

Spiritual growth 18 - A Faith that Marches

For many people, faith stops at merely finding security in an insecure world. But faith goes much further than that. We have looked at the kind of faith that saves. It changed us into a child of God. As our faith grows, it extends beyond to changing our character and producing good works. It then moves even *further* to changing *others* lives with the Gospel of salvation.

1. Faith more than a security blanket.

There are those of us who have memories of Charlie Brown TV specials and can recall Linus with his security blanket. You could see his anxiety if he had to go without that blanket. This was a device that Charles Schulz used as he dealt with issues through his comic strip children.

Faith is not meant to be a security blanket. "I'm going through such hard times, but I have my faith." "There, there, only believe and you'll feel better." "I'm starving." "There, there, only believe in bacon and eggs and you'll feel better." Now, there actually is a time for *compassionate* preaching where we encourage people to put their trust in God, but we need to move on to *passionate* preaching at some point to get up and take action.

Picture going out to the beach where Satan is out in the water trying to drown people. They are swimming as hard as they can to survive, all the while Satan is blocking them from getting to the shore and handing them life rafts filled with holes. As we are sitting there, he takes out someone in the water, and what do we do? We comfort each other that God is in control and that He *needed* that person in heaven and so God took him. While we are there praying for the relative strength of faith, Satan takes out another one in the water. What do we do? We sing *Great is Thy Faithfulness* and pray for *more* strength and preach with great compassion for those who have suffered such loss, and Satan is picking off more people out in the water. We complain that the government is not doing enough to help people feel comfortable in the water, and Satan is picking off more people. At some point we need to preach with *passion*, "Get out of the water! Take cover on the shore." We need to preach with *passion*, "Someone go out there and bring them in, bring them in, bring them in from the fields of sin!"

Haggai confronted Israel over their procrastination and lack of action in the work they were supposed to be doing. Israel had spent 70 years in captivity because of years of sin and neglect of their spiritual responsibility. What a relief it must have been to be able to get back to the Promised Land. They were supposed to rebuild the Temple, but the

busy-ness of life got in the way.

Hag 1:2-4 Thus speaketh the LORD of hosts, saying, This people say, The time is not come, the time that the LORD'S house should be built.

3Then came the word of the LORD by Haggai the prophet, saying,

4*Is it* time for you, O ye, to dwell in your cieled houses, and this house *lie* waste?

Haggai didn't just say, "Don't worry about the work, just keep your faith." We can always do a little more to make ourselves feel at home in this world. But if you are waiting until you feel strong enough, or your worldly affairs are in order, the work will never get done. Your personal life will not get in order if you leave off the work of God. A recurring theme of Haggai is to "consider your ways." Notice this in the next verse.

Hag 1:5-14 Now therefore thus saith the LORD of hosts; Consider your ways.

6Ye have sown much, and bring in little; ye eat, but ye have not enough; ye drink, but ye are not filled with drink; ye clothe you, but there is none warm; and he that earneth wages earneth wages *to put it* into a bag with holes.

7Thus saith the LORD of hosts; Consider your ways.

8Go up to the mountain, and bring wood, and build the house; and I will take pleasure in it, and I will be glorified, saith the LORD.

9Ye looked for much, and, lo, *it came* to little; and when ye brought *it* home, I did blow upon it. Why? saith the LORD of hosts. Because of mine house that *is* waste, and ye run every man unto his own house.

10Therefore the heaven over you is stayed from dew, and the earth is stayed *from* her fruit.

11And I called for a drought upon the land, and upon the mountains, and upon the corn, and upon the new wine, and upon the oil, and upon *that* which the ground bringeth forth, and upon men, and upon cattle, and upon all the labour of the hands.

12Then Zerubbabel the son of Shealtiel, and Joshua the son of Josedech, the high priest, with all the remnant of the people, obeyed the voice of the LORD their God, and the words of Haggai the prophet, as the LORD their God had sent him, and the people did fear before the LORD.

13Then spake Haggai the LORD'S messenger in the LORD'S message unto the people, saying, I *am* with you,

saith the LORD.

14And the LORD stirred up the spirit of Zerubbabel the son of Shealtiel, governor of Judah, and the spirit of Joshua the son of Josedech, the high priest, and the spirit of all the remnant of the people; and they came and did work in the house of the LORD of hosts, their God,

The people did start to get to work. Then they ran into another discouragement. They started comparing what they were doing to some ideal and were discouraged by how much less significant their efforts were. They looked back at how things had been in yesteryears of glory. Don't set your eyes on how insignificant your work for God is, just get to work. Haggai didn't just tell them to just keep up their faith, he challenged them to keep at the work.

Hag 2:1-9 In the seventh *month*, in the one and twentieth *day* of the month, came the word of the LORD by the prophet Haggai, saying,

2Speak now to Zerubbabel the son of Shealtiel, governor of Judah, and to Joshua the son of Josedech, the high priest, and to the residue of the people, saying,

3Who *is* left among you that saw this house in her first glory? and how do ye see it now? *is it* not in your eyes in comparison of it as nothing?

4Yet now be strong, O Zerubbabel, saith the LORD; and be strong, O Joshua, son of Josedech, the high priest; and be strong, all ye people of the land, saith the LORD, and work: for I *am* with you, saith the LORD of hosts:

5According to the word that I covenanted with you when ye came out of Egypt, so my spirit remaineth among you: fear ye not.

6For thus saith the LORD of hosts; Yet once, it *is* a little while, and I will shake the heavens, and the earth, and the sea, and the dry *land*;

7And I will shake all nations, and the desire of all nations shall come: and I will fill this house with glory, saith the LORD of hosts.

8The silver *is* mine, and the gold *is* mine, saith the LORD of hosts.

9The glory of this latter house shall be greater than of the former, saith the LORD of hosts: and in this place will I give peace, saith the LORD of hosts.

Yes, we have to get comfort and strength, but the work doesn't have to wait. We have to do both. All of the Christian life is going to be like that.

Later, Nehemiah ran into opposition from Sanballat and company when it came time to build the walls of the city back up was hindered by the local opposition. He didn't tell the people to just keep up their faith and they would feel better, he challenged them to action.

Neh 4:7-9 But it came to pass, that when Sanballat, and Tobiah, and the Arabians, and the Ammonites, and the Ashdodites, heard that the walls of Jerusalem were made up, and that the breaches began to be stopped, then they were very wroth,

⁸And conspired all of them together to come and to fight against Jerusalem, and to hinder it.

⁹Nevertheless we made our prayer unto our God, and set a watch against them day and night, because of them.

Neh 4:10-11 And Judah said, The strength of the bearers of burdens is decayed, and there is much rubbish; so that we are not able to build the wall.

¹¹And our adversaries said, They shall not know, neither see, till we come in the midst among them, and slay them, and cause the work to cease.

We have to ask ourselves what it would take to stop us from serving God.

Neh 4:16-18 And it came to pass from that time forth, that the half of my servants wrought in the work, and the other half of them held both the spears, the shields, and the bows, and the habergeons; and the rulers were behind all the house of Judah.

¹⁷They which builded on the wall, and they that bare burdens, with those that laded, every one with one of his hands wrought in the work, and with the other hand held a weapon.

¹⁸For the builders, every one had his sword girded by his side, and so builded. And he that sounded the trumpet was by me.

Notice that they were prepared for battle *even while they were working!*

"I'm going through such hard times, but I have my faith." This is all well and good, but it is only a starting point. Keeping the faith does not mean taking comfort in *our* ability to keep a positive outlook. Faith itself does not provide security. Our security is in the *object* of our faith. Jesus Christ is the object of our faith. A guarantee is only as secure as the guarantor can secure it. You can have faith in Mohammed, or Buddha, or Lao-tze, or Krishna, but your security is only as good as they can secure it. (Silver certificate notes). When we *truly* have

our faith in Jesus Christ it moves us to action.

2. Faith delivered.

Jude 3 Beloved, when I gave all diligence to write unto you of the common salvation, it was needful for me to write unto you, and exhort *you* that ye should earnestly contend for the faith which was once delivered unto the saints.

In this case, the faith once delivered is referring to the body of doctrine that we subscribe to, that we hold to. The significance of this verse is that that body of doctrine was *once* delivered. It was not delivered as a rough draft, revised, edited, proofed, and corrected as it passed through multiple editions and printings. It was delivered in its final form. We preach the same Gospel that Jesus and Peter and Paul preached. It is tried and true. Millions have lived *by* it. Millions have died *for* it. It hasn't been refined and evolved. It hasn't adapted to the culture and *redefined* to accommodate our sin.

What especially interests me in this verse is an application that arises out of it. This body of doctrine which forms the guarantee of our faith was *delivered*. In other words, it was *sent* out. That is why there were apostles. An apostle was a commission one. He was *charged* with a mission to fulfill. His mission was to *deliver* the Gospel. We have the same commission. In fact we call it the great commission and it appears in each of the Gospels, Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John, and also the book of Acts.

Matt 28:18-20 And Jesus came and spake unto them, saying, All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth.

19Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost:

20Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and, lo, I am with you alway, *even* unto the end of the world. Amen.

We are to *deliver* the *word of faith*.

Rom 6:17 But God be thanked, that ye were the servants of sin, but ye have obeyed from the heart that form of doctrine which was delivered you.

Rom 10:8-13 But what saith it? The word is nigh thee, *even* in thy mouth, and in thy heart: that is, the word of faith, which we preach;

9That if thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart that

God hath raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved.

10For with the heart man believeth unto righteousness; and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation.

11For the scripture saith, Whosoever believeth on him shall not be ashamed.

12For there is no difference between the Jew and the Greek: for the same Lord over all is rich unto all that call upon him.

13For whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved.

3. Faith on the march.

In theology, the churches of the Reformation in the 1500s described two phases of Christianity: the Church Militant and the Church Triumphant. I think this is really powerful imagery. They saw believers going through this life in a military sense in a struggle against sin, and in the next life victorious. The Church Triumphant is an easy call, but they could have described Christian life here as the Church Struggling. I'm glad they chose the phrase Militant. If you chose the word struggling, you might get the idea that believers are here licking their wounds and just trying to get by. The word Militant is a great word. The word Militant suggests that, even though there are battles where you don't do so well, there is a sense of mission in a spiritual warfare where we set up strategies fighting against the devil and sin.

Eph 6:10-17 Finally, my brethren, be strong in the Lord, and in the power of his might.

11Put on the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil.

12For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high *places*.

13Wherefore take unto you the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand.

14Stand therefore, having your loins girt about with truth, and having on the breastplate of righteousness;

15And your feet shod with the preparation of the gospel of peace;

16Above all, taking the shield of faith, wherewith ye shall be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked.

17And take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God:

Most specifically, we have a faith on the march. Notice in vs. 15 that our feet are to be shod with the preparation of the Gospel of peace. The Roman military shoe was spiked for better traction as the Roman soldier pushed forward into battle. We are to press forward with the Gospel of peace.

Rom 10:13-17 For whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved.

14How then shall they call on him in whom they have not believed? and how shall they believe in him of whom they have not heard? and how shall they hear without a preacher?

15And how shall they preach, except they be sent? as it is written, How beautiful are the feet of them that preach the gospel of peace, and bring glad tidings of good things!

16But they have not all obeyed the gospel. For Esaias saith, Lord, who hath believed our report?

17So then faith *cometh* by hearing, and hearing by the word of God.

Notice in vs. 15 how we are called to travel with the Gospel. We defeat the power of the devil and sin and the world as people hear the message of the Gospel from God's Word, the Bible. As we press forward, the Gospel is meant to be on the march.

In 1 Chronicles 28 we read about all the men who came to David, to fetch him from Hebron to completely make him king of a united Israel.

1Chr 12:23 And these *are* the numbers of the bands *that were* ready armed to the war, *and* came to David to Hebron, to turn the kingdom of Saul to him, according to the word of the LORD.

There were so many thousands from this tribe and that tribe. What is most notable is not the total number in the military who came to David. It was not even so much that he had the support of all Israel. What might be the most notable thing about that company of men is found in vs. 38.

1Chr 12:38 All these men of war, that could keep rank, came with a perfect heart to Hebron, to make David king over all Israel: and all the rest also of Israel *were* of one heart to make David king.

What is most notable is that they could keep rank. One of the great objectives of a military engagement is to break through and divide an army. You try to divide them by disrupting their communications. You try to break

through their strong point. You try to outflank them and attack from behind. If you can break through their ranks, they tend to fall apart and flee. These men, however, could *keep* rank. They could hold the line even as they were meeting the attack head on. They not only could stand as a wall against an enemy, they could keep rank as they marched forward. I remember marching drill. You have to ask, however, why do they still drill today? Armies that would neatly march onto a battle field to engage each other is a thing of the past. There is a great reason to still drill: it teaches you to keep ranks! It teaches you to move in unison as one man on command. It disciplines the mind to recognize that you are a unit. One day the trick drill team leaders came to recruit people for the drill team. I volunteered for the demonstration. I was told to stand perfectly still as two men took their Springfield rifles with fixed bayonets and sent them spinning, one in front of me and the other in back of me and then caught them in mid air. Hot-diggity, sign me up! It is marvelous to watch military drill teams with their precision movements. That is what we are supposed to be like. Moving forward, marching onward, pressing in unison of spirit and cause, making *the enemy* break rank and flee.

Josh 23:10 One man of you shall chase a thousand: for the LORD your God, he *it is* that fighteth for you, as he hath promised you.

Great military leaders have called upon their men to press themselves in great marches to engage the enemy. There is no greater leader to inspire us than Jesus Christ.

Heb 12:1-4 Wherefore seeing we also are compassed about with so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which doth so easily beset *us*, and let us run with patience the race that is set before us,
2 Looking unto Jesus the author and finisher of *our* faith; who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God.
3 For consider him that endured such contradiction of sinners against himself, lest ye be wearied and faint in your minds.
4 Ye have not yet resisted unto blood, striving against sin.

In Matthew 16 we read about how God is going to build His church on faith in Jesus as the Rock of our salvation. But we are always quick to point out that this is done because we are on the attack, not on the defense. *We* are the aggressors.

Matt 16:17-18 And Jesus

answered and said unto him,
Blessed art thou, Simon Barjona:
for flesh and blood hath not
revealed *it* unto thee, but my
Father which is in heaven.

18And I say also unto thee, That
thou art Peter, and upon this rock
I will build my church; and the
gates of hell shall not prevail
against it.

When it says that the gates of Hell shall not prevail against the church, that does not mean that the powers of darkness who sit in the gates of the city are attacking churches, but that they occupy the seats of power, affecting people's lives, and that when *we* attack them, they will not prevail in the battle. *We* will be victorious. *We* are supposed to be on the march and *launch* the attack. *They* are on the defense and will lose.

As Haggai said, it is not time for us to merely build our house so we can retire. We must be on the move and attack. The stranger our times are, the more we must be motivated to not sit idly by with our security blanket of faith. The stranger our times are, the more we must be motivated to take action.

The word Evangelist is used today to speak of a strong proponent of something. He is not just a super salesman, but someone who is so impressed with what software they are using, or what person he admires, or investment method they are using, so that they want everyone to like what they like and use it, too. We can't fault them, or blame them, for stealing the word evangelist from us because there are too many Christians who aren't using it very much. They might as well take it and use it unless we claim the power of it.

We are the evangelists, on the march, converting the world.

1. Faith more than a security blanket. Hag 1:2-4, Hag 1:5-14, 2:1-9
2. Faith delivered. Jude 3, Matt 28:18-20, Rom 6:17, 10:8-13
3. Faith on the march. Eph 6:10-17, Rom 10:13-17, 1Chr 12:23,38, Josh 23:10, Heb 12:1-4, Matt 16:17-18