

Text: 1 Cor. 2:1-5

Title: Faith in the power of God

Time: 7/14/2013 am

Place: NBBC

Introduction: A brother-in-the-Lord took his family on vacation recently, and they were enjoying cooling off in a swimming pool together. At one point he challenged his son of about six years of age to get a running head start and jump in the pool as far as he could. The six-year-old agreed that this would be a terrific thing to do, so he took a bunch of steps away from the edge of the pool, held his breath, plugged his nose, closed his eyes, and started running. Before his dad could yell out “No, Son No!”, he had leaped into the air well short of the edge of the pool and came down with a crash before finally hitting the water.

That is a great illustration of misplaced faith – faith in an idea that is simply wrong. The boy had faith in his idea that water was closer than it was.

Paul is dealing with people who have misplaced faith in this passage, and he mentioned that back in 1:22-25. Simply put, Paul knows that every Christian needs faith in the power of God, but we are all tempted to put our faith in ideas, goals, and hopes that do not involve the power of God.

I am reading a book written by Edward Welch called, *Depression: Looking Up from the Stubborn Darkness*. In a chapter on fear, Dr. Welch says this about misplaced faith: “This is THE problem of the human heart – misplaced trust. We value, love, and trust something in creation more than the Creator, and since there is nothing in creation that is intended to bear the weight of our trust, we are bound to live

in fear” (133). Paul understands the seriousness of misplaced trust in the lives of Christians (v. 5).

I have titled the message, “Faith in the power of God,” and I want us to notice four things that we need to do to make sure that we have our faith well-placed in our Savior and not misplaced in something that is only going to cause us great spiritual injury.

I. Humbly boast in the Lord (v. 1).

Illustration: Our King James translators lived under the rule of King James in England, and it was King James who, as the head of the Church of England, granted official authorization to their work so that we also know the King James Version as the *Authorized Version*.

The KJV is an accurate translation of the Word of God from the original languages of Scripture for which we are very thankful. The translators wrote a dedication of their work to their king, and you may have a copy of that like I do in the front of your King James Bible. In that dedication, King James is addressed by these subjects with the titles “Your Majesty” and “Your Highness.” We Americans do not know much about these titles, but as I understand it, the title “Your Excellency” is often used not for the monarch of a country, but for other royal family members, heads of state, and diplomats.

Application: That meaning and usage of the word *excellency* is behind Paul’s description of his coming to Corinth in v. 1. The word is used only one other time in the New Testament (1 Tim. 2:2). Paul’s point is not that he had a simple vocabulary or used short phrases when he came to Corinth, but rather that he did not have much name recognition when it

came to his preaching and his wisdom (in Athens they called him a seed-picker, Acts 17:18).

Paul was not the great evangelist everyone knew when he came into town. He was not the man with the Corinthian radio program that everyone in Corinth had heard causing them to anticipate his coming. All that he had when he came to proclaim the testimony of the Lord was a humble boast in the Lord (1:31). We need to aspire to be humble people who boast only in the Lord. Paul taught that, and he also lived that. The obscurity of his ministry in Corinth was ok with him, and the obscurity of our assignment from the Lord should be ok with us, because we boast in the Lord.

So are you a humble example of boasting in the Lord? Have you advertised how great your God is, or are you a witness of a different kind – how great you are or how lacking others might be? If we are to have a faith that is truly placed in the power of God, we must be willing to humbly boast only in Him.

II. Make Jesus Christ and His work on the cross the one important thing you know (v. 2).

Illustration: I googled the phrase *number one key to success* this past week and got 174MM hits. Mace Horoff wrote on one website that the number one key to success in the sales of medical supplies is to always do what you say you are going to do. That seemed like good advice for other things as well. We like it when a task like selling medical equipment can be boiled down to one thing that you have to know and do.

Application: It turns out that living the Christian life and serving Christ are like that (Jesus told Martha, “One thing

is necessary”). Paul made a conscious decision to know only one thing as he ministered in Corinth—Jesus Christ and His work on the cross.

Of course, Paul knew other things too, but what he is saying is that he had decided that this is the only really important thing he knew related to having a life and a witness that is filled with the power of God.

Every believer knows Jesus Christ, and that He died on the cross. But so often our knowledge of that is really not very important to us. For various reasons, knowing Christ and His work slips in importance. Notice quickly three things that knowing Christ and His cross enable us to do:

1. It enables us to truly believe that we are loved of God (Eph. 3:17, “That Christ may dwell in your hearts by faith; that ye, being rooted and grounded in love . . .”); before we can conclude that God does not love us, we have to forget Christ and the cross.
2. It helps us to run our race with patience (Heb. 12:1-2, “Wherefore seeing we also are compassed about with so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which doth so easily beset us, and let us run with patience the race that is set before us, looking unto Jesus the author and finisher of our faith; who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God.”); before we can quit on God and His calling in our lives, we have to forget Christ going all the way to the cross for us.
3. It gives us power to forgive and love one another (Luke 23:34a, “Then said Jesus, Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do”; Eph. 4:32, “And be ye kind one to another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God

for Christ's sake hath forgiven you.”); before we can be embroiled in bitterness at someone else, we have to forget Christ hanging from the cross, crying out, “Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do.”

This morning you know Jesus Christ and you know all about the cross. But have you made the determination that this is the one truly important thing that you will know, or has Christ and His cross become not quite important enough to you to make you understand that God loves you, that you must not quit, and that you have to love and forgive your brother and sister in Christ?

Be a faithful example of humble boasting in the Lord; decide to make Jesus Christ and Him crucified the one important thing you know. This is how we have faith in the power of God. Note a third way:

III. Do your God-given duty in spite of your weakness, fear, and trembling (v. 3).

Illustration: It is surprising how weak and fearful and trembling we can become when we begin to speak of Christ and His cross to others. We certainly need to pray for boldness, and Paul often asks for believers to pray that he could have some more boldness.

Application: Boldness, however, is not the absence of weakness, fear, and trembling. We mentioned this about courage in our study of the Psalms. David did not say that as a courageous believer he was never afraid. No, he said, “When I am afraid, I will trust in you [the Lord]” (Ps. 56:3).

Boldness works the same way. Boldness in Paul’s ministry involved operating in the midst of weakness, fear, and trembling. In fact, the Scripture is clear that if anything, we

do not have enough fear and trembling in our ministry for Christ.

Psalms 2:11 indicates that we need fear and trembling in our worship of God, "Serve the Lord with fear, and rejoice with trembling." 2 Cor. 7:15 indicates that we need to respond to the God-given leadership we receive in the local church in fear and trembling, "And his [Titus's] inward affection is more abundant toward you whilst he remembereth the obedience of you all, how with fear and trembling ye received him." Eph. 6:5 tells us that we need fear and trembling to be the employees we need to be, "Servants, be obedient to them that are your masters according to the flesh, with fear and trembling, in singleness of your heart, as unto Christ." And Phil. 2:12 tells us that we need fear and trembling in order to grow in the Lord as we should, "Wherefore, my beloved, as ye have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling."

We do not fear and tremble enough when approaching our service of our great and holy God. Only when we are willing to keep the fear of the Lord before our eyes will we ever correctly place our faith in the power of God.

Do you fear and tremble in this way? Or has your attitude to the things of God become something closer to contempt and disrespect? You and I must learn to fear and to tremble in weakness in order to know the power of God.

IV. Do not rely on the wisdom of men but on the evidence of the Spirit and power of God (vv. 4-5).

Application: I had some difficulty understanding what Paul meant when he spoke of his ministry being a demonstration

of the Holy Spirit and God's power. My mind went first to apostolic miracles, but then I remembered what he said about the Jews in 1:22. Seeking a sign is no better than seeking the enticing words of man's wisdom that the Greeks liked so much.

Then I thought that he meant the power of God's Word, and that may have been a big part of his meaning. God's Word is certainly living and powerful and sharper than any two-edged sword.

But then I found 1 Cor. 4:9, which has the verb form of the noun *demonstration* in a context in which Paul is talking about what was demonstrated by his ministry as an apostle. Read 1 Cor. 4:9-14, 20. You see, the demonstration of the Spirit of God and His power in Paul's life as an apostle was the ability that he had to be faithful while enduring the same hardships and difficulties and lack of success in the world's eyes that you and I always have to deal with as we serve the Lord.

That is what makes people see that we rely not on the wisdom of men, but on the evidence of the Spirit and power of God. We must never run to the place that looks more successful to the eyes of man's wisdom. We must rather be followers of this dear apostle, who was faithful in spite of great suffering and difficulty.

Conclusion: Do we really want to have faith that rests in the power of God rather than in the wisdom of man? If so, it will not just happen.

We have to be faithful examples of humble boasting in the Lord. When was the last time you had a conversation about how good and great our God is? We have to make a

conscious decision to make Jesus Christ and His work on the cross for us the one important thing we know. When we do that, we will know God loves us, we will run our race with patient endurance, and we will love and forgive one another.

We must fear and tremble as we do our God-given duty. And we must demonstrate through hardship and trial that God's Spirit and God's power is real to us. We chose it over the wisdom of men. May God make us a church filled not with the wisdom of men, but with the power of God.

“A man came—I think it was actually in Philadelphia—on one occasion to the great George Whitefield and asked if he might print his sermons. Whitefield gave this reply; he said, ‘Well, I have no inherent objection, if you like, but you will never be able to put on the printed page the lightning and the thunder.’ That is the distinction—the sermon, and the ‘lightning and the thunder.’ To Whitefield this was of very great importance, and it should be of very great importance to all preachers, as I hope to show. You can put the sermon into print, but not the lightning and the thunder. That comes into the act of preaching and cannot be conveyed by cold print. Indeed it almost baffles the descriptive powers of the best reporters.”

—David Martin Lloyd-Jones,

*Preachers and Preaching*