

7 Simple Words That Change Your World

It might surprise you to know the word “faith” is only mentioned two times in the Old Testament. There were many true believers back then, but they were the exception rather than the rule. Synonyms like “believe(d)” and “trust” are found numerous times. Heroes of faith like Abraham, Moses, David, Daniel and others overcame their doubts and displayed great faith in God. The first time the word “faith” appears is a divine indictment against Israel for their lack of it, “And He said: ‘I will hide My face from them, I will see what their end *will be*, For they *are* a perverse generation, Children in whom *is* no faith” (Deut. 32:20, NKJV). The main reason the Israelites were not allowed to enter Canaan Land and wasted 40 years wandering in the wilderness was due to their unbelief (Heb. 3:19).

The next time the word “faith” surfaced was centuries later in the book of Habakkuk, a minor prophet with a major message that is still relevant today. Inspired by the Holy Spirit, he prophesied of a New Covenant Age, “For the vision is yet for an appointed time, but it speaks of the end, and does not lie. If it delays, wait for it ... the just shall live by his faith” (Hab. 2:3-4, MEV).

Those seven simple, yet profound words—“the just shall live by his faith”—lay dormant for over 600 years until the apostle Paul quoted them in his letters (Rom. 1:17, Gal. 3:11). The writer of Hebrews, perhaps Paul, also reprinted this statement (Heb. 10:38). Notice Habakkuk’s original quote included the personal pronoun “his.” That’s important because no one will make it to heaven based on another person’s faith. We all must have our own personal encounter with Christ; our parents’ or preacher’s faith is not sufficient for us. We must have our own individual salvation experience through faith in Christ

(Rom. 10:9-10, Eph. 2:8-9). The old saying is true, "God doesn't have any grandchildren, just children."

Let's break down this powerful phrase: "The just" (those who are justified or declared righteous in the sight of God) "shall live" (become and remain spiritually alive) "by faith" (belief and trust in God). In other words, the way we get saved is the way we stay saved. We become spiritually alive at new birth by faith in the finished work of Christ on the cross. We remain spiritually alive by continuing to believe in His atonement. The classic hymn says it well, "My hope is built on nothing less/ than Jesus' blood and righteousness/ I dare not trust the sweetest frame/ but wholly lean on Jesus' name/ ... On Christ the solid rock I stand' all other ground is sinking sand/ all other ground is sinking sand."

This simple truth doesn't seem like a big deal to us today, but 500 years ago, these seven words literally shook the church order and changed the world. In 1505, a German university student was approaching a town when a violent storm erupted. Lightning struck so close that the young man fell to the ground. Scared, he made a rash vow and desperately prayed, "Saint Anne, help me, and I will become a monk." True to his word, Martin Luther became a devout monk. He lived a life of extreme self-discipline and isolation in a monastery. He was a tortured soul who deprived himself of most earthly pleasures. He fasted, prayed, studied Scripture, embraced poverty and celibacy and fulfilled every ritual of the church to the max. He even refused blankets in the winter, slept on the cold, hard ground and nearly froze himself to death, all in an effort to gain God's favor. Still, he couldn't remove his sense of guilt and unworthiness.

At times, he was proud of his sanctity and said, "I have done nothing wrong today." Then the misgivings would arise. "Have you fasted enough? Are you poor enough?" He believed later in life that his extreme fasting regimen permanently damaged his digestive system. He later said, "I was a good monk, and I

kept the rule of my order so strictly that I may say that if ever a monk got to heaven by his monkery it was I ... if I had kept on any longer, I would have killed myself with vigils, prayers, readings and other work.”

In 1515, Martin Luther taught a class on the book of Romans that turned his theology topsy-turvy. Studying Paul’s writings, he rediscovered a simple truth that was forgotten during the Middle Ages. “Night and day I pondered until ... I grasped the truth that ... through grace and sheer mercy, God justified us by faith. I felt myself to be reborn and to have gone through open doors into paradise. The whole of Scripture took on a new meaning ... this passage of Paul became to me a gateway to heaven.”

Luther finally realized that keeping religious rituals and shunning sin are *not* what makes us right with God; rather, simple faith in Christ imparts to us His righteousness (all our righteousness is like filthy rags—Isa. 64:6). Works do not replace faith in justification; they are merely the evidence of true faith (where there’s smoke, there’s fire) because faith without works is dead (see James 2:17-26). True faith produces action.

Luther’s “new revelation” was not well received. In fact, after nailing his 95 Theses to the Wittenberg Church door in 1517, he was condemned as a heretic and ordered to recant. When he refused, his writings were banned and burned. He too would have been burned at the stake, but he escaped and later translated the Bible into German. God used Martin Luther to spark the Great Protestant Reformation that swept the world. Protestants worldwide owe him a debt of gratitude all because he boldly believed a simple truth—the just shall live by his faith. Those same seven words can radically change your life too ... if only you believe! {eo}

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