

The Science of Cultivating Faith

No. 3

WHEN the centurion said to Jesus that he need not "come and heal" his servant, but that if he would "speak the word only," the servant would be healed, Jesus "said to them that followed, Verily I say unto you, I have not found so great faith, no, not in Israel."

Here was a Roman, by Israel despised and shunned as a heathen and held to be hated of God, who had spent his life among heathen influences, with no Bible advantages, yet who had discovered that when the Lord speaks, in that word itself there is power to do what the word says, and who depended on that word to do what it said.

And there were the people of Israel, who all their lives had been in daily connection with the word of the Lord, who prided themselves on being "the people of the Book," and boasted of their knowledge of the word of God; and yet had not learned that in the word there is power to accomplish what that word says.

All this lack on the part of Israel prevailed, too, when that very word in which they boasted said to them plainly, and showed over and over, that such is alone the character of the word of God: and that word was read in their synagogues every Sabbath day.

That word had all their lives said plainly to them: "*As the rain* cometh down, and the snow from heaven, and returneth not thither, but watereth the earth, and maketh it bring forth and bud, that it may give seed to the sower, and bread to the eater: *so shall my word be* that goeth forth out of my mouth: it shall not return unto me void, but *it shall accomplish that which I please*, and it shall prosper in the thing whereto I sent it." Isa. 55:10, 11.

Nature itself held constantly before them the instruction that the earth of itself could produce nothing; that it was the moisture of rain and snow, *from heaven*, that *made it* bring forth and bud, and produce fruit.

And the Lord said, "*So shall my word be.*" As the earth of itself can do nothing, so you of yourself can do nothing. And as the moisture of rain and snow from heaven makes the earth bring forth, and bud, and produce fruit, so shall *my word* make *you* bring forth the fruit of righteousness to the glory of God. "My word, . . . IT shall accomplish that which I please."

Many and many a time had Israel read this scripture. And year in and year out they had read the word of God, and had said: *I will do what that word says; I will accomplish that which pleases him.*

And that they might be the more certain that *they* should do exactly what the word said, that word was separated into parts, and each part drawn out into many fine-spun distinctions. Then they set about diligently to do, carefully and particularly, *themselves*, each specification of the word, as thus set forth.

True, nowhere in all this did they find any peace, much less any joy. With all their doing, they never found the things done. Always they found themselves far short of having done what the word said,—so far short, too, that it was the despairing cry of Israel that "if but one person could only for one day keep the whole law, and not offend in one point,—nay, if but one person could but keep that one point of the law which affected the due observance of the Sabbath,—then the troubles of Israel would be ended, and the Messiah at last would come." Yet still they slaved on in the treadmill round of their own fruitless doings,—all of works, and none of faith; all of themselves, and none of God; all of their own doing, which was not really doing at all, and none of the word itself doing, which is the only real doing of the word of God.

How refreshing it was to the spirit of Jesus, in the midst of this desert waste of Israel, to meet a man, whoever he might be, who had found the word of God indeed; who knew that when the word was spoken, that word itself would accomplish the thing spoken; and who would depend upon "the word only." This was faith. This opened the life to the power of God. And as the consequence, there was accomplished in the life that which pleased God.

"My word, . . . IT [not you] shall accomplish that which I please." "The *word* of God . . . *effectually worketh* also in you that believe." 1 Thess. 2:13. To depend upon it to work in you that which is well pleasing in his sight—this is faith. To cultivate this dependence upon the word is to cultivate faith. And "the knowledge of what the Scripture means when urging upon us the necessity of cultivating faith, is more essential than any other knowledge that can be acquired."

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