

FAITH – BUILT OR TRUTH OR EXPERIENCE?

“Where is your faith?” (Luke 8:25) Upon who or what is our faith built?

In the days of Jesus & the apostles, some experienced remarkable things:

- The widow from Nain got to see her son alive again. (**Luke 7:11-15**)
- A father (synagogue ruler) and mother got to have their little girl alive again. (**Mark 5**)
- A man at a pool in Bethesda could walk after being lame for 38 years. (**John 5**)
- Blind men could see. (**John 9**)
- Mary and Martha got to live with their brother again. (**John 11**)
- A storm ceased instantly as his disciples cried out in fear for their lives.
- Dorcas was presented alive to those who had so admired her works. (**Acts 9**)
- Many others saw and experienced firsthand the wonderful works of God.

The desire for spiritual experiences (experience oriented culture)

- Some believe that if they could just see a miracle, have some personal experience with God or an appearance of Jesus or the Holy Spirit or angels, or listen to someone who has had some experience (testimonials), that it would change their lives.
- There’s not one word from Lazarus about his experience. (or from any of the others in the NT who were raised from the dead). They could have sold many books telling their story.
- If Paul is relating a personal experience (or even the experience of another) in **2 Cor. 12**, he wrote nothing about what he heard because *it was not lawful for a man to utter*.
 - Paul didn’t use this experience to convince others to follow Jesus.
 - ◆ When gospel preaching is replaced by testimonials, confidence in the word of God has been replaced with the exaltation of self. Look at what God has done for me.
 - ⇒ What Christ has done for me is what he’s done for everyone!
- Paul did tell of his experience on the road to Damascus (**Acts 22; 26**), but he did so to convince others that Jesus had been raised from the dead. (**1 Cor. 15:8**)
 - He told no one else to expect the same thing to happen to them.
 - This was not even a “conversion experience.” (the beginning of it perhaps)
 - That experience alone was not the central story of his preaching.
 - ◆ He preached the gospel of Jesus Christ, not his experience(s). The changes he experienced, all of us can experience because of what Jesus did.

Did all those who experienced miracles believe and follow Jesus? (John 6)

- Did they believe in Jesus after the cross? Did they believe he had been raised from the dead and in doing so was declared to be the Christ, the Son of God?
- The apostles did not believe, even after being told the Lord had risen from the dead. Judas betrayed the Lord and took his life in despondent grief. Peter denied him in His presence (**Luke 22:61**)

None of those experiences guaranteed happiness (absence of pain/sorrow).

- Pain and sorrow did not cease for those who experienced or saw the miracles.
- We see the initial responses of folks after they were healed (rejoicing, glorifying God, following Jesus) and not how they did in the long run.
- And they all still died, even those healed and those who had been raised from the dead, i.e., Lazarus and the son of the widow of Nain. They may have even gotten sick again.
 - The chief priests and counsel sought to kill Lazarus. (**Jn. 12:10**)

What we should want is to live a life of faithfulness – faith + obedience.

- A faith based upon the truth found in scripture. (**Romans 10:17**)
 - What was the purpose of those events? (**John 20:31; Mark 16:20; 1 Cor. 14:22**)
 - We have a faith that is based on the words of eyewitnesses.
 - ◆ Jesus rebuked the apostles for not believing when they were first told by Mary and others that He had been raised from the grave. (**Mark 16:14**)
 - ◆ What did Jesus tell Thomas? *“Thomas, because you have seen Me, you have believed. Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed.”* (**Jn. 20:29**)
 - ◆ We don’t need a personal experience or a miracle to know that Jesus died for our sins and was raised from the dead. See **Luke 16:30-31**
 - In order to survive, to win the battle, we must have faith. We must trust our King.
- A life of obedience to Jesus built upon the faith that comes from hearing his word.
 - Feelings and emotions accompany faithfulness.
 - ◆ The eunuch went on his way rejoicing! Why? (**Acts 8**)
 - ◆ The apostles rejoiced *that they were counted worthy to suffer shame.* (**Acts 5:41**)
 - ◆ We can rejoice in trials – in having our faith tested. (**1 Peter 1:6-9**)
 - We know God when we keep His commandments. (**1 John 2:3-4**)
 - ◆ *“Experiencing God” “Encountering Jesus”*
 - ◆ We learn obedience as Jesus did and thereby learn to experience what He experienced. (highs and lows of trying to lead others to Christ) (**Heb. 5:8**)
 - ⇒ With sweat running down your face, friends asleep, mind and body groaning with the anticipation of suffering indescribable pain, saying to God, Your will be done and not mine. Finding the resolve to obey.
 - ⇒ With nails in your hands and feet, thorns in your scalp, bare back with open wounds rubbing against the wood of a cross, you pray for mercy for your enemies, make sure your mom is cared for, save one more soul, say nothing when it is in your power to avenge. Keep on obeying.
 - ◆ We can experience the emotions that Jesus experienced when we obey the Father.
 - ⇒ Grief, sadness, anger, frustration, disappointment, compassion, joy, love

“Authentic spiritual experience may include strong feelings of remorse over sin, a mighty sense of trust that surpasses the pain of a traumatic situation, an overpowering peace in the midst of trouble, the overwhelming sense of joy related to confidence and hope in God, intense sorrow over the lost, the exhilarating praise in understanding the glory of God, or a heightened zeal for ministry.”

(John MacArthur, *Charismatic Chaos*, p. 24)

The man at the pool was told to go and sin no more lest a worse thing happen to him.
(**John 5:14**)