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# Faith in the fourth gospel

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'FAITH' IN THE FOURTH GOSPEL

Curtis Brookens Harrold, '09.

Before we begin to examine the one important thread that weaves its way through this Gospel and seems to help hold all other parts together, it may be an inspiration to us to know how this Gospel as a whole has impressed itself upon the minds and hearts of those who have spent a life-time in studying and examining its contents.

"This little book is a sea in which the sun and stars are mirrored and if there are eternal truths for the human race, they are found in the Gospel of John." "The Gospel of John is the most original, the most important, the most influential book in all literature. It is simple as a child, sublime as a seraph, gentle as a lamb, and bold as an eagle, deep as the sea, and high as the heavens."

"Beneath the tranquil surface of this Gospel, which is filled to so great an extent with what the Lord himself said, are deep and fervid ocean currents of holy life and love which no one can undertake to explore, and describe without being made to feel the dimness of his vision and the feebleness of his speech!"

"This Gospel speaks a language to which no parallel whatever is to be found in the world's compass of

literature; such child-like simplicity, with such contemplative profundity, such life and such deep rest, such sadness and such serenity, and above all such a breath of love." "The Gospel is the Gospel of the world, resolving reason into intuition and faith into sight!"

#### FAITH IN THE FOURTH GOSPEL.

We are going to try to reach the source of the life-giving power in this Gospel. We realize that one cannot enter into this book with the spirit of irreverence or scepticism, but only with the spirit of devoutness for this and this alone is the key that unlocks the sacred vaults in which are kept the choicest treasures of this wonderful Gospel. Before going in search of the treasures in the Gospel to a sure success, we must have spent hours of pondering in the enlightening presence of the Holy Spirit. We find there are two kinds of faith in this Gospel. There is that kind which is an indispensable prerequisite or condition in order to His healing of men's infirmities, but which in so far as we have any evidence is not the saving faith through which the soul is knit to Christ."

In John II. 23-24 "Now when he was in Jerusalem at the passover in the feast day many believed in his name when they saw the miracles which he did. But Jesus did not commit himself unto them because he knew all men." From this it appears that though the men said they believed in his name Christ saw and knew that their faith was only in his name, his ability to work miracles. There seemed to be no evidence that they joined to Christ in discipleship.

But the kind of faith that shines out so brightly in this Gospel is a faith that does not stop at simply the evidences of the power of Christ to heal, but goes on further and leans on the "perfectness of his moral character, on his divinity, on his ability to give eternal life."

The faith we are dealing with is that where the individual soul assents there can be but one God who is ruler and lawgiver, that God and Jesus Christ are one, and that to this one the soul surrenders in all obedience and love. It means a great change in the life, both outwardly and inwardly. In studying John we find the word faith is used but once. Perhaps this is true because the word faith is abstract. The verb 'believe' is used many times and has in it action and

life. John's idea of faith is more closely allied to life, a vital union, than to an intellextual perception of the truth.

According to one man's idea-John, by faith means "the activity of a soul which is steadfastly putting itself in harmony with God. The expression of a life at work in all holy ways, a holy living with Christ, as both the supreme source and supreme goal." The incident related concerning John in Chapter I. 29 seems to be about as strong an illustration of faith as we find in this Gospel. With this sentence, "Behold the Lamb of God that taketh away the sin of the world," at the first of this Gospel and the saying of Thomas, "My Lord and my God," at the close of the book there cannot be an entrance or exit made without ascending these mountain peaks of faith. And well it is so, for such lofty peaks of faith are needed in order that any who try to look for the beauties and search for the wealth in this book they first must ascend high in faith that they may be prepared to appreciate the beauty and enabled to search and live in the lofty atmosphere of this whole Gospel."

If one part of faith is the intellectual perception of Christ as he is, John certainly had faith

when he recognised Christ as the Lamb of God. From what has been stated as regards the meaning of faith, no doubt but we can understand what is meant when Christ in John III. 15 says, "Whosoever believeth in him should not perish but have eternal life. For God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten son that whosoever believeth in him should not perish but have everlasting life." John III. 18, "He that believeth on him is not condemned, but he that believeth not is condemned already because he has not believed in the name of the only begotten son of God." John V. 24, "Verily, verily I say unto you he that heareth my word and believeth on him that sent me hath eternal life and shall not come into condemnation, but is passed from death unto life."

In John VI. 29, VI. 40, VI. 47, VII. 38, XI. 25, XI. 40, XII. 46, XIV. 1, XIV. 12 we find sayings of Jesus in regard to belief, faith. Here is told what is in store for those who have the true faith. Not only does this true faith mean belief in the sense it is often taken--the narrow meaning--but to have faith to believe on the Lord Jesus Christ means first repentance, second belief, third confession, and fourth obedience. So that when John gives us the words of Christ saying, "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ," the four things above

mentioned are necessary.

In studying this Gospel we find scattered all through it places where faith in Christ is shown forth by the disciples and by those to whom Christ revealed himself in words and deeds. The first place I. 29 has been mentioned before. In this verse the disciple shows us what his belief, his faith, is. We know he believes what he is saying for he was willing to suffer rather than give up this faith. Anyone who looks upon Christ as the "Lamb of God" with love here manifested and the power ("Taketh away the sin of the world") and so clear a view of his mission, we say if that belief, if that faith is manifested we are sure the rewards offered by our saviour shall be won.

In the fourth Gospel we have that interesting and ever new story of Christ <sup>and</sup> ~~of~~ the woman of Samaria. This story has brought comfort to many a fallen woman for here is realized the thought that though one has fallen from grace into the mire of sin--though virtue--the most beautiful gift to woman is gone, there is yet hope. Not only hope for self, but hope and everlasting life can be given to others by such an one, if that one is willing to be a messenger for Christ, to have faith in Jesus Christ. We read that through the good



news brought to the town by this once fallen woman many believed.

This was just the start of a revival, for when Christ himself came many more believed. They had true faith for they cried out, "This is, indeed, the Christ, the Saviour of the world." Such a cry coming from a human heart shows that there has been a consciousness of his power felt in that heart. They have been saved and know that he can save, and is the Saviour of the world.

In IV. 49-53 we hear the pleading and sorrowful voice of the nobleman, and yet there is a note of joy in that cry, for the nobleman, though sorrowful because his son is so near death, yet he beholds one whom he believes can restore his child to life. We say faith is an act of trust or confidence in a person, then Christian faith is an act of trust or confidence in Jesus Christ. Certainly we have here an act of trust and confidence in Jesus Christ. It is intensely personal. So great was his faith in Christ that there needed to be no outward manifestation that the son was to live, but simply the words of Christ, "Go thy way, thy son liveth." This was enough. The nobleman immediately turned with happy and restful mind

confident that the son would live.

One who has this confidence and trust has more than simply an intellectual perception of Christ. There must be that power in the soul that the Holy Spirit gives in order to produce such a trust, such a faith. There was no questioning or hesitating on the part of the nobleman after the words of Christ were spoken. The heart of this man after his return home did not lose its grip on God. With the eyes he now beholds the son alive. There are people who seem to have faith in Christ and pray for help, but after the help comes they say, "Well, I guess this would have happened anyhow," and they forget Christ. It is like the little boy who <sup>was</sup> asked why he didn't say his prayers in the morning as well as at nights. He answered, "At night I can't see and need protection, but in the daytime I can take care of myself." So with some people in sickness, poverty and death they call upon God, but when there is health and prosperity God is forgotten. In the case mentioned we are told that after seeing his son alive he still believed, and not only himself believed but, thanks be to God, his whole household believed.

In Chapter VI. 69 Peter is not doubtful. He does

not go about the country wondering whether this One who is among them is truly the Christ or not. He is not sceptical, whether or not to put trust or faith in HIM. What a clear note and sound of hope, joy and life in the words, "We believe and are sure that thou art the Christ the son of the living God." In Chapter IX. 35-38 we have both God's idea of faith and also man's. "Dost thou believe on the Son of God," said Jesus to the man who was born blind. He answered and said, "Who is he, Lord, that I might believe on him?" And Jesus said unto him, "Thou hast both seen him and it is he that talketh with thee." And he said, "Lord, I believe." The blind man sees Christ, he hears him, he believes, he worships him. These are steps of faith. Man asks first, Who art thou, Lord, that I may trust thee? Man wants to see and know before he can believe. Here is that personal relation shown again. The heart wants to know, to have a personal knowledge. This is the only true faith, when there is a living relation between man and God.

How refreshing as we travel through this field of John's Gospel to come upon those spots of sweet clover, "Many believe." Though we are not able to see or understand the power that causes the clover filled

with its sweet perfume and many colors to come up from the dark and cold earth, we do see the clover and inhale its fragrance. Just so with the power of God upon the heart of man. We do not see or understand the power that changes the unbelieving heart to one of trust and faith, but we do see men in whom the change has taken place, and whose influence has the sweet spirit of Christ going out and sweetening the atmosphere of discord and strife. We do hear from the lips of men, I believe.

What a power Lazarus after being raised from the dead. We read, "Because that by reason of him many of the Jews went away and believed on Jesus." If our faith is as it ought to be, if we believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, we also shall be risen from death (in sin) to a glorious life in Christ, and as we go forth through the world many will believe on Jesus because of us.

As we come to the close of this book we see before us that mountain peak of faith found in XX. 28-- "My Lord and my God." What an uplifting power takes hold of us as we stand looking at this peak of faith. By studying its majesty and strength we cannot help feeling stronger and nobler. If we read this book as

we ought, thoughtfully and prayerfully, we too shall ascend with Thomas to heights from whence we can get a new view, a larger view, a better view of Christ. We ascend nearer to him and can behold his view, feel his power, and enjoy his love. We feel as though the burdens are lighter, the way brighter because we have been permitted to spend hours reading and studying the examples of faith shown in the fourth Gospel.

"Faith fails;

Then in the dust

Lie failing rest, and light and trust.

So doth the troubled soul itself distress

And choke the fountain in the wilderness.

I care not what your peace assails!

The deep root is, faith fails.

"Faith fails;

When in the breast

The Lord's sweet presence doth not rest;

For who believes, clouds cannot make afraid;

He knows the sun doth shine behind the shade;

He rides at anchor through the gales.

Do you not alas? Faith fails.

Faith fails;  
Its foes alarm  
And persecutions' threats disarm;  
False friends can scarcely wish it a good day,  
Before it taketh fright and shrinks away.  
When God doth guard, what foe prevails?  
Why then the fear? Faith fails.

Faith fails;  
Else care would die,  
And we should on God's care rely.  
Man for the coming day doth grieve and fret,  
And all past days doth sinfully forget.  
For every beast God's care prevails;  
Why not for us? Faith fails.

Faith fails;  
Then cometh fear,  
If sickness comes, if death is near.  
O, man, why is it, when the times are bad  
And the day is evil, that they face is sad?  
How is it that thy courage quails? §  
It must be this: Faith fails.

My God!

Let my faith be

Living and working actively

With hope and joy, that death may not surprise.

So let them sweetly close my eyes;

The Christian's life to death may yield--

Hope stands: faith has the field.

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