

Strong Faith

Would you like to have strong faith? You might think that would be hard, but nothing in God's Word is hard. It just takes a little persistence, in fact for the Christian; faith should be like water to a fish. It should be your environment. Without faith, you are like a fish out of water. I've become so accustomed to faith in God's Word that when I'm in a church where there is a lot of unbelief, I'm uncomfortable.

In Romans 4:20 and 21 we read, "He staggered not at the promise of God through unbelief; but was strong in faith, giving glory to God". The next verse is the definition of strong faith. "And being fully persuaded that, what He had **promised**, He was **able** also to perform.

Abraham saw that God is not only **able** to back his Word. He is willing. Some of us have never got it down on the inside of us that it's the fondest desire of God's heart to meet every promise that He's given in His Word. Not only is he **able** to give all things he **wants** to give them to you. It's His fondest desire to give to you. We talk about God's ability but we very rarely talk about His willingness.

Abraham found a combination for strong faith, God's ability and will. Without those two, you have no basis for faith. Just knowing that God is **able** is no basis for faith. Neither can you just know that God is **willing**.

Just suppose a rich man was to come before a group of people and say, "I am **able** to give each one of you ten thousand dollars." There wouldn't be anyone who would doubt him, but neither would anyone get excited. Just because he is able, doesn't mean he is willing. There is no basis for faith that you are going to receive ten thousand dollars. Ability alone is no basis for faith.

On the other hand, suppose a poor man were to stand before the same group and say, "It is the fondest desire of my heart to give each one of you ten thousand dollars." Someone might pat him on the back and say, "We sure appreciate it. We

know you are willing, but you're not able." **Ability** alone is no basis for faith, neither is **willingness**. But if you put the two together, you have a combination for faith.

Suppose the rich man then jumped up and said, "I am willing to give each one of you ten thousand dollars, also." Everyone would begin running to get in line.

Ability plus willingness produces a foundation for faith. The same thing holds true for any promise in God's Word. First, you must know God is able to back his promise, and then you need to know He is willing.

I know what you are probably thinking. "I know God is able and willing. I must have strong faith." Well slow down just a minute. Notice again what the Word said about Abraham in verse 21, "And being FULLY PERSUADED that what He promised, He was able also to perform." Are you fully persuaded?

It's easy to sit in church and say you are fully persuaded that God is able and willing. Also, while reading a book or listening to a tape you might be excited about God's promises. But, you will never know if you are FULLY PERSUADED until you face the real situation and put your faith to the test. The faith of Abraham did not start out being strong. Through opposition, the faith of Abraham BECAME strong as he used it.

There are too many armchair quarterbacks in faith today who are telling everyone what they would do if they met certain situations. You do not **know** what you would do until you face them.

Faith is a growing process, and so is the knowledge of God's ability and willingness to meet His promises. God is **able** to save them to the uttermost that come to Him (Hebrews 7:25). Also, He is not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance (II Peter 3:9). There is the combination. God is **able** to save and God is **willing** to save.

I was raised in Pentecostal churches, and I remember prayer request time. Someone would stand up and say, "Let's remember Sister Smith. She's in the hospital.

The doctors have given her up to die. They say she won't live until the end of the week. But we know **GOD IS ABLE.**" Everyone would say, "Amen, Yes, Amen."

What has that person said? **Nothing.** They might as well say, "Sister Smith is sick. The doctors don't expect her to live until the end of the week, and a rich man is able to give each one of us ten thousand dollars." That has as much to do with faith as "God is able."

But why have we said for so long, in connection with healing, "God is able"? Because for years, we have based healing on **experience** rather than on the **Word** of God.

Sometimes we have prayed and people were healed, other times we have prayed and they were not healed. So all we will say is "God is able." That way **if He heals** we're alright, or **if He doesn't heal** we can't be blamed. Whether He does or He doesn't heal **we're off the hook.**

It takes a person who really believes and knows the Word of God to say "God is also willing." You may not get very many "Amens," but you will be scriptural. So, faith for healing cannot be based on God's ability alone.

Do you wonder why the world has such a bad image of God? We could be partly to blame, because of the longest time we have expressed God's ability and left His willingness out. Most unbelievers believe God's able to do anything. But he is no nearer heaven or salvation, and we expect to receive God's blessings on the same basis as the unbeliever; just knowing God's able.

Let's suppose we had two individuals in the church, one was rich and the other poor. The rich man is able to give you a loan, but he won't do it. The poor man doesn't have the money, but if he did he would be willing to give it to you. Who would you have more respect for? The poor man, wouldn't you? You would have little or no respect for a man, who was able to bless others, but not willing to do so.

We have been looking at God like that for years. God has all the resources of heaven, but we don't know if he is willing to give them to us or not. No wonder there is a lack of respect for God today.

There is one instance in the word of God where somebody doubted God's ability and that's in Mark 9:17-22. Here we have the instance where Jesus came down from the mount of Transfiguration with Peter, James and John. The other disciples

couldn't cast the devil out of a little child. They had all failed when Jesus came to them.

Beginning in verse 17, "And one of the multitude answered and said, Master, I have brought unto thee my son, which hath a dumb spirit; and wheresoever he taketh him, he teareth him: and he foameth, and gnasheth with his teeth, and pineth away: and I spake to thy disciples that they should cast him out; and **they could not**. He answereth him, and saith, O faithless generation, how long shall I be with you? How long shall I suffer you? Bring him unto me. And they brought him unto him: and when he saw him, straightway the spirit tare him: and he fell on the ground, and wallowed foaming. And he asked his father, how long is it ago since this came unto him? And he said, of a child. And oftentimes it hath cast him into the fire, and into the waters, to destroy him:" Notice this statement, "but if thou **canst** do anything, have compassion on us, and help us.

"If thou **canst** do anything", he doubted the very **ability** of Jesus to heal. You say, "If I would have been there I would at least believe He was **able**". Would you **after you had seen nine failures in a row?**

This man brought his son to the disciples and nine men who had followed Jesus could not cast that devil out. Now he turns to Jesus and says, "What are you going to do? You are the ringleader. Can you do anything?" In verse 23 we read, "Jesus said unto him, if thou canst believe, all things are possible to him that believeth." He is saying, "I am able, but you have got to believe it." Continuing in verse 24, "And straightway the father of the child cried out, and said with tears, Lord, I believe: help thou mine unbelief."

I'll tell you what the man said, "Lord I believe you're able, I'm having trouble with the willing part. I believe, help thou mine unbelief." Jesus went on to heal that child. Let me tell you why. At least the man was honest.

Let me put one thing to rest here. Too many people are teaching the message of faith that you have to get up to some great spiritual level before you can ask God anything. That is incorrect. Jesus will meet you **at your level**. Just be honest. Tell him, "I'll us the faith I have, but Lord help me with my unbelief."

We have another story in Matthew where a leper doubted Jesus' willingness. In Matthew 8:1-3 it says, "When he was come down from the mountain, great multitudes

followed him. And behold, there came a leper and worshipped him, saying, Lord, if thou wilt, thou canst make me clean.”

He said, “I know you are able, I don’t know if you’re willing.” Jesus met his need. Notice verse 3, “And Jesus put forth his hand, and touched him saying, I will: (the Greek says “I will it.” “It is my will”.) Be thou clean. And immediately his leprosy was cleansed.”

I want to ask you a question. In either case, the man with the demon possessed child, or the man with leprosy; did Jesus commend either man as being strong in faith? No! Because strong faith is being fully persuaded of His ability and willingness.

I believe the theme of God’s ability and willingness runs throughout Matthew 8. I want to continue into the next story beginning in verses 5-10, “And when Jesus was entered into Capernaum, there came unto him a **centurion**, beseeching him. And saying, Lord my servant lieth at home sick of palsy, grievously tormented. And Jesus saith unto him I will come and heal him. The **centurion** answered and said, Lord, I am not worthy that thou shouldest come under my roof: but speak the word only, and my servant shall be healed. For I am a man under authority, having soldiers under me: and I say to this man, Go, and he goeth; and to another, Come, and he cometh; and to my servant, Do this, and he doeth it. When Jesus heard it, he marveled, and said to them that followed, Verily I say unto you, I have not found so **great faith...**” Where have we heard **that** before? It’s the faith of Abraham. Let’s go on”... I have not found so **great faith**, no, not in Israel.”

Verse 11 goes on to say, “And I say unto you, that many shall come from the east and west, and shall sit down with Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob, in the kingdom of heaven. But the children of the kingdom shall be cast out into outer darkness: there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth.”

Jesus is simply saying, “I haven’t found this kind of faith in Israel, my home.” There is coming a day in the kingdom of heaven when people will come from the east and from the west (a reference to Gentiles) and will sit down with the father of the Jewish faith Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, but the children of the kingdom (Jews are going to be cast into outer darkness.

The Jews thought they were automatically in with God because they were **born** Jews. But physical birth doesn't mean anything with the Lord; it's the new birth. This man expressed faith and that's what Jesus had been looking for.

In verse 13 we read, "and Jesus said unto the **centurion**, go thy way and as thou hast believed, so be it done unto thee. And his servant was healed in the self same hour." I have been emphasizing the fact that the **centurion** came to Jesus for his servant. This is important because this story is told twice in the gospels and they seemingly contradict. Many liberals jump on these stories to prove the Bible is inaccurate. Let's take a closer look by reading this story again from Luke 7:1-10. "Now when he had ended all his sayings in the audience of the people, he entered into Capernaum. And a certain centurion's servant, who was dear unto him was sick, and ready to die. And when he heard of Jesus, he sent unto him the **elders of the Jews**, beseeching him that he would come and heal his servant. And when **they** came to Jesus, **they** besought him instantly, saying, that he was worthy for whom he should do this: for he loveth our nation, and he hath built us a synagogue. Then Jesus went with **them**. And when he was now not far from the house, the centurion sent **friends** to him, saying unto him Lord, trouble not thyself: for I am not worthy that thou shouldest enter under my roof: wherefore neither thought I myself worthy to come unto thee: but say in a word, and my servant shall be healed. For I also as a man set under authority, having under me soldiers, and I say unto one, Go and he goeth; and to another, Come, and he cometh; and to my servant, Do this, and he doeth it. When Jesus heard these things, he marveled at him, and turned him about, and said unto the people that followed him, I say unto you, I have not found so **great faith**, no not in Israel. And they that were sent, returning to the house, found the servant whole that had been sick."

We don't have to very far in that story to find out that it totally contradicts the story in Matthew. In Matthew it is stated that the centurion came to see Jesus, but in Luke it stated that the centurion never even left his house, that he sent **the elders of the Jews** out to meet Jesus.

Jesus then came to his house and before he ever got there the centurion sent out friends or servants to stop Jesus. They said speak the word from here and the servant will be healed in the house. Again, the centurion never left the house.

There appears to be a contradiction. Does the Bible contradict itself? No! It never does. But here's where liberals jump all over the Bible and say, "It's just a bunch of myths and fables. We can't believe it all". But the Word of God does **not** contradict itself. Where is the connection?

In the day in which this was written, when one man was sent out in the name of another man, it was just as if that man came himself. So much so that the Holy Spirit inspired Matthew to say that the **centurion** came himself. When actually he sent representatives in his name.

That gets me excited. Whose name have **we** been sent in? The name of Jesus. Glory to God! When I go somewhere and speak, it's **Jesus** speaking. Jesus told his disciples before he left, "These signs shall follow them that believe, **in my name**, they shall cast out devils." Do you think the devil comes out because you're such a hot shot? He comes out because you use that **name**.

In my name they shall lay hands on the sick and they shall recover. When you lay hands on somebody and speak the name of Jesus, you are standing in His place. Jesus said, "whatever you loose on earth, I'll loose in heaven whatever you bind on earth, I'll bind in heaven." (Matthew 18:18)

The name of Jesus is the key. **Jesus** came in His Father's name and did his Father's work. Jesus said one time, "To see me is to see the Father". But the crowning touch comes in John 13:20 where Jesus said, "Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that receiveth whomsoever I send receiveth me;" We've been sent in the name of Jesus.

I haven't lost my train of thought. We are still on God's ability and God's willingness. Jesus said this man had **great faith** and the definition of great faith, like Abraham, is being fully persuaded that God is able and **willing**. So where does that fit into the story?

Imagine for just a moment that you are a disciple, you are with Jesus and these representatives, the Jews, came to Jesus and said, "Lord, we have a master at home, a centurion. He has a sick servant. Will you come and heal him?"

I imagine one of the disciples turned to the other and one said, "I'll bet Jesus is going to tell him to bring him to the mass healing meeting next week. Jesus has been healing so many multitudes that he won't take the time to go heal **one** man."

But do you know what Jesus did? He said, "I'll go". I imagine those disciples went, "OH!" This was not a two-mile trip, like when he went to raise Lazarus from the dead. This was twenty miles, one way! A full days journey. They also had to **walk**. All the way there they are probably griping. Then they came within eye distance of the house and the centurion sent servants out to **stop** Jesus and had the nerve to say, "Don't trouble yourself". I can imagine one disciple turning to another and saying, "**Don't trouble yourself!** We just walked **twenty** miles out of our way and he says don't trouble yourself." The servants said, "Speak the word from **here** and the servant will be healed in there". I can see Peter saying, "Speak the word **here**? Why couldn't Jesus have spoken it back there in Jerusalem? Why did we have to come twenty miles to speak it?" While the disciples were murmuring among themselves, Jesus turned to his disciples and said "This is **great** faith".

We've looked at the story from outside the house, now let's look at it from the **inside**.

The centurion was in his house with his servant dying, wanting to help, but not knowing what to do. I imagine one day one of his servants said, "Sir, there is a man named Jesus Christ. I saw him raise a dead boy in a funeral procession, while I was in

Jerusalem. Jesus went over and touched him and he immediately sat up and was whole. The mourners had to all leave. Instead of sadness there was shouting in the streets.

Another servant said, "Sir, I also saw him heal a blind man. He came and put his hands on the blind man's eyes and that man could see instantly." A third servant said, " I saw a man with leprosy. Jesus touched him and the leprosy departed from him." The centurion must have questioned them further, "Is this true? Do you mean this?" The testimonies of the servants proved to the centurion that Jesus was able. So he sent the elders of the Jews to get Jesus knowing one thing: **Jesus was able**. Knowing that, Jesus walked twenty miles to prove he was willing.

I imagine the centurion walked around for two days wringing his hands. I'm sure he asked his servants over and over to repeat their stories about the miracles they had witnessed.

Then one day the servants were standing by the window and as they were looking outside they saw the elders returning. They told the centurion, “Sir, the elders of the Jews are coming. And sir, there are several men with them. And sir, Jesus is with them!”

The centurion runs over to the window and looks and says, “He’s **willing**, He’s **willing**. Glory to God, He’s **willing**! Tell him to stop right there. I don’t need anymore. Speak the word from **there** and my servant will be healed in **here**.”

The servants ran out and told Jesus, “Stop, stop Jesus. The master says if you’ll just speak the word from here the servant will be healed in there.” And Jesus said to his disciples, “That’s what I’ve been looking for. That’s great faith like Abraham had. I haven’t found this kind of faith at home.”

If Jesus came to your house, would he commend you for your faith. In all these cases, Jesus met the need. But the only one he commended was the centurion. Don’t doubt God’s willingness to meet your family crisis.

He is compassionate toward your spouse and children. Let your mouth shout God’s Word. Sickness and financial difficulties will crumble when you speak of his mercy.

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