

THE KEYS OF THE KINGDOM - PART II

“Fact, Faith and Feeling”

Dr. John Allan Lavender

Lam. 3:21-23

I don't suppose a day ever passes but what the conscientious minister wishes the precious commodities with which he deals were not so imponderable, for often the real things of life seem unreal.

Many times I have sat across the desk from someone perplexed by one of life's vexing trials and wished I could cut off three or four yards of faith and wrap it around her for protection against the storm she was facing.

Often I have stood in a hospital room at the bedside of one facing serious surgery and wished with all of my heart I could pump a couple of gallons of courage into his veins.

Not seldom have I chatted with someone whose every outward action was evidence of an inward hunger for affection and approval and wished I could weigh out a pound or two of love and present it to her as sustenance for her starving spirit.

Unfortunately, that can't be done. And yet these imponderables, these precious commodities of the spirit: faith, love, courage, forgiveness and hope, these are the things which really matter. These are the things which conquer.

It takes courage to storm a fortress. It takes love to mount a cross. It takes faith to stand beside an open grave and hope. These are the real things in life and though they be difficult to define in language, they are easy to recognize in action. Though they cannot be weighed on a scale or measured by a ruler, we know when we have them and we know when we don't.

Just because something cannot be seen, or heard, or felt with the hands is no proof it does not exist. Because it is an imponderable does not mean it is not real.

For instance, at this very moment this room is filled with sound. We are actually surrounded by a veritable din of conflicting noises. We are sitting in the center of “a symphony of sound”.

Right now a magnificent organ is filling this room with the majestic chords of a Bach Chorale. Right now the harsh sounds of a raspy voiced huckster is filling this room with the promise of the greatest deal ever on a brand new '56 Jetmobile.

You say, “I can't hear them. You're daft.” No, all I need is a radio and by merely sweeping the dial you could hear them all. From the stirring strains of the “Pax Romana” to the frantic beat of “You're Nothin' But a Hound Dog”. They're all here. That you can't hear them does not deny their existence. It only means you have not met the conditions required.

It is the same with this precious imponderable we call Faith. It is just as real as the unheard sounds in this room. It is only necessary that you meet the required conditions before it can be yours in all of its transforming power.

FACT

What are the conditions required for making Faith real? If Faith is the Master Key of the Kingdom, as someone has said, how can we learn to use it effectively in our lives? First of all, we must begin with some basis of Fact.

It is here that we have a decided advantage over the pilgrims of the past. For ours need not be blind faith. We are the inheritors of a rich legacy of Fact providing a sure foundation upon which to build.

Consider how little the disciples knew about Jesus. Far less than we know. In fact, when you stop to think about it, it's amazing they followed Him at all. He made such incredible claims which seemed, at first, to have no basis in Fact. But the disciples started with what they had and went on from there. As Laubach says, “They were captivated by a magnetic personality and by faith decided to walk with Him and see what He would do. After they had followed Him for a few months, their hearts felt a tremendous love and their minds found a tremendous truth.”

Or look at Abraham. How little he knew about God. Even less than the disciples. And yet upon that tiny island of Fact he built a great empire of Faith. What I am saying is that Faith is not opposed to reason. It is actually based upon reason. It simply goes beyond it. It supplements it. It is complimentary to it. It is reason plus.

The cycle of events in this **Adventure In Spiritual Pioneering** is, as the sermon title puts it, first Fact, then Faith, then Feeling.

Let me see if I can show you what I mean. Suppose a man is crossing the ocean and the ship on which he is riding is suddenly enveloped by a terrible storm. He becomes desperately afraid and rushes up to a sailor asking if the boat will sink. The sailor, who is an old salt and the survivor of storms much worse, laughs hilariously at the question and makes a joke of the whole idea.

Which of the two is safer? The man gripped by terror? Or the sailor with carefree, almost casual, assurance? Neither! They are both in the same boat! Their safety does not depend upon their feelings, but upon certain facts about the boat in which they have put their faith. It's seaworthiness, for instance.

It is the same in this **Adventure of Spiritual Pioneering**. Your security does not rest in your feelings which may fluctuate by the moment. It does not even rest in *your* faith, which at times grows feeble and dim. It rests first of all in the Great Fact upon which you have built your faith and The dynamic Truth which has given your faith direction and meaning and power.

What is that Fact? It is this: God loves you with an unfailing love. Do you need any proof of that? Why, there hasn't been one moment of your lifetime when God has not loved you. But more than that, there hasn't been one moment in *His* lifetime when He has not loved you. His love, like Himself, is eternal. It is a circle, without beginning and without end.

For a moment let's march back in time. In fact, let's go back *before* time, when the earth was without form and void. Back before “a wave ever beat upon a shore, or a leaf of a tree fluttered in a breeze, or an angel worshipped before the throne.” And when we have gone as far back into the infinite past as finite mind can go, we will be no nearer the beginning of God's love than we are right now.

Then let's march out into the future. Out beyond the time when the mountains have molded into dust, the stars are old, the sun is cold and the leaves of the Judgement book unfold. And when we have gone as far out into the infinite future as finite mind can go, we will be no nearer the end of God's love than we are right now. No wonder the poet could write, “The love of God How rich and pure! How measureless and strong. It shall forevermore endure, The saints' and angels' song. “Could we with ink the oceans fill, And were the sky of parchment made; Were every stalk on earth a quill, And every man a scribe by trade.

“To write the love of God above Would drain the ocean dry; Nor could the scroll contain the whole, Though stretched from sky to sky.”

Beloved, God loves *you* with an unfailing love. Look at the world about you and see in its matchless provisions how, through the love of God, your every physical need has been supplied. Look at this Book, God's Word, and discover in it the precious truth that, through the love of God, every longing of your seeking mind is answered. Look at His Son and see in His beautiful life and sacrificial death how, through the love of God, every desire of your spiritually starving soul is satisfied. Indeed! God loves you with an unfailing love.

“Tenderly He watches over you. Every step, every mile of the way.

As a mother watches o'er her baby, He is near you every hour of the day.

When you're weak, when you're strong, When you're right, when you're wrong.

In your joy, in your pain; When you lose, and when you gain.

Tenderly He watches o'er you, Every step, every mile of the way.” It's been said that all rivers stop when they reach the ocean. All but one! And that is the river of God's love. It didn't stop when it reached the ocean, but it flowed on and on and on until it swept into your heart. With limitless compassion and concern God's love has been and is directed toward you. That is the incontestable Fact of history. That is the Truth upon which your faith can build.

Say it any way you like. As one of the pioneering souls of our church likes to put it, “God is here beside me and will be with me all the way.” Or as the rugged pugilist, Rocky Graziano, puts it: “Somebody up there likes me.” It doesn't matter how you say it. The language is unimportant. The Fact is that God loves you with an unfailing love.

FAITH

Now then, with this great Fact as your foundation, Faith takes on new meaning. It ceases to be blind, unreasoned superstition. It becomes not the act of closing your eyes, but the act of opening your eyes to behold what you did not see at first glance. It means waking up to the Fact of God's unfailing love and letting that Fact grip your entire being.

A man named C. E. Montague put it this way, "One of the great delights of life is the discovery that certain trite pieces of observation are shinningly and exhilaratingly true." You've experienced that. Don't you remember the time you first started to swim, or cautiously climbed aboard a big two-wheeler bike? You'd gone through all the motions of swimming time and again in your mind's eye. You had ridden that bike over hill and dale in your imagination. Then suddenly you found you could really do it! You could really swim. You could really ride that bike. A mere wish and hope had become shinningly and exhilaratingly true.

Well, Faith can be exciting too if you begin with the Fact of God's unfailing love and allow what is often a trite observation to become "shinningly and exhilaratingly true."

Faith is not a stain-glassed word. It is not limited to church windows. As Dr. V. Carney Hargroves points out, "Faith is a word which gets out into the streets, rides the trolley cars, does business in banks, cooks food and mends clothes for the family. Faith goes to school and college, sustains marriage, creates friendships. Faith is the element in life which enables people to keep on choosing the right when there are countless expedient, profitable reasons for choosing the wrong."

No, Faith is not a stained-glass word. It is not an easy escape from responsibility. It is not a lazy man's retreat from reality. Rather, Faith is a means by which we know and a method by which we live. You can have Faith like that. It will not require a special act of God any more than it takes a special act of God for a bird to fly. That power is within her and she only needs to use it.

It didn't take a special act of God for the Israelites to own the land of promise. They simply had to go in and possess it.

It doesn't take a special act of God for a flower to grow. That power is locked within the seed. It only needs to be put into the ground and given a bit of water and care.

Even so, it will not require a special act of God for you to live by Faith. This Key of the Kingdom is within you. You need only to use it. Feed it upon the food of promise. Allow it to bask in the sunshine of communion with Christ.

FEELING

Many people are experiencing the power of Faith in their lives every day. I could tell you of one person in our church who has parlayed this great Fact of the unfailing love of God into a vast

fortune of spiritual power. She has done it by beginning each day with a gentle reminder that God is with her. Many times throughout the day she thanks Him for walking by her side, giving strength, guidance, wisdom and power. She has not closed her eyes to reality. She has opened then to the wonders of God's love and that Fact-based-Faith has brought miraculous changes into her heart and home.

Martha Packard, a nineteen year old girl in Topeka, Kansas, discovered the power of Faith two years ago when face to face with a broken teenage marriage and the responsibility of supporting a tiny daughter, she turned to God for help and found in the words of Christ, “Lo, I am with you always,” new evidence of the Fact of God's unfailing love for her.

She writes, “Those words, ‘Lo, I am with you always’, made a terrific impression upon me and I began letting God be more than just a part of life. Since then I have tried saying them to myself every time I am faced with a problem. They have given me strength to make decisions, courage when I was afraid.

“Oh, mistakes are inevitable. But I have found that mistakes are much easier to face now and I have the strength and courage it takes to correct them in the best possible way. Nothing seems to be too great to conquer and nothing seems too complicated to solve. Until two years ago God was just a part of my life...now He is with me in everything I do.”
Here is a teenager who began with Fact and moved through Faith to a Feeling of security, peace and at-one-ment with God.

Mrs. Albert M. Potter, of Clinton, Iowa, had a similar experience. For ten years her creed had been, “God helps those who help themselves,” and she found that under that code life was extremely hard. Then, through the medium of a little book, she rediscovered the Fact of God's unfailing love and the Feelings of joy, power and security which came into her life when she built her Faith upon that Fact.

She came across a spiritual exercise prescribed by Dr. Emmett Fox in which he said, “*If* a person wishes to really grow in faith, he should for one week, seven days and seven nights, twenty-four hours a day, consciously endeavor to think nothing but positive thoughts.”

Mrs. Potter decided to do it. She writes that she had never under-taken anything so difficult. “Not once could I raise my voice to my children. Not once could I take offense at a questionable implication. Not once could I fear depressing headlines. Not once could I feel sad when circumstances indicated disappointment. Every separate negative thought had to be replaced with a positive idea and assertion. The effort this took was unbelievable.

“By the sixth day my mind was so spent I could do nothing but sleep out the last two days in a benumbed condition. But at least I had fulfilled the conditions of my assignment and, because I undertook it, I sincerely feel I will never be the same person again.”

After the conclusion of the experiment she began to realize that for the first time in more than fifteen years she was living each moment in the present. For years she had been living only for tomorrow. It was a terrible habit which had started while she was in school with such thoughts as "when I graduate," "when I get a job," "when we get married," "when the war is over," or "when we build our house." It had seeped into everything she did.

But now the habit is cleanly broken and she concludes, "I find myself enjoying every moment with all possible pleasure and peace and happiness. If I awaken in the night a cozy, warm feeling envelopes me. If I walk out into the early morning, I am delighted with the leaves and grass instead of being caught with worry for the day's activities. How wonderful it is to feel peace and contentment."

Do you call that living with your eyes closed? Of course not! It is living with your eyes wide open. It is a practical exercise of Faith based upon the Fact of God's unfailing love.

Norman Peale would be quick to point out, "Positive thinking is not an end in itself. It is a means to an end: greater faith." It is the oil on the hinges which make it a whole new world in which the consciousness of God is ever present.

Just one or two words of caution. First of all, proper use of this **Key Of The kingdom** called Faith will require –

Time Spent Alone With God. It is impossible to rush into God's presence, grab anything which catches your fancy and run off with it. As someone has said, "Nature will not unveil her rarest beauties to the chance observer. And God's best gifts can only be yours by patiently waiting in His holy presence."

Secondly, to know the full power of Faith,

You Must Eagerly Desire It. There is a great difference between wishing for something and willing it. You may go window shopping down at the plaza and find yourself wishing for any one of a hundred things, only to forget them a moment later. How different that is from a fixed determination of the will which is not content until an object desired is an object owned. Like Jacob, who wrestled with God, crying, "I will not let you go unless you bless me," so, too, you must be possessed by strong and passionate desire. You must hunger and thirst after Faith power. You must make the acquisition of this great treasure a high priority. Finally, remember your Faith is built upon the Fact of God's unfailing love so

Come To Him With A Promise In Your Hand. That is the only way to really do business with God. Search the Bible for some holy word which exactly fits your need. It won't be hard to find. The Bible abounds with such promises. When you find it, memorize it. Roll it around in your mind. Keep it ever and always on the tip of your tongue. And take it with you into the presence of God!

Do not be troubled by your faithlessness, but tread firmly on His faithfulness remembering that, “What God hath promised, He is able also to perform” (Rom. 4:21).

“O soul of mine, though others fail,
Thy God around thee stands;
The Waker of the universe
Holds thee in His strong hands.

“Thy faintest sigh, each falling tear,
He marks that He may cast
His compensation 'round the life
Of thee, whom He holds fast.

“Dwell deep then, ever deep, in God;
Rest in His love and wait;
In days to come He will explain
Life's riddles, small and great.

“Now is the time to trust, in heaven,
Faith's mission will be passed,
Merged into sight, there to behold
The one who held you fast.”

NOTE: The following was printed on a 3 x 5 card and handed out to the congregation. A different color card accompanied each sermon.

ASSIGNMENT FOR THE WEEK

1. Review the progress you made on last week's assignment by writing down those areas in which you succeeded and those in which you would like to accomplish more.
2. Take Philippians 4:13 - “I can do all things through Christ who strengtheneth me” - as God's promise to you and as “positive thought” with which you will drive out all negative thought this week.
 - a. Memorize it.
 - b. Roll it around in your mind;
 - c. Keep it always on the tip of your tongue; and
 - d. For seven days, morning, noon and night, endeavor to use it as a sword to cut down your fear, doubt, faint-heartedness, etc.