



FAITH
I. — What Faith Is

Comrades and Friends, — I want to say something this morning to which much importance is attached and which is much talked about by good men, and that is Faith. In doing so I have chosen as a text the words of Jesus to His Apostles, which you will find in Mark xi. 22, and which reads: 'Have faith in God.'

I will begin by trying to answer the question:

I. — What are we to understand by faith in God?

In doing so I remark:

1. That religious faith is very much the same thing as any other kind of faith.

The difference consists not in the faculty that believes, nor in the use made of it in believing but in the greatness of the object to which it is directed, and the importance of the blessings that follow its exercise.

Having faith in God is, therefore, so far as the act of the mind is concerned, very much the same kind of thing as having faith in man. Now you know what it is to have faith in your brother, for instance. In the first place, you believe what he says.

Well, faith in God is very much the same kind of thing as that. You receive the words spoken or written by your brother as being true. Should anyone throw any doubt upon their accuracy, you should cry out: 'I believe what my brother says to be absolutely correct. Has he promised these things? If he has, then, so far as he is able, he will keep his word. What he has promised he will perform.'

That is exercising faith; or, as we call it, believing.

2. So you will see that faith in God implies belief in the words He has spoken.



The William Booth Collection

However unlikely the things they set forth may appear, or however men may deny their truthfulness, or whatever doubts human opinions or knowledge may seem to throw upon their accuracy, we are to believe that every word He has spoken is true; that every prophecy He has uttered will come to pass; and that every promise He has made will be fulfilled.

3. But faith is more than believing in the Word of God, whether spoken or written.

It signifies trust in the individual. It means confidence in the speaker, apart from his words. You will often hear this kind of faith referred to in something like the following manner. A man will say of his friend: 'I know him.' 'I know his heart, bless him! I am quite sure he will do what I want him to do, if he can, whether he says so or not. I can trust him.' Here you have trust in the person.

4. In the same way, faith in God means faith in the word He has spoken; but it means more than that, it means confidence in God himself.

So that when things are happening within or around you that appear to be opposed to the notion that God is kindly disposed towards you, you must believe that God is loving you all the time, and that He is really making all things work together for your good.

Faith in the words God has spoken is most important, but faith in God Himself is more important still.

Here, then, you have the kind of believing for which Jesus Christ asks, when He says, 'Have faith in God.'

II. – Simple as faith is, my Comrades, many serious mistakes are made respecting it.

Let me point out one or two of them, and so try to prevent your being misled by them.

1. And, first, I remark, that faith is not feeling.

In striving to believe, dependence should not be placed upon such feelings as you are likely to think will follow or be associated with faith.



The William Booth Collection

This is a mistake into which many people fall in their efforts to believe. The moment they start off to seek any blessing, the bestowment of which is made to depend upon their faith, they begin to look within to see if any feeling which seems to answer to the blessing they are seeking has spring up in their hearts; and, discouraged at not finding the expected emotion there, they too often cease from their efforts to believe, and cry out, 'Alas, for my hear of unbelief!'

But faith essentially differs from feeling. It is true that it is often so closely associated with feeling, or followed so closely by it, that it is not at all unnatural for it to be regarded as the same thing. But feeling is not the same; it is something very different. Faith produces feeling; faith is seldom exercised without feeling. Still, faith is something entirely distinct form it.

Believing usually goes ahead of feeling; and to expect feelings before the exercise of faith, is, as I used to say when a boy, sixty-five years ago, to put the cart before the horse. The law of faith is: first believe, and then feel.

2. Neither must faith be confounded with sight, nor must seeing be taken for believing.

Believing with what we sometimes call a 'naked faith' – that faith which trusts God without the assistance of feelings, or signs, or wonders, whether great or small – will be the most effective and enduring.

I remember a good man saying to me when I was a youth, 'Trust God in the dark, my son, and you will be most likely to trust Him in the light.'

Believing that the thing is done, or that it will be done, is not the same as seeing the thing done, or knowing that it will be done. And yet how often we want to see the thing accomplished before we are willing to believe that it will come to pass.

When Elijah was praying for rain, on Mount Carmel, he did not put off the exercise of his faith until his servant told him of the cloud, no bigger than a man's hand, which betokened the coming flood. Oh, dear, no! Although the sky continued to be one vast glaring sea of brass, and although the servant reported, again and again, that he could not see any sign of the expected rain. Elijah persisted in saying: 'The rain will come; the rain is coming; God will send it! Jehovah has heard, and Jehovah will answer my prayer!' He had faith in God!

A little sight, we often say, helps faith amazingly. When you see a few clouds in the heaven, you say, 'I believe there will be a shower.' So, when you see the people coming to your Hall, and kneeling at the Mercy-Seat, or when you get some visible answers to your prayers, it is much easier to believe for more.

III. – The faith Jesus Christ commands is neither more nor less than believing that the things God has caused to be written down in His Book are absolutely true, and that the promises He has made will be fulfilled, and the things that He has prophesied will come to pass, whether you can see satisfying evidences of it or not. You must accept it as a fact, that, and just as faithful, and just as loving as he has described Himself to be.

Jesus Christ says this morning: 'Take God at His word. My Father cannot lie. If He has promised you can be quite sure that He will perform. Trust Him. Has He not shown Himself in ten thousand ways, at ten thousand different times, to be worthy of your utmost confidence?'

So, my Comrades, I invite you to lay yourselves at His feet this very day. Ask Him to forgive all your past unbelief, and banish every doubt and fear that you have allowed to live in your hearts. Nay, go further. Is there not some blessing that you need which depends upon the present exercise of faith?

What is it? Is it forgiveness of your sins? Is it restoration from backsliding? Is it a more satisfying assurance of the Divine favour in your soul? Is it a pure heart? Is it a burning love for souls? Is it comfort or deliverance in some particular sorrow or trial.

Whatever the blessing may be that you need, believe that God is willing to give it. Then go down, and ask Him for it now, resting in the assurance that He is willing and able to bestow it; and believe that He gives it you here and now.

And if, after all, the satisfying evidence of the bestowment of the blessing be withheld, trust Him still; and believe that in withholding it He seems your truest and highest good.

Your affectionate General,
William Booth.