

THE JUST SHALL LIVE BY FAITH

PART 2

Receiving What God Has Given

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18 December 2010

Right brethren, you may recollect that last week we talked about *Seeing the Invisible*. The comment that we made last week was that you and I are blessed with having five physical senses. By these we relate to the world around us, and by these senses we receive information. We see, we hear, we smell, we touch and so on. Those senses are absolutely vital if we are doing things like driving a car, cooking a meal, even just talking to friends, etc. But, as good as they are, they are limited. There is a real genuine spiritual realm. God is out there, plus angels, demons and other various creatures and so on. We do not see them or hear them with our physical senses. You and I do need the eye of faith so that we can see the invisible.

Last week we looked at a couple of examples, one of which was Elisha and his servant. He saw the armies of the Assyrians with their shields and their swords, but Elisha told him not to worry as there are 'more of us than there are of them'. He had to ask God to open the servant's eyes to see the chariots of fire and all of the angels surrounding the city.

Another example that we saw last week was Balaam's donkey. Balaam was quite keen to get the donkey to move on; but the donkey went to the left and went to the right, and finally gave up and just flopped down and would not move. When asked why, the donkey said because of the big angel with the sword. At that point Balaam's eyes were opened and he saw something that was typically invisible. Unfortunately, you and I do not generally have the advantage of the spiritual realm manifesting itself to us in that way. But we still need to know that it is there, and to be very comfortable with its existence, and in essence to really *see the invisible*.

Hebrew 11:1 Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of *things not seen*.

Things that are not seen are obviously *invisible* and we cannot see them. But faith is the evidence, or the proof, or the conviction of things not seen. It is not that they are *unreal*, they are definite and they are out there, but they are not necessarily seen. Our faith is *the substance* of things hoped for. We said last week that faith is not wishy-washy and vague. We are talking about hope being a confident expectation. Our faith is the evidence of their existence. The Amplified translation says, “*Faith perceiving as REAL FACT what is not revealed to the senses*”. So our eyes do not literally see, our ears do not literally hear, we cannot reach out and touch these things, but they are absolutely real; and our faith is the evidence of those things that we do not see. One translation says that faith is the *title deed*. You may have a title deed to a property that you have never seen, but your title deed means that it belongs to you — it is real.

II Corinthians 5:7 For we walk by faith, not by sight.

Paul was going through some quite severe difficulties at that time in his life, but he says that we walk by faith. We do not walk by sight (but clearly there are times that it is very correct to walk by sight and to drive by sight!).

There are some situations where the physical senses are not enough. You and I are limited, and there are situations where you and I need to make decisions and choose, based upon not just the things that we can see, touch and hear, but you and I on occasion have to walk by faith. That can be very, very important.

II Corinthians 4:16 Therefore we do not lose heart. Even though our outward man is perishing, yet the inward man is being renewed day by day.

This is very comforting that even though our outer bodies might eventually start showing the occasional sign of age, the inner man can be renewed and be stronger and stronger. As time goes on there is no reason why you should not be sharper and stronger spiritually at aged ninety than you were at age thirty. Your body may not be quite as strong, perhaps you cannot run ten miles at ninety, or at least at the speed you could when you were twenty five; but *the inner man* can be renewed day by day.

II Corinthians 4:17-18 For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, is working for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory, while we do not look at the things which are seen, but *at the things which are not seen*. For the things which are seen are temporary, but the things which are not seen are eternal.

Paul says, ‘The difficulties I am going through, the obstacles, the occasional harassment and attacks, all these things that are around me — I am not looking at those, I am not moved by those and they do not dictate to me how I live. I do not want to look at the things which are seen, I am looking at the things which are not seen’. He made his decisions, his choices, and he lived his life by clearly seeing what was not seen. To that extent, Paul clearly was a man of faith; faith being the evidence of things not seen. Paul is saying that we walk by faith not by sight.

You remember the case last week of doubting Thomas. Thomas said, ‘Unless *I see* the holes in Jesus’ hands, unless I reach out *and touch* the hole in his side, I will not believe’. Jesus came and Thomas decided that he was not so smart after all. Jesus told Thomas, “Blessed are those who believe but do not see”. So requiring physical hard evidence is really not too impressive. If we have, for example, the word of a person, well if that person is good to their word it should be sufficient. For example, if God says something, then if you believe God is a person of integrity, then His word should be sufficient. We should not need additional hard evidence. So learning to see what is not visible, seeing the invisible, is a key part of living by faith. We saw in Romans last week, that *the just shall live by faith*. That is how you and I are supposed to be; a people who live by faith. It cannot be just when a crisis comes along and we "work up" some faith, but other than that we are just "ordinary Christians." Well there is no such thing really.

Paul says that the *just shall live by faith*. That is how you and I are supposed to live our lives day in and day out.

We need to clarify what we think *the purpose* of faith is. We know that we need faith, but what exactly does faith do; what is its purpose?

Matthew 21:20-22 And when the disciples saw it, they marveled, saying, "How did the fig tree wither away so soon?" So Jesus answered and said to them, "Assuredly, I say to you, if you have faith and do not doubt, you will not only do what was done to the fig tree, but also if you say to this mountain, 'Be removed and be cast into the sea,' it will be done. "And whatever things you ask in prayer, believing, you will receive."

Of course, there was a catch there if you were paying attention. We must *believe*. You and I need to *believe* if we wish to *receive*. What part does faith play? There is a common misconception which is that our *faith moves God* to answer us — that faith is what we do to *persuade God* to respond to our needs, desires and our requests. Faith is something that we do that pushes God into a response. Some people think that when they need healing, financial help, or any other problem, they know God could help them, but He will not reach out and help until 'I demonstrate my faith. If I have enough faith it will persuade God to act, if it is strong enough it might even force Him to act'. The picture that we are describing there is that God is reluctant. We think that He is sitting there on His throne, and He has His arms folded and He is holding back. 'It is really difficult to reach God to persuade Him to act, and I really have to work up faith. If I can work up enough faith I *can move God*. If I do not have enough faith then in that case I will enlist my famous email prayer chain and if there are plenty of us going to God and we are all pushing God, then maybe somebody else may have the faith to persuade God. Or, if that fails well it is time to "storm the gates of heaven." Or, if all else fails, I will fast, and that will really move God when He sees the pain, agony and discomfort that I am in'. Of course, when we actually say these things out loud we know that there is something really not quite right with this concept!!

In other messages in the past, we have discussed associated ideas or concepts, and the common theme of many of them is that "God is the problem." "If only God would listen. If only God would respond. If only God would reach out. If only God would use His great power." Our prayers get longer and longer as we try to explain the situation to God, as if He did not know already, or as we try *to persuade* Him to love us. Sometimes we get lots of others involved to try to build up the numbers, or maybe find one person in our extended fellowship that has faith.

We do not always put our thoughts into words, but sometimes if we played back our prayers we would recognize the theme: ‘Oh God if you really cared for me. Oh God if you really understood my situation you would reach out and deliver. Oh God if you really loved me you would answer’. If you put it that way it is just plain wrong because God *is* caring and He *is* loving and He *does* understand. In living by faith we need to understand that the purpose of faith is *not to move God*; He does not need moving! The key to faith is to understand that faith is much more about *our receiving* what God has *already made available* in His goodness and His love for us. Faith is reaching out *to receive* what God has *already* made available in His love toward us; faith is not about pressuring or persuading God, it is about *how we receive* from God what He has *already done*. Today’s message is entitled “Receiving What God Has Given”. Receiving (that is our part) what God has given.

Mark 6:1-5 Then He went out from there and came to His own country, and His disciples followed Him. And when the Sabbath had come, He began to teach in the synagogue. And many hearing Him were astonished, saying, "Where did this Man get these things? And what wisdom is this which is given to Him, that such mighty works are performed by His hands! "Is this not the carpenter, the Son of Mary, and brother of James, Joses, Judas, and Simon? And are not His sisters here with us?" And they were offended at Him. But Jesus said to them, "A prophet is not without honor except in his own country, among his own relatives, and in his own house." Now He could do no mighty work there, except that He laid His hands on a few sick people and healed them. And He marveled because of their unbelief. Then He went about the villages in a circuit, teaching.

They knew the family. Jesus had at least four brothers mentioned here, and clearly at least two sisters.

So here is the Lord Jesus, who has been going around Galilee, cleansing lepers, restoring sight to the blind, casting out demons, He has raised the dead, and done many mighty works, but in His own hometown He could do no mighty works. A tiny number got healed of some sickness, but in the main Jesus could not do any mighty works or great healings. He was astonished, and it says that Jesus marveled at their lack of faith. Now did Jesus love the people in His own home

town? Yes, no question, Jesus was not a respecter of persons. He deeply loved and had compassion on the people of Nazareth, as elsewhere. Jesus' attitude was the same to all of them. Did He want to heal them? Yes — everywhere that Jesus went He taught, He preached and He healed. Was the problem that they did not persuade Jesus enough, or did they not beg and squall enough to get Jesus to heal them? No, Jesus desired to heal, but *they would not receive*. Jesus was the same wherever He went, and His power was unchanged, His desire to help, deliver, prosper and bless was unchanged. But it is not all God's part. It is not all Jesus' part. You and I have a part, and these people had a part to do. Their part was not to pressure Jesus to heal them, their part was *just to receive* the provision that God had made for them. But they did not — and Jesus was highly disappointed, and it said that He marveled at their unbelief. They could not believe, they could not receive the good things that the Lord Jesus wanted to do there. There were many people there who were lepers, those who had demons, but Jesus walked away. It was not God's fault, it was not Jesus' fault; it was no lack on His part, it was *their problem*. It was not because their faith was required to push Jesus into healing, the faith was required simply to reach out *and receive* the good things that God has for them.

Mark 1:40 Now a leper came to Him, imploring Him, kneeling down to Him and saying to Him, "If You are willing, You can make me clean."

See the leper knew some things, but not a great deal. Let us be fair to the leper, he did not have access to the New Testament scriptures, probably did not know much about the Old Testament for that matter. But he knew a wee bit about the Lord Jesus, and he knew clearly that He could heal Him. He had heard the stories, and from the word that he had heard his faith was growing. So he said to Jesus "*If you are willing, You can make me clean*".

He knew of Jesus' power and of the great things that he had done. Many people are this way with God; they know that God *can heal*, that God *can prosper*, and that God *can deliver*. But where people tend to fall down is that they know that *He can*, but they are not really sure that *He will* for them. "I know He *can*, but I do not know if He *is willing*". Jesus answered this in verse 41:

Mark 1:41 Then Jesus, moved with compassion, stretched out His hand and touched him, and said to him, "*I am willing*; be cleansed."

Was there any pressure required here on Jesus? Did the leper have to "work up" something super special and did he have to have a long, long prayer of petition? His prayer was only about ten words long. Jesus immediately responded with a "Yes I am willing." Notice also in verse 41, that Jesus was *moved with compassion*. Jesus was tender hearted; He was not uncaring about this man's sickness, He was not too busy to respond to the man's needs. Of course, the Lord Jesus is the same yesterday, today and for ever will be. This is the way that Jesus *is*, present tense, He *IS* this way.

Mark 1:42 As soon as He had spoken, immediately the leprosy left him, and he was cleansed.

The leper did not know for sure. He did say "I do not know whether you *will* heal me; I know that you *can*." You and I do not have to be in that scenario, because the answer is there; Christ said, "I am willing," and He did.

Faith is not something that you and I produce to impress God, or to persuade God to do something. God *is willing* to meet our needs, as we will see in plenty more scriptures. Faith is what you and I need *to receive* what God has done. There is God's part — and there is our part — and we will see that God has done *His part*.

Mark 9:14-18 And when He came to the disciples, He saw a great multitude around them, and scribes disputing with them. Immediately, when they saw Him, all the people were greatly amazed, and running to Him, greeted Him. And He asked the scribes, "What are you discussing with them?" Then one of the crowd answered and said, "Teacher, I brought You my son, who has a mute spirit." And wherever it seizes him, it throws him down; he foams at the mouth, gnashes his teeth, and becomes rigid.

This must have been a horrific sight to see a young boy, maybe a teenager, falling on the ground and then becoming rigid, and his mouth all foaming, and grinding his teeth.

Mark 9:18 So I spoke to Your disciples, that they should cast it out, but they could not."

Was Jesus impressed with His disciples? No He was not, and He answered:

Mark 9:19 He answered him and said, "O faithless generation, how long shall I be with you? How long shall I bear with you? Bring him to Me."

That is slightly old fashioned language in some ways. The Good News Bible translates that as: "How unbelieving you people are! How long must I stay with you? How long do I have to put up with you?"

Jesus was actually pained at this point, even grieved, because the disciples had just failed. Here is the need of a young boy to be delivered and the disciples in Jesus' eyes should have got on with it. Here is a complete disaster facing Him, and the Scribes are probably accusing the disciples of being false teachers and so on.

Mark 9:20-22 Then they brought him to Him. And when he saw Him, immediately the spirit convulsed him, and he fell on the ground and wallowed, foaming at the mouth. So He asked his father, "How long has this been happening to him?" And he said, "From childhood." And often he has thrown him both into the fire and into the water to destroy him. But if You can do anything, have compassion on us and help us."

I guess this man was not too sure the Master would have any more success. *"If you can do something have compassion."* Jesus responded that he should not put all of the weight on Him and what He could do.

Mark 9:23 Jesus said to him, "If YOU can believe, all things are possible to him who believes."

So it is not just up to Me. *You* have to believe. All things are possible to him who believes. Jesus said *"that all things are possible to him who believes."*

Now the father is clearly quite emotional and struggling a bit; he wants to believe but the evidence of the disciples' attempts was not too encouraging.

Mark 9:24-27 Immediately the father of the child cried out and said with tears, "Lord, I believe; help my unbelief!" When Jesus saw that the people came running together, He rebuked the unclean spirit, saying to it, "Deaf and dumb spirit, I command you, come out of him and enter him no more!" Then the spirit cried out, convulsed him greatly, and came out of him. And he became as one dead, so that many said, "He is dead." But Jesus took him by the hand and lifted him up, and he arose.

It is fairly clear that it was God's will to heal the young boy. God's part had not changed, but the disciples were a bit uncertain.

Mark 9:28-29 And when He had come into the house, His disciples asked Him privately, "Why could we not cast it out?" So He said to them, "This kind can come out by nothing but prayer and fasting."

You can see the point there, Jesus was instant to respond. The father did not have to beat Jesus up, pressure him, but he did have to have the faith to receive. God's part is always a willing response. God is not the problem. We say, 'I guess it was not God's will to heal'. But that is *not the case*. That could have been said here by the people. It was God's will to heal, God did heal, but the disciples were unable to bring that about because of their unbelief. We should never think that *God* is the problem and we should never think that we have to move or *persuade God*.

Matthew 17:14-16 And when they had come to the multitude, a man came to Him, kneeling down to Him and saying, "Lord, have mercy on my son, for he is an epileptic and suffers severely; for he often falls into the fire and often into the water. "So I brought him to Your disciples, but they could not cure him."

Which does not mean that it was not God's will; and I repeat that because that is often the case in our generation. How do you know God's will? "Well, you see what happens. If it happens it was God's will and if it does not happen it was God's will." That is NOT how you find out God's will. You do not look at the experiences and work backwards. God's will is found *in His word*.

Matthew 17:17 Then Jesus answered and said, "O faithless and perverse generation, how long shall I be with you? How long shall I bear with you? Bring him here to Me."

Faithless means lacking faith, unbelieving. Jesus is pained by lack of faith. How can the Father, how can the Lord Jesus, get blessings to us, which is their part, which they have done, if we will not reach out and receive them by faith? In a sense we have almost wasted all of Their time; They have done Their part, but we do not enjoy the benefits because we do not do *our part*. We have to reach out by faith *and receive*.

Matthew 17:18-20 And Jesus rebuked the demon, and it came out of him; and the child was cured from that very hour. Then the disciples came to Jesus privately and said, "Why could we not cast it out?" So Jesus said to them, "Because of *your unbelief*; for assuredly..."

It was not a question of God's will. The problem was at the disciples' end. The type of unbelief that they had needed some more work in terms of prayer and fasting. Although the disciples started off believing and commanding the young boy to be made well, the physical evidence of his condition was so severe that *their faith* rapidly shrank and their unbelief *rapidly increased*. You cannot succeed with faith and unbelief at the same time. Jesus told them they did not maintain their faith — and their unbelief took over. Because the demon refused to budge their faith collapsed; and instead of standing their ground they caved in. The problem was not at God's end, it was *their end*.

Matthew 17:20 ...for assuredly, I say to you, if you have faith as a mustard seed, you will say to this mountain, 'Move from here to there,' and it will move; and nothing will be impossible for you.

Now we have spoken before about speaking to the mountain; tell it to move and it will move. If we do not like speaking to mountains we will struggle a bit, because that is how it works. If we have faith then we will say to the mountain, 'Move!'

Matthew 17:21 "However, this kind does not go out except by prayer and fasting."

Probably meaning this *type of unbelief*. The problem is not at God's end and it was not at God's end there. It was not a question of to get this boy cured you had to get e-mail chains going. You did not have to "storm the gates of heaven." It was very simple: God wanted to heal, Jesus wanted to heal, and He was willing to heal. He did require some *faith to receive*. Without that faith to receive, the connection is not made.

You can think of a physical example of television signals. All around us at the moment there are television signals — all around us, but we cannot see them. They are invisible but they are there; and if you switch on a television receiver, you will see and hear the picture. It did not just happen; the signals were there all along, but you have to switch the receiver on and tune in to the channel. If the picture disappears, or the sound disappears, no point in phoning up the broadcast company and saying, 'What has happened to your picture?' Most of the time if there is a problem it is going to be with *our receiver*, and we need to get it fixed.

In a sense this is the problem that we have with believing God. God's provision is there, and He has made provision for us in many areas, but often we do not "tune in" and we do not switch on *our receiver*. The problem is not at God's end, but it is at *the receiving end*. You might think of switching on a light and nothing happens. You might think of phoning the power company and shouting at them, but the odds are that it is *the receiving end*, and the fuse has gone, or the bulb has gone. The power is there all along — but you do need to have a connection that works. It is wrong for you and me to keep arguing and fussing with God; even claiming, 'God I have faith, please respond to me'. God's heart is already and always tender towards us. God is for us and not against us.

Matthew 9:35-36 Then Jesus went about all the cities and villages, teaching in their synagogues, preaching the gospel of the kingdom, and healing every sickness and every disease among the people. But when He saw the multitudes, He was *moved with compassion* for them, because they were weary and scattered, like sheep having no shepherd.

The point here is that Jesus was moved with compassion. Jesus liked people, and He desired to be around people and He desired to help people. He saw all of the people and saw all of their needs, and He was moved with compassion.

Matthew 9:37-38 Then He said to His disciples, "The harvest truly is plentiful, but the laborers are few." Therefore pray the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into His harvest."

Matthew 14:13-14 When Jesus heard it, He departed from there by boat to a deserted place by Himself. But when the multitudes heard it, they followed Him on foot from the cities. And when Jesus went out He saw a great multitude; and He was *moved with compassion* for them, and healed their sick.

The scripture are telling us something. Jesus saw people and He was moved, His heart churned for them, and He was tender- hearted.

Mathew 20:29-34 Now as they went out of Jericho, a great multitude followed Him. And behold, two blind men sitting by the road, when they heard that Jesus was passing by, cried out, saying, "Have mercy on us, O Lord, Son of David!" Then the multitude warned them that they should be quiet; but they cried out all the more, saying, "Have mercy on us, O Lord, Son of David!" So Jesus stood still and called them, and said, "What do you want Me to do for you?" They said to Him, "Lord, that our eyes may be opened." So *Jesus had compassion* and touched their eyes. And immediately their eyes received sight, and they followed Him.

You can look at many more places, where Jesus *had compassion*. Jesus had a longing to help people, to meet the needs of people, and Jesus often said that He did not do the things just of His own volition, but He did what *the Father* wanted Him to do. If you see Jesus in action you have

seen the Father in action. In fact, Jesus said it was really the Father that did all of the works that He did. So when Jesus restored sight to the blind, cleansed the lepers, cast out the spirit from the young epileptic boy, raised various people from the dead, it was really *the Father working* through Jesus. So when you see Jesus moved with compassion, reaching out to help and deliver people, it is *the Father* doing the self same thing.

Some people have the weird idea that the Father was the hard and vindictive God of the Old Testament, and Jesus as loving and friendly person of the New Testament as if there is some sort of opposition between the Father and the Son. That is not correct of course because They are of *one mind*.

John 14:8-9 Philip said to Him, "Lord, show us the Father, and it is sufficient for us." Jesus said to him, "Have I been with you so long, and yet you have not known Me, Philip? He who has seen Me has seen the Father; so how can you say, 'Show us the Father'?"

In other words, 'If you have seen me in operation, and you have heard me speak, seen my character and my temperament, the way that I operate, then you have seen the Father. We are like two peas in a pod. I do what the Father wants; we are of one mind'.

John 14:10-11 "Do you not believe that I am in the Father, and the Father in Me? The words that I speak to you I do not speak on My own authority; but the Father who dwells in Me does the works. "Believe Me that I am in the Father and the Father in Me, or else believe Me for the sake of the works themselves.

Jesus is saying to Philip — and to anybody else for that matter — 'What I do, the Father does. We have the same spirit and the same mind'. You and I can understand that the compassion that Jesus showed from time to time is *exactly* how the Father operates. The Father is moved with compassion and He is reaching out. So there is no way that any of us should jump on God's case to somehow "convince Him" to respond as if He is deaf, or pre-occupied. That is the wrong picture of the Father and the Lord Jesus.

Hebrews 4:14-15 Seeing then that we have a great High Priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold fast our confession. For we do not have a High Priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but was in all points tempted as we are, yet without sin.

So what Paul is saying is that Jesus Christ, our great High Priest, can sympathize with our weaknesses because He has been here. He has been tempted in every way, by tiredness, and by false brethren. He has been harassed, He has been attacked, and He has been disappointed. He has met Satan and the demons off and on. The Lord Jesus has been here, He has got the t-shirt. He has worked, He has sweated — and He is not remote, distant and uncaring. You could rephrase verse 15 as: ‘We *do have* a High Priest who *can sympathize* with our weaknesses.’ Yes, Jesus can be touched with the feeling of our infirmities, because He has been here. He has had first-hand experience; and He is easy to reach.

Hebrew 4:16 Let us therefore come boldly to the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need.

To come *boldly* means that we can *be confident* — and we are not begging and pleading and trying to put some emotional pressure on God! We come boldly because God understands; Jesus understands. Verse 16 says that we can obtain mercy. So we come to the throne of grace, where God dispenses His grace, His goodness and His kindness, to receive.

Matthew 6:25 "Therefore I say to you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink; nor about your body, what you will put on. Is not life more than food and the body more than clothing?"

We must not worry. You and I have been begotten by the Holy Spirit and our minds are (allegedly!) renewed, and we have the mind of Christ. We are to cast all of our cares on the Eternal for He cares for us.

Matthew 6:26 "Look at the birds of the air, for they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns; yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not of more value than they?"

Jesus is saying, 'Why would you worry, why would you be careful, full of worry? Do you not understand that your Father is looking after you, and He looks over you?'

Matthew 6:27-30 Which of you by worrying can add one cubit to his stature? "So why do you worry about clothing? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow: they neither toil nor spin; and yet I say to you that even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these. Now if God so clothes the grass of the field, which today is, and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, will He not much more clothe you, O you of little faith?"

Do you not understand that God is looking after you? Do you not realize how much more God will look after you than He does look after the grass and the birds and so on?

Matthew 6:31-32 "Now if God so clothes the grass of the field, which today is, and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, will He not much more clothe you, O you of little faith? "Therefore do not worry, saying, 'What shall we eat?' or 'What shall we drink?' or 'What shall we wear?' "For after all these things the Gentiles seek. For your heavenly Father knows that you need all these things.

This is not a surprise to the Father. We do not have to spend hours and hours laying out all of the horrendous needs that we have. By all means acknowledge some of them, but do not forget that *God knows*, before you arrive in your prayer closet, what your needs are. Our Father *knows* all of our needs *before* we get there. He does like us to acknowledge Him as our source and take them to him and receive them by faith and be grateful. But we are not going there to explain in detail things that He already knows in advance.

Matthew 6:33 "But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you."

We do not need to fret, or "storm the gates of heaven," nor plead, beg, force or persuade God. Jesus said, 'God knows that already, so *you focus* on seeking His Kingdom.' It is God's idea to bless us, provide for us, and heal us and deliver us. We do not have to talk God into the notion of doing for us what was *His idea* in the first place! If God had not said anything about provision for our material needs or our healing it might be different. If God has already said that He has done these things, then we should not have to think about *begging Him* to do things that He has already said; it is *His idea*. Certainly we must ask, and be polite and courteous, and know that God is our source. But our faith is then reaching out *to receive* what God has *already* provided.

This answers the question that some people ask on occasion:

Mark 11:20-24 Now in the morning, as they passed by, they saw the fig tree dried up from the roots. And Peter, remembering, said to Him, "Rabbi, look! The fig tree which You cursed has withered away." So Jesus answered and said to them, "Have faith in God. "For assuredly, I say to you, whoever says to this mountain, 'Be removed and be cast into the sea,' and does not doubt in his heart, but believes that those things he says will be done, he will have whatever he says. "Therefore I say to you, whatever things you ask when you pray, believe that you receive them, and you will have them.

People sometimes say, "Wow, *whatever things* that you ask, believe — and you will have them". Well that seems to be a little bit open to abuse. Could we ask to win on the lottery? No — faith is receiving what God has *already made available* by His grace. If He has not provided it, you will not get it! Faith is receiving what God has made provision for in His goodness. God has nowhere made provision for you to have another man's wife, or another woman's husband. Faith is not "pushing God around." When we sin we like to be forgiven. What do we do? You just confess your sin to God and thank Him for His forgiveness, and He washes us clean. It is as simple as that. You know the story well. Jesus Christ, the Lamb of God, the Passover Lamb as slain, that his shed blood, and died, paid the penalty for our sins. We just receive what God has provided. Faith is receiving what God has provided. When we sin we do not just push God

around and try leaning on Him with our faith. God wants to forgive, and He has made provision to forgive.

Psalms 145:8-9 The LORD is gracious and full of compassion, Slow to anger and great in mercy. The LORD is good to all, And His tender mercies are over all His works.

It says in verse 8 that the Eternal is gracious and full of compassion. Another translation says that God is *disposed to show favor*. It is God's nature, and God is gracious, He is full of compassion. He is good to all. We come to God recognizing that His heart toward us is to do good, and to share the best. God has made provision for us in many areas. His word is out there and it is published; faith is our reaching out and receiving what He has provided. Even though we do not see it, necessarily, we believe that His word is good and we receive it, and then we are thankful until it happens.

Matthew 7:7-9 "Ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you."For everyone who asks receives, and he who seeks finds, and to him who knocks it will be opened. "Or what man is there among you who, if his son asks for bread, will give him a stone?

The answer is nobody really. Is there any normal, healthy father who, if his son comes along and says, 'I am hungry, can I have some bread?' would just pick up a stone and give it to him? That does not happen.

Matthew 7:10 "Or if he asks for a fish, will he give him a serpent?"

No, that is just not what natural Dads do, or natural Moms to their daughter would ever do.

Matthew 7:11 "If you then, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father who is in heaven give good things to those who ask Him!

Jesus is trying to make it as plain as He can. Everybody knows that a good Dad looks after and gives good things to their children, so how much do you think that God will give good things to those who ask Him? The answer is obviously *much more*. You have *much more* chance of the Father in heaven giving us good gifts than we have of getting good gifts from our own parents.

And, of course, God has all of the power; it is His nature; and He is easily entreated. God is quick to respond. He is the giver of every good gift and every perfect gift. We do not have to twist God's arm. Faith is not the spiritual equivalent of wrestling with God. Faith is about our part, what we do *to receive* is to believe that God will keep His word and then we rest in that, and trust God to do His part.

I John 5:14-15 Now this is the confidence that we have in Him, that if we ask anything according to His will, He hears us. And if we know that He hears us, whatever we ask, we know that we have the petitions that we have asked of Him.

This is quite a powerful promise is it not? If it is in His will, and if God has made provision for it, then of course we can have confidence. If God has written it down, or inspired it to be written down that it is His will, then we can have absolute confidence. We can trust God to be faithful to His own word, can we not? We ask, we believe that we receive, we stand our ground and then we have the petitions that we desire. There is no hint here of "wrestling with God" or trying to impress Him with our magnificent faith to *convince Him* that we are worthy of an occasional act of kindness. You might say, 'Well how do you know what is His will for us?' It says there, "*.....that if we ask anything according to His will...*" How do we know what His will is? We saw last week in Romans 10:17, "*So then faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God.*" And we did say that it is not so often that we have a "faith problem," as we have a "word problem." Faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God. We cannot have faith for what we have not heard. We cannot have faith to receive if we do not know it is God's provision to have. So we have to *know the word* first, and then we can have faith that God will do exactly as He has said. If we find that God has made provision and it is in the Word then we can relax and we can receive by faith. The trouble is that too many do *not know* what is in the Word, or we do not know it well enough. If we do not know it well enough, then really that is our fault. There is no point in blaming others, and there is definitely no point in blaming God. We can ask the question, just how much quality time do you and I spend in God's word? How high a priority is it? If we are not feeding off God's word then we will be weak in knowledge and faith. Faith cannot rise above our knowledge of God's word. If we want strong faith we have to find out, and understand what His Word tells us.

Ephesians 5:17 Therefore do not be unwise, but understand what the will of the Lord is.

You and I do not need to be ignorant, but we will be if we do not open the Bible, or just spend the odd five minutes here and the odd ten minutes there. It is a big book and there is lots of teaching, and there are examples of others' lives for us to learn from. We have the good, the bad and the ugly. Jesus said that man should live by *every word* that proceeds from the mouth of God. But it is up to you and me to invest some good quality time in the Word, so that we understand what the will of the Lord is. Then, we can reach out and receive by faith.

It is important to be clear about what faith is. Faith is not about us trying to force God into doing something for us. He already loves us, and He has made provision in many areas in our lives. He has given us many promises and they are recorded in His Word, and He has done His part. Faith is *our part*, where we reach out *and receive* what God has made available. God's Word must be our foundation. We will continue this in a future week.

Transcript by Patricia Plunkett (many thanks Trish!)