

A “Hole” Lot of Faith Luke 5:17-26

My message today is a message on faith. Whether a Christian or not, faith is a component of daily life. To one degree or another, we all have faith. Some have greater faith than others. Tomorrow when you go to the bank to withdraw money, you have faith in the bank that it has kept your account intact and secure.

If you happen to go to the doctor this week, you have faith that he or she has been Board certified and will give you a thorough and accurate assessment of your health regardless of why you are there.

If you board a plane headed to some destination you have faith that the pilot will get you there safely.

When you put your mortgage payment in the mail, you have faith that it will arrive on time and not 22 years from now.

Every day we place our faith in multitudes of things from the stock market where we invest our retirement funds to politicians who make promises to our military who maintain our freedoms. We all put faith in people and things.

For the Christian faith is viewed from an entirely different perspective. It begins with faith about God and faith in God.

Faith believes that God exists.

Faith believes in the nature of God.

That He is all powerful

That He is all knowing

That He is everywhere

That He is loving

That He is forgiving

That He is trustworthy to keep His promises

That He is merciful - And so on.

Faith believes that He is able to do what He says,

when He says because of who He is.

From Webster’s dictionary we find that faith is *“unquestioning belief that does not require proof or evidence.”*

There is probably no better verse defining faith than **Hebrews 11:1 “Now faith is being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see.”**

We could define it as unshaken confidence or absolute trust. I don’t think there is a better statement or verse that sums up the matter about faith. What also comes to mind is **Proverbs 3:5-6. “Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding. In all your ways acknowledge Him and He will direct your paths.”**

Faith is unquestioning belief. That means the object of our faith, not the thing we are hoping for or the result, the object of our faith is not questioned, there is no doubt. And when we have the utmost faith in God, we don’t question what He does. Now, let me qualify that. I’m sure you have just as I have at times questioned God about things that have happened to us or to others. We have all asked why. Why did God let that child die of cancer?

Why did God allow 9/11?

Why did God allow those mudslides to take all those lives?

Why did God...and you fill in the blank.

Initially asking God why about some event that doesn’t seem to fit with His nature may be a means by which we want to have Him show us more about His character so that we have a clearer understanding of the event in light of His overall plan that helps us make some sense of it. In it we have faith that God has a purpose even though we don’t know all the reasons. But even if He chooses not to disclose His purpose we still believe in God’s sovereign plan because we believe that His wisdom and power are in control of everything.

On the other hand, it is wrong to continue to ask why. It calls God into question and doubts His power, or His wisdom, or His character in that event. That is not faith, that is arrogance – to think we know better. Faith does not doubt the plan or hand of God.

According to the definition, faith is not only unquestioning belief, it also does not require proof or evidence. God is not required to get permission or need to demonstrate His power to prove Himself capable.

Let me share some quotes about faith that I find particularly thought provoking as it relates to our passage.

There is a short story about the faith of Adoniram Judson. Faith in God makes great optimists. Over in Burma, Judson was lying in a foul jail with 32 lbs. of chains on his ankles, his feet bound to a bamboo pole. With a sneer on his face a fellow prisoner said, "Dr. Judson, what about the prospect of the conversion of the heathen? His instant reply was, "The prospects are just as bright as the promises of God."

Oswald Chambers wrote: "Faith for my deliverance is not faith in God. Faith means, whether I am visibly delivered or not, I will stick to my belief that God is love. There are some things only learned in a fiery furnace." That was Daniel and his friends.

John Calvin is quoted as saying: "Faith is not a distant view but a warm embrace of Christ. "

George Muller, who knew a great deal about faith, wrote: "Faith does not operate in the realm of the possible. There is no glory for God in that which is humanly possible. Faith begins where man's power ends."

Turn to **Luke 5:17-26**. In our story 5 different people or groups are affected in some way by faith.

Of course the central figure around this story and the gospel itself is Jesus. He is the object of faith here, the one in whom individuals come believing that He can do something for a man who is paralyzed. Whether they had witnessed Jesus perform other miracles or just heard that Jesus had supernatural power to heal, He is the one they seek out. He is the object of their faith.

We also see a group of religious leaders present. They are the Pharisees and the scribes. The Pharisees were zealous for the law. Their name literally means separated ones and so they became known as separatists. They appeared on the scene sometime around the reign of Antiochus Epiphanies during the intertestamental period. As a group they opposed the Hellenization of Jews meaning they didn't like Greek culture mixing with Judaism. As time went on the observance of the law and its ceremonies became less and less important in terms of its significance and more out of duty. They added legalistic regulations for observance.

The Scribes on the other hand were the religious leaders who studied, taught, interpreted and transmitted the Mosaic law, law that was explained by tradition. As William Hendriksen explains "the real law was buried underneath tradition." Tradition became the essence of their religion.

Then we see the paralytic, the man with the physical problem. We don't know anything about his paralysis. We don't know if it was something that he was born with, something that resulted from an injury that occurred sometime in his life or because of some disease that affected his nervous system rendering him incapable of mobility. We assume his paralysis affected his entire body as he required four men to carry him.

We also see the four men. Friends of the paralytic who heard about Jesus being nearby and cared enough about their friend to bring him on some kind of stretcher to where Jesus was at in Capernaum.

Whether lifelong pals or just neighbors is unclear, but they cared enough and were determined to get their friend help. We don't even know how far they carried the man. [We hear stories from missionaries about villagers who walk for miles or even for days to seek medical treatment at a hospital.](#) These were faithful friends.

Finally, we note the crowds. Mark 2 tells us that the house where Jesus was teaching filled up and people were crowded outside. I can just see people standing outside the door craning their neck to get a look or to make sure they heard what was being said. Windows were opened and heads crammed in every available space to see. There was a big crowd.

Those are the people who are part of this story. If you are taking notes, I have two points. The first point has to do with the faith of the friends and the paralytic. The second has to do with our own faith. Here are the two points:

[A response to their faith](#)
[Reasons to have faith](#)

I. A RESPONSE TO THEIR FAITH

Here is a very familiar story. Jesus was one teaching in a house. We know from Mark 2 that it was in Capernaum. Some believe it was the home of Peter's Mother-in-law. We don't know for sure. The house was over crowded. People filled every possible spot inside the house and spilled outside. Among the group as we noted were Pharisees and Scribes and our text tells us that they came from the regions of Galilee and Judea and from the city of Jerusalem.

You might ask why they were there and that would be a good question. It was the responsibility of religious leaders to ensure that anyone teaching was not teaching heresy. So they were there not as curious listeners but silent observers to hear Jesus. With a watchful eye and attentive ear they listened to everything He said.

We also note that Luke tells us the **“power of the Lord was present for Him to heal the sick.”** That doesn't mean that on some days He had power and other days He didn't. It simply means that the power to heal was always present in Him, but like His glory, it was at times veiled. Let me remind you of Paul's words about Jesus: **“Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, but made Himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself.” (Philippians 2:6-8a)**

When His power was displayed by healing it authenticated His message and affirmed who He was. Jesus had power to heal and our story continues by noting that four guys brought a paralytic on a mat and tried to gain access to Jesus but were denied. But the swelling crowd did not deter their desire to get their friend to Jesus. They may have gone up to those crowded around the door and politely asked if they could squeeze by to get him to where Jesus was, but were met with rudeness. “Hey, what do you think you're doing? Wait your turn.” Maybe they went to the windows and asked if somehow they could get His attention, but again, they were met with resistance and rejection.

There is always a crowd who will try to keep others from Jesus.

A guy at work tells some buddies that he's been invited to church to hear some preacher and they tell him not to waste his time. They tried it once years ago and it was lame, didn't do anything for them and besides the church is filled with hypocrites.

A gal in the office is having some marriage trouble and she talks with her co-workers about wanting to read the Bible to see if there are any answers to help her. They tell her that the Bible is only a book of rules and regulations that will restrict her fun and tie her down. Besides out archaic and out of touch.

Undaunted by the barriers, they climb the stairs on the outside of the house that lead to the roof. During the middle of His teaching, some muffled noises came from on top of the house. They hear some scraping sounds and perhaps some chopping noises. Debris begins to fall from the ceiling. If it were in California, they might think it was an earthquake. People look up toward the ceiling and see a little ray of light poking through a hole. The hole gets bigger. I suppose by now, Jesus has stopped teaching and is looking up as well. Maybe they hear some talking. “Okay let’s each grab a corner and lower him down slowly. Careful. Don’t let him slip.” Down through the hole in the ceiling a mat of some kind descends. It appears heavy. They can’t see what it is until it reaches eye level. It’s a man. Why is a man on a mat getting lowered through ceiling?

Here’s where the story turns. When Jesus sees their faith, our text says that something unusual happened. He said to the man **“Friend, your sins are forgiven.”**

That seems strange given the man’s obvious physical condition of paralysis. What Jesus does is strategic. Rather than heal the man first, He forgives the man his sins. The prevailing thought of that day was that any physical disease or abnormality was thought to be the result of sin. So Jesus teaches them all a lesson by forgiving the man’s sin, by healing his soul. We have no record that he or the four men asked Jesus for a healing or forgiveness. Jesus looked beyond his physical condition and saw the heart and healed the soul. Like the cleansing of the leper in last week’s message, this is further indication of the power and authority that Jesus had to make someone ceremonially clean.

You can almost hear the silent murmurings of the religious leaders who sat there calling it blasphemy, challenging Jesus that God alone has authority to forgive sins. And they are right, yet they rejected the idea that Jesus is God who also can forgive sin.

Psalm 103:11-12 “For as high as the heavens are above the earth, so great is His love for those who fear Him; as far as the east is from the west, so far has He removed our transgressions from us.”

Isaiah 43:25 “I, even I, am He who blots out your transgressions, for My own sake, and remembers your sins no more.”

They understood what Scripture said and believed only God could forgive sin. Who does this guy think He is? He put Himself equal with God. It was blasphemous. Knowing their thoughts Jesus challenged them. **“Which is easier: to say, ‘Your sins are forgiven,’ or to say, ‘Get up and walk? But that you may know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins, I tell you [paralyzed man], get up, take your mat and go home.’”** It’s easier to say your sins are forgiven because there’s no what to prove it.

Immediately the man got up and walked by all the people who had barred him from entering. He went home praising God and the people were amazed. In this story we see a response to their faith. Whatever faith they had, I believe it is seen in the tenacity they showed in not being deterred by the physical barriers that were evident.

Bible scholar Lewis Sperry Chafer sums it up by saying that “Faith is personal confidence in God. This implies that the individual has come to know God to some degree of real experience.”

They could have had a fear of failure. They could have reasoned even before they started that the plan was sure to fail. Jesus is so busy. There’s always a crowd. How are we going to get near Him? He’s been like this his whole life, it’s probably a hopeless case, too difficult, even for someone like Jesus.

They could have had a fear of rejection. What’s the point, Jesus won’t want to see us. There’s probably people assigned to keep the disruptions down.

We'll just get turned away.

They could have had a fear of ridicule. People could have laughed at them when they came up to the house. People could have laughed at them when they heard they wanted Jesus to see their friend and heal them.

They could have had a fear of silence. **What if they did get to see Jesus and He does nothing?**

Fear can derail our faith quickly. Fear can neutralize our actions, immobilize us. **Do you allow fear to rule your heart and keep you from real faith?**

A. For the Five Men, Faith Was Rewarded

For each response of those who witnessed this miracle there is both an attitude and an action. For the men who came hoping beyond all hope in the power of Jesus we see their faith rewarded.

William Booth, founder of the Salvation Army once said "Faith and works should travel side by side, step answering to step, like the legs of men walking. First faith, and then works; and then faith again, and then works again -- until they can scarcely distinguish which is the one and which is the other."

Their attitude was that they believed in what Jesus could do, even though they didn't know what He would do.

Their action was that they brought the man to Jesus. The reward for their faith was the physical healing of their friend and secondly, but more importantly, their faith resulted in their sins being forgiven.

They were healed spiritually.

Faith not only believes, it acts.

B. For the Religious Leaders, Faith Was Rejected

Some people will look at the facts of a miracle and even conclude that it was a miracle, but they are so steeped in their religious traditions, so set in their

ways that they are unwilling to have any faith and believe. Like the religious leaders, pride keeps many from having faith. They would rather take issue with the result than acknowledge their sinfulness and need of repentance. The attitude of the religious leaders was to sit in silent observation. Their action was strong objection.

C. For the Crowd, Faith Was Reverential

When they saw what had occurred, their attitude was amazement **"We have never seen anything like this before."** Their action was adoration. **"Everyone was amazed and gave praise to God."**

How do we respond when we are asked by God to step out in faith? How do we respond when we see God do some miracle in the life of someone else?

Of these three groups, who are we most like in our attitudes and actions when it comes to faith?

Booth was right when he said that faith takes a step and actions follow. James said the same thing in a different way: **"Faith without works is dead."** We only accomplish for God things that are as big as our faith.

If Abraham had stayed in Ur, his faith would have never been rewarded. In order for God to make him a great nation through whom all the nations of the world would be blessed he had to put some action to his faith and leave his relatives.

The Israelites couldn't take the Promised Land by faith without stepping into the Jordan River.

Gideon's faith was rewarded when he took God at His word and went into battle against the Midianites with only 300 soldiers.

Someone has said that faith is the bridge between where I am and where God is taking me.

What faith do you have in God today? What is God asking you to do by faith? We have talked about a response to their faith and maybe their faith inspires

you to step out in faith. Seeing the faith of others can be all we need to step out in faith ourselves. Faith takes a lot of courage. Keep in mind our definition: *Faith is “unquestioning belief that does not require proof or evidence.”* Even though it doesn't make sense, se do it.

It is “personal confidence in God. This implies that the individual has come to know God to some degree of real experience.”

Had you been there that day, how would you have responded to their faith? With that, I want to close this morning by considering reasons to have faith. I have jotted down five reasons.

II. REASONS TO HAVE FAITH

A. Faith Receives Pardon By God

We see that evidenced in this story and we see it from what Paul writes to the church of Ephesus.
Ephesians 2:8-9

Faith takes at face value that what God has said about how we are saved or that we are saved at all, is only by one way, and that way is by faith in Jesus who died on the cross. We have to believe that God is not some scheming, nefarious, evil minded, sadistic being who will one day reveal that it was all a big hoax, that He never wanted nor intended to pardon anyone, or that He could never pardon anyone and it was all just to see how many He could deceive into following Him.

Faith believes that when God says anyone who comes to Him, He will in no wise cast out is true. He believes that pardon is immediate and complete. Faith trusts that God loves the world so much that He gave His only Son that whoever believes in Jesus will not perish but have everlasting life, and that life is a gift for our faith.

Faith receives pardon from God.

B. Faith Reverently Petitions God

In our story, we see four men come to the Lord. We don't see that they demanded anything of Him, just brought Him, believing that He could help. Last week we saw the leper come in belief, but reverently asked if Jesus would cleanse Him. We should never think that we can presume upon God anything, to demand He do something. I would never presume upon God by climbing up on the roof of the church and tell you that my faith will now be demonstrated by jumping off head first so that God can catch me. When we come to God in faith, petitioning Him for something, remember into whose presence we come and revere Him. **What are you petitioning God for in faith that only He can do and how are you asking?**

Keep in mind that a step of faith always requires a step of action.

If you have ever been unemployed and you had faith in God and prayed earnestly for a job, you know that faith also means making phone calls, sending out resumes, going to interviews, following up. God doesn't generally just throw something in your lap while you're sitting at home doing nothing or make you independently wealthy so you don't have to work.

If you have a medical issue that you have petitioned God about in faith for healing, you should still go to the doctor. It may be that the answer to your healing will come through medical intervention.

Oswald Chambers wrote “We have to pray with our eyes on God, not on the difficulties.” That's faith.

An attitude of faith requires action. Pursue and petition God.

C. Faith Readily Pursues God

Hebrews 11:6

Faith isn't something we do today and tomorrow we opt to live in our own strength. Faith diligently

seeks God every day. It is a lifelong commitment and pursuit. It is a way of life.

These four friends of the paralytic pursued after the only possible help they knew for their friend. They went by faith. They sought Him out and were undeterred by the obstacles before them. A crowded house and a covered roof didn't stop them. Faith readily pursues God.

The verse also says something else about faith.

D. Faith Really Pleases God **Hebrews 11:6**

The first step of faith is to simply believe that He exists. God is not the old bearded, grandfatherly figure as He is sometimes depicted. He is not an elusive, unknowable God. He is not the grand policeman making life difficult for those who disobey Him. He is knowable and we have come to know Him through Christ (**John 1:18 "No man has seen God at any time the only begotten Son which is in the bosom of the Father, He has made Him known."**)

The existence of God is all around us both revealed in nature and through His Divine Word.

The writer of Hebrews continues by noting that for those who by faith believe that He exists there is a reward for that faith. In the context of the passage, the reward for Enoch's walk of faith was that God took him so that he did not see death. God was pleased with the faith of Enoch. But without faith we cannot hope to please God and neither can we hope or will we experience pardon from God.

Believing faith is rewarded by pardon for sin. Believing faith is rewarded by blessings from God. Read through both Testaments and mark the people who were in some way rewarded for their faith.

Why was Enoch's faith rewarded? It was rewarded because he walked with God.

The greater our faith in God, the greater our walk with God.

The greater our walk with God, the greater our faith in God.

God asks us to believe and trust Him, with all our heart. Someone has said that faith honors God and God honors faith.

E. Faith Rigorously Perseveres With God **II Peter 1:5**

Faith begins a journey in the family of God that adds godly character along the way. Faith is the glue that keeps you going along the road of life when difficulties come your way. When trials hit, when temptations assault, whatever it is, faith keeps you persevering with God. Faith keeps you on the path with God. Faith keeps going no matter what, even when God isn't visible to us, even when the way doesn't make any sense, even when it is hard. *"The lord knows the way through the wilderness, all I have to do is follow."*

One night a house caught fire and a young boy was forced to flee to the roof. The father stood on the ground below with outstretched arms, calling to his son, "Jump! I'll catch you." He knew the boy had to jump to save his life. All the boy could see, however, was flame, smoke, and blackness. As can be imagined, he was afraid to leave the roof. His father kept yelling: "Jump! I will catch you." But the boy protested, "Daddy, I can't see you." The father replied, "But I can see you and that's all that matters."

We can walk by sight or walk by faith. It's a choice. Walking by sight is limited by how far we can see. Walking by faith is limited only by how much we believe in the all-powerful, faithfulness of a never changing God.

“Now faith is being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see...And without faith it is impossible to please God, because anyone who comes to Him must believe that He exists and that He rewards those who earnestly seek Him.” (Hebrews 11:1, 6)