

Introduction:

Where is your faith? The fact is we all have faith. Some have faith in God. Some have faith in their parents. Some have faith in scientists. Some have faith in their experiences. We all have faith. We all have something that says this is what I'm going to base my belief system and worldview on. The fact is, none of us can have so studied everything and so experienced everything that we can say, "I'm walking by sight on all things." We are putting our trust somewhere. The question is where. A few weeks ago, I had the great fortune to hear brother Paul Earnhart preach about faith in a gospel meeting at the North Terrace congregation in Chattanooga, Tennessee. I got some great insight out of that lesson and want to share with you some of what I heard plus the thoughts and study it inspired in me. My hope is sharing these thoughts will build your faith as they did mine.

Discussion:

I. Examples of faith

A. Peter: **Luke 5:1-11**

1. Jesus had been teaching from Peter's boat. When finished, He turned to Peter and said, "Put out into the deep and let down your nets for a catch." There's a problem. Peter had been fishing all night in those waters and caught nothing. There's a further problem. Peter is the expert fisherman. Jesus is just a carpenter turned itinerant teacher. That would really be like me giving Wesley pointers on fishing and hunting. No doubt, Peter had been toiling at night and was putting up his nets right now because nighttime was the right time for fishing. Yet, against all that Peter knew and had experienced, Jesus said, "Let down your nets."
2. Notice how Peter responded. While he did explain his own perception, he made a statement of great faith. "Master, we toiled all night and took nothing! But at your word I will let down the nets." Notice what this statement says. It says, "Jesus, I don't understand the point of your direction. My senses and experience tell me this will do no good. My judgment is we're done for the night. But, because You are saying this, I'll do it. There is something about You that says I can put my faith in You."
3. Peter had an option, he could put his faith in his own senses and experiences or he could put his faith in Jesus. The first is a subjective faith. Subjective faith says my faith is subject to what I can sense, feel, experience, see. My faith will depend on how I feel about what is said. The second is objective faith. That is, the faith is placed in an object outside of self. My senses, feelings, experiences, sight are not the standard.
4. What did Peter do? He placed his faith in Jesus. "My experiences tell me one thing, You are telling me something else. I'll put my faith in you, Jesus." **Luke 5:6** tells the story. "And when they had done this, they enclosed a large number of fish, and their nets were breaking." Peter put his faith in Jesus, instead of in himself and Jesus was proven worthy of faith.

B. Naaman: **II Kings 5:1-14**

1. Naaman was a commander in the army of Syria. He was a man of power and authority, but he had a problem. He was also a leper. He had a debilitating disease that made him anathema to all around him. But he had captured a little servant girl who offered some advice. He should see the prophet in Samaria—Elisha. When Naaman finally got to Elisha's house, Elisha didn't even come see him. He sent a messenger, probably Gehazi, out to direct Naaman to dip seven times in the Jordan River.
2. Naaman responded in anger. This wasn't how he thought it should be. In his mind, the prophet should have come to him, called on Jehovah, waved his hand over the spot, and then heal the leper. Not to mention if he was going to have to dip in a river, why the Jordan? It had no miraculous qualities. Surely, if the Jordan itself were a source of healing, its powers would be known far and wide. Why wouldn't Abana and Pharpar, Syrian rivers, be just as good? They had a reputation for being cleaner; why wouldn't they make him clean?
3. A servant approached him. The English Standard treats this differently than other translations. In the ESV treatment, it is basically, "Hey, Naaman, he said 'Wash and be clean,' how hard could that be. Why not try it?" The usual rendering is along the lines of, "Master, if the

prophet had given you some great task to do, you would have done it. You would have taken it as a challenge to prove yourself worthy of healing. Why not do this simple task?"

4. Now Naaman does it. But consider what his submission is. Everything within him is telling him that what Elisha's messenger said just didn't make sense. But he did it. **II Kings 5:14** says, "So he went down and dipped himself seven times in the Jordan, according to the word of the man of God, and his flesh was restored..." What did Naaman do? He took his faith out of himself and put it in the word of the man of God. This didn't mean he didn't have doubts. This didn't mean he no longer wondered how on earth it could be true. What it did mean is he trusted the word of the man of God enough to believe what he said. It worked.

C. Abraham: **Genesis 22:1-14**

1. God had finally given Abraham and Sarah a son—Isaac. But now, God had commanded Abraham to offer Isaac up as a sacrifice. What did Abraham do? Did he argue? Did he fuss? No, he simply obeyed. He gathered wood, he took fire, but he didn't take anything for the sacrifice other than Isaac. However, notice what he told his servants in **Genesis 22:5**, "Stay here with the donkey; I and the boy will go over there and worship and come again to you." Abraham was going to take Isaac to worship and come back with Isaac. That is his statement. And yet, he was fully going to kill Isaac. When Isaac asked where the sacrifice was, Abraham's answer was, "The Lord will provide."
2. That had been Abraham's problem in the past. He wasn't sure the Lord would provide. The Lord had promised a son, but it hadn't happened. In **Genesis 13:16**, God had promised offspring. But none came. In **Genesis 15:2**, Abraham questioned God saying without offspring his heir was simply one born in the house, Eliezer of Damascus. God promised him his very own son. Sarah offered her handmaid to bear a son in her place. Ishmael was born, and Abraham couldn't understand why the son he provided wasn't good enough in **Genesis 17:18**. But God said He would provide a son. And He did. Isaac was born when Abraham was 100 and Sarah 90. Abraham had struggled with his faith in God's provision for years. But Isaac's birth secured his faith in God's provision. He told his son, "The Lord will provide."
3. Believing they would both return, he trussed Isaac up for sacrifice. Why? How could he go to kill Isaac but believe they would both return? Because Abraham put his faith in the word of God. In **Genesis 17:19**, God had promised that Isaac would be born, calling him by name. God then promised that His covenant would be with Isaac and his offspring. Abraham knew God's word and His promise; his faith was planted firmly in them. Abraham had been through his crisis of faith. His knowledge, experience, senses, feelings, measurements, judgment all said that what God promised just couldn't be. But there he was with a son at 100 years old. So, despite the facts that experience, knowledge, senses, feelings said if he killed his son the promises couldn't be true, he claimed both he and Isaac would come back. He took his faith out of himself and put it squarely in the word of God. In **Genesis 22:11-13**, the angel of the Lord stopped him and a sacrifice was provided. Abraham and Isaac returned to the servants, Isaac grew up, God kept His covenant with him.

II. Where is your faith?

- A. Is your faith in yourself? Or is it in Jesus? Is your faith in what you can see, in your experiences, in your measurements, in what you can understand to be true? Or is it in Jesus. Do you only trust Jesus so far as you can wrap your mind around and agree with what He said and did or do you just put your faith in Him? Is your faith subjective, subject to you and your feelings, or is it objectively placed in someone outside yourself?
- B. Do you believe in Jesus? Do you believe that Jesus is God in the flesh? Do you accept all of that? Do you believe He is your Lord? If so, then let your faith be placed in Him. He knows more. He understands more. As smart as we might be, He is smarter. As knowledgeable as we might be, He is more knowledgeable. As experienced as we might be, He is more experienced. Put your faith in Him. But if you won't believe Him, then do not claim to believe in Him. Because to the extent that you believe in Him as your Savior, as God the Son in the flesh, to that extent you will believe Him. And to the extent that you don't believe what He says, then to that extent you don't actually believe in Him as Lord. In **Luke 6:46**, Jesus said, "Why do you call me 'Lord,

Lord,' and not do what I tell you?" A similar question could be asked, "Why do you call me 'Lord, Lord,' and not believe what I tell you?" Consider some common questions today.

C. Young earth creation or old earth evolution?

1. We've all read **Genesis 1**. "In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth." Over six days, God created and formed this earth and the universe that surrounds it. On day six, the text claims God created man (**Genesis 1:26**). We've got questions about that. Some scientists tell us that just can't be so. Some scientists tell us the universe is over 13 billion years old. Some scientists tell us the earth is over 4.5 billion years old. Some scientists tell us man, as we know him, evolved on the earth about 50,000 years ago. We hear about the fossil record. We hear about radiometric dating. We hear these things every year from scientists who don't actually agree with each other and change their story every year.
2. Brothers and sisters, this is not a scientific crisis. This is not a **Genesis** crisis. This is a crisis of faith in Jesus. Jesus said in **Matthew 19:4** that God created male and female from the beginning. Does that sound like 13.5 billion years after God created the heavens? Does that sound like 4.5 billion years after God created the earth? Or does that sound more like the sixth day of God's creative work? Allow me to illustrate this for you. Imagine a football field equals all of earth's history. The beginning occurred at one goal line and present day is the other goal line. For male and female to have existed "from the beginning" where would that be on the field? In the first yard, the first 10 yards, surely at least the first 50 yards? According to evolutionary time scale, each inch on this field is at least 3.6 million years. Do you know where male and female come in? In the very last inch of the field. They came in less than 1/72 of an inch from the goal line opposite the beginning. "I don't know," we say. "Those scientists make some pretty convincing arguments. I think we better just be agnostic about that." Maybe we don't know, but do we believe that Jesus, God in the flesh, knows? If you believe in Him, then believe Him. This is not a question about whether or not you will believe **Genesis**. This is a question about whether or not you believe Jesus.

D. Noachic flood or mythical construct?

1. We've read **Genesis 6-8**. We know the Bible story of Noah's ark and the flood. But some scientists tell us that just can't have been true. Some teachers of mythology explain that this is just one myth in a long line of flood myths. Noah wasn't a real person. He didn't really build an ark; he was just the Cultural Hero of the Hebrew nation idolized in made up tales to show how man survived on a cruel earth. The world was not really destroyed by a flood and mankind was not really saved through Noah on the ark.
2. We hear their arguments and begin to wonder. We weren't there. We don't really know. Maybe the Bible is wrong or maybe the Bible doesn't mean for us to really believe Noah existed. Brothers and sisters, this is not a scientific crisis. This is not a mythological crisis. This is not a **Genesis** crisis. This is a crisis of faith in Jesus. In **Matthew 24:36-39**, Jesus explained that His coming (whether you believe this is in final judgment or in judgment over Jerusalem doesn't really matter for our point) would be just like the coming of the flood in the days of Noah. "As in those days..., so will be the coming of the Son of Man." Just like it was then, it will be when the Son of Man comes. Can you imagine someone saying, "Just as Paul Bunyan's big ox was blue, so will such and such be the case?" Of course not. If the first part of the statement isn't true, then the second must not be true.
3. Jesus said there was a flood. Jesus said mankind was saved in an ark through Noah. The question is who are you going to believe? Are you going to believe your experiences, feelings, measurements, or are you going to believe God the Son in the flesh who was actually there when the world was destroyed by flood and commissioned Noah to build the ark?

E. Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob: Real patriarchs or watered down mythologies?

1. We've read **Genesis**. We've read about the beginnings of the Hebrew nation by the promises made to Abraham and the covenant passed on to his son and grandson. But some students of history and mythology tell us this just isn't so. Some tell us that these men didn't actually live in history. They weren't real men. No, they were simply watered down stories of Babylonian and Sumerian gods made human to fit within the Jewish culture of monotheism. We are told how similar the stories of these men are to mythological gods in other nations. They just weren't real. The Hebrews didn't actually come from these men.

2. We may hear these arguments and they seem compelling. Maybe these stories are just Hebrew myths to focus us on monotheism. Maybe the Bible doesn't intend for us to believe these are actual histories surrounding real people. Brothers and sisters, this is not a crisis of history. This is not a crisis of mythology. This is not a crisis of **Genesis**. This is a crisis of faith in Jesus. Jesus believed these three men were real, historical figures. In **Matthew 8:11**, Jesus claimed many would come from east and west and recline at the table with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven. According to **Matthew 22:32**, Jesus claimed that Jehovah was God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. He made a point about the resurrection saying God is the God of the living, not the dead. I guess we could make the point that God is God of real people, not mythological, fanciful, make believe people.
 3. The question is where are we going to put our faith? Are we going to put our faith in Jesus, the one we claim is the Son of God, God in the flesh? Or are we going to put it in students of mythology, teachers of history? Or are we going to put it in ourselves and what we can see, taste, touch, feel, and experience? Jesus said these men were real patriarchs. We can believe Him. He was there. He knows.
- F. Jonah and the fish: Actual event or fanciful story?
1. We've read the book of **Jonah**. We've heard his story since we were children. We know he refused to go to Nineveh because God was too merciful and gracious. He ran the other way and God brought judgment against him. He prepared a fish to swallow Jonah (**Jonah 1:17**). Jonah was in the belly of that fish for three days. He prayed to God for deliverance and God granted it. Then he went to Nineveh and preached. But some folks tell us this just can't be true. There aren't any fish with big enough throats or stomachs for this to be the case. Jonah couldn't last that long in the deep. Jonah couldn't survive in a fish under water. This is just a fanciful story trying to make a point about how we have to do what God says no matter what or He'll punish us.
 2. Let's face it; it does seem pretty fanciful that all of this could happen. Maybe that is all it is. Maybe it is just a legendary, morality story that built up over the years around the person of one of Israel's great prophetic heroes (cf. **II Kings 14:25**). Brothers and sisters, this is not a crisis of prophecy. This is not a crisis of the Old Testament. This is a crisis of faith in Jesus. In **Matthew 12:38-41**, Jesus said Jonah was a sign. As he was in the belly of the fish for three days so would Jesus be in the belly of the earth. Jesus said Nineveh really did repent at the preaching of Jonah, according to Jesus. The men of Nineveh would actually rise up in judgment against the Jews because they would not repent at the preaching of one who was greater than Jonah. Jesus likens his own death and resurrection to Jonah's time in the fish. Do we believe Jesus was really in the earth until the third day? Then why not believe Him when He says His experience was just like Jonah's experience?
 3. The question is where we put our faith? Will we put it subjectively in ourselves that we've never seen a fish that could accomplish this? Will we put it subjectively in ourselves because we just can't imagine how a man could survive under such conditions? Or will we put our faith in Jesus and say, "At your word, Lord, I'll believe it."

Conclusion:

I'll concede that maybe I'm wrong about Jesus. Maybe Jesus isn't real. Maybe He isn't God in the flesh. Maybe He shouldn't be my Lord. However, I've become convinced that He is. For me, these questions aren't answered in the fossil record. They aren't answered in the chemistry lab. They aren't answered in the professor's classroom. They are answered by Jesus. If we are going to claim Jesus is our Lord, then we need to put our faith in Him. We need to take our faith out of ourselves and what we can see, feel, experience, measure. Where is your faith?