

Easter Sunday - The Divine Rationale for Faith

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Preacher: Marvin Wiseman

[0 : 0 0] I am confident that the title of today's message, which has to do with the divine rationale for faith, would probably be interpreted a lot of different ways by a lot of different people, and interpreted in different ways even by a number of different churches, because people tend to come from their own point of view and their own perspective regarding issues like that.

And what's more, I am confident that if you ask someone just kind of across the board or took a public opinion survey, and asked them to explain, what is faith?

You would again get all kinds of answers. Faith is, well, one of the most classic answers was given by little Johnny in the first grade Sunday school class when his teacher asked him if he knew what faith meant.

And he says, sure. Faith means that you believe something that you know isn't so. That's not faith. That's incredulity. Christians make much of the issue of faith, and for very good reason.

And the reason is this. Faith is God's coin of the realm. That's the vehicle he uses. That's his modus operandi for not only for today and not only for this dispensation, but for any and all dispensations.

[1 : 2 4] Men have always been justified, brought into a right relationship with God solely on the basis of faith. But to him that worketh not, but believeth on him, justifies the ungodly.

His faith. His faith is counted for righteousness. That means that God simply allows our faith in him to be a substitute for the righteousness that he requires that we do not have.

So, when we exercise faith, he gives us a righteousness that we do not have, and he makes it ours. It is the righteousness of Jesus Christ that is imparted to us.

Or, a better word might mean, imputed to us. It means that God has fixed it and placed it inside of you so that you are internally justified on the basis of grace.

Faith being God's coin of the realm probably is more easily identifiable when we talk about the coin of the realm. I remember a couple of years ago when we journeyed to Europe and did some sightseeing.

[2 : 4 2] The money that we had with us, the American money, the American currency, was good only in certain places. It just wasn't acceptable as the coin of the realm in a number of places.

And many of the spots that we visited required our having our dollars converted into euros. That's the equivalent of a European dollar, and it's just given the shorter name.

It used to be, before the euro came along, you had to change your money when you went from country to country. If you went to France, you had to deal with francs, because that was the coin of the realm.

And in Spain, it's pesos. And in Greece, it's something else. And in Italy, it was the lira. So the coin of any realm will obtain what you want to purchase within that realm.

But when it comes to the subject of faith, it can adequately be described as God's coin of the realm. And the realm is all that over which he rules and reigns.

[3 : 50] So we're talking about the entire universe. And the beautiful thing about faith is you don't have to worry about exchanging it. You don't have to worry it being unacceptable someplace, because it is God's legal tender.

And it will pay to the bearer upon demand. And there is an intrinsic value in faith because of the one in whom our faith is placed. And that's another subject, and we will get to it right away.

But I'd like you to turn, first of all, to Hebrews chapter 11. Hebrews chapter 11, a very familiar passage, often referred to as the Hall of Faith.

We're all familiar with Halls of Fame. This is the Hall of Faith. And I want to read just the first six verses. And I do not know that the term by faith, by faith, by faith really communicates that much because of the ambiguous way that the way faith is often interpreted and understood by so many people.

So I'm going to suggest a Wisemanism here, which may or may not be all that valuable, but it helps me. Maybe it will help you too. When you understand that faith, the word faith, it's an action word.

[5 : 05] And all it means is that which is synonymous with belief or trust or confidence or reliance.

Just about anywhere you read the word faith, you could replace it with one of those words, and you'd get a good and accurate meaning. There may be some exceptions, but by and large, that's the way it works.

Hebrews chapter 11, and beginning with verse 1, the writer says, Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen.

For by it, that is, by faith, the men of old gained approval. Can we say that that verse is saying, on the basis of simply believing, the men of old gained approval?

I think we can. And each time you see those two words, by faith, by faith, by faith, if you would just replace those two words with what I think is a more understandable equivalent, it would be this, because he believed God.

[6 : 18] Just think of it that way, in place of the word faith. And if you do, we read verse 3 this way, Because we believe God, we understand that the worlds were prepared by the word of God, so that what is seen was not made out of things which are visible.

Because he believed what God said, Abel offered to God a better sacrifice than Cain, through which he obtained the testimony that he was righteous, God testifying about his gifts, and through faith, though he is dead, he still speaks.

Because he believed what God said, Enoch was taken up so that he should not see death, and he was not found because God took him up, for he obtained the witness that before his being taken up, he was pleasing to God.

And without faith, it is impossible to please him. For he who comes to God must believe that he is, and that he is a rewarder of those who seek him.

Nothing but faith can be the legal tender of heaven. Faith has always been the basis or the legal tender of God's rule and reign.

[7 : 40] It has not changed. We are told in Romans 5, Being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.

It simply means being declared righteous by God on the basis of simply believing what he has revealed about his Son. We have peace with God.

Hostilities are over. Man at enmity with God has come to a new position, a new posture. Peace has been declared.

And Jesus Christ, of course, is our basis of peace. Peace has been declared.

You know, there was a time, and I can well remember this, when you could go to the doctor and he would give you that annual checkup, you know, he would listen to your heart and he would have you say, ah, and he'd look in your ears and eyes and he'd take your blood pressure and maybe give you an EKG or something like that.

[9 : 06] And then he would say, well, looks to me like you're as sound as a dollar. And now we say, oh, boy, is it that bad? Because the dollar isn't very sound.

We have a circulation of paper money. And what is that \$20 bill worth intrinsically?

I mean, in and of itself, what is it worth? Almost nothing. In other words, what is a piece of scrap paper that is about two and a half inches by six inches worth?

Virtually nothing. Our paper money has no intrinsic value. By that, I mean value that is in and of itself.

And this is why a lot of people are excited about gold and silver. And you've seen those commercials ad infinitum ad nauseum. And the only conclusion I've come to is that there must be a lot of money in peddling this stuff because there are so many who are doing it.

[10 : 17] But the point is, a gold coin or a silver coin, as opposed to what is produced now as coins, it's with a lot of alloy, but it has intrinsic value.

That means the thing is valuable in and of itself as opposed to a paper dollar. Because a paper dollar has no more value or credibility than the stability of the government that is behind it.

And if you live in the island of Cyprus right now, you're really concerned about that, especially if you've got money in a large sum in the bank.

Because it is backed by the government of Cyprus or Spain or Greece. We all know they are in financial turmoil because they produce this money, the euro and everything else.

But what is there in the government behind it to back it up and make it good is very questionable and very shaky. But you don't have to worry about the coin of the realm, which is faith.

[11 : 24] You don't have to worry about the resource that stands behind it to make it good, because it is impossible for him to fail. Everybody has this coin of the realm.

Everybody has faith. I care not who you are. You cannot live and you will not live without faith. It's just that there are all kinds of different faiths.

There is faith in government and the monetary system. There's faith in politics. There's faith in astrology. There's faith in fortune tellers.

There's faith in Ouija boards. There's faith in you name it. Did you ever consider that people who most often denigrate faith, those in our atheistic community, have faith?

And if you really want to rankle the ire of an atheist, tell him that he is a person of faith. I'm not, you know, I have no faith. Oh, yes, you do.

[12 : 31] You have faith. You have faith. You have confidence, trust, reliance in your own intellect. That's the object of your faith. You see, everybody, without exception, if they are in touch with the real world, everybody has faith and operates on the basis of faith.

You do it when you get on an airliner and that thing starts to lift off the ground. You probably didn't go up to the cockpit and ask the pilot for his credentials.

How many flying hours do you have with this machine? Have you ever been in a plane wreck? Have you ever come close to crashing? No. What are you doing? You are just automatically, without even thinking about it, you are exercising a degree of faith in American Airlines or Southwest or whatever it may be.

That's where your faith is. You don't think about putting faith in it, but that's exactly what you're doing. If you are a Muslim, you have faith in the Koran and in Allah and in Muhammad.

How does the faith of a Muslim differ from the faith of a Christian? Is it a different kind of faith? No. No, it isn't. The faith of a Christian is no different from the faith of an atheist.

[13 : 50] They both utilize the same methodology for exercising their faith. And what that is, is an act of your will.

It's a decision that you make of your intellect. It's something that you process in your mind and reach a conclusion and you say, that thing is worthy of my trust.

And if you are a Hindu, it is the Vedas and the Gita Bhagavad. If you are a Buddhist, it is the teachings of Buddha.

And you consider those things worthy recipients of your faith. And that's where you deposit it. And it's important to understand, in order to really get a handle on the subject of faith, that nobody's faith differs from anybody else's.

Everybody uses the same mechanism, the same procedure, the same methodology for processing information, reaching conclusions, and then depositing your faith in whatever you consider to be worthy of your faith.

[14 : 59] And the thing, the only thing, that really makes the Christian faith different is stunning, startling.

It is the object of your faith. It is the finished work of Jesus Christ and what God has declared about him.

You see, what all that is, is information, the gospel, the good news. In fact, we even think of news and information as being almost synonymous.

This good news is nothing more than data. It is information about something that took place in time and space history. And it involved this person called Jesus Christ, who came sent by God the Father to accomplish a mission.

And the scriptures tell us that he accomplished that mission. And all God is asking us to do is put our faith in that person, that he did what the scriptures say he did.

[16 : 21] That's all it is. It's very simple. It's very easy. In fact, I've often said that God accomplished the most difficult thing he could possibly do so that he could require from us the very least that we could do.

You think about that. When God gave his son, what else could he give?

What could God give in place of his son that would have any possible meaning or merit in light of what he was trying to purchase with it?

What could he do? We know that God is the owner of the cattle on a thousand hills and tons and tons and metric tons of gold and silver and precious stones and all that.

It means nothing to God. That's just stuff. That's the kind of thing that we mortals put a lot of value on and some of us even give our lives and futures for it. But that's just stuff.

[17 : 47] And yet, what God gave, who God gave in the person of his son, transcended all possible value that we could ever contemplate.

Because God actually, in ways we don't understand, God actually interrupted his own character and nature in the triune Godhead to provide a person of deity to come to this earth.

And the person he provided was agreeable to being provided, accepted the responsibility, and willingly took it upon him.

What else could God do? In other words, what I'm saying is this. Listen, I want you to understand this. God gave everything he had. We tend to think of God having everything.

But physical stuff and planets and stars and all other things that God created to him, value-wise, are inconsequential.

[19 : 00] And do you know why? Because he can replace and reproduce any of those things he wants to just by willing it. But he cannot produce, nor will into existence, another person of his own character, quality, and makeup.

God gave of himself in order to purchase us. He gave of himself.

God was in Christ reconciling the world unto himself. Wow.

It is not an overstatement to say God gave everything that meant anything to him to purchase our pardon.

If you get a real handle on that, and I hope you do, it will. Come with me, please, to Acts chapter 20.

[20 : 11] This word of faith is just brought out in a wonderful way by the Apostle Paul when he is addressing the Ephesian elders as he is about to leave and go to Jerusalem.

And Paul is on his last missionary journey. The next time he sets sail, it will be as a prisoner. Acts chapter 20 and verse 17. And from Miletus, he sent to Ephesus and called to him the elders of the church.

When they had come to him, he said to them, this is Paul's farewell address. And it's going to be a tearful one because he spent a considerable amount of time there. And he's really gotten connected with these people.

They've really gotten together. They've become close, good friends, brethren in Christ. And Paul says to them, you yourselves know from the first day that I set foot in Asia.

Of course, he's talking about Asia Minor, which is present day Turkey. How I was with you the whole time, serving the Lord with all humility and with tears.

[21 : 23] Apparently, there was a lot to cry about. And with tears and with trials, which came upon me through the plots of the Jews.

Now, this did not surprise Paul. Because even before he was aware of what his calling was going to be, when God communicated with Ananias to go his way and lay hands on Saul of Tarsus that he may receive his sight.

And God said to Ananias, for I will show him what great things he must suffer for my sake before kings and princes and Gentiles.

Now, we ordinarily don't think of someone as astute and as well positioned as an apostle being called upon to suffer.

But that's part of the job description of an apostle. These were called to suffer from the very beginning. And Paul, Saul of Tarsus, to become Paul the apostle is no exception.

[22 : 35] So, these tears and trials that came upon him through the plots of the Jews were not a surprise. They were just standard operating procedure. And Anani says, How I did not shrink from declaring to you anything that was profitable.

Does that include telling people things that you think they don't want to hear but that they need to know? Yes, it does. And every prophet who has ever done that has gotten himself into a lot of trouble.

And sometimes he'd pay for it with his own life. Because when you tell people things they don't want to hear, it often evokes anger. Sometimes they take it out on you.

But nonetheless, Paul was committed to teaching and preaching what people needed to know, not whether or not they wanted to know it. So, he wrote to Timothy and he said, The time will come when people will not endure sound doctrine, but they will gather to themselves or surround themselves with the kind of teachers who will tell them what they want to hear.

But Paul didn't do that. And when he was at Ephesus, he didn't do that. I did not shrink from declaring to you anything that was profitable and teaching you publicly and from house to house, solemnly testifying to both Jews and Greeks of repentance toward God and faith in our Lord Jesus Christ.

[24 : 08] Christ's death, burial, and resurrection is God's gracious provision for man's fallen dilemma.

And what God wants from man is the response to what he did in Jesus Christ. So, what is your response? That's where faith comes in.

The response that God wants from us is an agreement with what the scriptures say God did in Christ. We agree with that.

We believe that. We accept that. Because we believe it to be true and credible. Consequently, we take whatever confidence, faith, reliance, dependence we can muster, and we remove it from anything in which we might have placed it, and we put it solely in the person of Jesus Christ.

That is an act of the will. You do that in a deliberate fashion. It is not a feeling. It is an act. It is something that we do.

[25 : 19] And when Paul talks about this to the Greeks of repentance toward God and faith in our Lord Jesus Christ, that's the formula. And they come in the right order here.

Because apart from a repentant attitude, there's no real reason to put our faith in Jesus Christ. Because the only people who can put their faith in Jesus Christ are those who don't have it there already.

So, where do they have it? Well, they've got it in this or that or something else. They've got it in their church. They've got it in their history. They've got it in their family lineage. They've got it in their good deeds. They've got it in their lodge.

They've got it in all kinds of things. And when you repent, it means you change your mind and you remove your faith, confidence, or trust from any or all of those things.

And you place it solely upon the person of Christ. He is all you have and he is all you need. Repentance means to change your mind.

[26 : 20] And if you've got your confidence or trust in anything else, you need to change your mind. That's repentance toward God. And people have all kinds of things they're counting.

Let me put it to you this way. Assuming that you believe there is a heaven and a hell. And if you don't, that's another issue and I won't go there now. But most people do. And if you do believe that there is a heaven, are you planning on going there?

And if you are, what is it you're counting on to make sure that you make it? Whatever that is, that's your object of faith.

If it's, well, I'm really a pretty nice person most of the time, then you are your own object of faith. You and your good behavior and your reputation and your good deeds and your trying harder and all the rest.

That's what you're counting on. That's the dynamic of faith that you're operating with. That's not God's coin of the realm. It is not just faith.

[27 : 31] It is faith in a particular individual. It's the individual that God has provided. That's the coin of the realm. So that anyone who has faith and trust, reliance, commitment, dependence upon Jesus Christ is assured that the one who is standing behind that will provide legal tender for your faith.

That's all there is. Now, that's very simple. It's also an act of obedience because in Romans chapter 1 as well as in the 15th chapter, Paul talks about God raised me up as an apostle for the specific purpose of bringing the Gentiles to the obedience of faith.

And we often don't think of obedience as being an item of faith, but it is, or faith being an item of obedience, but it is. And the scriptures make it quite clear that everyone who is outside of Christ, no matter how nice a person they may be, they are living in disobedience to God, even if they don't know it.

But when once you hear the gospel, once you hear the good news, that becomes the basis for changing your mind. I know it was for me over 50 years ago when I heard that information.

My thought process that went through, you know, I was always counting on the fact that I wasn't too bad a guy, you know. I know there were a lot of people worse than me, and there were a lot of people better than me, and I was somewhere in the happy middle, and isn't it comfortable to be in the majority?

[29 : 16] And besides, God probably grades on the curve. That's the way I was thinking. And you know what I had to do? You say, Marv, you're wrong.

That's not the way it is at all. And what this minister was telling me the same day that Barbara and I were married was that none of that was good enough.

That Jesus Christ was the only provision that God made for my sin. And I swallowed hard and said, I never heard that before. I never understood that before.

But there it is, right there in the Bible. I can't gainsay that. You know what I need to do? I need to reverse myself.

I need to change my mind. Because I have heard information that refutes what I used to believe.

[30 : 18] And I can't buy that anymore. That's what the Bible calls repentance. It is a change of mind. But you can repent and change your mind and still not become a believer.

I've known people who've done that. And they'll say something like this. Yeah, you know, I've heard this gospel. Christ died for a month. You know what? That's probably right.

I believe that. It fits. I believe that. You mean you've changed your mind about it? Yeah, I've changed my mind. I just, you know, this is the first thing I've heard that really makes sense.

And I've never heard it put together like that. But I believe that. All right? Now, what are you going to do about it? What do you mean, what am I going to do about it?

What can I do about it? That happened 2,000 years ago. I can't do anything about it. Yes, you can. The text says, repentance toward God and. It isn't just repentance toward God, period.

[31 : 30] That's the beginning. It's repentance toward God and. Faith. In. Jesus Christ. You can repent and change your mind and still not have placed your faith and trust in Jesus Christ.

Because you're holding back from doing so. And there are a couple of reasons why people would do that. One of which is. They have too many questions that they haven't been able to answer.

And they reason this way. Once I get all my questions answered, then I'll give some real. Hey, the time will never come. I've been doing this thing called Christianity for over 50 years.

When as a 21 year old soldier boy, I came to faith in Christ. And I'm still looking for answers to a lot of things that I don't have. I've already discovered a lot of answers, but I got a lot more questions that haven't been answered.

So if I were waiting for that, I'd still be waiting. The point is, the gospel contains enough credible information for anyone to act upon. And when someone says, I believe that stuff.

[32 : 39] I believe all that religious stuff about Jesus coming to the earth and about dying for our sins and about being crucified and being raised from the dead the third day. I believe all of that. But.

And there's where they're hung up. And you know what is very often at the base of it. I want you to think about this because I've seen it happen a number of times. What is often at the base of it is this.

They know. They know. They know in their heart of hearts that if they make that commitment. Things are going to change.

Radically. And they don't want them to. They want things to stay just like they are where they are running the show, where they are calling the shots, where they are making the decisions.

And very often it is because of some moral problem, some pet sin, some special weakness that they adore and engage in and don't want to give it up.

[33 : 50] But they know. If they make this break and put their faith in Jesus Christ, that thing is going to have to go. And they don't want to do that. There are a lot of people there.

That's a major impediment for them. And once you come to the position where you realize that even though this may be the case, if you come with your feeble faith.

And by the way, we aren't told that you have to have faith in some great quantity. We aren't told that it takes this much faith to believe.

No, no. We're just told that it's just the exercise of faith. I think almost all faith that is placed in Christ at the outset is a feeble, lacking faith that we might in later life be embarrassed about.

But you know something? That's all God requires. God doesn't require some deep, deep level of commitment, understanding, appreciation. No, no, no. No. No. All God requires is a simple trust, a simple reliance, an act of the will.

[35 : 02] That's all he requires. And God will respond. God will respond when you respond with your faith. And God will save, cleanse, pardon, forgive, make you his child.

God will save, cleanse, and forgive, and forgive, and forgive, and forgive, and forgive. That's the coin of the realm. And that's the rationale of faith. God has always operated that way. He did the most that he could do so he could require the least from us.

It's that easy. It's that simple. Nobody can say, well, this faith thing, that's really hard to do. No, it isn't. No, it isn't. You just look at the information. Is it true? If it's true, commit to it.

You rely upon it. That's it. It's a beautiful thing. Therefore, being justified by faith, being declared righteous before God on the basis of faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.

Simple gospel. Simple truth. I trust that you've made that decision sometime in the past. And it isn't even necessary that you know when you made it.

[36 : 08] It's just necessary that you made it. And we do have a few moments left for questions or comments. We'll be glad to entertain. Anybody? Do we have a roving mic back there?

Anybody with a question or comment? Okay. Very good. Would you?

All right. Keith has a question. Thank you. Some months ago, I helped out over at the nursing home when Marv couldn't be there, and I had a message.

And I talked about faith, and I was studying it. And while it doesn't walk on all legs, I related it to electricity. And I was amazed at the similarities.

Number one, being plugged in. The connection. Yeah. And many, many other. I won't go into it now. But I was amazed to see the relative illustration of faith in the fact of electricity.

[37 : 22] Think about it. Yeah. Yeah. Thank you. There is a tendency on the part of the public in general. When you talk about faith, it's very nebulous, very deep, dark, mysterious, because it has something to do with God, and that means you probably can't figure it out or understand it.

None of that's true. Faith has a simplicity to it. That's part of the appeal of the gospel. God did not create the gospel for intellectuals. God created it for just ordinary people, and ordinary people can process the information and believe.

Anyone else? All right. If you'll stand, I'm going to dismiss you five minutes early if you promise not to spread that word around.

Okay? Okay. Loving Father, we are so grateful not only for the message itself that Christ died for our sins, but for the wonderful sublimity, for the profundity, and the simplicity all wrapped up into one.

Only you, only you, only you could devise a message that is so deep and yet so simple that a child need not err therein.

[38 : 50] The gospel, embracing the principle of substitution, the innocent dying for the guilty, is not a thing that we humans would ever have contrived in a million years.

But you have done it, and you have brought it forth to present to us, make it available to us, and with the volition that you've given us, allow us the opportunity and the ability to exercise simple childlike faith in who you are and what you've done for us through Christ.

We trust this day that this will be a reality for each and every individual here. And if they have never come to that place where they've really repented of whatever they were trusting in and transferred to Jesus Christ, until they do that, you'll provide for them no rest and no peace for their mind, for their own good.

Thank you again for the glories and beauty of this resurrection day and all of the truth and history that stands behind it. And thank you for the knowledge that will celebrate that throughout the eternity to come.

In Christ's wonderful name. Amen. Amen.