

Confidence

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Given 14-Feb-26; Sermon #1859A

I believe one of the things we all seek after in our walk with God is that we all desire to have a strong confidence with Him. A firm belief that has been built up over time within our faith that knows and knows that it knows that God is near each one of us as we work out our salvation with Him and learn to become increasingly more confident that He will finish the good work He has begun in us. Knowing that He was watching over us at all times to do us good and guiding events and doing what is necessary to have us build up a life of faith that will glorify Him. And it becomes a faith that teaches us that we can rely on His promises no matter the circumstances that we find ourselves in. Confident and knowing those He has called will be brought into His Kingdom and into a life of holiness and joy through the sacrifice and the work of our Savior and High Priest Jesus Christ.

Certainly we all must know that God is never slack in His responsibilities to His own created works. The very act of creating brings with it the responsibility of being a good steward over what one has made, does it not? Just as human parents who bring children into the world have not only a legal responsibility to nurture their children, we would say that parents also have a moral responsibility to care for and raise their children as well as they can. I think many of the problems our society struggles with land in the arena of parenting. But sadly, what we see with many parents is that they take their responsibility too lightly in their childrearing duties. But what is true of men is not true of God.

Is God a good steward of what He brought forth? We would all affirm that He is. Genesis 1, in verses 26 and 27 certainly establishes God as Creator of us all and the giver of life. I will quote it quickly.

Genesis 1:26 Let us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness.

This takes work. I would say it takes a lot of work, and it is a work that God has never stopped being engaged in. The apostle Paul confirms this as he speaks to the men of Athens in Acts 17 and proclaims that the unknown God that they worship is their Creator. Picking up his words in verse 24 through verse 28. You can turn there if you like. He teaches them that

Acts 17:24-28 "God, who made the world and everything in it, since He is Lord of heaven and earth, does not dwell in temples made with hands. Nor is He worshiped with men's hands, as though He needed anything, since He gives life to all, breath, and all things. And He has made from one blood [this refers us back to Genesis 1:26] every nation of men to dwell on the face of the earth, and has determined their preappointed times and the boundaries of their dwellings [Think God's stewardship here and His providential care He daily sustains His creation with. Verse 27 tells us why He does this., so that they should seek the Lord, in the hope that they might grope for Him and find Him, though He is not far from each one of us; for in Him we live and move and have our being, as some of your own poets have said, 'For we are also His offspring.'"

Certainly these verses show us how active our God is in His creation and gives us reason that we can have a strong confidence in Him to fulfill His purpose with each one of us as we seek and then as we find Him at the very center of our lives.

Please turn over to the book of Psalms. King David put this thought so beautifully, showing how much we can put our confidence in our God as He looks after our every need. Psalm 36 and we will read verses 5 through 10. I want you to notice how broad and how large are the topics he uses to praise God with, topics only God could fulfill to the brim for His creation. Words like mercy, clouds, mountains, righteousness, lovingkindness, and more.

Psalm 36:5-10 Your mercy, O Lord, is in the heavens; Your faithfulness reaches the clouds. Your righteousness is like the great mountains; Your judgments are a great deep; O Lord, You preserve man and beast. How precious is Your lovingkindness, O God! Therefore the children of men put their trust under the shadow of Your wings. They are abundantly satisfied with the fullness of

Your house, and You give them drink from the river of Your pleasures. For with You is the fountain of life; in Your light we see light. O, continue Your lovingkindness to those who know You, and Your righteousness to the upright in heart.

With that being said, and as important as God working out His responsibilities are in building our confidence in Him, have we ever considered that confidence is very much a two-way affair? Are not the trials we endure and the testing He puts on His saints largely concerned with our faith and our love for Him? Why would He not want to know that He can have a good measure of confidence and find obedience in each one of us? This is very common to see in our Bibles, and we can look at some of the testing He has done with His people to confirm His confidence in them, knowing that much of what they experience also applies to us. For it is done that they may be made more complete in their faith and in concert with His purposes.

Like I said, the list of many of those God has tested, from Adam to Moses to the apostles, virtually all who serve the living God will be tested, and we should expect no less for ourselves. But we are taught by God and we are tested by Him. It can be as straightforward as that in understanding many of our life's travails. The apostle James in chapter 1, verse 2, we know it well, starts his message on this very topic and tells us to

James 1:2-4 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.

At first blush, this statement to count it all joy sounds absurd. But look back in time, look back to your past trials and the help you received in enduring and learning from it, knowing it has worked to strengthen your faith. I know this is true because you are here today. You are still here pursuing the will of God. And that is a joyful outcome. God chastens those He loves. I need say no more than that.

The first example on my list of three we all know very well, as it is concerned with the father of the faithful, and concerns the testing and

instructions God gave Abraham to sacrifice his only son Isaac on Mount Moriah. Please turn with me to the book of Genesis, chapter 22. Genesis 22 and we are going to pick it up in verse 1. I am not going to read it all, but enough. My New King James has a chapter heading yours may too: Abraham's Faith Confirmed.

Genesis 22:1-2 Now it came to pass after these things that God tested Abraham, and said to him, "Abraham!" And he said, "Here I am." And He said, "Take now your son, your only son Isaac, whom you love, and go to the land of Moriah, and offer him there as a burnt offering on one of the mountains of which I shall tell you."

Drop down to verse 9, please.

Genesis 22:9-10 Then they came to the place of which God had told him, and Abraham built an altar there and placed the wood in order; and he bound Isaac his son and laid him on the altar, upon the wood. And Abraham stretched out his hand, took the knife to slay his son. But the Angel of the Lord called to him, "Abraham, Abraham!" So he said, "Here I am." And He [the Angel of the Lord] said, "Do not lay your hand on the lad, or do anything to him. For now I know that you fear God, since you have not withheld your son, your only son from Me."

This, by anyone's standards, was a major test of Abraham's faith and obedience to the Lord. How convinced God was of Abraham's commitment to Himself prior to this event, we could argue or debate about it. But the text shows that there was room for doubt if Abraham would follow God's instructions under the most trying of circumstances. The issue becomes settled when God said in verse 12, "Now I know." Whatever doubt or questions God may have had no longer existed, and it is immediately following this test of His obedience that God commits Himself to fulfill promises and blessings upon Abraham and his descendants. And those promises and blessings you and I are enjoying this very moment.

In verse 18 of this same chapter, God tells Abraham what He will do and why He will do it. We will quote verse 18.

Genesis 22:18 "In your seed all the nations of the earth shall be blessed, because you have obeyed My voice."

What a wonderful outcome occurs when both parties in a covenant have a complete confidence in each other. This faith, this trust becomes a strong pillar in a healthy relationship between both parties. Confidence is not limited only to be between God and His creation. Trust and faithfulness is vital in human relationships as well. Certainly within the marriage covenant. But what about friendships?

They stand on the grounds of concern and trust in each other. If we could look over all of the failed relationships in the human sphere, we would most certainly find the trust and our confidence somehow got compromised and eroded until separation was the only option going forward. This lack that can be driven by any number of human failings: lust, greed, fear, self-centered behavior—probably top of the list by one or both individuals—creates contention. And the tipping point for what once was is no longer able to stand. All of us over the years have seen or gone through this. Even God has had to deal with rejection.

Let us move on to my second example of trial and confidence in God on display for all of us to learn by. Again, as with Abraham, a very familiar event we all know. This would be found in the book of Daniel. But before we go there, I want us to consider, in my humble opinion, that the statement by God, "Now I know" is not limited to Abraham and other well-known persons from the pages of our Bible. But it is a question that needs to be sought out and answered for each and every one of us.

We cannot, or maybe better said, we should not expect that anyone God has called to be a firstfruit of His harvest and chosen to be among those presented to His Son as His bride, are not fully vetted in their commitment to the Groom. The pillar of confidence in each relationship with Christ must be solid and must be unmovable. And this confidence are with those that have been built up over a lifetime of sacrificial love by both parties, that is God and us, that produce a 100% commitment to each other. And as we saw with Abraham, it can also show a pattern of God's in putting forth blessings with us as well. And that just does all the more to add to our confidence with our Creator. It creates the perfect peace that we all seek to have.

Isaiah 30 has wonderful words for us spoken within the context of Israel being chastised for going down to Egypt for help. Verse 15, pulled out, looks wonderful.

Isaiah 30:15 For thus says the Lord God, the Holy One of Israel: "In returning and rest you shall be saved; in quietness and confidence shall be your strength."

For us, who can struggle in the flesh to maintain our commitment with God, the promise of God to support us in our times of temptation is of great importance for us in building our confidence with God. Paul tells us that

I Corinthians 10:13 No temptation [no trial] has overtaken you except such as is common to man; but God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation [trial] will also make the way of escape, that you may be able to bear [or endure] it.

God's promises of help are many. They are one stacked on top of each other, like the wood that is put on the altar in its proper order. For His people they become like a beautiful tapestry that enhances our lives for giving us strength to endure and confidence in God for all good things. Are not His mercies renewed each day? I think all of us have a complete confidence in God to do all things necessary to work out our own individual salvation. We do.

Usually what we can lack is the confidence in ourselves and our own ability to get things right. We have seen ourselves fall short and end up being in a state of discouragement and certainly not very confident in ourselves. Psalm 42, verse 5 speaks to this thought and points us to what we need to focus our hopes saying,

Psalm 42:5 Why are you cast down, O my soul? And why are you disquieted within me? Hope in God, for I shall yet praise Him for the help of His countenance.

My advice, if he is willing to hear it, is take any feeling of discouragement to God early on. Give Him the opportunity to pardon and lift you up and never limit His love for you but remain confident in His strength and the compassion that He has for His children.

Now we can get back to our second example of those men being tested and showing complete and unequivocal confidence in God's providential care. So strong was their conviction, I am surprised only one of them was mentioned in Hebrews 11, of those who came through trials by great faith and a bold confidence in God's ability to save.

I am speaking of Daniel and his three companions, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah that were captive in Babylon with him. I am reading into the scriptures where Hebrews 11:33 said, "who stopped the mouths of lions," that it is referring to Daniel. Maybe it is referring to Samson or even someone else. Be that as it may, I cannot read of these four men and not see how confident they were in their God and have become a wonderful example of both faith and of the Lord's oversight when we are in trials and hard pressed by the culture around us.

Please turn over to Daniel chapter 3 if you have not jumped there already. We will read some of this episode and in particular where King Nebuchadnezzar decided He needed a statue set up for everyone to worship. I know people do crazy things all the time to promote themselves. Down here in Southern California and Hollywood, they only get a piece of the sidewalk to put before everyone. It is just another testament that human nature does not change.

Daniel 3:1 Nebuchadnezzar the king made an image of gold, whose height was sixty cubits [aka 90 feet] and its width was six cubits. He set it up in the plains of Dura, in the province of Babylon.

Verses 2 and 3 tells us all the dignitaries gathered together to worship the image. I always stop there when I read this and say, "But where was Daniel?" I have an idea and hope to tell you that someday.

Daniel 3:6 "And whoever does not fall down and worship the gold image shall be cast immediately into the midst of the burning fiery furnace."

Daniel 3:8 Therefore at that time certain Chaldeans came forward and accused the Jews.

Drop down to verse 12, please, saying,

Daniel 3:12 "There are certain Jews whom you have set over the affairs of the province of Babylon: Shadrach [aka Hananiah,] Meshach, [aka Mishael], and Abed-nego [aka Azariah. I like using their Jewish names. We always tend to use their Babylonian names.]; these men, O king, have not paid due regard to you. They do not serve your gods or worship the gold image which you have set up."

Now drop down to verse 14.

Daniel 3:14 Nebuchadnezzar spoke, saying to them, "Is it true, Shadrach, Meshach, Abednego, that you do not serve my gods or worship the gold image which I have set up?"

I do not know about you, but I sense trouble here. We are now at a tipping point of critical ideological mass when something has to happen as two opposing forces are ready to collide. We have a crime scene on the plains of Dura. We have the accusers, those jealous and pesky Chaldeans. We have a victim and a judge all rolled up into one vain king, and we have the potential death penalty in the background in the form of a fiery furnace. We see the accused who defend themselves by pleading guilty.

It really has become an interesting lesson of faith for all of us, and it just overflows with the confidence these three men have in our God, their God. However we say it, it is the same God for all of us. Verse 16 gives us a well-placed reply to the king. Notice the narrative. It is not one of them speaking,

but all three with one voice, united together and holding fast in their beliefs, speaking so confidently over the roar of the fire to governmental power as they witnessed their faith before God and men.

Daniel 3:16 Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego answered and said to the king, "O Nebuchadnezzar, we have no need to answer you in this matter."

The king's suggestion to keep them out of the penalty phase of this offense fell on deaf ears, as it were. Verses 17 and 18 wraps up their rebuttal, telling everyone listening that they serve one God only, and no matter the outcome for this crime, it is His call and not yours, O king, to decide. Certainly a powerful lesson of faith and confidence.

We are at that point in my message that one may be thinking—I know I was thinking this, I am not anymore—James, you are just doing a message about faith and trust and calling it confidence in and with God. Well, my answer to that is yes and no.

Yes, when we can see how closely confidence needs to be in the expression of our faith. But no, in that it is not faith, but an attribute of a strong faith. Like faith, it is a character trait or a virtue, if you will, that grows over time with faith as our relationship with God progresses. It is the trait of confidence we need to help us produce good works. Confidence gives faith its outward expression, so in this sense, confidence also supports our outward actions of our faith, often referred to as works. We become confident that the works we do truly are an expression of our faith towards God, and it helps us to believe that God is a rewarder to those whose faith breaks forth in actions that seek to please Him.

And it is a gift one receives by the working of God's Spirit within us. This can be seen as an action of one faith in the book of Hebrews. We will pick up one verse in chapter 10, reading verse 19.

Hebrews 10:19 Therefore, brethren, having boldness to enter the Holiest by the blood of Jesus.

Boldly is also translated as confidence, as we see written here by Paul, or Apollos. I say that because the author of Hebrews is still a bit of a mystery and there are in some quarters those that suggest it was written by Apollos rather than Paul. I see it written by God, and if I needed to know who wrote it, He would have told me. I am confident of that. What we see, then, is boldly being used as an action or a type of approach we are to take, but it is not faith, but the application of one's faith, how we present our faith before God confidently and boldly.

And why not? Are we not the apple of His eye, constantly under His care and affection for us? We should always be ready to come to God with a high degree of confidence but with a contrite heart as well. Godly confidence is not what we see so much in the world. A lot of men have a lot of confidence in themselves, but this is not the confidence we seek.

Men get full of bluster and pride and behave in a confidence that will never submit to God. Nor is it wanted. They find their strength from within themselves. We can only find it as a strength of faith from God. As Paul said in Acts 17, we live and move by what God has done for us.

Maybe the closest example I can think of (I am going to mess this up in a second), in confidence entering into the presence of the king is the way Hadassah, that is, Esther, who went before King Ahasuerus to begin the process of securing the future of her people. Chapter 4, verse 16 shows how she prepares herself when she told Mordecai

Esther 4:16 "Go, gather all the Jews who are present in Shushan, and fast for me; neither eat nor drink for three days, night or day. My maids and I will fast likewise. And so I will go to the king, which is against the law; and if I perish, I perish!"

Feel confident. In chapter 5 we will pick up one verse when she answers the king, verse 4,

Esther 5:4 So Esther answered, "If it pleases the king, let the king and Haman come today to a banquet that I have prepared for him."

Godly fasting always produces humility. And though it is not directly stated, these verses present to us a picture of a strong, godly woman who was both confident and humble in her approach before her king. This, in my view, is also what we are to understand when we read Hebrews 10:19. Also in Hebrews, we have verses 21 through 23 that speak to our confidence in coming before God when he uses the words assurance or without wavering.

Hebrews 10:21-23 And having a High Priest over the house of God, let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water. Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for He who promised is faithful.

Hebrews 4, verse 16 teaches us how even when we come before God in prayer, something we do most often, to do so in confidence that we may find what we seek. I am reminded, of course, just now in my head about Christ saying, "Seek, knock. Put some effort into it. Be confident." Verse 16 is very clear.

Hebrews 4:16 Let us therefore come boldly to the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need.

My last thought I can fit in here today concerning confidence takes us back to where we started in Genesis. For the one great lie Satan spoke to Eve was designed to strip her belief in what God had spoken to her and Adam, and in so doing, he was taking her confidence in God that she would have had to get her to lean on her own understanding. He is tricky, that Satan. Verses 4 and 5 sets the stage for this.

Genesis 3:4-5 Then the serpent said to the woman, "You will not surely die. For God knows that in the day you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil.'

These two now, Adam and Eve, went from walking with God to hiding from Him. Not good. From confidence in His care for them to being fearful of what He might do because of their transgression. Let it not be so with us. Let us confidently seek Him at all times in faith and for all reasons, and boldly

come before the throne of grace. For those of you who remember when I started here, I said I would look at three examples, but I timed this message and it did not have time to fit it in, but I do want to reference it for you.

It is one you know well. Luke 8:43-47, where the woman with the flow of blood for 12 years, is trembling but determined to reach out and touch the garment so she may be healed, confident in her faith. And Christ said she had much faith. Confident in her faith that this could and should be done. And it was—a lesson learned.