Sermon Summary 7 May 2023

Hot to Please God: by Graham Mol

There are many different ways and things we can do to please the Lord but there is something that underpins them all.

> Now without faith it is impossible to please God, since the one who draws near to Him must believe that He exists and that He rewards those who seek Him. (**Hebrews 11:6**)

Without faith it is impossible to please God. This is a strong statement to make but the author of Hebrews backs it up with the examples of Faith we find in the heroes of Scripture. By faith they were approved. He is logical in saying that to draw near to God you need to believe He exists and, not only that, believe that He rewards those who seek Him. Because it is such a simple and logical statement we may nod our heads in agreement and move straight past this sentence to read about all the heroes of the faith. In doing so we may not grasp the significance of what is said: God is pleased by our faith in Him.

Let's consider some examples. Before we go back to the Old Testament to look at the primary example of a hero of the faith, let us consider two occasions in the Gospels where Jesus was pleasantly surprised by faith.

> **Matthew 8:5-13**
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> When He entered Capernaum, a centurion came to Him, pleading with Him, "Lord, my servant is lying at home paralyzed, in terrible agony." He said to him, "Am I to come and heal him?" "Lord," the centurion replied, "I am not worthy to have you come under my roof. But just say the word, and my servant will be healed. For I too am a man under authority, having soldiers under my command. I say to this one, 'Go,' and he goes; and to another, 'Come,' and he comes; and to my servant, 'Do this!' and he does it." Hearing this, Jesus was amazed and said to those following Him, "Truly I tell you, I have not found anyone in Israel with so great a faith. I tell you that many will come from east and west to share the banquet with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven. But the sons of the kingdom will be thrown into the outer darkness where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth." Then Jesus told the centurion, "Go. As you have believed, let it be done for you." And his servant was healed that very moment.

We can read between the lines to understand that Jesus is pleased with the faith of the Centurion. He uses his faith as a teaching point – a point of comparison to the unbelief of the Jews – God's own people. Who is it that will share the banquet with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob? Many from the east and the west – those seen as "outsiders" like this Gentile centurion. By his faith He will share in the reward but the sons of the kingdom – the people of God who might expect to be included in the feast – they will find themselves on the outside because they do not believe.

Let's jump to our next example

> **Matthew 15:21-28**
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> When Jesus left there, He withdrew to the area of Tyre and Sidon. Just then a Canaanite woman from that region came and kept crying out, "Have mercy on me, Lord, Son of David! My daughter is severely tormented by a demon." Jesus did not say a word to her. His disciples approached Him and urged Him, "Send her away because she's crying out after us." He replied, "I was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel." But she came, knelt before Him, and said, "Lord, help me!" He answered, "It isn't right to take the children's bread and throw it to the dogs." "Yes, Lord," she said, "yet even the dogs eat the crumbs that fall from their masters' table." Then Jesus replied to her, "Woman, your faith is great. Let it be done for you as you want." And from that moment her daughter was healed.

There's a bit to unpack here. Jesus had moved quite far away the Galilee area, 50-100km away. The Canaanites had been the pagans that the Israelites had fought against for the Promised Land, traditionally enemies of Israel. Yet this Canaanite woman comes to Jesus recognising Him as the Messiah, "Lord, Son of David". She begs for His help and is persistent. Disciples ask Jesus to help her so she can leave and stop bothering them. Jesus ignoring her may seem inconsistent with His character but we see that He gives the reason being that His mission, His purpose is to minister to the lost sheep of Israel. As the apostle Paul would write later:

> For I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God that brings salvation to everyone who believes: first to the Jew, then to the Gentile. For in the gospel the righteousness of God is revealed – a righteousness that is by faith from first to last, just as it is written: "The righteous will live by faith." (**Romans 1:16-17**)

It was not an issue of rejection but rather of timing. Jesus' purpose and mission at this point was to the Jews. But salvation would be offered to all. The analogy of the children's bread and the dogs may seem harsh to us but it was one that the women understood. The bread was for the family – Israel – it would not be appropriate to take what was for the family and through it to the dogs (Gentiles). She acknowledges this but asks that maybe of the crumbs that fall, some of the blessings be extended to her in her time of need.

In saying this she demonstrates a faith that God's own people, the children of Israel were lacking. That is why Jesus says – Your faith is great. He is pleased by her faith and thus rewards her with healing for her daughter.

This foreshadows what Paul wrote: "The righteous will live by faith." Righteousness, right standing with God, is linked to faith. Without faith it is impossible to please God.

Let's now jump back into the Old Testament and consider Abraham. He was a friend of God, one who pleased the Lord. He is regarded as the father of the nation of God's people. He was blessed in this way because God was pleased with him. What was it about Abraham that pleased the Lord? The message in Scripture makes it clear – it was His faith in God:

> So also Abraham "believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness." Understand, then, that those who have faith are children of Abraham. Scripture foresaw that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, and announced the gospel in advance to Abraham: "All nations will be blessed through you." So those who rely on faith are blessed along with Abraham, the man of faith. (**Galatians 3:6-9**)

When we have faith in God we show that we are truly sons and daughters of Abraham, included in God's family. It is not through impressive deeds, or attempts at perfection, getting it all right nor is it through genealogy or tradition. It is through our own personal faith in Him.

About two weeks ago one of our members shared a video clip with me where the speaker in the video asks the question: How does the thief on the cross fit your theology? (When Jesus was crucified, there were two other thieves crucified with him. One hurled insults at Jesus but the other, acknowledged his own guilt and asks for mercy placing his faith in Jesus.)

How does the thief on the cross fit your theology? There was no baptism, no confirmation, no communion, he had never given any money, never spoken in tongues, never wore church clothes. He never said the sinner's prayer, he was a thief.

Jesus didn't take away his pain, or heal his body. Yet it was that very thief who walked into paradise with Jesus that day. Simply by believing.

He had nothing to offer Jesus except that belief. No status, or achievements – he was just a naked man dying on a cross who recognised the Son of God.

> "For God so loved the world that He gave His one and only Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish but have eternal life." (**John 3:16**)

Just believe. For without faith it is impossible to please God.

So often we get caught up in doing stuff for the Lord, worrying if we are doing enough, getting it right. Yes there are many things we can do to serve the Lord, it is a joy to serve Him. But what pleases Him most is placing our faith in Him. To have faith in Jesus is to entrust our lives to Him. To believe that He is always enough no matter our need. That to Him we run for He is our Saviour. And to Him we listen for He is our Lord. The Righteous will live by faith.