

February 6th 2011: Faith Means Having Great Expectations: Matt 13:53-58

I don't know how it is with you, but when God has something to say to me that He really wants me to hear, He seems always to say it more than once. I read the Bible or a Christian book and He speaks to me through what I read. Then I find that when I am praying He brings the same message back to me through what I think. Then I attend a church service or even preach myself, and the sermon focuses on exactly the same subject.

So it was that when I started my holidays I put aside several novels I wanted to read and a couple of Christian books including one on Godly Leadership, and as I started to read that book God started to speak to me about the faith I have in Him to work through me: through us as His people. He began to show me that too often lately I had become so mindful of what we lack, in terms of people, resources, skills, that my expectations of what God will do had taken a dramatic plunge.

God started to remind me through that book that there is a mindset that God expects of all His people—not just of leaders but of all His followers—and that is the mindset of trust. Of having the faith in God that expects Him to honour our obedience by doing more through us than what we ask or even think.(Ephesians 3:20-21)

That the one thing God wants to see developing in us more than anything else is trust in His power at work. Faith, that means having Great Expectations of what God will do. God wants us as individuals but especially as His church to focus on what He will do through our obedience, rather than on what we must do; we must have; we must achieve, before anything worthwhile happens.

Then at the same time I came across these two verses from the book of Jeremiah in my daily bible reading: Jeremiah 17:5

"This is what the Lord says: 'Cursed is the one who trusts in man, who depends on flesh for his strength and whose heart turns away from the Lord'".

And then verse 7

"But blessed is the man who trusts in the Lord, whose confidence(trust) is in Him(in the Lord)."

I wonder if you are struck as I was, by the repetition in this verse of the concept of trust. The first reference is to 'trusts'. An action word referring to daily trusting God for all we need to live and serve Him. But sometimes it's hard to have that continual action of trust uppermost in our hearts. Other problems or difficulties flood in and overwhelm our thoughts. That's when the second use of trust comes in and it's a noun having reference to that foundation of Faith that our lives are built on. That even when we are so wound up with all the difficulties and problems that surround us we still know deep down that God is in control. And God calls us to remind ourselves of that and to wait with anticipation for Him to intervene, or to clarify, or to sustain, or to overcome.

So here was more teaching that God was giving me on trust. On expecting Him to do great things, even when humanly it seems highly unlikely.

But it seems that this message, which about then I had begun to realize was not just for me but for us as a church, was so important that God had to give it to me at least one more time. And so it was that on Jan 23rd I went to a church service held in the main Cathedral there in Singapore. The preacher began his message with a question:

"What" he asked, "does God want to see developing in His people more than anything else?"

As I sat there I thought to myself, I know the answer. It's the same thing that God has been telling me over the last couple of weeks.

Then someone called out from the back, it's worship. And the Pastor responded by saying that worship is extremely important to God, but although our worship can always improve that is not what God wants to see developing in us most of all. Then someone else called out, it's love. And again the Pastor emphasized that love is indeed extremely important....it's the first two greatest commandment, but once more we all need to do it better, but as believers we are seeking to love. Well it must be prayer then, someone else called out, and once more the preacher stressed how vital our prayers are to God but that although we all need to work on it we are praying. And that it is not prayer.

And as I sat there silently I knew what the answer was. I knew what God had given that man to say. And I called out, it's Trust!

And the preacher looked at me and he asked what did you just say. And I repeated, it's trust. And he said, that's right. The one thing God wants to see growing in His people more than anything else is their trust in Him. He wants people who believe that God will do something great in their lives and through His body here on earth. Believers who will attempt great things for God because they expect great things from God.

It was after that service that the Lord confirmed to me that such was the message He wanted me to share with you today, and He brought to my mind the scripture reading from Matthew 13 that Fay read. It's a passage that is repeated in Mark 6. It tells of Jesus' second visit in His ministry to Nazareth his home town. The first visit had ended in disaster when they tried to throw Him off a cliff because they didn't like what He had to say.

But Jesus delights to give second chances, and so He returns and at first they are amazed at His teaching. But then this big obstacle to faith emerges. They couldn't get past the fact that he had once been a carpenter in their village. Just one of a rather large family. And verse 58 of Matthew 13 is such a sad verse to read:-

"And He did not do many miracles there because of their lack of faith."

This is not saying that faith is a pre-requisite for God to do a miracle. There are several accounts of miracles that occurred despite unbelief. But what we find here is that the community was so united in their lack of faith that they missed out on so much that Jesus would have liked to do in their midst.

Mark in his account tells us that at first the people were amazed when they heard Jesus, and then later on he writes that Jesus was amazed at their lack of faith. Amazed and I reckon, really disappointed.

As I read that verse I thought to myself what a sad statement that would be if said about me or about a church: That Jesus did not do many mighty acts there because of their lack of faith.

You see Faith here means having great expectations regarding what God will do in, amongst, and through His people.

I received this week some information from a worldwide and strongly Christ centred group that runs an orphanage and centre in Thailand that cares for disabled children. It encourages believers to go and minister with them as

short term volunteers and arranges for adoption of these unwanted children into Christian families. In the booklet they sent there was a story of a young married couple from the UK who believed strongly that God was calling them to adopt a child as their response to the Biblical injunction to care for the orphans and the homeless. So they began the process by volunteering to work in Thailand and then by applying to adopt a little girl who is profoundly deaf and has athetoid cerebral palsy. The process was long and frustrating. It involved trips back and forth to the UK and many other near impossible hurdles to overcome. But they had heard God's voice and they never stopped trusting that He would make it happen; He would enable them to fulfill the mission that God had laid upon their heart.

They began with Faith in God to do great things, and despite the disappointments along the way they held firm to their trust, not in themselves, not in the system, not in the organization, but in God. And their testimony now is that every day God is doing awesome things.

Every act of God is awesome, whether it may seem that way to others or not. That's why we sing "Our God is an Awesome God". But do we honestly believe that God will do awesome things in and through our lives? In and through our church? Because that's what God wants to see more and more in each of us.