

# Straight Bible Talk

Manchester Church of Christ, Share Christ's Love and Share His Message

## What Is Faith?

For some people, faith is a leap into the dark with the expectation that one will land in a 'bed of roses' (without the thorns). For Richard Dawkins (an atheist) he lumps his definition of faith among other religious ideas, and gives this description: "Faith (belief without evidence) is a virtue. The more your beliefs defy the evidence, the more virtuous you are. Virtuoso believers who can manage to believe something really weird, unsupported and insupportable, in the teeth of evidence and reason, are especially highly rewarded."

Wherever he found this, it was not from reading the Bible, nor from speaking with anyone who has even the slightest acquaintance with what the Bible teaches about faith.

Consider the story of Moses as found in the book of Exodus. Moses is called by God to return to Egypt and lead the Israelites to freedom. Among other excuses that Moses offered is this one: "What if they will not believe me or listen to what I say? For they may say, 'Yahweh has not appeared to you.'"

God then proceeds to give some signs (miracles) to Moses that will point to God as the one who has sent him. For example, he will be able to change water to blood and turn his staff into a snake.

One may dismiss this story as a myth, but that does not change what it teaches about faith. The Israelites are not expected to believe without evidence. Rather, they are expected to believe because of the evidence.

One may argue that miracles are impossible. One may argue that the story cannot be true, but the moral of the story is still the same. Faith (for the one writing the story) is based on evidence!

Jesus' words to Thomas after Jesus was raised from the dead are used as an argument by some that faith requires no evidence. Here is Jesus comment: "Blessed are they who did not see, and yet believed."

Yet consider what is also included in this story. The ten disciples (excluding Thomas)

had seen Jesus on Sunday after his death. They believed in his resurrection based on the evidence. Jesus had stood in their midst.

Thomas came in later and doubted their testimony. "Unless I see in His hands the imprint of the nails, and put my finger into the place of the nails, and put my hand into His side, I will not believe."

A week later, Jesus stood in their midst again. He said to Thomas, "Reach here with your finger, and see My hands; and reach here your hand and put it into My side; and do not be unbelieving, but believing."

Notice that the faith of the first ten disciples was based on evidence. Thomas did not believe their testimony. Jesus appeared again to give Thomas the same evidence that he had given the others. Thomas then became a believer based on this evidence. Later generations are expected to believe based on the testimony of these disciples. We are not expected to believe without evidence (testimony).

This is no different than what happens in courtrooms across America today. A person is charged with a crime. Witnesses are presented to the jury to give testimony. The jury is expected to reach a verdict based on the testimony. It is not necessary that the jury see the commission of the crime in order to have certainty. Their faith in the testimony of others (people or physical evidence) is sufficient to decide the case.

In the same way, God arranged that there should be witnesses who would give their testimony so that we might believe. God does not expect us to have faith apart from evidence, but rather expects us to become believers based on the evidence that is provided by others.

In another passage, John writes, "Therefore many other signs Jesus also performed in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book; but these have been written so that you may believe that Jesus is the

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"Therefore having overlooked the times of ignorance, God is now declaring to men that all people everywhere should repent, because He has fixed a day in which He will judge the world in righteousness through a Man whom He has appointed, having furnished proof to all men by raising Him from the dead."

Acts 17:31

All scripture quotations are from the New American Standard Bible unless otherwise indicated.

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Christ, the Son of God' and that believ-  
ing you may have life in His name."

That sounds very much as though God  
expects people to believe because of the  
evidence that He has provided. John  
records such miracles of Jesus as turning  
water to wine, healing a man who had  
been lame for 38 years, feeding 5000  
people with five loaves and two fish,  
giving sight to a man who had been  
blind from birth and giving life to a man  
who had been dead for four days.

With this background it is quite under-  
standable that Paul would write the fol-  
lowing: "So faith comes from hearing,  
and hearing by the word of Christ." Faith  
is not a leap in the dark, but the result  
of information that has been received.  
It is faith because it is not information  
that comes through one's observations,  
but information that comes from the  
observations of others. Of course the  
credibility of the eye witnesses is an  
issue to be resolved.

I am well aware that many reject the  
miracles in the Bible as mere fables.  
That view comes from a presupposition  
that miracles (by definition) cannot hap-  
pen. For our purposes it is only neces-  
sary to know that the writer's of the Bi-  
ble present the miracles as evidence for  
faith. They did not teach faith as belief  
without evidence. They did not teach  
faith as more virtuous when one has no  
reason to believe. They did not teach a  
faith that believes, in contradiction of the  
evidence. The writers of the Bible  
taught that faith comes from the evi-

dence.

Perhaps most conclusive of all is the  
death and resurrection of Jesus. A  
good part of each of the four gospels is  
devoted to the evidence for this. Per-  
haps this explains the enthusiasm of  
some to toss out the Bible. No Bible,  
no evidence.

First, the four gospel writers carefully  
set forth the events that led to the  
death of Jesus. From the ride on the  
donkey into Jerusalem through the  
cleansing of the temple and the par-  
ables, Matthew, Mark, Luke and John  
show us the rising anger of the Jewish  
leadership against Jesus.

Their anger was so intense that when  
Judas offered to betray his friend, they  
eagerly accepted his offer and imme-  
diately placed in his hands the thirty  
pieces of silver as the price for his  
betrayal.

The agreement of Judas to hand over  
his friend moved the Jewish rulers  
from "not during the festival, other-  
wise a riot might occur among the  
people," to an understanding that it  
could be done during the Passover  
away from the adoring crowds who  
flocked to hear Jesus teach. Judas  
could show them where to arrest Jesus  
when the crowds would not be pre-  
sent.

The gospel writers also want us to  
know that the Romans were involved  
in the death of Jesus. So, they tell us  
how the Jewish rulers arrested, tried  
and condemned Jesus, but then took

him to Pilate to be executed.

The Jewish rulers wanted a public exe-  
cution carried out by the Romans.  
(Perhaps they were thinking that they  
could escape the consequences for put-  
ting Jesus to death, for, after all, they did  
not do it!) The followers of Jesus would  
surely be dispersed when their leader  
was dead.

Everything went according to their plan.  
When Pilate wavered, they were able to  
orchestrate a big enough protest to make  
Pilate fear the wrath of the crowd. Pilate  
then gave the order to his soldiers and  
Jesus was taken to a public place, out-  
side the gates of the city where all those  
who came into the city for the Passover  
could see Jesus hanging on the cross.

Jesus died on Friday. The Jewish rulers  
and the Romans were all convinced of  
his death. Pilate gave permission for the  
disciples of Jesus to take the body from  
the cross and bury him. The Jewish rul-  
ers set a guard at the tomb to make cer-  
tain the body was not stolen.

On Sunday the tomb was found to be  
empty. A story was concocted, by the  
Jewish rulers, to explain the absence of  
the body.

Jesus appeared, over a period of forty  
days, to more than 500 of his followers.  
Many of them saw Jesus on multiple  
occasions. They talked with Jesus.  
They ate with him. They walked with  
him. They were the chosen witnesses.

Their testimony is in the Bible. The  
resurrection of Jesus says emphatically,  
"There is a God." That is our faith.