

Faith is Spelled R-I-S-K – Faith on Fire

1. Faith on Fire

Heb 11:1

Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen.

When we read this passage, it is easy to assume that faith is the same as belief. We think that if we just believe the right things, we have faith, right?

While we might think that is right, that is not the picture of faith we see demonstrated in the life and ministry of Jesus in the Gospels. It is also not the picture of faith we see in the rest of the New Testament, as we watch Jesus' disciples in action.

There is something about Jesus' faith, something about the faith of the disciples, that is deeper, wider, stronger, and more "faith-with-skin-on-it" than mere belief. It's called conviction. Conviction, it's been said, is faith on fire.

2. Risk & Conviction

Bruce Arians, the former coach of the Bucs, had a no-risk-it-no-biscuit mentality. He didn't play not to lose, he risked it all to win and win big.

Matt 13:44

"The kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden in a field, which a man found and covered up. Then in his joy he goes and sells all that he has and buys that field.

When we have a conviction about something, not only have we agreed with a belief in our hearts and minds, but we are also backing up that belief with everything we've got.

Conviction causes us to take action! We walk into difficult and unknown situations, and we do things we never thought we would do. Conviction has the power to motivate us beyond our fears – enabling even the most timid person to throw caution to the wind as they act on what they believe.

Conviction means that a belief has soaked deep into our bones, and now our entire body is involved in acting out the belief.

Mark 9:20-27

And they brought the boy to him. And when the spirit saw him, immediately it convulsed the boy, and he fell on the ground and rolled about, foaming at the mouth. 21 And Jesus asked his father, "How long has this been happening to him?" And he said, "From childhood. 22 And it has often cast him into fire and into water, to destroy him. But if you can do anything, have compassion on us and help us." 23 And Jesus said to him, "If you can! All things are possible for one who believes." 24 Immediately the father of the child cried out and said, "I believe; help my

unbelief!" 25 And when Jesus saw that a crowd came running together, he rebuked the unclean spirit, saying to it, "You mute and deaf spirit, I command you, come out of him and never enter him again." 26 And after crying out and convulsing him terribly, it came out, and the boy was like a corpse, so that most of them said, "He is dead." 27 But Jesus took him by the hand and lifted him up, and he arose.

The father in this story has taken a public risk. He has put his personal reputation on the line to ask Jesus to do something for his dear tortured son. The scene is in full view of everyone, and there is no turning back.

There may be no more profound demonstration of humility than that captured in the father's words: "I believe, help my unbelief!"

What if we were all as self-aware as this man about having a faith that is incomplete - one that lacks teeth, that lacks gripping power, that lacks some important level of hope and trust?

This is where the rubber meets the road for every Christian.

We can sing, profess, and declare our faith from the rooftops. But when that moment of desperation has arrived. That moment of all-or-nothing trust where we will be utterly embarrassed if God doesn't do something, we see our faith for what it really is.

3. Stepping into the unknown

Following the man's risk, Jesus Himself then steps into the unknown. Sure, we can say that Jesus was absolutely positive, completely assured, that the Father would act when He spoke the words of command to the demon infesting the boy's body and mind. But the truth is, even if Jesus did know beyond a shadow of a doubt that His Father would act, He still had to act first in partnership with the Father by uttering the command.

Seeing God move is a partnership between the Holy Spirit and us. Yes, God could just heal someone without our involvement, but for some reason, He loves to work with us, teaching us to do whatever it takes to see His love intervene in another's life.

Jesus acts, speaking a command, discerning the spirit He is dealing with ("You mute and deaf spirit") and the power of God is manifest in an amazing deliverance we are still talking about today.

That is where we, as Jesus' disciples in our time and our place, come in.

A long time ago before television, radio, cell phones, and the internet, there were people who travelled around the country putting on shows and amazing people. These things were reported in the newspapers and people would flock to wherever these people would perform next.

One such man was the tightrope artist, Charles Blondin, who was well known for walking between buildings and other death-defying acts, and all without a net.

In 1859 word got out that he was going to walk a tight rope over Niagara Falls.

Thousands of people gathered on both sides of the Falls to witness this event. Step by step, he slowly crossed from the Canadian side to the American side to the cheers and applause of everyone.

Once on the American side he spoke to the audience and asked them if they believed he could make it back to the Canadian side. Everyone clapped and cheered and said they believed he could do it.

Then he stunned everyone. He said he was going to push a wheelbarrow across the Falls to the other side and asked for a volunteer to sit in it. Suddenly, the crowd became silent as not a single person volunteered.

They all believed he could do it, but no one had enough conviction to do it with him.

That is the difference between belief and no-risk-it-no-biscuit conviction.

Conclusion

We need to allow God to grow our faith to the point where it becomes a conviction that overrides our excuses, our fears, and our reputation. Our faith needs to be more than just a belief, it needs to take action in the face of all obstacles including our own personal humiliation.

John Wimber faced this. He realized that if he stepped out and did the stuff he read in the pages of the New Testament and nothing happened, he would look like a fool. However, his conviction was so great that he decided that it was OK to look like a fool. In fact, the title of his testimony is "I'm a fool for Christ, whose fool are you?"

Do you have a faith that is on fire?

Do you have the conviction to act on that faith?

Are you willing to risk it all and step out into abyss of the unknown?