

“Shall He Find Faith on the Earth?”



Joseph B. Wirthlin, “Shall He Find Faith on the Earth?” Sunday Afternoon Session, 6 October 2002, *Ensign*, Nov. 2002, 82ff. © 2005 Intellectual Reserve, Inc. All rights reserved.

That was the most beautiful rendition of a magnificent song, “A Poor Wayfaring Man of Grief,” which was the favorite of the Prophet Joseph and his brother Hyrum. What a beautiful performance from the choir and orchestra.

I pray I may have the Spirit of the Lord with me that has been with us during our conference, that I may say those things that will be beneficial to members of the Church and those who are not members. I feel very humble in this assignment.

Today I ask a question the Savior asked nearly 2,000 years ago: “When the Son of man cometh, shall he find faith on the earth?”¹

First Principle of the Gospel

What is true faith? Faith is defined as “belief and trust in and loyalty to God; . . . firm belief in something for which there is no proof.”² We believe that “faith is to hope for things which are not seen, but which are true . . . , and must be centered in Jesus Christ.” In fact, we believe that “faith in Jesus Christ is the first principle of the gospel.”³

A Widow’s Faith

There are those who can teach us regarding faith if we will but open our hearts and our minds. One such person is a woman whose husband had died. Left alone to raise her son, she had tried to find ways of supporting herself, but she lived in a time of terrible famine. Food was scarce and many were perishing because of hunger.

As available food diminished, so did the woman’s chance of surviving. Every day, she watched helplessly as her meager supply of food decreased.

Hoping for relief but finding none, the woman finally realized the day had come when she had only enough food for one last meal.

It was then that a stranger approached and asked the unthinkable. “Bring me, I pray thee,” he said to her, “a morsel of bread.”

The woman turned to the man and said, “As the Lord thy God liveth, I have not a cake, but an handful of meal in a barrel, and a little oil in a cruse.” She told him she was

about to prepare it as a last meal for herself and her son, “that we may eat it, and die.”

She did not know that the man before her was the prophet Elijah, sent to her by the Lord. What this prophet told her next may seem surprising to those today who do not understand the principle of faith.

“Fear not,” he said to her, “but make me thereof a little cake first, and bring it unto me, and after make for thee and for thy son.”

Can you imagine what she must have thought? What she must have felt? She hardly had time to reply when the man continued, “For thus saith the Lord God of Israel, The barrel of meal shall not waste, neither shall the cruse of oil fail, until the day that the Lord sendeth rain upon the earth.”

The woman, after hearing this prophetic promise, went in faith and did as Elijah had directed. “And she, and he, and her house, did eat many days. And the barrel of meal wasted not, neither did the cruse of oil fail, according to the word of the Lord, which he spake by Elijah.”⁴

In the wisdom of our day, the prophet’s request may seem unfair and selfish. In the wisdom of our day, the widow’s response may appear foolish and unwise. That is largely because we often learn to make decisions based upon what we see. We make decisions based on the evidence before us and what appears to be in our immediate best interest.

“Faith,” on the other hand, “is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen.”⁵ Faith has eyes that penetrate the darkness, seeing into the light beyond. “Your faith should not stand in the wisdom of men, but in the power of God.”⁶

Failure to Exercise Faith

Too often today, we do not rely on faith so much as on our own ability to reason and solve problems. If we become ill, modern medicine can work healing miracles. We can travel great distances in a short time. We have at our fingertips information that 500 years ago would have made the poorest man a prince.

True Faith

“The just shall live by faith,”⁷ we are told in holy writ. I ask again, What is faith?

Faith exists when absolute confidence in that which we cannot see combines with action that is in absolute conformity to the will of our Heavenly Father. Without all three—first, absolute confidence; second, action; and third, absolute conformity—without these three all we have is a counterfeit, a weak and watered-down faith.

Let me discuss each of these three imperatives of faith.

First, we must have confidence in that which we cannot see. When Thomas finally felt the prints of the nails and thrust his hand into the side of the resurrected Savior, he confessed that he, at last, believed.

“Jesus saith unto him, Thomas, because thou hast seen me, thou hast believed: blessed are they that have not seen, and yet have believed.”⁸

Peter echoed those words when he praised early followers for their faith in Jesus the Christ. He said:

“Whom having not seen, ye love; in whom, though now ye see him not, yet believing, ye rejoice with joy unspeakable and full of glory:

“Receiving the end of your faith, even the salvation of your souls.”⁹

Second, for our faith to make a difference, we must act. We must do all that is in our power to change passive belief into active faith, for truly, “faith, if it hath not works, is dead.”¹⁰

In 1998, President Gordon B. Hinckley raised a voice of warning to the Saints of this Church as well as to the world at large. He uttered that same warning last night at priesthood meeting. He said: “I am suggesting that the time has come to get our houses in order. So many people are living on the very edge of their incomes. In fact, some are living on borrowings. . . . I am troubled by the huge consumer installment debt which hangs over the people of the nation, including our own people.”¹¹

Brothers and sisters, when these prophetic words were uttered, some faithful members of the Church mustered their faith and heeded the counsel of the prophet. They are profoundly grateful today that they did. Others perhaps believed that what the prophet said was true but lacked faith, even as small as a grain of mustard seed. Consequently, some have suffered financial, personal, and family distress.

Third, one’s faith should be consistent with the will of our Heavenly Father, including His laws of nature. The sparrow flying into a hurricane may believe that he can successfully navigate the storm, but the unforgiving natural law will convince him otherwise in the end.

Are we wiser than the sparrow? Often what passes for faith in this world is little more than gullibility. It is distressing to

see how eager some people are to embrace fads and theories while rejecting or giving less credence and attention to the everlasting principles of the gospel of Jesus Christ. It is distressing how eagerly some rush into foolish or unethical behavior, believing that God will somehow deliver them from the inevitable tragic consequences of their actions. They even go so far as to ask for the blessings of heaven, knowing in their hearts that what they do is contrary to the will of our Father in Heaven.

How do we know when our faith conforms to the will of our Heavenly Father and He approves of that which we seek? We must know the word of God. One of the reasons we immerse ourselves in the scriptures is to know of Heavenly Father’s dealings with man from the beginning. If the desires of our heart are contrary to scripture, then we should not pursue them further.

Next, we must heed the counsel of latter-day prophets as they give inspired instruction.

Additionally, we must ponder and pray and seek the guidance of the Spirit. If we do so, the Lord has promised, “I will tell you in your mind and in your heart, by the Holy Ghost, which shall come upon you and which shall dwell in your heart.”¹²

Only when our faith is aligned with the will of our Heavenly Father will we be empowered to receive the blessings we seek.

Principle of Power

Truly understood and properly practiced, faith is one of the grand and glorious powers of eternity. It is a force powerful beyond our comprehension. “Through faith . . . the worlds were framed by the word of God.”¹³ Through faith, waters are parted, the sick healed, the wicked silenced, and salvation made possible.

Our faith is the foundation upon which all our spiritual lives rest. It should be the most important resource of our lives. Faith is not so much something we believe; faith is something we live.

Remember the words of the Savior: “If thou canst believe, all things are possible to him that believeth.”¹⁴ “He that believeth on me, the works that I do shall he do also; and greater works than these shall he do.”¹⁵

Teaching the Principle

Those who walk in faith will feel their lives encompassed with the light and blessings of heaven. They will understand and know things that others cannot. Those who do not walk in faith esteem the things of the Spirit as foolishness, for the things of the Spirit can only be discerned by the Spirit.¹⁶

The manifestations of heaven are sealed from the understanding of those who do not believe. “For if there be no faith among the children of men,” Moroni tells us, “God

can do no miracle among them; wherefore, he showed not himself until after their faith.”¹⁷

Yet throughout history, even in times of darkness there were those who, through eyes of faith, pierced the darkness and beheld things as they truly are. Moroni reveals that “there were many whose faith was so exceedingly strong ... [they] could not be kept from within the veil, but truly saw with their eyes the things which they had beheld with an eye of faith, and they were glad.”¹⁸

Our homes should be havens of faith. Mothers and fathers should teach the principles of faith to their children. Grandparents, too, can help. When I’m at a family gathering, I try to spend time, when appropriate, to have a one-on-one discussion with some of our grandchildren. I sit with them and ask them a few questions: “How are you doing?” “How is school?”

Then I ask them how they feel about the true Church, which means so much to me. I try to discover the depth of their faith and testimony. If I perceive areas of uncertainty, I’ll ask them, “Would you accept a goal from your granddad?”

Then I’ll suggest they read the scriptures daily and recommend they kneel down every morning and night and pray with their father and mother and have personal prayers. I admonish them to go to their sacrament meetings. I admonish them always to keep themselves pure and clean, always attend their meetings, and finally, among other things, always strive to be sensitive to the whisperings of the Lord.

Now one time after a talk with Joseph, our eight-year-old grandson, he looked into my eyes and asked this pointed question: “May I go now, Granddad?” He ran from my arms and I thought, “Did I do any good?” Apparently I did, because the next day he said, “Thanks for the little talk we had.”

If we approach them with love rather than reproach, we will find that the faith of our grandchildren will increase as a result of the influence and testimony of someone who loves the Savior and His divine Church.

Trials

Sometimes the world appears dark. Sometimes our faith is tried. Sometimes we feel that the heavens are closed against us. Yet we should not despair. We should never abandon our faith. We should not lose hope.

A few years ago, I began to notice that things around me were beginning to darken. It troubled me because simple things like reading the print in my scriptures were becoming more difficult. I wondered what had happened to the quality of the lightbulbs and wondered why manufacturers today couldn’t make things like they had in years past.

I replaced the bulbs with brighter ones. They, too, became dim. I blamed the poor design of the lamps and bulbs. I even

questioned whether the brightness of the sun was fading before the thought occurred to me that the problem might not be with the amount of light in the room—the problem might be with my own eyes.

Shortly thereafter, I went to an ophthalmologist who assured me that the world was not going dark at all. A cataract on my eye was the reason the light seemed to be fading. This certainly gives you my age. I placed my faith in the capable hands of this trained specialist, the cataract was removed, and behold, light again flooded my life! The light had never diminished; only my capacity to see the light had been lessened.

This taught me a profound truth. Often when the world seems dark, when the heavens seem distant, we seek to blame everything around us, when the real cause of the darkness may be a lack of faith within ourselves.

Be of good cheer. Have faith and confidence. The Lord will not forsake you.

The Lord has promised if we “search diligently, pray always, and be believing, ... all things shall work together for your good, if ye walk uprightly.”¹⁹

I know, as did Alma of old, that “whosoever shall put their trust in God shall be supported in their trials, and their troubles, and their afflictions, and shall be lifted up at the last day.”²⁰

Our Heavenly Father is a powerful, moving, directing being. While we may, at times, bear burdens of sorrow, pain, and grief; while we may struggle to understand trials of faith we are called to pass through; while life may seem dark and dreary—through faith, we have absolute confidence that a loving Heavenly Father is at our side.

As the Apostle Paul promised, “Therefore being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.”²¹

And one day, we will fully see through the darkness into the light. We will understand His eternal plan, His mercy, and His love.

“When the Son of man cometh, shall he find faith on the earth?”

Perhaps as members of the Church trust with all their hearts, transform their hopes and beliefs into action, and seek to align themselves with the will of the Lord, the answer to the question the Savior asked 2,000 years ago will be a resounding “Yes, He will find faith. He will find faith among those who take upon themselves His name. He will find it among those who are living His divine principles.”

Testimony

I testify that through our prophet, seer, and revelator, President Gordon B. Hinckley, our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ, speaks to all of us today. I testify the gospel was

restored in its fulness through the Prophet Joseph Smith.
Faith, an eternal power, is a gift from our Heavenly Father

for all mankind. To this eternal truth I bear my personal
witness in the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

Notes:

1. Luke 18:8.
2. Webster's Ninth New Collegiate Dictionary (1984), "Faith," 446.
3. Bible Dictionary, "Faith," 669–70.
4. See 1 Kgs. 17:11–16.
5. Heb. 11:1; see also Heb. 11:2–40; Ether 12:7–22.
6. 1 Cor. 2:5.
7. Rom. 1:17.
8. John 20:29.
9. 1 Pet. 1:8–9.
10. James 2:17.
11. "To the Boys and to the Men," *Ensign*, Nov. 1998, 53; *Liahona*, Jan. 1999, 65.
12. D&C 8:2.
13. Heb. 11:3.
14. Mark 9:23.
15. John 14:12.
16. See 1 Cor. 2:14.
17. Ether 12:12.
18. Ether 12:19.
19. D&C 90:24.
20. Alma 36:3.
21. Rom. 5:1