

8. From Folly to Faith: The Apostle Peter (3Q 2008—Agents of Hope)

Biblical material: Acts 2:14–40; 3; 5:1–11; 1 Peter; 2 Peter.

Quotes

- Folly loves the martyrdom of Fame. *Lord Byron*
- Folly is wont to have more followers and comrades than discretion. [Mas acompanados y paniguados debe di tener la locura que la discrecion.] *Miguel de Cervantes Saavedra*
- Faith is a higher faculty than reason. *Philip James Bailey*
- Faith is a passionate intuition. *William Wordsworth*
- Faith is spiritualized imagination. *Henry Ward Beecher*
- A casual stroll through the lunatic asylum shows that faith does not prove anything. *Friedrich Nietzsche*

Questions

How do we define both folly and faith? How can some explanations of faith be counterproductive? What was the key aspect in Peter's change of mind? What really convinced him? What role does evidence play in faith? How does Peter's experience speak of the issues in the great controversy?

Discussion

Peter's eloquent and dramatic speech at Pentecost reveals a changed man from the one crying over the denial of his Lord. The key question is what changed him? Was it the emotional experience of his denial? Seeing his own stupidity? Wanting to make amends?

No: the fundamental reason for the change in Peter—and all of the disciples—was the demonstrated evidence of Jesus' resurrection! That Jesus returned to them from the dead, that he was alive, and that he had proved he was able to do all he said—this is what brought conviction and confidence. No other reason can be given for the disciples' joy and enthusiasm. They were transformed from cowering cowards hiding behind locked doors into confident and assured spokesmen for God. Their sole mission from then on was to announce the good news of their loving Lord to the entire world. Here is the motivation for mission: the truth about God as revealed by Jesus—the answer not only to our own needs, but the fundamental questions of the whole universe.

For God is on trial, and it's our privilege to speak for him, and to reveal in our actions the kind of person we believe him to be. In Acts 2, Peter lays out the evidence that has convinced him. It is an intense appeal to look again at God. Peter confronts his hearers with their false picture of God, and what they have done to Jesus—so much so that they are pierced to the heart. Their cry is, "What should we do?" This realization of how far they have gone from God, and how much they wish to return, is for all of us. And God's message is to "change your minds" and come back to him, our loving Father. In this we also demonstrate the truth about God and his character, the wisdom of his actions, and his complete trustworthiness.

Peter in Acts 3 then practically demonstrates this God who wants everyone to be healed—not just from their physical illnesses, but from the spiritual disease that leads to eternal death. People even try to place themselves under Peter's shadow (Acts 5) because

they are so convinced he can help them, but Peter points them to God as the only “possession” of value that he has. In his epistles Peter reveals the transformation of his character. Instead of being hasty and impulsive, he is now willing to patiently wait on his loving Lord. His understanding now is: “The Lord isn’t really being slow about his promise, as some people think. No, he is being patient for your sake, He does not want anyone to be destroyed, but wants everyone to repent.” (2 Peter 3:9 NLT).

Comments on Faith by Richard Dawkins

“I [...] think that basing your beliefs upon blind faith rather than upon evidence is potentially very dangerous, because you can’t argue against it.”

“Faith is the great cop-out, the great excuse to evade the need to think and evaluate evidence. Faith is belief in spite of, even perhaps because of, the lack of evidence.”

“Blind faith can justify anything. If a man believes in a different god, or even if he uses a different ritual for worshipping the same god, blind faith can decree that he should die—on the cross, at the stake, skewered on a Crusader’s sword, shot in a Beirut street, or blown up in a bar in Belfast.”

“Faith is powerful enough to immunize people against all appeals to pity, to forgiveness, to decent human feelings. It even immunizes them against fear, if they honestly believe that a martyr’s death will send them straight to heaven. What a weapon! Religious faith deserves a chapter to itself in the annals of war technology, on an even footing with the longbow, the warhorse, the tank, and the hydrogen bomb.”

“Faith... leads people to believe in whatever it is so strongly that in extreme cases they are prepared to kill and to die for it without the need for further justification.”

Ellen White Comments

Oh, how I wish that we would honor Christ by realizing what He wants to do for us, and taking Him at His word. If we would do this, we should be sunshiny Christians. By beholding Christ, we would be changed into His likeness. {UL 359}

We need more sunshiny parents and more sunshiny Christians. We are too much shut up within ourselves. {AH 37}

Do not act from motives of policy. The great danger of our businessmen and those in responsible positions is that they will be turned from Christ to secure some help aside from Him. Peter would not have been left to show such weakness and folly had he not sought by the use of policy to avoid reproach and scorn, persecution and abuse. His highest hopes centered in Christ; but when he saw Him in humiliation, unbelief came in and was entertained. He fell under the power of temptation, and, instead of showing his fidelity in a crisis, he wickedly denied his Lord. {5T 427-8}

The priests and elders also feared lest Peter might make one of those powerful appeals which had frequently aroused the people to study the life and character of Jesus—appeals which they, with all their arguments, had been unable to controvert. Peter’s zeal in advocating the cause of Christ had led many to take their stand for the gospel, and the rulers feared that should he be given an opportunity to defend his faith in the presence of the multitude who had come to the city to worship, his release would be demanded at the hands of the king. {AA 144-5}