

Sermon AMC- A Faith More Precious than Gold

Scripture: 1 Peter 1:3-9

Sunday, April 23, 2017

Last Saturday when I met Walter he told me this joke. There was a young boy who went to meet his grandmother in the hospital. When we got there his grandmother was sleeping. Now he did not want to disturb his grandmother so he sat there by her bed and looking around the room. Now next to her bed he saw that there was one of those tables that patients are served their meals on when they are in bed. On that table was a bowl of peanuts. The boy reaches in and pops one into his mouth. They are a little salty and seem pretty good to him so he pops another into his mouth. Soon the peanuts are all gone. Now after sometime his grandmother wakes up. The boy looks at his grandma and they are happy to see each other. But then the boy tells his grandmother, grandma I need to apologize to you. So the grandmother looks puzzled and says, “what do you want to apologize for son?” So he tells her, grandma there was this bowl of peanuts by your bed and I tried one and then another and before I realized it, they were all gone. When the grandma heard that, she said, oh, sonny don’t worry about that. I was already done with those peanuts, I had licked off all the chocolate around them.

Now don’t worry, I did not see any peanuts in Walter’s room and was not tempted in the same manner so no worries there!!! Today we are going to talk about faith. Now last Sunday was the most important Sunday in the life of the church because we get to celebrate the most important aspect of our faith, the fact that Christ rose from the dead. And faith in that fact, is the corner stone on which the whole edifice of our Christian life is built around. So this Sunday we are going to focus on what this first Epistle of Peter says about faith itself.

Now faith has become such a generalized word. We are a nation full of people of many faiths and so many faith based organizations. So when the word faith is used, it could mean something very different from what 1 Peter 1, 7 is referring to what it talks about the “genuineness of faith”.

So the first thing to establish is, when you and I talk about faith as it refers to the Bible, what is the contents of our faith? To answer that, we will rereading verses 3 to 5 of our passage today. It says, **By his great mercy he has given us a new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, 4and into an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven for you, 5who are being protected by the power of God through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time.** There are a lot of elements embedded in those two verse so we are going to look at it in parts. The first think we have to have faith in is the idea of Christ’s resurrection itself. Apostle Paul said that if Christ did not rise from the dead then everything that we believe in as Christians comes crashing down. Let’s look at why he says that. You see because if Christ did not rise from the dead, it means you have no way of establishing the truth of His claim that he was the Son of God. If Christ was not God, then his death on the cross was not special. If Christ’s death was not special, our sins have not been forgiven. If our sins are not forgiven, we have no relationship with God. If we have no relationship with God, we also have no hope of eternal life. And if we have no hope of eternal life and all we have is what we get in this world, then Apostle Paul says in 1 Cor 15:19, we are to be pitied above all human beings. Further if Christ did not rise from the dead, it makes the whole NT false and the whole OT is pointing to someone who is yet to come. If the Messiah is yet to come, then the whole church of the last 2000 years is just a bunch of misinformed dummies.

But if it was that easy to demolish the premise that the church stands on, the fact my friends is that no one has been able to prove that Jesus did not rise from the dead in 2000 years really says something.

So Christian faith, is the conviction that Jesus Christ was who he claimed he was and he did rise from the dead demonstrating his power and his purpose. Now if we go back to Apostle Paul, he will tell you that, that if you believe the miracle on the first Easter, then there is more to that story that directly involves you. If you believe Christ rose from the dead, that enables you to be born anew as well. Your new birth, comes with the title, a child of God. And as God's child, you get three amazing things coming to you. You get to experience a resurrection yourself, to will inherit something remarkable directly from God that is kept in heaven for you that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading. And finally you will have special protection of God's power that is surrounding you at all times. Three things that make every believer nothing less than royalty. So what is the content of faith? Believing specifically that Christ rose from the dead, which results in a new birth for those who believe, believing that you are surrounded by God's protection and believing that eventually you will inherit an eternal life that is preserved in heaven for the believer. This is the content of faith my friends. God's promises are the content of our faith.

But here is the problem my friends, Apostle Paul is saying holding on to that content is not going to be easy. If you hold on to those truths, you are going to experience the next aspect of faith, the deep testing that comes with it. Verse 6 and 7 put it like this. You will have to suffer various trials or a "testing by fire". The test of faith is this. Every single element of the content of your faith will be put in a circumstance that will test you ability to believe. Think of the promises in the text we are looking at. The fact of Christ's resurrection was only witnessed by 500 people. Those eyewitnesses would have lived

say for the next 20 or 30 years. So within a few decades there was no one who had witnessed the resurrected Christ and everyone had to believe without seeing. And that is just the first element. Verse 3 also promises that through the resurrection we have been given a new birth that will result in protection here on earth by God's power and a fantastic inheritance after we die. Now here is the deal. You will say, I do believe I am born again, but do I feel any different from before. Not really. Do I feel protected by God's power. That is something I have to take by faith too because I still fall sick, I still get into accidents, I still face injustice and random tragedies. In fact I can go around telling people God is protecting me and then in practice face more challenges even than the average person. So people will mock you and tell you, so where is that special protection that God is talking about? Life will really test your faith in God's protection. Beyond that there will be times when you will feel that God is just totally silent or that God is not even present. Now that is the highest level of test a believer can ever go through. For some of you, it could feel like, there is a whole Grand Canyon between what God has promised and where you live on a daily basis. And as far as the inheritance kept in heaven is concerned people will say, who knows what happens after we die. Nobody has gone to heaven and come back to tell us what it is like. If someone claims to have come back from heaven no one is going to believe them either. So our eternal inheritance is yet another element of our faith that we just have to believe and everything in this world will make you doubt it. Why people will even mock you for believing that God exists, let alone eternal life. So every single element of the content of your faith is going to be tested by the intense fire that this world will throw at you.

To the human mind, the suffering you go through as a believer just does not make sense. But God's logic is not our logic and I want to quickly take you through the logic of

faith. In our passage Apostle Paul puts it this way, the trails you go through are to test the genuineness of your faith. So let me draw out the logic of faith we see explained in the whole salvation story.

In the garden of Eden when Adam and Eve were tempted what is the percentage of people that fell for the temptation? Well it was 100%. Romans 3:23 says “we have all fallen short of the glory of God”. But within this 100% failure rate, Ephesians 1:4 says he has chosen a group of people even before the foundation of the world God chose an elect group who would be holy and without fault in his eyes. What is the percentage of elect? The Bible does not say. Christ’s death on the cross makes it possible to have a group of people considered Holy and blameless. And when some people put their faith and trust in Jesus Christ they actually are considered Holy and blameless by God the Father. But, God’s enemy asks God this question, ok God, so some people want to follow you? But are they doing it because they love you or are they doing it because of what they can get out of you? This is the question put to God about Job right? So in response, God says, I know the answer to that question, but you will see for yourself if you sift my followers like wheat. Take away the benefits, let them go through the trials, test every aspect of the content of their faith and see what happens. So the testing happens. And it is hard and depressing and painful. It is hard for the believer and it is hard for God as well because remember God is not having a party while you and I are going through suffering. God is always in the fire with you. But in the end, it is not God who changes or has learned something about us. Remember Ephesians 1:4, God knew the end result from the foundation of the world itself. What has changed is that our faith that starts out as a baby faith, naïve and still very self-centered, becomes strong and bold and able to withstand trials and pure and steadfast. Let me share a little bit about Walter’s faith right now.

That is where God wants to take our faith. That is the logic of the tests of our faith. May each of us, grow in our faith so that one day, God will welcome us into His arms, as pure, Holy and blameless, because you have endured faithfully till the end. Let us pray.