

Faith Comes by Hearing

Summary:

Faith is received through God's gift to everyone, the Holy Spirit's work, and hearing God's Word. Spiritual growth happens by surrendering to God, hearing His voice, and responding with faith.

Opening Prayer:

Gracious God,

You have never left your church without the opportunity to hear you speaking into the hearts of those who love you. You have spoken your unchanging word through the apostles and prophets that Jesus is Lord and Christ. The message of your love and grace has echoed through the centuries and now comes to us today. Even during times of trouble, turmoil and conflict, your word is a firm anchor for all. Your throne and rule will never fail. It will continue forever.

Thank you that you have spoken your word to the world through your Son, our Saviour, Jesus Christ. He is the radiance of your very presence. You, Father, Son and Holy Spirit we worship as our triune God. Your Son, Jesus is the Living Word who has become fully human and fully God. Thank you for revealing yourself to us and giving us the gift of your Son who gave his life and rose again to give us eternal life.

Thank you for speaking your quiet whispers into our hearts through the witness of the Holy Spirit who lives within every believer. Praise you for confirming his spoken word through your written word in the Bible. Thank you for the message of hope that speaks truth and love and joy, feeding our souls with spiritual food. Thank you for continuing to speak into our hearts, day by day.

We praise your holy name and offer this time of worship to you. Come and refresh our hearts as we lift them to you. In Jesus' name. Amen.

Song: Thy Word *by Amy Grant | Michael W. Smith*

Thy Word is a lamp unto my feet and a light unto my path

Thy Word is a lamp unto my feet and a light unto my path

1. When I feel afraid, and I think I've lost my way, Still, You're there right beside me.
Nothing will I fear, as long as You are near, Please be near me to the end.
2. I will not forget Your love for me and yet, My heart forever is wandering.
Jesus be my guide, hold me to Your side. I will love You to the end.

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Prayer for Illumination

Loving God,

As we turn to your word, speak into our lives. Soften our hearts and sharpen our minds so that we may hear what you are saying.

Silence in us every voice, except your own, so that we may be transformed by the renewing of our minds, and live out your gospel with faith and obedience to your commands.

We ask in Jesus' name. Amen.

Bible Reading:

- Romans 10:9-17 (NIV)

If you confess with your mouth, "Jesus is Lord," and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. For it is with your heart that you believe and are justified, and it is with your mouth that you confess and are saved. As the Scripture says, "Anyone who trusts in him will never be put to shame." For there is no difference between Jew and Gentile--the same Lord is Lord of all and richly blesses all who call on him, for, "Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved."

How, then, can they call on the one they have not believed in? And how can they believe in the one of whom they have not heard? And how can they hear without someone preaching to them? And how can they preach unless they are sent? As it is written, "How beautiful are the feet of those who bring good news!" But not all the Israelites accepted the good news. For Isaiah says, "Lord, who has believed our message?" Consequently, faith comes from hearing the message, and the message is heard through the word of Christ.

SERMON: FAITH COMES BY HEARING

A. HOW DO WE GET FAITH?

In the Scriptures we find three ways that we receive faith.

- (1) Paul says that God has deposited a measure of faith in everyone's hearts (Rom 12:3). So, that means that everyone in the world has been created with enough faith to call out to the Lord and be saved. I believe God created every human in this world to hear God's voice.
- (2) The second way we receive faith is either as a gift or a fruit of the Holy Spirit. In his list of the supernatural gifts (1 Cor 12:9), Paul lists 'faith' as the supernatural gift that God gives some Christians to believe God will do something supernatural. Gal 5:22-23 has a list of the fruit of the Spirit, and in that list is the fruit of 'faithfulness'. (The same word is used for both.) The fruit comes as we yield our lives to the control of the Holy Spirit. When we do that, we are in the best position to hear God's voice. Or as in John's gospel, fruit comes as we abide in Christ. The more we abide in Christ, the more fruitful we will be, and the more we will be able to hear the voice of God.

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(3) The third way we receive faith is by hearing the Word of God. As Paul says, (Rom 10:17 NKJV) “Faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God.” I have always understood this verse to mean that faith comes as people respond to the preaching of the Gospel. This is because a few verses earlier in Romans 10:14, we read, “How can [anyone] believe in the one of whom they have not heard? And how can they hear without someone preaching to them?” But I have come to realise that to limit God’s provision of faith only to hearers responding to preaching, is too narrow. Faith comes anytime we hear from God.

Back in May 1959 here in Adelaide, a quarter of a million people, that’s almost half the population of Adelaide, went to the Wayville Showground to hear Billy Graham preach the gospel over three days. Thousands of people were converted to Christ, hundreds of them with no Church background. Yet, they became aware of their sin and their need of a Saviour; they became Christians and had faith to trust that Jesus died for them. How could that be? I believe they were converted because they repented and believed. And they repented and believed because they heard God’s Word, and their faith grew.

For sure, God does produce faith in us when we hear His Word when it is preached in the power of His Spirit, but there is much more that we need to know about this source of faith. So do you know where you got your faith from? Do you know how your faith can grow? It comes as we surrender to God. As Solomon writes, “In all your ways submit to him and he will make your paths straight” (Prov 3:6). Now, I want to share some insights with you about how we can grow in faith.

B. HEARING GOD’S VOICE

Hearing is our human sense that God prefers to use to communicate with us. We find in the Bible that what we hear is more important than what we see. As Paul says, (2 Cor 5:7) “we walk by faith, not by sight”. We find that all visual revelations are less important than the message God wants to get across.

For example, in Exodus 3, the Lord appears to Moses in the burning bush that is not consumed. The burning bush was essential to attract Moses’ attention. But that miracle is not the important thing for Moses and us. Rather, the burning bush is a revelation of the presence of the Living Lord, the opportunity for the Lord to reveal his divine name: “I AM THAT I AM”, and also, the burning bush is when God calls Moses to lead the children of Israel out of slavery in Egypt to the promised land.

After feeding more than 5,000 with a boy’s lunch, those who followed Jesus asked “*What sign then will you give that we may see it and believe you? What will you do? Our ancestors ate the manna in the wilderness; as it is written, ‘He gave them bread from heaven to eat.’”* Jesus said to them, “*Very truly I tell you, it is not Moses who has given you the bread from heaven, but it is my Father who gives you the true bread from heaven. For the bread of God is the bread that comes down from heaven and gives life to the world.*” “*Sir,*” they said, “*always give us this bread.*” Then Jesus declared, “*I am the Bread of Life. Whoever comes to me will never go hungry, and whoever believes in me will never be thirsty.*”

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So, the miraculous sign of multiplying five scones and two pilchards for enough to feed 5,000 men, plus women and children, was the opportunity for the revelation from Jesus that he is Bread of Life for everyone who believes in him.

God desires to use our physical ears and our inner ears to hear his voice and thereby to grow in our faith. Faith comes when we hear God speak into our hearts. Yet, hearing the Scriptures read or hearing a sermon with our physical ears does not guarantee that we will experience faith. Of course, the preacher has a responsibility to make the Word of God simple, plain, and relevant to the hearers. But it is the responsibility of the hearer to hear what God is saying through the preacher, by surrendering to the Lord, by having faith in his Word and by being obedient to him.

On one occasion Jesus took Peter, James and John with him to Mt Tabor. *“There he was transfigured before them. His face shone like the sun, and his clothes became a white as the light. Just then there appeared before them Moses and Elijah, talking with Jesus. Peter said to Jesus, ‘Lord, it is good for us to be here. If you wish, I will put up three shelters – one for you, one for Moses and one for Elijah.’ While he was still speaking, a bright cloud covered them, and a voice from the cloud said, ‘This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased. Listen to him.’ ”* (Matthew 17:2-5)

So, more important than the blinding light and the enveloping cloud was the voice of God that silenced Peter’s exuberance to make everyone shelters. What did the voice of God say to them? The Lord, speaking from the cloud, repeated his affirmation of Jesus at his baptism and added only three words: “Listen to Him!”

Faith comes by hearing God speak. Our conversion happens because of our response to hearing God speak – giving us an invitation to come to the foot of the Cross, to confess our sin, and to believe that Jesus’ death and resurrection saves us. But all this is a gift of God’s grace; never is it our intention to put our trust in Christ. At the time, we would rather think of doing anything else in the world than doing that. Yes, the invitation always comes from God speaking his Word to us.

When we become Christians, we are given a new nature; we become part of God’s new creation. Our new nature as a child of God is that we are given a desire to listen to God’s voice. The reason God does this, is that when we listen to what he is saying, he produces faith in our hearts. Faith comes by hearing the voice of God.

You can read and even understand what the Bible, and the commentaries, say and listen to lots of sermons. But unless the Holy Spirit interprets it and reveals the truth, all you have is mental comprehension. For sure, we do need to read our Bibles and we do need to hear the Scriptures preached. But we also need the Holy Spirit, the author of the Scriptures, and the inspiration of sermon writers, to interpret his Word into our hearts. Then the Holy Spirit enables us to hear God’s voice and faith wells up within us; we believe what he says.

The Lord does speak! Do you hear him? Do you recognise him? Faith comes when we hear his voice.

We have looked at how we get faith and how we hear God’s voice. Now we look at spiritual insight. So, how else does that work for you and me? How can we get faith to grow in our hearts?

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C. SPIRITUAL INSIGHT

Maybe you had a brilliant idea that turned out to be really fruitful! Maybe it was an investment that later became an extraordinary blessing. In January 2001, I received a letter from our bank saying we had paid off our 25-year home loan. We now owned our house in NSW, which we were renting, outright, and we kept renting for another four years. Then we decided to build a new home in Mount Barker. So we put our 2-bedroom house up for sale but were concerned about the taxes we would need to pay. As it turned out, capital gains tax did not apply because I had bought the house before that legislation went through. Neither did we have to pay vendor's tax because the then new NSW government enacted their first piece of legislation to abolish vendor tax just two days before the contract to sell was signed. Then when the house went on the market, two keen buyers kept bidding against each other, raising the sale price again and again. So the timing to sell when we did was perfect. We were able to buy the block of land in Mt Barker and build the house of our own design. We took the plans to several builders, and we finally chose one. To my astonishment, the price was exactly what we had available. We moved in in 2007. We were confident that God had brought us to this place. We have been blessed with a wonderful home that far exceeded our expectations. And all within budget!

Maybe you had a seed-thought that you built on over time. It has ripened, and God showed you the time when to use it. In hindsight, you can say he prepared the whole thing and all the circumstances fitted neatly together. He prepared the choices you had to make to bring it to pass. You may have thought that it was your brilliant planning. But let me tell you it was your co-operation with the Holy Spirit. You were listening to the quiet whispers of the Holy Spirit, and you obeyed the voice of God in your heart.

The Lord has designed that we would hear him speak to us. Can you think of a time when that happened to you? When you actually heard God's voice and your faith was built up? Faith comes by hearing God's voice. Are you ready to hear him speak into your heart today? Proverbs 3:6 says, "In all your ways submit to Him and He will make your paths straight."

Even now, why are you listening and not thinking of your own comfort? If your life is different right now, it is because you have been receiving God's Word. Your faith has been boosted by hearing God's voice. For that reason, I know God is speaking into your heart today. His quiet whispers are confirming the words that I am preaching, and you are being challenged to deeper faith because you are listening to what he is saying. And, the faith you are experiencing is coming because you are hearing the voice of God.

Therefore, I urge you, brothers and sisters, to immerse yourself in God's Word. Commit yourself today to this challenge: "Yes, Lord, give me a passion to hear you speaking into my life, and to experience your peace as I find myself right in the centre of your will for my life." Please join with me in prayer...

CLOSING PRAYER

Father God,

Thank you for desiring to communicate your perfect will by speaking into our hearts by your Holy Spirit. Lord, we need you to remind us that it is you who is

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speaking into us. It is your voice of truth, your love, your peace, your direction, your health, your healing, your restoration, and your forgiveness.

Come to us now. Speak your word into us. Help us to listen to you. We are desperate to hear you speak. We want to grow in our faith, and we know this happens as we respond to your voice. We surrender to you. So let us, your people, experience your presence, speak into our hearts. Come now by your grace, and make yourself known to us.

Thank you for your presence, thank you for your voice, thank you for helping us recognise you, and thank you for loving us enough to share your heart with us. We love you, Lord. We are yours.

Amen.

HYMN (AHB 516) *Frances Ridley Havergal 1836-79*

1. Master, speak, thy servant heareth, waiting for thy gracious word,
longing for thy voice that cheereth; Master, let it now be heard.
I am listening, Lord, for thee: what hast thou to say to me?
2. Speak to me by name, O Master, let me know it is to me;
speak, that I may follow faster, with a step more firm and free,
where the shepherd leads the flock in the shadow of the rock.
3. Master, speak: and make me ready, when thy voice is truly heard,
with obedience glad and steady still to follow every word.
I am listening, Lord, for thee: Master, speak, O speak to me!

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BLESSING

You are the delight of your heavenly Father who delights to reveal his ways to you day by day;

He has chosen to reveal himself to you through the quiet whispers of his voice in your hearts.

Because he knows that your trust in him, your faith in him comes as you hear his voice speaking hope and life into you;

You are to listen to Jesus speaking as He is the Living Word.

Your faith in God is enhanced and grows as you listen to him speaking to your heart,
So, go in peace... as a fully-surrendered disciple of Jesus, your Lord and Saviour.

And the blessing of God Almighty, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, be with you today and always.

Amen.

This service was prepared for HopeNet SA by Rev Dr Kevin Sarlow