

Voices: Practical faith is living the impossible

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Now without faith it is impossible to please God, since the one who draws near to him must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who seek him (Hebrews 11:6 CSB).

The word “impossible” is used in seven different passages of Scripture. Three times, it is used in the Gospels to say salvation is impossible without God’s intervention. Salvation cannot be obtained through human effort. Salvation is only made possible by God.

A rich young man’s struggle

On one occasion a rich young man came to Jesus and wanted to know how he could have eternal life. Jesus told him to keep the commandments, and the young man said he had kept all of them.

He wanted to know what was still lacking in his life. Jesus told him to sell all he had and give it to the poor. Jesus exposed what the rich young man really was worshipping. He wasn’t worshipping God alone. His heart was set on earthly possessions.

Then Jesus said to his disciples: “Truly I tell you, it will be hard for a rich person to enter the kingdom of heaven. Again I tell you, it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich person to enter the kingdom of God” (Matthew 19:23-24 CSB).

The story continues: When the disciples heard this, they were utterly astonished and asked, “Then who can be saved?”

Jesus looked at them and said, “With man this is impossible, but with God all things are possible” (Matthew 19:25-26 CSB).

The more material wealth you have, the harder it is to trust in God alone and not in the power of what your wealth can achieve.

The disciples thought, as is common, that wealth was a sign of God’s blessing, and if you are being blessed by God, then you are loved by God. If you are loved by God, then you are saved.

Jesus flipped all of this on its head. Without faith, it is impossible to please God.

Things that are impossible

This word “impossible” is used three other times in the book of Hebrews.

Hebrews 6:4 says it is impossible to be saved if you reject the way of salvation. Hebrews 6:18 says it is impossible for God to lie. Hebrews 10:4 says it is impossible for animal blood to take away our sins.

This same word is used in Acts 14:8 to say it was impossible for a man to walk who had been born lame. The point is it can’t be done. It is not possible.

Without faith it is impossible to please God. You must have faith to please God.

So then, what is faith?

What is faith?

“Now faith is the reality of what is hoped for, the proof of what is not seen. For by it our ancestors won God’s approval” (Hebrews 11:1-2 CSB).

To the author of Hebrews, faith is the “reality” and “proof” of the existence of something that at the moment cannot be seen. Faith is having complete confidence. It is living as if something is real, even if it hasn’t happened yet. Faith is choosing to trust even when the circumstances are not clear.

This is why in Romans 4, Paul said the Old Testament patriarchs were justified by their faith in the promise—a promise yet to be seen. These Old Testament saints hadn’t seen the object of their salvation yet, but they trusted in God’s promise to provide it one day, which he did in Jesus Christ.

Just like the patriarchs, our faith looks forward with hope in that which still is not seen. Our faith is not only in who Christ is and what he has done but also in what he has promised to do.

Our salvation is already and not yet. We are saved from the judgment of sin, but we eagerly await the fullness of our salvation when we finally will be rid of sin and when Christ finally redeems creation itself.

Faith acted out

For believers, it is essential for faith to impact how we go about our daily lives.

Many people who attend weekly worship gatherings are in reality practical atheists. What do I mean by saying they are practical atheists? I mean they come to worship on Sunday but deny God by how they live their lives the rest of the week.

Brennan Manning said, “The greatest single cause of atheism in the world today is Christians who acknowledge Jesus with their lips then walk out the door and deny him by their lifestyle. That is what an unbelieving world simply finds unbelievable.”

Do people know by the way you live your life that you have faith in God?

Does the existence of God impact how you are living your life?

The call is to live with purpose. Live in the reality of God's existence by allowing the reality of God's existence to permeate every facet of your life.

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