

Having the Faith to Not Lose Heart

James Smyda

Recorded on April 15, 2023

As we all know, going into the spring Holy Days or the fall Holy Days, we tend to get hit with a myriad of trials. By the time you get into the Holy Days season we're just kind of worn out from all the trials and fighting all the things that go wrong in our lives. While that can be true around the Holy Days, that's just one of the things that are inherent to the Christian life. Just being beat up by trials. As a friend of mine would like to put it, it's like the waves of the sea. You get hit with a wave and as soon as you get back on your feet from the first wave, then another wave is coming at you. The trials we go through in our Christian lives can, over time if we allow it, wear us down. Sometimes we can just get discouraged and lose heart and want to give up. Sometimes, if we allow ourselves to succumb to it, it can give us a fatalistic attitude. Like the joke, "Just kill me now and get it over with". We just get worn down and feel like that.

I would like to address that particular subject today. If you would like a title for this sermon it's:

Having the Faith to Not Lose Heart

As we're going to see today, Christ even told us in one of His parables that He was expecting this to be a problem. Particularly the time right before He returns. There would be a problem of people losing heart and not having faith. We need to look at this and see what we need to do to ensure that we don't succumb to trials and lose heart and give up—lose our crown and our opportunity to be in the Kingdom of God. To start looking at this subject, turn to Luke 18 and we'll see a parable where Christ addressed this very subject.

Luke 18:1 *Then He spoke a parable to them, that men always ought to pray and not lose heart,*

2) saying: "There was in a certain city a judge who did not fear God nor regard man.

3) Now there was a widow in that city; and she came to him, saying, 'Get justice for me from my adversary.'

4) And he would not for a while; but afterward he said within himself, 'Though I do not fear God nor regard man,

5) yet because this widow troubles me I will avenge her, lest by her continual coming she weary me.' "

6) Then the Lord said, "Hear what the unjust judge said.

7) And shall God not avenge His own elect who cry out day and night to Him, though He bears long with them?

8) I tell you that He will avenge them speedily. Nevertheless, when the Son of Man comes, will He really find faith on the earth?" (NKJV)

Notice He's questioning if He's going to find much faith when He returns. In other words, He's expecting that to be a rare commodity at the time He returns. Will mankind have faith? As we're going to see today, faith is one of those things that is an absolute necessity for us to stand up under the trials and the beatings we receive in this life. To keep our eye on what God has planned for us—the Kingdom of God and the reward we can receive. We need that faith to successfully endure to the end and get through the trials and tests that we go through.

What I would like to do is look at some of the common causes that can make us feel that we just want to give up. Things that can cause us to be beaten down and the dynamics that take place as that comes about. One of the more common things that can wear us out in our church of God environment today is the feeling of being isolated and alone. I'm sure a lot of us can identify with that. It's always been a situation in the church of God that we're the odd balls in the world that we live in. Going back years ago when I grew up as a kid in the Worldwide Church of God, you would attend a congregation in which there were hundreds of people around and you would have a good social support around you in many cases. Today, in the more scattered environment as it is, people are often alone and watching services on their laptop or their TV in the living room, sometimes by themselves or just with close family and they feel very isolated. At times that can really wear us down.

We're going to start by looking at an example of a biblical character who went through the exact same experience. Turn to 1 Kings 19 and we'll look at the example of Elijah. I'm sure that's a name that as I soon as I mention it, people know who it is. He's a famous biblical character and someone who God did very powerful things through. Elijah reaches a point in his life where he has the attitude of,

“Kill me now and get it over with. I'm all alone, I'm isolated and I just want to give up”.

He just has that fatalistic attitude.

1 Kings 19:1 *And Ahab told Jezebel all that Elijah had done, also how he had executed all the prophets with the sword.*

2) Then Jezebel sent a messenger to Elijah, saying, “So let the gods do to me, and more also, if I do not make your life as the life of one of them by tomorrow about this time.” (NKJV)

In other words, he's receiving death threats here. As you can imagine, that would be a stressful situation to him. As we read through this, it's not just the stress of some of this, he's at a point in life where he's feeling overwhelmed, isolated and alone. It's just me, there's nobody else and nobody else cares.

3) And when he saw that, he arose and ran for his life, and went to Beersheba, which belongs to Judah, and left his servant there.

4) *But he himself went a day's journey into the wilderness, and came and sat down under a broom tree. And he prayed that he might die, and said, "It is enough! Now, LORD, take my life, for I am no better than my fathers!"* (NKJV)

In other words, "Just kill me now and get it over with".

5) *Then as he lay and slept under a broom tree, suddenly an angel touched him, and said to him, "Arise and eat."*

6) *Then he looked, and there by his head was a cake baked on coals, and a jar of water. So he ate and drank, and lay down again.*

7) *And the angel of the LORD came back the second time, and touched him, and said, "Arise and eat, because the journey is too great for you."*

8) *So he arose, and ate and drank; and he went in the strength of that food forty days and forty nights as far as Horeb, the mountain of God.*

9) *And there he went into a cave, and spent the night in that place; and behold, the word of the LORD came to him, and He said to him, "What are you doing here, Elijah?"*

10) *So he said, "I have been very zealous for the LORD God of hosts; for the children of Israel have forsaken Your covenant, torn down Your altars, and killed Your prophets with the sword. I alone am left; and they seek to take my life."* (NKJV)

"It's just me, I'm all alone, nobody else cares, I have nowhere to turn, just kill me and get it over with."

That's an attitude we can find ourselves falling into if we lose sight of God and what He's accomplishing and we just feel weak and vulnerable and isolated. Notice how God responds to this.

11) *Then He said, "Go out, and stand on the mountain before the LORD." And behold, the LORD passed by, and a great and strong wind tore into the mountains and broke the rocks in pieces 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;*

12) *and after the earthquake a fire, but the LORD was not in the fire; and after the fire a still small voice.*

13) *So it was, when Elijah heard it, that he wrapped his face in his mantle and went out and stood in the entrance of the cave. Suddenly a voice came to him, and said, "What are you doing here, Elijah?"*

14) *And he said, "I have been very zealous for the LORD God of hosts; because the children of Israel have forsaken Your covenant, torn down Your altars, and killed Your prophets with the sword. I alone am left; and they seek to take my life."* (NKJV)

He's very overwhelmed by the feeling of isolation and being alone with nowhere to turn.

15) *Then the LORD said to him: "Go, return on your way to the Wilderness of Damascus; and when you arrive, anoint Hazael as king over Syria.*

16) *Also you shall anoint Jehu the son of Nimshi as king over Israel. And Elisha the son of Shaphat of Abel Meholah you shall anoint as prophet in your place.*

17) *It shall be that whoever escapes the sword of Hazael, Jehu will kill; and whoever escapes the sword of Jehu, Elisha will kill.*

18) *Yet I have reserved seven thousand in Israel, all whose knees have not bowed to Baal, and every mouth that has not kissed him."* (NKJV)

I find it interesting that at the end of all of this, God slides this in as an afterthought,

"Oh, by the way, there are 7000 other people that you didn't know about. it's not just you."

But notice he starts off showing him His power. Elijah has tunnel vision—"I'm overwhelmed, I can't do this anymore, just kill me, I just want to die and make this stop." God starts off by showing him how powerful He is, like, "I'm with you and I want you to focus on the job I have for you." and then tells him what He wants him to do. Then says, "By the way, there are 7000 people, it's not just you." He gets his perspective refocused,

"Focus on what I'm doing for you, what I need you to do and stay on task doing that. By the way, you're not alone".

I think that's good for all of us to realize as well, because if we get overwhelmed, feeling like "It's just me, I'm all alone, just kill me and get it over with", we need to realize that God has it under control. He has a plan for all of this, He can handle anything that gets thrown at us, if we just trust in Him, He can take care of it and deliver it through us. There are also many others He is working with who care, we just may not be seeing it or realize it at this time.

Another thing that can happen—we just focused on that feeling of isolation and being alone—but we can also get discouraged in a big group. We can be in a big group where we know we have all these others who are with us and together, but the problem can be not just that feeling of isolation, it can be focusing on the obstacles and not on God. Let's look at an example of that in Deuteronomy 1. What we're seeing here is Moses recounting the story of when the Israelites initially went to try and take the Promised Land. When they first came out of Egypt and made the covenant at Mount Sinai and journeyed off to conquer the Promised Land and he's basically retelling the story of what took place. How everything went wrong.

Deuteronomy 1:19 *"So we departed from Horeb, and went through all that great and terrible wilderness which you saw on the way to the mountains of the Amorites, as the LORD our God had commanded us. Then we came to Kadesh Barnea.*

20) *And I said to you, 'You have come to the mountains of the Amorites, which the LORD our God is giving us.*

21) *Look, the LORD your God has set the land before you; go up and possess it, as the LORD God of your fathers has spoken to you; do not fear or be discouraged.* (NKJV)

We're going to see that they got very discouraged. The way they got discouraged was, they were focused on the giants in the land and all these obstacles and were not looking to Who was on their side. God was able to deliver them and had all this taken care of—they weren't looking at that, instead they were looking at all the obstacles before them and they adopted a fatalistic attitude.

22) *And every one of you came near to me and said, 'Let us send men before us, and let them search out the land for us, and bring back word to us of the way by which we should go up, and of the cities into which we shall come.'*

23) *The plan pleased me well; so I took twelve of your men, one man from each tribe.*

24) *And they departed and went up into the mountains, and came to the Valley of Eshcol, and spied it out.*

25) *They also took some of the fruit of the land in their hands and brought it down to us; and they brought back word to us, saying, 'It is a good land which the LORD our God is giving us.'*

26) *Nevertheless you would not go up, but rebelled against the command of the LORD your God;*

27) *and you complained in your tents, and said, 'Because the LORD hates us, He has brought us out of the land of Egypt to deliver us into the hand of the Amorites, to destroy us.'*

28) *Where can we go up? Our brethren have discouraged our hearts, saying, 'The people are greater and taller than we; the cities are great and fortified up to heaven; moreover we have seen the sons of the Anakim there.'* "

29) *Then I said to you, 'Do not be terrified, or afraid of them.'*

30) *The LORD your God, who goes before you, He will fight for you, according to all He did for you in Egypt before your eyes ...* (NKJV)

Keep in mind that this is a group of people who had witnessed all the miracles in Egypt. They witnessed the parting of the Red Sea and the drowning Pharaoh's army; they had seen how powerfully God could help them, but then they get to this point where their focus is on the giants in the land who could kill them. They're not focused on, "We have a God Who is helping us out. He parted the Red Sea; He has performed these massive miracles." They aren't thinking, "Let's just trust in Him to take care of it". They're thinking "We have these big obstacles and we're all going to die. Let's give up." If we take our eye off God we fall into this same mentality.

31) *... and in the wilderness where you saw how the LORD your God carried you, as a man carries his son, in all the way that you went until you came to this place.'*

32) *Yet, for all that, you did not believe the LORD your God,*

33) who went in the way before you to search out a place for you to pitch your tents, to show you the way you should go, in the fire by night and in the cloud by day. (NKJV)

As we know, what happened was they wound up having to wander in the wilderness for 40 years until that generation died off. The moral for us is, this is a situation where they wouldn't feel like, "It's just me and I'm all alone and there's nobody else." There's a whole nation, thousands of them. They are all together, they have plenty of social support but the problem is, they are focused on all the obstacles. They are forgetting about God even though they have witnessed these miracles he pulled off and they have seen what He can do. I mean—He parted the sea. They walked through it and watched Pharaoh's army being drowned but they have quickly forgotten about that and now all they see are the obstacles. We can fall into the same mentality. If we are just focused on the obstacles of what we are up against and not thinking about God and what He can accomplish and trusting in Him to take care of it We can develop that same negative attitude. Not only can that be fatalistic, we can also wind up literally despising the blessings that God has given us to take care of us in the process.

To see an example of that, turn to Numbers 21:4.

Numbers 21:4 *Then they journeyed from Mount Hor by the Way of the Red Sea, to go around the land of Edom; and the soul of the people became very discouraged on the way. (NKJV)*

Again, here we have the Israelites being overwhelmed and discouraged but look at the attitude they have and how they respond.

5) And the people spoke against God and against Moses: "Why have you brought us up out of Egypt to die in the wilderness?" (NKJV)

This fatalistic attitude— everything is going to go wrong and we're all going to die. Notice the next sentence.

5 continued) ... For there is no food and no water, and our soul loathes this worthless bread." (NKJV)

What they are referring to is a miracle that happens. Food falls from the sky six days a week and has been taking care of them and sustaining them through all of this. They see miracles literally on a daily basis to sustain their basic needs, but what's their attitude about it? "This worthless bread that we have." It's a hostile attitude to what God has done to sustain them and take care of them. That's what can happen when we allow ourselves to succumb to that negative, fatalistic, discouraged attitude. We have to keep in mind that there is a spiritual battle going on. We're going to look at this a little later in the sermon—this is a spiritual battle and a spiritual enemy trying to poison your mind and give you a negative, hostile attitude to all that God is doing.

There's another way that discouragement can take hold of us. We've looked at a couple of examples of, "I just want to give up"—very fatalistic attitude of "Kill me now and get it over with". Another thing can happen that as well is maybe a little less severe. If we take our eyes off God and His plan and what He has in mind for us, another way we can respond to that is not necessarily just being fatalistic and "kill me now", but just getting distracted and pursuing other things. Getting off the course of pursuing overcoming and trying to pursue our Christian lives. To see what this is about, turn to Proverbs 29:18.

Proverbs 29:18 *Where there is no revelation, the people cast off restraint; But happy is he who keeps the law.* (NKJV)

I'm reading from a New King James translation of this verse and if you have one and look at where the word "revelation" is, you'll see a little 1. next to it. If you look in the margin it says *prophetic vision*. In other words, where there is no *prophetic vision* or when we're not focused on the future. When we're not focused on where we're headed and what God has in mind for us and His plan, what happens? We cast off restraint. It doesn't have to get quite as severe as a fatalistic, "I just want to give up, kill me now attitude." We can just stop focusing on overcoming and just let our human nature and carnality take charge because overcoming is hard. Trying to be a faithful Christian and overcoming our human nature and fighting it, it's a battle. It's tough and we can get worn out with it. We can just decide to take the easy route and do what's fun. That's where we can wind up going if we allow ourselves to cast off *restraint*, losing our focus and our faith in where we are headed.

To see an example of this, turn to Exodus 32 and look at the famous golden calf incident.

Exodus 32:1 *Now when the people saw that Moses delayed coming down from the mountain, the people gathered together to Aaron, and said to him, "Come, make us gods that shall go before us; for as for this Moses, the man who brought us up out of the land of Egypt, we do not know what has become of him."* (NKJV)

They've lost their patience, lost their focus and now they're going to go right back to idolatry. Right back to the pagan environment they came out of because they are losing focus on what they're there for. They've come through all of this—just made a covenant with God, still at Mount Sinai and just chapters away in the book from having said "Yes" to all that God has said, "We will do and will faithfully obey". Then they say, "We don't know what happened to Moses, let's make a calf and worship it". We're going to see they don't just have a calf; they wind up having an orgy as we're about to see.

2) *And Aaron said to them, "Break off the golden earrings which are in the ears of your wives, your sons, and your daughters, and bring them to me."*

3) *So all the people broke off the golden earrings which were in their ears, and brought them to Aaron.*

4) *And he received the gold from their hand, and he fashioned it with an engraving tool, and made a molded calf. Then they said, "This is your god, O Israel, that brought you out of the land of Egypt!"*

5) *So when Aaron saw it, he built an altar before it. And Aaron made a proclamation and said, "Tomorrow is a feast to the LORD." (NKJV)*

Now he's making up Holy Days.

6) *Then they rose early on the next day, offered burnt offerings, and brought peace offerings; and the people sat down to eat and drink, and rose up to play. (NKJV)*

In my last sermon I talked about the story of Ishmael and Isaac where it says that Ishmael was "mocking" Isaac and I mentioned that was not well translated into English because it sounds like two brothers that are just poking fun at each other. I mentioned that the Hebrew word can mean "just mocking" or it can have a sexual connotation to it. I used the example of Isaac and Rebekah, when Abimelech sees Isaac, as the New King James says, *showing affection* to Rebekah and comes back later and says, "That's not your sister, that's your wife. You don't show that kind of affection to your sister." That was the same Hebrew word. It says, *when they rose up to play*, it's the same Hebrew word. What it's referring to—they didn't rise up and get out some board games and start playing monopoly—they rose up and had an orgy. That was common in pagan worship to have lots of immoral sexual activity involved in their worship. That was quite common at the time.

7) *And the LORD said to Moses, "Go, get down! For your people whom you brought out of the land of Egypt have corrupted themselves.*

8) *They have turned aside quickly out of the way which I commanded them. They have made themselves a molded calf, and worshiped it and sacrificed to it, and said, This is your god, O Israel, that brought you out of the land of Egypt!" ' (NKJV)*

God is saying, "You go down and deal with the people who you brought out of Egypt, I'm disowning them." That's kind of how He's addressing this. Go to verse 21 and we'll see the rest of this. You'll see how this would tie into Proverbs 29 which we talked about earlier.

21) *And Moses said to Aaron, "What did this people do to you that you have brought so great a sin upon them?"*

22) *So Aaron said, "Do not let the anger of my lord become hot. You know the people, that they are set on evil.*

23) *For they said to me, 'Make us gods that shall go before us; as for this Moses, the man who brought us out of the land of Egypt, we do not know what has become of him.'*

24) *And I said to them, 'Whoever has any gold, let them break it off. 'So they gave it to me, and I cast it into the fire, and this calf came out.'" (NKJV)*

“It was magic Moses. We just threw this gold in there and a calf just magically came out. I don’t know how it happened—it’s all the people’s fault. Don’t look at me, it’s everybody else’s fault and it’s just magic.”

I just find that really hilarious, how the story is. It’s so ridiculous how he is trying to justify his behavior. Look at verse 25.

25) Now when Moses saw that the people were unrestrained ... (NKJV)

The Hebrew word for *unrestrained*, when we read it in Proverbs *when the people cast off restraint—when there is no prophetic vision*—this is the same Hebrew word. They were *unrestrained*.

25 continued) ... (for Aaron had not restrained them, to their shame among their enemies) ... (NKJV)

You can see what was happening and the point I’m getting at is, getting discouraged and losing our focus on overcoming, losing our focus on pursuing the Kingdom of God, it can take that discouraged, “Kill me now”, fatalistic attitude of “I just want to give up”. Or we can just lose focus and stop focusing on overcoming and find something more fun to do—just give into our carnal human nature and just start drifting off and go back into the sin that we tried to come out of. They both have the same destructive end to them. It packages itself in a different manner.

How do we deal with this? As we’re going to see in the rest of the sermon, having faith and being focused on what God is going to accomplish for us—that He can see us through whatever gets thrown upon us, trusting in Him and keeping our focus. Our eyes and minds are to be on what God has in store for us and what the ultimate plan and reward is for us, is key to us overcoming. If we keep that motivation then we have the exact opposite response. Instead of wanting to just give up or get distracted from our overcoming, we’re very motivated to be very focused on it. Turn to 1 John 3:1.

1 John 3:1 *Behold what manner of love the Father has bestowed on us, that we should be called children of God! Therefore the world does not know us, because it did not know Him.*

2) Beloved, now we are children of God; and it has not yet been revealed what we shall be, but we know that when He is revealed, we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is.

3) And everyone who has this hope in Him purifies himself, just as He is pure. (NKJV)

You can see it’s the exact opposite of casting off restraint or just wanting to give up and say just kill me now and get it over with. It’s a much more motivated, focused approach because we’re seeing this wonderful reward and end to this that we want to be a part of.

Even though it may be painful and a struggle to have to go through, but it's so wonderful that I don't want to give that up. It has to be this painful endurance of,

"I'll do it because the reward at the end of this is so wonderful, I can't sacrifice that. I'm willing to endure whatever pain and whatever suffering I have to go through to get there."

How do we do this? How do we make sure that we stay on track? As I mentioned previously, one of the big things we need to realize is we are in a spiritual battle. This isn't just a game of physical endurance, it's not just like a guy running a marathon and just having to face his physical tiredness and keep going. No, we are up against a spiritual enemy and what we don't want to do is, as the analogy goes, "bring a knife to a gun fight". If we try to take on a spiritual enemy just using our physical means, we brought "a knife to a gun fight" and we should expect to lose. We have to be utilizing God's Spirit and particularly faith to fight this battle and to overcome. Turn to Ephesians 6, we'll see it's talking about the whole armor of God. But I want you to particularly see the role *faith* plays in fighting off Satan's attacks.

Ephesians 6:10 *Finally, my brethren, be strong in the Lord and in the power of His might.*

11) *Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil.* (NKJV)

Realize we are up against a spiritual enemy and if you're in a spiritual fight, you need spiritual weapons to be able to fight it. You need spiritual strength to be able to do it. If we are depending on our physical ability, we are dead in the water. We've brought "a knife to a gun fight" and should expect to lose.

12) *For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this age, against spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places.*

13) *Therefore take up the whole armor of God, that you may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand.*

14) *Stand therefore, having girded your waist with truth, having put on the breastplate of righteousness,*

15) *and having shod your feet with the preparation of the gospel of peace;*

16) *above all, taking the shield of faith with which, you will be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked one.* (NKJV)

Notice, it tells us that faith is essential for being able to fight off Satan's attacks. One of the things is, it takes faith to trust in God, to keep our focus on what He has planned for us and not only that, but the fact that He is going to be faithful and will deliver us through whatever gets thrown at us. That He can sustain us and deliver us through whatever trials we have, regardless of how difficult and painful they can be; that He is going to deliver us. We have to realize this is a very spiritual thing, it's not just a physical faith that we can have. Turn to Hebrews 11:1.

Hebrews 11:1 *Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen.*

2) *For by it the elders obtained a good testimony.*

3) *By faith we understand that the worlds were framed by the word of God, so that the things which are seen were not made of things which are visible.*

4) *By faith Abel offered to God a more excellent sacrifice than Cain, through which he obtained witness that he was righteous, God testifying of his gifts; and through it he being dead still speaks.*

5) *By faith Enoch was taken away so that he did not see death, "and was not found, because God had taken him"; for before he was taken he had this testimony, that he pleased God.*

6) *But without faith it is impossible to please Him, for he who comes to God must believe that He is, and that He is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him.*

(NKJV)

We have to believe in God but also, have a strong faith that He will reward us and be faithful. He'll see us through whatever gets thrown at us and will deliver us, provide our daily needs and enable us to get through whatever trials are thrown at us. It's absolutely an essential thing for us.

So how do we have this faith? How do we build? One of the first things we need to realize is, we need to ask for it. Oftentimes we don't have that spiritual help because we don't ask for it. We don't acknowledge our need for God and ask Him to sustain us, to give us the faith and strength that we need. Turn to James 4 and we'll see this basic principle.

James 4:2 *You lust and do not have. You murder and covet and cannot obtain. You fight and war. Yet you do not have because you do not ask.*

3) *You ask and do not receive, because you ask amiss, that you may spend it on your pleasures.* (NKJV)

We have to ask God; we have to acknowledge our need of Him and ask for the strength that we need. We have to do it according to His will, not just to exalt ourselves. Let me also put a little bit of disclaimer in all of this. My mother used to love to say to me, when I was a kid, "Be careful what you ask for because you might get it." Rick touched on this in his first day of Unleavened Bread sermon. We need to think about the things we ask for in prayer because we might get it. The reason I say that is because, sometimes we look at it like, "If I ask for faith, God will just flood me with faith, or if I ask for patience, He'll just give me patience". It's like the old joke, "Lord give me patience and give it to me now." We think of it that way. The reality is, if you pray and ask for patience, God is probably going to put you in a situation in your life where you need to develop patience. Where you have to wait for something and it's going to be painful. If you ask for faith, yes, He will deliver that, but He's probably going to put you in a situation in life where you need faith to get it. I would just be aware of that. I am not saying don't pray and ask for those things, I'm just saying go into this with your eyes open to realize that when you

ask for something of a spiritual strength like this, God often gives you a trial and then you have the opportunity to help develop that. So that's the reality of how that goes. I just want to put that disclaimer out there.

We also need to realize another concept that I would like to point out in this regard. It's the idea that God is not a Genie in a bottle. The reason I mention that is, there are a number of scriptures in the Bible that tell us if we ask God in faith, He will fulfill our request and give us what we ask for and He's faithful in doing that. We're going to look at a couple of those scriptures today, but we need to keep in mind that we need to keep these scriptures in the context of the whole Bible. Sometimes people naively look at this and get the idea in their head that God is like a Genie in a bottle. I rub the bottle and the Genie comes out and just grants all my wishes. We have to realize that sometimes God tells us "No" and sometimes we want something and we ask for it, but we don't always get it because maybe it's not in our best interest or doesn't fit into His plan. Let's notice in 1 John 3 and look at a couple of scriptures that directly tell us that we can go and ask of God and He is faithful to take care of us and give us what we ask for. But we have to put these into the context of the whole Bible and His whole plan. Not just look at these from the perspective of God as a Genie in a bottle—because He's not.

1 John 3:22 *And whatever we ask we receive from Him, because we keep His commandments and do those things that are pleasing in His sight.*

23) And this is His commandment: that we should believe on the name of His Son Jesus Christ and love one another, as He gave us commandment. (NKJV)

He promises us that we can go and request of Him and He will hear us and answer our request. That doesn't always mean that 100% of the time we will get what we want or in the way that we want. Just look at one other scripture in this regard. John 15:16.

John 15:16 *You did not choose Me, but I chose you and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit, and that your fruit should remain, that whatever you ask the Father in My name He may give you. (NKJV)*

We're repeatedly told in the Bible that we can go and make our request to the Father. He will hear us and oftentimes give us what we've asked for, but we have to keep in mind that it's His will that reigns supreme and there are times that He is going to answer our prayer but the answer may be no. "Yes, I love you and I care for you but giving what you just asked for is not in your best interest. It's not in the best interest of the whole plan." Sometimes I've seen this, particularly in my young years in the Worldwide Church of God, it got put across that as long as you are faithful and you don't have some hidden sin you haven't repented of, God gives you whatever you want. If you had a health problem and you've been anointed and prayed for that, if you haven't been healed then that must be because you have some hidden sin you haven't repented of. There's an important example to look at and it's my favorite example to address this subject is Matthew 26. The individual involved in making a request here is Jesus Christ. It's impossible to make the argument that Christ ever sinned. You can't say that Christ didn't have enough faith or had some hidden sin he hadn't repented of—Christ lived a

perfect life. He never messed up on anything, He never did anything wrong, He was always perfectly obedient, He never sinned once in His entire life so all of those arguments are moot. What we'll see is an example of Him fervently, repeatedly, very passionately requesting something from God and God the Father's answer was "No". It's something we have to keep in mind as well.

Matthew 26:36 *Then Jesus came with them to a place called Gethsemane, and said to the disciples, "Sit here while I go and pray over there."*

37) *And He took with Him Peter and the two sons of Zebedee, and He began to be sorrowful and deeply distressed.*

38) *Then He said to them, "My soul is exceedingly sorrowful, even to death. Stay here and watch with Me."*

39) *He went a little farther and fell on His face, and prayed, saying, "O My Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from Me; nevertheless, not as I will, but as You will."*

40) *Then He came to the disciples and found them sleeping, and said to Peter, "What! Could you not watch with Me one hour?"*

41) *Watch and pray, lest you enter into temptation. The spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak."*

42) *Again, a second time, He went away and prayed, saying, "O My Father, if this cup cannot pass away from Me unless I drink it, Your will be done."*

43) *And He came and found them asleep again, for their eyes were heavy.*

44) *So He left them, went away again, and prayed the third time, saying the same words.*

45) *Then He came to His disciples and said to them, "Are you still sleeping and resting? Behold, the hour is at hand, and the Son of Man is being betrayed into the hands of sinners.*

46) *Rise, let us be going. See, My betrayer is at hand."* (NKJV)

Notice what He's saying here. He knows in graphic detail—He's very familiar with the book of Isaiah that prophesies about what's about to take place in His life and He knows it's extremely ugly. He's not looking forward to this. He was really hoping for a plan B here. He is begging repeatedly, I do not want to go through this ugly, grueling trial and then be tortured and murdered. Is there some other way We can work out the plan here? We can totally understand, any of us in His circumstances, in His shoes would be saying the same thing. "Please can we skip this; this does not sound like any kind of fun." But the most important thing of His example, notice He always says,

Here is what I want, but Your will be done.

In other words,

"If Your answer is 'No' and You decide I have to go through this, I'm going to suck it up and deal with it. I'm not going to enjoy it, it's not something I want to have to go through but if it's Your will, I'll submit and do it."

We have to realize that's how it works—that's how faith works. Ultimately yes, we can trust God to hear our prayers and answer us but sometimes that answer is "No". That's an important part of understanding that's how faith works. We have to be willing to trust God in whatever He has planned for us and sometimes that is a very ugly, painful trial we don't want to go through.

Just to reinforce this point, turn to Hebrews 11. Much of this chapter is all these very, nice, feelgood heroic stories of all these things people faced and we see the triumph they went through. It's stories like Moses where the Red Sea was parted; Daniel in the lion's den and he doesn't get eaten by the lions and you have all these other different examples where it's wonderful to read because this person trusts in God and God protects them and they don't face the ugly things. There's another side of this that is covered in this chapter as well. Notice in Hebrews 11:30, we'll see several positive feelgood stories that we like to focus on—the good guy gets saved from it all and is protected from the pain—but then we're going to see the people who went through ugly pain and had to endure that as well.

Hebrews 11:30 *By faith the walls of Jericho fell down after they were encircled for seven days.*

31) By faith the harlot Rahab did not perish with those who did not believe, when she had received the spies with peace.

32) And what more shall I say? For the time would fail me to tell of Gideon and Barak and Samson and Jephthah, also of David and Samuel and the prophets:

33) who through faith subdued kingdoms, worked righteousness, obtained promises, stopped the mouths of lions,

34) quenched the violence of fire, escaped the edge of the sword, out of weakness were made strong, became valiant in battle, turned to flight the armies of the aliens.

35) Women received their dead raised to life again. (NKJV)

These are all the stories we love to focus on. These folks had faith and prayed to God and God protected them from everything and it worked out great. Those are all true examples we can look to, but those are what we like to focus on. Notice the rest of the chapter.

35 continued) ... Others were tortured, not accepting deliverance, that they might obtain a better resurrection.

36) Still others had trial of mockings and scourgings, yes, and of chains and imprisonment.

37) They were stoned, they were sawn in two, were tempted, were slain with the sword. They wandered about in sheepskins and goatskins, being destitute, afflicted, tormented—

38) of whom the world was not worthy. They wandered in deserts and mountains, in dens and caves of the earth.

39) And all these, having obtained a good testimony through faith, did not receive the promise,

40) God having provided something better for us, that they should not be made perfect apart from us. (NKJV)

I'm sure if you look back at the lives of those individuals who are referred to here, I'm sure they were praying along the way, "Can I be delivered from this? Can I not be persecuted and killed and tortured?". I'm sure that was their will but to those prayers, God said "No. It's My will that you have to go through this and that's what faith means". Faith always means accepting God's judgment and realizing it's not just that we prayed to Him that He will protect us from all pain, but in the long run, the ultimate reward of being in His Kingdom is worth all of it and He will sustain us through it all. That's a very important thing for us to realize.

On this subject of faith and accepting God's will, one of the best examples in the Bible on this subject is the book of Job. As you go through the book of Job, it's important to think about this story from the perspective of what Job actually went through. What I mean by that is, we have the advantage when we read the story, we get to read the first two chapters so we see what's going on behind the scenes. We see this whole situation playing out with God and Satan and know what's taking place.

As Job is experiencing this, he doesn't have the advantage of all of this. He just knows his life is falling apart, everything is brutally painful and going wrong and he does not know why. In fact, that's the question he is absolutely stuck on— "Why? Why is this happening?" He often phrases throughout the book, "What did I do so badly that has brought all of this upon me". He is reasoning from a false premise, a similar false premise that his friends are reasoning from. The idea that bad things don't happen to good people. His three friends came to the idea that "Obviously you've been a sinner and if you just repent of whatever your hidden sins are, all of this will magically go away". God Himself comes out and flatly says to the three friends, "You didn't speak the truth about Me, yet my servant Job did". This is obviously wrong and if we just read the first three chapters of the book, it explicitly explains that this logic is absolutely wrong.

Through all of this, Job is demanding an answer for why; why did this happen to me? God spends four chapters putting Job in his place and saying, I'm your Creator, the Sustainer of the universe, you're my creation, you should shut up and be humble and accept my judgment. Get off your high horse, you don't get to question me and you have to accept My judgment. The most powerful thing of the stories is that Job humbles himself and accepts that and it is never in the book, never recorded that he is given the explanation for why. God never explains that to him—at least we don't have that recorded. Turn to Job 42 and see his response. This is right after God has spent four chapters of the book giving him a nature appreciation course. Where He walks him through, "Where were you when I formed the foundations of the earth. How does all of this stuff work, can you explain it to me?" He's illustrating to Job how powerful and all-knowing God is and how small and insignificant Job is. Saying, "I am your Creator, you should humble yourself and accept my judgment because I'm wiser than you."

Well Job does that here in chapter 42:1.

Job 42:1 Then Job answered the LORD and said:

2) *"I know that You can do everything, And that no purpose of Yours can be withheld from You.*

3) *You asked, Who is this who hides counsel without knowledge?' Therefore I have uttered what I did not understand, Things too wonderful for me, which I did not know.*

4) *Listen, please, and let me speak; You said, I will question you, and you shall answer Me.'*

5) *I have heard of You by the hearing of the ear, But now my eye sees You.*

6) *Therefore I abhor myself, And repent in dust and ashes."* (NKJV)

In other words, he is saying,

"I realize I shouldn't be questioning You. You're the all-knowing Creator and You know everything, I'm just Your creation, I'm going to just shut up and trust you".

He accepts this and to me, the great things of this story are that it's never recorded that God sat down and explained to him,

"I orchestrated this situation with Satan, we kind of had a duel and used your life to illustrate all of this because you're going to be this great teaching tool for the rest of mankind."

He's not told that, he just knows his life is falling apart, it's horrendously horrible, it's his worst nightmare and he didn't do anything to deserve this. God said "You're right, it's not like you did anything to deserve this, but I decided to use you as tool." Job didn't know while this was happening that he was going to be mentioned in the New Testament as the example that everyone should look to in dealing with trials. He didn't have that answer. Turn to James 5:10.

James 5:10 *My brethren, take the prophets, who spoke in the name of the Lord, as an example of suffering and patience.*

11) *Indeed we count them blessed who endure. You have heard of the perseverance of Job and seen the end intended by the Lord—that the Lord is very compassionate and merciful.* (NKJV)

Looking back after the fact, when we look at all that has come about from his example, we can see this much bigger picture that he could not have seen while he was going through it. I think that's a very important lesson for us to realize. I think we've all gone through trials in our lives when we've struggled with that question. Why is this happening to me? What is the purpose? Why did I have to go through this painful, ugly experience, what is it about? Sometimes later in our lives we look back and say, "Now it makes sense, now I see how things have come about. What I've learned, what came about in my life and other people's lives that were involved and now I see a bigger purpose in this". Or sometimes we may finish the rest of our lives and still say, "I still

don't understand why I had to go through that" because maybe we won't know until a whole lot later.

It's important for all us to realize that as we go through those difficult, beating up trials in our lives we have to trust that God has this greater purpose in mind. We may realize later, years later, in our lives looking back and realize now it makes sense. Or we may come up in the Kingdom or the resurrection and realize, "Now I get it, now I get why I went through this." But we have to be like Job and to be able to be in that situation where it's utterly painful, we don't have all the answers and it doesn't make sense to us at this point. But we say we are going to trust God. I'm going to trust God, I'm going to trust that He knows what He's doing, He has a purpose in all of this and He's going to deliver me through it. I may not understand it all right now and it may be in the resurrection when He explains to me why it had to happen like this. I may not grasp that now but we have to have that faith and trust Him with that.

We have to have a mature definition of faith. The reason I mention that is because faith can get presented from the perspective that God is a Genie in a bottle. That if we just have enough faith and if we've repented of all of our sins, then we just ask of the Genie and the Genie just gives whatever we want. That is a very immature view of faith. Yes, we can go before the Father and He will hear us. He will take our requests into consideration and oftentimes give us what we ask for. But sometimes He hears our prayers and the answer is "No". We have to be willing to accept that and realize what we are in this for is not comfort in this life; what this is about is the Kingdom of God and the ultimate reward of working with Him in His Kingdom.

Turn back over to Hebrews 11 and see that this is what motivated the patriarchs. Through all the trials they went through was the focus on the long term of realizing the ultimate reward is serving with God in spiritual New Jerusalem. Dwelling directly together with the Father and the Son in the spirit realm and that's really what this is all about. If we obtain that, it doesn't really matter the ugly things we have to go through in this life. Look at Hebrews 11:8.

Hebrews 11:8 *By faith Abraham obeyed when he was called to go out to the place which he would receive as an inheritance. And he went out, not knowing where he was going.*

9) By faith he dwelt in the land of promise as in a foreign country, dwelling in tents with Isaac and Jacob, the heirs with him of the same promise;

10) for he waited for the city which has foundations, whose builder and maker is God. (NKJV)

Not understanding the whole picture or where he was going, what does he ultimately focus on? New Jerusalem; he's focused on the Kingdom. Whatever I have to go through in this life is worth it if I make it into the Kingdom and it doesn't really matter what I have to suffer through in this life.

11) *By faith Sarah herself also received strength to conceive seed, and she bore a child when she was past the age, because she judged Him faithful who had promised.*

12) *Therefore from one man, and him as good as dead, were born as many as the stars of the sky in multitude—innumerable as the sand which is by the seashore.*

13) *These all died in faith, not having received the promises, but having seen them afar off were assured of them, embraced them and confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth.*

14) *For those who say such things declare plainly that they seek a homeland.*

15) *And truly if they had called to mind that country from which they had come out, they would have had opportunity to return.*

16) *But now they desire a better, that is, a heavenly country. Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God, for He has prepared a city for them. (NKJV)*

That city is New Jerusalem. They endured through trials not always knowing what this was about or where they were going or how this was going to end or how God was going to deliver them through it. How did they endure through it all? Having the faith and trust in God, keeping their eye on God and what He has planned for us and what He wants us to do and the ultimate reward is making it into His Kingdom, making it into the spirit realm. That's where we need to keep our focus.

As I started off this sermon, one of the things that can be very discouraging for us today is, so many of us increasingly find ourselves in very isolated environments. Where our church is sitting in the living room, watching a tape on the TV or on your laptop, maybe with one or two other people. That's what we call a congregation these days; it can be a very discouraging situation where you feel isolated and feel like Elijah.

"I alone am left and now they seek to take my life, so just kill me and get it over with because I'm discouraged and worn out."

If we allow ourselves, we can succumb to that and have that fatalistic attitude where we want to give up. Or we just get distracted and start pursuing the physical pleasures of this life that seems to make life feel better today. All of those things are compromising our ultimate reward.

What we need to do through this is be focused on God. To ask from Him the faith—realizing that asking for faith oftentimes means a trial that will require faith—but having that strength to focus on what our ultimate future is and that's the ultimate reward. If our eyes are focused on that, then we're going to be zealously focused on overcoming and sticking to it and enduring to the end. Realizing it's all worth it, regardless of what we have to go through. If we focus on that and trust in God, that's the key that we can have the faith that we don't lose heart.