

Faithfulness in action.

READINGS: Genesis Chapter 6 v 1 – 21, 2 Timothy Chapter 3 v1-17

As Pat and I were recently on holiday in Cairns I had this sermon on Faithfulness in Action on my heart. We visited a rather special place and God prompted me to start thinking about the word faith. Let me share a little about this place.

In 1913 one Jose Paronalla emigrated from Spain to North Queensland. His purpose – to build a new life for himself and his fiancée Matilda whom he left behind in Spain to wait for his return. He worked hard buying and upgrading sugar cane farms and became wealthy. Eventually in 1924 he returned to Spain only to find that Matilda had given up and married someone else, so he sought out Matilda's younger sister Margarita and proposed to her. The pair returned to Australia and purchased a forested plot next to a waterfall where in 1929 they began to build their dream – a Spanish Castle and Entertainment Park with their own Hydro power station to power all the attractions. They named the park Paronalla. Here are some pictures I took of what remains of the park and buildings. Remember that Jose and his wife built this themselves.

1. 344 what is left of the main ballroom and castle.



2. 364 what remains of the lower refreshment centre.



3. 371 1946 flood level.



4. 372 looking down from 1946 flood level.



So in 1946 a flood all but wiped out Jose's dream. Jose gave up and 2 years later he died of a broken heart.

There are 2 questions. Firstly did Jose Paronalla believe in what he was doing? The answer is probably yes – he had a dream and believed he could fulfil that dream. The second question is “did Jose show faithfulness to that dream?” Now that question is harder to answer. First of all you have to define what faithfulness is.

Here is one definition from Wikipedia.

Faithfulness is the concept of unfailingly remaining loyal to someone or something and putting that loyalty into consistent practice, regardless of extenuating circumstances.

I am going to come back to the question of Jose and his faithfulness later but for now we let us examine the word faithfulness as it relates to our Christian lives.

You know the bible tells us that the single most important thing in a person's life is faith. Hebrews 11 verse 6 says “Without faith it is impossible to please God, because anyone who comes to him must believe that he exists ----“. That is pretty clear, but notice that you have to **believe that God exists**. So now we know that we must believe first in order to get a result of faith. Let me give you an example. Charles Blondin was a tightrope walker who asks the question –

‘does anybody believe that I can walk a tightrope across Niagra falls pushing a wheelbarrow?’ Most in the crowd answered yes – they believed he could do it. But does having a belief that he can do it automatically mean that we have faith? The next question Charles asked was – ‘who amongst you who answered yes is now prepared to get into the wheelbarrow while I push it on a tightrope across the falls?’ Only if your belief reaches the point of faith would you contemplate getting in the wheelbarrow. So faith in this case is the result of a belief put into action by the fact that you got into the wheelbarrow with absolute trust you would reach the other side.

Perhaps we should revise our definition of Faithfulness.

Faithfulness = (belief + action + trust).

So faith then is having enough trust in a belief to take action. It is quite simple really. Suppose I said I believe that this vehicle is roadworthy and you agreed with me. If you ask me to go for a ride in the vehicle and I hesitate and then decline then I have no faith because I did not take the action needed to test my belief. No Action, no faith. Christian faith believes God and acts on what God says because Christian faith trusts that what God says is right. Christian faith does not hesitate and then decline to take action while some more thinking goes on about our belief and we decide if we can really trust what God says.

The unfortunate fact is that the great miracles of God have not turned men to the Lord and have not increased man’s faith in God. This fact is recorded time and time again in the Bible. God parted the Red Sea and let the Israelites escape but it wasn’t long before they forgot about this miracle and returned to their complaining old ways. Jesus raised Lazarus from the dead, but the Jewish leaders rejected this miracle as a threat to their power and plotted against Jesus. If raising a dead man to life did not convince them of who Jesus was then what would? Let us look at Noah as a wonderful example of faithfulness.

The world had become a wicked place in Noah’s time and God was so grieved that he regretted having created man on earth – genesis 6 v 7 “So the Lord said, I will wipe mankind whom I have created from the face of the earth ---for I am grieved that I have made him”. I would suggest to you that when God is that upset, it is a rather serious situation. Noah and his family were the only ones left on earth who walked with God, and God, who initially said he would

destroy all life on earth, saw in Noah a hope for the future and so commanded Noah to build the ark. Now it is easy to gloss over this story but when we look at Noah and his circumstances, the story becomes more and more amazing. In verse 3 it says “Then the Lord said – my spirit will not contend with man forever for he is mortal, his days will be 120 years”. God gave men 120 years to change their sinful ways but at the end of that time nothing had changed and God lost patience. God told Noah to build the ark and even gave specific instructions on the construction – it was to be 450 ft long, 75ft wide, and 45ft high. Just to put that in perspective those measurements equate to approximately 7 x the length of this church, twice the width of this church, and 4 storeys high. Also note that God gave Noah dimensions which were a length 6 times the width – exactly the same dimensions used in shipbuilding today. This was no weekend job Noah was taking on – we can quite comfortably say that it took many years to build. Noah set about the task which would have taken a great deal of faithfulness on Noah’s part. Remember we are in the middle of the desert – nobody builds boats in the desert. But this boat was huge and because it took many years to build, one can imagine the taunts and jokes the wicked people of those times continued to make about this crazy man Noah building this huge boat where there was no water. But Noah’s faith was quite simple. God told Noah the world was going to be destroyed and Noah believed it was God who spoke to him. If it was God who spoke, then it must be true, and so Noah confirmed his belief and actioned it by building the Ark. This was true faith based on Noah’s belief that it was God who had spoken to him. It was not faith based on anything he had seen or learnt in the world. After all, it did not rain in the desert to the extent that a flood would result. There had never been a flood that covered the whole world before so what evidence could you hold up that such a flood could ever happen. So there was no knowledge available on which Noah could base the building of this extraordinary craft except Noah’s belief that God had told him to do it, and Noah’s trust in the truth of God’s word.

Noah was a man of God and tried very hard to warn people of the coming disaster. He tried hard for 120 years but nobody listened. Noah never gave up trying to warn the people while he was building the Ark. Noah had listened to God and not only believed that the flood was coming but also believed that in the building of the Ark was a promise of salvation from God. Noah must have

been discouraged when nobody took the warning seriously and nobody took up the offer of his salvation, but he never gave up trying until the day he and his family moved into the ark and closed the door. The great lesson from Noah is that his faithfulness was shown by the actions he took. He showed that faithfulness not just by building the ark but by trying to preach God's warning to people who would not listen. He preached out of love for his God and love for the people he was trying to warn. He did not become bitter and change his style but continued to preach God's word until the end came with the flood. You know, how often do we start something and fail to finish it. Noah did not start something and not finish it, even when people made him out to be a fool and ridiculed him. God never starts something and does not finish it and Noah's faithfulness is the proof.

And what of our friend Jose Paronalla? We asked the question did he have faithfulness. Well at the end of the day he did not. When the flood in 1946 damaged his dream he caved in and died 2 years later of a broken heart. Jose never finished his work. Jose was driven by a belief of this world in that he could create something grand. When it didn't work out he gave up. That is an example of so many beliefs that are born of this world and not of God – they are only beliefs as long as they satisfy and then they are dumped for the latest new belief on the block. Contrast this with our belief in something eternal – our God who remains faithful forever.

What of the world we live in today – is it like the world of Noah's time? There are some who say that the world has never been as wicked as it is today and it is getting worse. If this be true then maybe God is running out of patience just as he did in the times before the great flood. In those times Noah was his faithful servant. In these times we are God's faithful servants. But is our belief rock solid enough to live as faithful servants? Is our belief rock solid enough that through faith we listen to God and take some action? We all of us live in this world. We all of us have contact with those of no faith. We all of us read and are aware of the depth of depravity to which many in the world have sunk. Paul said in his letter to Timothy that everyone who wants to live a Godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted while evil men and imposters will go from bad to worse deceiving and being deceived. Earlier in 2Timothy 3 v 1-5 he warns of the end times and gives us 19 examples of the wickedness that man will

descend to. The sad fact is that the environment to commit sin is growing ever more amenable to the point where people commit sin because everyone else is doing it and therefore why shouldn't they have a piece of the action. The environment we are living in is making it ever more difficult to remain faithful. But is this any different from Noah's time? So what do we do about it. Well Noah was not prepared to do nothing so maybe we should not be prepared to do nothing. Always remember that as we are faithful to God so is God faithful to us. He will never burden you beyond your ability to cope.

Belief is an acceptance of the truth of God's word. Trust is our confidence in that belief. Action is the result of our trust in our belief. Faithfulness is the result. What action does your faithfulness produce in your life as a Christian?

Amen