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Sermon preached by Mr. J. Raven at "Ebenezer" chapel, Clapham
on Wednesday evening 4th. February, 1942

Text: Hebrews 11.6

"But without faith it is impossible to please Him: for he that cometh to God must believe that He is, and that He is a rewarder of them that diligently seek Him."

How these words have sorely tried the minds of some poor people! "Without faith it is impossible to please Him:". Where is my faith? What evidence have I that I possess the faith of God's elect, the faith of God? What do I know of the work and power of faith in my heart? O, these questions have put some of us to it at times, have they not? Sometimes we have looked within and have not been able to discern so much as a grain of faith. When we have thought about things we have turned over the Word, we have thought of the things of God, thought of the Being of God, and could not see in our hearts one grain of faith. A good deal of the opposite; a good deal of atheism and infidelity working; a mocking Ishmael there; a principle within that would make a mock of these sacred things. "Without faith it is impossible to please Him." How that word has seemed to strike a dying person dead, has seemed to forbid all hope! And the "Examine yourselves, whether ye be in the faith; prove your own selves. Know ye not your own selves, how that Jesus Christ is in you, except ye be reprobates?" (2 Cor. 13.5) Destitute of this faith of which the apostle speaks, we are dead, we are reprobates, we are destitute of any of the principles of godliness.

"Without faith it is impossible to please Him." There can be no worship, no service acceptable to God, not so much as a thought or a word, let alone an act, that is acceptable to God, if this faith is wanting. If we make a profession of religion, all our religion is a hollow sham if this faith is lacking. "Without faith it is impossible to please Him." There is no real prayer, no entering into heaven, into the holiest, as the apostle speaks, but by faith. A person may pray a prayer without any faith in his heart, but that prayer can never ascend to heaven. "Without faith it is impossible to please Him: for he that cometh to God must believe that He is, and that He is a rewarder of them that diligently seek Him." Now, how we do need to have an answer, and a divinely-given answer, to the anxious questions that arise in the exercised heart about this matter. O that I may know that I am a believer; that I am possessed of this living faith! I like the word in one of Erksine's sermons where, speaking of faith, he says, 'What am I to believe? I am to believe that

I am an unbeliever.' The first step in faith is to believe that I am an unbeliever. It seems like a contradiction, does it not? One of our hymnwriters speaks of a soul under conviction:

"Convinced and pierced through and through,
He thinks himself the sinner chief;
And, conscious of his mighty woe,
Perceives at length his unbelief;"

is convinced of his unbelief, realises, with pain of heart, that he is an unbeliever. That is a good step towards faith. The Spirit of God, we are told, shall come to convince the world of sin; "Of sin, because they believe not on Me", said the Lord Jesus. The Spirit of God convinces a sinner of his sin of unbelief, so that when a man is made to feel the presence and power of unbelief in his heart so as to be pained by it, distressed by it, who but the Spirit of God has made that discovery to him? This chiefest of all sin is unbelief and therefore if we are convinced of sin by the Holy Ghost we shall be convinced of this sin of unbelief, shall be made to know that we are unbelievers.

"O, could I but believe,
Then all would easy be;
I would, but cannot; Lord, relieve!
My help must come from Thee."

Erskine says, in the sermon to which I referred, that the next step in faith, is to believe that Christ can give me faith. What a great point this is - to believe that Christ can give me faith. Years ago that was a great word to me in the Epistle to the Ephesians 2. "By grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God". O, I thought, if faith were to be produced by me, if it were to grow native in my heart, there would be no hope whatever. I have not the least power to believe; nothing could I produce from this heart of mine but sin, unbelief. But when I saw there that faith is the gift of God, that He gives it, gives it freely to poor people, it brought a little hope. Yes, Christ gives faith to poor people who in themselves are nothing but unbelief. He gives faith. And believing that, Erskine says, the next thing is to come and ask Him for it. Do you know what these three steps are, to believe that you are an unbeliever, to believe that Christ can give you faith, and then to come and entreat Him to do it? O, Lord, do make me a believer, a true believer, for "without faith it is impossible to please Him." The mercy is that the God of grace gives what He requires of His people. He requires faith, He gives it, He works it by His Spirit in their hearts.

"Without faith it is impossible to please Him: for he that cometh to God must believe that He is." Now, when a person perceives the dreadful unbelief of his heart, this word seems as if it shuts the door and bars the way to the Throne of Grace. It seems as if it says, O, then you must not pray, an unbeliever

like you, a person with an atheistical heart such as you have, must not pray, "for he that cometh to God must believe that He is." Can you say that you "believe that He is" when you are so full of atheism and infidelity? when you have such questions as to the very being of God rise in your heart? when, as you bow your knee in prayer, this dreadful atheism is working at such a rate that you cannot utter a word? "He that cometh to God must believe that He is." But this word, after all, is not against a poor, struggling soul, a soul that would fain be struggling to the Throne of grace, and yet feels so beset by unbelief. This word is not so much against this soul as at first may appear. "For he that cometh to God". Think of that! Now do you ever, - with this dreadful burden of unbelief, with the guilt of this sin of unbelief upon you, - do you ever try? O, it is a poor sort of trying, you may feel, but do you ever try? Is there a poor, struggling endeavour in your heart to go and lay it before God? Here is your unbelieving heart, and you would bring it to the throne of grace if you could. You would do it as well as you can. Sometimes perhaps, as you lie upon your bed with this hard and unbelieving heart, you would bring it to the mercy seat. You try to tell the Lord about it, and pour out your complaint before Him. What is that? It is a coming to Him. It is a coming to God. In the prayer of the Pharisee there was no coming to God; but in the prayer of the Publican there was a coming to God, and in the prayer of this poor sinner who prays with the burden of an unbelieving heart, there is in those sighs, in those cries, in those midnight complaints, a coming to God. Then faith must be there, "for he that cometh to God must believe that He is." These cries, these poor struggling endeavours to lay the case before God, whence spring they, if not from faith?

"Can it be less than power divine,
Which animates these strong desires?"

Can it be anything less than the Spirit of grace and supplication that leads the soul to pour out the case before God thus? "He that cometh to God must believe that He is." O, then, though unbelief does so molest, though the guilt of it does so burden, though the heart be so hard and unfeeling - there is a believing that God is. Yes, this poor soul is, after all, a believer.

I remember at the moment a choice saying of Samuel Rutherford. He said, "If you cannot bring your heart to Jesus Christ, ask Him to come and fetch it." And it is so with poor, exercised people, they feel quite unable to lay their case before the Lord. But O, they say, 'Lord, do come to me! I am as the man by the pool, quite helpless; do come to me! I am too weak, too crippled by unbelief and by my confusion to come to Thee, but Thou canst come to me. "He that cometh to God must believe that He is." What a great thing it is

to believe that God is real, to believe it even in this feeble sort of way. Even though you may be full of doubt as to whether you are a believer, yet to have a grain of faith in your heart to believe that God is! What a great thing it is to believe that God is real, to believe it even in that feeble sort of way. Even though you may be full of doubt as to whether you are a believer, yet to have a grain of faith in your heart to believe that God is! enough faith to believe that God is! enough faith to come before Him with your unbelief and with your hardness of heart, and with all the enmity to Him which you find working within, Come to Him with it. It is a mercy to have sufficient faith for that. You "must believe that He is!" I say again, what a great thing it is to believe that God is. This is not merely assenting to the fact of the Being of God. Many people will say, 'O, yes, we believe there is a God', and yet this faith of which the apostle speaks is not in their hearts. The God in whom they believe is but the creature of their fancy, a god of their own invention, an idol god, not the living God; not the Jehovah of the Scriptures. But where the Spirit of God is, as the Spirit of faith, of wisdom, of revelation and of knowledge, where He is, there will be in the soul very solemn and real and deep impressions of the Being of God, the reality of His Being, the majesty of God. My old pastor used often to speak of an overwhelming sense of the majesty of God. If we believe that God is, our belief in Him will fill us with a solemn awe of His majesty. Where there is true faith in the Being of God, it is felt to be no trifling matter to have to do with God.

I was looking recently at the ten commandments. I think that perhaps we pay too little attention to them, they are too seldom read by us. But I was looking at the ten commandments and I noticed there first of all, "Thou shalt have no other gods before Me;" and it is very plain that in those ten commandments the first stress is laid upon the right attitude to God, right thoughts of God, and right conception of His Being. "Thou shalt have no other gods before Me." "Must believe that He is;" and if we are wrong here, if we have wrong conceptions of the Deity, where can we be right? It is very evident, as we read down those ten commandments, that the breaches of the nine commandments all spring out of the breach of the first: "Thou shalt have no other gods before Me." And if we are destitute of a true faith in God, I believe that it is then other things will creep in and take possession of our hearts, be trusted in and worshipped and loved before Him, and then we shall become triflers. This has taken

place among men in the earth ever since the beginning. Paul traces it in the first chapter of his epistle to the Romans - the dreadful drifting away from God. Why do men so lightly and profanely use the Name of God? Because they have no right conception of Him; they have no right conception of worship. Why do they desecrate His holy day? Because they have no right conception of Him, no love to Him, no light in Him. Then will follow inevitably the breach of all those commandments which relate to our attitude to our neighbour. We cannot be right in our attitude one toward another if we are wrong in our attitude to God. The world is filled with outrage, hatred, murder, distress, with every evil, because man is so wrong with God, so estranged from God, so destitute of a true faith in God. "He that cometh to God must believe that He is." Now if we are led to "believe that He is," there will be a sense, as I said just now, of His majesty. We shall believe Him to be holy, infinitely holy, infinitely just, infinitely righteous. O what a brightness there will appear in His glory! And as we believe this, that God is of "purer eyes than to behold evil", (Hab.1.13) we shall begin to discover, as the Spirit leads us thus, our own sinnership and our total unfitness for Him. He is pure and holy; I am unholy and impure in every part.

"He requires pure desires;

All the heart, or nothing".

I am altogether wrong; I am a sinner in thought, in word and act. "Wherewith shall I come before the Lord, and bow myself before the high God?" (Mic.6.6) I have not so much as a thought that is fit to appear before Him. There is not a deed of mine that is fit to be presented to Him. I am wholly a sinner, polluted through and through; a sinner in heart and life. This is the discovery that is made when the Spirit brings the knowledge of God into the heart, and causes a person to believe that God is. O, how it withers up a man's strength, withers up his fancied righteousness, withers up his wisdom, his self-confidence, his religion!

"He that cometh to God must believe that He is." And as this truth is made to shine in the heart and conscience, there is in the light of it the discovery of the great need that a person is in. O what need! What a poor person one is who is thus taught! In what poverty he finds Himself sunk, and sinking deeper! What sinful helplessness! What awful guiltiness! He is poor, he is needy. What does he need? Why, he needs that all his demerit shall be put away. Everything that unfits him for God he needs to be delivered from, and he needs to have bestowed upon him everything that can make him acceptable to God and fit for His presence. There is

his need. What a real and great need it is! O, the solemnity of it, to find that I have everything that unfits me for God, that I lack everything that would fit me for Him! In writing to Timothy the apostle Paul says, "There is one Mediator between God and man, the Man Christ Jesus." And that blessed Spirit Who makes a sinner utterly sick at the sight of himself, and brings him down into self-despair and self-condemnation, speaks in his heart and says, "Behold the Lamb of God". Isaiah, you know, after he had been led to depict a state of awful ruin, says he was inspired of the Lord to speak this word to the people, "Behold My Servant, whom I uphold; Mine Elect, in Whom My soul delighteth". O, poor sinner, who art heart-sick, and sinking into self-despair, because of what thou seest in thyself, "Behold My Servant, whom I uphold, Mine Elect, in Whom My soul delighteth." O, the Spirit of God turns a poor sinner's eyes away from self to Jesus and His blood, to Jesus, the divine and all-sufficient Mediator. "There is one Mediator between God and man"; and Christ, God in Christ, is faith's Object. It is the Spirit of God who, as He reveals Christ, enables a poor sinner to believe in Him. O, says the poor sinner that is led by the Spirit, this Christ is what I want! I want His salvation, I want His righteousness, I want Him as the Saviour of my poor, perishing soul. I want Him as my Advocate with the Father, I want Him in His High-Priestly intercession. O the deep want of Christ that is felt! "Thou, O Christ, art all I want." Here is the language of faith. Do you ever have such thoughts as these concerning the Lord Jesus, as you feel your ruin, as your mind is filled with despair of yourself, as you realise that you are just a ruined wretch without strength, a sinner, and a great sinner? Do you have your thoughts running, as it were, after Jesus Christ in this way? - "Thou, O Christ, art all I want."

O, is there sometimes a going out to Him in the promises? Bunyan (in *Grace Abounding*) spoke of 'flowings' towards the promises: the hungerings and thirstings, the desires and longings of the soul going out to Christ in the promises of the everlasting covenant; in the invitations and declarations of the gospel, in those Scriptures where His glory and His grace are set forth. Do you know what it is to get such a glimpse of Christ in the Scripture sometimes so that your heart begins in desire to move toward Him? Here is the exercise of living faith. Feeble it may seem to be in its actings, but yet a living faith; and remember, even in the feeble actings of faith, as they may seem to be, there is the power of omnipotence, for this faith is of the operation of God the Holy Spirit, and there is almightiness in it; it is the power of God that has worked it in the soul. Then, where this faith in Jesus is, there will be a thirst and a hungering that cannot be satisfied without Him. One speaks of a thirst no earthly

stream can satisfy, a hungering that must feed on Christ or die, and every glimpse that faith has of Jesus Christ increases its hunger for Christ, strengthens its desires after Christ. You get an inkling of what Christ is, in His Person, in His finished work, in His wondrous grace, and your heart will run to Him in desires: O, that I might know Him! O, that He would come into my heart, that He might dwell there by faith! O, to be enabled to say, "My beloved is mine and I am His!" "My Lord, and my God!" One said,

"Come, and claim us as Thy portion,
And let us lay claim to Thee."

Where this faith is, it is not just a thought, it is not just an inward feeling, it will work, it will bear fruit. We read in this chapter of people who believed, and we find in every case that their faith had a very great deal to do with their actions. By faith they did this or that; by faith they spoke; by faith they looked for a city. Their faith moved them in their life, regulated their conduct; and so one evidence of the reality of faith is that it works, and works by love. When the apostle wrote to one and another of the churches, and commended them for their faith, what was it he commended? Not a groundless faith, not a mere profession of faith, not even a strict orthodoxy of profession. No! what he commended was faith in the fruit of it, faith in the labour of it. "Without faith it is impossible to please Him: for he that cometh to God must believe that He is, and that He is a Rewarder of them that diligently seek Him".

A Rewarder! What He bestows upon those who seek Him is not bestowed upon them for any merit of theirs, for any worthiness in them, it is bestowed freely, that is, without money and without price. It is given undeserved, unbought "Let him that is athirst come. And whosoever will, let him take the water of life freely." (Rev.22.17) He is the Rewarder. O, such a Rewarder He is of them that diligently seek Him, for He bestows freely; He bestows undeservedly. A poor soul who receives the benefit says, 'This came to me, unworthy me; I did not deserve the least of it; I deserved the curse, and He gave me a blessing; I deserved hell, and He has given me heaven. I do nothing but sin in myself; He has given me holiness in His Son. I am unrighteous; He has given me righteousness. I am guilty; He has given me a blood-bought pardon.' He has given all the gifts of His grace. Solomon gave according to his royal bounty, but God gives according to His own glory, "according to His riches in glory by Christ Jesus." "He is a Rewarder

of them that diligently seek Him." Yes, the feeblest of those who seek Him; those who feel themselves the most worthless, the most out of the way, the most unlikely to receive the benefit. "He is a Rewarder of them that diligently seek Him." Amen

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