

## *Faith Brings Its Own Umbrella*

“Peter therefore was kept in prison: but prayer was made without ceasing of the church unto God for him” (Acts 12:5).

“And when she knew Peter's voice, she opened not the gate for gladness, but ran in, and told how Peter stood before the gate. And they said unto her, Thou art mad. But she constantly affirmed that it was even so. Then said they, It is his angel. But Peter continued knocking: and when they had opened the door, and saw him, they were astonished” (Acts 12:14-16).

Joshua Olmsted in his November 2009, *Pentecostal Herald* article, “What is Faith?” told the story of three farmers that met daily in the field during a dreadful drought. Every single day, they fell to their knees, and prayed that God would open the heavens and pour down abundance of rain. The heavens remained silent, and the farmers became discouraged.

One day a stranger came by and asked what they were doing. They answered, “We are praying for rain.”

The stranger shook his head and disagreed.

One of the farmers retorted, “We have not had rain for more than a year and we are praying for rain.”

The stranger told them that their efforts were futile and would never work.

Another farmer said, “We must have the rain, not only for ourselves but our farms and livestock.”

The stranger responded, “You are wasting your time.”

The third farmer annoyingly said, “What would you do if you were in our place?”

The stranger queried, “Do you really want to know?”

The three farmers answered, “Yes! We want to know!”

The stranger said, “I would have brought an umbrella.” That took faith!

This story of the three praying farmers reminds me of another story in Acts 12. I find it humorous, yet a realistic reflection of our prayers some of the times. All were praying. Few had actual faith. Rhoda was included in the few or stood alone.

“That's when King Herod got it into his head to go after some of the church members. He murdered James, John's brother. When he saw how much it raised his popularity ratings with the Jews, he arrested Peter — all this during Passover Week, mind you — and had him thrown in jail, putting four squads of four soldiers each to guard him. He was planning a public lynching after Passover. All the time that Peter was under heavy guard in the jailhouse, the church prayed for him most strenuously. Then the time came for Herod to bring him out for the kill. That night, even though shackled to two soldiers, one on either side, Peter slept like a baby. And there were guards at the door keeping their eyes on the place. Herod was taking no chances! Suddenly there was an angel at his side and light flooding the room. The angel shook Peter and got him up: “Hurry!” The handcuffs fell off his wrists. The angel said, “Get dressed. Put on your shoes.” Peter did it. Then, “Grab your coat and let's get out of here.” Peter followed him, but didn't believe it was really an angel — he thought he was dreaming. Past the first guard and then the second, they came to the iron gate that led into the city. It swung open before them on its own, and they

were out on the street, free as the breeze. At the first intersection the angel left him, going his own way. That's when Peter realized it was no dream. "I can't believe it — this really happened! The Master sent his angel and rescued me from Herod's vicious little production and the spectacle the Jewish mob was looking forward to." Still shaking his head, amazed, he went to Mary's house, the Mary who was John Mark's mother. The house was packed with praying friends. When he knocked on the door to the courtyard, a young woman named Rhoda came to see who it was. But when she recognized his voice — Peter's voice! — she was so excited and eager to tell everyone Peter was there that she forgot to open the door and left him standing in the street. But they wouldn't believe her, dismissing her, dismissing her report. "You're crazy," they said. She stuck by her story, insisting. They still wouldn't believe her and said, "It must be his angel." All this time poor Peter was standing out in the street, knocking away. Finally they opened up and saw him — and went wild! Peter put his hands up and calmed them down. He described how the Master had gotten him out of jail, then said, "Tell James and the brothers what's happened." He left them and went off to another place. At daybreak the jail was in an uproar. "Where is Peter? What's happened to Peter?" When Herod sent for him and they could neither produce him nor explain why not, he ordered their execution: "Off with their heads!" Fed up with Judea and Jews, he went for a vacation to Caesarea. (Acts 12:1-19; MSG).

"Faith is the confidence that what we hope for will actually happen; it gives us assurance about things we cannot see" (Hebrews 11:1, NLT).

"Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen" (Hebrews 11:1, NKJV).

"For we walk by faith, not by sight" (2 Corinthians 5:7, NKJV).

With God there is no such thing as a hopeless state of affairs.

"For with God nothing shall be impossible" (Luke 1:37).

"And he said, The things which are impossible with men are possible with God" (Luke 18:27).

"But as it is written: "Eye has not seen, nor ear heard, Nor have entered into the heart of man The things which God has prepared for those who love Him." But God has revealed them to us through His Spirit. For the Spirit searches all things, yes, the deep things of God" (1 Corinthians 2:9-10, NKJV).

"Now to Him who is able to do exceedingly abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that works in us, to Him be glory in the church by Christ Jesus to all generations, forever and ever. Amen" (Ephesians 3:20-21, NKJV).

"Elijah said to Ahab, "Up on your feet! Eat and drink — celebrate! Rain is on the way; I hear it coming." Ahab did it: got up and ate and drank. Meanwhile, Elijah climbed to the top of Carmel, bowed deeply in prayer, his face between his knees. Then he said to his young servant, "On your feet now! Look toward the sea." He went, looked, and reported back, "I don't see a thing." "Keep looking," said Elijah, "seven times if necessary." And sure enough, the seventh time he said, "Oh yes, a cloud! But very small, no bigger than someone's hand, rising out of the sea." "Quickly then, on your way. Tell Ahab, 'Saddle up and get down from the mountain before the rain stops you.'" Things happened fast. The sky grew black with wind-driven clouds, and then a huge cloudburst of rain, with Ahab hightailing it in his chariot for Jezreel. And God strengthened Elijah mightily.

Pulling up his robe and tying it around his waist, Elijah ran in front of Ahab's chariot until they reached Jezreel" (1 Kings 18:41-44, MSG).

"Then Elijah said to Ahab, "Go up, eat and drink; for there is the sound of abundance of rain." So Ahab went up to eat and drink. And Elijah went up to the top of Carmel; then he bowed down on the ground, and put his face between his knees, and said to his servant, "Go up now, look toward the sea." So he went up and looked, and said, "There is nothing." And seven times he said, "Go again." Then it came to pass the seventh time, that he said, "There is a cloud, as small as a man's hand, rising out of the sea!" So he said, "Go up, say to Ahab, 'Prepare your chariot, and go down before the rain stops you'" (1 Kings 18:41-44, NKJV).

A preacher friend's son, and his boy, went on an excursion to the local zoo, to see all the animals. In one enclosed area, across a small pond, there stood huge elephants and towering giraffes. The Dad tried to get the attention of his little son, "Look, see the elephants." Amazingly, the boy was captivated by a frog leaping from the little pool of water. Every time the father would say, "Look, son, see the elephants, and the giraffes," the boy would respond, "Frog. Frog!" Finally, the Dad pulled the son, away from the enclosure, and they moved along. The little boy kept crying, "Frog. Frog. Frog." Isn't that like us sometimes? God's wants to show us the elephants, giraffes; the mighty things He wants to accomplish in our lives and ministries. Yet, all we see are the insignificant frogs.

The *Bible Exposition Commentary* says, "True Bible faith is confident obedience to God's Word in spite of circumstances and consequences. Read that last sentence again and let it soak into your mind and heart. This faith operates quite simply. God speaks and we hear His Word. We trust His Word and act on it no matter what the circumstances are or what the

consequences may be. The circumstances may be impossible, and the consequences frightening and unknown; but we obey God's Word just the same and believe Him to do what is right and what is best."

Steps to increased faith:

1. God speaks.
2. We hear His Word (Romans 10:17)
3. We trust His Word. Believe that God will keep His Word. He is trustworthy (Psalms 20:7; 25:2; 62:8; 118:8-9).
4. We act on His Word, regardless of the circumstances and no matter the consequences.

There are two key words in this verse: one is 'substance,' the other is 'confidence.' *The Bible Exposition Commentary*, "The word translated "substance" means literally "to stand under, to support." Faith is to a Christian what a foundation is to a house: it gives confidence and assurance that he will stand. So you might say, "Faith is the confidence of things hoped for." When a believer has faith, it is God's way of giving him confidence and assurance that what is promised will be experienced. The word evidence simply means "conviction." This is the inward conviction from God that what He has promised, He will perform. The presence of God-given faith in one's heart is conviction enough that He will keep His Word."

Dr. J. Oswald Sanders says, "Faith enables the believing soul to treat the future as present and the invisible as seen."

"It is the substance of things hoped for. Faith and hope go together; and the same things that are the object of our hope are the object of our faith. It is a firm persuasion and expectation that God will perform all that he has promised to us in Christ; and this persuasion is so strong that it gives the soul a kind of possession and

present fruition of those things" (*Matthew Henry's Commentary*).

*Willmington's Bible Handbook*, "Faith is the "confident assurance" or "substance" of things hoped for and the "evidence" or "proof" of things we cannot yet see. Faith is trust in the unseen, not the unknown (11:3; see 11:27)."

Martin Luther King, Junior said, "Faith is taking the first step, even when you don't see the whole staircase."

George Muller once said, "Faith does not operate in the realm of the possible. There is no glory for God in that which is humanly possible. Faith begins where man's power ends"

Donnie Martin in his sermon, "The Faith that God Favors" quoted this story: "One night a house caught fire and a young boy was forced to flee to the roof. The father stood on the ground below with outstretched arms, calling to his son, "Jump! I'll catch you." He knew the boy had to jump to save his life. All the boy could see, however, was flame, smoke, and blackness. As can be imagined, he was afraid to leave the roof. His father kept yelling: "Jump! I will catch you." But the boy protested, "Daddy, I can't see you." The father replied, "But I can see you and that's all that matters."

Peter thought he was seeing a vision or dreaming a dream. When he realized what was happening, he said, "Now I know without a doubt..." That probably summarizes faith: knowing without doubting.

Elisha demonstrated this kind of faith and confidence in the following Old Testament story: "Then he sent horses and chariots and a strong force there. They went by night and surrounded the city. When the servant of the man of God got up and went out early the next morning, an army with horses and chariots had

surrounded the city. "Oh, my lord, what shall we do?" the servant asked. "Don't be afraid," the prophet answered. "Those who are with us are more than those who are with them." And Elisha prayed, "O LORD, open his eyes so he may see." Then the LORD opened the servant's eyes, and he looked and saw the hills full of horses and chariots of fire all around Elisha. As the enemy came down toward him, Elisha prayed to the LORD, "Strike these people with blindness." So he struck them with blindness, as Elisha had asked," (2 Kings 6:14-18 NIV).

The *Wiersbe WTW Bible Commentary* teaches, "Faith is confidence in God that leads to obedience to God. True faith is based on what God says and is demonstrated in what we do. People with faith do things for God, and God does things for them."

Jim Davis, in his online sermon, "Living with Great Expectation" writes, "Peter's arrival was an unexpected answer to the disciple's prayer. You can see the shock on their faces as Peter's arrival is announced. The prayers of earthbound believers often become stale and trite. We want God to do the unexpected, but we really don't expect him too. We know that with God all things are possible, but do we really believe they are probable. Our prayers are earnest, but we have little expectation. Our faith is so rooted in earthly circumstances that we are unable to look up and to see the handiwork of God. When God does the unexpected we have difficulty believing what God is doing. When God answers prayer in an unexpected way, we often have difficulty recognizing his answer."

"Understanding what is going on behind the scenes is the key to expectant prayer. God is busy answering their prayers while they are praying them. If we could by faith look through the veil of time into eternity, we would see God moving heaven and earth for our salvation."