

# Life's Common Denominator

BROADCAST October 14

SCRIPTURE—I John 5:1-5

TEXT—" . . . *this is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith*"—I John 5:4

The name of Helen Keller is synonymous with courageous and gracious living. Born deaf, dumb, and blind, she is a choice specimen of noble womanhood whose accomplishments have proved a blessing to her generation. The secret of her wonderful life is well expressed in her own beautiful and picturesque words.

"Dark as my path may seem to others, I carry a magic light in my heart. Faith, the spiritual strong searchlight illumines the way, and although sinister doubts lurk in the shadow, I walk unafraid toward the Enchanted Wood where the foliage is always green, where joy abides, where nightingales nest and sing, and where life and death are one in the presence of the Lord."

"Faith, the spiritual strong searchlight . . ." Can you think of a better way to express the primary need of our generation either collectively or individually? In one of the darkest days of man's history Franklin D. Roosevelt said, "The only limit to our realization of tomorrow will be our doubts of today." And in a more positive fashion another reminds us that cynicism and fear freeze life, but faith "thaws it out, releases it, sets it free."<sup>2</sup>

1. Virginia Elv, *I Quote*, Stewart, New York, 1947, pp. 127-128.

2. *Ibid.*, p. 127.

We sometimes say that all men are "created equal." Is this true? Not if you think in terms of mental and physical endowments or of opportunity. But there is certainly one sense in which it is true. All men are created equal in that each possesses the spiritual endowment of faith. Someone has said that men yield faith as apple trees yield apples.

Now one person may exercise faith more than another. But every man, whether he lives in a palace or a hovel, whether he be a savage in the jungle or a sage in the university, has the capacity for faith. Indeed, faith may well be called "Life's Common Denominator." What one does with his faith is another matter. Our generation sorely needs to re-discover the place of this vital element, and to apply it to the many problems of life which perplex us.

We should do well, therefore, to heed the words of the apostle John. ". . . *this is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith*" (I John 5:14).

A little girl, when asked to define faith, said, "Faith is believing something which you know is not so." L. P. Jacks says it better. "Faith is reason grown courageous."<sup>2</sup> Better still are the words of William Newton Clarke. "Faith is the daring of the soul to go farther than it can see."<sup>2</sup>

In this light, therefore, let us consider "Life's Common Denominator" as we note, first, the endowment; second, the experience; third, the expression.

**First, consider the endowment.** John speaks of "*our faith*" (I John 5:4). This is not faith in a collective sense. It means, rather, the faith of each individual in a community of believers.

Now some cynical person may deny that he lives by faith. But is this actually the case? A preacher spoke on faith to a group of college students. Afterward one of them walked with him across a dark campus. He challenged the preacher's message saying, "I do not live by faith. I live only by that which I know." Replied the preacher, "Well, if that be true why do you walk alone with me in the dark? How do you know that I am not planning to knock you in the head and rob you?" "But," remonstrated the student, "I am not afraid. I believe in you!" "Ah," said the preacher, "then you do live by faith, for belief is faith."

Yes, it is not a question of whether or not you have faith. The question is in whom or what you deposit your faith. There is no experience in life which does not involve the element of faith. The research scientist delves into the mysteries of nature in faith that there is knowledge which he does not possess. You have faith in your physician, pharmacist, banker, bus driver, and elevator operator. Every bite of food that you eat is an act of faith, faith that it has not been poisoned, faith that it will sustain life. The money in your purse is an evidence of your faith in the government which guarantees its value. These are but suggestions of a list that could be almost endless.

**Now what do we mean by faith?** With one exception (Heb. 10:23, literally "hope") in the New Testament the word "faith" renders one root Greek word. It means to believe, to trust, to have confidence. Unfortunately we use the word "believe" so loosely. You read an article in the newspaper, and say that you believe it. But it makes no difference as to the manner of your life. What you have done is to give an intellectual assent to the truthfulness of the facts related, and nothing more. The New Testament does not so use the word "believe" or "faith."

In the New Testament use of the word, it means to accept the truthfulness of the facts to the extent that you commit your soul and life to them. It is not merely an attitude of the mind. It is also an act of the will.

Let me illustrate. You look at a chair, and in your mind you believe that it will support the weight of your body. That is simply believing about it. You believe in it when you trust the weight of your body to it. But whether you believe about a thing or believe in it, the fact remains that you are endowed with the capacity for faith.

**Second, note the experience.** "*Who-soever believeth that Jesus is the Christ is born of God*" (I John 5:1). This brings us more definitely to consider faith in the Christian sense. As a human being you have the capacity for faith. But that alone is not enough. It is vitally important that you shall have an experience as to the proper object of your faith.

To say that it does not matter what you believe so long as you are sincere in it is to miss the point altogether. You would not apply this philosophy to any other area of life. It is hardly reasonable to apply it in the most

vital realm of your being. John does not say, "Whosoever believeth," and then leave faith to wander where it will. He is most definite. "*Whosoever believeth that Jesus is the Christ is born of God.*" In verse 5 he adds, ". . . believeth that Jesus is the Son of God."

Once again let me caution you as to the distinction between intellectual assent and the full commitment of your will. To be sure you must believe intellectually the facts recorded in the New Testament about Jesus. But you must go beyond this to a trust in Him on the basis of the facts.

Now what are the facts? Note that John says that you must believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God. The Christ is the anointed of God in His eternal revelation as Redeemer. As the Son of God, Jesus is this eternal Christ in God's redemptive revelation in history. As the Son of God, Jesus was virgin born, and, therefore, without a sinful nature. He was perfect in His life, and, therefore, was without experiential sin. Yet God made Him to be sin for you and me (II Cor. 5:21). On the cross He paid the penalty for your sin. In His bodily resurrection He triumphed over sin and death. In His resurrection life He ever liveth to hold intercession for us (Heb. 7:25). These are the basic facts of the Gospel.

Now the question is "Do you believe them?" Not merely the truth of the record. Do you believe them to the point that you are willing to commit your soul, your life to Jesus as your Saviour? To do so is to be "*born of God*" (I John 5:1) or born again (John 3:3). Through such a faith you can have the assurance of eternal life.

In II Timothy 1:12 Paul describes such an experience. ". . . for I know (in) whom I have believed, and am persuaded that he is able to keep

*that which I have committed unto him against that day.*" This is the figure of placing a deposit in the bank. Literally, Paul said, "*I know in whom I have believed . . .*" The King James Version says, "*I know whom I have believed . . .*" There is a difference between "*whom I have believed*" and "*in whom I have believed.*"

Let us suppose that you have some money to put in a bank. You examine the bank's statement and find that it is strong and safe. You believe it. You accept as true every fact of the statement. But you still do not trust your money to it. That is believing about it. But suppose that you then place your money in the bank. Then you are believing in it. That is the difference between "*I know whom I have believed*" and "*I know in whom I have believed.*"

So I beg that you will not merely believe about Jesus, but that you will believe in Him. Having thus committed your soul to Him, you can be assured that He "*is able to keep that which (you) have committed (placed on deposit) unto him against*" the day of judgment. This faith, and this alone, can save your soul from the wages of sin which is death.

Third, consider the expression. "*For whatsoever is born of God overcometh the world: and this is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith*" (I John 5:4).

The new birth is not the end of the Christian experience, but the beginning. Born as a child of God, you must go on growing in grace and in the knowledge of your Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ (II Pet. 3:18). And this is the day by day expression of the faith that is in you. As one has said it is working out what God has worked in you. You are saved by grace through faith. But your faith must also be expressed in a life lived for the glory of God.

Note that in I John 5:4 the word "overcometh," appears twice. The first one means "keep on overcoming." It is the continuous victory in a continuous struggle against the evil forces which oppose your spiritual growth. The second word expresses the idea of one great victory. It is the thought of victorious Christian living. In short, because you have been born of God you keep on overcoming. Thus you live a victorious Christian life. And it is a life of faith.

And this faith will express itself in good works. On one occasion Jesus said, "If ye have faith as a grain of mustard seed, ye shall say unto this mountain, Remove thence to yonder place; and it shall remove; and nothing shall be impossible unto you" (Matt. 17:20). Note that Jesus did not say, "If ye have faith as large as a grain of mustard seed . . ." He said, "If ye have faith as a grain of mustard seed . . ." Thus he spoke not of quantity but quality. What kind of faith does a mustard seed have? It is a living faith, a faith that has God's power in it so that it works. Put a mustard seed in the ground, and it will germinate and produce a harvest.

So your faith must be one that works. If you want a mountain removed, you will believe that it can be done. And, if necessary, you will be found with a pick and shovel trying to remove it. Your life with its energy, coupled with the power of God, can do the impossible. And that is the faith which overcomes the world.

Jeremy Taylor said, "Faith is the root of all blessings. Believe, and you shall be saved; believe and you must needs be satisfied; believe, and you cannot but be comforted and happy." This is "Life's Common Denominator." It is possible to all. It but awaits your experience and expression.

Let me share with you a beautiful expression of faith. A father promised his little son a watch the next time that he went to town. From that moment on the little fellow wore a shoestring tied to his suspender button. When asked, "Why the shoestring?" he replied, "That's for the watch Dad is going to bring from town."

God has promised. Will you believe? For "this is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith."

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