

FAITH WITH MUSCLE

August 18, 1957

As water began to lap over the edge of the boat, the fishermen were afraid that their lives would be lost. One of the passengers was sound asleep! What a time to be asleep when a boat is ready to sink! Being unable to stand his sleeping composure any longer, they cried out in fear and He sat up and asked them, "Where is your faith?"

Was it faith they needed or life-jackets? Surely this was no time to preach a sermon about faith. Yet, that is exactly where we miss the boat of Christianity. We had rather reach for life rafts than remember that He is Master of sea and land. To Jesus, faith was not a weak sentiment but a force with muscle in it . . . so much so that the amount of a mustard seed could do unbelievable things. Let me tell you about that now.

VESTIBULE OF DOUBT

I have never met a person of strong faith who had not gone through the vestibule of doubt. As a matter of fact, one can never enter the sanctuary of faith until he walks through that foyer of doubt. Said Tennyson, "More real faith lives in honest doubt than in half our creeds." That I believe. To call gullibility faith is to misunderstand what Jesus meant. The attitude, that never questions a thing just because it is regarded as "true" or because some important person says it, doesn't mark us as men of faith. More a matter of foolishness.

For instance, if some of the rot that has been pawned off as Christian theology had been thought through, questioned, and weighed, the Church of Jesus Christ would have been spared much of its divisive misery. To run through the hopper of testing all that one hears does not harm the pure gold of divine truth . . . it merely separates it from the dross of hearsay. There is a positive type of doubting which separates shadow from substance. But I speak out of that negative doubt which knows more kinship with cynicism than with Christian truth. Some people seem to doubt everything and believe nothing.

PUT GOD TO THE TEST

Once you have gone through the vestibule of doubt and have entered the sanctuary of belief, then you are ready to put God to the test. Nothing proves faith's foundations like taking God literally at His word. This is not presumption; either we believe it, or we do not believe it. Jacob wrestled with the Angel of the Lord, fought it out with him, came to grips with that issue, and got his answer. Too often we run from a fight that involves truth and its wrestling. The world would know far more men of ardent faith if they put God right to the test. Did He not say, "Ask and you shall receive"?

Faith refuses to lie dormant when a fight for the right is at stake. You cannot lock it up as though it belonged on a shelf of display. It is a divine force that must be turned loose if it is to do the work of which it is capable. There was no exaggeration in His words that "All things are possible for them that believe." All things? Indeed!

AREAS OF APPLICATION

It is the areas where faith needs to be applied that so often thins out into pale nothingness. We need faith to see that there is more good news than bad news. Many would conclude from reading newspapers that the world is surely "going to the dogs" and in this decade at that! Surface impressions would have you believe that everyone is a reckless driver, every other person is a drunkard, and that a World War is about to occur.

Reading of one or two planes' crashing makes some conclude that there is no safety in air travel. What is overlooked is the hundreds of flights that land safely every hour on the hour. Faith takes the world's news with a grain of salt while it knows that most of the good news seldom if ever gets into print.

It also knows that there is more sunshine than clouds in life. This is literally true. The earth is slanted at 23 degrees

which gives us our four seasons. This fact makes possible some extremely hot and cold days; but if one looked at the weather over a given period of time, he would have to admit that a good average favors man's desires. There are extremes of course, sometimes floods, droughts, tornadoes, and hurricanes. But how about the average? In a figurative sense there is more sunshine than clouds. The tornadoes of sorrow twist through our lives and leave wreckage and misery. Yet, think of the weeks on end when joy prevailed instead of sorrow. Think of the highnoons instead of the midnights. There is something in man's makeup that enables him to see only the dark and dismal while summarily forgetting that which is in his favor.

FAITH REMEMBERS

Faith remembers that there is more health than sickness. Man is living longer today by several years than he has ever lived before. Despite the fact that some people seem to be congenitally ill (chronic complainers) there is more health than sickness. One should run an average through his whole years—not just his adolescent ones, his twenties, or thirties. Yes, it is difficult to get a bed in the average hospital . . . but think of the beds in millions of homes wherein perfectly healthy people sleep.

Man is "fearfully and wonderfully made:" a fact that assures warding off many diseases. But the trouble with modern man is that he can create a symptom an hour . . . what with a tedious preoccupation about his health, he has created the worst of diseases. Most of us would be 100 per cent healthier if we went to our medicine cabinets and emptied their contents down the commode, went out in the fresh air, expanded our lungs, and set ourselves to some holy work. Then we could sleep with complete slumber befitting those who know their Lord.

Moreover, we need faith with muscle in order to know that there are more good

people in this world than there are evil ones.

Faith is that ability to see the good in all men. And there is some good in all men . . . microscopic perhaps in some, but it is there.

Take our young people for instance. From all the articles, sermons, and conversation about juvenile delinquency it is no surprise that many nations across the seas believe that our boys and girls are a generation of hoodlums. Every amateur journalist who has nothing better to do can gather his material on juvenile delinquency.

Let someone rise up to write his articles on *juvenile decency*: a tribute to the millions who do not go wrong; recognition for the 4-H members who love nature and apply themselves in diligence; Boy and Girl Scouts by the millions; Sunday School teachers and pupils who have learned the wondrous art of self-discipline; John, Horace, Jane, and Nancy . . . the nameless throngs who are tomorrow's good citizens. When a young person sees that an adult has faith in him or her, then and there is lighted a spark that glows in future significance.

My first efforts to float will be remembered for a long, long time. Fearing that I would sink, I put up all sorts of splashing efforts. My body was rigid, my legs bent, and my arms moved in feverish pace. Then someone told me to stop fighting and just relax. Said he, "The water will hold you up if you will stop fighting it."

Just so in life with faith: most of our noisy splashing to accomplish what seems needful could be foregone if we believed in powerful earnestness that God was behind us wanting us to succeed. This law of support not only works, but it is intensely enjoyable. Put some muscle in your faith . . . today . . . right now . . . and see the difference it makes.