

Faith believes

- **Introduction: video or testimony**
- **Biblical benefits of faith in God – 10 minutes, 2 Groups**
- **Biblical benefits contest**
- **Add missed benefits and consequences of not believing to form other side of Jordan**

Health Assessment:

- **Do our lives look like lives of faith?** Where is worry, stress, anxiety, tiredness, lack of purpose or inspiration, confusion, spiritual and physical sickness, being controlled by misbehaviour and animal desires, spending all of our energy on getting comfort and pleasure, being driven backwards by the waves of life, depression and inability to communicate the wonders of Jesus? They are not the promised land. They are in the desert.
- **I am afraid that we are on the wrong side of the Jordan!** Why did Moses not cross the Jordan? Because God was angry with the Israelites refusal to trust in him (Deut 4:21). The LORD said to Moses, "How long will these people treat me with contempt? How long will they refuse to believe in me, in spite of all the miraculous signs I have performed among them? (Numbers 14:11)
- **Let me remind you what we believe. We believe** that God loves the world so much He sent His only Son to pay the price our wrongdoing deserves - to die as an atoning sacrifice for the sin of the world – to reconcile rebellious men to himself. We believe that Jesus is the Son of God. That He died and on the third day rose again, declaring his power to offer forgiveness and eternal life to everyone who receives Him. **We believe** that Jesus is the image of the invisible God. And that 'through him [we] believe in God, who raised him from the dead and glorified him, and so [our] faith and hope are in God' (1 Peter 1:21)
- **This is our faith.** The facts we believe. But here is the heart of the problem: just accepting the facts about Jesus won't bring the transforming life Jesus promised. Lets remember that Satan knows that Jesus is God and he is still Satan (James 2:19).
- **The writer to the Hebrews defines faith as being certain.** He wrote that "Faith is being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see. This is what the ancients were commended for. (Hebrews 11:1)
- Being is a verb, a doing word. Hence, biblical faith is an action. Faith is a verb. Faith believes.

How does this verb look? What are the characteristics of belief? How does faith believe? I want to share 7 characteristics of believing faith.

1 First of all, believing faith loves.

- I don't want to say much about a believer's love, as my last sermon was all about loving faith. But love is paramount. Indeed Paul writes that "If I have the gift of prophecy and can

fathom all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have a faith that can move mountains, but have not love, I am nothing. (1 Corin 13:2) If we have a faith that can move mountains but have not love. We are nothing. Faith itself is nothing.

- Elsewhere Paul explained that "The only thing that counts [in God's order] is faith expressing itself through love." (Gal 5:6) Because our faith is in a God of love and in His love for us, our faith should produce love. Faith in a God of love must be expressed in love, in acts of love. The first part of the verb of faith is love.

2 Secondly, Believing faith grows.

- Faith does not all come at once. It develops as we practice it. If we really believe the facts about God it should affect our behaviour. Faith is expressed by action. It asks and it receives. Above all, faith prays.
- Prayer is an opportunity for faith to grow. If we do not pray we can never know if God will answer. If we pray irregularly we may fail to see how God has answered or even think His answer a coincidence. Only if we pray consistently can we hope to see how God answers.
- The Israelites did make it to the promised land, with Joshua. And they carried with them God's ancient promises to give them that land and bless them in it. And on his death bed Joshua wrote: "Now I am about to go the way of all the earth. You know with all your heart and soul that not one of all the good promises the LORD your God gave you has failed. Every promise has been fulfilled; not one has failed. (Joshua 23:4) Because it crossed the Jordan, Israel had learnt that God is faithful to every promise. That belief came from experience. From responding to God's word.
- Believing faith knows that God is willing and able to answer. God's people have tested His promises and found they do not fail.
- **Faith grows through believing miracles** "Do not believe me unless I do what my Father does. But if I do it, even though you do not believe me, believe the miracles, that you may know and understand that the Father is in me, and I in the Father." (John 10:37-38)
- **When it gets difficult it asks God for help.** For faith is a gift to be asked for and received. Not once but constantly. Remember Paul asking for faith to walk on water, faith for a specific purpose.

3 Thirdly, believing faith overcomes doubt.

- Jesus taught that "if anyone says to this mountain, 'Go, throw yourself into the sea,' and does not doubt in his heart but believes that what he says will happen, it will be done for him." "Therefore, [he said] whatever you ask for in prayer, believe that you have received it, and it will be yours. (Mark 11:22-24)
- Ask, believe, receive. There is the call to seek God in prayer. To ask him for our needs. But asking is not enough. We must believe. And when we believe we must not doubt. If we ask and do not doubt we will receive. Simple.

- We may first need to deal with doubt, even battle periods of doubt, but we must overcome doubt because it kills faith. Remember Hebrews defines faith as “being certain” of what we hope for. There is no doubt in certainty.
- James wrote that when we ask things of God we “must believe and not doubt, because he who doubts is like a wave of the sea, blown and tossed by the wind. That man should not think he will receive anything from the Lord” (James 1: 6-7). The doubter is unstable. He might catch the providence of God and be driven forward but then He doubts and is tossed back by the winds of life. God will not give to such an unstable man.
- We doubt because of circumstances. It may appear we have too much work for the time available, that we can’t achieve anything of value, that everything is against us, that God has forgotten us. But these are judgements based on circumstances. And they are inconsistent with the truth revealed in Christ. Paul wrote that “We live by faith, not by sight.” (2 Corinthians 5:7), which means trusting in God, however things look.
- We can rely on our own judgment, we can listen to others, we can put our trust in the Sun or the BBC or we can trust God’s word. His word speaks to every situation. If we ask for his wisdom and believe, He will guide us. Believing faith is a shield against the thoughts that come against it. It deflects depression, it deflects accusation, it deflects despair.
- Believing faith does not wait for the circumstances to look better. Thomas refused to believe Jesus had risen until he put his hands in his scars. Jesus appeared to Thomas and said, “Because you have seen me, you have believed; blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed (John 20:29). And remember how Jesus despaired with the Israelites who demanded signs before the believed. Believing faith trusts in God, despite the circumstances.
- Remember the faith of the centurion. His servant was paralysed and at home suffering. But the centurion knew Jesus just had to “say the word, and [his] servant [would] be healed. He said “I myself am a man under authority, with soldiers under me. I tell this one, ‘Go,’ and he goes; and that one, ‘Come,’ and he comes. I say to my servant, ‘Do this,’ and he does it.” Jesus was astonished at the man’s faith and his servant was healed just as the centurion had believed. The centurion did not look at the circumstances, his servant was in a bad way and Jesus was nowhere near, he believed that Jesus had the authority to heal despite the circumstances. Faith is sufficient but faith must be sufficient. It is not enough to hope God can do it. We must be certain that He has the power, He is able, despite the circumstances.

4 Believing faith is Spirit-led.

- It prefers prayer to effort, following the leading of the spirit to following the law. Remember how Jesus tells us we can move mountains by faith? There is a great passage in Zechariah which gives a clue to what Jesus meant. Zechariah records the word of the LORD to the then ruler, Zerubbabel, as follows: “Not by might nor by power, but by my Spirit,” says the LORD Almighty. “What are you, O mighty mountain? Before Zerubbabel you will become level ground.” (Zech 4:6-7) The mountains before us make look enormous, may look mighty but through believing faith will become as level ground. And such faith works by God’s spirit, not by might nor by power. If we try to overcome the mountain in our strength

we will tire greater and probably fail. If we put our trust in God's spirit, the mountain will be removed from our path.

- We should reflect on this as a church. For many churches have gone wrong here. Probably we have too. In times of trouble, we look for strength within, we work harder. But this is not God's way. God is building his church. It is his work. The glory shall be his. It is vain, to try and do for him. Paul
- Paul saw this in the Galatian church. He asked them "Did you receive the Spirit [of God] by observing the law, or by believing what you heard? Are you so foolish? After beginning with the Spirit, are you now trying to attain your goal by human effort? Have you suffered so much for nothing—if it really was for nothing? Does God give you his Spirit and work miracles among you because you observe the law, or because you believe what you heard?" (Gal 3:2-5) We came to faith in God by receiving Him. Faith begins as gift of grace. It is received not earned. If we know this why do we then try to take hold of the life for which Christ died by effort? Faith and miracles begin and end in believing.

5 Faith is Christo-centric

- Faith believes in Jesus. The disciples asked God "What we [must] do to do the works God requires?" Jesus answered, "The work of God is this: to believe in the one he has sent." (James 6: 26-29) Faith grows, faith resists doubt, it's an action. An action focused on Christ.
- [Jesus told the disciples to "Have faith in God" (Mark 11:22). Our faith is in God. God is holding all the power. For our faith to be effective, it must be in Him] And this is [God's] command: to believe in the name of his Son, Jesus Christ, and to love one another as he commanded us. (1 John 3:23)
- Our hearts and prayers must be seeking after the Lord's purpose for that is what the Lord is about. We must pray God's prayer and hold Christ-centred motives. James explained that we "do not have, because [we] do not ask God. [and] When [we] ask, [we] do not receive, because [we] ask with wrong motives, that [we] may spend what you get on your pleasures." (James 4: 2-3) We will not receive if the focus of our prayer is only our comforts.
- The Bible records many thousands of wonderful promises God has made to mankind. Whatever you are going through God has made a promise for that situation. HE wants us to rely on Him and His promises in every situation. And God is not like a man, He does not lie or fail to deliver. He is faithful and true. Paul put it wonderfully in his second letter to the Corinthian church. He wrote: that The "Son of God, Jesus Christ, who was preached among you by me and Silas and Timothy, was not "Yes" and "No," but in him it has always been "Yes." For no matter how many promises God has made, they are "Yes" in Christ. And so through him the "Amen" is spoken by us to the glory of God." (2 Corinthians 1:19-20). All the promises of God are all Yes in Christ.
- The writer to the Hebrews encourages us "to throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles, and [to] run with perseverance the race marked out for us." To "fix

our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy set before him endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. Consider him who endured such opposition from sinful men, so that you will not grow weary and lose heart. (Heb 12:1-3)

6 Faith perseveres

- This passage from Hebrews tells us of the focus of our faith, Jesus Christ, and it tells us something about the growth of our faith. It tells us that Jesus is the perfecter of our faith. If our faith needs perfecting it is not yet perfect. I think we know that actually!
- And this passage explains that Jesus will perfect our faith through testing. It encourages us to run the race with perseverance. For believing faith perseveres. And it reminds us to consider Jesus who endured endless opposition even unto death. Faith must persevere under trial for that is where it shows itself true.
- Just as the purity of precious metal is tested by fire so the Lord tests our hearts by trial. So Peter wrote that: “These trials are only to test your faith, to show that it is strong and pure. It is being tested as fire tests and purifies gold--and your faith is far more precious to God than mere gold. So if your faith remains strong after being tried by fiery trials, it will bring you much praise and glory and honour on the day when Jesus Christ is revealed to the whole world.” (1 Peter 1:5-7)
- So the writer to the Hebrews tells us we “need to persevere so that when [we] have done the will of God, [we] will receive what [God] has promised.” (Heb 10:36) He goes on to quote the prophecy of Habbakuk that the “righteous .. will live by faith.” And warns that if we shrink back from faith, God will not be pleased with us.
- Note the reference to the ancient promise that the righteousness will live by faith. The write to the Hebrews clearly understands faith as persevering, lasting faith. Faith that carries on until it has completed the will of God. Saving faith is lasting faith. Paul wrote that we are saved by the gospel “if [we] hold firmly to the word .. Otherwise, [we] have believed in vain. (1 Corinthians 15:2).
- Consider what happens to the seed, which is God’s word, in the parable of the sower (Luke 8). There are 4 destinations. First, there is the seed that falls on the path and is trampled and eaten by birds – that is, those who do not believe. The other three destinations all start with belief but only one ends in belief, the seed landing in good soil.
- The other seed either landed on rock so it has no moisture and withered or landed in thorns and was choked. Jesus explained that the seeds that fell “on the rock are the ones who receive the word with joy when they hear it, but they have no root. They believe for a while, but in the time of testing they fall away. [and] The seed that fell among thorns stands for those who hear, but as they go on their way they are choked by life’s worries, riches and pleasures, and they do not mature.”
- Our faith can wither, if we don’t have a deep root in Jesus Christ, a deep knowledge of Him. And our faith can be choked, if let the concerns and pleasures of life stop us growing in

Christ. Believing in God is not enough. Persevering in faith, living in faith, building a deep root in Christ and growing in Christ are what counts. These are the marks of seed that bears a yielded a crop, a hundred times more than was sown.

7 Believing faith shares

- My final aspect of the verb of faith is sharing. Believing faith shares itself with others.
- By faith we have entered into a relationship with God. This faith, naturally expresses itself by sharing with others. Hence the kingdom of God is described as a mustard seed, which is the smallest seed but grows to be one of the largest trees. The nature of faith is grow and yield a crop, a hundred times more than was sown.
- We know that faith is a work of the spirit. And Jesus has declared that those in whom the spirit lives shall have streams of living water flow from them, by which he meant the spirit. Our faith gives birth to the work of the spirit in our lives and overflows to touch those around us. This may just be the example of our lives. It may be the power of the spirit when we pray for our neighbours.
- It may be sharing what we know of God. Because we came to faith by hearing about God. And no one can believe in God if they have not heard about him (Romans 10:14). So Isaiah prophesied that we would be God's witnesses along with Jesus, so that the world may know and believe God "and understand that I [He is God], that before him there was no god and after Him there shall be no god and apart from Him there is no saviour" (Isaiah 43:10-11). Thanks be to God.

My thought for the day: faith believes. Surely, there are many fantastic things in store for those who believe. But we must cross the Jordan, we must act in faith, step out and live in faith. Faith is verb, it:

1. It loves
2. It grows
3. Its doubtless
4. Its Spirit-led
5. Its Christ-centric
6. It perseveres
7. It shares

Lets pray – but not with doubt - lets ask God and believe we have what we ask for.

Further: Consider victories of the ancients in Hebrews 11?