's sermon subject as the "key to salvation." The buoyancy of a life preserver is a saving principle; but the drowning man who hasn't enough faith in the saving power of a life preserver to grab hold of it and hang on, cannot be saved by it. Faith in the ability of the life preserver to save him is the key to his salvation. The sinner who has no faith in Christ or in his saving power -- who refuses to lay hold on Christ and cling to him until the end -- that sinner cannot be saved by Christ; and since he cannot save himself, he is lost. In a very real sense then, faith is the key that unlocks and makes available to men all the rich treasure of salvation.

Faith is the key to salvation. Faith saves those who will exercise it unto salvation. It will not, cannot save those who do not use it. "By grace are ye saved, through faith," wrote Paul to the Ephesians. To the Romans he wrote, "Thou standest by faith," and to the Galatians, "The just shall live by faith."

A Book of Mormon writer declares that "God works not save according to the faith of men," and Paul expresses the same thought in the eleventh chapter of Hebrews: "Without faith it is impossible to please him; for he that cometh to God must believe that he is, and that he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him."

By faith men are justified, or forgiven, and accounted righteous in spite of their previous life of sin. Justification may be briefly explained as follows: God is a perfect being; his law is perfect; he demands perfection in those who would serve him and dwell with him. Yet all men are sinful; we are heirs of sin

and death; and in addition to inheriting the effects of original sin, we all commit personal sins for which we alone are responsible. All have sinned and come short of the glory of God. Because God knew that no man could live perfectly by himself, he sent his Son, Jesus Christ, the perfect one, into the world to make atonement for us, that all men who would exercise faith in him might reap the rewards of perfection, and he accounted perfect through him. Justification is a change of status from a wrong to a right relationship with God -- not because of our own works, or our own righteousness, but because of the atonement of Christ. No man can be justified by works, because no man can perfectly keep the law. We are justified only by our faith in the perfect Christ, and in the power of his atonement.

Being justified through faith does not mean that we become instantly and completely righteous, with never any more desire to sin; nor does it mean that we can never again fall into sin. But on the other hand, unless a righteous life follows justification, there has been no justification. One of the proofs that justification has taken place is that good works result from an exercise of the active, dynamic, aggressive, constructive faith of the believer. Good works cannot save; but faith without works is dead. The quality of the life and works of him who is saved demonstrates the quality of his faith and of the justification it has brought.

Justification leads to sanctification -- the process by which the believer is freed from sin, and enabled to realize the will of God in his life. He who is under the burden and guilt of sin cannot devote himself to God; but when that burden and guilt are lifted -- when the sinner is justified through his faith in Christ -- then that man may become sanctified -- completely consecrated to the service to God. He is no more common or unclean; he is no longer devoted to common or profane things, but he is a "vessel unto honor, sanctified, meet for the Master's service, prepared unto every good work." "Whatsoever is born of God overcometh the world; and that is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith."

We receive the Holy Spirit through faith. Paul declares in the third chapter of Galatians that the just shall live by faith, and that we receive the promise of the Spirit through faith. Jarom, a Book of Mormon writer, says that those who are not stiff-necked and proud "and have faith, have communion with the Holy Spirit, which maketh manifest unto the children of men, according to their faith." Paul speaks of the "earnest of the Spirit," or the advance or token payment given to the believer to give assurance that the complete reward and salvation will some day be his, and adds, "By faith ye stand."

It is through faith that we receive the blessings which we need and petition God to give. James says of him who would ask God for wisdom, "Let him ask in faith, nothing wavering." Jesus told his disciples that faith even as a grain of mustard seed could move mountains by bringing together the will and power of God and the will and power of men. In the Book of Mormon, the prophet Moroni says: "Behold I say unto you, that whoso believeth in Christ, doubting nothing, whatsoever he shall ask the Father in the name of Christ, it shall be granted him; and this promise is unto all, even unto the ends of the earth." And the voice of modern revelation through Joseph Smith is, "Whatsoever ye shall ask in faith...ye shall receive."

Faith brings the signs which follow the believer. "Faith cometh not by signs, but signs follow those that believe. Yea, signs cometh by faith, not by the will of men, nor as they please, but by the will of God. Yea, signs cometh by faith, unto mighty works, for without faith no man pleaseth God...." (D.C.-63:3) "It is by faith that miracles are wrought; and it is by faith that angels appear and minister unto men." If there are no more signs or miracles following the believer, then there is no faith, and there can be no salvation--for salvation can come only through faith.

Faith is not knowledge; for when we have knowledge, when we know, we no longer need to exercise faith. But without faith there can never be knowledge of the things of God. We cannot find God, we cannot please God, we cannot know God, unless we first believe that he is, and have faith in the Savior whom he sent into the world for us. We cannot know that a seed is good unless we plant it in the faith and hope that it will grow; then when it sprouts and begins to grow, we know that it is a good seed. We cannot know that faith in Christ will save us, unless we exercise that faith. "Ye cannot know of a surety at first... ..But behold, if ye will awake and rouse your faculties, even to an experiment upon my words, and exercise a particle of faith," letting the desire to believe work in you, your faith will increase and grow until it becomes perfect knowledge in the kingdom of God.