

ACTION DRIVEN BY FAITH

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Scripture: Hebrews 11:1-8 (NKJV)

As I was preparing for this message, I kept wondering why this Word was being impressed upon me. What resounded from the first service, and I'm sure it is now resonating here as well, is what we in navigation terms say: whenever things fail, when things go wrong especially technology-wise, and today we use a lot of technology in sailing ships, if something does fail, go back to basics. And why is that? Because basics will never fail. Those concepts on which the original navigation was sounded upon and founded upon, are something that drive what happens even in today's hi-tech instruments on the vessels. That was what resonated within me and said to go back to basics. I suppose this message would also make it very clear.

I'd like to start with a story. It's about Andrew from Texas, USA. He was very fond of going on adventures; he would find the most extreme situations to step out, with no dependencies on technology or anything, just on his own skills. This time around, he decided to trek through the Sahara desert. So he started walking with a small canteen, and as he went along, his water ran out. Suddenly whatever was on the horizon turned into just distant mountains and dunes of glistening sand. There was nothing to be seen. At the peak of the day, he was parched with thirst and no water to drink. Suddenly he saw this possible illusion of a hut on the horizon and he thought it was just a mirage out in the desert and that his mind was playing tricks on him. But as he kept walking, this hut kind of started becoming a reality, and he realized that there was actually a structure which was broken down. But this gave him the hope which gave him a sudden burst of strength, and with that energy, he ran towards that hut thinking that he would find something to drink and fine shade and revive his energy.

As he entered the hut, he noticed right in the middle was a water pump. You could imagine the thoughts in his mind as he was walking from the door to the water pump – thoughts of gushing water and how he would be able to replenish his strength and drink and be revived. He starts frantically pumping; but the pump was bone-dry. All that energy that he had just kind of went away. And as he slumped to the ground, from the corner of his eye, he noticed something similar to a bottle of water in the corner of the hut. So he crawled up to it. He wasn't even sure whether it was drinkable, how ole it was, nothing. But just as he was about to open up the bottle and drink, he noticed a note under the bottle which said: "Use this on the pump; it will work."

Now this was a dilemma. Andrew didn't know what to do. On one hand there was a bone-dry pump and on the other was a small bottle of water and a note that said to use it to prime the pump and you would get water. For those who are not able to understand the connect here, the pump needs a little bit of priming with water so that it creates the required suction and then it starts working. A dry pump will not be able to pull up even if the water is full. But concepts are fine; this is a situation where Andrew is in a dilemma. He has water in one hand and he has a pump which is not going to work. He's not sure it's going to work, but the note says: Use it!

Andrew quietly prayed, and I don't know what gave him the confidence or faith to do it, but he did as the note said. He put the water into the pump, started pumping and fresh water started gushing out. Andrew was able to freshen himself, get revived in his energy, fill up his canteen of water. He also found a note on the table which gave the directions to the nearest village where he would be able to get some help. Andrew then added one more sentence to the note that was under the bottle – "Have faith; it works!"

So that's where I'm headed in this message. Back to basics is going back to faith.

Hebrews 11:1-8

¹ Now faith is confidence in what we hope for and assurance about what we do not see. ² This is what the ancients were commended for.

³ By faith we understand that the universe was formed at God's command, so that what is seen was not made out of what was visible.

⁴ By faith Abel brought God a better offering than Cain did. By faith he was commended as righteous, when God spoke well of his offerings. And by faith Abel still speaks, even though he is dead.

⁵ By faith Enoch was taken from this life, so that he did not experience death. 'He could not be found, because God had taken him away.' For before he was taken, he was commended as one who pleased God. ⁶ And without faith it is impossible to please God, because anyone who comes to him must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who earnestly seek him.

⁷ By faith Noah, when warned about things not yet seen, in holy fear built an ark to save his family. By his faith he condemned the world and became heir of the righteousness that is in keeping with faith.

⁸ By faith Abraham, when called to go to a place he would later receive as his inheritance, obeyed and went, even though he did not know where he was going.

I'm going to remain focused on verses 1 to 4.

Each one of us starts our day with some kind of faith. I'm not going right now to the Bible; I'm talking about just everyday actions. When you go to sleep, you have faith that you're going to get up next morning. When you get up in the morning, you have faith that your car is going to crank up on the first start. When I get into my car, I have faith that I'm going to reach office in time until I reach the western express highway. When I meet my boss, I have faith that he knows what he's doing when he's telling me to do something. More importantly, for each of us we all have faith that the doctor who is diagnosing us knows what he is doing. Right? So these are all little steps of faith we kind of do every moment of our lives.

But there is a differentiation in what all of these examples of faith are and what we as children of God are called to. There is an aspect of the spiritual realm also here. These are the physical examples that I gave you. Spiritually-speaking, even if we look at an atheist, he also has faith. When I say that, it's basically because he has faith that there is no God. That is his foundation of belief. So each person, whether atheist, believer or non-believer, has faith in some form or the other. But what differentiates very critically, is the object of faith. What is the focus of faith? You could be focusing on an entirely different thing and believing it to be right, or you could be focusing on God and everything turns out to be right. The bible says that none can save us as there is no other name under heaven. So when our object of faith is wrong, then there is no other way that we can be saved, and that salvation comes only in the name of Jesus.

Acts 4:12 says: ¹² "Neither is there salvation in any other: for there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved." So I think it's very loud and clear where our focus of faith has to be.

Hebrews 11:1 "Now faith is confidence in what we hope for and assurance about what we do not see."

When you look at that Word, it's easy to just take it in the way it is written, being confident of what we are hopeful and assurance of what we do not see. But we need to actually really get deep into that. The wider understanding of the world at large (and here I am including us as well as the people who don't believe in Jesus, but majorly the secular world), there is an understanding that when you

are true in your efforts and sincere in your actions, whatever you believe in, in faith, will be good enough. I've just given you a very beautifully laid-out definition of the word 'karma', and that is what the world believes in. Good karma gets them good something, but that's not what we are at. I'll repeat that: True in their efforts and sincere in their actions and whatever they believe in faith will be good enough.

But faith based solely on one's intent is never good enough. There is very clear categorization in the bible, very clear and specific instructions in the bible as to where that faith has to be placed on. It's got nothing to do with intent, it's got nothing to do with sincerity.

2 Timothy 1:12 Paul very explicitly says:

"That is why I am suffering as I am. Yet this is no cause for shame, because I know whom I have believed, and am convinced that he is able to guard what I have entrusted to him until that day." There is a certain confidence that Paul is exonerating here. He is saying, "For I know whom I have believed, and I am convinced that he is able to guard what I have entrusted to him."

Now if your beliefs are not founded on the right person, then it really doesn't matter what else you believe in. And that is very important for us as children of God, because we can very easily find ourselves digressing from that focus. We can very easily find ourselves in moments of comfort, to just take it in the rut of the day that that's going to happen. We kind of lose track that it's not just going to happen because God purposes it to happen.

Before I go further, I want to use the Message version to give a little elaboration on these four verses that I read, and I'm going to do it in parts:

Verse 1: The fundamental fact of existence is that this trust in God, this faith, is the firm foundation under everything that makes life worth living. It's our handle on what we can't see. The act of faith is what distinguished our ancestors, set them above the crowd."

To give a little bit more clarity into this word faith, in more real terms, it literally means (from the dictionary) confidence. And confidence is something of a strong belief or trust on something or somebody. A perfect example is an elevator, a lift. Now I am sure each one of us here understands how an elevator works; there's a length of wires, there's a pulley, counterweights, and there's a motor which is riding it up and it responds to your controls of going up or down. But my youngest daughter doesn't understand how the lift works. She just follows me into it, and she does exactly what I do. She presses the button and it goes up, and she presses the button and it goes down. She has no concept of how that lift functions, and more importantly, she has no concept of what is supporting it, is not underneath it; it is actually hanging from the top. She is just doing it in absolute faith that this thing works the way it is supposed to work, and this is going to take me where I'm to go.

If I draw a parallel back to a believer's life – for us faith is the affirmative response to God's will and Word. I am specifying that it's an affirmative response. We don't respond in any other form but to say, "Yes Lord." That's what our faith is. We possess that faith when we take God at His own Word, at His very word that is written. We don't need to see something to believe it. Almost all of what is written in the bible is not something that we have witnessed. All what is written in the bible is something that has happened many years back, but it has been documented for our benefit. We believe it because it is there. We don't have the evidence or proof that it happened. Faith is the acceptance of something simply because God said it's so.

Now that is a very easy definition. But surprisingly even Jesus emphasized this very statement that I just made, that we believe. In John 20:29, *“Jesus then told him, ‘because you have seen Me, you have believed. Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed.’”* And that’s the category of people that we are in. we are, in God’s own words, more blessed because we believed what was written. And it’s not by our doing; it’s because God chose us to be able to receive that understanding. It’s out there for everybody. It’s not a hidden secret; it’s out there for each and every person in this world. But we have been chosen by God to have an understanding and opening on our minds to be able to receive it and believe it. And that’s where faith gets exemplified.

Moving on to vv. 2-3 from The Message:

By faith, we see the world called into existence by God’s word, what we see created by what we don’t see.”

I’m sure the teachers in the room would have a lot of struggles with many students if they have to explain how something can come into existence if it doesn’t exist. We all know matter needs to occupy space, it has to have weight and volume and it has to be in some form of solid, liquid or gas. But here the bible says that God created something which was not there and He brought it into existence. By faith we see the world called into existence by God’s Word, what we see created by what we don’t see. Something which was not visible was used to create something which is visible, and that is scientifically very difficult if one were to look at it from today’s point of view. But yet we believe. We don’t seek evidence to prove it. how can something come into existence if there was nothing else? We believe that God was capable of doing that.

The first few chapters of Genesis explain this very vividly. The science books of today also very beautifully explain the possible creation that was single-cellular, multicellular and complex organisms. Then you now have the evidence of test-tube babies and other genetically-created organisms – all that is happening in the scientific world. But we just believe what the Word of God has said in those chapters of Genesis – that creation was just out of nothing. God said it’s happening, and it happened. And that is where faith kind of exemplifies in a believer’s life, because if it was not faith, I’m sure each one of us would have continued to struggle with what is written there.

Now, while we have put faith into perspective as to what it is from a believer’s point of view, there has to be something further on. Now there are certain standards that God expects of us, and to reach those standards, there is possibly a way of doing works. Now all of you may have reacted to my using the term ‘achieving God’s standard by works’. The bible talks about it in Galatians 6:9-10 *“Let us not become weary in doing good, for at the proper time we will reap a harvest if we do not give up. Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all people, especially to those who belong to the family of believers.”*

So the bible is very clear that there is something about good works, there is some benefit out of doing good but is that going to reach you where you need to go? From God’s point of view, good works is vastly different than being righteous. There is a strong gap in between those two, because good works does not mean you are righteous. Righteousness may come through good works, but righteousness has a whole different walk altogether. If you look at good works as possibly the way to reach God then we need to look back at history – we see that Adam failed, we see that Abraham failed, we see David failed, we see Daniel failed. In fact, nobody was able to achieve the standard or acceptance of God by their works.

So, how do we, as God’s children, manifest faith? To put it simply, for a believer, true faith is simple obedience and believing God’s Word despite circumstances and conditions. Situations and circumstances can make it very difficult for you to have that faith. It causes you to get torn apart between believing what you are actually seeing, and then having confidence in what you’re not

seeing yet but hoping for it. That's where true faith comes in, because you are simply disregarding all circumstances and conditions, and you're believing in God for what He said. And what He said is in the Word of God. There's no deviation from that.

To add more to faith, it's described in a two-fold way from what we read. It reads as: "It is a substance of things hoped for and the evidence of the things not seen." And that again brings us back to a kind of a dilemma. Hoping for something is not an issue. You can always hope for anything, and imagination can go wild. But the evidence of things not seen is something which I think we all struggle with. How do we bank on something which is not yet proven itself? It's something which is just said would happen. That's where faith gets exemplified when you are able to do both of them together and consistently.

Let me give you a story to put this into perspective so that it gets more clear. Hudson Taylor was a missionary, and he travelled far and wide. One of his travels took him to China, and this travel needed him to go on a sailboat. As you all know, sailboats at that time were totally dependent on the winds to move. If there was no wind, the sailboat was just a log. On one of the evenings, as the boat was moving, there was dead calm and for a while the boat continued with the currents and the drifts. Then frantically, the people realized they were not drifting dangerously close to the shore which would completely wreck their boat. Hudson Taylor was blissfully unaware in his room, while the captain was frantically running around to see what could be done. He suddenly realized that one of the passengers on the sailboat was a missionary. As usual, the world outside always looks at children of God to bail them out in situations. He quickly ran down to Hudson's room and he said: Pray for us. And Hudson said, "Sure I will, but put the sails up." The captain looked at him and realized what a mockery it would be if a captain puts up the sail when there's dead wind. He said, "I can't do that." But Hudson told him, "I'll only pray if you put the sails up." Anyway, the captain had no choice. So he put up the sails. A couple of minutes down the line, nobody knew what was happening. Suddenly there was a knock on Hudson's door. It was the captain. "Are you still praying, Mr. Hudson?" and Hudson said, "Yes." He says, "You'd better stop because we can't handle the wind anymore." So that's what it is – you suddenly are hoping for things and you are banking on the evidence that was not seen.

Another word for faith is also conviction. The conviction which comes from a believer's heart to believe without doubting and to be sure that these are believing in things not yet seen.

Going back to the verses that we read. Abel's faith was set as a benchmark all those years back, it is intact till today. It says, "By an act of faith, Abel brought a better sacrifice to God and it was what he believed, not what he brought that made the difference. That's what God noticed and approved as righteousness." After all these centuries, that belief continues to catch our notice and in the NKJV it says, "And by faith Abel still speaks even though he is dead." So there is a significance to why this was written. Why is there a reference made to what Abel's faith was and is to us?

Romans 10:17, *"Consequently, faith comes from hearing the message, and the message is heard through the word about Christ."*

So there are two verses which I'm going to take parallelly. Abel's act of faith has been set as a benchmark, and then it says in Romans, that the message is heard through the word about Christ. Obviously, none of us were there when creation happened, none of us were there when God walked the earth. But we read about it and we believe in it and we have the faith to be strongly founded in what the Word is saying.

Likewise, God had revealed to Adam regarding the sacrifice. In fact, Genesis ch.3 talks about the first sacrifice. As we look at the sacrifice that God had ordained, there was a sacrifice of an animal. There

was eventually a talk about atonement for sin which talked about a blood sacrifice. More specifically, there had to be a shedding of life for an atonement of sin, there has to be shedding of blood for redemption from sin. That was the way God had ordained for man to come back to Him. There was no dilution to this, and over time, even today, this has not changed. There has got to be a sacrifice if one needs to turn back from sin and go back to God. The only difference is what was then a physical sacrifice as the cutting of a lamb and sprinkling its blood, today it's in believing in the sacrifice that was paid on the Cross. The ultimate once and for all sacrifice that Jesus Christ paid on the cross. That is an act of faith by itself, because John 3:16 says, *"For God so loved the world that whosoever believes in Him shall not perish but will have everlasting life."*

The bible is clear from the start till the end as to what is God's way to atone from sin. So obviously Adam practiced that and Cain and Abel had seen that and as a result, Abel conducted in the same manner as he had seen his father do. I am sure without doubt, Adam had told his sons as to what is expected when dealing in these matters, and the way back to God, and what needs to be done as far as the sacrifice goes. Probably Abel would have also seen his father do this whenever it was to be done in the presence of God. But somehow, what Abel and Cain saw, both of them imbibed in their lives differently. Abel heard about it, this all-important subject, and he believed. He did what he needed to do. There was no deviation from what he had heard. But Cain, even though he had heard it, he devised an alternate way. He may have thought of it in a different manner, his own understanding. But there was a digression from what was shown to him. Now the Bible is very clear that there is no mention about Cain's offering being bad; it just says that Abel offered a better offering.

What is important is the way that Cain chose to give this offering.

Genesis 4:3-4 says, *"In the course of time Cain brought some of the fruits of the soil as an offering to the Lord. but Abel also brought an offering – fat portions from some of the firstborn of his flock."*

Abel was a shepherd, so naturally what he would have offered was animal. It would have been the first one. Cain was a farmer, so obviously what he brought was from the ground as the first fruits of his crops that he got. But there was a stark difference in both the offerings. Abel simply did what he heard and he was witness to what his father taught him, and he believed it and he just did it. Cain kind of devised his own way. Cain chose to give Him the gift or the offering from the land. What does God say about the land in Genesis? "Because you listened to your wife and ate from the tree about which I commanded you not to eat of, cursed is the ground because of you." So, as a result, Cain brought an offering which was cursed from the very source, and it was not something that God appreciated. This is explained by God to Cain in Genesis 4:7, "If you do what is right, will you not be accepted? But if you do not do what is right, sin is crouching at your door; it desires to have you, but you must rule over it. Now this is a very subtle way to tell Cain that you are already kind of deviating from the path that you had to be on. Cain had offered a bloodless sacrifice while Abel stuck to the rules that were required to be conducted with the sacrifice. Cain devised his own way of thinking that he is giving something good from his crops which was from the ground. But God didn't accept it.

What was majorly different was the motivation behind it. for Abel, the motivation was simply to obey. It was like I said, true faith is affirmative obedience. There was not that – Yeah! I'm going to obey what God has done but let me think about why not do it this way. No! It was just yes Lord; this is what I'm going to do. But in the case of Cain, there was a devising of a method that he thought was also acceptable. And if we go ahead and try to differentiate between these two, we will see that one is God's way, the other was man's way. One was by faith, the other by imagination or device. One was of grace, the other was of merit. One was to be, in today's world, as Christ-like, the other was by religion. And why do I say religion? Because it turns to be ritualistic, mindlessly just doing something just because it needs to be done, and the other is to do it because Christ ordained it so.

Now there is a stark difference when we look at these vv. 3 and 4, where it talks about the sacrifice. For sure it kind of amplifies the motivation behind. So while there was a motivation to do what was required, there was something that was more of obedience established by Abel and disobedience done by Cain. This was made very clear by God in Hebrews 9:22 which says, "In fact, the law requires that nearly everything be cleansed with blood, and without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness." I am sure that both Cain and Abel understood this, but why am I coming back again and again to this point is the lack of obedience in being true to the word that God has written. True faith comes only by being affirmatively responsive, to be able to believe and to conduct yourself in the word that is written. That's where things can go wrong in a believer's life. That's why I mentioned going back to basics when things go wrong. When things go wrong, situations and circumstances change; we get torn to do something which is seemingly better, there is evidence of it, and we forget that faith is about hoping for things and to have the evidence of things which have not yet come into existence. And for us today, the sole purpose of that faith and the focus is on Christ Jesus. It is only fulfilled on that cross because salvation to us was given by the ultimate sacrifice made by Jesus.

Now this is where faith kind of goes multi-fold. You're hearing about an action that was done 2000 years back and it has its sustained influence even today, and for God knows how many years to come, till the time life on earth continues. For anybody to just believe that God's sacrifice was for me and my sins are taken care of, that adoption of salvation can only happen when you have true faith. For that lamb that was slain couldn't take away the sin, but it foreshadowed the coming of Christ who is the Lamb of God that taketh the sin away from this world. John 1:29 says, "The next day John saw Jesus coming towards him and said, 'Look, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!'" so, it was very clear that Jesus was the only central focus of that faith. If we need salvation, and we need redemption from sin, we have to have that focus on Jesus.

In ending, let me give a little story as to what faith can do. This is about a missionary who was from a church in Michigan who was sent out to the villages in Africa, to be a pastor there. One of his responsibilities was that every couple of weeks, he would have to go to the nearest city, withdraw money from the bank and then purchase medicines and provisions, etc. that was required, and then walk back the long distance to the villages deep in the jungle. This action of his was becoming quite prominent because it was happening every 2 or 3 weeks, and people took note of it. On one of these trips, he happened to see two people fighting. So he intervened and tried to get them to make peace with each other. This resulted in losing a couple of hours in his journey time, and he wasn't able to make it back in time with all the money, medicines and provisions. He decided to stop enroute and make a makeshift camp under a tree in the forest. The following morning, he made his way back to his village.

A couple of weeks later, he once more went into town. These two lads met him and they said, "Who are you?" He said, "I am a pastor in a village here." The boys said, "We didn't know that you were such an important man to have guards with you." This pastor was astonished, wondering what they meant. "Can you be more clear?" he asked. They said, "When you came and interrupted our fight, it was actually a staged thing. We wanted to delay you as we knew you were carrying money and medicines. We followed you with the intent to rob you. But when we came to the campsite where you were lying down to rest, while we were about to attack you, we suddenly saw that you were surrounded by guards." The pastor laughed at him saying, "I am just a simple pastor. I have no guards. I don't have any cavalry around me." They said, "No, no, that's not possible. My friend and I specifically counted and there were 26 of them standing around you, watching the area."

As the pastor was relating this story to his church back in Michigan, one of the members got up and he said, "Excuse me pastor, what date was this?" The pastor gave him the date. The man said, "That was a Saturday morning. I was getting ready to play golf, and as I got into my car, I had this sudden

urge to pray for you. But I was not sure, so I went ahead. But that eagerness and burden became stronger in me that I need to pray for you. So then I called up some of my friends who were available that day and I told them that there is this burden on my heart that we need to pray for pastor as he is there in Africa. I don't know what the reason is, but let's do that in faith that this is what God purposes to do. And so those friends communicated to many others saying this was a prayer request that has come in." Nobody knew who all had prayed for that pastor that day. Then the man said, "Will all of you who prayed for pastor that day please stand up?" there was pin-drop silence in the entire church. The pastor literally lost his balance because 26 of them stood up.

What I'm trying to say is when you have an action that is driven by faith, faith comes into action. That is the important aspect of this message because many a times, we miss the mark. We just go along with a lot of it but the fact is action driven by faith has no other choice but to put faith into action.

Amen.
