

## Sermon- Doubt And Faith

About the time I turned 36 I realized that my life was a failure. I had left a marriage and a career in shambles. I was unemployed and had no marketable skills. I was an atheist and a cynic. I drank too much and talked too much and my wife of three years was beginning to wonder what she had married. Those were the bare facts of my life. My wife finally managed to drag me kicking and screaming to a church down the street. The preacher was the chaplain at a local penitentiary. He was a tough guy and he used truth like a bludgeon in order to get people's attention. He forced me to face up to the fact that I was an unholy mess and that I had no reason to place any hope in myself. My only hope lay in turning to God. Two months later I was a believer. Then God began to turn my life around. Soon after that I managed to get a job with a manufacturing company. I did well, I liked the job, my boss liked me and everything was green pastures and blue skies. Then one Friday afternoon the phone rang in my office. It was my boss. He said in a low voice: "would you please come to my office?" I was unnerved, to say the least. Friday afternoons were when people got fired. As I started the walk down the hallway to his office my mind was churning. What could I have done to get in trouble? I joked around a lot; had I offended someone important? By the time I reached my boss's office I was in a near panic. I knocked—he said "come in and close the door"—he motioned to a chair in front of his desk—I sat down. He put down the file he was reading and looked up at me. My heart was racing and my mouth was dry. "Powell," he said, "I'm getting a new company car and we'd like to let you buy the old one at a ridiculously low price as a token of fact that we think you are doing a good job." In one instant, panic turned into joy! Instead of getting fired, I was going to be the proud owner of a two-year-old Oldsmobile! I went home and Karen and I celebrated over a bottle of wine. As I recall, I did most of the talking. I've thought many times about what happened that day—about how 7 words had thrown me into a panic. God had turned my life around, I was overflowing with faith and confidence that he would always take care of me. I was doing a good job and nothing had happened to change that. Yet 7 words threw me into an emotional tailspin. Why? What had happened that day is that I had been attacked by something called **doubt**. There was no good reason that I should be in trouble, but **doubt** had thrown me into a panic. Doubt is not only a lack of confidence; doubt is a demonic power that continually gnaws at our heart. Luther described it as a spiritual disease and called it the "monster of uncertainty." One day you're growing and blossoming in your faith, thankful to God for all he's done for you and expecting that the future will be just as wonderful as the past. Then something scary pops up—your child gets seriously sick, your marriage starts to show strains, apart, your job appears to be in jeopardy—and the monster of doubt is staring you right in the face.

You think: God has always taken care of me in the past...but will he take care of me **this** time? Like our ancient enemy the devil, doubt is always prowling around like a lion looking for someone to devour. And sometimes are his dinner. Doubt is the monster that infected the two men in today's gospel lesson who were walking down the road to a town called Emmaus on the same day Jesus rose from the dead. These men knew their Old Testament scriptures—they knew that it had been prophesied for two thousand years that when Messiah came he would be rejected and killed and then raised up from the dead. Two days before they had watched as Jesus had been rejected and killed and on the day at hand they had heard that the tomb where his body had been laid was empty. But instead of regarding these events as evidence of fulfilled prophecy, showing that Jesus was the Messiah, they allowed doubt to lead them to despair. We must never, ever allow doubt to blind us to the truth of God's word.

Consider Abraham: he was almost 90 years old, his wife Sarah's womb was barren and he had given up all thoughts of having children. Then God promised Abraham a son. The facts said one thing but God said another and Abraham believed God. The years went by—six, seven, eight, nine years—and Abraham was almost 100 and his wife not far behind. The facts of the situation still said that there was not going to be any son. But Abraham trusted God's word and clung to his promise despite the facts. And he received his son Isaac, just as God had promised. The two men on the road to Emmaus lacked Abraham's faith and had let doubt blind them to the truth of God's promise. So what did Jesus do? Instead of revealing himself as the risen messiah, he pointed them to the Old Testament prophecies about him and restored their faith. Their hearts burned within them as they were convicted by the truth of God's word. Luther once said that every believer struggles with doubt in the inmost heart. When Jesus asked a man if he believed he could heal his son, the man replied, "Lord, I do believe—but help me with my unbelief." That's the most honest answer ever given! We're like the man: we believe, but the devil plants seeds of doubt in our minds, waters them with lies and unbelief springs up in us like an ugly weed. So what's the cure? Where there's a spiritual problem, God always provides a spiritual cure. And the cure for doubt is faith. Doubt makes sceptics; faith makes believers. Doubt comes from our enemy; faith comes from the holy spirit of God. Doubt sees only a fallen world where Murphy's Law reigns and everything will finally grind down to a screeching stop. Faith sees the kingdom of God growing and in the end, triumphant. Doubt sees the disease spreading, the wound festering and sin abounding. Faith sees the disease cured, the wound bound up, the sin washed away. Yet, ironically, faith has no power of its own; in fact faith is completely passive. It's been said that faith is the outstretched hand of a beggar receiving a gift from a king. For me, faith is a window the Holy Spirit opens up in our minds which allows the light of God's truth to shine in. This is why faith has no appetite for worldly facts: it feeds only on heavenly manna: the word proclaimed and the sacraments received.

Spirit-created and spirit-nourished faith can banish all doubts and fears as we navigate our way through this valley of the shadow of death. Through faith, God performs miracles in human lives every day. Through faith God saved the life of a woman named Kelly—a close friend of one of my daughters. Kelly had spent all of her life looking for meaning in the facts of her existence. But the facts were grim and she could find no meaning. Then about three years ago she became a believer and joined a local church. She had never been part of a church family before and the experience was exhilarating. Then about ten weeks ago Kelly began to feel sick. She developed a cough and became overwhelmed with fatigue. She went to her family doctor and he sent her immediately to the emergency room. She had contracted the covid-19 virus. The next day she fell into a coma and was placed on a ventilator. The doctors gave her a 40% chance of surviving. As she was going into the coma all she could think of was who would take care of her 3-year-old son if she died. While she was in the coma she had visions of her church family standing around her. What she didn't know is that members of her church had descended on the hospital in mass and were constantly praying for her. After several days in the coma, she revived and was restored to health. Kelly is positive that if this had happened to her before she was saved, she would not have survived. But the Lord who saved her soul also saved her body. Kelly recorded her account of this and her testimony is on the website of Fellowship Bible Church in Bainbridge. I urge you all to dial it up on Fellowship Bible's website and listen to it. It will add one more stone to the fortress of your faith and make you that much more invincible to doubt. God does these things all the time—we just don't always hear about them. But when we do, they give us confidence as we make our own journey down the long hallway to the boss's office that what awaits us there is a lot better than a used car. Amen.

