

Faith Like a Potato

There are many people in the world who don't believe that the Bible is the Word of God.

That it doesn't record real historical events or people but is a collection of myths and fables.

They say that it is absurd to believe that God created the heavens and the earth in seven days.

They have no idea how the universe came into being, but they're sure it wasn't created.

That kind of logic would have given Aristotle a headache, but it suits them fine.

They would call the story of Jonah a fairy tale like Jack and the Beanstalk or Snow White.

They would put it in the same category as Aesop's Fables—children's stories that were designed to teach us lessons.

Now it is true that the Bible was written to teach us a lesson.

But it's a lesson which is far more important than one of Aesop's fables.

That lesson was how we can be saved from our sins and have eternal life rather than spend eternity in pain and torment.

And God's way of writing it was to encode it in human history—the history of real people whose lives and experiences teach this very, very important lesson.

God said through the prophet Isaiah: *“As the rain and the snow come down from heaven, and do not return to it without watering the earth and making it bud and flourish...so is my word that goes forth from my mouth: it will not return to me empty, but will accomplish what I desire and achieve the purpose for which I sent it.”*

Now among the other things that Scripture teaches us is that God Himself is not a physical being, but a Spirit.

But it also teaches that He appears to us in physical ways.

He appeared to Abraham in the form of a priest by the name of Melchizedek.

Melchizedek communed Abraham with wine and bread and Abraham responded by giving Melchizedek a tenth of everything he had.

Later God appeared to Abraham as a flaming torch and made a covenant with him and all his descendants.

Still later he appeared again as an angel and promised Abraham that he would give him more descendants than there were stars in the sky.

God appeared to Moses in the form of a burning bush and commanded him to return to Egypt and lead the Israelites out of slavery to Pharaoh.

God gathered Moses and the children of Israel together at the foot of Mount Sinai where he descended on the mountain them in fire and smoke and lightning.

Then he called Moses up on the mountain and gave him the Ten Commandments on two tablets of stone.

Later, in Canaan he appeared to Joshua on the day before the battle of Jericho as "the Captain of the Lord's army" and gave Joshua specific instructions as to how the Israelites should conquer the city.

Even though God Himself is a Spirit he does not reject physical things evil simply because they are physical.

After all, He created the physical universe and called it good.

He created Adam and Eve in His own image and placed them in a paradise called Eden.

He blessed them and instructed them to go forth and populate the earth.

He loved his creatures so much that in the fulness of time He became one—a physical man who was human in every way.

But although He was completely human, he was also God which is why he was called "Immanuel" which means "God with us."

He took the name Y'shua or Jesus, which means "salvation."

He was conceived in the womb of a human woman and grew in her womb for nine months like any other infant.

His mother gave him birth, wrapped him in a binding cloth and nursed him like any other child.

Utterly common; utterly human, utterly physical.

As a human being He would feel temptation like every other human being felt.

And some Christians have a problem dealing with this.

They are more comfortable with the idea of Jesus' divinity than we are with the idea of his humanity.

It makes them uneasy to think about the physical aspects of Jesus' life—that he experienced all the normal functions of a human body and felt all the temptations to which human flesh is subject.

Many false teachings about Jesus arose from people's inability to accept his humanity.

That's why the three great ecumenical creeds—the Apostles' Creed, the Nicene Creed, and the Athanasian Creed—all strongly affirm Jesus' physical humanity.

"Born of the virgin Mary" and "suffered under Pontius Pilate"—did you ever wonder why these two particular human beings are mentioned in the creeds?

It was to emphasize that Jesus was *born* of human flesh and that he was *subject* to human flesh.

Like every other human being Jesus was born under the Law, so that he could take the burden and curse of the Law upon himself as only a flesh and blood person could do.

To redeem us, he had to become like us in every way so that he could reconcile us with God the Father.

And Jesus' never "gave back" his humanity.

He remains forever man even as he is forever God.

He ascended in the flesh to be with His Father and He will come back in the flesh at the end of time to judge mankind.

In the meantime he comes to us in His physical body and blood in the supper he gave to his church.

Not only is Jesus a physical person but he ministered in physical ways to people when he walked the earth.

At Cana he turned water into wine.

He rubbed mud into a blind man's eyes to restore his sight.

He suffered physical pain when he was scourged with a whip and nailed to the cross.

He suffered unimaginable agony as he endured the torments of hell for six hours.

He rose from the dead in a physical body which he retains for all eternity in heaven.

The author of Hebrews writes, *"...he had to be made like his brothers in every way, in order that he might become a merciful and faithful high priest in service to God, and that he might make atonement for the sins of the people."*

But Jesus was not only our Savior on the cross, he is our Savior and our Sanctifier each and every day of our lives.

He is our high priest in heaven where he intercedes for us before the throne of God.

He helps us avoid sinning sin by strengthening us when we are tempted, as the author of Hebrews writes: *"Because he himself suffered when he was tempted, he is able to help those who are being tempted."*

Jesus wants to be WITH us every moment of our lives; he wants to fill our minds and hearts with the peace that passes understanding.

So how do we avail ourselves of his help?

By striving to **be with Jesus** as much as he desires to be with us.

By listening to His Word every chance we can get.

By reading it when we can't hear it.

By asking Him for help and thanking Him for giving it every time He crosses our minds.

By praising Him and singing psalms and spiritual songs to him every day.

By communing with Him and accepting through faith that we are receiving His body and blood when we do.

By sharing our faith in Him with anybody who will listen.

Our faith can seem as physical a thing to us as our bodies.

Karen and I watched a movie the other night entitled "Faith Like Potatoes."

It was based on the true life story of a man and his wife who were farmers in South Africa.

The man started out as an atheist but was converted by a missionary and became a devout believer.

One night some Zulus came to his house and begged him to come minister to a young woman who had been struck by lightning and was dying.

He prayed over her and she recovered and as a result he developed a following both among both the Zulus and white South Africans.

When a severe drought hit South Africa and all the farmers' crops were failing—including his own—he held a large prayer meeting at a sports stadium.

He urged all those present to pray to God and trust God to deliver them out of the drought.

As a token of his own trust in God, he announced that he would immediately mortgage his farm and use the money to plant his fields full of potatoes.

This seemed like lunacy to the people at the prayer meeting: of all the crops he might have chosen to plant, potatoes had the greatest need for water.

Nevertheless, he planted the potatoes.

Only minimal amounts of rain fell during the next few months, but when he went to harvest the potatoes, he ended up with a bumper crop.

People asked him where his great faith came from.

He answered that he didn't think of his faith as something abstract or spiritual but as something solid and tangible that you could wrap your hand around and know that it was there.

Something like a potato.

I like that description of faith.

Since Jesus was a physical man who did physical miracles, healed physically sick people, experienced physical pain, died a physical death and arose physically from death—why can't our faith be firm and solid and physical?

Like a potato?

There's an old joke about children's sermons which goes to the effect that whatever question the pastor asks, the answer is always "Jesus."

And you know, it's true.

Whatever question you have, Jesus is the answer.

Luther once said that if you were to cut the pages of the Bible at any point they would bleed Christ.

Christ IS what the Scriptures, both *Old and New Testaments*, are all about.

He is the beginning and the end, the first and the last, the alpha and the omega of everything.

So let's start the new year by praying that God will give us all faith like a potato!

Amen.

