

THE MISSING INGREDIENT

By

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“One thing you lack” Jesus said to the rich young ruler who had kept the commandments all his life. He didn’t tell him what the thing was but instructed him to give away his riches and become His follower.

The rich man turned away sorrowfully. He would retain his security in the world. His faith in the power of Jesus was not as great as his faith in his own resources. He could not truly follow Jesus because he hadn’t faith to depend entirely upon Him.

Scripture says that “without faith it is impossible to be well pleasing (to God); for he that cometh to God must believe that he is, and that he is a rewarder of them that seek after him” (Heb.11:6). It is this element of faith that was lacking in the rich man and that is so often missing today.

Jesus expected His disciples to enjoy life. He promised peace and joy, saying, “Be of good cheer”...“Rejoice and be exceedingly glad”...“My peace I give unto you ...” Such promises, at that time, must have seemed empty and impossible to keep, for Jesus had no visible resources, no political power, and was Himself the target of criticism and opposition by powerful forces. Yet He expected people to have faith to follow His teaching.

The question in many minds today is: “How can I live as a happy and successful Christian in a world hostile to Christ’s way?” The answer is: “By faith”...“For we walk by faith, not by sight” (2 Cor. 5:7).

This has become more difficult with the modern technique of visuals. Through television we are able to see from our living room chair a world-wide host of enemies, and they are assaulting the Christian community on every hand. We see ourselves outnumbered and outmaneuvered at every turn. Humanism has so permeated our thinking that even the statements and commands of Jesus are generally measured by humanistic standards. If it is practical, acceptable to society and profitable, then it is permitted. If we try to follow Christ and at the same time meet the criteria of our humanistic culture, we will be frustrated and defeated continually. Christ’s way is not normative for a culture that makes materialism and pleasure its gods. It is only by faith that we can live contrary to that culture and overcome the obstacles it sets before us.

Worry over finances is one of the chief obstacles to peace and joy. Paul wrote, “Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say rejoice” (Phil. 4:4). But one may ask, “How can I rejoice when I don’t know how I’m going to pay my bills?” God promises to provide a way for us to have everything we need. “Do not worry about your life, what you will eat, or what you will drink; nor about your body, what you will put on,” Jesus said, “For your

heavenly Father knows that you need all these things. But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you” (Matt. 6:25, 33).

Bills accumulate, not from seeking God’s righteousness, but from gratifying our pleasure and ego and keeping up with the Joneses. Faith begins when we begin to follow God’s instructions, not when we follow our own way of disobedience than expect Him to bail us out!

Another wall in the way of peace and joy is fear of what the future may hold. People see the world coming apart at the seams with antichrists in power. It is frustrating to know that things are going the wrong direction, but that there is no place to take hold to turn it around. What is a Christian to do?

In apostolic times the future for Christians also was bleak. There were wars and rumors of wars, pestilence and famine, along with physical persecution of believers. Jesus, knowing of all this, still told His disciples to be not anxious and to have no fear. Paul saw his generation as “crooked and perverse” but exhorted Christians to be obedient to God, knowing that “it is God who works in you both to will and to work, for His good pleasure” (Phil. 2:13). It is our task to “become blameless and harmless children of God without blemish, in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation, among whom (we) are seen as lights in the world, holding forth the word of life...” (Phil. 2:15, 16). Whatever results we see from this, we have faith that it is right and pleases God.

Some believers may be discouraged about their faith because of a false notion of what is meant by peace and joy. Peace does not require the total absence of conflict in the world but peace in one’s own life because he is pursuing the purpose of God, the purpose for which he was created. Jesus was at peace even under the constant attack of Pharisees. He said, “My peace I give unto you; not as the world gives, give I unto you. Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be fearful” (John 15:27). You can have peace now, by putting complete faith in God, relying solely on Him and trusting that He is working His will and that His purpose will be accomplished.

Joy is not that which the world calls fun and pleasure. Jesus wanted His “joy made full” in His disciples but also affirmed that they would be hated by the world (John 17:13, 14). Obviously the joy Christ promised is not the joy of being accepted, loved and honored by others, nor the joy of power and prosperity. Real joy is in knowing you are in Christ, that your name is written in the Lamb’s book of life and that He is present with you. But to experience such joy requires faith. You must have faith that He really is there, through His spirit, right now, even as you read these lines; that there is never a time, even on your worst day, that He is not with you. If we can have faith in the ultimate miracle of resurrection from the dead to an eternity of indescribable glory, surely we can have faith for all the other promises He made.

When you set your life to the course of pleasing God, you may be sure that He will keep His word, in spite of all circumstances. The more you turn loose of security in the world, the more you can focus your faith in God’s power and purpose. He has power over His

creation and all circumstances and can use even your weakness and failure to accomplish His will.

This is the case even in personal calamities, like the death of a loved one, a severe illness, or a major financial loss. God uses such trials to mold you to His own image. That's why Peter wrote that "you have been put to grief in manifold trials, that the proof of your faith, being more precious than gold that perishes though it is proved by fire, may be found unto praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ" (I Peter 1:6, 7).

Note that he does not say that faith makes things easy, that if you have faith everything will turn out the way you want it. On the contrary, faith allows you to rejoice when things are hard and even the opposite of what you desired or planned.

Faith is to live by His word. It is to submit to Christ's way when other ways promise more pleasure and success. Faith is to tell the devil, "Get out of here," and to say to the flesh, "You're not in charge" Faith is to return good to the one who harms you, to be honest when cheating would be far more profitable, and to reject the glory of men in order to accept the role of a servant.

Where there is faith there is action, Faith produces works, but where there is no obedience to God, there evidently is no faith. This explains why there is a great surge in religion, in church building and spiritual experiences but at the same time an increase in stress and immorality. The missing ingredient is faith.

One who believes Christ believes everything He said and commanded. His faith changes him. He acts according to his faith. But "faith without works is dead in itself" that is, it is not truly faith (James 2:17).

You don't have to wait until all the ducks are in line-all the problems solved, all opposition eliminated and all conflict gone-to experience joy. The condition required is faith. Faith is to believe that God can give you peace and joy and happiness without anything else.

"This is the victory that has overcome the world, even our faith" (I John 5:4). Don't let it be the missing ingredient in your life. '

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