

Faith and Hope

Over the past couple of weeks, we've discussed prayer (and why they were or weren't answered) and so-called "prosperity gospel" teaching. There was a lot of great discussion, some hard for me to process, some leaving me uneasy and some with which I, at face value, disagree. Is there something about me that disqualifies me from having my prayer answered? If I have doubt about God fulfilling my prayer request, is that, alone, enough that my request will be denied? If I request something of God that is outside of His will, what does that reflect on my faith or impact my relationship with Him? So, this morning, we're going to look at the concepts of "faith" and "hope", but in the specific context of asking things of God.

1. Compare and discuss the meanings of the words Faith (pistis) and Hope (elpis). What, then, is "faith"? What, then, is "hope"?
2. Matthew 8:5-13 is the familiar story of the centurion who, in Jesus' assessment, had more faith (pistis) than anyone in Israel.
 - a. In what did the centurion have faith? In hope?
 - b. If the servant had not been healed, how would that have impacted the centurion's faith? His hope?
3. Think about those times when you prayed and genuinely believed that God would answer your prayer as you expected.
 - a. Did you tell God (e.g. "Heal this illness, please and thank you") what you wanted Him to do, or did you ask Him (e.g. "Will you heal this illness, please and thank you")? Why and what was the outcome?
 - b. In those cases when your prayer was not "answered" with what you desired, how did that affect your faith?
4. One of the tenets of "prosperity gospel preaching" is that God will affirmatively answer our prayers if we have sufficient faith. The practice of "faith healing" says that my and/or others' faith can heal sickness. Matthew 21 seems to make it hard to argue with those premises. So, if I believe hard enough, God will grant my desires. Thoughts?
5. Refer to the 1 Corinthians 13 passage.

Faith is knowing with absolute assuredness, things about God. Faith, then, cannot get 'stronger' ... either you are sure of that thing or you are not. Faith does, however, get more comprehensive ... you can be absolutely assured of more and more things about God. Thoughts?

Scripture:

Matthew 8:5-13

5 When he had entered Capernaum, a centurion came forward to him, appealing to him, 6 "Lord, my servant is lying paralyzed at home, suffering terribly." 7 And he said to him, "I will come and heal him." 8 But the centurion replied, "Lord, I am not worthy to have you come under my roof, but only say the word, and my servant will be healed. 9 For I too am a man under authority, with soldiers under me. And I say to one, 'Go,' and he goes, and to another, 'Come,' and he comes, and to my servant, 'Do this,' and he does it." 10 When Jesus heard this, he marveled and said to those who followed him, "Truly, I tell you, with no one in Israel have I found such faith. 11 I tell you, many will come from east and west and recline at table with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven, 12 while the sons of the kingdom will be thrown into the outer darkness. In that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth." 13 And to the centurion Jesus said, "Go; let it be done for you as you have believed." And the servant was healed at that very moment.

1 Corinthians 13:9-13

9 For we know in part and we prophesy in part, 10 but when the perfect comes, the partial will pass away. 11 When I was a child, I spoke like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child. When I became a man, I gave up childish ways. 12 For now we see in a mirror dimly, but then face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I have been fully known. 13 So now faith, hope, and love abide, these three; but the greatest of these is love.

Matthew 21:21-22

21 And Jesus answered them, "Truly, I say to you, if you have faith and do not doubt, you will not only do what has been done to the fig tree, but even if you say to this mountain, 'Be taken up and thrown into the sea,' it will happen. 22 And whatever you ask in prayer, you will receive, if you have faith."

Definitions:

Faith (*Pistis*)

- conviction of the truth of anything, belief; in the NT of a conviction or belief respecting man's relationship to God and divine things, generally with the included idea of trust and holy fervour born of faith and joined with it
- relating to God - the conviction that God exists and is the creator and ruler of all things, the provider and bestower of eternal salvation through Christ
- relating to Christ - a strong and welcome conviction or belief that Jesus is the Messiah, through whom we obtain eternal salvation in the kingdom of God
- the religious beliefs of Christians
- belief with the predominate idea of trust (or confidence) whether in God or in Christ, springing from faith in the same
- fidelity, faithfulness - the character of one who can be relied on

Hope (*Elpis*)

- expectation of evil, fear
- expectation of good, hope, in the Christian sense, joyful and confident expectation of eternal salvation
- on hope, in hope, having hope, the author of hope, or he who is its foundation

- the thing hoped for