

Most of us try to live by certain standards and so many of us tie this into our relationship to God. We just want to do everything well enough so that we'll please him and so our relationship with him will be right. And many of us end up in our lives as slaves to this whole business of standards. Always trying to live up to certain standards, to please my dad, or please my mum, or please my peers, or please my professors, or please God. And many of us get into the whole religious business that way. We decide the way to make things right with God the way to make our relationship right with him is to be as good as we possibly can be. And of course brothers and sisters, God in this book just put an absolute end to all of that.

He just ended all that because he said, "Listen, by works of law, by living up to standards no man will be justified. You'll never get into a right relationship with your peers or with me by trying to do works of law, by trying to live up to other people's standards. That will never make you feel right with me." And really loved ones, God ended all that silly infantile attitude to Christianity that so many of us have received and inherited.

You would agree with me, that most of the people who don't come to church believe that to get right with God you ought to be a very moral person. Isn't that right? And most of them think of all of us as very moral people. You know, they always think, "Oh yeah," – in fact, in Ireland we had a phrase we described Christians as 'good living' people, 'good living people,'5 people who lived the good life. And it seems to me that many people think that a Christian is one who is morally better than everybody else.

Now that may be as a result of God's life in him but the primary mark of a Christian is not that he's a good person but that he actually trusts God as his loving Father. And you remember that that's what we've been discovering is the only right way to get into a good relationship with God. Not to try to be good, be good, be good. Not trying to live up to standards of your parents, and God, and everybody else, but trusting God. And you get that dear ones, if you'd like to look at it in Romans 4:22. You remember God is talking about Abraham here and he says, "That is why his faith was 'reckoned to him as righteousness.'"

Abraham was 100 years old, Sarah was 90. God said you're going to have a son, be the father of many nations. Abraham believed God and his faith was reckoned to him as righteousness. He trusted God as his loving father. And that's the only way to get right with God really, to trust him as your loving Father.

If you say to me, "Oh now, what about with the kids? If they tell a lie do you not tell them that lying is a wrong thing and they have to live up to a standard of truth?" Well loved ones, no doubt we have to bring before them their responsibility of not telling lies, but do you see we ought to explain why? We tell lies because we don't trust God to take care of the reaction of other people to our failure, or we don't trust God that he will work out our circumstances for us, and we think we have to give him a bit of help. We miss the assignment, and we realize that the grade is going to go down, and so we lie in order to get round that, because we don't trust God that he will circumvent that, and that if we really repent, whatever he allows to come to us, as a result of our

failure, will be right for us.

And it seems to me when we deal with each other we should not be continually saying, “Oh, you must live up to this standard, or you must live up to that standard.” But look, by not doing this you’re really not trusting God. That’s really what’s wrong and that’s the important thing to do, to really trust God.

You know that last Sunday we saw that really that’s the way we’re to live. It’s not just a matter of one past act of the will whereby you believe that God will accept you because Jesus has died for you. It’s not just one past act, but it’s a continual living trusting God. You remember, Romans 1:17 says, “The justified live by faith.” That is they live by trusting God day-by-day and brothers and sisters, its true whenever you feel in a wrong relationship with God it’s probably because you’ve stopped trusting him in some area of your lives. And you know we say, “Oh, it’s because we sinned.” Yes, but you sin because you don’t trust him. You tell a lie because you don’t trust him. You covet because you don’t trust that he will give you what you need. You’re greedy because you don’t trust that he will give you the things when you need them. And it’s trusting God that continues to enable God to make us feel right with himself.

You remember that last day we took that verse Romans 4:18, if you’d like to look at it and we were just looking at some of the factors involved in living by this kind of faith. And Romans 4:18, you see it’s, “In hope he believed against hope,” and we saw for instance that it couldn’t be just human hope it had to be divine hope and that human hope was based on the past record of our achievements and our poor human abilities and therefore we hoped on the basis of those that something might happen. But divine hope is a sure certain expectation that God is going to do something in our lives on the basis of his past good record. And we saw that divine hope was what we used when we were trusting God, it wasn’t human hope. It wasn’t eking out divine hope with human hope.

We saw too, you remember, “In hope he believed against hope,” that it is faith that is not hope. In other words hope is old Abraham saying, “Yeah, well God has been good he’s made all the babies in the world, he’s made all the mothers of the world. Yeah, probably in time he will enable Sarah my 90 year old wife to have a child and in time, centuries hence, I will be the father of many nations.” And that is hope, a sure and certain expectation that something is going to happen in the future. And faith, you remember, is an absolute sure confidence that the thing has already happened because God has said it has happened.

And you remember we got that from 4:18 there if you look at the Greek in it. “In hope he believed against hope, that he should become the father of many nations.” But actually the Greek is, you remember, “eis to genesthai” and it really means, in hope he believed against hope so that he became the father of many nations. So that he was the father of many nations. It has already taken place and that faith is that, an absolute confidence that the thing has already taken place. Why? Because God has said that it has taken place. You remember we traced it through with old Abraham. You might like to look at it because I know this is new to some of us and it sounds like just the old 'double think' of Orwell. [George Orwell, author of the book "Nineteen Eighty-four"]

So maybe we should look at it, Genesis 17:5. There you have the promise you see. Before the thing ever took place you have the promise that God gave. “No longer shall your name be Abram, but your name shall be Abraham; for I have made you the father of a multitude of nations.” God said, “I have made you,” so Abraham believes it and it’s already so. In the moment Abraham believes it, it is already so. God says, “For I have made you the father of a multitude of nations.” And once God

says this thing to you it's done. The thing is done already.

George Muller had maybe 4,000 kids to look after in orphanages that God led him to start in England in about, I think, the 19th century. And he would sit them down at the table, and this happened one particular day, he sat them down at the table and they all sat down. The larder was empty; there was no food in the larder but God had said to Muller, "There will be food on this table for this meal." And so Muller sat down and thanked God for the food and they said grace, and there was no food. And they finished grace and all the children were sitting there and the knock came to the door and the baker came in with the food. It was a gift that somebody had given to the orphanages.

But Muller sat down and thanked God for the thing because God had said, "You have it," and so Muller believed. And faith is believing that you have the thing because God has told you, you have it. If I say to my wife, "You know that green coat of yours, well I put \$5 in it and I know you're going to Sears would you get me this?" She won't have to feel in the pocket to see, "Did he put it there?" She'll say, "He said he put it there. Okay, I go to Sears and I make provision to buy this thing knowing that I have \$5 there. I've never seen the \$5 but his word is good. I trust him." Now do you see it's that with God? When God says a thing has been done then it has been done. It's a historical fact at that moment loved ones. It's done already.

Now do you see that the reason for this is that the cause of all our lack in the world and all our need is because we rejected God? And because we rejected him he withdrew from the world, you remember, the supernatural life of the Holy Spirit, the 'tree of life' that was to supply all our needs. Now, while that 'tree of life' is withdrawn Satan can say to us, "You're in need, you're in lack. You need this, you need that. You're absolutely dependent on me and the world to fulfill your needs." But do you see that the Bible says that God has reconciled the world to himself through Jesus' death.

In other words, Jesus died for the whole world so God no longer has to condemn the world to destruction and no longer had to keep his life back from it. So ever from Jesus rose to the Father and presented his blood before the Father, the Father has replaced the tree of life, the Holy Spirit. And the whole world is reconciled to God and the tree of life is available here among us. And so we only have to turn to that tree of life and receive immediately what we need.

Now Satan's only power now is one of deception. He says, "Look at the way things look. Look at the way things appear. Now is there a tree of life here?" And if we believe 'that', then the tree of life is not available to us. But if we believe what God has said is true, then the tree of life, the Holy Spirit, and all that we need is here available in our world today because, you see, God has already reconciled the world to himself. The world has already been put in Jesus and raised to God's right hand and so God's right hand is very close. My right hand, it's very close to anything that appears there. If this hand is here, the right hand can grab it. Now, we're at God's right hand in Jesus and every fulfillment of every need is there.

Now you can see that loved ones, if you look at it in 2 Corinthians 5:18-19, "All this is from God, who through Christ reconciled us to himself and gave us the ministry of reconciliation; that is, in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting to us the message of reconciliation." In other words, God has already reconciled the world to himself, there's no reason why he can't give us whatever we need. Indeed, it's all there. And that's really what Jesus meant when he said – oh it's Matthew 3:2 if you look at it, one of the first things that Jesus said when he arrived upon the earth. "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is

at hand.” And the Greek word “aenggiken” means not 'is at hand' in that it's just round the corner, but it means the kingdom of heaven is right here. And Jesus meant, “Ever since I have come to earth with my ability to heal blind eyes and to heal lame legs, ever since I have come to earth, the kingdom of heaven is right here among you. It's right next door to you. It's just at your right hand. The moment you turn to it there is the kingdom of heaven. And so dear ones, immediately God says a thing, that thing is done as far as he is concerned.

Now you see that's what Hebrews 11:1 means if you look at it. Hebrews 11:1, it's a statement that God makes here about faith. Hebrews 11:1, “Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen.” Now, the 'conviction' -- the word conviction is a Greek word “hupostasis” and it really literally means the substantiating of things unseen and that's what faith is. Faith knows that in Jesus the whole thing has been reconciled. In Jesus my mother is already well. In Jesus the family situation is already healed. In Jesus my job is already secure. In Jesus my financial difficulties have already been overcome. Now faith is the substantiating of those things. It's the saying, “These things are so. I believe they're so. I'm going to walk on in the assurance that these things are so.” But faith is that loved ones.

Faith is not going forward saying, “Yeah, I believe God can do it.” There's no question of that. Any critic of history will look back and see God can do those things. But that isn't faith. Faith is thanking God that he has already done the thing knowing that the moment he speaks it, it is done. God says, “Let there be light,” there was light. Immediately God says it, it's done and we walk on in that absolute assurance.

Now you see that's the way these Old Testament giants worked. Judges 7:15, when God said a thing to them they believed it and they went ahead, not believing it would come to pass, but believing it had actually come to pass. “When Gideon heard the telling of the dream and its interpretation, he worshiped; and he returned to the camp of Israel, and said, ‘Arise; for the Lord has given the host of Midian into your hand.’” Now he said, “Has given the host of Midian.” Now the Midianites were out there in their thousands but old Gideon says, “Arise; for the Lord has given them into your hands.”

Now loved ones, that's the only way old Gideon had any courage to go out there. He went out there because he knew the army was already defeated. And it was so with old Jonah you remember. Let's look at him in there just trying to get air in the fish's stomach, Jonah 2:1, “Then Jonah prayed to the Lord his God from the belly of the fish.” And then look at Verse 9, “But I with the voice of thanksgiving will sacrifice to thee; what I have vowed I will pay. Deliverance belongs to the Lord!” And Jonah said, “I with the voice of thanksgiving will sacrifice to thee.” And he thanked God that he had already answered him. Look in Verse 2, “Saying, ‘I called to the Lord, out of my distress, and he answered me; out of the belly of Sheol I cried, and thou didst hear my voice.’” And he's sitting in there looking at the old tonsils of the fish and yet he's thanking God that God has already delivered him.

Now loved ones, that is faith. Faith is believing that God has already done the thing even before the fact is obvious to the human eye. In the eyes of faith the thing is already done. So I'm sure some of the boys were so sure that the walls of Jericho were already down that they probably bumped their noses on the walls of Jericho on their way in. They were so confident. They were so confident that God already put them down that they probably just tore up the old walls immediately they shouted.

Now do you see that is what faith is? It's an absolute confidence that God in Christ has already done the thing so the thing is already real right there. I remember one dear old preacher at a summer camp that I once spoke at saying, "If the Holy Spirit tells you to jump through that wall you jump and he makes a hole." You know, it took me a while to see, yeah, yeah. And then I realized, that's it! When God says the thing is done then you walk in absolute confidence that it is done.

Now do you see loved ones that a lot of us don't walk that way and so in our finances, and in questions of sickness, we're praying to God, "Lord, will you help me? Will you help me?" But we're actually providing – making provision for him not helping us. We're not making provision for him helping us and we're expected to walk believing that God has already done the thing.

Now here's an important thing: if the men round Jericho were walking by faith they might have bumped their noses on the wall in their confidence. But if they were walking by faith none of them would have knocked themselves out. In other words, they'd have got it just right. Just the moment God did it they would be there. And you see if the priests were walking by faith through the Jordan some of them might have got their feet wet because they were right on the second that God was doing the thing, but if they were walking on faith none of them drowned. They didn't keep walking, walking until it got up above their nose. If they were walking by faith they were right there at the moment that God said they should be there.

Now do you see that brings us onto the other factor in walking by faith? We have to believe God for what he wants for us, not for what we want for ourselves. Now those words are important. There are five of them and they're in Romans 4:18. Old Abraham, you see, didn't just say, "Oh, it would be nice for me to have a child. I'd like to be the father of many nations." No, there are five important words that apply to all of us who intend to walk by faith. Romans 4:18, "In hope he believed against hope, that he should become the father of many nations," the five words, 'As he had been told.'

Now you can only have faith for what is God's will for you. We can only believe God for what is his will for us. Now many of us are prepared to take God as a miracle worker and many of us are prepared to take him as an almighty miracle worker and as a provider of all our needs. But we're not prepared to take him as our guide and our Lord. Many of us are ready to love the power of God but we're not ready to love the will of God. Many of us are anxious for God to be our servant and are ready to believe him for the things we want. But we're not willing to ask him and spend enough time with him to find out what he wants for us.

Now brothers and sisters God will only do for us what he himself wants to do. And do you see that many of us are offering prayers of presumption? Many of us are going up outside the walls of Antioch and praying that God will tear down the walls of Antioch. Well, he's not interested in Antioch; he's interested actually in Jericho. But we're praying away at the walls of Antioch. And many of us you see are offering prayers of presumption, not prayers of faith. And you see the total difference between them.

I mean, look at the prayer of presumption that old David prayed. 2 Samuel 12 it is. It's part of that lesson that we read. And you remember it was in connection with the son that was sick. And without going into the explanation, of course, God had permitted the son to become sick. And yet 2 Samuel 12:15-16, "Then Nathan went to his house," you see, "And the Lord struck the child that Uriah's wife bore to David, and it became sick." And then, "David therefore besought God for the child." He had just contradicted God. "And David fasted, and went in and lay all night upon the

ground. And the elders of his house stood beside him, to raise him from the ground; but he would not, nor did he eat food with them." See, he really went into the fasting and the praying and, "On the seventh day the child died." And it was because David was praying a prayer of presumption, something that God didn't want at all for his life.

Now brothers and sisters when we're walking trusting God we need to trust God for guidance about the things we've to believe him for and we need to walk anxious to know his will.

Dear ones, many of us at this stage -- because most of us are kind of the same generation -- many of us at our stage in the Christian life have got into tremendous difficulties because we've offered prayers of presumption. And then we get into that position of saying, "Oh, God didn't answer me. Why won't he answer me?" Well loved ones, God will always answer what he has put into your heart to pray for. But it is his will to do it that way you see.

God has not only reconciled the world to himself and then said to us, "Okay, you distribute the benefits of Christ's death the way you want to." God hasn't done that. We don't do it with a thing like penicillin. Once we discover penicillin we don't say, "Okay, you can distribute it wherever you like it doesn't matter." No, we govern carefully the distribution of a drug like penicillin. Now so it is with the Father. The Father has already overcome all the need and lack in our world. But do you see that he has a perfect plan for applying the benefits of Christ's atonement to the whole world and he wants us to listen to his plan for it?

I have a dear brother, he's at the fellowship now, and he got into tremendous difficulties the same way. He was at the old Coffeehouse Extempore you remember. And one evening, one Friday evening there was a group all round and they were talking about Christianity. And this fellow says, "Okay, if you're God is so great, here my left leg has been paralyzed since I was born. If you're God is so great won't he heal it tomorrow night?" And of course my friend Ed said, "Yeah, yeah, God can heal it tomorrow night." And dear love him he knows now he hadn't asked God what he wanted to do with this fellow's leg or whether he wanted to touch the fellow's heart first to bring him to himself. And so Ed went out on a limb and said, "Yeah, yeah." So of course, you can guess what tomorrow night was like. The fellow wasn't healed, because God hadn't given that prayer of faith to anyone. It was just a prayer of presumption. It was just something that Ed said, "Well, I'm in a tight spot. I'd better have some proof that there's a God. Okay, let's go with it."

You see, many of us loved ones do the same thing. We offer prayers of presumption. We believe God for all sorts of things that we think will be good. Do you see that what we need to do is love the Father's will? Be anxious, "Father, what do you want in this situation?" And it's in that that God brings about his will in you.

And I shared with you about my mum with cancer and she was in Ireland and I was over here. And so often I'd pray, "Lord, will you heal? Will you heal? Will you heal?" And then this time there came a prayer of faith. And a prayer of faith is a conviction borne in your heart by the Holy Spirit when you're in a place of neutrality and quietness that a certain thing will take place. And there just came a voice saying, "I have borne her sickness." But it was at last something that came from God and not from me and she was healed. And do you see that a prayer of faith is God's will for a situation and the moment you accept it God is able to do it.

Now of course it has to be accepted by someone you see. You may say, "Well, why doesn't God just do it? When he knows what's necessary why doesn't he just do it?" No, God refuses to dominate man's

free will that way. Someone in the world must pray for the thing before God can do it. That's Ezekiel 36:37, if you'd like to look at it. You remember God had the obvious plan for the Israelites. They needed more men, they were in exile. Ezekiel 36:37, "Thus says the Lord God: This also I will let the house of Israel ask me to do for them: to increase their men like a flock."

Now God knew that he had to increase the men like a flock but he said, "This I will let the house of Israel ask me to do for them." And unless we pray the prayer God is unable to do it, because he will not answer apart from our free wills. And yet dear ones, it needs to be a prayer of faith, you see. And every prayer and every walk in faith, every step that we take in faith needs to be trusting God for his will in the matter, and then allowing him to show you it. And you see, you may say, "Oh well does that mean you pray every prayer, 'If it be your will?'" No, that's not a prayer of faith at all. That's just an excuse for not praying saying, "If it is your will, will you do this?"

No, we should go to the Father and seek his will. We should seek the Father's face. We should seek what he wants to do, and ask him what he wants, so that we can pray for it and see it come to pass. But do you see that most of the prayers we offer aren't prayers at all. We're all praying like mad, "If it be your will, if it be your will, if it be your will." And the Father is unable to do a thing, because it isn't a prayer of faith it's a prayer of doubt. It's just a prayer of excuse and compromise. We've to seek God's face and find out what his will is.

And how do you do that? Well, there is a story in the Old Testament, you remember, that tells you, 1 Kings 19:11-12. And this was Elijah you remember. And God said, "Go forth, and stand upon the mount before the Lord." And behold, the Lord passed by, and a great and strong wind rent the mountains, and broke in pieces the rocks before the Lord, but the Lord was not in the wind; and after the wind an earthquake, but the Lord was not in the earthquake; and after the earthquake a fire, but the Lord was not in the fire; and after the fire a still small voice." And the way to come into a knowledge of God's will is to still the earthquake of the emotions, and still the storm of the pressure of circumstances, and still the wind of your hereditary and come into a position of quietness before the Father where you say, "Father, whatever you want that's what I want." And then the Holy Spirit will speak in a still small voice and bring you God's answer. And then once you've received that it's done that moment. You just thank God for it and you walk in absolute confidence that it has happened and that's the way the Father works.

And loved ones, it's the same with all the things you see. With the finances that you're all in trouble about, with the jobs that we're all in trouble about, with school and the assignments, and will I do this or will I do that. Some people walk around more in doubt than they do in faith, they're so preoccupied with the problems. And do you see what God wants us to do? To come into a position of real quietness where we say, "Father, whatever you want that's what I want." And then in that moment of quietness the still small voice of the Holy Spirit makes God's will known. And then you just praise and thank God.

And that's why loved ones, walking by faith day-by-day in a loving Father who wants the very best thing for us, is a way of absolute peace and absolute quiet. And the only time we experience anything but peace and quiet is when we don't trust the loving Father, and we start trusting ourselves. Or, we start offering up prayers that we think would be very good with a God such as we have.

Loved ones, we Christians don't pray what might be good; we pray what is God's will. Those of us

who are children of God walk, not as people that walk in the night not knowing where we're going; we walk confidently because we've spent time with the Father. And every time there's doubt, loved ones, every time there's doubt in our lives -- honestly, I know it in my own life -- every time there's doubt about shall we go this way or that way, will we live here or live there, it's because we're not before the Father. We're working out with our minds all sorts of alternatives and so we're filled with 25 different options. And one time we give our mind to one of them, the next day to another one, the next day to another one until we run through the whole 25. Then, we start all over again and Satan just dangles us from one to the other.

Do you see that the way is quietness before the Father and satisfaction with our own position at the moment? You see, yes 'contentment with the position we're in', "Father, you've allowed us to come into this position at this time. Alright, you've permitted us to come here. Whether it's your ideal will or not here we are. We're in this job; we're in this school, thank you Father for that. Now, I want to love you and I want to be your person in this situation." Come into a position of quietness and then God is able to make his will known.

But it's a good way to walk dear ones. And certainly it's a lot easier on the old blood vessels and on the old nerves, really. Because, it is the Father's way you see. We're not intended to walk in strain at all. We have a loving Father who knows each one of us intimately and has a plan for us.

Maybe we should just finish by just praying this morning instead of singing. Let us close our eyes and pray.

Dear Father, we would each one look up to you this morning and say that we have had difficulty thinking that you could actually operate in our day-to-day lives. And Father we have felt for many years that it's up to us to live them ourselves the best way we can. But Father, we thank you that it just makes sense that if we're only here because you hold the atoms, and the neutrons, and the protons together, then you know everything that happens to us, and you are able to operate and to affect our daily lives, and you are able to keep us and to support us. And Father, we've been looking to insurance, and we've been looking to husbands, and fathers, and mothers, and wives, and friends. And Father, we want to tell you that we want to start looking to you this morning, and we intend to start trusting you and taking you at your word.

You say you're a loving Father, well Father we're going to trust you as that. We're going to stop worrying about things and we're going to come into a place of peace and say to you Lord, whatever way you want this thing to go will you reveal it to me so that I can pray? Father, we don't want to be faithless. We don't want to just give up according to the way events fall out. We want to receive from you clear indication of what we've to believe for, and then we intend to walk in faith, trusting you day-by-day, and knowing the joy of being right with the Creator of the universe.

So Father, we give ourselves to you this day. We trust you for a good day today. For a day when we will spend the hours as you want them spent and when we will see your hand moving in our lives. So Lord, I trust you to bless each dear brother and sister here and enable them to have a good day, and a day lived above the petty circumstances and above our petty selves, a day lived in you, in your world, with your Spirit within us.

Now the grace of our Lord Jesus, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with each one of us now and throughout this coming week. Amen.

