

VIRTUE THAT COUNTS

Pursuing That Which Touches The Heart Of God

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—Chapter 3—

FAITH:

Fighting To See Things From God's Perspective

Faith that counts is having a reason to doubt God yet choosing to trust and believe Him.

Faith Defies the Physical Reality and Stands the Test of Time

If we have a practical reason or an experience as a basis for doubting God, yet we make a deliberate choice to trust Him, then that is faith that counts. Faith that counts defies reality and considers as evidence things of hope. It focuses on the promises of Him who is able to fulfil His purposes against all odds. Faith calls the witness of the Word of God as a basis that things are not only real when they are physical; they also are when they are not. Though faith defies reality, it doesn't deny it—this is important to note.

Faith is schooled in the wisdom that things that are were the creations from things that were not. Faith counts on God and not on the goings-on. It sees no limitation because it views the world from God's perspective. Faith holds out even at the dire contradiction as it counts on the option that, "... we know that all things work together for good to those who love God ..." (Rom. 8:28 NKJV). Faith is one of the virtues the apostle Paul mentioned that will remain after other things come to an end (1 Cor. 13:13). This means that even death itself—physical death—does not disqualify faith (Heb. 11:13, 39).

The popular and exhausted side of faith is that which avails results promptly or in due course—sooner rather than later. The result must be in this life. Most of the teachings we hear are about this. There is nothing wrong with faith that promptly gets what it seeks from God—it is scriptural.

However, there is the other side of faith that is not so much taught, leave alone liked. This is the kind of faith the apostle Paul was talking about in 1 Corinthians 13 and it is also what Hebrews 11:13,39 is talking about.

And now these three remain: faith, hope and love....
—1 Corinthians 13:13.

All these people were still living by faith when they died. They did not receive the things promised; they only saw them and welcomed them from a distance. And they admitted that they were aliens and strangers on earth.... These were all commended for their faith, yet none of them received what had been promised.

—Hebrews 11:13,39.

Abraham had this kind of faith . After so many years in waiting, he kept the hope alive. This is the kind of faith that stands the test of patience and endurance—it is a tested faith. We see in the following quotation that Abraham’s faith defied reality yet never denied it:

Against all hope, Abraham in hope believed and so became the father of many nations, just as it had been said to him, “So shall your offspring be.” Without weakening in his faith, he faced the fact that his body was as good as dead—since he was about a hundred years old—and that Sarah’s womb was also dead. Yet he did not waver through unbelief regarding the promise of God, but was strengthened in his faith and gave glory to God, being fully persuaded that God had power to do what he had promised.

—Romans 4:18-21.

Faith that counts is not that which commands mountains to move and they obey at once. It is, however, that which the mountains defy but still does not give up. There must be a persistence dimension to faith. Yes, it matters that faith should be resolute as to set mountains on motion but on a scale of quality, greater faith is that which believes even when things are apparently contradictory.

Faith that counts is that which does not consider to have lost should the things expected fail to materialise in this life or at the “right time”. Faith that counts doesn’t pay respect to a setback. To the contrary, it is energised by it. Faith that counts is that which believes that God is completely in control even if the physical reality doesn’t seem to prove it.

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Initially, I used to question the sincerity of Christians who claimed to teach faith and telling people to “just believe” when in their life they had “lost” a battle or two, in one way or the other. I would ask, for example: “This faith they are teaching and asking us to have, why didn’t they apply it to help them win the battle they lost?”

One day, a renowned servant of God was preaching under a great anointing. He said that as he spoke, he had the scars of the battle. He had lost a member of his family to cancer despite concerted prayers. He said that he was aware that many Christians had succumbed to illness, but he also knew of cases of profound healings.

In spite of the setbacks, he still maintained that God was/is faithful and has promised to heal. He challenged everybody in the congregation he was ministering to and people who were watching by television to believe God for their healings. From that day, God enabled me see another side of faith. I also saw something new about holding unto God even if that which we expected failed to materialise in our way and at our time. Faith must be stubborn. Judging from the Scripture, healing, for example, to borrow computer language, is the default position of God though some times things happen that we cannot explain.

The Doctor Sicker Than I was

It started one day when I went to the hospital. The doctor attending to me seemed sicker than I was. This was a regrettable thing to do but I ridiculed him in my heart, “How can this sick person make me well—can’t he make himself well first?” I wonder why he didn’t take an off.

Of course the doctor was so good at his job and he actually helped me. God began to teach me something. Just as I can go to a sick doctor to treat me, so I can go to a sick person to pray for me to get well (Jam. 5:16). But the difference is that while with the doctor it is the medicine he prescribes that would make us well, a sick person’s prayer focuses on God. He defies his condition and exercises selflessness maintaining that even if he has not been ministered to, God can still minister to others through him.

Therefore, faith that sees beyond the person (vessel) making the prayer and the person himself not getting absorbed in his condition, is a faith that counts. This faith counts because it believes that God can use a person at his most humble position to accomplish a feat. If we go to be prayed for by a sick person, it means we have not been attracted by the health of that person but by the belief that God listens to sick people and He appreciates that we haven’t disregarded His servants who might be down but not out.

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endures all things; faith is endurance as it is instant; it is future as it is present;...*

Faith that counts is going to a poor person to pray for us to get wealth; faith that counts is going to a small boy to counsel us. Someone may wonder how this is recounted as faith. But isn’t faith belief in God and the fact that He can use even stones to praise Him? Faith that counts is going to a person who has the same problem or probably more than we do to help us get over our problem. One may quickly ask, for example, ‘how can we go to someone who has marital problems to counsel or pray for us to get over our marital dilemmas?’ But isn’t faith belief in God’s word? If we go to such a person, we wouldn’t be looking at his “successful marriage”—since he doesn’t have any. Rather, we would be counting on the word of God that He may speak through him. God can quicken that word so that it becomes alive and we may get help as a result. In fact, as one ministers to others in an area that he himself needs ministrations, God can turn things round for that person as well. There are also cases where the problems are not necessarily a result of an undoing of the person. The word in him may still be effective.

The trend of thought that people normally have is that we have to be “successful” in a particular area in order for our “authority” to be acknowledged. Consequently, we normally think that God can only use us if He has given us something to show in that particular area. While this is very important and actually He does give something to show for authority, the most important thing that God has given us to show upon which faith must be built is His Word. This is why the Scripture says,

But not all the Israelites accepted the good news. For Isaiah says, “Lord, who has believed our message?” Consequently, faith comes from hearing the message, and the message is heard through the *word* of Christ.

—Romans 10:16-17 (italics, author's emphasis).

Faith must begin with the Word and must end with the Word. This is why if we go to someone who is sick to pray for us that we may be healed, it is not that person but the Word of God that he would invoke that becomes the focus of our expectation.

Faith that counts is depositing everything with God and relaxing not being careful what He is doing with them (2 Tim. 1:12). This is the essence of resting in Him even when things don't seem to be going well. With this kind of attitude, the raging sea that sets everyone panicking would rock us into a deep sleep.

Faith that counts does not follow Christ because of the “food” He gives and the miracles He performs (John 6:26), but because of *Who* He is—He is Lord for whose fellowship we were created. He is infinite and promised never to forsake or leave those who have come to Him (Heb. 13:5). Whatever happens, we are challenged to conduct ourselves in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ. Then whether things happen or not according to our expectations, we would stand firm, in one spirit contending for the faith of the gospel without being frightened in any way (Phil. 1:27-28). He is the One who makes all things work together for the good of them that love Him, them that are the called according to His purpose (Rom. 8:28).

Faith is not only *here* and *now*, it is also *there* and *later*; faith, just like love, endures all things; faith is endurance as it is instant; it is future as it is present; faith that counts is not only forgiving it is also forgetting, and it is certainly not only for getting, it is also for giving. Faith that *gives* is of higher quality than faith that *receives*.

Faith that counts is offering what we cannot retrieve and yet it is probably the best thing in our life. This is what Abraham did or was about to do. Since he was completely resolved to do it, God counted it for him as something he accomplished (By faith Abraham, when God tested him, *offered* Isaac as a sacrifice—Hebrews 11:17). Even though God had said to him, “It is through Isaac that your offspring will be reckoned.” Abraham reasoned that God could raise the dead, and figuratively speaking, he did receive Isaac back from death (Heb. 11:18-19). Abraham had faith that God could raise the dead at a time when no one had been raised from the dead—what an “original” faith!

Today, we would really impress ourselves that we have faith when we take a step to act in a way that demonstrates our resolute belief that God raises the dead, yet, this is not novel in our generation. Through history, God has raised quite a number from the dead so that when we *believe*, it is more of a mankind's experience than it is an original thing.

Not Quitting

Faith that counts does not quit, *whatever* is happening notwithstanding. Consider the story of John Stephen Akhwari, a Tanzanian marathon runner at the 1968 Olympics in Mexico City. Akhwari finished so last that a writer described his case thus: “No last-place finisher in a marathon ever finished quite so last”. It was more than an hour after the rest of the runners had completed the race. Most people had left, believing that they had seen the last person finish the race. There was nothing more to excite them. Only a few spectators were still in the stadium. For whatever reason they still lingered in the stadium, it is doubtful if they still expected anything to cheer. Then, in came Akhwari, determined to cross the finishing line. And he did.

His being so last was not without reason. He was injured along the way. He came into the stadium limping and stumbling with a bloodied and bandaged leg. He, no doubt, had a genuine reason not just to

finish quite so last but to quit the race altogether. Why did he punish himself? Why didn't he just call it off since everyone would understand, and more so, there was "nothing more to win"?

The few people who were still in the stadium were treated to a warm inspiration in life. Even for us who read about him many years later, see a beautiful attitude in life, especially beneficial in a Christian race. When asked why he continued to run despite the pain, Akhwari replied, "My country did not send me to Mexico City to start the race. They sent me here to finish".

In my judgement, Akhwari "won" the race and he didn't just win it, he also won a prize. He was still determined to finish even though it wasn't in the limelight. Winning is not necessarily coming first, it is "finishing". And finishing means you have gone through the whole course.

This man didn't win a medal but he won something of much more value than a medal—respect.

Faith that counts facilitates a commitment that makes it possible to continue the *race* even after being "wounded" and eluded by the much-fancied visible prize. Many people think that when they get "wounded", they then have a justification to stop the race. It is not! They would appeal for sympathy and the last thing they would do is to continue the race.

When asked why he continued to run despite the pain, Akhwari replied, "My country did not send me to Mexico City to start the race. They sent me here to finish".

There are many people who will tumble as they get to the *finishing line*—being last—yet they would get a standing ovation. This, I believe, will be a scene for many when we finally cross the line of physical race of life into the eternal rest.

Those who have understood the *tested* side of faith know that faith is a *war*. The Bible says in 1 Timothy 6:12:

Fight the good fight of the faith. Take hold of the eternal life to which you were called when you made your good confession in the presence of many witnesses.

Faith that counts is that which helps us *take hold* of the eternal life to which we have been called. With this faith, we may not necessarily get everything we wanted, the way we had wanted it and when we wanted it. Despite all, we just have to hold on. This life may deny us many things but one thing we must not allow it to deny us is choosing eternal life and sticking to it. Given a chance, our unfulfilled expectations and dreams in this life may make us frustrated and bitter, the result is that we may blow off everything including our hold on virtue and eternal life. We must not allow this to happen.

At the end of the day, as he was winding up, the apostle Paul said:

I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. Now there is in store for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will award to me on that day—and not only to me, but also to all who have longed for his appearing.
—2 Timothy 4:7-8.

We can let go everything but we must keep the faith. Finishing the race meant that despite the war, he still had his faith. He may have *lost* a great deal but not his faith. In the book of Hebrews 6:12 we read:

We do not want you to become lazy, but to imitate those who through *faith and patience* inherit what has been promised (italics, author's emphasis).

And again in Hebrews 10:32, it is written:

Remember those earlier days after you had received the light, when you *stood your ground* in a great contest in the face of suffering (italics, author's emphasis).

Faith that counts endures *all* things; all things endured strengthen faith and all things can be endured through faith. What an all round spiritual asset!

Reflections and Questions to Ponder

1. *What has been your understanding of faith? How have you practically demonstrated faith, especially when you don't seem to get what you had wanted? Do you consider to have lacked faith if you don't promptly get what you had prayed for? Is this necessarily the case?*
2. *To what extent can you say that your understanding of faith is balanced?*
3. *How do you relate faith with patience? What about faith and hope?*