

The Hearing of Faith

The Bible presents us with some very challenging statements about believing and receiving. For example in Matthew 21:21 and 22 we read *“Jesus answered and said unto them, Verily I say unto you, If ye have faith, and doubt not, ye shall not only do this which is done to the fig tree, but also if ye shall say unto this mountain, Be thou removed, and be thou cast into the sea; it shall be done. And all things, whatsoever ye shall ask in prayer, believing, ye shall receive”*. This surely was Jesus’ own experience as the Son of Man living a life on earth in a relationship with His Father. In Matthew 6, in the wonderful “Sermon on the Mount”, Jesus says *“Ask and it shall be given you, seek and you will find, knock and the door shall be opened unto you; for everyone that asks shall receive and those that seek shall find and to those that knock the door shall be opened”*. Again this must be Jesus’ own experience, practised in His life and not just theory. As we read through the gospels we find wonderful accounts of the miracles of Jesus; because He asked His Father. We read of the feeding of the 5000, the raising from the dead of Lazarus and so on. In the narrative there is a clear indication that these events happened because Jesus prayed. In John’s gospel chapter 11, where we read of the raising of Lazarus, Jesus makes the comment, that He prayed for the sake of those gathered around the tomb, in order that they could understand that the miracle was because Jesus asked His Father. Jesus prays and says *“I know that you hear (or listen to) me always”*. Perhaps the greatest miracle of all is that we are Christians and from every part of the world, as this surely is the outworking of the promise in Psalm 2, *“Ask of me and I will give you the heathen for your inheritance”*. The Lord Jesus takes up the promise and asked believing and here we are, the people of God; saved by grace.

So we can see the clear truth; ask and you **shall** receive, not may receive, or could possibly receive, or if God is having a good day receive, but **SHALL** receive. The verse in Matthew helps us *“Whatsoever you ask **believing** you **will** receive”*. So **if** we believe we will receive, Wow! There are no opt out clauses, no provisos, it is totally clear. The implication, therefore, must be that if we don’t receive, we have not believed. That must be the conclusion we reach and although that may sound really tough to those seeking God’s will in their lives, it brings in a much needed element of honesty and realism. We read *“The truth shall make you free”*, so the starkness of this truth helps to put us on the right foundation, if we are to move forward to seeing our prayers answered.

James in his epistle says *“Let him ask in faith, nothing wavering, doubting perhaps, as the person who wavers (or doubts) shall receive nothing from the Lord”*. Again that is a pretty revolutionary concept and James is only talking about asking for wisdom, nothing more than that. James also tells us that God does not upbraid us. Upbraid is an old English word which really means to tell off, to reprimand or rebuke. So God is not telling us off for what we lack, but rather wanting us to come to Him to ask and believe and receive. Before moving on we need help from James again. In chapter 4 he writes *“You have not, because you ask not”* and *“You ask and receive not, because you ask amiss”*, in other words your motives are wrong. Asking wrongly is described in the Authorised Version as *“To consume it on your own lusts”*, in other words it is for your own selfish ends and motives; for worldly reasons, rather than godly ones. So we see there are reasons for not receiving; these are doubting and not believing or asking for our own selfish motives, wealth, fame, ambition etc. The apostle John in his first letter describes to us the love of the world. It is *“The lust of the eyes, the lust of the flesh and the pride of life”*. These can be summed up as any motivation which causes us to seek for the things we want for ourselves and which is not in keeping with the teaching of Jesus, *“Seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness and all these things will be added unto you”*. Indeed when our motives are right all the essential things of life, food, clothing, housing, and so on are added, or given, to us. In many ways there is no need to have to keep asking for them. Your Heavenly Father knows your needs before you ask for them and will make sure you are provided for.

So we see when we **ask in faith** we will **receive**, and where wavering or doubting exists we receive nothing. James describes wavering or doubting as “Being in two minds” or really “Two souls”. He then says *“Purify your hearts, you double minded”*; so the solution to double mindedness, and therefore wavering, is to have our hearts cleansed from everything in them which causes us not to believe. It is the condition of our heart which affects our thinking, so the answer to double mindedness is not study and effort but a change of heart; a purification of heart. Jesus talks about *“If your eye is single your whole body shall be full of light”*. The word single means with singleness of purpose and not with divided loyalties; that is just what it means to have a pure heart. Divided loyalties are removed and we seek the Lord Jesus, looking to Him with all our heart.

There are many Christians who say “I am believing” when what they really mean is “I am hoping”. “Hoping” is not “believing”, but it is a good start and really the honest place to be when that is the best we can do. However there is so much pressure in Christianity and on Christians “to believe”, the temptation is to substitute in our language and thinking hoping for believing. In some ways it is quite subtle, and yet it can produce in the heart and mind of a Christian the concept that they are believing when they are really only hoping. It can become a habit and is really damaging as, if there is no real faith, and the thing we think we are believing for does not occur, disappointment comes. We read in the Proverbs *“Hope deferred makes the heart sick”*. So if hope deferred makes the heart sick, what will take place in our hearts when things do not happen when we think we have believed? So we are to believe with our hearts and if they are sick with disappointment they are not going to find believing that easy. There are many Christians with this state of heart who struggle through crises and suffer problems which they need not endure. They can live in a state of bewilderment and it is often not of their own making, rather bad teaching and practice under which they have grown up as Christians.

The starting point must be that God can never be wrong, He is all powerful and *“With God nothing shall be impossible”*. So, as we have seen, when things we ask for are not received, the problem must lie with us and not with God. If there is a problem with God, that is awful and I can do nothing about it, but if the problem is with me, with God’s help something can be done to resolve the issue. That is a brilliant starting point, it is honest, gives us hope and fits in with the teaching of the book of Hebrews. *“For without faith it is impossible to please Him. He who **comes** to God must believe that He is and that He is a rewarder of those that diligently seek Him”*. The **coming** is in two stages. The first; God is, that is not a problem, or should not be, for the Christian. So I believe that God is, stage 1 is settled. Stage 2; He is a rewarder of those who diligently, or earnestly, seek Him. This confirms the earlier observation of not being double minded, as it is impossible to seek diligently, or earnestly, with double mindedness or with divided loyalties. For the Christian, with the disappointed heart, it is the earnest seeking which can be the problem; doubts will have crept in about God’s faithfulness and whether He will really reward us if we seek Him. We need to be honest with the Lord, if that is how we feel, and let His love work in our hearts. *“Faith works by love”*. Time in the presence of God gaining assurance of such love can be a huge help. Often laying the issue aside to wait on the Lord can help, and once the heart is comforted, the issue can be taken up again and it will often have a different perspective, look very different, and a clear understanding and faith will come.

In the book of 2 Timothy there is the wonderful truth; *“If we believe not, yet He abides faithful: He cannot deny Himself”* So we discover even when we struggle to believe, God remains faithful. Faithful in the sense that He does not cast us off, and remains totally committed to us but also in the sense that God is full of faith i.e. “faithFULL”. So we can come to Him for the faith we need; God is full of faith as He is totally aware of His ability to do the things we need Him to do. That is why “Faith comes by hearing the **word** of God”, as when we **come** to Him **He** can communicate an understanding and knowledge of His ability to us, and impart the faith which we lack in ourselves.

However for many there is real faith that God will reward, although they may not have the faith for the specific thing for which they are asking, but they **DO** have faith in God's loving desire to give them an answer. If that is the case then stage 1 and 2 are complete and we can come to God with our requests. Hallelujah.

When we come we find the answer is that *"Faith comes by **hearing and hearing by the word of God**".* So faith only comes **one way** and the **word of God** has within it the quality to impart faith. Faith is not a self-generated thing or a learned thing. So many people think they have to find the faith for themselves or manufacture it in their own hearts and minds. Many preachers exhort people "To believe" when the very last thing they feel they can do is to believe. But the people try to believe, of course they try, and then fail, when what the preacher should be doing is bringing the word of God and imparting, or bringing, faith to the heart. Faith, as we have said, comes by **hearing** the word of God. Preachers are required to preach as the *"Oracles of God"*; to be His mouthpiece and bring the **word** of God, which will inspire living faith. Too often preachers pass the responsibility onto the listeners "You must believe" they say, when in reality they have no faith in their own hearts. The book of Jude describes them as *"Clouds without water"*. They look good, but bring nothing and bear no fruit. So it is, as we read in Romans 10.17, when **God Himself** speaks to our hearts He does so in such a way that He brings real substance to our hearts, and we **know** what He has said, and can believe Him with certainty.

The word for "Word" in the Greek language is **"rhema"**, many people call it the living word. Probably it is better called "The heard word", but it is a **word/communication** which comes in such a way that it is possible to listen to it and understand it in such a way that it works in our hearts and makes believing simple and straightforward. Sorry that is a long sentence, but perhaps one of the best ways to understand rhema is to look at a couple of examples of its use in the New Testament. Jesus said the **words/rhema** He spoke were *"Spirit and life"*. In other words there was something spiritual about them and also something life giving. There is an old English word to "Quicken" and it just expresses it so well; Jesus said *"It is the Spirit which quickens"*. Suddenly when God speaks there is understanding, suddenly there is faith, and suddenly everything is all straightforward and easy. That is the outcome of the faith brought by the word of God; the words are spirit and they are life.

Jesus Himself quotes the **word** from the Old Testament *"Man shall not live by bread alone but by every **word/rhema** which proceeds from the mouth of God"*. Jesus Himself had heard the words from the mouth of His Father; probably they had been quickened, or made alive in His heart, when He would have read them as a young boy in the Jewish Synagogue. The words had worked faith in Jesus' heart and enabled Him to believe in God His Father and His total provision, during His temptation in the wilderness. Paul writing to the Ephesians mentions *"The shield of faith with which we are to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked one"*. This is exactly how faith worked in the heart of our Lord Jesus and acted as a shield for Him. The living words of God work in our hearts, when we hear them, and bring the faith to ask, believe, and receive. They form a strong foundation in us and similarly provide a shield of faith in our hearts. In the parable of the sower Jesus, when explaining the parable, mentions the *"Good ground"* and says they are those *"Who hear and understand"*. It is in open hearts that the word of God finds a place where it can be established and grow and maintain our hearts in faith towards God.

The implication from "man shall not live by bread alone" is that "Man... shall... live". *"The just **shall live by faith**"* we read in Habakkuk. There is a totally certainty about it. Faith therefore brings us to a place of **knowledge or knowing**, to a place of **certainty**. Let us look at some events in the life of Jesus and His comments on the faith of those who came to receive from Him. We can see and understand that their faith had brought them into a place of knowing and of certainty. Because they had faith, they received and went away healed or blessed and with their needs met. The Roman

centurion was asking the Lord Jesus to heal his servant. The centurion's faith was declared, and we paraphrase, "I say go and they go, I say come and they come, Lord you can do the same, just give the commandment and all will be well"; **Not may be** well but **will be**. The centurion amazingly understood the authority of the Lord Jesus, he had no doubt in how Jesus worked and was totally convinced. To quote the book of Romans "*He was fully persuaded that what He had promised He was able to perform*" and Jesus said about the centurion's faith, "*I have not found so great **faith**, not in all of Israel*". In contrast Jesus said He "*Could not do many mighty works in His home town because of their unbelief*". There they still saw Him as Mary and Joseph's son and not the Anointed One for Israel. They were full of unbelief, their knowledge of Jesus as a natural man prevented them believing in His authority; whereas the centurion had a spiritual knowledge of Jesus' authority and on that basis he **believed** and **received** and his servant was healed.

There was a woman with what could be called a "ladies' problem", a constant and unpleasant haemorrhage. It made her unclean in Jewish law. In addition to all the legal requirements, her sickness was a huge problem in her life. She comes to Jesus and touches the hem of His garment. The hem of the High Priest's garment in the Old Testament was blue, a symbol of wholeness, so the lady reached out for the wholeness of God saying in her heart, "*If I can but touch the hem of His garment I **shall be** made whole*". There was no doubting, no wavering and no unbelief. How she came to this place of faith we are not told. Perhaps she had seen other miracles or just heard the news of the miracles Jesus had worked. Jesus says to the woman "Go in peace your **faith** has made you whole". The woman's certainty described as **shall be** is declared to be **faith** by the Lord Jesus. That was His view and helps us to see what real faith is, from God's point of view. It really is a knowing and a certainty. It is something very real and very solid.

In Hebrews 11 we read "*Faith is the substance of things hoped for and the evidence for things not seen*". Faith is substance. It is real, it is evidence. Faith is the substance, the reality if you like, of the things hoped for. Suddenly when faith comes that for which we hoped has substance. It becomes the real thing and we have the evidence for the thing which we have not yet seen. The lady with the haemorrhage had the evidence for that which she had not yet seen and with that she reached out. "It must be; I must be healed, because I have the evidence for it in my heart". The healing then became real in her body, that for which she had the evidence took place and immediately the haemorrhage stopped. It was just the same for the centurion, faith brought its rewards and the servant was healed. God is real, His works are real, His truth is impeccable and when **we believe, we receive**.

We have already mentioned the "*Hearing of Faith*". Paul the apostle used the phrase in the book of Galatians to describe the basis on which the Christians there had received the Spirit of God, and also how miracles had been worked among them. This was in contrast to the "*Works of the law*" or something of human resource. Faith taps into the resources of Almighty God. The Galatians had heard the gospel; they had **believed** and thereby **received** the Spirit of God. They may not have understood it all at the time. They would not have analysed what was happening to them, we usually don't when we believe; we just believe and receive, but the **word** of the gospel produces the faith we need, in our hearts, in order that we can believe. So the "*hearing of faith*" is always by the **word** of God and requires us genuinely to hear God's communication. It can come in different ways; when we are listening to a preacher, just reading our Bibles, when we are praying, or even living our lives and the **word/communication** comes in the circumstances in which we find ourselves. Jesus said "*My sheep hear my voice*". That is exactly right, as we listen and hear, we get to recognise Jesus' voice and know when He is communicating with us. Of course the voice need not be audible, it rarely will be so, in some ways it does not even need to be a "Word", but it is a communication which we know is of God and, when it comes, it brings faith and substance and evidence and certainty to our hearts. When Peter denied Jesus, Jesus just looked at him and said nothing, but the look would have

conveyed everything. Just **knowing** the Lord Jesus and “His look”; the awareness of Him and His thoughts can convey so much.

This true faith which we are considering, therefore, is not of our own imagination. We don’t make it up, we don’t pretend. So many do that, and often it is understandable why they do so, but pretending can prevent the real faith coming. Fear can be the motive, it can be a means of self-protection; pretence can be made under all sorts of pressure. There is the concept that we must believe, we must be spiritual, and it can be a thing of pride to produce faith in our imaginations or our emotions, being reluctant to admit we don’t believe. When we admit our lack of faith, as we have seen, such a position of truth can be the place to start to seek God, but the false faith we create ourselves, in our own imaginations or emotions, can hinder real faith. False faith gets in the way; we hang onto it, sometimes the more strongly as it seems to fail, afraid to let go of that which we have imagined in case we are left with nothing. Better to come to God and say “Lord I have no faith” rather than to make it up as we go along.

When those with such false faith talk about their imagined faith it always sounds so hollow. Why? It has no substance, it does not ring true. Preachers who speak the word with no faith sound hollow too; they do not ring true, and unless they do preach truth and minister faith we should not be under any obligation to listen to them and do what they say. *“God looks on the heart and not on the outward appearance”*

Remember how Jesus dealt with the man who had the son from whom the disciples were unable to cast out a devil. This is the narrative from Mark’s gospel. *“If you can believe, all things are possible to him that believes”*; Imagine the thinking in the man. “Lord I have just watched your disciples fail and you still want me to believe? But I am desperate for my son, so Yes I believe, but help my unbelief, (or, little believing)”. The moment he said “I believe” the father was confronted in conscience by his own lack of faith. “Lord, really I don’t believe, but I have brought what little faith I have, so please help me”. Jesus of course made up his shortcomings; the boy was delivered. What freedom to be honest about our lack of faith and cry out for help and see Jesus make up the deficit. The Bible talks about *“The measure, or the size, of faith”*. We have a measure, an amount, but the Lord Jesus can provide more faith when we need it and increase our measure so that we can trust Him more and see greater works in our lives.

The Spirit we have received of the Lord Jesus is said to be of *“A sound mind”*. It means a disciplined mind, and if and when we, and of course we should, rather we must, let the Holy Spirit work in our thinking and imaginations, it will bring a discipline into our minds and our ways of thinking. This will prevent us going off in our own imaginations and fantasies. Many cultures are built on fantasy, of what might be or come, so those with such a cultural background have to be careful not to take such thinking into their Christianity. Such patterns of thinking will have been established in their upbringing and education, within their families and schools. Such thinking in the world is normal, and therefore there is a danger that we will not recognise our imaginations going off into falsehood and wrong ideas, building up false hopes. Much in education works to develop children’s imaginations, fiction books are all the fruit of the imaginations of the writers. They may be just plain evil, but all these things encourage the development of the imagination and set patterns of thinking in human lives. Paul says this *“For the weapons of our warfare are not carnal, but mighty through God to the pulling down of strong holds; Casting down imaginations, and every high thing that exalts itself against the **knowledge** of God, and bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ”*. We have talked about faith really giving us **knowledge**. Paul tells us that our imaginations can raise themselves up against the **knowledge** of God, so we need the Spirit of God to impart discipline into our thinking and bring **every** thought into the obedience of Christ. We don’t need our imaginations; we have the living God and His word and He can meet our needs. Such provision is far better than anything the world has to offer.

As we have said, we can be pressurised into believing by preachers, to meet their needs for response and boost their egos. Never produce false faith to satisfy a preacher or minister under any sort of pressure. If they are really of God, they will be able to bring the **word** of God to you to enable you to believe. So often “Men of God” dump all their unbelief on their congregations and blame them for failure, rather than to seek for the real **word** of God which brings faith. True faith makes believing so straightforward and never complicated. We are told “*Let every man who speaks speak as the oracle, or the mouth piece, of God*”. There is much in the Old Testament of prophets who did not bring the word of God, and the judgement upon them. They brought false words, “*When God has not spoken*”. It is so easy for people to be carried away in the excitement of the moment, of a meeting and so on, and bring forth some sort of word or imagination from their own mind or emotions. This often will be with good intentions, however only the real **word** of God brings the faith that we need and, in the end, anything less than real faith is unhelpful; it only raises false hopes and will fail. Beware of false prophets.

We have mentioned the **hearing** of faith. Not the seeing and not of the imagination. Lots of different forms of occult practice, shamanism and so on, work through the use of the imagination and “seeing” what you want and having it. Anything from a bicycle to a wife; many of these things are suggested and tried. Yes it works. Shamanists have been using such methods for many centuries, deceiving people. Some so called Christian preachers have adapted this methodology into their Christianity and it is just very wrong. “*How can the temple of God mix with the temple of idols?*” Paul tells us, “*Come out from among them and be separate and touch not the unclean thing*”. Yes, this sort of practice is unclean; it comes from an unclean spirit, and is very wrong and yet very popular, as are all sorts of prosperity doctrine which appeal to the desires of the flesh, especially to those who have very little. The instructions from those who teach such things “Just imagine the thing, form an image in your mind, and desire it, and it will come”. It is so wrong and, of course, the image becomes an idol, and then we serve the idol and follow its demands, and are taken away from Lord Jesus. Beware! Faith, the faith of God, the faith of our Lord Jesus, does not come through our imaginings, or our desires, but by hearing the **word/rhema** of God. Hearing the **word** of God does not provoke our imagination; it does not set us off in fantasies but brings real substance and evidence and indeed certainty into our hearts. The word of God speaks in our hearts “*He is faithful who promised*” and the **word** brings us to a place of “**We know**”. Paul writes “**I know** whom I have **believed**”

The joy is that God really wants to speak to us so we can believe. Paul the apostle says “*The word is near to you, it is in your heart and in your mouth, the word of faith which we preach because with the heart you believe unto righteousness and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation*” Salvation can mean **wholeness**, it is putting things right, whatever the need.

A great example of having faith in God, with believing and confessing, is in the narrative about the two blind men being healed. We can read the account in Matthew’s gospel chapter 9. Jesus asks them what they want, and the answer is, “*That we may receive our sight*”. Jesus continues “*Do you believe that I am able to do this?*” Reply; “*Yes Lord*”; the blind men had faith that Jesus could heal them and also recognised His Lordship using the word “**Lord**”. It is quite similar to the faith of the centurion and his understanding of authority. So they believed and they confessed and received their sight. This is so different from the man with the son, whom we have considered earlier. His confession was, “*Help my unbelief*”, when he was confronted with his lack of faith, by his inward conscience. The two blind men had such an assurance, such certainty. Again, we are not told how they came to this place of faith but their response “*Yes Lord!*” is very emphatic. So we see clearly with the **heart** we **believe** and with the **mouth confession** is made, and this is supported by the experience of the two blind men.

There is another false teaching about “Confessing a thing” and then you can have it. It is the wrong way round and wrongly invokes the power of the human soul. With the heart we believe and **then** with the mouth we confess. That is the right order, as it first requires the “*Hearing of faith*” by the **word** of God bringing faith to our hearts. That produces the substance of that for which we hope, and evidence for that we have not seen. **Then**, and only **then**, can we confess truth with our mouths and as a result receive the answer to our requests. Hallelujah.

Before we finish please understand the words of the Lord Jesus, “*Ask and it shall be given you, seek and you will find, knock and it will be opened unto you*”. There is often a need for perseverance, things can take time and are not always instant. God wants us to seek Him for answers and “*Fight the good fight of faith*”. Paul in Ephesians talks about perseverance in prayer, and those who have prayed for revival, in different parts of the world, have often prayed for many years. But oh the joy when revival comes and the prayers are all answered.

The Syrophenician woman, seeking deliverance for her daughter, had to pursue her faith when Jesus challenged it. Initially He resisted, or appeared to refuse her request. Jesus’ action caused her to persist and bring forth greater faith from her heart. She, of course, received deliverance for her daughter. We have much to learn, and need to be more spiritual and understand how God is often drawing us out to greater faith. Daniel was told his prayer was heard from the first moment it was prayed but the answer was resisted by the principality and power of the nation in which he lived. Daniel persisted in his prayer and the answer came.

James, whom we have found to be very honest and stark in his writings, saying “*Faith without works is dead*”, encourages us at the end of his letter. We read “*The effectual, fervent prayer of a righteous man avails much. Elijah was a man subject to like passions as we are, and he prayed earnestly that it might not rain: and it rained not on the earth by the space of three years and six months. And he prayed again, and the heaven gave rain, and the earth brought forth her fruit*”. Elijah was just like you and me, and had all the inward feelings, emotions, and so on, we have; you can read of the ups and downs in his life in your Bible. But Elijah prayed and God answered; the effectual fervent, (maybe earnest or diligent say the same thing), prayer avails much. God hears and answers. Elijah heard the **word** of God and **obeyed in faith** and **God** worked. That is the “*Hearing of faith*”.

The devil has done so much to try and twist these things and distort the truth and deny Christians the joy of seeing God answer their prayers. He has done much to try to discourage our hearts. Those who have no faith, or have lost it and have compromised, join in the conspiracy to provide a false basis for these things of real faith. All the time what we all need is the **word/communication** of God. This **word** brings faith to our hearts, enabling us **easily to** believe for the will of God to be outworked in our lives, and see God meeting all our needs. When we don’t believe, as we have seen, He **remains faithful**. God is faithful, so we don’t need any falsehood, pride, imagination and fantasy. We can come to the Lord Jesus, confess our needs and our unbelief, if we find it in our hearts, and hear **His word**.

Let us allow Him to examine our hearts and remove “*Any wicked way*” from them. We will not then ask amiss and for the wrong motives, but come with our requests with **real faith** in our hearts, being “*Fully persuaded that what He has promised He is able to perform*”. We will have the real substance and evidence which faith brings in our hearts. Faith **is** the substance of things hoped for and the evidence for things not seen, and only comes by hearing the **word of God**. It is real because God is real. **He is able** to make **us believe** so that we can **serve** and **please** Him in our lives. Hallelujah.

