



## “What is Faith For?”

By Pastor Matthew Woods

What is faith for? What exactly is faith in Jesus supposed to do? Well, I was listening to another preacher the other day talk about Jesus condemning the fig tree in Mark 11. This radio preacher was suggesting Mark 11 as an illustration of what faith has the power to do. He was attempting to illustrate that faith “used properly” can command the tree

as Jesus did. He suggested that a faith that can do things like heal and literally move mountains is a sign of a healthy faith. I found myself talking back at the radio baffled at what I was hearing. First, the preacher totally missed the point of Mark 11 which was an illustration of how Jesus will treat the hypocrisy of Israel. Mark 11 also illustrates the truth of James 2:26, “Faith without works is dead.” A fruitless faith is a dead faith. Second, does this guy really know what the purpose of faith in Jesus is really about?”

### **Not a Super-Power**

Let me suggest first what the purpose of faith is not. Faith is not some kind of super-power. In my first couple of years as a pastor I had a charismatic friend who kindly suggested to me that my faith was not strong enough, or somehow incomplete because I could not speak in tongues. She also suggested that such gifts of the Holy Spirit were signs that each Christian should wear. I was quick to point out that my gifts were more along the lines of the Fruits of the same Holy Spirit, “Love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, gentleness, faithfulness, and self-control.” I will never perfect these fruits in my life but I still practice them every day. As one looks at the Sermon on the Mount it is these fruits of the Spirit that are to be practiced openly so that our “righteousness surpasses the righteousness of the Pharisees” who were a good show on the outside but dead on the inside.

### **Not to heal disease**

The purpose of faith is also not to heal people of diseases. To heal disease is certainly anyone wish. Jesus healed many and thought it was important to do so. As we know, Jesus healed many people. In Mark 5 an unnamed woman who needed healing reached out amongst the crowd and touched the hem of Jesus’ garment and was healed instantly. Jesus confronts her with joy and says, “Your faith has made you well.” Jesus certainly healed countless people illustrating that illness was just as prominent then as it is now. Today we have the advantage of modern medicine which I would argue can do some amazing things. So, why doesn’t Jesus give us all the gift of healing? I say ask the Apostle Paul.

The Apostle Paul was certainly a man of faith, a champion in fact. And yet in 2 Corinthians 12 we hear Paul plead for the Lord to remove the thorn *in his flesh*. Surely, if anyone could or should be healed it would be Paul! The Lord simply responded, “My grace is sufficient for you.” Not even Paul would be exempt from the wounds of this world. But let me remind you that this does not mean God loved Paul less or anyone of us who suffer from disease.

I could spend a lot of time discussing faith and healing but for our purposes here let it be said that the purpose of faith is not about healing our bodies.

### **Not To Bring Prosperity**

Finally, the purpose of faith is not to be blessed with worldly blessings. The “Prosperity Gospel” preachers want us to believe that the sign of a strong faith is wealth, health, and prosperity. But I would submit to you that Mary and Joseph were as faithful as they came and they were not wealthy... but they were arguable very blessed. They struggled just to have enough for food on the table let alone any notion of a retirement. They were not blessed as the Pharisees would define blessed. Mary and Joseph were blessed in knowing Jesus personally.

### **For a Relationship in Jesus Christ**

This brings me to the real purpose of faith. The purpose of faith is written in John 20:31. “These things are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing in Him you may have life in His name.” The Purpose of faith is for us to know Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior and by knowing Him be saved unto eternal life. Jesus’ goal for us is not to get comfortable in this world but to get home safely.

On Pentecost in Acts 2 Peter reminded the crowd that had gathered, “Jesus of Nazareth was a man accredited by God to you by miracles, wonders and signs, which God did among you through him, as you yourselves know.<sup>23</sup> This man was handed over to you by God’s deliberate plan and foreknowledge; and you, with the help of wicked men, put him to death by nailing him to the cross.<sup>24</sup> But God raised him from the dead, freeing him from the agony of death, because it was impossible for death to keep its hold on him.” The signs and wonders were to not the goal. The purpose of the signs and wonders was to bring attention to Jesus as the Christ. Jesus came to die on the cross and rise in the resurrection. This was God’s “deliberate plan.” Salvation from sin is the goal of our faith and that comes only by knowing Jesus Christ as “The Way, the Truth, and The Life” through His written Word.

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--John 20:31

### **That’s Not All**

Is that all? No. While the purpose of faith is not super-powers that perform miracles, or healing, or prosperity, it is designed to produce fruit. Fruit only comes after the purpose of faith is fulfilled, which is to know Jesus. Yet we cannot know Jesus without our relationship with Him moving us to live for Him through the Holy Spirit. Hebrews 11 talks of such people who lived for the Lord because of their relationship with Him.

Heb 11:1 introduces a host of heroic faithful people by saying, “Now faith is confidence in what we hope for and assurance about what we do not see. *2 This is what the ancients were commended for*” (Emphasis mine). In the list of heroes listed in Hebrews 11 we see those like Abraham and Rahab. Neither performed a miracle and yet these were giants in faith. The great claim to fame was obedience. If the Lord asked, they put their faith to action and did as the Lord commanded without hesitation and with supreme trust that it was the right thing even if they

didn't completely understand. Hebrews 11 teaches us that a faith in Jesus finds a way of expression. Faith in Jesus gives purpose to our actions.



Jesus says, John 14:12 “Very truly I tell you, whoever believes in me will do the works I have been doing, and they will do even greater things than these, because I am going to the Father.” “Surely Pastor, Jesus is telling us that we will do great miracles just like Jesus.” I am not saying miracles can't happen. What I am saying is that the purpose of faith in Jesus is not to do miracles but to know Jesus. Along with that, no one who truly knows Jesus can go through this life without serving Him either. The hardest works that Jesus did in His ministry were things like loving the unlovable, expressing forgiveness to those hard to forgive, and sharing kindness

in His name to someone who is unkind. That's heavy lifting to a sinful person like me and a miracle that a selfish sinner can express such grace. And yet to know Jesus propels me to do those things that Jesus did in spite of my sin—great things to one hungering and thirsting for such grace. The greatest miracle happens in any heart that comes to know Jesus Christ. That's what makes Faith so incredible. It's a gift to be shared.