

Urban Legends

Faith Can Fix Anything

There's always been folk legends and myths floating around every culture and society. They were passed along from generation to generation.

In the past those legends spread slowly but today nothing happens slowly. We call contemporary folklore "Urban Legends" and they spread with lightening speed.

One shows up in somebody's email in box and with in milliseconds it's been forwarded to the 200 people in their address book. What used to take years to spread now happens in a matter of moments.

SMB Definitions gives this definition of an urban legend. "An urban legend is a tale of contemporary folklore that purports to be true and is often designed to elicit an emotional response from the audience."

One famous Urban Legend is the hands of God. This first circulated in 2004 and was said to be from hurricane Charlie. In the latest incarnation a meteorologist at channel 36 news in Kentucky said similar photos have been taken all over the world. This is actually a 2 minute creation using the clone tool in Photoshop.

Here's another. Dumping nail polish remover in your gas tank will increase your mileage. It doesn't work but it might do a job on gaskets and O rings.

How about this one; Vans shoes have Stars of David on the bottom meaning "Stomp the Jews" because the company was started by neo-Nazis.

The list goes on. Colonel Sanders left all his millions to the KKK. Colonel Sanders had a policy of giving free food to any homeless so when he died the company reorganized and changed the name to KFC to get out of the obligation. Drinking bleach will help you beat a drug test. Starbucks refused to give products to our troops in Iraq because they opposed the war.

Urban legends keep coming non stop and unfortunately most people don't take the time to find out if they're true or not.

Well, there's a other sphere of urban legends and that's in the realm of religion. Christians have their own urban legends that get circulated around.

Do any of these sound familiar?

NASA scientists discovered a lost day in time referred to in the Book of Joshua.
Alabama redefined the value of pi to 3 to bring it in line with Biblical precepts.
Scientists drilling in Siberia punched through to Hell.
A group known as 'The Second Coming Project' is seeking to clone Jesus from the DNA of holy relics.
Atheist Madalyn Murray O'Hair is circulating a petition to have religious broadcasting banned from American airwaves.

And one of my all time favorites Airlines will not pair Christian pilots and co-pilots out of fear that The Rapture will snatch away both crewmembers capable of landing the flight.

Most of those legends are innocuous at best. Most people aren't going to lose their faith in God when they find out those aren't true.

But there's a whole other list of urban legends floating around that can be spiritually deadly.

There are spiritual opinions that seem to float around as freely as internet legends that have no basis in fact, but are believed by way too many people.

How many of you are fans of the show "Myth Busters?" I've really appreciated some of the things they've tackled. I was concerned about my cell phone ringing and sparking an explosion while I was filling my car with gas. They proved that wasn't possible.

On the other hand, they did show that it was possible to flunk a drug test if you ate poppy seed bagels the day before.

But one thing you have to say about Myth Busters is this, they always go out of their way to check out the facts. They don't rest until they can prove something one way or another. They always have to have some standard to use to prove or disprove the myth they're studying.

Over the next 5 weeks we want to use the sure standard of the Bible to challenge these "Spiritual Urban Legends."

Today we want to look at the myth, Faith Can Fix Anything.

I. The Myth: If We Have Enough Faith We'll Always Be Successful In Life.

There's a group of well know TV type preachers that say that faith is really a positive mental

outlook that has the power to change our reality.

They include Kenneth Copeland, Kenneth Hagin, Morris Cerello, Benny Hinn, Creflo Dollar, Joyce Meyer, and a number of others.

I only mention their names because they're on the public airwaves, their books are bestsellers, and they influence a lot of people.

If I say something publicly obviously it's up for scrutiny. The same is true for these guys.

Here's a basic synopsis of their teaching:

1. God creates by using His faith through the power of spoken words.
2. Man is a "little god" capable of creating in the same fashion as did God.
3. Man, through faith-filled words, creates or causes to come to pass that which is spoken. Thus by one's spoken words health/healing and wealth/prosperity are created.

The bottom line is that if you just have enough faith you can fix your whole life. No more sickness, financial problems, or family problems.

Have faith, say the right words, and your whole life will all work out the way you want it to.

The myth is that everything will be OK if you just have enough faith. Not necessarily faith in anything of substance, just kind of a generic faith in faith. Have faith that life will always work out and your positive attitude will be a self-fulfilling wish.

Arthur Levine has written a book entitled "The Magic of Faith," which he'd love to sell you on his web site faith123.com.

Here's what he says:

I figured out how to strip away my inhibitions, unlock my imagination, and use it to help me build my faith so that I could cope with my problems.

In my case I used my imagination to invent a Magic Genie Faith Builder named Glorious. He has been a big help to me by revealing 99 Magical Keys that have helped me find my faith. Glorious has revealed to me that:

1. *Sometimes it takes a little imagination to believe in what we cannot see or understand.*
2. *Only God can be in control all the time*

3. *We all have a right to discover our own path to becoming a Person of Faith in our own way*
4. *We are all good & worthwhile people who are entitled to have faith.*

When you find your faith you will:

1. *Start to find peace of mind.*
2. *Feel more secure.*
3. *Discover the beauty in life.*
4. *Begin to feel wonderful.*

Talk about a “feel good” version of faith. Is that true? There’s certainly enough high powered spokesmen for that view, but the question that still has to be answered is, “Is it true?”

I. The Myth: If We Have Enough Faith We’ll Always Be Successful In Life

II. The Biblical Reality: Faith Is Trusting God To Fulfill His Purposes

First let’s try to define faith. What are we really talking about?

Webster gives this definition.

1. allegiance to duty or a person
2. belief and trust in and loyalty to God
3. firm belief in something for which there is no proof
4. something that is believed with strong conviction; especially : a system of religious beliefs, ie “The Christian faith”

It all depends on where your coming from as how you view this thing called faith.

Some people say, “You just have to believe.” The object of your faith isn’t important. For others faith is a subjective feeling. They test the strength of their faith by the extent of their emotional experiences. Other people reduce faith to right opinions. To them faith is measured by the way you respond to certain questions.

This morning we’re not interested in Webster’s definition of faith, or anyone else’s for that matter.

What we want to know is what the God who created all says.

Turn to Hebrews 11 page 1069

The Bible defines faith this way, **Read vs 1**

This is interesting because this is the only place in the New Testament where we're given a definition of faith. You might say it's more a description of the characteristics of faith.

Our English word "substance" comes from the Latin, *sub* meaning "under" and *stans* meaning "standing." The basic meaning of "substance" is "foundation." Something that stands under to fortify.

That makes "substance" a good choice to translate the original Greek word. The New Testament was written in Greek and the Greek here is *hupostasis*.

It's a compound word made up of the preposition *hupo*, which means "under" and the verb *histemi*, which means "to stand."

So faith is the foundation of things hoped for. Faith is the place to stand.

Faith is assurance. It's not a subjective feeling. It's not a question of how sincere we are. Everything depends on the truth of what we believe.

Faith is the firm ground we stand on because it's based on what God has promised us.

Faith isn't nebulous, it's not uncertain, it's not whatever you want it to be, it's the present essence of a future reality.

So faith is the substance of things hoped for, *the evidence of things not seen*.

The translators of the NKJV used the word "evidence" because the Greek term *elegchos* is a Greek legal idiom meaning "evidence" or "proof."

The New Century Version says, *Faith means being sure of the things we hope for and knowing something is real even if we do not see it.*

God has made promises of blessing to us in the Bible.
Faith means we're convinced of their reality.

Most people build their lives on the realities of things that are visible. That can make these words seem strange to us.

What we need to remember is, the world we see is only a temporary reality. In a sense it's not the real world at all.

Sometimes having faith in God can bring us into conflict with the material world.

If we're prioritizing things which can't be seen over things that can be seen sometimes we're going to seem a little strange to people. But we need to be very careful of letting what other people think of us determine how we live.

We don't want to be purposely weird. Sometimes I meet Christians who are so strange that they cut themselves off from the opportunities to communicate their faith to the people around them.

But if you actually take faith seriously and live a life that trusts God you're never going to quite fit the mould of our culture.

What happens in Hebrews 11 is we're given a whole list of people from the Bible who lived by faith. And what you see as you go through this chapter is different people, at different times in history, facing different struggles, and how each one handled those troubles by faith.

Each one had faith in God so their faith was in the right object.

Their faith became the solid ground, the foundation for them to stand on.

We tend to want to look at faith as something to get me through life and help me to feel better.

The problem is if you're life's goal is to be happy and to feel good you're going to get real frustrated. There's always going to be something that gets in the way of your goal.

Ecclesiastes 5:10 puts it so well from a material stand point. *He who loves silver will not be satisfied with silver; Nor he who loves abundance, with increase.*

If money and stuff are your heart's desire you'll always be on a quest for more. You'll get these little flashes of satisfaction that will be gone in no time.

If feeling good is your end goal you're going to start chasing the wind looking for those good times that you'll find are fewer and far between.

The very thing we want, crave, and desire is going to be the very thing that eludes us if we make it our priority.

If that describes you this morning let me challenge you with a whole new radical way of thinking.

Instead of a goal of trying to please yourself, try living for what you were created for in the first place, to please God.

Listen to Colossians 1:16 *For by Him all things were created that are in heaven and that are on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or principalities or powers. All things were created through Him and for Him.*

You know what that means? It means that you and I were created by God for God. We weren't created by God for us. And when we try to live like we were created for us we come up empty and unfulfilled.

Now watch this. If we were created by God and for God and we live our lives to please God we're going to have all those illusive things we missed out on by living for self; meaning, purpose, fulfillment, inner joy and peace.

Let me bring you a newsflash here. God isn't here for us, we're here for Him.

We act like He's here for us. We think He's here for us. We say "God, bless me, care for me, make my life go the way I want it to."

God has done so much for us. He's created us, He's sent His Son to be our Savior. He's given us great and precious promises. But He doesn't exist for us. We exist for Him.

Our whole purpose is by God, for God.

So how do you please God? **Read vs 6**

Here's what pleases God, faith. First of all you have to believe that He is. You have to believe that He exists, that

He's the one true God, not God as you understand Him or want Him to be but God as He's revealed Himself in creation and in the Bible.

And, you have to believe that He's the rewarder of those who diligently seek Him.

Maybe today you'd say, "Ed, I'm not sure there is a God or if there is that I could actually know Him."

If that's where you are today remember, He's a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him. I'd challenge you to begin with this simple prayer. "God if you actually exist help me to know for sure. Help me to know You're real."

I believe that anybody who prays that prayer in sincerity is going to get an answer.

And then I'd follow up with this challenge. The Bible claims to be the very word of God. If it is it's going to be obvious. Begin to read it. If you don't have a Bible please take one of ours that we hand out here, there's more in the back.

Begin in the Gospel of John, the fourth book in the New Testament and pray a similar prayer. "God if You're real and this is Your book show me."

God's not running around incognito. He's not in the witness protection program somewhere. He's not silent.

God' our Creator loves us and has a message for us to hear.

He's a God who has made us in His own image which is why we can think rationally and communicate.

The Bible claims to be His communication to us and here's what it tells us. It begins in the beginning and tells us we have a Creator. We're not cosmic accidents. Our lives have meaning and value.

But it goes on to explain how we've wandered from our Creator and done what we wanted to do instead of what He told us to do. We've tried to please ourselves instead of trying to please Him.

The Bible calls that sin. That sin which we're all committed to varying degrees has earned us something. The Bible says, *The wages of sin is death.*

God is life and light, sin brings death and darkness. In fact the Bible says sin brings eternal death. Separation from God in hell forever.

See, sin's a whole lot more serious than we realize. In fact we think sin is so inconsequential that we could do a few good things and make up for it.

The Bible says that it's so deadly that Jesus Christ had to die in our place to pay for it.

Here's what it says, *For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life. For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through Him might be saved.*"

It says, *the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.*

Faith is the key because faith says "I believe you God. I believe You and I'm helpless to change my eternal destiny. God my trust is in what you did by sending your Son to die on a cross and rise from the dead for me."

"God, I'm not here to brag about my goodness I'm here to worship You for your goodness."

You want to please God? There's only one way, faith.

So then, if I have real faith in God will He fix all my problems? Can I create my own reality by positive thinking?

Read vs 32-35a

There's some people in the Bible who had some great victories over what seemed like impossible odds. Their stories are compelling. Their true. There's so many lessons we can learn from them.

We don't have time to look at each of these individuals in detail but lets just look at what happened to one, Gideon.

Gideon was a military commander in Israel around 1250 BC. The country had been invaded by the Midianites. God says, Gideon, you're my man to drive the Midianites out.

Gideon said, "Who am I? I'm a nobody."

God said, "That's the point. This one's going to be all about Me," and just so there was no mistake he whittled down Gideon's army from 32,000 men to 300 men.

Gideon's men were outfitted with only two weapons, trumpets and pitchers with torches inside. They surrounded the Midianite camp and on cue all broke their pitchers, held up their torches and blew their trumpets.

Judges 7:22 says, *When the three hundred blew the trumpets, the LORD set every man's sword against his companion throughout the whole camp.*

The Midianites were routed and God got all the glory.

There's plenty of accounts like that in the Bible.

Sometimes I think we make the mistake of only teaching those kinds stories to our kids. Sunday School lessons are full of these wonderful accounts of God miraculously answering prayer and everybody living happily ever after.

Then our kids get a little older and they see that those aren't the norm and they begin to doubt that what they were taught was true after all.

We need to give them the whole story. Don't stop in the middle of verse 35 or you'll get an unrealistic picture. Because we have enough faith doesn't mean that we won't have heartaches, sorrows, and disappointments in our lives.

Read vs 35b-38

For every one in the Bible who was brought back from the dead millions have died. One guy was delivered from the mouths of lions but tens of thousands of others met their death by the lions.

I'm excited about the promise that I'm going to heaven when I die because Jesus Christ paid for my sins. And when I do it will be great to talk to Gideon, and Barak, and David. No question about it.

But there's another bunch of men and women that I'm even more anxious to meet. That's the others. The others who didn't get the miraculous deliverance. The others who remained faithful to the point of death. The others who didn't give up on God because He didn't do life their way.

Sometimes God rescues people who are on the brink of death. Sometimes He miraculously heals people. Sometimes He straightens out the hard stuff in a person's life and it all works

out the way the wanted it to.

But those are the exceptions not the rule. The exceptions are there to remind us that God's very much alive and well but then we're called to live by faith.

Faith may not fix all of our problems but there's some things faith will do.

Faith will connect us to God. **Turn to John 1 Page 938 Read vs 12-13**

Notice how clear the Bible is. If we're going to be connected to God, if we're going to be His children, born in His family we need to receive Him. The way we do that is to believe in His name. It's by faith.

The words "believe" and "faith" are used 500 times in the Bible. There are 150 verses in the New Testament that say salvation is by faith.

We come to God by faith, we connect to God by faith, and we please God by faith.

When we started Faith Community Church we said what do want to be the foundational verse for this ministry? If someone said, "Where would I go in the Bible to find the Cliff Notes version of what you guys are all about, where would it be?"

And here's what we decided from day 1. *Ephesians 2:8-9 For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast.*

That's clear!

So faith may not fix all our problems but it connects us to God and number two, it guides us through life.

Proverbs 3:5-6 Trust in the LORD with all your heart, And lean not on your own understanding: In all your ways acknowledge Him, And He shall direct your paths.

Psalms 119:105 Your word is a lamp to my feet And a light to my path.

God and His truth will guide us. We'll know what to do and what not to do. We'll know how to respond even when life doesn't play out the way we would have ordered it.

Are you a person of faith today? If it's a biblical faith you're not going to believe that you'll always be healthy, wealthy, and happy in life.

But you will believe that God not only exists, but He's active in our world and in our lives doing what He knows is best for eternity.