

FAITH, IT'S WORK AND REWARD

A SERMON

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“His faith is counted for righteousness.” Romans 4:5

MIGHTY are the powers of sin, and death, and delusion, and circumstances that have carried us away from God, and nothing short of the Savior's omnipotent arm can crush those powers, and bring a soul to God. There is much said about coming to God, but every Christian that knows his own heart, and that knows the cares, anxieties, and perplexities of the world, recognizes the truth of the Savior's words, that “No man can come unto me except it be given him of my Father, except my Father draw him.” Nothing but the quickening and almighty power of the Eternal Spirit of God can keep us standing fast in spirituality of mind. The real Christian, if he be ever so favored in providence, wants something beyond that. It is not temporal things that can feed the soul. And if, on the other hand, his adversities be great, he needs also the almighty power and mercy of the blessed God to keep him up in his Christian character, to keep him up in his faith in God, and it is only by faith that the great God is on the side of any one. All things are possible to him that believes, simply because the Lord is on his side. The Savior, therefore, might well say, “Have faith in God.” But then our text suggests a very solemn thought, and brings me this morning into a very solemn position; for it here said of a certain kind of belief, that “his faith is counted for righteousness;” implying that there are faiths that are not counted for righteousness. Fallen angels believe, but their faith is not counted for righteousness; and the Pharisees of old believed in the letter of God's word, but their faith was not counted for righteousness. What a direful deception will it be for us if, professing to be believers in Christ, we find out, when we come to the end, and hell shall receive us, that after all we have not possessed that faith that God accounts to us for righteousness. Faith that does not receive the truth in the love of it is not accounted for righteousness; faith that has not works is not accounted for righteousness.

I will notice our subject under a threefold aspect. First, *the nature of true faith*; secondly, *the work of true faith*; thirdly and lastly, *the present and the future reward of faith*.

I will first notice, then, *the nature of true faith*. Now in order for there to be true faith there are two things essential: first, divine authority; and secondly, characteristic authority. First there must be divine authority. Whatever has not divine authority is sin. Whatever, therefore, men bring as religion, if it has not divine authority, the Lord will esteem it as sin. This is so self-evident that I

need not bring scriptures to prove it; the one scripture will suffice, that “in vain do they worship me, seeing their fear toward me is taught by the precepts of men.” Let us therefore look carefully just for a minute or two at this first branch of our subject, that faith must have divine authority. And it does appear when the fall took place, I think it a pretty safe inference, that the Lord taught Adam to offer sacrifice. This inference we come to from the fact of the Lord making coats of skins, and clothing them, which we might naturally suppose were the skins of the animals that were offered in sacrifice. Indeed, the proper explanation of the promise there given, that the seed of the woman should bruise the serpent’s head, would point to this. And so the Holy Spirit would give Abel to see the way in which Satan’s power was to be overcome; that it was to be overcome by the life and by the death of Jesus Christ; that he should by his atoning death destroy sin; and Satan has no power over us without sin; and Christ having destroyed sin, he has thereby destroyed Satan’s power over us, and has thereby destroyed death, because death is the effect and wages of sin; Christ having destroyed sin, he has hereby destroyed the power of the adversary over us. Abel, understanding that this was to be done sacrificially, saw that he had divine authority to bring a lamb without blemish and without spot. So, we may say of Noah, and so we may say of the Levitical dispensation. I am sure, if there be one thing in the Bible more impressed upon your mind than another in relation to the great subject of sacrificial substitution, what is there in the Bible about which there is more said, or in relation to which there are more definite particulars given, than that of the sacrificial service of old? So that they had divine authority there; they took the lamb, for so they were commanded; it must be without blemish and without spot, for so it was commanded; and so in abiding by that at the Passover, all of it had divine authority, and, therefore, having God’s authority and God’s command, they could rest here safely indeed. There therefore must be divine authority. And we bless the Lord that the Lord Jesus Christ came not to do his own will as man, but he came to do the will of God, and he did nothing for which he had not the authority of the most high. God. Then again, all the doctrines we believe must have divine authority. It is well for us if we hold, which we do, the eternal perfection of the sacrifices of Christ, it is well for us to be convinced from the Scriptures themselves that that is the real character of his sacrifice. Yes, it is roundly asserted that he is a priest forever, and he can be a priest forever only on the ground of his perfection; so, he has by his one offering perfected forever them that are sanctified. Then we come to the doctrine of God’s love. If we believe that love to be sovereign; if we believe that love to be free; if we believe, which we do, that love to be everlasting and immutable, then we ought to look well into the Scriptures, and be assured from the Scriptures that we have the Lord’s own authority for believing such a thing. Then if we come to election, we ought to be well convinced from the Scriptures that there are a people that he has chosen; we must have divine authority. And so, indeed, of final perseverance and ultimate glorification; we must have divine authority for the whole.

Now, for you to have that faith that shall be counted to you for righteousness you must have divine authority for what you believe. But, secondly, there must also be characteristic authority. Many persons have claimed the promises as theirs, many persons have claimed God as their Father, many persons have claimed eternal glory as theirs, but at the same time they have had no characteristic authority. There must be characteristic authority; that is, you must answer (and I will make this as clear as I can presently), you must answer in your own character to the descriptions given in the Bible of those who shall be saved, and if you do not answer to that character you have no right to believe that the sacrifice is for you, you have no right to believe that God is yours, let us, before I quote some scriptures to make this as clear as possible, notice two or three circumstances to

illustrate this. Now take, in the first place, Cain, for instance. Did Cain feel what a poor, lost, helpless, ruined sinner he was? and in connection with that conviction was he so enlightened as to do as Abel did? No, he had not that conviction, and therefore he had no attachment to God's truth. He had no authority for his offering the fruits of the ground. He was for bringing the fruits of the ground without being convinced of his need of a sacrifice to fill up the infinite gulf that sin had made between him and God, and thus he had not the characteristic authority. Jesus Christ came into the world to save sinners, and as the former part of the verse in which my text is said, "To him that works not, but believes on him that justifies the ungodly." You must not be anything, apart from his grace, in your own eye, in your own feelings, but ungodly; you must be nothing else but a sinner; you must be nothing else but unclean; you must be nothing else but guilty; you must be nothing else but destitute. That is one characteristic, "He shall convince of sin. Then again, Ishmael; he himself had not this characteristic; he was not convinced of his need of the promise; and although he appears to have claimed the promise, and Abraham and Sarah for thirteen years appear to have labored more or less under the opinion that this Ishmael was the child of promise, yet when the heir apparent came, the heir presumptive of course was set aside. And Ishmael was not the kind of character that indicated his interest in these things; he was not a convinced sinner, he was not a praying sinner, he was not a poor trembling sinner. "To this man will I look, that is poor, of a contrite spirit, and that trembles at my word." Then, again, we take also the Pharisee and the Publican. Now the Pharisee had no sight and sense of his condition as a sinner, and therefore he brought in his own doings; he was not a believer in the atonement of Christ. There was nothing in the Pharisee to commend the atonement of Christ to him; there was nothing in the Pharisee that would render the atonement of Christ acceptable to him; there was nothing in the Pharisee that would render the righteousness of Christ acceptable to him; there was nothing in the Pharisee that would make acceptable to him God's promise to Abraham, "In blessing I will bless." He had, therefore, no characteristic authority. Saul of Tarsus was not the character; but after God had called him by his grace, convinced him of his state, then he had characteristic authority. Now the Publican cried, "God be merciful to me a sinner." Here is the characteristic authority. Then you have one of the beatitudes, "Blessed are the poor in spirit." Now, am I thus a poor, lost, helpless creature, and is this matter a matter of solemn weight with me? And with what feelings do I read such a verse as this "To him that works not, but believes on him that justifies the ungodly?" Not justifies the ungodliness, no, no, God forbid we should so speak, nor justify the ungodly as ungodly. The meaning is, that he justifies the ungodly from their ungodliness; the meaning is, that the Savior's atonement exempts the ungodly man, the man who is in his nature ungodly, but is now, by the quickening power of God, being convinced of what he is, become godly, he now believes in Jesus Christ with all his heart, with all his might, with all his mind, with all his soul. Now this ungodly man is become a praying man, he is become a godly man, and for the blessedness of the remission of sins by Jesus Christ shall every one that is godly pray. Now, then, if I am thus poor and needy, if I am thus convinced of my state, if I believe thus on him that justifies the ungodly, then I can come before God and say, Lord, you see what I am; you have convinced me of my state, and I have no hope, or what little hope I have is but a trembling hope, in your mercy by your dear Son. Now this is the characteristic authority. "To this man will I look, that is poor." If my conscience bears me testimony that this is my character, I may pray in the strength of that promise to God that he will look to me, and have mercy upon me. And if the poor in spirit are blessed, then I may look to God in the strength of that promise, if I am this poor creature, in the belief that the kingdom of God is mine, and it shall someday be made manifest to the soul beyond all doubting and fearing. So, then, I must have this faith, for the Savior said of the Holy Spirit's work, "He shall convince

you of sin;" then he goes on to convince you of the way in which you are to be made righteous. Thus, then, we have to bless the name of the Lord that we have divine authority for believing in the perfection of the Substitute, Christ Jesus; that we have divine authority for believing in an everlasting covenant, ordered in all things and sure. And if we are convinced of our state, and do lay hold of these blessed things, and are sincere in our profession before God, then we have characteristic authority. I might mention, perhaps, one or two more cases in which there was not characteristic authority. **For you may hold the right thing, and have divine authority for what you hold, but you may not have the characteristic authority. Now this is of vast importance; everything depends upon this, entirely so. Either my faith is that that God accounts for righteousness, and justifies me, or it is not; if it be not, woeful my condition.** Let us look for one moment, for our admonition, for our instruction, at king Saul. He saw that sacrifice was right; God had instituted sacrifice, God had commanded sacrifice, God had accepted sacrifice, and he said, I have divine authority, or rather, there is divine authority, so I may as well offer sacrifice, because there is divine authority for so doing. Stop, Saul! Do you love God's truth? Do you love God's David, and would not hurt a hair of his head? Do you love God's priests, and would rather be slain yourself than send your soldiers to slay them? Stop and ask, How am I? Why, he would have been like the man without the wedding garment, he would have been speechless. He had not the characteristic authority. Therefore, when Samuel came, he put a negative upon it. "The Lord has rejected you, and rent your kingdom from you." If you had loved the truth, you would have obeyed the truth. "Behold, to obey" that is the first thing, the obedience of faith, to believe in God's truth, "is better than sacrifice", this ceremonial sacrifice, "and to hearken than the fat of rams." You are therefore rejected; you have no characteristic authority; you are not the man. But if David built an altar, he can gain access to God. He sees the angel, when he builds the altar, suspended between earth and heaven; David builds an altar, looks to God; he was a believer in God's truth, and a lover of God's everlasting covenant, a lover of the great Melchisedek, and a lover of eternal truths. He built an altar, offered sacrifice, the angel sheathed his sword, retired, the plague was stayed, his petition heard, the sacrifice accepted, the people had peace, and God was glorified. That is the right character. The Lord had respect unto "Abel and to his offering," because Abel was of the right character. See how solemn this matter is. Is there one here this morning that holds the same doctrine that I preach, and by some mysterious feeling or other you like to come and hear them, and you sit as God's people sit, and sometimes you are delighted, and sometimes not, and with all this approbation and attention, at the same time secretly before God no sighing, no mourning, no groaning, no looking up to God with aching heart and aching eyes in private, "I am oppressed; undertake for me." When you are out of the place your religion is gone, and you have no more till you come back to the place again. Ah, if this be all the religion you have, then, as the old divines used to say, when you come to die your doctrines will be unto you like a bag of gold around the neck of a drowning man, it will only drown him the more rapidly. And so, there is such a thing, then, as holding the truth naturally without having it spiritually. His faith, then, is counted for righteousness that is poor and needy in and of himself, who is sincere in his profession, and knows what it is to sigh before God in private. The Lord's people are ruminating, sighing people, before God in private. He knows their afflictions, he knows their sorrows, he hears their secret cries, and many times does he come down and deliver them, again, again, and again. He has constituted them sincere. Jesus Christ was sincere, and if we have not that part of his spirit, that of sincerity in our devotedness to God, love to his truth, and decision for it, then our faith is a dead faith, and not a living faith, Such, then, is the nature of true faith; you must believe the right thing, and you must believe it from a sight and sense of your need of it, from an understanding of the

adaptation of it; and there must be a solemn sincerity, yes, unless you have a martyr's spirit you are not a Christian. **Why, it is as true now as it ever was that if a man is not prepared to give up the dearest relations and the dearest objects he has in this world, life itself for God's truth, there is something lacking in his faith.** Such is the nature of faith; there must be divine authority for what you believe, and there must be characteristic authority, or else the Lord will reject our services, and will say, "Who has required this at your hands?" I wish you to understand as clearly as possible the nature of faith, that it stands by divine authority, or, as the apostle says, by divine power; and that the true believer is the man that believes of necessity, knowing his need, and is sincere, and abides firmly by the Lord, as the Lord will by him.

Secondly, I notice *the work of true faith*. There is a twofold justification in relation to the believer. These two justifications essentially differ from each other; they perfectly harmonize together, but they at the same time essentially differ from each other. Now one very important work of faith is to receive that righteousness by which you are justified before God. We can be justified before God only by the obedience of Christ. Let us take the word obedience here to mean the whole of Christ's humiliation, his life and his death together; let us take the whole, for you read in the 5th chapter, the next to that in which our text is, that "we are justified by his blood." Let us there take the word obedience to mean the whole of Christ's humiliation work. Now, then, true faith receives him as the end of the law; true faith receives him as the end of sin; true faith receives him as the way of equitable justification before God; true faith receives him as that provision which God has made to meet the demands of justice and the rights of the law. Hence the apostle said in the last verse of the 3rd chapter, "Do we then make void the law through faith? God forbid: yes, we establish the law." Now I will ask you that are Christians, and I ask you because it does you good to hear it, when the Lord is pleased at all to bless the word. You see that the law of God is established by what the Savior has done in a way that it could not have been on earth, even although the fall had not taken place. You see that the law of God is more honored by the obedience of Jesus Christ than it could have been by the obedience of the myriads of angels that encircle God's eternal throne; for whether angels or men, they are but creatures, however high their order of being. But Jesus Christ was God. He came under the law in his own eternal person. He is "Jehovah our righteousness." "Feed the church of God, which he purchased with his own blood." Now, then, this is one part of the work of faith, to receive this righteousness; and the other part is to abide firmly by it. Oh, what a delightful thought! There is nothing so pleasing, there is nothing so profitable. I can hardly forbear saying that whatever your bodily afflictions, whatever your soul troubles, whatever your family troubles, whatever your worldly troubles, yes, even if death's trouble should approach you; if the Lord put at the same time into your hand that cup of consolation that is by the finished work of Jesus, it would enable you so to drink into the spirit of what he has done as to forget your affliction, to forget your sorrow, to forget your guilt, because it has been taken away, and to forget death itself. You would view it as a shadow; you would say, I have a lamp here of salvation to light me through this valley, and this lamp of salvation is brighter than the noonday sun; this lamp of salvation is inextinguishable. Well might the apostle upon this subject say, and he said it from the very bottom of his soul, "Thanks be to God, who always causes us to triumph in Christ." Precious faith! That is the work then of that faith that has divine authority, characteristic authority, and thus receives Christ's righteousness in its dignity, abides solemnly and sincerely by it. Here you have access into the very bosom of the great God; here you have access into the deep counsels of heaven; here you have abundance of access to God in all the greatness of his love, in all the smiles of his countenance, in all the promises of his word, and in

all the blessings of everlasting love. Thus “being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ; by whom also we have access by faith into this grace,” of justification, for we are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that is in Christ, “wherein we stand,” in this grace of justification by faith, “and rejoice in hope of the glory of God;” because whom he justifies, them he also glorifies. There is our justification before God. When an infant dies, there it is complete in Christ. The thief on the cross dies without any of those works, and the infant dies without any of those works that I have presently to touch upon. And our poor fellow-creatures now that are, at the eleventh hour, on their death-bed, convinced of what they are, we have not to go and say to them, Now, unless you regain your health far enough to live so long, and perform so many good works, you cannot be saved. No, bless the Lord! we have to go with the glorious message, “that whosoever believes on Him has everlasting life.” In comes the completeness of the dear Savior, swallows up all their sin and woe, and the soul brought at that eleventh hour shall enter as triumphantly into heaven as did the soul of any one of the prophets or apostles, because they entered by the triumphs of Christ, and so does every soul that enters there. Let that soul have been what it may, the completeness that is in Christ is a remedy for everything. But that does not set aside the other justification. What justification is that? The justification of our profession. “He that says he abides in Him,” that is, makes a profession of abiding in Him, “ought himself also so to walk, even as he walked.” He ought to be devoted to God in his measure as Christ was. Christ, of course, had no exception; we have. Elijah was compassed with infirmities; nevertheless, we must thus be like him. And so, faith. If we profess to be believers, and yet do not do good works, then our faith is vain. “Wilt you know, O vain man, that faith without works is dead?” Let us look at it thus, and see whether we are among the workers or not. Now first there must be a very kindly, practical feeling, especially towards the household of faith. I will give you the word of the Lord, and say as little of my own as possible. “So, speak you, and so do, as they that shall be judged by the law of liberty.” What is the law of liberty? Why, liberty so to know the Lord as to love his people; liberty so to know the Lord as to do all the good we can. “For he shall have judgment without mercy that has showed no mercy; and mercy rejoices against judgment.” So, then, if we make a profession of his name, and yet are at home in an ungodly world, and with the ungodly, and do as they do, then the difference is in word, but not in work; the difference is in sentiment, not in substance; the difference is in pretense, but not in actual practice. There must be a separation. Then, again, the work will consist of practical and solemn decision for God and for his people. “Was not Abraham our father justified by works?” I suppose I may quote that without the danger of being charged with holding the doctrine that every Christian that has a son may offer him as a sacrifice. I wonder they do not charge me with that. “Was not Abraham our father justified by works, when he had offered Isaac his son upon the altar?” But he had divine authority to do so; and he was the right character also, for he sincerely believed; God found his heart faithful before him, as Nehemiah saith; Abraham sincerely believed the truth. “See you how faith wrought with his works, and by works was faith made perfect?” Now, Abraham, let us see what your faith is. Can you give up your son? We know you love him, and that is to your credit; we know you are delighted with him, and that is to your credit; and you see that God has blessed him, and that is to your comfort and delight. Well, he did give up his son; “and the scripture was fulfilled which said, Abraham believed God, and it was imputed unto him for righteousness,” evidential righteousness, “and he was called the Friend of God.” Thus, then, our justification before God, by the eternal righteousness of Jesus Christ, is one thing, showing one another our faith by our works is another; justification, that is that which justifies our profession. Well, now, “likewise also was not Rahab the harlot justified by works, when she had received the messengers?” James does not stop there,

no; he did not live in our enlightened day, so James goes on to the end, “when she had received the messengers, and had” past tense again, “sent them out another way.” There are some stereotype-minded Christians, that get certain notions from their stereotype-minded parsons, that tell us there is an interregnum between what Rahab did that was right, and that what she did was wrong, and that James passes over that. That is the stereotyped old wives fable in the brain. They have got a stereotyped set of thoughts and words, and if a man happens to step at all out of their ordinary way of things they start up and denounce him directly. Now James sums up everything, “when she had received the messengers, and had sent them out another way.” He does not consider that Rahab’s faith was proved to be perfect until she had finished her mission. Now will she betray the spies? If she does, then her works do not justify her; her faith is not right; her faith is deficient. Will she be faithful to them? Will she use such evasions as the eternal Spirit shall give her, and will she succeed? will she save them? Will she tell them where to go to? will she tell them where to stop? When was she justified? When she had sent them out another way, not before. If she had betrayed them in any part of the transaction, that would have proved the hollowness of her faith, and she would not be in the position she now occupies. Inspired penmanship neither in the Old nor the New Testament lays a single fault to her charge in the transaction; it remained for moderns, for uninspired men, to show themselves wiser than the Spirit of God, to show themselves wiser than the God of wisdom, to show themselves wiser than that God that knows all things. Rahab did what thousands have done since in times of martyrdom, and felt justified in their so doing, though our modern boasters say they would not do it. You had just better keep still, say nothing, for it does make such a difference when you are brought into the circumstances, it makes all the difference. When Job’s friends were very flippant with him, “Ah,” he said, “if your soul were in my soul’s stead, I could heap up words against you, and shake mine head at you.” Be brought into the circumstances, and then see where you would be. And I once more deny in *toto* that what she said was in the fear of man. What she said was in the fear of God. Her life was in danger in what she did. If she had betrayed the spies, she would have gained honor in the world; but abiding fast by them, she is justified by the eternal Spirit of God; not a syllable said against her anywhere. Her works thus showed the reality of her faith or the reality of her decision for God.

Thus, then, the works of faith, the essential works, are to receive Christ in his perfection, and abide by him; the practical works are to abide by the people of God, and go on and do just as you have done, all the good you can. You have done that; go on just as you have done, that is all. I am quite satisfied; I am quite content. If I had to give my account of you tonight or today to God, I could do it with joy and not with grief. I have not a single word of fault to find with you, but everything that I could reasonably wish, except more spirituality of mind and more power to be useful to you. Now, then, that is the faith that is counted for righteousness. So, then, you are right as to authority, right as to character, right as you stand in Christ, and right in working in righteousness and solemn decision for God and his cause.

But what shall I say to the last part, *the present and future reward of faith*? Time would fail me to set before you the present reward of faith. What is the present reward of faith with Noah? He escapes the flood. What is the present reward of Lot? He escapes the consuming fire. What is the present reward of faith to the Israelites? They escape the iron hand of Pharaoh. What is the present reward of those that did cleave unto the Lord your God? Why, they lived to see, and possess, and enjoy the promised land. What is the present reward of the faith of David? He escapes the sword of Saul, and comes to the throne. What is the present reward of the faith of the three worthies?

Quench the violence of fire. What is the present reward of the faith of Daniel? Stops the mouths of lions. What is the present reward of the faith of Mordecai? The deliverance of the Jews. What was the present reward of the faith of the apostles? Why, God's presence, in making them happier than it was in the power of their adversaries to make them miserable. But, say you, what do you say to the other side, what do you say to the martyrs? What is the present reward of their faith? In their being sustained to bear it, in their being made exceeding joyful in their tribulation, in their glorying to suffer for Christ's sake, for they rejoiced that they were counted worthy to suffer for his sake. Those of you that know the Lord, what is your present reward? The preservation from ten thousand evils that others fall into. You have nothing to do but take up your newspaper (and I am not going to be so hypocritical as to say I never read it; I do not read it much because I have something better to do), you have nothing to do but take up your newspaper, and you will see what evils others are overtaken with, but you are preserved from. A kind hand upholds you, and feeds you, and prospers you, and preserves you from the calamities into which the ungodly run; you are preserved, and have ten thousand blessings, ten thousand mercies. And if some calamities overtake you, you will have God with you in those calamities; and if you have your faults, you have a God with you that forgives those faults, and buries those faults; that sustains, supports, defends, and keeps you as the apple of his eye. It is the reward of faith, not of the flesh, for if the Lord had given you the reward of the flesh, it would have been like the flesh, something very bad; but if the reward be of faith, it is like the faith, good. Abraham liked very much that interview he had with Melchizedek; but while by faith he wrought a victory, and there were enemies around him, now what is Abraham's present reward? "Fear not, Abraham, I am your shield, and your exceeding great reward." That will include both the present and the future. But I regret very much that your time is gone, and so I must say no more.