

Faith (Part One)

Unleavened Bread

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Our son, Richard, and I had a brief conversation last Wednesday on a subject that he brought up. He was reflecting on what he felt that he had learned during this past year about human nature and having been involved in this work. So he brought it up to me, and I had to agree that it is a major thing that he and I have had to learn to deal with. It is something that all of us have to learn to deal with, but it was a topic that we felt was worthwhile bringing up here, and that is what we have learned through this year is how impatient we all are.

It almost seems as though a thought, a desire which we perceive to be a need, must be realized immediately. It seems to me on reflecting back over especially the last thirty or forty years of my life that instant gratification seems to be the hallmark of this age. We have got to have it now. I know that this impacts on me because every so often I receive a fax, or a letter, or a telephone call from somebody saying they are withdrawing from our fellowship, or they do not want the tapes anymore or any other literature. Almost every time that they say that it is because we are not "preaching the gospel to the world." What it seems to me is that they either do not understand what we are doing—that there is some ignorance in regard to that and it is certainly understandable—but it also seems to me that they do not want to allow enough time for something to grow. It has to be done **right away** or you are immediately identified as being a heretic that they do not want to be a part of.

There is a scripture in James 1, where it says:

James 1:2-4 My brethren, count it all joy when you fall into various trials, knowing that the testing of your faith produces patience. But let patience have its perfect work, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking nothing.

Patience is needed because it is working something in us. It is going to produce something that is very valuable in regard to us glorifying God. It is going to be very valuable in regard to our relationship with God. It is going to be very valuable for us when we are in the Kingdom of God.

How would you like to be dealing with somebody who has the power of a God being, but who is *very* impatient, a person with hair-trigger reactions to things? A thought buzzes through their mind and they have to gratify it right away and, suddenly, somebody becomes a grease spot on the pavement where formerly there had been a human being. We do not like to think of that. We do not like to think of God dealing like that, and we are mighty glad that He is patient in the way that He is. We are mighty glad that He is long-suffering, gentle, and kind to us because when we begin to reflect on it, we have needed His patience a very great deal. So patience is necessary for producing major things in our character, and if we do not have it, especially the kind that is mixed with faith, then it is very likely we are not going to be able to grow as we should.

Rod McLeish, a radio commentator back in the 1970s in Los Angeles, said in a commentary about the American scene that we American's have a

concept of the moment and in so doing we tune out the rest of time with a childish tendency to focus on right now. Whatever the urging, whatever the impulse, whatever the need, whether real or imagined, whatever the problem, the urging impulse or need have to be satisfied right now regardless of whether anything is learned.

Now that is not too unusual. I think that Americans are not the only ones who have this problem, I think that it is a problem of human nature. All of mankind has the same problem. But maybe they have it to a lesser degree than those of us here in America.

I think my father is a good illustration of the way a lot of American's used to be. We seem to have lost this concept. It is no longer a practice in very many people's lives. All the time that I was growing up we had old cars. We had a 1936 Ford it seemed like forever. It really was not forever. It really was only a couple of years that we had it and then he was able to purchase a 1934 Plymouth. So now the car was two years older than the 1936 Ford we had. It

actually was a pretty fine car, but while other people were riding around in cars that were only one or two years old, the Ritenbaughs were riding around in a 1934 Plymouth. But I felt kind of sheepish about this, going around in this stagecoach-like looking automobile.

However, in 1954, my father walked into a Ford dealership and plunked down *every dollar* in cash for a brand new automobile, a 1954 Plymouth Belvedere, the top of the line for Plymouth. A couple of years later he did the same thing and he bought a Mercury for cash. I do not think very many of us have ever bought a brand new automobile for cash, but he did, and in so doing he saved tremendous amounts of interest that would have been paid out in the loans and, in the long run, I am sure considering his wages, he had more new cars than he ever would have had, had he back in the 1930s and early 1940s, before World War II began, been buying cars on credit.

Not many people do things like that anymore. I think that we can see this reflected in our national personality. Our entire economic system has been fueled by going into debt, buying things on credit, and the reason is, businessmen have found a good way to make a great deal more money than they could by you going in there and buying it for cash because they not only get the price for the automobile, but now they get all the interest that you pay on the loan. I dare say that maybe General Motors, who operates GMAC, makes as much money on the interest on the loans that they have outstanding, maybe, as they do on the automobiles, and so they are kind of disappointed if you buy a car for cash, because they are always looking for ways to make a little money. Now they have found the insurance ways. You get a warranty on your automobile and that is another way that they get money from you that they otherwise would not have.

There is precious little saving up and patiently waiting until one has the cash in hand to buy, and we have come to the place in the United States where there is an excess of \$10 of debt for every one dollar that is in circulation. That is just the private debt, but the public debt, the federal debt, is the equal of the private debt. So when you see the federal debt published in the paper you better double it because the private debt is equal to the federal debt, and our situation is actually a lot worse than it is.

I think that you know what the Bible says about being in debt, that the debtor is in slavery. That runs counter to what God's plan is to bring everybody into independence. So the one who is in debt is in slavery to the one who is holding onto the note.

When we come into the church we also, unfortunately, bring these concepts into the church with us, these concepts that are really something that is related to the use of time. You see, patience works within a time frame, does it not? So we begin to operate toward God in our relationship with Him in much the same principle and much the same way as we do in relationship to money. We would like God *always* to respond so that we are instantly gratified when we ask Him for something, and operating by faith becomes something that is very difficult for us to deal with.

Frequently, because we have this concept of dealing with time and God in pretty much the same way, it leads us to a great deal of unnecessary frustration, and sometimes anger and sometimes bitterness will develop because really the problem, and the impatience, and maybe the lack of faith, is in us, but somehow it is related to God and it becomes His problem—see, there is something wrong with Him.

One of the approaches we have toward God that is related to this faith and patience thing, is we have this idea of using God as a genie in the bottle. We rub the bottle, the genie appears, we give the command and he instantly obeys: Your wish is my command. We speak to God and we would like very much for Him to jump right at that moment. As long as we do this, we are really acting unfairly in relation to God, I mean unfairness toward Him.

I remember reading a small book written by J. B. Phillips, the man who is given credit for the Phillips translation of the Bible, called *Your God is Too Small*. He said in that book that most people's concept of God is simply that of a greater man and, to compound problems, men use themselves as the model.

Now God is viewed as a father and we use, unfortunately, human beings as a model of how a father ought to be. God is not like a human father. God is far better than any human father. I do not mean that there are no similarities.

There are similarities or God would have never used that analogy for us to understand a relationship that He wants to have with us, that is the family relationship. He is the Head of the Family as the father is humanly the head of the family and, so, we are to pray to our Father.

However, to use a human being as the model for what God is has severe limitations to it and we better understand that. Because God as a Father is **far greater** in magnitude in every aspect of what a father ought to be, than any human being could ever fulfill. So if we use a man as a model, we are always going to be cutting God short in what He really is. That is unfair to God. See, the real model of what He is like is in His Word. Jesus said "If you have seen Me, you have seen the father." That is as close of a model as you can get, and Jesus Christ was never a father, but a Son. Kind of an interesting twist. But He is the closest model of what God the Father is like that there is available to anybody—not a human father, but Jesus Christ, the Son.

In Isaiah 55, God—through Isaiah—helps us to understand that when we use human models for God, we are cutting ourselves short here.

Isaiah 55:8-11 For My thoughts are not your thoughts, nor are your ways My ways, says the Lord. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are My ways higher than your ways, and My thoughts than your thoughts. For as the rain comes down, and the snow from heaven, and do not return there, but water the earth, and make it bring forth and bud, that it may give seed to the sower and bread to the eater, so shall My word be that goes forth from My mouth; it shall not return to Me void, but it shall accomplish what I please, and it shall prosper in the thing for which I sent it.

Another place it says that God is not a man that He should lie. When we put this together with what we have just read in Isaiah, God and man do not essentially think the same. God does not lie, man does lie. Man's essential nature according to Jeremiah 17:9 is "deceitful above all things and desperately wicked" because our real spiritual father, up until the time of conversion, is Satan the Devil and he is a liar. And, as Jesus said in John 8, we want to do the things that our father does, not like Abraham did. So God can very confidently and truly say that His ways are not our ways and His

thoughts are so much higher than our thoughts there is no comparison. His thoughts on what a father is like are so much higher, so much grander, that we do not even have the eloquence to be able to describe it. It is almost something like maybe we have to "mystically" feel.

Now, even though we do not think like God, is it not His very purpose that we do come to think like He does, that our thoughts be His thoughts? Man's thinking is reflected in the routines of his life.

Matthew 12:34 For out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks.

The way a man acts reflects his thinking, reflects his heart. Our thinking, then, is reflected in what we do. What is our life absorbed in? It is absorbed in business. It is absorbed in entertainment, in education, in homemaking. We are so absorbed in our own business, that many times we are prevented from seeing God more as He really is, as well as His vast purpose. You might connect this to Isaiah 58:13-14 where he tells us on the Sabbath day not to think or talk about our pleasure, better translated, busyness, what is keeping us busy. He is not talking about earning our living here necessarily, although that is part of it, but He means all of those things that keep us busy. We are to think His Words and to speak His Words.

We also find from our own experience that there is a great deal of fickleness involved in our thinking. First we go this way, and then we go that way. But there is no fickleness at all with God. That is what these verses tell us. What He sets out to do, that gets done. Even as the rain and snow come, and they do not return to Him in the heavens, as we might say, until after they have done what He sent them out to do, and that is to water the earth so that it brings forth fruits that we might be able to eat.

Now remember this. He is giving us this as an illustration that His word always—always, always, always—accomplishes what He sends it forth to do.

It is our lack of seeing ourselves as part of God's vast purpose that gives life most of its negative qualities. So a **new mind** must be acquired, but, on the other hand, it is our preoccupation with our own interests that proves to be God's, you might say, greatest obstacle. It is not so much that there is in us

an obdurate antagonism. That is the kind the unconverted have—a rebellious, stony, hard heart. God does not expect that from His people and that is not really what we, most of the time, present to Him. But rather it is more like we are apathetic or indifferent. We just kind of go cruising along as we have *always* cruised along and it is so hard, so difficult to break away from those old patterns.

When a person repents, what has happened is that he has turned to look at life, at least some portion of his life, from God's point of view and he has chosen to go in that direction. He has made a turn. But he never would have made that turn unless God's Word had penetrated into his mind, affected his thinking enough to motivate the person to make an adjustment in his life, and then turn in the direction that God's point of view pointed him in.

For instance, keeping the Sabbath; there was a time you did not know about the Sabbath. Then there was the time you knew about it vaguely. Then there was the time when you began to think, "Hey, maybe I ought to keep this." Then there was the time that you decided *I must keep it*, and then there was the time that you *did* keep it. And so, you repented.

That was the process. God led you in that process until you saw this one command from His point of view and you decided you believed it and you decided that you would turn your life. That is what a person who has repented has done. He now sees things from God's point of view. His thinking has changed in this area, and he has then been motivated to turn his life and go in that direction. It is simple when it is explained that way, is it not? But that is what repentance is.

Unfortunately, maybe fortunately, I do not know which it is, because it is so difficult to break away from our customary way of thinking and doing, God is very gracious and He gives us time. He gives us gifts to enable us to see more things from His perspective and turn our life so that we become more and more in accord. We are therefore growing. However that growth, and coming to see things from God's point of view and making it a part of our life, turn our life, and beginning to go in that direction, *requires time*. And we are not as patient as God, and we do not believe Him in the way that someday we are going to believe Him.

Phillips went on in his book (*Your God is Too Small*) to give titles and descriptions to the most popular concepts of God, every one of which was wrong, but one of these concepts fits this sermon and that is, "God in a hurry." No, God is not in a hurry. Man is in a hurry. But you see, man transfers his concept of what God is like from himself to God. And what he is really wishing is that God would be in just as much of a hurry as he, the man, is. Sometimes, we can actually get haughty about this. I understand, and I think you do, it is because we are fearful of what we are going through—maybe frustration, we need a job, marital problems—that we feel that God ought to jump. But remember, Isaiah 55:8 is telling us God does not think the way we do. If we get frustrated it is because we wish God did think like we do. But He does not.

If there is anything that ought to be plain from the revelation God gives us in His Word is that He *never* seems to be in a hurry. This may be a small point, but I think it illustrates something that is worthwhile to always keep in the back of our thinking. Did you ever notice that God never seems to show up on the scene until after the dirty deed is done? Look at Adam and Eve. He could have stopped them. He could have stepped in and said, "Hey, wait a minute there, Adam and Eve. I see you're just about ready to reach out there and take of that piece of fruit, but wouldn't you please consider what you are doing, and if you won't reconsider what you are doing and you start reaching your hand out there (slap) I'm going to grab your wrist and give you a twist and you're going to be on your back so you can't sin."

God did not show up until after they did it. He did not show up, apparently, until they had enough time to recognize that they were naked and to hide somewhere in the Garden. It almost seems as though an hour or two, maybe hours went by, but all the while God was aware—He was watching, and we know that—but He did not show up until after it was done. He did not show up until after Cain killed his brother.

Now if God was in a hurry the way we would like Him to be in a hurry, then He could have stepped in, but He did not. God actually had to restrain Himself, I am sure, because He had determined that He was going to give us free moral agency and He was not going to interfere with that. Because using free moral agency rightly involves thinking. It involves evaluating evidence that is available, choosing a course, and then going in that course.

We make a lot of mistakes. Let us think about God. Does not the Bible show that long preparation, careful planning, and slow growth are part and parcel of our knowledge of Him? I think that you would honestly have to say that when we look at Him through our eyes, He never seems to be in a hurry about anything.

There are interesting illustrations of this. He took twenty-five years to fulfill His promise to Abraham and Sarah. He could have done it instantaneously, but He did not. Look at what He did to His own Son. He had Him born as a baby. That baby had to grow into a mature human adult. He was about thirty, it says, when He began His preaching, and He was dead at the age of 33 1/2. Now if a human being was running the show, I can almost guarantee you that the way he would have done it is that he would have sent Jesus Christ as a full grown adult. But there are other things in God's purpose and His thinking. We do not think the same way that He does. Instead He made His own Son go through **every process** of a human being. I think that is rather interesting. It shows that God would not back away, even in the case of His own Son, and His desire to see us use free moral agency according to, or by faith.

When Christ ascended, what was the last thing that they said to Him there in Acts 1? "Are you going to set up the kingdom, now?" That is the way of human beings. That is the way you and I would have done if we were there. So Jesus said, "Well it's not for you to know the time or season. Just be patient. It's not yet." God knows in His own wisdom, and of course He told them earlier, "I don't even know when it's going to be." God was not even in a hurry to inform His Son.

The New Testament church did not realize until about sixty-five years later, when the apostle John wrote Revelation, that Christ was not going to come back for quite a long period of time. They had some indications that they wrote about. "It doesn't look like He's going to be showing up soon before that," but the church really did not know until about sixty, sixty-five years later when the Revelation was given. So even then God left it vague, but He delayed for sixty-some years before He let them know. You know what is so interesting? Almost everybody who had been witness to Christ's resurrection was already dead by that time.

Look at Moses. Here we are in the Days of Unleavened Bread. He left Egypt. God worked with him for forty years. And then He finally said, "OK Moses, we're ready for you now to go back there." And then He worked with him and the rest of the Israelites *for another forty years* after that. Moses did not even get in to see the Promised Land. God did not hurry up things at all, did He? That is His pattern.

What about Noah? It was *120* years from the time that God said to Noah, "OK, let's get ready and build this ark out here." 120 years later, the rain came. God never seems to be in a hurry. And the only reason is because it is important to you and me that He not be in a hurry. I am sure He has thoughts of hurrying things up, but He restrains Himself because it is a benefit to you and me.

God's own Word is written in such a way that what we see now as, let us say, a full revelation of His Word never existed in most of the history of mankind. So what we see from the beginning, let us say up until the time of Jesus Christ, is an evolving form of doctrine that finally culminates in the preaching of the gospel of the Kingdom of God *4,000* years after God began. Why did He not give us the whole story right from the very beginning? Even in regard to the New Covenant, the Old Covenant was made sometime in the 1440s BC. We do not find out that there is a New Covenant coming until the book of Jeremiah *800 years later*. So God is not in all that big of a hurry.

I went through all of this detail because I want us to understand that we are never going to feel very comfortable, secure, or confident, or be very faithful to the kind of degree that will give us a great deal of growth until we can get to the place where we can look at time more as God does. We do not look at time as God does because we are not really confident that He has things under control. And in addition to that, we are not really sure that He is focusing on us, let alone that He *lives* in us. Now what this concept leads to is a mental image of God who is always going to seem to be a blur of disappointment and fear because we begin to feel that if we really do put our trust in Him, He will let us down, or we may even die.

I do not mean by saying this that I want everybody to feel crushed, because we have a lot of growing to do. That is what God is in the business of

doing—promoting growth. When we make mistakes, if our faith slips, if we have times of doubt and we fear, it is not the end of the track. It is not the end of the trail. We will see more of this as we go along, because God is patient toward us. He mercifully moves us gently and with great *kindness* so that we will grow. And I know that He does not expect all of us to have the same kind of faith that everybody else has. It would be nice if we did and that faith was very strong, but the whole family of God is growing gradually to the place where it will have the kind of faith that will really honor God.

Exodus 14:5-10 Now it was told the king of Egypt that the people had fled, and the heart of Pharaoh and his servants was turned against the people; and they said, "Why have we done this, that we have let Israel go from serving us? So he made ready his chariot and took his people with him. Also, he took six hundred choice chariots, and all the chariots of Egypt with captains over every one of them. And the Lord hardened the heart of Pharaoh king of Egypt. So the Egyptians pursued them, all the horses and chariots of Pharaoh, his horsemen and his army, and overtook them camping by the sea beside Pi Hahiroth, before Baal Zephon. [Now Israel's reaction] And when Pharaoh drew near, the children of Israel lifted their eyes, and behold the Egyptians marched after them. So they were very afraid, and the children of Israel cried out to the Lord.

Then, of course, they accused Moses of not dealing with them fairly, murmured that he led them out of Egypt because had they not been right? They told him while they were still in Egypt, "Don't disturb things." This was just days after going out with a pretty high hand in the sight of all the Egyptians, joyful that they were going to freedom. So how quickly their faith evaporated when *time* began closing in on them. That was the real problem. Because there were the Egyptians, the horses, the chariots, all the shining army—all the might of Egypt represented there. Their backs were up against the sea and they could see the death sentence approaching them as fast as a horse could pull a chariot. Time—the end of their life was very quickly coming within view. So they thought that their lives were hanging in a balance when they saw the army.

Now here is what we have to think of. Had not God given them enough evidence through all the plagues by which God assaulted Egypt? Had He not given them enough evidence to impact their thinking in the very clear division that He made between the Israelites and the Egyptians beginning with the fourth plague on? All of the plagues fell on Egypt, but none of them fell on the Israelites. Had He not impressed their minds enough on Passover when the blood of the lamb enabled their firstborn to live while the Egyptian's died?

We can learn from this lesson. We can grow from it. But in principle, we deal with the same things. And as my wife mentioned to me this morning, every one of us comes to our own personal Red Sea. And every one of us fails time and time again as Israel did when they lost their faith for awhile. So the things that we go through when we come up against our own personal Red Sea are very similar to what Israel went through.

God rescued them. And He had some chastening words for them. But God did not dump them either. We can be mighty thankful of that because He also shows that He will continue to work patiently with us in much the same way that a teacher in school continues to work with the students that he has, even though some of them fail and hardly any of them ever do anything perfectly. Maybe none of them ever do. So a teacher is faced with the same principle that we are involved in here with God. And the teacher does not want to fail students. So he uses all his time and energy and efforts to try to encourage and instruct in such a way that those who are failing from time to time will somehow get turned around, catch the vision, and begin to *use* what they have available to them in the teaching in the right way.

Now what if God thought about time in the same way that many of us do? Instead God thinks of time in the same way that a teacher in school does. There is still time. I can catch this person's interest and we can get them turned around. So God gave those Israelites forty years in the wilderness to try to get them turned around.

In Hebrews 11, we find there that these people *did* recover their faith in time to go through the Red Sea.

Hebrews 11:29 By faith they passed through the Red Sea as by dry land, whereas the Egyptians, attempting to do so, were drowned.

I tend to think that part of the major reason that they did get themselves turned around was largely because of faithful leadership, primarily by Moses and maybe by others as well, but they did exhibit some measure of faith and God faithfully and duly recorded it.

That ought to be encouraging to those of us who have failed from time to time. Many times our faith has failed. But God patiently continues to work with us. So do not get discouraged, just keep going on. Just keep going on because God will not stop. He will keep working with us.

Romans 10:14-17 How 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? And how shall they preach unless they are sent? As it is written, "How beautiful are the feet of those who preach the gospel of peace, who bring glad tidings of good things!" But they have not all obeyed the gospel. For Isaiah says, "Lord, who has believed our report?" So then faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God.

Faith comes by hearing—hearing the Word of God. Those Words contain the evidence by which one can judge, reason, and *choose* what one is going to do with his life. God's Word is truth. He cannot lie. He has never gone back on a promise. If He did, He would cease to be God. God expects us to reason with His truth as our foundation. Now God's Word is not everything in terms of life, but His Word is the foundation against which we evaluate all the other words that we have heard, taught, been taught, all through the years. So faith then comes by hearing, and hearing by the Word of God.

Let us go back to the book of Exodus and see how this works. At least we will see this very briefly in Exodus 4.

Exodus 4:27 And the Lord said to Aaron, "Go into the wilderness to meet Moses." So he went and met him on the mountain of God, and kissed him.

This episode takes place whenever the forty years that Moses spent in the wilderness tending Jethro's sheep has come to an end and God has sent him back to Egypt. But Moses' faith is not really all that strong, so along the way he is complaining to God that he does not know how to speak, which is kind of interesting because when Moses was in Egypt, he was a leader, a champion of men, apparently, a general of the armies, a man who was in line to become Pharaoh. And that responsibility would entail that he communicate as the head of the nation to others who were part and parcel of the ruling of the nation, and maybe give speeches before thousands of people. But now, suddenly, he does not know how to speak.

Maybe during that forty years God had worked on him in such a way it was not that he really forgot how to speak, but he had seen enough of himself that he was no longer confident as Moses in Egypt was, (I mean in the first forty years of his life), and now he was going to have to put his confidence in somebody else. He was not really all that sure that God was going to be with him yet. So God came to his aid in the person of his brother, Aaron.

I bring this up because we all have failings of faith and I do not want us to feel overly bad about this because God supplies the need in some way. He does not dump us, but He supplies another way. It is experiences like this that the concept that is given in I Corinthians 10:13 where he says that God will make a way of escape that you may be able to bear it, overcome it, endure it, or whatever. In this case, the way was provided by Aaron, who apparently was not afraid to speak. Maybe he was a far better speaker even naturally than Moses was at his best. I do not know.

Exodus 4:28-31 So Moses told Aaron all the words of the Lord who had sent him, and all the signs which He had commanded him. Then Moses and Aaron went and gathered together all the elders of the children of Israel. And Aaron spoke all the words which the Lord had spoken to Moses. Then he did the signs in the sight of the

people. So the people believed; and when they heard that the Lord had visited the children of Israel and that He had looked on their affliction, then they bowed their heads and worshipped.

So God informed Moses, Moses passed the word on to Aaron, Aaron, in turn, passed on the Word of God to the leaders of Israel, who in turn passed on the Word of God to the people that they were responsible to; that is, the Israelites did. Do you see how it is being passed? The Word of God, on which faith is based, which contains the evidence of what God is going to do, of what God is. It does not always say how He is going to do it, it just says that He is going to do this, and that and the other thing. But He wants us to use that evidence to act. Now in this case, the people believed, they responded, and put things to work.

Exodus 5:22-23 So Moses returned to the Lord and said, "Lord, why have You brought trouble on this people? Why is it You have sent me? For since I came to Pharaoh to speak in Your name, he has done evil to this people; neither have You delivered Your people at all.

Exodus 6:1 Then the Lord said to Moses, "Now you shall see what I will do to Pharaoh. For with a strong hand he will let them go, and with a strong hand he will drive them out of his land.

There comes the word, here comes the evidence:

Exodus 6:5-7 And I have also heard the groaning of the children of Israel whom the Egyptians keep in bondage, and I have remembered My covenant. Therefore say to the children of Israel: "I am the Lord; I will bring you out from under the burdens of the Egyptians. I will rescue you from their bondage, and I will redeem you with an outstretched arm and with great judgments. I will take you as My people, and I will be your God. Then you shall know that I am the Lord your God who brings you out from under the burdens of the Egyptians.

That is kind of interesting, that last verse. "**Then** you shall know. . ." It indicates that God expects that when He begins to speak to us, that though we may believe Him, we may not be able to really translate that into the kind of action that we someday will be able to. We will really not *know* the Lord your God until *after* He has fulfilled what He has promised to do. So He expects that there is going to be weakness on our behalf. And that we are not always going to do things right in regard to our faith in Him.

We begin to see here, then, that the people got strengthened through God's Word once again. They bucked themselves up, you might say, and they decided to be encouraged and to resist in the way that they could. We will just look at one more here:

Exodus 12:1-3 Now the Lord spoke to Moses and Aaron in the land of Egypt, saying, "This month shall be your beginning of months; it shall be the first month of the year to you. Speak to all the congregation of Israel, saying: "On the tenth day of this month every man shall take for himself a lamb, according to the house of his father, a lamb for a household.

We will not go any further. You know what happened. The Word of God came to Moses and Aaron. They in turn delivered the Word of God to the people. What we are talking about here is the instruction regarding Passover. The people then believed what Moses and Aaron told them. They killed the lamb, put the blood on the door posts and lintels and they were spared. They reasoned that what came through Moses and Aaron was evidence that they could trust. They did it, believing it, they were motivated to do it. They did it and God responded with what He had said to do.

With that in mind then, let us go back to Hebrews 11.

Hebrews 11:1 Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen.

The word "*substance*" is capable of alternative translations into English. Faith is assurance. Faith is a foundation, something upon which other things

can be built. In this case, it is what hope is built on. It is a confidence of things hoped for. We can say that it is evidence, or conviction of things that are not yet seen. If one hopes for something, it automatically means because that hope is there that the person does not yet have what he hopes for because if he did have what he hoped for, he would not hope.

Faith is that quality or faculty that a person exhibits or exercises between the time that he becomes aware of a need that he hopes for, and the actual realization of what it was that he first became aware that he was in need of.

Faith then operates during the passing of time, because whenever the times comes that we have what it is we hope for, we no longer need faith, we no longer need hope, at least concerning that for which we hope. So faith then operates in an expanse of time between awareness of a need and the actual receiving of that need. Therefore, since it is operating during that period of time, it *is* the evidence that we will receive what it is that we hoped for. If you do not have any faith, there is nothing to show people that you think you are going to get what you hoped for. But the very confidence you show is the evidence that you are hoping for something.

We all hope for many things, but here comes the big question: What is it that we hope for? Do we have any foundation for having hope that we will have what it is that we hope for? **It all depends on the faithfulness of God.** If there is no God, we have no foundation. There is no reason to hope. If His promise is not true, we also have no foundation because He cannot be trusted. Everything depends on the fact that God has spoken and it is impossible for Him to lie.

Faith comes by hearing, according to Romans 10:17, and hearing by the Word of God. If we heard nothing, then there is nothing to believe, there is no room for faith. All we have, then, is human imagination and experience—and you know what God says about our thoughts. God spoke. Abraham heard. Abraham believed. Abraham acted. There is the process. Because his hope was in someone who did not lie, and therefore his conviction was that he would receive what it was that he wanted, and this is what he exhibited to the world as the evidence that he would have it. His conviction, his faith. Now what he heard had its proper foundation, because what he heard was God's Word.

Here comes an important thing. The critical question is not always what is it that we believe, but **who** do we believe? We believe many things that men say and promise, but the question is, "Is what they say true?" See, it is not a question of sincerity. Many people tell us things in all sincerity. But they are not God. So what they say, though given in sincerity, may not be true. What is important is the truth of what we believe, and the more sincerely we believe what is not true, the worse off we are. When we listen to men, we cannot be quite certain that they are true, but when we give ear to God, we can be certain. Faith is hearing God, believing the evidence that He gives to the extent that we act upon it.

Again, this is not always easy to do. Sometimes it is very difficult to do, because very frequently we find ourselves on the shores of the Red Sea.

We find faith is also somewhat like a muscle. That it must be used or it atrophies. And if a muscle, faith, is put under stress, then it grows and becomes stronger. That is, in order for faith to be tested, grow, and produce, it sometimes must be taken beyond what we might think is its limit. Sometimes it must be taken to what seems to be a breaking point of unbelievable pressure. We have been given free moral agency, but we have to be led through experiences and circumstances to choose the way that will lead in the right direction. And this is where the Creator God comes in. In the analogy (Israel in the wilderness), **He led them through** the experiences. He is doing that to us as well.

Though a person's cooperation is required in this joint venture involving the use of faith, there is another aspect and that is that each person must be shown through the trials that the ultimate solution of each person's problems and his salvation can only be accomplished by God. Now there is a danger here in what I am talking about in that sometimes there are people of strong will who can be led to think that all one has to do is to set one's will and persevere and all these things will be accomplished. That is not true. That is kind of the stoic approach. It was also a Gnostic approach—a Greek approach that led them to establish ascetic religions. "Will-worship," the apostle Paul called it. It is not all will. It is faith *and* it is the grace of God working with our will. It is all three of them at the same time. You leave any one of them out and we are going to fail. We have to be led to the place

where we recognize we are saved by grace, *through faith*. Faith is an integral part of it. If God did not give His grace, I do not care how much will we have, we would never make it!

I Corinthians 1:26-29 For you see your calling, brethren, that not many wise according to the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble, are called. But God has chosen the foolish things of the world to put to shame the wise, and God has chosen the weak things of the world to put to shame the things which are mighty; and the base things of the world and the things which are despised God has chosen, and the things which are not, to bring to nothing the things that are [Why?], that no flesh should glory in His presence.

Nobody is ever going to come to God and say, "I did it by the strength of my own hands." Though this person may have faith, and though this person may have a strong will, they are not perfect. There are many times when their faith broke down that God had to intervene in some way in order to save them. Whether it is Israel at the Red Sea, or whether it is Israel out in the wilderness, you will find that in what God led Israel through, that time and time again He had to intervene and spare them, even through periods of time in which they were showing some measure of faith.

Ever since man's creation, men have been exalting themselves against God by choosing to do things their own way. But there is only one way that works eternally, and every human being is going to be led to see his weakness, and know that it is by grace that we are saved. That does wonders to a person's feelings about himself and makes humility possible, which in turn makes it possible for this person to yield to God, which in turn makes it possible for the person to deal with other human beings, not with a high hand, not with a master/slave relationship, but as a friend—as an understanding brother or sister who has gone through things of similar experience and seen his or her own failures—who can commiserate, sympathize, be compassionate, be merciful, be encouraging, be inspiring to the one who has failed.

God is going to work and will do it in such a way that a person will come to know and see very well that just knowing the truth, and even believing the truth, and even doing some acting on the truth, is not enough yet.

It is not that works are not important. They are. They are important to maintaining one's relationship with God, developing it. It is important in regard to the building of character and I think that we can go so far as to say that without works we are going to have a very difficult time being saved. Because at least, if nothing else, it shows a relationship between the person and God. So they are important to earning rewards, to building character, to providing a witness for God, but they still will not save us of and by themselves because they are terribly flawed and short of perfection.

I Corinthians 4:7 For who makes you differ from another? And what do you have that you did not receive? Now if you did indeed receive it, why do you glory as if you had not received it?

You can just fit this together with Philippians 2:13 where Paul says that it is "God who works in you both to will and to do."

How is He going to do this? God will manipulate the things that we go through in order to make our weaknesses, and God's power, clear.

Consider Abraham and Sarah again. God waited twenty-five years before He fulfilled the promise that He gave to them. If we would care to look, you could go back to Romans 4:19 and Hebrews 11:11. Both of those verses confirm each other. God purposely waited *until* neither Abraham nor Sarah were capable of producing a child. They exhibited faith during the 25 years, but God manipulated circumstances so that Abraham and Sarah, regardless of their great faith, regardless of their belief, regardless of how they acted upon what they believed, they would know that God worked a miracle. God gave them *grace* in order to fulfill His own promise to them.

Abraham and Sarah had to do what they did, but that still did not fulfill God's Word. It was only a response God expected them to do. Now they are examples that are held up to us because they did do the right thing, but you see this sets a pattern, that as we go through life, God expects us to exercise

faith, and there are times that He is going to bring us to our own personal Red Seas, that even though He brings us to the Red Sea, we have to understand that He is the one that parts the water.

If we wanted to follow Abraham and Sarah, would we not see that they had their problems? They failed along the way. God only shows us a couple of them. They might have failed ten or fifteen times more times than God showed us during that twenty-five years. They never forgot their basic responsibility to God. Sarah tried to get Abraham a child through Hagar. That was not the right thing to do. Abraham went along with it. That was not the right thing to do. It was not an act of faith.

You see we can learn from this. God is going to take us to where we understand that we are saved in spite of our weaknesses and that salvation comes by grace. But He still expects us to exhibit faith. Because if we do, then there is going to be steady growth. Not that we will never fail, but there is going to be steady growth from the time of our conception to the time of our birth into His family. So, we will fail tests along the way, but He patiently keeps on working with us. It is not the end of the story, and on we go.

When we compare ourselves to those great men and women of faith, I know that we feel intimidated and how could we possibly ever live up to what they accomplished, because they seemed to do so much. Now, people want to be great. I guess there is nothing wrong with wanting to be great, except for the area of greatness that one might strive to have recognition in and in how one reaches that greatness. But greatness is hard to pin down because most of us are a confusing mixture of strength and weakness. We are all that way. And it was that way with the great people of the Bible as well. Compared to the world, those people were superbly balanced, but compared to Jesus Christ, they were nothing. They still had very visible strengths and weaknesses. Weaknesses which God chose to record.

Hebrews 11:32 And what more shall I say? [Paul writes] For the time would fail me to tell of Gideon . . .

Are you familiar with the story of Gideon? I think that thing starts out with a laugh, God chuckling because He introduces Gideon hiding inside the press,

threshing his wheat so the enemy would not see what he was doing, and God said "Hail, Gideon, O man of valor." He called him what he was going to become. We see how strong Gideon was because he kept asking God, "Prove it to me." That is what we want. We want proof. See, Gideon was a man of strength and weakness all combined. The material for greatness was there, but it was not developed yet in the way God wanted it to be developed, in the areas that God wanted it to be developed. God patiently worked with the man.

How about Barak? Barak was so strong, he said to Deborah, a woman, "I'll go into battle with you Deborah. You just lead the way." Again the basic material was there, but like all of us, he had his flaws.

Samson. He liked a skirt, did he not? And there were times that he liked to show off his strength too, did he not?

Jephthah. Whoa, bad ancestry. Illegitimate. Almost, we might say, a typical Manassehite. He was one you know, where the illegitimacy rate is so high in this nation.

David had his problems. Certainly he did. And the prophets:

Hebrews 11:33-34 Who through faith subdued kingdoms, worked righteousness, obtained promises, stopped the mouths of lions, quenched the violence of fire, escaped the edge of the sword, out of weakness were made strong.

Out of weakness. They were just like you and me when God began, and it is probably a good thing that He did not show us their entire life. They were a mixed bag, but they grew. They kept trying to rely on God more and more. They allowed their faith to be tested and stretched. They failed a lot, but God patiently worked with them and they did not give up.

In II Corinthians 12:9 it tells us there, God says that "My strength is made perfect in weakness."

His strength is shown to be our salvation through our weaknesses and that suits God just fine because it does wonders for our attitude about ourselves

and our attitudes about others. That falls right in that section where Paul says that he asked God three times to heal him and God said, "No, No, No." Paul learned humility because God said no. So he also learned to be patient, and he learned, too, that despite his weaknesses that God continued to supply his strength, his need, every day, so God's strength was made perfect through Paul's weaknesses.

We could go on to Moses which we will not. And we could go on to Israel once again. But let us look very carefully here now considering Psalm 22, and we will finish on this. This is a psalm that is applied to Christ as He was hanging on the stake. He said:

Psalm 22:1-3 My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?
Why are You so far from helping Me, and from the words of My
groaning? O My God, I cry in the daytime, but You do not hear;
and in the night season, and am not silent. But You are holy . . .

God is in heaven. God oversees everything. God is **perfect**. God is **pure** in His thinking. And what we have to come to understand is that everything within God's purpose for us as individuals is going to be worked out considering the *whole purpose* that He is working out, not just what it is that we need at the moment. In the case of His own Son, He would not intervene, even though He was absolutely innocent, because going through that kind of a death was essential to the whole purpose.

We can see here that Christ Himself had His faith stretched. "Why have You forsaken Me?" But in this case, Christ's faith did not break as ours so frequently does.

Psalm 22:4-5 Our fathers trusted in You; they trusted and You delivered them. They cried to You, and were delivered; they trusted in You and were not ashamed.

The psalm goes on to show how His mind changed, even though He was receiving all kinds of insults and persecution from the people who were watching what was going on.

Psalm 22:21 Save Me from the lion's mouth [Satan] and from the horns of the wild oxen! You have answered Me.

Now look how the psalm changes to one of positive confidence and conviction.

Psalm 22:22-24 I will declare Your name [He was going to die pretty soon, so He was looking beyond to the resurrection of the dead, because that is the only time He could do it—after He was resurrected] to My brethren; in the midst of the congregation I will praise You. You who fear the Lord, praise Him! All you descendants of Jacob, glorify Him, and fear Him, all you offspring of Israel! For He has not despised nor abhorred the affliction of the afflicted; nor has He hidden His face from Him; but when He cried to Him, He heard.

We could go on because it gets even more positive and shows that He is going to fulfill His purpose right to the very end.

So brethren, we all go through trials of faith. There are times when our patience wears thin and our faith breaks. Please be assured and understand that even when we are at our Red Sea God does not abandon us. He does not give up on us. He is patient with us. And He will carry us through and provide us with salvation, as long as we keep picking ourselves up, going on, walking His way, and slowly but surely growing in the qualities that are a part of Him and He wants to be a part of us.

So continue to feed on the unleavened bread of God's Word and that growth then will be assured even though we are far from perfect right now.