

An Introduction to “Faith”

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I am convinced that we’re on the very brink of the next dimension, the next level, the next revelation, the next out-pouring, the next great move of God. Hopefully, one of those terms will strike a cord of identification with what your doctrine is looking for in terms of Revival. All describe the dynamic move of His Spirit on the earth. We’re just about to witness what many of us have been crying out for for a long time. “Oh, God, move again.” Many have lost their enthusiasm for this future move because we’ve heard Christian leaders say that for years. Some have said, “God is about to move in a new and dynamic way.” Others have said, “We’re going to have the greatest Revival the church has ever known! Thousands upon thousands – multitudes – are going to come to know the Lord Jesus Christ!” and it doesn’t seem to be happening. When we hear things like that, we have a tendency to project this understanding: “tomorrow.” When such a prophetic word is spoken, some people give God all week to fulfill it. ☺ The more mature ones will even wait three or four months. Either way, we tend to take that seemingly unfulfilled promise and bury it somewhere saying, “I *thought* I heard from God.”

Today, I believe, we are in an *interim time*, a different season. We’re between moves of God. We’re between revelations. We enjoyed powerful revelations in the great Charismatic Renewal of the 1960s and ‘70s. God reached down into many churches having heard the voices of His people crying out for a fresh move of His Spirit. He didn’t move on everyone in every church because everyone wasn’t crying the same prayers. The spiritually hungry were saying something like this, “God, surely there is more to it than this.” And He said, “I hear that prayer.” Then He poured out His Spirit upon those who were seeking Him for much more. Others were peering into the Word and saw that there was an experience described there they didn’t have. Their prayer was, “Lord God, if that’s for today, I want it.” And He said, “I hear *that* prayer.”

This great divine outpouring of God crossed denominational barriers and every other hindrance *the church* set up. The Lord determined, “I will have My people.” Subsequently, He found one here and several there and several more there, and there, and there. And it was a *glorious* move at that time – the most glorious move that many of us have seen in our lifetimes, and much greater than the previous move we called Pentecost.

But then we camped right there. We became very comfortable. In fact, we adopted little sayings to identify ourselves. We said things like, “Do you speak in tongues?” Or, “Are you Charismatic? Have you had ‘the experience’?” And then we became very selective with whom we had fellowship because we had this “new power” with God. We felt we had to protect it. And so we did protect it; we kept it safely encased in our private little circles. Sadly, that is the truth.

So now we ask, “Why is there ever a ‘slack time’ between great moves of God? Why does God do that?” I believe it’s because in the space of time between one great dynamic outpouring of His Spirit and the next, there is a pause for *appropriation of the fresh revelation* that has just come to the church. It gives us opportunity to ***put into practice*** what we know. We have seen all the glorious things we’ve seen, and we’ve heard the glorious promises we’ve heard, and we even have come to believe some of them. “Oh Lord, yes, be it unto me as Thou hast spoken.” What we haven’t done is taken a look at the “price tag” (the conditions) affixed to the promises to see whether or not we are willing to pay it. I am strongly convinced that God is about to allow those who *will* “pay the price” to move on into a new revelation.

Now, listen to this and think about it: I believe there will be many thousands of believers, now praying for the next move of God to come – who will continue to pray for it all the way through it – because it may not come the way they envisioned or planned for it to come. They will miss it because it may not look the same as something they heard occurred historically, or even saw for themselves some time in the last 50 years. It may not come in a package that pleases us but it **is** going to come.

This I believe: the next move of God is going to usher in the greatest response in disciples that the church has ever known. We are going to fulfill the concept that names us a “kingdom of priests” (Ex.19:6; Rev.1:6). Hallelujah! We like the title, don’t we, but we’re not sure of the work. Yet we are going to come into the fulfillment of it.

I heard a man say something interesting as he was talking about “kingdom living.” He was relating that concept to a teaching that came to him from the head of his denominational church, one who is a very strong, firm leader and takes an extremely strong stand on what he calls headship – period. (Isn’t it funny how much you can say when you put a period on something?) ☺ The man I was speaking with made this statement: “kingdom living is wonderful – if you’re the kind.” And I was actually groping in my spirit for an appropriate response as he was sharing with me. Then I heard it, under the anointing of the Holy Spirit, as I said, “or if you’re in love with Him.”

Now, Church, it’s not by chance we have what seems to be many diverse teachings or even extreme teachings on these subjects. It has been the will of God for several reasons. One of them is for us to be **balanced**. An English teacher teaches English as if mathematics does not exist. And that is true for every academic subject. So, God raised up some teachers and birthed within them a single concern, or focus. They came to the Body of Christ then, and still come now, to stir us along those particular lines. The Lord never intended us to camp with only one school of thought or developed idea. He wants us to add each biblical teaching that is from Him to our repertoire of revelation, and reject the heresy if it exists.

However, we picked up teachings like little children. We embraced some and rejected or ignored others that were really from the Lord. This selectivity caused separation (division) in the Body of Christ so that people are known as this or that or the other thing based on the teachings they have espoused. “They’re the praisers.” “They’re the tongue-speakers.” “They’re the faith people.” That was **never** God’s plan or intention. Every Spirit-filled person ought to be a balance of all scriptural doctrines. We shouldn’t allow or encourage our churches to be known by such defining tags: “That’s a praising church.” “That’s a Word church.” What other kind is there? Those labels ought to be buried.

We need a new vision of the King of kings and Lord of lords, instead of seeing Him as the little servant that goes about doing what we tell Him to do, saying “in His name.” Hello? We need to see Him as high and lifted up. Let His train fill the temple (Is.6:1). We must come to realize that we’re the ones that are the servants. He already has risen from the dead. His work here is completed. Church, He’s alive! He is seated at the right hand of the Father (Ac.2:33) and He is looking for disciples who’ll carry on in His stead. (Jn.14:12). He’s not working. Some say, “The Lord is working among us.” The Bible says He is resting (see Heb.4:9-11). How can we say He’s working? The Lord is not *working* – *we’re* supposed to be working!

The church is dying waiting for us to grow up. It is time for someone to take a stand against the dissension and all of the various doctrinal “factions,” taking place in the Body of Christ today. It is time for a “kingdom of priests” to rise up and say, “You’re my brother and you’re my sister and we’re on the same team – let’s get the job done together!”

What is faith? We must be careful not to lose God’s focus here. Faith is the Greek word /pistikos/. It means “total reliance on the word of another.” Because of some extremes in the past, we didn’t know what we were to have faith in, or about, or why, but we all set a goal: *that I might have faith*. Then we had scores of people running around like little kids who get something before they are mature enough to use it “In Jesus’ name. Watch my faith work.” “Want to see my faith? What would you like for me to do?” We boldly, and unfortunately brashly, moved out “in faith” and if “it” worked once, then we really got excited. “All right! Did you see that?” What a sad, but true, commentary.

The Bible says, “Without faith it is impossible to please God” (Heb.11:6) and that every one of us has faith – “...to every man [is given] the measure of faith” (Rom.12:3). Faith is absolutely necessary for

everything we are – and the first thing we are is *ministers unto the Lord*. That is what the priest does – he ministers to the Lord, and we are discussing what it is to be a “kingdom of priests.” Praise is ministering to the Lord. Worship is also. If you think we come together corporately simply to sing some songs – and “now let us kneel,” “now let us stand,” “now let us raise our hands,” “now let us clap” – because we don’t know what else to do – you don’t know priesthood at all. Let me help explain why it is so difficult for some to worship the Lord: it is because they never get out of the “outer court.” We enter into His courts through praise (Psa.100:4), but we press into intimacy in worship. It’s hard to worship Him from out there in the courts when He’s inside in His chambers. It’s hard to worship Him when you see Him as a servant, who responds to your every beck and call. No one ever worships a servant, we just *use* servants.

Why do you think John had to have the vision he had on the island of Patmos? John was an old man by that time. He’d been talking about the Lord for years. Many years earlier, this John was the one who used to lean on Jesus’ breast (Jn.13:23). He knew Jesus well: Jesus meek and mild; Jesus the servant of all; Jesus who whenever He saw a need met that need. That was the limited concept John had and it needed to be enlarged. One day, on the Lord’s Day (Rev.1:10), the Spirit visited him and declared, “John, you need to rise to a new dimension, a new level of understanding of who Jesus really is.” The heavens opened and Revelation Chapter 1 is a description of what John’s eyes beheld. He saw something he couldn’t even explain for us. I am reminded of the verse that tells us without the Spirit, we can see nothing about our God (Jn.16:12-15). We can understand nothing unless the Holy Spirit makes Him real, my friend. You couldn’t even understand what I’m saying right now without Him.

Some people want a God that can be ordered around. That’s not unusual, it’s common. Every Godless nation, or people group, has always created gods over which they could exert control. The little gods they created were made out of wood, silver, gold and stone. Take pagan nations – they want to worship what they want to worship; something they can control. - - - Don’t we? ☺

Now, on this coming day of revelation, the Lord will come back to His people as Lord of lords and King of kings. The only ones that are going to know the next dimension of that revelation in its fullness – the only ones that are going to be used in this last day Revival – the only ones that are, as Jesus said, going “to do greater things than I do shall ye do because I go to the Father” (Jn.14:12) – the only ones that are going to be a part of that fulfillment – are going to be *those who see Him as He is* – the King of kings and Lord of lords, in all of His splendor and all His glory. They are the ones who bow before Him and are delighted to be *servants* of the Most High God.

Let me bring a balance now. When someone asks me, “of all the messages that you ever teach, which is your favorite?” I almost always respond, “The Song of Solomon.” I love that Book. I love to talk about the Bride of Christ and our love relationship with the King. It is so beautiful! And indeed, we’re going to come to that. Men, for you that’s going to be your next real stretch for growth, when you really come to an understanding of what it is to be a member of the *Bride* of Christ. Oh, it won’t take away your masculinity. It will complete you.

You see, worshippers are being returned to the church of the Lord Jesus Christ. Hallelujah! The church has been relegated to widowhood long enough. It’s time now for God to get hold of men who are real men and bring them into the church. He will make them true worshippers so that the generation coming up behind them can look and see *men* (stereotyped in their thinking as “macho men”), now standing unashamedly, worshipping, making love to Jesus Christ.

I love to teach about the Bride-Bridegroom relationship between the Church and our Lord Jesus Christ. But, it’s not quite time for us to sit down at the Marriage Feast of the Lamb. We’re betrothed to Him, but there is a job to be done first. Can you grasp that?

There exists what may seem to be a contradiction in visions. Let’s try to clear up any confusion. One time we talk about being the Bride of Christ, worshipping the Lord and coming into intimacy with Him.

The next minute we're saying the church is the Army of the Lord, battling in the fray. "God's got an Army, marching through the land." So which one is it? Bride or Soldier?

The Lord reminded me of the time a lady came to me at a conference and said, "Iverna, I had the strangest dream. And I really didn't understand it, but I felt I was to share it with you." She continued by describing a grand wedding she had seen in her dream. She knew this was the Bride of Christ – it was glorious and wonderful. But here is the strange element in her dream: ***the Bride was wearing combat boots.***

I was delighted with this picture as I could clearly see our position in Christ. We *are* His Bride and that's how *He sees us*. But Church, we are still here on the earth. It's not time for us to sit around in little cloister groups protecting what God has given us. It is time for Him to send us to the world, but He isn't going to send us out to the world to win the lost in the new dimension of a grand Revival until we can learn to get along within the family!

We all have been given faith, a measure of faith (Rom.12:3) – so, what are we doing with it? Why is it that we are not moving mountains? The answer to that is: *because there is an occasion, often in our lives, when we literally resist faith.* It is sadly probable that many believers reading this message are like Governor Festus and King Agrippa of long ago. Do you remember the story (Ac.23-26)? Paul was captive in Caesarea under the Governors Felix (Ac.23:23ff), then Festus (Ac.25). King Agrippa comes for a visit and is given opportunity to interview Paul (Ac.25:26ff). Agrippa invited Paul to speak on his own behalf (Ac.26). So Paul gave his full testimony (vvs.2-17) and a fabulous sermon that included all of the elements that would/could lead one to salvation (vvs.17-23; see vs.28). Agrippa became so frustrated. He was the king but he didn't know what to do with Paul. Paul seemed like a nice guy, yet he was always causing trouble. Finally Festus and Agrippa were there together, having heard all of Paul's words, but they could not, would not, respond to the Spirit of God for themselves.

I love Paul. Whenever he was asked a question in court, do you notice that he always seized the opportunity to testify to the greatness of God? You would-be preachers will appreciate this – every time they bring in Paul, either shackled or recently unshackled, and they say, "Alright, Paul, do you have anything to say for yourself?" He says, "Yes. You see, many years ago..." and he preaches from Genesis to where he is at that moment. And such was the occasion at this time when he was before Festus and Agrippa.

I pray you all understand this, that gone are the days when the church, much less unbelievers, are impressed with great sermons. People have had enough great messages. They've become, in a way, immune. No longer are they impressed with fine verbal outlay, or what we might call "witnessing." Witnessing is not effective if we try to force-feed people with memorized scriptures. That may make us feel good but it turns them off.

But when the presence of Jesus Christ is there, it makes all the difference. The anointing – the presence of Christ **is** the anointing. ***The anointed divine Presence is what makes the difference.*** It really doesn't matter if you're an eloquent speaker or a person who loses the place in your thoughts, when the presence of Jesus is there, it causes everyone listen. They may not like it, they may be able to resist it, but they do hear it.

So Paul testifies to these great officials. "Yes, many years ago, you see..." and he relates the story of everything he knows about the goodness and provision of God. Now, it wasn't his *content* so much as the *presence of Christ* within him – or if you prefer, the Holy Spirit present within him. *That – He – is what made the difference.* For the Word became flesh in Paul – "and the word became" – what? – "flesh and dwelt among us" (Jn.1:14).

Is the Word made "flesh" in you? Are you a walking, talking, thinking, acting, feeling Word of God? That's our call. We're not simply called to salvation. It doesn't get the job done, or our calling fulfilled,

just to stay saved. We have a job to do, can you agree? There's a whole confused, mixed-up world out there saying, "We've seen the counterfeit, the fakes and the flakes. Is there any real?" "Well, yes there is" and we are supposed to mirror Him. Made in His image, we're supposed to be like Him (Rom.8:29).

Let's turn to Paul again. He is the fulfillment, the personification of what Peter intended when he said: "Sanctify the Lord God in your hearts" (1Pet.3:15a). That's the first step toward witnessing. Sanctify means, "to set apart for holy purpose." "Sanctify the Lord God in your hearts and be ready always to give an answer to every man that asks of you a reason of the hope that lieth within you with godliness and fear" (1Pet.3:15). *Paul lived that way*. Here, he is back in the prison but still giving a personal report of the goodness of God – the hope with which Paul lives.

What would you do under such negative circumstances? "Oh, my God, I've *tried* to serve You. I don't understand this at all! Oh, God, You know I've done everything You've ever wanted me to do. My God, how can I witness in this place? You've called me to preach and..." Not Paul. He's there, shackled, saying, "This is going so good, I can't wait! Hallelujah! I remember the last time I was in a crazy prison. I started praising the Lord and He got too close and all the doors opened."

There's a side sermon for you. I do find this so interesting. The Bible says, about that previous imprisonment, "And all the prison doors were opened; but nobody came out. Not anybody" (Ac.16:25-29). Can't you just hear them back in their cells? "I'm not coming out. It's probably a trick." Now, doesn't that sound just like the Body of Christ today? "I'm not going to get involved in that. It's probably getting off the deep end. It could be heresy!"

Paul sits there waiting. He says, "Glory to God! I just love You, Lord." And I love Paul's description of being a prisoner! I am sure that absolutely frustrated the jailers as well as the kings that put him in prison. Every time he wrote he said, "I, Paul, the prisoner of the **Lord Jesus Christ**" (Eph.3:1;4:1; 2Tim.1:8; Phm.1:1.9, bold added). Oh, Church, I wish we could grow up to that – *that once we have accepted His salvation and committed our lives to Jesus, He truly would become King*. You know in a Kingdom, only the King gives orders or has a vote on any issue. And the King's responsibility includes taking care of his subjects. Your King *will* take care of you in every circumstance that is a part of your life – if you let Him.

So, here's Paul and he can't wait to see what God is going to do this time. Days go by, and more days go by, and even more days, but Paul is not worried. He's not holding any pity-parties; he's not upset; he's not whining or complaining or wringing his hands in despair wondering where his God is. He's just saying, "Lord, it's so good to be shut in with You. I'm a prisoner of the Lord Jesus Christ." Finally they loose him, bring him out into the daylight and say, "Well Paul, you're being brought before Festus and Agrippa today. They are going to give you opportunity to say something for yourself." We can only imagine Paul is quietly praying, "Holy Spirit, give me the words. Make it come alive!" And Paul, one with Christ, so totally united with Christ – filled with His Holy Spirit –

What do you think being filled with the Spirit is? "Well, it's *an experience*." I feel sorry for you if all you did was to fill up an empty doubt with an experience but haven't filled up again since. Anyone that personally knows what Baptized in the Holy Spirit is, emerges with this one awareness: "Christ is truly in me! and that's the hope of God's glory filling all the earth (Col.1:27). Everywhere I go, people will see Christ. Every time I speak, people will hear Christ." It's an awesome privilege – and responsibility.

Why do you think everyone was so stirred in the Synagogue when Jesus arose and read from Isaiah? They heard the same passage read often. That passage was no big deal to them. But when *Jesus* got up and read it – He didn't comment on it, He just read it – when He finished reading, they said, "Wow! Never has a man spoken like this!" (Lk.4:16-20; cf.Mk.6:1,2; Jn.7:46). He gave it all fresh meaning. He said, "The Spirit of the Lord God is upon *Me* for He hath anointed *Me* to preach good tidings, open prison doors and set the captives free! Open the eyes of the blind..." (Lk.4:18). They all were confronted with the fact that Jesus was now identifying Himself with the messianic revelation in the passage.

The whole church has blind eyes today, limited vision – walking around with tunnel vision – seeing one little concern and only that issue. When Paul came out of the prison he said, “Spirit of God, be Thou released from within me.” And he stood there waiting for that moment, that divine appointment, when Agrippa said, “What do you have to say for yourself” (Ac.26:1). Then, at their invitation, Paul began to explain to them every feeling that was within him and expound on the very words that they claimed religiously to believe. I pray you’re hearing this. One who stood there, Festus, began to tremble (26:24).

I’ve seen people so completely under the conviction of the Holy Spirit that they literally must grab the pew to hold themselves up. I’ve seen them get up to quickly exit and be stricken by the Holy Spirit. Just recently, I watched a person start to rise as we were ministering the Word, and God just struck them over – Whap! Slap! Everyone started to run to her aid and I said, “Leave her alone. God knocked her down; He will pick her up when He’s ready.” Listen now – there’s something about the power of the Holy Spirit that does the job all by Himself and we have interfered in His business long enough. It’s time for us to stop trying to help Him do what only He can do. We need to start cooperating with the Holy Spirit.

Festus begins to tremble, *but he was able to resist*. Agrippa begins to be moved by faith (26:28), because **any time it’s the Word of the Lord, it is always coupled with sufficient faith for the hearer to react**. Now, remember that for it will be useful in days to come.

Allow me to say it another way. When Jesus said to the lame, “rise up and walk” (Mt.9:2-7; Jn.5:3-9), they always could comply *at that moment*. Whenever God is speaking through a human vessel, **He couples that message with sufficient faith that anyone who hears it can do anything they hear**. If you’re hearing, you can be set free out of your own prison tonight – if you heard that, you *can* be. But if you walk out of here without responding to God in the /kairos/ moment, you can resist that special divine outpouring of faith-for-the-moment. If you are hearing some things about the anointing and you understand what you’re hearing, you can move into that or you can resist it and say, “That’s just her opinion.”

Festus trembled. Agrippa said, “I’m hearing something like I’ve never heard it before.” He doesn’t know what to do because he doesn’t want to obey it; he doesn’t want to change his ways; he doesn’t want to be impacted by this Paul or his God. So, he must – now hear this – it’s a word of knowledge for some of you – **when you don’t want to obey what you hear, you must get rid of it**. You have to dispel conviction, get it out of your mind, and you can do that by talking. Selah.

So, Agrippa says to Paul – out loud – “Paul, *almost...*” (Ac.26:28). Almost – almost. Church, we could talk more than an hour on “almost.” “*Almost* the Lord has you completely...” “*Almost* there’s a new anointing in your life today...” Almost – almost – almost. But you *are* able to talk yourself out of whatever it is that God is focusing on with you. It’s your choice. That’s part of our *free will* in action.

The Pharisees took a *legalistic* view of ministry. “Here are the rules, now follow them explicitly.” The disciples of Jesus were teaching something *relational* – “God loves you and has a plan for your life.” The legalists had to get rid of these “revolutionaries” and they set out to capture Peter (see Ac.23ff) along with some of the others that were preaching like he did. They could not actually find any fault in these men of God (Ac.23:9), but the legalistic officials were people-pleasers, and the majority of the people did not want Christianity preached - - - - - do they? Even today.

The majority of people in the United States of America don’t mind “religion.” They don’t care if people go to church or not. And there are many different church denominations, so they don’t mind how you worship. But – they have a terrible time *when Christianity makes a difference*. When Christians finally come together in unity long enough to form some kind of an influential group. “God forbid the Christian evangelicals should align themselves and form a political presence, let alone a voting block.” They don’t like it when Christians dare to find out how elected officials are voting or when they dare to let people know what the voting records reveal. It is then the *liberal media* jumps in and says, “This is ridiculous. They can’t do that. There must be a separation of church and state.”

Come on, Church, it's about time for us to grow up! It's time for us to get involved! We have been standing on the sidelines long enough. God is saying some very personal things and we all know it. If you're sitting around trying to find someone as miserable as you are, so the two of you can talk away the anointing, I fear for you. You see, it only takes one voice, and we find agreement. If we can find three, that makes for a very strong cord (Eccl.4:12) even though it is a negative situation.

Do you remember the time the disciples were so excited following the Resurrection of Jesus when He suddenly appeared to them? (John 20:24ff). Earlier, Thomas was missing from the group gathered but now had just come in and they said, "Oh, Thomas, Thomas! Oh, you should've been here! We were just sitting around here together, Thomas, and the Lord came! The Lord came! He just came in! Thomas, it was like – I don't know how to say it. It was like He came through the wall or something. But oh, Thomas! It was glorious!" And they were all going on and on about the visitation. Finally, Thomas said, "That's impossible! I doubt all that. You probably got caught up in mob psychology or something. You know, a lot of these teachers are great at that. They get you revved up and then you think you've got hold of something. The only way I'll believe is if I actually touch Him."

Interesting isn't it? That happens to be too true. You can *talk about* Jesus from now until He returns and yet not be a part of the Army of God who gets the job done. You can go out and *witness* – trying to cram your words down people's throats. "Are you saved?" "You have got to have a plan for your life." "Blah-blah-blah." And all it really is, is just talking scriptures. You put them in your Gospel-gun, and shoot them out there – rat-ta-tat-tat! – "in the name of the Lord" (of course). We call that "witnessing."

No wonder the world balks at us! They often laugh in derision. A better witness? When we hear His voice and become rightly-related to Him – then walk and talk as Jesus did. And when people touch us – what happens? They touch Him! They can't deny the reality of the power of God when they work or live alongside of a life, mine or yours, that lives like Jesus and loves like Jesus. They might resist responding to His call, but they can't deny the reality – if it is a reality!

Thomas said, "I will not believe." And then Jesus stepped in once again (Jn.20:26ff) and said to him, "Thomas, what was that you said?" Thomas' response was in utter astonishment: "Oh, my Lord and my God." Jesus lovingly understood just where he was: "You want to touch Me, Thomas? Come on, Thomas, you can touch Me. Let's make a believer out of you, once and for all." If people can touch Jesus, through us, the results will be awesome. Jesus made this great attempt to jump-start their faith.

On the other hand, if you honestly, really doubt your walk, your experience with God; if you doubt the Holy Spirit's presence in you; if you doubt the call of God upon your life – if you're honestly doubting at this very moment – God will make it all certain to you once again. He will allow you to touch in Him exactly what you need to touch, and in the way you need. He will make it all a reality to you, for you. He does not want you to continue in uncertainty or doubt. I believe that with all my heart! Honestly – doubt is not the sin. The sin is not to admit you doubt. Can you see the difference?

But – if the doubts are over and you have touched nail-scarred hands; if you have heard the glorified Christ and you know that He has spoken to you; my friend, you don't need to hear another voice. It is settled in the purposes of God. Now, you just need to get on with the program. That's how we *resist faith* – by not responding to Him when we know we have heard His call; by remaining the same after we have heard the divine voice.

Faith can also be *reduced* as well as resisted. Let's look at Mark 14, verses 27 and 28. Jesus is talking to His disciples delivering His farewell address. He says, "All ye shall be offended because of Me this night, for it is written, 'I will smite the shepherd and the sheep will be scattered.' But after I am risen, I will go before you into Galilee."

He gave them the information they needed to know for belief – *it is the projection for faith's action* – “after I am risen... I will go before you...” What a positive, encouraging word of expectancy! But Peter said... Here's a quick aside for you – do you see Peter *talking* when he ought to be listening and believing? Peter said (Mk.14:29,30), “‘Although all shall be offended yet not will I.’ And Jesus said unto him, ‘Verily I say unto you, This day, even in this night, before the morning, before the cock crows twice, thou shalt deny me thrice.’” There is the second attempt to get their faith activated.

What should Peter have said then? “Help me, Lord, so I do not let You down.” Does this sound a bit like what we hear today? I hate to use the word because it's been used so much that it almost is stereotyped, but this is a gorgeous picture of *humanism*. The “religious” approach, humanistically, is: man can do it alone, without anyone's help.

What is taught too often as faith is really personal tenacity: “Make up your mind, grit your teeth, and go with it, man. If you know it's good – shift – get moving.” And we've totally ignored the verses: “it is not in man to do right, or to do His ways” (Jer.10:23); or, “let him that standeth take heed lest he fall” (1Cor.10:12). That's not faith, that's negative – negative talk – reverse thinking – not faith. Faith says, “I can do it” – “I can do all things through Christ Jesus who strengthens me.” True, we can do it – but it's through “Christ who strengtheneth me” (Phil.4:13). When does Christ strengthen you? When you're weak. When you're weak, what do you do? When you're afraid, what do you do? The psalmist said, “When I am weak, when I am afraid, I will trust the Lord” (Ps.56:3).

Whatever happened to prayer? There's a teaching out there that has caused the church to become almost superstitious about prayer. We're afraid to pray about our weaknesses; afraid it might be a negative confession. The devil loves that. If he can't talk you out of it one way, he'll try another. Read some of the psalms of David. Read some of the prayers that Paul prayed for the believers to whom he had ministered (i.e. Col3:9-11; Eph.3:14-21). He knew that they were weak. When you know that you're weak, you need to pray: “God help me.” When we become aware of deficiencies within, we need to fall on our faces before God – “help Thou mine unbelief” (Mk.9:24).

When the Lord says, “You say a lot of things, but you don't carry through,” that's not a time to become tenacious and determine, “I will from now on.” That's a time to say, “True, Lord. You are so right. I need Your strength. I know I don't deserve it – ‘It's not meet to take the children's prayers and give it to the dogs’” (Mt.15:26; Mk.7:27). Is that a familiar scripture to you? Jesus said that to a woman who was not from the house of David, she was not a Jew. Theoretically, Jesus was sent at that time to only the house of Israel (Mt.15:24), so she “deserved” nothing from Him. What did she answer? She said, “Lord, You're absolutely right. I don't deserve a thing from You, but I sure would appreciate a crumb.” Hello, Church. I'm not trying to diminish faith; I'm trying to help us understand it. She had so much faith in Him that she dared to approach Him, a woman and a non-Jew, and ask for a crumb.

We've got to come into some more mature things. We've lost our feeling for people, for the “weaker brethren.” Do you realize that? We've lost our sensitivity, our compassion. All we do is crucify them when they demonstrate lack of wisdom or failures in faith. “Well, if you had *faith*, you wouldn't be in that mess.” My Bible says, when Jesus came He said, “a bruised reed, I'll never break.” (Mt.12:20). What right do we have to walk through the garden, His garden, and break them off? He went on to say, “I came with a fan in My hand to encourage what little hope remains there.” We see a little bit of smoke, a dying fire that's kind of smoldering with nothing but smoke coming up, no flame, and we walk along saying, “Well, if you had the faith...” Then we put it out. We douse what little was there with our wet blankets. But Jesus said, “I came with a fan in My hand.” And He said, “Oh, hallelujah! When you're afraid, when you're not trusting, I tell you, I'm going to be your faith. I'll be for you, trust” (see Mt.12:21).

That's the kind of thinking that needs to be going on in us. We need to turn around, see a bruised reed, lay hands on and heal it. When we see a little smoke, we can take the fan of *our* faith, the fervency of the Holy Spirit within, and the beauty of the Word of God – not those legalistic scriptures that kill and put out

the little smoldering embers of faith (“the letter kills but the Spirit [of love] gives life” (2Cor.3:6) – but we can come alongside with encouragement and speak God’s love into the situation. “I believe God for you, Sis.” “I believe God for you, Brother. God is the Restorer of everything (Ps.23). He can put your life back together and restore that which the enemy has robbed from you” (Joel 2:25; Pr.6:31). Jesus said of the enemy, “He is a thief and a liar” (Jn.10:10). I want you to know – Jesus is going to give it back.

Mark 14:31 – “But [Peter] spoke the more vehemently.” He was so sure of his own commitment level! “If I should die with thee, I will not deny thee in any wise.” And all the disciples present were so impressed with Peter’s speech that, with one accord, they jumped in, “Me too, Lord.” Isn’t that a picture of a Sunday night church service? We get so excited, so delighted with the presence of the Lord and someone confidently declares, “Where He leads I will follow” and the rest of us say, “Amen, amen, amen!” Sometimes that fervor even lasts until noon on Monday. ☺ Then, when the Lord starts leading a little different way, we resist the change and Him. “Lord, I’m not going *that* way. I meant it Sunday night because I felt it fervently, but I didn’t know You meant...”

I love emotion, and I’m an emotional person, *but emotion is not faith*. I have seen God move mightily when I was so tired and almost without a voice, when I could barely put one foot in front of the other. I still watched over a hundred people receive the Holy Spirit in a moment of time, hundreds receive physical healing in their bodies, and countless people delivered from bondage – but I didn’t *feel* it – I was too tired to feel. It is not by how “powerful” or “anointed” we *feel* that we can measure the works of God. It is through faith and faith alone. “He said it, it must be so!” Let’s remember our definition, faith is totally relying on the words of another.

We sit in a church service and think because we *feel* a lot of things that the Lord really moved. Maybe yes – maybe no – maybe *you* moved. Here’s a truth: if you have to sing a song fifteen times to get people inspired, God isn’t there. Now Church, that’s true; it really is. It’s one thing to sing the same chorus because the Lord moves in on it and you’re worshipping *Him*. But you know what I’m saying, don’t you? If you just have to keep the thing going, rev it up, take it and prime it and pump it up, He is not there. You might as well dismiss the service and go home.

Jesus and His disciples arrived in Gethsemane and the Lord says, “Alright, you’re going to stay with Me, Peter.” And Peter says, “That’s right, Lord. You’ve got me. I don’t know about the others, but I’m with You!” And Jesus took up the challenge: “Alright, Peter, let’s go. Let’s see what you can do.” Then He said, “Men, My soul is almost sorrowful unto death” (Mk.14:34). He goes on, “This is a moment that I can’t explain to you.”

Now hear me, Church. Please, please hear *exactly* how I’m saying this. Jesus said, “*I need the help of the brethren in this hour.*” If you can hear me, that’s a prophetic word for the Church today – now – in the 21st century. That’s the voice of the Lord saying, “I really do need the help of the brethren interceding in this hour.” The verse says, “Tarry ye here, and watch.” Not because He’s incapacitated or incapable of handling it by Himself, but because it is His way. He wants His people involved with Him. If this generation does not fulfill this call, then God will raise up another generation that will. God **is** going to work through His church.

Jesus takes Peter, James and John, and brings them just a stone’s throw away from where He is going to be praying. He says to them, “Pray with Me, men. I need you to intercede with Me.” Then Jesus walked a little further, knowing the anguish He was to face shortly. These men who had been saying (boasting?), “Wherever You lead, wherever You go, Lord, if anyone else lets You down, not us. We will always be with You.” These same men laid down on the ground and went right off to sleep (Mk.14:37a).

How do we go to sleep today, figuratively? Well, I’m glad you asked that because there are many ways the Church, individuals in the church, go to sleep. One of the ways, perhaps the most subtle one, is this: “What difference would I make, I’m only one voice, one vote? You can’t fight City Hall. The majority is against you. You mean one little Christian is going to make a difference? I’m not going to make a

difference all by myself.” The Lord returns and says to the threesome, “Couldn’t you have waited with Me? Couldn’t you have lasted? You made a commitment. Couldn’t you have lasted one little hour?” (Mk.14:37b) “Oh, sorry, Lord. We’ll do better next time.” Jesus went away a second time and they slept a second time. And the third time, when He returned and they slept again, He said to them, “Sleep on now.” And then, “Rise let us be going.” I think what He was actually saying, “You’re asleep spiritually. I gave you an occasion for faith to be put into practice, but you slept through it. Peter, James and John, you could have been with Me through to the very end – had you leaned on Me for the strength.”

Some of you are very hurt, spiritually, because what you thought was faith was actually presumption on your part. You made a great declaration to the Lord – and more dangerously, to His kids. You said “The Lord is going to do this” and “The Lord is going to do that” and “I’m going to do the other thing.” And nothing happened like you thought it would or declared it would.

I know this is going to shock some of you, but at least it will provoke you to start thinking differently. In the days to come, you are going to be very amazed when you start out like this: “Thus saith the Lord,” and you’re going to hear a voice inside of you loudly say, “I did not. That’s not Me!” We blame a lot of things on God, don’t we? And we must know that there *will* be those who hear the still small voice of God, that certain voice of divine inspiration. With fear and trembling, they’re going to say, “I **know** I heard from God, and Church, ‘thus saith the Lord.’” And when we say that, He’s going to say, “And I will follow that with signs, because it **is** My voice.” Not because *you* said it will He stand behind it, but because He really did inspire that Word.

Hurt. Like Peter, you stepped up and promised the Lord a whole lot of things you’ve never fulfilled. You do the same thing every time you sense the presence of the Lord, every time you’re in a meeting where the presence of the Lord is – where conviction sets in because He is there. His Spirit always convicts anything that is anti-holiness, or unconsecrated to His service. Every unholy thing in your life is going to be roused when the presence of the Lord is there.

Right now, the Lord is saying, “I’m not asking you for great words. I’m asking you to walk it out.” You know the story of Peter’s denial (Mk.14:66ff; Mt.26:69ff). When it was over, the Bible says, “Peter went out and wept bitterly (Mt.26:75). For 3 days, he wept. While Jesus was in the grave, he wept. What was he crying about? Were they tears of repentance or tears of self-pity or tears of anger?

A lot of you have fooled a lot of other people with your tears. You cried and allowed people think you were soft and gentle toward the Lord, when the truth was, you were (are) just plain angry. You’re mad at your own failures. You’re mad because He didn’t back your words. You’re mad because things haven’t gone the way you thought they ought to and you’re embarrassed to have spoken out boldly and been in error, so you cry. And that’s why you have to cry longer than one day. Three speaks of resurrection.

Three reminds us of that great day of resurrection! Maybe the second day Peter was saying, “I’m such a failure, I’m not a man. I’m a failure. I’ll never make it. I’m a loser, a born loser.” Let me tell you something: if you’re born again, you’re not “a born loser.” Born again people are never born to lose. You’re not even programmed to lose by your family of origin or any other thing or experience from your past. That’s why we handle things so poorly. We don’t believe what God has said about us. You’re programmed for success (Jer.29:11), and that’s the only thing that will bring you joy, fulfillment and contentment. Success – in God.

The third day – I think Peter’s already cried out his anger and he’s cried out his self-pity. It’s the third day and repentance begins to flow. “God, I’m not mad any more. And it no longer matters what people think of me. Yes, I failed. But of course I failed in my own strength (which is not really strength at all!). I don’t care about me, but **Thy** kingdom come. Cleanse me, oh God. Do whatever has to be done within me. Change me. Make me like You, O Holy One of Israel.”

Meanwhile, at Jesus' grave – Mary Magdalene – out of whom He cast seven devils, is standing there, and she hears a voice saying, “Mary.” And she turns to see the Lord (Jn.20:11ff). Here is a side sermon: Why did the Lord appear to Mary first after the resurrection? Not to make us women preachers feel good, although I love that. The answer to the question is, because *Mary was the first to seek Him*. God has no favorites.

“My Lord and my Master.” And He says, “Don’t touch Me, Mary, but go tell My disciples, and Peter too, that I am risen” (Jn.20:16ff). So Mary goes to the disciples and finds Peter over here crying, “Oh, my God, my God, if there is any second chance for anybody. Oh, God.” And she says, “Peter, I’ve seen the Lord and He said to tell you, He’s risen.” “No, no. Not me. He meant the disciples; I’m not one of the disciples anymore. Once I had a call of God on my life, but it’s too late.” “No, Peter, He said, ‘go tell My disciples and Peter.’” Peter said, “Honest? Say it exactly like He said it.”

That’s exactly how He’s saying it, Sir. That’s exactly how He’s saying it, Lady. “I’m calling you – yes, you – you who say it’s too late to fulfill the call of God upon your life. He said you didn’t know what to do with your faith the first time. You put it in yourself, but now, you know...”

We can look to one more portion of scripture to discover what happened to Peter. After his repentance and humbling coming to the Lord, who was it God used immediately following the outpouring of His Spirit in the Upper Room? We find the story in Acts 2, beginning in verse 14. What an exciting restoration! It was Peter who first preached in power, under the divine anointing of God. Great was the influence of his testimony and sermon! Three thousand souls “gladly received the word (vs.41)... continued steadfastly in the apostles’ doctrine (vs.42)... continued daily with one accord (vs.46)...” Read it. This should encourage us that it is not by anything we do in our own strength, wisdom, or intelligence. It is all by the power of faith in God and obedience to His Word. Then follows “favor with all the people” (vs.47). Can it get any better than that?