

July 23, 2017

Faith: The Choice to Believe

"Now faith is being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see."

Hebrews 11:1-12:2

After the death and resurrection of Jesus, God's relationship with mankind changed. Under the Law of Moses God dealt primarily with the nation of Israel as his chosen people. Under the new covenant we now enjoy with Jesus, God deals with us as individuals from all nations, races, and cultures. All of us are now his chosen people, his royal priesthood, his holy nation. (I Peter 2:1-12)

God's heroes have also changed in some ways. In the New Testament God's heroes of faith are not typically kings or judges, but Apostles and other early teachers. All of the Apostles were great heroes of faith, and many early teachers and preachers stood up for God as well. Three of these New Testament heroes include, of course, Peter, Paul and John.



Peter started out as an itinerant fisherman. Like all Jewish men of his age, Peter was educated in the local Synagogue school. He would have learned the basics of the Law and the fundamentals of reading and writing. With his partners, Andrew, James and John, Peter ran a fishing business in the Sea of Galilee. When Jesus called him and his partners they were mending their nets after a night's fishing.

From such humble beginnings Peter rose to the role of leader to the twelve. His name always appears first in any list of these men and he is, as Jesus named him, the keeper of the "***...keys of the kingdom of heaven...***" (Matthew 16:17-19) From the beginning of the church, Peter opened the doors of faith. He preached the first gospel sermon in Acts 2. He brought the first non-Jewish believers into the church in Acts 10. His leadership was essential in shaping the early church's attitude toward Gentile converts.

Peter healed the sick, and even raised the dead. But Peter was also human and he made mistakes. While he was still with Jesus he was always getting it wrong, and after Jesus' ascension he still bumbled occasionally. But God can work through any of us, even when we are imperfect, to accomplish his work.

The same is true of the Apostle Paul. Paul started out his faith journey as a non-believer who went so far as to actively and viciously persecute believers. But when God called him, Paul stepped out in great faith and immediately began risking his life to preach the gospel. Like Peter, Paul had human frailties. His impatience led to problems more than once and, I believe, his handling of young John Mark was less than perfect.



In Paul, as in Peter, we find God doing great works and using the Apostle to reach much of the Roman Empire before his death. All of the Apostles are referred to as the foundation upon which the whole of God's household is built. (Ephesians 2:19-22) Peter and Paul certainly played a major role in setting that foundation.

John was also a great hero of faith, but in a somewhat different capacity. After the death of his brother James, John remained in Jerusalem for some time before eventually making his way to Ephesus. Wherever he went he encouraged the believers to focus on fulfilling the law of Love. It's interesting that this 'Son of Thunder' (Mark 3:17) would become known as the Apostle of

love. All of the writers of the New Testament focus on the importance of our relationships as believer, but John most of all. He concludes, ***"Whoever loves his brother lives in the light and there is nothing in him to make him stumble. But whoever hates his brother is in darkness..."*** (I John 2:9-11)

In the course of our study of God's great heroes of faith we have come to understand that these men and women were heroes because they chose to follow God's direction for them even when it wasn't easy. We learned that the fact that they are heroes did not make them perfect, but that the power of God working through their weaknesses could still accomplish his work.

The author of Hebrews would conclude ***"Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles, and let us run with perseverance the race marked out before us. Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith..."*** (Hebrews 12:1-3)