


*The Heart of the Gospel*  
**ROMANS**  
  
*The Work Of Faith*

*Romans 4:16-25, August 27, 2017, Pastor Bill Russell*

**PROMINENT AUTHOR EXPERIENCES AN ALMOST-CONVERSION**

A classic example of an almost-conversion to Christ happened to Lord Kenneth Clark, one of Great Britain's most prominent art historians and authors, and the producer of the BBC television series Civilization. In an autobiographical account, Clark writes that when he was living in a villa in France he had a curious episode.

I had a religious experience. It took place in the church of San Lorenzo, but did not seem to be connected with the harmonious beauty of the architecture. I can only say that for a few minutes, my whole being was radiated by a kind of heavenly joy, far more intense than anything I had ever experienced before. This state of mind lasted for several minutes ... but wonderful as it was, [it] posed an awkward problem in terms of action. My life was far from blameless. I would have to reform. My family would think I was going mad, and perhaps after all, it was a delusion, for I was in every way unworthy of such a flood of grace. Gradually the effect wore off and I made no effort to retain it. I think I was right. I was too deeply embedded in the world to change course. But I had "felt the finger of God" quite sure and, although the memory of this experience has faded, it still helps me to understand the joys of the saints.

*Tim Keller, Making Sense of God (Viking, 2016), pages 18-19*

☪ THE PERSONAL NATURE OF FAITH:

I found this story fascinating. It spoke to me about the personal nature of faith. Faith is extremely personal for all of us. In fact we all have to make a **personal faith decision** to enter into a **personal relationship with God**.

At the same time we can also see the power that faith can unlock within us. When we enter into a relationship with God through faith, we are filled with the very person and power of God. The thing is, it is through an active faith and living out of the gospel, that the power of God will continually come alive in me and accomplish His work. The gospel is the power of God for salvation, and yet through faith we can live out the gospel and live in our salvation.

We are in chapter 4 of Romans, wrapping up the second half of the chapter this morning, and what we see in Romans 4 is the very personal nature of faith. Abraham is the picture to us of the personal nature of faith. Abraham had a personal encounter with God. Unlike, though, the prominent art historian and author Kenneth Clark, Abraham responded to God in faith and the rest as they say, is history. Abraham's faith made him a man of great influence and significance throughout not just the Bible but eternity.

Now in chapter 4 we are looking at this issue of faith. Last week we looked at the goal of faith and the brilliance of the Gospel.

🌀 THE GOAL OF FAITH is that faith is intended to **humble** us.

I pointed out last week that two important dynamics in a right relationship with God are first that we need to be humbled and second God needs to be exalted. That is the brilliance of the Gospel. On one hand the gospel humbles us while at the same time it exalts Christ. In fact as we saw last week **never again**, for all of eternity will we ever be able to say to God that we don't need Him. The scars in His hands will prove that we do.

Now chapter four is showing us two ways that faith humbles us. Hopefully in some ways these simple outlines will always help us understand the book of Romans as we approach it. Romans 4, two ways that faith humbles us.

**I.** First faith accomplishes what we can't.

*This was last weeks driving point.*

- a.)** We can't SAVE ourselves.
- b.)** We can't SANCTIFY ourselves
- c.)** We can't SATISFY ourselves.

Faith is how we are saved and yet even after we are saved faith allows us to live in our salvation or sanctification. We live a set-apart and even satisfied life through faith. In fact to be honest a life of faith will be the most satisfying life that we can live, because a life of faith repeatedly humbles us and exalts God. No life can be more satisfying, just ask Abraham.

Let me give you the BIG IDEA behind this mornings message then.

### **TODAY'S BIG IDEA**

WHAT GOD CAN ACCOMPLISH THROUGH HIS POWER AND PERSON IS BEYOND HUMAN COMPREHENSION! YET IT IS FAITH THAT BRINGS THE HUMBLING REALITY OF GOD'S POWER AND PERSON TO LIFE IN US. OUR FAITH REVEALS THE POWER AND PERSON OF GOD AT WORK, IN US, THROUGH US AND FOR US.

This morning then I want us to see the second way that faith humbles us as we consider the work of faith in our life.

Let's start in verse 16 this morning.

### **Romans 4:16 ESV**

That is why it depends on faith, in order that the promise may rest on grace and be guaranteed to all his offspring—not only to the adherent of the law but also to the one who shares the faith of Abraham, who is the father of us all,

### **🌀 IT ALL DEPENDS ON FAITH [V16]**

This just summarizes to some extent what Paul has been talking about in the previous verses of the chapter. It all depends on faith, so that...

**#1** The Promise (GOSPEL) is of faith which results in Humility. Faith takes away any of the self-aggrandizing tendencies of our salvation and puts all of the focus and glory on God.

**#2** Everyone can be saved from Adam to Abraham To Moses to us. Those who had a law and failed to keep it, and those who didn't even have a law to keep at all. Our good works have no place bringing about our salvation.

Now as we move on to verse 17-25 we will see the second way that faith humbles us.

## **TWO WAYS THAT FAITH HUMBLER US**

- I. Faith accomplishes **WHAT WE CAN'T!**
- II. Faith accomplishes **WHAT GOD CAN!**

### **Romans 4:17 ESV**

17 as it is written, "I have made you the father of many nations"—in the presence of the God in whom he believed, who gives life to the dead and calls into existence the things that do not exist.

### **1. God gives us Something to BELIEVE IN. [V17, 24-25]**

*v 17. In the presence of the God in WHOM He believed*

The fact is, everyone believes in something. I don't care who you are. Even if you are an atheist you believe in something. If I believe that God doesn't exist I still believe something, I believe IN something. Everyone believes in and has faith in something, it is just a matter of what.

Now one thing we will do this morning is we will focus on the word promise from three angles. Last week we saw the word righteousness from three angles, this morning I want us to see the word promise.

The first way to understand the promise is to see the promise as a person.

### **The Promise = PERSON**

You see when I say that God gives us something to believe in, the truth is He gives us SOMEONE to believe in. The promise is ultimately a person. The original promise comes to us from the Garden of Eden and is the promise of the Messiah. As we saw last week, this was the original promise that Abraham had to have faith in before he received the more personal promises.

In fact Paul ends chapter 4 speaking about the person who is the promise.

**Romans 4:24-25 ESV**

24 ...It (righteousness) will be counted to us who believe in him who raised from the dead Jesus our Lord, 25 who was delivered up for our trespasses and raised for our justification.

In short God gives us something to believe in and that something is a someone.

Now what Paul does, is Paul takes the life-experience of Abraham and uses it to define God in two ways. You see Abraham's faith was not some simple, flippant decision but it was a conscious understanding of WHO God was and WHAT he could do. Abraham's faith as we also see is an invitation for you and me to join Him in this lifestyle of faith. Remember the phrase last week from verse 12 when Paul speaks to the universality of faith?

*...who also walk in the footsteps of the faith  
that our father Abraham had...*

Faith to Abraham is presented as a lifestyle and a journey and we are invited to join him in that journey. We are invited to walk in faith and to know God as Abraham did.

There are then two attributes of God that Paul emphasizes through Abraham's faith-walk.

**A. He is the God of RESURRECTION!  
*He gives life to the Dead.***

Now of course we see this at the cross in the life and death and then life of Jesus and yet I think it is even more vividly expressed in other parts of the Bible. Jesus, His very nature being that He is eternal life, the moment He died and reassumed his God Card and all of His deity defining attributes, He naturally came back to life. It is through the rest of the scriptures though that we see God repeatedly rising the dead to life. Not including the resurrection of Christ, there are 9 direct examples in the Bible of people being raised from the dead. 9 direct examples involving only 5 people.

- *Elijah* - 1
- *Elisha* - 2
- *Jesus* - 4
- *Peter* - 1
- *Paul* - 1

There is an interesting debate about whether or not God works miracles today, like he did when Jesus was on earth. Here is the truth, the simple answer to that question is NO! Today we see people who claim to be able to do miracles and yet the question remains can they?

We have to understand why God did miracles in the Bible and throughout the redemptive story. Do you know why?

Primarily miracles would **authenticate the message of the messenger.**

That means you had better listen to the teaching of this individual because he can do miracles. The miracles proved his message came from God because the miracles he performed came from God. Think Moses leaving Egypt with the Jews. Think the teachings of Jesus, Peter and Paul.

Now the thing is, God is no longer adding to the truth of Scripture. His Word is complete so there is no need to authenticate the message of anyone. It is already authenticated because it is in the Bible. The need for miracles has passed.

The other reason why God is not doing miracles today like we see in the Bible is that to be honest, according to the Bible's standards, that would be highly unusual as it doesn't fit the pattern of the Bible. You see there are not as many miracles in the Bible as we may think there are. I think we have this notion that everybody and their brother in the Old Testament worked miraculous signs and wonders, and yet they didn't. Seriously think about it and write down the number of O.T. individuals who did miracles. They are actually few and far between.

Moses and Elijah did some rather amazing miracles, Joseph and Daniel interpreted some dreams, but you know what there are not a lot of other individuals who performed miracles. Israel won some battles in miraculous ways but that was God doing His thing not an individual working a miracle. You get to the New Testament and Jesus does a lot more miracles. Peter and Paul do a couple of miracles, but not that many to be honest.

Now I am not saying that God CAN'T do a miracle today and that God DOESN'T work miracles today. God works miracles through prayer all of the time or just on His own. I am speaking to the evangelist who claims he can go around and heal people. That would be highly unusual according to God's standards.

One practical thing that miracles do show us though, is God's intervention in this world.

### **MIRACLES OR THE RESURRECTION DON'T VIOLATE NATURE'S LAW**

Some people argue that miracles (like Christ's resurrection) are impossible because nature is a closed system and miracles would therefore violate the laws of nature. But John Lennox, mathematician and Professor at Oxford University, says that Christians don't claim that Jesus rose by some natural process that violated the laws of nature. Instead, Jesus rose because God injected enormous power and energy from outside the system.

Here's an illustration: Suppose I put \$ 1,000 tonight in a drawer in my office. Then I put another \$1,000 in tomorrow night. One plus one equals two. That's \$ 2,000. On the third day, I open the drawer and I find \$500. Obviously, when you only find \$500 in the drawer, the laws of arithmetic have not been broken. \$1,000 plus \$1,000 still equals \$2,000. What those laws tell you is that someone (in this case, probably a thief) has put his hand into the drawer and removed the money from the drawer. The laws of mathematics or the laws of nature or science can't stop him from doing that. Lennox concludes: In the same way, the Resurrection of Christ (and every other miracle) doesn't negate the laws of nature. The Resurrection (or another miracle) shows that Someone has reached into the drawer of history and removed something—the sting of death. So unless you have evidence that the system is totally closed, you cannot argue against the possibility of miracles.

*Adapted from John Lennox, Miracles (The Veritas Forum, 2013), p. 24*

So let's get practical here though because that is what Abraham and Paul do. They take this aspect of God's character then and bring it into everyday life. Abraham pictures Sarah's womb as good as dead and God bringing it back to life through His resurrection power. This is the way that God wants us to understand His resurrection power today in real life and in real time.

God wants us to see and understand His resurrection power today in the most practical of terms. Just as he brought a dead womb back to life for Abraham and Sarah, God wants us to believe that He can...

- *Bring a dead marriage back to life.*
- *Resurrect a dream that has died.*
- *Restore a dead church or*
- *Resuscitate someone's personal faith.*

Our God is a God of Resurrection!

Paul though, also presents God to us with this attribute.

## **B. He is the God of CREATION!**

***He calls into existence that which doesn't exist.***

God can take a situation, a circumstance, where there is absolutely nothing and he can speak something into existence. Let me show you something I think is amazing to consider.

Okay I have a handful of dirt here. (*Hold up a handful of dirt.*) Now how many are aware of what this was before it looked like this? Before it became dirt what did it look like?

(Pause) Before this was dirt, this was the WORD OF GOD!

God spoke dirt into existence out of nothing.

### **Psalm 33:6 ESV**

By the word of the Lord the heavens were made,  
and by the breath of his mouth all their host.

God spoke dirt into existence out of nothing and God can do this in your life as well. He can speak something into existence where nothing appears to exist.

- *Maybe it is a job.*
- *Maybe it is a spouse.*
- *Maybe it is a friend.*
- *Maybe it is finances for a need.*



I'm not sure what it looks like in your present circumstance, but God can speak something into existence out of nothing. He can meet needs in your life in ways that you would have never imagined.

The bottom line here of point 1 is that everyone believes in something AND someone.

### **THIRD GREATEST PHYSICIST OF ALL-TIME BELIEVED GOD IS CREATOR**

A poll conducted by the BBC that surveyed the 100 most prominent physicists, James Clerk Maxwell was voted the third greatest physicist of all time, behind only Newton and Einstein. On the centenary of Maxwell's birthday, Einstein described Maxwell's work as the "most profound and the most fruitful that physics has experienced since the time of Newton." Maxwell, in his famous equations, found a single description for electricity and magnetism, a remarkable feat. But he also showed that his equations predicted waves that traveled at the speed of light, showing that visible light, radio waves, microwaves, and X-rays, were also all part of the same phenomenon. Surely this was one of the most wonder-inducing Eureka moments in the history of human thought.

What was Maxwell's response? Maxwell was a devout Christian, who wrote frequently about his faith. In one letter, he wrote, "I think Christians whose minds are scientific are bound to study science that their view of the glory of God may be as extensive as their being is capable." For Maxwell, the beauty of the natural world that he observed and the fact that he could discover it filled him with wonder, and it gave credence to the idea that there is a Creator who created an ordered universe and created us to inhabit and explore it.

*Jonathan Feng, "Wonder and the Gift of not Knowing," Veritas Forum (2-3-17)*

You see everyone believes in something AND someone.

Even Scientists.

**ONLY GOD CAN RESURRECT WHAT'S DEAD  
AND CREATE SOMETHING FROM NOTHING!**

### **Romans 4:18-21 ESV**

18 In hope he believed against hope, that he should become the father of many nations, as he had been told, "So shall your offspring be." 19 He did not weaken in faith when he considered his own body, which was as good as dead (since he was about a hundred years old), or when he considered the barrenness of Sarah's womb. 20 No unbelief made him waver concerning the promise of God, but he grew strong in his faith as he gave glory to God, 21 fully convinced that God was able to do what he had promised.

## **2. God gives us Something to LIVE FOR. [V17, 24-25]**

*v 18. In hope he believed against hope*

God gives us a reason to get out bed every morning. He gives us a reason to get up and face the world. He gives us something to live for.

Now lets go back to that word promise again.

We saw promise first as a person,  
but now let's look at promise as our HOPE!

### **The Promise = HOPE**

Abraham was given a promise by God, it was a promise that had far-reaching implications. It was a promise that pointed to the future. It was in fact a promise that would far out-last Abraham's life. It was a promise that would be fulfilled long after he was gone. His promise was in many ways the legacy He would leave behind.

Now Paul helps us process How Abraham LIVED-FOR this promise. God may give us something to live for but how do we actually do that? There are three practical realities to consider.

### **A. In order to live for the PROMISE**

**I must look beyond my CIRCUMSTANCE.**

I love this line in verse 19...

## ***He did not weaken in faith when he considered his own body...***

The question for all of us is how much power we give to our circumstances. Our circumstances can impact us positively or negatively. Our circumstances can weaken our faith or they can be an opportunity for our faith to shine. In Abraham's life, his circumstances allowed his faith to be witnessed by all. His faith brought glory to God!

I think about those this morning who live in Texas and who lost everything at the forceful hands of Hurricane Harvey. I think about the devastation that storm brought and while it wiped out towns, communities and house, what is of real important is whether or not it wiped out any families and anyones faith. THAT is what really matters.

When you build a house down south in the hurricane prone states, there are special requirements for how you build the home, with the intent that your home will be able to withstand the force of the hurricane. The greater question though is what about your faith? Would your faith be strong enough to stand to to a hurricane?

The thing is our circumstances are no match for God's promise and God's power. So often, the problem we have, is seeing beyond our circumstances to the promise of God. For many people they are having a hard time today seeing beyond the rubble of their lives to find God's promise. Yet His promise is there in the rubble fully intact.

Often our circumstances can run contrary to what God has said to us. God tells Abraham he is going to have a huge offspring, many descendants, while at the same time, Abraham is already 75 years old and Sarah about the same. They are past the child-rearing let alone child-bearing years. God's word seems to run contrary to their circumstance and yet Abraham's faith rises up to meet the challenge.

Here is a second reality, though...

**B. In order to live for the PROMISE  
I must learn to WORSHIP no matter what!**

How about verse 20-21...

**...he grew strong in his faith as he gave glory to God,  
21 fully convinced...**

I absolutely love the word picture here. As Abraham brought glory to God, as he worshiped Him, His faith became stronger. I love the correlation between my faith and my worship. Abraham worshiped God for the promises that God had given him, as Abraham was fully convinced that God would do what he said he would do. The thing is the more that Abraham worshiped the more convinced that Abraham was, the stronger his faith grew. What is amazing about this is that it took 25 years for God to bring about the first miracle and promise. It took 25 years for the promised child to be born.

Even after that Abraham was willing to sacrifice his only child to the Lord. Abraham believe that the God of resurrection could raise Him up or the God of creation could create another child and so Abraham was willing to offer up His only Child. God of course intervened and stopped Abraham providing a ram instead.

The thing is, there is something about worshipping God in the face of circumstances that run contrary to God's promise. There is something about worshipping God through faith in a way that strengthens our faith and resolve. There is something about worshipping God when everyone says worship makes no sense. There is something about worshipping God when the world says we should be mad at God and blame Him. 1

**Psalm 121:1-2 ESV**

1 I lift up my eyes to the hills. From where does my help come?  
2 My help comes from the Lord, who made heaven and earth.

The hills here are most likely the distant hills of Jerusalem that as they made their pilgrimage to the city they could see the hills in the distance and know where they were going and why they were traveling, yet they could also know the ONE who created them and made the pilgrimage with them. They looked to the hills, the place where they went to worship and yet they worshiped not the hills but the very one who created them.

## **WE HAVE ENTERED THE NEW AGE OF ANXIETY**

This past winter (2017), Sarah Fader, a 37-year-old social media consultant in Brooklyn who has generalized anxiety disorder, texted a friend in Oregon about an impending visit, and when a quick response failed to materialize, she posted on Twitter to her 16,000-plus followers. "I don't hear from my friend for a day—my thought, they don't want to be my friend anymore," she wrote, appending the hashtag #ThisIsWhatAnxietyFeelsLike.

Thousands of people were soon offering up their own examples under the hashtag; some were retweeted more than 1,000 times. You might say Ms. Fader struck a nerve. "If you're a human being living in 2017 and you're not anxious," she said on the telephone, "there's something wrong with you."

Editor's Note: This same article also argues, "As depression was to the 1990s ... so it seems we have entered a new Age of Anxiety ... The Americans of 2017 can make a pretty strong case that they are gold medalists in the Anxiety Olympics."

*Alex Williams, "Prozac Nation Is Now the United States of Xanax," New York Times (6-10-17)*

We live in an age of anxiety and yet do we really need to be anxious? We have the promises of God ever before us. We have something to live for, someone to live for, someone to worship. In the end, could the best antidote to our anxiety be something as simple as worship. Magnifying God over our circumstances, that is the easiest way to address our anxiety.

I love the idea though, of how our faith is actually made stronger as we worship!

A third reality shows itself to us as well, though this one you may have to look a little more closely.

### **C. In order to live for the PROMISE I must aim for ETERNITY.**

What strikes me as I consider Abraham's faith in God and the promises to come, is how these promises were all things that would happen after Abraham's lifetime. He would be the father of a great Nation but he would not be around to see it. He would have massive descendants and the most precious of real estate on the earth and yet He would not be around to see the temple built and the glory of God fall upon the city and people. As I said earlier Abraham's promise was much more like the legacy he would leave behind.

The point is this, for Abraham to receive and rejoice in this promise Abraham would have to be a person who understood the eternal nature of his relationship with God. He would have to be one who could see eternity! Who lived for eternity! All that God was promising him had eternal implications.

We have a promise today that has eternal implications and that we understand as a hope. We have a promise of the blessed hope, that we look are to for each and everyday.

#### **Titus 2:11-14 ESV**

For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation for all people, 12 training us to renounce ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright, and godly lives in the present age, 13 **waiting for our blessed hope, the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ**, 14 who gave himself for us to redeem us from all lawlessness and to purify for himself a people for his own possession who are zealous for good works.

The promise of an eternal hope is the hope that goes before us each day and gives us something to live for.

The truth is,

**ONLY GOD CAN GIVE HOPE WHERE THERE IS NONE!**

### **Romans 4:22-25 ESV**

22 That is why his faith was "counted to him as righteousness." 23 But the words "it was counted to him" were not written for his sake alone, 24 but for ours also. It will be counted to us who believe in him who raised from the dead Jesus our Lord, 25 who was delivered up for our trespasses and raised for our justification.

*(18 as he had been told, "So shall your offspring be.")*

### **3. God gives us Something to STAND ON. [V20]**

*v23 ...the words "it was counted to him" were not written for his sake alone,*



#### **The Promise = WORD**

I am taken back to the events in Texas again. Today the people in Texas have to stand upon the Word of God, the Promises of God! Jesus taught on this issue just like this.

### **Matthew 7:23-27 ESV**

"Everyone then who hears these words of mine and does them will be like a wise man who built his house on the rock. 25 And the rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew and beat on that house, but it did not fall, because it had been founded on the rock. 26 And everyone who hears these words of mine and does not do them will be like a foolish man who built his house on the sand. 27 And the rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew and beat against that house, and it fell, and great was the fall of it."

- *Hearing is one thing*
- *Doing is another*
- *Doing requires faith.*
- *Doing (as we see in Abrahams life) is to some extent BELIEVING, the promises of God!*

Abraham left for the Promise Land not even knowing where God was taking him.

Abraham was willing to sacrifice his only son believing that God could raise the dead or speak something out of nothing.

We need to stand on the Word of God.

Illustration: I heard at Unity. Holly Star?

As we stand on this ground we stand on the Word of God.

We need to stand on His Promises

- He will never leave you or forsake. **[Heb 13:5]**
- He will supply all your needs according to His riches in glory in Christ Jesus? **[Phil 4:19]**
- If God is for you who can be against you? **[Rom 8:31]**
- If the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed. **[John 8:36]**
- "You will keep him in perfect peace, Whose mind is stayed on You, because he trusts in You." **[Isa 26:3]**
- Submit yourselves therefore to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you. **[James 4:7]**
- And I am sure of this, that he who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ. **[Phil 1:6]**

Two BIG BOULDERS to stand on.

 **We stand on our RIGHTEOUSNESS.**

**Colossians 1:21-23 ESV**

And you, who once were alienated and hostile in mind, doing evil deeds, 22 he has now reconciled in his body of flesh by his death, in order to present you holy and blameless and above reproach before him, 23 if indeed you continue in the faith, stable and steadfast, not shifting from the hope of the gospel that you heard, which has been proclaimed in all creation under heaven, and of which I, Paul, became a minister.

*Believing and Seeing ourselves as righteous is STANDING on the Word of God!*



## **We stand on God's FAITHFULNESS**

### **Hebrews 6:17-19 ESV**

So when God desired to show more convincingly to the heirs of the promise the unchangeable character of his purpose, he guaranteed it with an oath, 18 so that by two unchangeable things, in which it is impossible for God to lie, we who have fled for refuge might have strong encouragement to hold fast to the hope set before us. 19 We have this as a sure and steadfast anchor of the soul, a hope that enters into the inner place behind the curtain,

**- ONLY GOD CAN KEEP HIS WORD TO PERFECTION!  
HE CANNOT LIE!**

### **CLOSING:**

 Grace always comes through FAITH.

### **APPLICATION & TRANSFORMATION**

*Something to "believe in" "live for" or "stand on."  
Which resonates most with you this morning?*

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*Can you think of one promise to claim and stand on this morning?*

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*What did God say to you this morning about your faith and what he can do through it?*

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## **TRAGIC RESULT OF DISOBEDIENCE**

The first funeral I ever conducted was for a beautiful three-year-old. She was the first child born to a couple in our church, and the first grandchild in their extended family. Unfortunately, she was spoiled. While visiting the little girl's home one day, I observed that she loved to ignore her parents' instructions. When they told her to come, she went. When they said, "sit down," she stood up. Her parents laughed, finding her behavior cute.

One day their front gate was inadvertently left open. The parents saw their child escaping out of the yard and heading toward the road. To their horror, a car was racing down the street. As she ran out between two parked cars, they both screamed at her to stop and turn back. She paused for a second, looked back at her parents, then gleefully laughed as she turned and ran directly into the path of the oncoming car. The parents rushed their little girl to the hospital, but she died from her injuries.

As a young pastor, this was a profound lesson for me. I realized I must teach God's people not only to recognize His voice but also immediately to obey His voice when they hear it. It is life.

*Henry Blackaby, Hearing God's Voice (Broadman & Holman, 2002); reprinted in Men of Integrity (May/June 2003)*

## **THE RESURRECTION IS LIKE CROSSING A RIVER**

In the book, *Raised? Finding Jesus by Doubting the Resurrection*, author Jonathan Dodson writes, "The resurrection is a dividing line—a parting claim." Here's how he illustrates that "dividing line":

The resurrection is like a river that parts a road. People are on the road approaching the river. Arriving at the river of the resurrection, you look across it to where the road continues and see quite a few cars are there. In your doubt, you can't imagine how people got to the other side of the river. How did they get across? How can rational people come to the belief that Jesus died and rose from the dead?

Faith is the unnoticed ferry, lying hidden near the bank of the river that can take us from the riverbank of doubt ... to the other side of belief in the resurrection. [But] it's not blind faith ... You don't cross by closing your eyes and wishing Jesus' resurrection was true. No. You cross with your eyes wide open. This is an informed faith, faith in a historical plausible resurrection, attested by hundreds of witnesses, one proven to be worth believing.

*Tim Keller, Making Sense of God (Viking, 2016), pages 18-19*

## **AFGHAN MONARCH WHO DESTROYED CHURCH 'OVERTHROWN BY GOD'**

In 1971, the Afghan government gave a fledgling band of Christians permission to plant a church in Kabul. It was the only Christian church building permitted on neutral soil in Afghanistan. The Afghan government permitted this place of worship only for use among the foreign community; it was never to be used by the Afghan people.

One Sunday morning, only three years after the sanctuary's dedication, soldiers arrived and began to hack away at the wall between the street and the church building. One gentleman in the congregation went to Kabul's mayor and prophetically warned, "If your government touches that house of God, God will overthrow your government!" The mayor responded by ordering the congregation to turn over their church for destruction, thereby eliminating the need for the Afghan government to pay compensation.

"This building does not belong to us but to God," the people of the church replied. "We can't turn it over for destruction." And they proceeded to serve tea and cookies to the soldiers who were destroying their place of worship.

On Tuesday, July 17, 1973, the Afghan soldiers completed their destruction of the church building. That very night, King Mohammed Zahir Shah, who had ruled for forty years, was overthrown in a coup, and the 227-year-old monarchy in Afghanistan came to an end forever. The rest of that story is told in the history books.

*Editor's Note: This story is relayed from eyewitness accounts in a short biography of that church's pastor, a missionary and then a seminary professor named J. Christy Wilson.*

*Ken Wilson, Where No One Has Heard (William Carey Library Publishers, 2015), Introduction*