

The Possibilities of Faith

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"If thou canst believe, all things are possible to him that believeth. "-Mark ix: 23.

These are bold and stupendous words. They open the treasure house of the Eternal King to sinful worms, and offer to the children of clay the privilege of God's own omnipotence and all the possibilities of His infinite resources. Side by side these two astounding declarations stand, "All things are possible with God;" "All things are possible to him that believeth."

I. Let us consider the possibilities of faith:--

Salvation is possible to him that believeth. No matter how vile the sin, how many or how great the sins, how aggravated the guilt, how deep the corruption, how long the career of impenitence and crime, it is everywhere and forever true, "He that believeth on the Son hath everlasting life," "Believe on the Lord Jesus and thou shalt be saved." And thus alone can any soul be saved, for it is just as true forever, no matter what qualifications the soul may possess, whether the highest morality or the deepest depravity, "He that believeth not shall be damned." This blessed text opens the gates of Paradise and all the possibilities of grace to any and every sinner, and "whosoever will, may come, and take the Water of Life freely."

Sanctification is possible to him that believeth. "Inheritance among them that are sanctified by faith that is in me," is still the inscription over the gates of our full inheritance. "Purifying our hearts by faith "is still the Divine process of full salvation. Thus alone can the soul be sanctified. It is not a work, but a gift of grace, and all grace must be by faith. It is not possible by painful struggling; it is not possible by penance and self-torture; it is not possible by sickness, suffering or self-crucifixion; it is not possible by moral suasion, careful training, correct teaching and perfect example; it is not possible even by the dark, cold waters of death itself. The soul that dies unsanctified shall be unsanctified forever. "He that is holy, let him be holy still: he that is filthy, let him be filthy still." But it is possible to him that believeth. It is the gift of Jesus Christ; it is the incoming and indwelling of Jesus Christ; it is the interior life and divine imparting of the Holy Ghost, and it must be by faith alone. And it is possible to any soul that will believe, no matter how unholy it has been, no matter how perverse it is; as mean perhaps and crooked as Jacob, as gross as David in his darkest sin, as self-confident as Simon Peter, as willful and self-righteous as Paul-it may be and shall be made as spotless as the Son of God, as holy as the holiness of Jesus Himself, who comes to dwell within, if we will only believe and receive.

Divine Healing is possible to him that believeth. "The prayer of faith shall save the sick," is still the Master's unaltered word for His suffering church. And this faith must be the faith of the receiver, for in the epistle it is said, "Let not him that wavereth think that he shall receive anything of the Lord." Still it is as true as when the Master touched the eyes of the blind men to whom He said it, "According to your faith be it unto you." It matters not how serious the disease, it may be as helpless as the cripple's who could not in any wise lift herself up; as chronic as the impotent man who lay for thirty and eight years helpless at the pool; as obscure and as despised a case as the poor blind men who begged by the wayside and whom the multitude thought unworthy of Christ's attention, or as the sinful woman of Syro-Phoenicia, whom even the Saviour called a dog, and yet to her, as to others, the healing came when He could say, "Great is thy faith; be it unto thee even as thou wilt." It is not the faith which heals, it is the God that the faith touches; but there is no other way of touching God except by faith, and, therefore, if we would receive His Almighty touch, we must believe.

All power for service is possible to him that believeth. The gift of the Holy Ghost is received by faith. The power of the apostles was in proportion to their faith. Stephen "full of faith and power" could meet all the wisdom of Saul of Tarsus and the synagogue of the Cilicians. The simple story of Barnabas is that "he was a good man. and full of faith and the Holy Ghost, and much people were added unto the Lord." The secret of effective preaching is not logic, or rhetoric, or elocution, but to be able to say, "I believed and therefore have I spoken." The success of some evangelists and Christian workers is out of all proportion to their talent or capacity in any direction, but they have one gift which they faithfully exercise, and that is expecting God to give them souls; and, therefore, they are never disappointed. The church has yet to see in the present generation the full possibilities of faith in the work of the Lord. The examples of a Moody and a Harrison are but types of what is possible for the humblest worker who, with a single eye to the glory of God and simple fidelity to the gospel of Christ, will dare to expect the mightiest results. Both these examples, perhaps the most marked instances of wide fruitfulness in the present generation, are persons without great natural gifts or educational advantages, and, therefore, the more encouraging as incentives to the work of faith. Humble toiler in the vineyard of the Lord, will you go forth to all the possibilities of faith in your work for Him as you realize the strength of your weakness and the might of your God? for it is "not by might or by power but by my Spirit, saith the Lord of

Hosts."

The day has come for God to reveal Himself through the very weakness of His instruments, and to prove once more that He has chosen the foolish things of the world to confound the wise, and the weak things to confound the things that are mighty.

All difficulties and dangers must give way before the omnipotence of faith. By faith the walls of Jericho fell down after they had been compassed seven days, and still the mightiest citadels of the adversary must give way before the steadfast and victorious march of faith. By faith Daniel stopped the mouths of lions, and was delivered, we are expressly told, because he believed in his God. It was not his uprightness of life, or courageous fidelity that saved him, but his confidence in Jehovah. Such faith has carried the intrepid Arnot through the jungles of Africa, and delivered the heroic Paton from the murderous fury of the savages of Tanna, and held back the stroke of death and the threatened disaster from many of us in the humbler experiences of our providential lives. Still the God of faith is as near, as mighty and as true as when He walked with the Hebrew children through the fire, and guarded the heroic Paul through all the perils of his changeful life. There is no difficulty too small for its exercise, and there is no crisis too terrible for its triumph. Shall we go forth with this shield and buckler, and prove all the possibilities of faith? Then, indeed, shall we carry a charmed life even through the very hosts of hell, and know that we are immortal till our work is done.

All the victories of prayer are possible to him that believeth. "Whatsoever ye shall ask in prayer, believing, shall ye receive." "When ye pray, believe that ye receive the things that ye ask, and ye shall have them." It is not the strength or the length of the prayer that prevails, but the simplicity of its confidence. It is the prayer of faith that claims the healing power of the unchanging Saviour. It is the prayer of faith that reaches the soul that no human hand, perhaps, can approach, and sometimes brings from Heaven the answer before the echo of the petition has died away. Yonder in the city of Cleveland a brokenhearted wife is praying with an evangelist for her husband's soul. At that very hour an influence all unknown to himself is leading him into a prayer-meeting in Chicago at noon, and before that prayer is ended the choirs of Heaven are singing over a repentant soul, and the Holy Ghost is whispering to her heart that the work is accomplished, not less surely than when on the morrow the swift mail brings the glad tidings from his own hand. The prayer of faith has reared those enduring monuments on Ashley Down, where two thousand orphan children are fed every day by the hand of God alone, in answer to the humble, believing cry of a faithful minister. These are but patterns of what God has always been ready to do and hindered only by His people's unbelief. Beloved, these possibilities are open to each of us. We may not be called to public service, or qualified for instructive speech, or endowed with wealth and influence, but to each of us is given the power to touch the hand of omnipotence and minister at the golden altar of prevailing prayer. One censer only we must bring—the golden bowl of faith, and as we fill it with the burning coals of the Holy Spirit's fire, and the incense of the great High Priest, lo! there will be silence once again in Heaven, as God hushes the universe to listen, and then the living fire will be poured out upon the earth in the mighty forces of providence and grace by which the kingdom of our Lord is to be ushered in.

All peace and joy are possible to him that believeth. The apostle's prayer for the Romans is that the God of hope shall fill them with all joy and peace in believing. It is God's will and purpose that the unbelieving soul shall be an unhappy soul, and that he shall be kept in perfect peace whose mind is stayed on God and trusting in Him. Would you then know the peace that passeth all understanding? Be careful for nothing, and steadfastly believe that the Lord is at hand, supreme above every circumstance, and causing all things to work together for good to them that love Him. Would you be happy in the darkest hour? Then trust in the Lord and stay yourself upon your God. Would you have the perennial overflowings of joy? Then learn to say, "Though now we see Him not, yet believing we rejoice with joy unspeakable and full of glory." The joy of mere paroxysmal emotion is like the cut flower of a brief winter's day, separated from the root and withering before another sun goes down. The joy of faith is the fruit and perpetual bloom that covers the living tree, or springs from the rooted plant in the watered garden.

"The men of faith have found
Glory begin below—
Celestial fruit on hostile ground
From faith and hope may grow."

The evangelization of the world is to be given to faith. The most successful missionary operations of to-day are sustained wholly through faith in God and the power of prayer. If China is to be evangelized in the present century it will be due to the faith of one humble missionary who has dared to attempt great things for God and to expect great things from Him. There is no field for faith so vast and so sublime as the mission field to-day, and there is no limit to the possibilities which faith may claim. Oh, that some of us may rise to the magnitude of

this great opportunity and become workers together with God for the greatest achievement of all the Christian centuries.

The Lord's coming will, doubtless, be given at last to faith. There will be a generation who shall say, "Lo! this is our God, we have waited for Him." As yet it is our blessed hope, but it will some day become more. And reading both upon earth and sky the tokens of His coming, His waiting bride shall hear the glad cry, "The marriage of the Lamb is come." To Simeon of old it was made known that he should see the Lord's Christ, and to some shall be given in the last times the Morning Star that shall precede the Millennial dawn. The Lord help us so to understand our times and the work the Master expects of us to prepare His coming, that we shall be permitted to share its glorious recompense of faith and even hasten that joyful day.

But beyond all that has been said this promise means that all things are possible to him that believeth. It is possible to have any or even many of the achievements specified and yet miss the all things of God's highest will. The meaning of this promise in its fullness is that faith may claim a complete life, a blessing from which nothing shall be lacking, a finished service, and a crown from which no jewel of recompense shall be found wanting. There are lives which are not wholly lost and yet are not saved to the uttermost. There are rainbows whose arch is broken, but there is a rainbow round about the throne whose perfect circle is the type of a completed record and an infinite reward. Many of us are coming short of all that God has had in His highest thought for us. When the king of Israel stood by the bedside of the dying prophet of the Lord, Elisha put his hand upon the hands of Joash and helped him shoot the arrows which were symbolic of faith and victory; but then the prophet required that the king should follow up this act of mutual faith by a more individual expression of the measure of his own expectation. Alas, like most of us, his faith evaporated long before its needed work was done. He smote thrice upon the ground and then he stayed. Too late for him to recover his lost blessing, the grieved and angry prophet upbraided him for his negligence and narrowness of heart, and told him sorrowfully that his blessing should be limited according to the measure of his own little faith. Never shall I forget the solemnity with which God brought this passage to my soul in a crisis of my life, and asked how much I would take from Him and how little would satisfy my faith. Thank God He enabled me to say with a bursting heart, "Nothing less than all Thy highest thought and will, even the all things of faith's greatest possibilities." The Lord help us to look forward ever to the time when all these opportunities shall be passing from our grasp, and to live each day under the power of those holy aspirations whose true value we shall then be able to understand, and evermore to say with Him who cherished the same lofty ambition, "I count not my life dear unto myself that I may finish my course with joy." Beloved, are you missing anything out of your life, your one precious, narrow span of earthly opportunity, the pivot on which eternity revolves, the one eternal possibility that never will return again? God is waiting to give you all, and all things are possible to him that believeth.

II. The reasonableness of faith. Why should God make all things dependent upon our faith?

Because the ruin of the race began with the loss of faith, and its recovery must come through the exercise of faith. The poison Satan injected into the blood of Eve was a question of God's faithfulness, and the one prescription that the Gospel gives to unsaved sinners is, "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and thou shalt be saved."

Faith is the law of Christianity, the vital principle of the Gospel dispensation. The law of faith the apostle calls it in distinction from the law of works. The Lord Jesus expressed it in the simple formula which has become the standard of answered prayers and every blessing that we receive through the name of Jesus. God is, therefore, bound to act according to our faith and also according to our unbelief.

Faith is the only way known to us by which we can accept a gift from God, and inasmuch as all the blessings of the Gospel are the gifts of grace, they must come to us through faith and in the measure of our faith, if they come at all.

Faith is necessary as a subjective influence to prepare our own hearts for the reception of God and His grace. How can the Father communicate His love to a timid, trembling heart? How can God come near to a frightened child? I have seen a little bird die of terror in my hand, when I intended it no harm but tried in vain to caress it and win its love. And so the individual heart without faith would die in the presence of God in absolute terror, and be unable to receive the overflowing love of the Father which it could not understand.

Faith is an actual, spiritual force. It is, no doubt, one of the attributes of God Himself. We find it exemplified in Jesus in all His miracles. He explains to His disciples that it was the very power by which He withered the fig tree, and the power by which they could overcome and dissolve the mightiest obstacles in their way. There is no doubt that while the soul is exercising through the power of God the faith that commands what God

commands, that a mighty force is operating at that very moment upon the obstacle, a force as real as the currents of electricity or the power of dynamite. God has really put into our hands one of His own implements of omnipotence and permitted us to use it in the name of Jesus according to His will and for the establishment of His Kingdom.

The pre-eminent reason why God requires faith, is because faith is the only way through which God Himself can have absolute room to work, for faith is just that colorless and simple attitude by which man ceases from his own works and enters into the work of God. It is the difference between the human and the divine, the natural and the supernatural. The reason therefore why faith is so mighty and indeed omnipotent is that it just makes way for the omnipotence of God. Therefore the two sentences are strangely and exactly parallel. "All things are possible with God." "All things are possible to him that believeth." The very same power is possessed by God and him that believeth, and the reason is that the latter is lost in, and wholly identified with, the former. How shall we illustrate the mighty distance between the earthly and the heavenly, the human and the divine, the finite and the infinite? Some one has said, take the strongest piece of artillery, load it to the muzzle with powder or dynamite, put in it the most perfect steel ball, be sure you have all the latest improvements in advance, then fire it, and your bullet will sweep through space at the rate of six hundred feet in a second. But in that second let God, with a single flash of light and without an effort or a sound, propel a ray from yonder sun or star or midnight lamp, and it will fly six hundred thousand miles. Six hundred feet, six hundred thousand miles! This is a feeble figure of the difference between the human and the divine. That ponderous gun with its slow but destructive power is a type of man's works. That gentle sunbeam and lightbeam with its silent, swift, beneficent minis-try is a type of God's infinite resources. This is the world into which faith introduces us. Surrendering its own insufficiency, it links itself with the all-sufficiency of God, and goes forth triumphantly exclaiming, "I can do all things through Christ who strengtheneth me," while approving Heaven echoes back, "All things are possible to him that believeth."

III. The possibility of faith. "If thou canst, believe."

Of course we need scarcely say that faith is dependent upon obedience and rightness of heart and life. We cannot trust God in the face of willful sin, and even an unsanctified state is fatal to any high degree of faith, for the carnal heart is not the soil in which it can grow, but it is the fruit of the Spirit, and is hindered by the weeds of sin and willful indulgence. The reason that a great many Christians have so little faith is because they are living in the world and in themselves, and separated in so large a part of their life from God and holiness. When the Lick Observatory was built on the Pacific coast, it was necessary to go above the valleys and lowlands of the coast, where the fogs and mists hung heavily over the land, and select a site on the top of Mount Hamilton, above the fogs and vapors of the ground, and in clear, unobstructed view of the heavens. So faith requires for its heavenly vision, the highlands of holiness and separation, and the clear, pure sky of a consecrated life.

Beloved, may you find in this the explanation of many of your doubts and fears, that your plane is too low, your heart is too mixed, and your life is too near this "present evil world."

Faith is hindered by the weak and unscriptural way in which so many excuse their unbelief and lightly think and speak of the sin of doubting God. If we would have strong faith we must recognize it as an imperative and sacred obligation, and steadfastly and firmly believe God, and refuse ever to doubt Him. Let us not say we cannot believe. It is true, we cannot of ourselves, but all that God also provides, and He has provided for us the power to believe if we will choose to do so. Let us then no more condone and palliate our doubts as harmless infirmities and sad misfortunes, but "take heed lest there be in any of us an evil heart of unbelief in departing from the living God."

Faith is hindered by reliance upon human wisdom, whether our own or the wisdom of others. The devil's first bait to Eve was an offer of wisdom, and for this she sold her faith. "Ye shall be as gods," he said, "knowing good and evil," and from the hour she began to know she ceased to trust. It was the spies that lost the land of promise to Israel of old. It was their foolish proposition to search out the land, and find out by investigation whether God had told the truth or not, that led to the awful outbreak of unbelief that shut the doors of Canaan to a whole generation. It is very significant that the names of these spies are nearly all suggestive of human wisdom, greatness and fame. And so in the days of Christ, it was the bondage of the Jews to the traditions of the fathers and the opinions of men, that kept them back from receiving Him. "How can ye believe," He asked, "which receive honor from men, and seek not that which cometh from God only?" This, to-day, has much to do with the limitation of the church's faith. The Bible is measured by human criticism, and the promises of God are weighed in the balance of natural probability and human reason. Our own wisdom is just as dangerous if it take the place of God's simple word, and therefore, if we would "trust the Lord with all our heart," we must "lean not to our own understanding."

Self-sufficiency and dependence on our strength is also a hindrance to our faith.

God, therefore, has to reduce us to helplessness before we can have much trust in Him. The hour of His mightiest interposition is usually the time of our greatest extremity.

A secular weekly tells the story of a little fellow whose experience represents a good many older people. He had reached that epoch in a boy's life when he gets his first pants, and the uplift unsettled his spiritual equilibrium. Hitherto he had been a devout little Christian and usually joined his little sister every morning in asking the Lord's help and blessing for the day, but this morning, when he looked at his new pants, and felt himself a man, he stopped his little sister as she began to pray for him as usual, "Lord Jesus, take care of Freddie to-day, and keep him from harm," and like poor Simon Peter, in his own self-sufficiency, he cried out, "No, Jennie, don't say that; Freddie can take care of himself now." The little saint was shocked and frightened, but knew not what to do. And so the day began, but before noon they both climbed up into a cherry-tree, and while reaching out for the tempting fruit, Freddie went head foremost down into an angle between the tree and the fence, and with all his desperate struggles and his frightened sister's, he was utterly unable to extricate himself, and at last he looked up to Jennie with a look of mingled shame and intelligence and said, "Jennie, pray; Freddie can't take care of himself after all." Just then a strong man was coming along the road, and the answer to their prayer quickly came as the sturdy arms in a few minutes had taken down the fence and Freddie was free, and went forth a lesson for life, to walk like Simon Peter, with downward head and humble trust in a strength and care more mighty than his own.

Truly this is the soil of faith! Wisely said Habakkuk, centuries ago, as he contrasted pride and confidence, "His soul which is lifted up is not upright in him; but the just shall live by faith."

Beloved, has God brought you to the end of your strength? Rejoice and be exceeding glad, for it is the beginning of His Omnipotence, if faith will but fall into His mighty arms and cry like those of old, "Lord, it is nothing with Thee to help by many or with those who have no power. Help us, Lord, for in Thy Name we go against this great multitude."

Faith is hindered by sight and sense, and our foolish dependence upon external evidences.

The very evidence in which we must live and grow is the unseen, and therefore all outward things must be withdrawn before we can truly believe; and as we look not at the things which are seen but on the things which are not seen, they grow real, more real than the things of sense, and then God makes them real in actual accomplishment. But faith must first step out into the great unknown, and walk upon the water to go to Jesus, nay, walk upon the air; but where was something only void it will find the rock beneath, like the traveler in the Alps who had reached the end of the mountain path as it suddenly disappeared beneath a great mass of ice and snow and became a subterranean torrent, while the mountain rose sternly in front and the miles of desolation which he had traveled lay behind. What should he do? Suddenly his guide exclaimed, "Follow me!" and plunged into the descending torrent and then disappeared from his view under the great mountain which it tunneled. It was an awful venture, but he must either follow or die, and plunging in, there was a sudden shock, and the whirl of waters and blackness of darkness, and then a burst of light, and he was lying on the banks of a quiet stream on the other side of the mountain, in the sweet valley below. The unseen way had led to life and light.

So faith still walks in paths of mystery oft-times, but God will always make it plain. Is not this the hindrance to your faith, that you hesitate to believe before you venture upon the naked word of promise? Your faith alone is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen. God help us to walk by faith and not by sight!

Therefore God has to train us in the way of faith by difficulties, trials, and seeming refusals, until like the Syro-Phoenician woman, we simply trust on and refuse to be refused. He is always waiting to recompense our trust by the glad words, "Great is thy faith! Be it unto thee even as thou wilt."

Finally, this faith is hindered most of all by what we call "our faith," and our fruitless struggles to work out a faith which after all is but a make-believe and a desperate trying to trust God, which must ever come short of His vast and glorious promises. The truth is that the only faith that is equal to the stupendous promises of God and the measureless needs of our life, is "the faith of God" Himself, the very trust which He will breathe into the heart which intelligently expects Him as its power to believe, as well as its power to love, obey, or perform any other exercise of the new life.

Blessed be His name! He has not given us a chain which reaches within a single link of our poor helpless heart, but that one last link is fatal to all the chain. Nay, the last link, the one that fastens on the human side, is as divine as the link that binds the chain of promise to His Throne of promise in the heavens. "Have the faith of God," is His great command. "I live by the faith of the Son of God," is the victorious testimony of one who had proved it true.

Beloved, in the light of this great provision, listen to the mighty promise now, and in His faith rise to claim, "If thou canst, believe. All things are possible to him that believeth," and cry, "Lord, I believe, nay, not I, but Thou! Help Thou my unbelief."

And now, beloved, this mighty engine of spiritual power is placed in our hands by Omnipotent love. Shall we claim, and by the help of God, rise to its utmost possibilities, and shall we from this hour turn it, like a heavenly weapon, upon the field of Christian life and conflict, and use it for all to which God has called us in the great conflicts of the age and for the Kingdom of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ? Our lot has fallen upon momentous times; the last decade of this stupendous century has just begun, and it finds the Church of God awaking to the greatest campaign of the Christian centuries, the evangelization of the world, with a view to the preparation for our Lord's immediate coming. What a glorious possibility! It is one of the possibilities of faith.

Last night as I sat at my open window, far into the night watches, from one of the cottages yonder, I heard the voice of prayer go forth all night long. It was a ceaseless and mighty cry that the mighty God would work with all His power and glory, and though the same words were oft repeated by the same voice, it never seemed to grow monotonous, for there was so much that language could not express in that prayer that it touched my heart with tenderness and solemnity, and seemed like a prophecy of that which I trust is to go forth from this mighty convocation and be caught up by all the world until it shall be answered by the voices of heaven above, proclaiming, "The kingdoms of this world have become the kingdom of our Lord and of His Christ. Allelnia! The Lord God Omnipotent reigneth." Oh, shall we take this engine of omnipotence, the prayer of faith, and turn it toward the heavens, and turn it upon the earth, and turn it against every foe, until we shall find it wholly true, "All things are possible to him that believeth?"

It has been proposed that we should form, this day, a Prayer Alliance, for the evangelization of the world during this present century, and the speedy coming of our Lord Jesus. Beloved, can there be a grander opportunity for the practical application of this great theme, and shall we not with one heart, join hands in believing prayer, around the world, until the happy day when we shall join hands once more around the Millennial Throne and praise Him for the glorious fulfillment?